State collapse and post-conflict development in Africa: the case of Somalia (1960-2001)
Mohamoud, A.

Citation for published version (APA):
Chapter Seven


7.1. Introduction

The chapter deals with the pitfalls of the politics of private and public pursuit that have been the marked feature of the Somali political life since Somalia achieved statehood in 1960. In fact, as I discussed in the previous two chapters, while the tendency towards private pursuit resulted in the bankruptcy of the state, that of public pursuit led to militarism. In this respect, although both pursuits represent contradictory political tendencies in a complex whole of historical processes that have been shaping the Somali society in much of its history, their current combined onslaughts have devastating effects both on the society and on the viability of the state. For example, during the 1980s, the majority of the urban inhabitant Somali population experienced the pitfalls of private pursuit as worsened living conditions, acute deprivation, high inflation and an increased financial burden on individual households. As the government revenue was privately appropriated on a grand scale, there were few national resources to be shared. Furthermore, the inflation that the dwindling national economy suffered from badly affected the purchasing power of the people and made the incomes of the government employees negligible. As a result, most of the urban households had problems in meeting their basic needs because of the acute financial burden. This, then, forced a large section of the society to withdraw from the official economy of the state. Similarly, during that same period, the regime and the state were also grappling with tremendous internal power crises because of the failure of decades of irredentist adventure and the pitfalls of that externally driven public pursuit. These challenges appeared as that of increased domestic power struggles, extreme militarisation of the state institutions, which was coupled with the growth of generalised violence, large refugee population, emergence of organised dissidence and apparent detachment of some regions in the country.

7.2. Downward Spiral of the Economy

The private embezzlement of the limited national resources on a grand scale not only bankrupted the state (see chapter 5) but also resulted in extreme impoverishment of the majority of the urban population. The period from 1980 to 1990 was the decade of rapid economic deterioration in Somalia as most people could not make both ends meet and the struggle for survival had become acute. In this respect, both the society and state were suffering from an abject material poverty.

After the Ogaden war when the Russians abandoned Somalia, the government lost its important financial patron and the economy stagnated. As I explained in chapter five, due to the meagre pastoral production in the country, the economic development of Somalia beyond subsistence level was always dependent on foreign aid. As expected, after the economic aid from the Soviet Union was cut off, the government of Somalia started looking for another foreign patron. Americans with some hesitance agreed to replace the Russians and provided
Somalia with about US$100 million of aid per year during the 1980s. Consequently, Somalia became one of the four countries in Africa, which received the most aid from the United States. However, this American financial assistance was a small drop compared with the massive military, technical and economic aid that the Somali government had been accustomed to receiving from the Soviet Union. Moreover, the decade of 1980 was also the decade of the IMF structural adjustment programme and the Somali government had to implement the economic policy instructions of this institute. The government was instructed to reduce social spending, cut the employment in the public sector and devaluate the Somali shilling. The deregulation of the economy as the IMF reform policy demanded, helped the growth of an illicit trade and an informal economy in Somalia (Miller 1981). For example, the devaluation of the shilling by more than 90 percent had triggered high inflation, which resulted in the decline of purchasing power. This, then, created a situation in which the monthly government wages could cover not more than three days of family expenses. This dire need forced most of the civil servants to show up at their offices every morning for only an hour and then disappear in search for an additional livelihood. Gradually, this survival strategy became a widespread practice as it put the daily running of the government on hold well before the state collapsed. Finally, when the state fell apart, the bureaucratic administration existed only in name. According to Miller, the general poverty situation was also what stimulated the informal economy, which in turn encouraged widespread corruption and illegal trade in the country. For instance, as the formal economy gradually shrank and the banking system collapsed a large section of society disengaged from the official economy and resorted to elicit economy for livelihood (Miller 1981: 3-19).

Furthermore, during the early 1980s when the economy was in a downward slide, the population in Somalia was experiencing an accelerated upward growth. In 1982, the population of Somalia had reached 4 million, with an alarming growth rate of about 3.1 percent per year. This means that more and more people had to compete for the dwindling economic assets in the country, and that increased the tensions among the various interest groups. During that period, because of the dire poverty in the country, many Somalis migrated to the rich Gulf countries for better material well-being. In 1980, Somalis working abroad

189 For this issue, see further, Nicolas van de Walle, “The Politics of Aid Effectiveness”, in S. Ellis (edited), Africa Now: People, Policies and Institutions, (London: Heinmann 1996). The other countries were Kenya, Liberia and Zaire.

190 According to David Laitin, “the consumer Price Index has averaged a 65 percent rise over the past seven years and the rate is increasing. For urban based families, getting sugar, meat, rice, charcoal, and other necessities has become a nightmarish burden” (Laitin 1982:60). See further David Laitin, “The political Crisis in Somalia”, Horn of Africa, 5, no.2 (1982): 60-64.

191 According to Omar, “for the common people in Somalia by the late eighties, the struggle for survival had become acute. A large majority of civil servants, whose average income was less than US$5.00 a month, were forced to seek additional private work to cope with the burden imposed by growing inflation. Absenteeism in Government offices increased even further. The system was on the verge of collapse” (Omar 1992:187).

192 Two factors have helped to accelerate the growth of the population in Somalia. One was the availability of modern medicines, which reduced the death rate at birth and the other was the traditional tendency of the Somalis to have more children in order to offset the hazards of the natural climate.

193 According to I.M. Lewis, “In a harsh environment with a high infant mortality rate and climate uncertainties, the Somalis recognise that, as with their livestock husbandry, they overproduce their human population to allow for the effects of natural hazards. Since at all levels in the population, fighting strength and political muscle are a matter of force of numbers, optimum size is the constant goal. These attitudes, widely prevalent in the population, are not conducive to birth control schemes (Lewis 1993:13).
were estimated to number around 250,000 individuals (Bradbury 1997:10). Unfortunately for the country, most of the migrated Somalis were those with skills and managerial personnel. The consequence was an acute drain on the human resources badly needed in the development of the economy.  

Other factors which contributed to the plummeting of the economy in Somalia in the 1980s were the collapse of the small industrial sector which constituted 20 percent of total exports, the renewed serious drought of 1979 to 1980 and the imposition of a ban on Somali livestock by Saudi Arabia after allegations that rinderpest had been detected in the Somali livestock, making them unsafe to eat (Mubarak 1996:28). Particularly banning the importation of the Somali livestock by the government of Saudi Arabia cut off by far the largest source of export earnings of Somalia. This then resulted in a large budget deficit whereby arrears on debt service started to accumulate reaching up to $1 billion in 1985. Already, the per capita income in Somalia has been abysmally low. For example, between 1979 and 1988, the real per capita GDP had decreased at 19.4 percent. In 1978, the World Bank estimates, the annual income of US$130 per person ranked Somalia eighth among the world’s least developed countries.

The economic and financial crisis in the 1980s resulted in the emergence of parallel economies in Somalia. While one was formal and regulated by the state, the other was informal and controlled by the businessmen in the market. The formal economy served the interest of the state class or a “state clan” as Charles Geshekter preferred to call it and those interest groups allied with them. In the 1980s, the prime source of revenue to the formal economy of Somalia was largely the foreign assistance which the government annually received. During that period, Somalia received between US$300 and US$ 400 million annually of gross Official Development Assistance or about US$55 to 70 per capita. And

194 “The geographic location of the country makes it economically useful to oil-rich neighbors as a cheap manpower pool. Somalia’s proximity to the nouveau riches of the oil world is both blessing and curse: Somalia’s main export, cattle, camels, sheep, and goats, have a ready market in the oil states, but these states entice much of the needed talent away from the homeland” (Miller 1981:4).

195 “The Saudi Arabian market had previously absorbed more than 90% of Somalia’s livestock exports. As a consequence of the ban, Somalia’s total export earnings (expressed in 1980 US$) declined by 40% in 1983 and 44% in 1984, and remained low until the Saudi ban was lifted in 1989” (Mubarak 1996:28).

196 In 1990 the foreign debt Somalia owed amounted to US$2 billion, while the inflation was estimated to have reached 600 per cent a year (Bradbury 1997). For more discussion, see Mark Bradbury, Somaliland (CIIR Country Report, 1997).

197 Norman Miller referred to a report published by the Overseas Development Council (ODC) in London, which compared the depth of poverty with Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda Burundi, and Rwanda. According to the report “Somalia had the lowest GNP, the lowest physical quality of life index, the lowest life expectancy (41 years), the highest infant mortality per 1,000 live births (177), the lowest literacy (5%), the lowest per capita public education expenditures ($2), and the highest per capita military expenditure ($7)” (Miller 1981:5). See further the article of Norman N. Miller, “The Other Somalia”, Horn of Africa, vol. 5, no., 3 (1981): 3-19.

198 For a further discussion, see Somalia: Country Presentation 1990 (UNCLDC II/CP. 4): 1-27.

despite the shaky power position of the ruling state class the availability of this foreign assistance enabled it to use the public funds for patronage purposes in order to remain in power.\textsuperscript{200} The foreign assistance to Somalia was partly military and partly economic aid. However in 1988 the military aid to Somalia was suspended. This happened when the poor human rights record of the regime was published in the international press, resulting from the domestic political violence that the government had been perpetuating against the civilian population in the country.\textsuperscript{201} In 1989 when the Cold War politics ended, the foreign economic aid for Somalia too was stopped. Consequently, the abrupt end of the external aid gravely diminished the wealth of the formal economy in the country.

By contrast, the largely informal remittances from abroad, a parallel economy, which was estimated to average between US $50 to 70 per capita annually in the 1980s was becoming a very important source of accumulation (Document of the World Bank 1989:2). This informal economy partly boosted by the huge wages of the Somalis working in the Gulf countries who transferred some of the earnings to their families in Somalia and partly by illicit trade practices, was growing while the formal economy was decreasing. As Mubarak writes, “Labor migration during the oil boom in the Gulf of Arabia states in the late 1970s and early 1980s produced remittances that equalled or exceeded merchandise export earnings. Most of the remittances, channelled through the black market, complemented private consumption and savings. Private investments were usually small and targeted projects with quick turnover because of the unpredictability of macroeconomic and political conditions” (Mubarak 1996:58). With respect to the illegal trade practices, smuggling of consumer goods, exchange of foreign currencies on the black market, poaching and trade in wildlife products and other hidden economic activities in the retail trade, construction, manufacturing, transportation and all types of services have developed into a booming business.\textsuperscript{202} The big profits of this informal economy considerably enriched the business class although some of the poor sections of the society who had no access to the formal economy controlled by the state had also marginally benefited (Miller 1981). Gradually, as time passed by, the ever-widening wealth of the informal economy became attractive to the political elite whose fortune of accumulation declined as the formal economy drastically dwindled (Bradbury 1997). Consequently, since the late 1980s, the real struggle between the urbanised economic and political elite in Somalia was over the access and appropriation of the wealth both in the formal and informal economy. This struggle therefore confirms the continuity of the tendency


\textsuperscript{201} According to Michael Maren, “for ten years before the 1992 famine, Somalia was the largest recipient of aid in sub-Saharan Africa, in some years the third largest in the world behind perennial leaders Egypt and Israel. But most of Somalia’s 6 million people never saw a penny. Much of what wasn’t filtered out to pay the expenses of the relief agency was lost in the corrupt maze of the Somali government’s nepotistic bureaucracy.... Aid money went to Somali bureaucrats whose primary skill was in earning money by dealing with foreign charities. And when money did drip down to the people it was used in ways designed by a government desperately trying to cling to its diminishing power” (Maren 1997:24). For a lucid historical account of the detrimental effects of foreign aid and international charity on Somalia, see Michael Maren, The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity, (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{202} For more information, see Africa Watch, Somalia: A Government at War with its Own People: Testimony about the Killings and the Conflict in the North (London: Africa Watch, 1990).

\textsuperscript{203} “The informal economy is composed of activities mainly carried out by extensive use of family labour of not more than a few persons. It could be an unlawful activity in the sense that it circumvents state regulations such as registration, tax payments, restrictions on trading foreign exchange, smuggling of foreign goods, etc” (Mubarak 1996:128).
towards private pursuit that has prevailed over public issues since the late 1970s as this study attempts to demonstrate.204

7.3. Massive Influx of Refugees

In the 1980s, Somalia also had to grapple with the daunting task of hosting a massive influx of refugees, which was a crippling burden on the impoverished economy and exacerbated the crisis of the state. The refugee problem in Somalia emerged as the consequence of the failure of the irredentist politics of public pursuit that the government had been waging since 1960s. To put it more simply, the defeat of Somalia by Ethiopia over the Ogaden was what generated the influx of a substantial number of refugees to the country, making Somalia host to the largest refugee population in Africa at the time. As Ali Galaydh explains, “the cost of the war with Ethiopia was incalculable. Apart from the death of tens of thousands of combatants, the population of the contested area suffered untold death and destruction of property. Hundreds of thousands were forced to flee to the Republic and were to have eventually a great economic, political and social impact on the country” (Galaydh 1990:18). For instance, in 1981 the number of refugees in Somalia was estimated to be around 1.5 million which amounted to about 40 per cent of population in Somalia (Simons 1995:52). Other studies estimated the number of the refugees in the country to be around one-quarter of the entire population of Somalia.205

The refugee crisis in Somalia has a historical antecedent. Since 1950 when the British colonial administration withdrew and returned the disputed Ogaden region to Ethiopia, there had been a more or less regular influx of refugees from the area into Somalia. The main reason was the recurring political tension between the two neighbouring countries, which time and again led to border skirmishes between their respective armed forces. In the past the border refugees seeking asylum in Somalia were small in number and the international assistance that the government needed to cater for them was very limited. However, after the war in 1977-78 when the Somali military force was defeated in the Ogaden region by the Ethiopian army with the help of the Soviet and Cuban troops, a large number of refugees who fled the fighting sought refuge in Somalia. Most of the refugees were ethnic Somalis, but there were also many Oromo, an ethnic group which primarily inhabit eastern Ethiopia. The refugees entered Somalia in hordes and the government was not able to cope with the influx, which severely tested the capacity of the country. The refugee problem became a heavy burden and a serious domestic concern because of the limited financial and national resources in the country. In response, the government then declared a state of emergency in order to deal with the refugee problem. According to the official government estimation, more than one million refugees had entered the country of whom about 475 000 were in camps in late December 1979.206 The UN Inter-Agency mission that afterwards visited the refugee camps also endorsed the estimate of the government. The report of the mission noted that:

204 For a good discussion of this spoils politics since the late 1970s, see Lee V. Cassanelli, “Explaining the Somali Crisis”, in Catherine Besteman and Lee V. Cassanelli (eds.) The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War (London: Westview Press, 1996).

205 For further information, see the report of the UN Inter-Agency mission that visited Somalia in December 1979.

“the mission visited seven of the refugee camps and held discussions with people who had visited the remainder. On the basis of these visits, and the information provided to the mission from government and other sources, the mission concluded that the Government’s estimate of the number of refugees in the camps - 475 000 - was broadly correct” (UN Inter-Agency Mission to Somalia, 1979:11).

Table I illustrates the monthly influx of refugees in camps in Somalia during 1979.

Table I. Monthly Influx of Refugees in Camps in Somalia in 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Influx</th>
<th>Total number of refugees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>114,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>126,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>44,000</td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>195,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>230,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustus</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>310,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>331,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>352,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>391,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>84,000</td>
<td>475,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Göran Melander, Refugees in Somalia (1980:20)*

This means that at the time Somalia had the highest number of refugees in camps as compared to any other country in Africa.207 Furthermore, the official government report estimated the refugees outside the camps to be around 650 000 in number. However, those unregistered “invisible refugees” who were living with relatives and scattered all over the country had swelled the population of some towns such as Hargeisa (Lewis 1988). Many of those “invisible refugees” had erected sprawling shelters around the outskirts of those towns. All in all the massive refugee influx into Somalia was alarming and the government appealed for help to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) in September 1979, but UNCHR did not formally process requests for international aid until March 1980 (Laitin and Samatar 1987). The reason why the UNCHR delayed to responding to the appeal of the Somali government might be explained because of the refugee crisis in South East Asia, which the mass media was focusing on during this period.

Eventually, the Somali government received assistance from international agencies, which was budgeted on a number of 650,000 refugees. To quote a concrete figure, the Somali government received financial assistance from inter-governmental organisations,

---

governmental and non-governmental agencies, which amounted to US $16 million (Melander 1980:27). However, due to the general poverty of the population in the country, this refugee aid had become a major economic source for private pursuit. Almost everyone from the top downwards who had access to it, attempted to siphon off the refugee relief economy without qualms. This wild chase for individual private pursuit then created all sources of rampant corruption, which contributed to the misuse and even the outright theft of food and medical supplies intended for refugees in the camps (Nelson 1982). Mark Bradbury writes, “as the government and many thousands of Somalis became dependent on refugees for income, humanitarian aid became a major public source of corruption” (Bradbury 1997:9). And Abdalla Manur considers this tendency of raiding the humanitarian aid intended for the refugees in a wider context. According to Abdalla Mansur:

“It is our belief that international aid worsened the political, economic, and social situation of the country for the following reasons. First, the aid given fostered the dictatorial regime, endowing it with a new life. Secondly, it created a dependency on imported foodstuff, discouraging local food production. Last, but not least, aid made thieves of nearly all the state employees, whose salaries were not enough to support their families even for a week” (Mansur 1995:115).

The massive influx of refugees into Somalia not only placed heavy burdens on an already strained economy but also on the ecology. This is what the mission of the UN Inter-Agency observed in the country. According to the UN Inter-Agency mission report, the influx of refugees into Somalia affected the ecological balance and caused environmental deterioration, which could lead to permanent damage. For example, in some areas where the refugees were camped, firewood had been rapidly depleted and the refugees had to walk 4 to 5 miles to collect wood. More seriously, by the end of 1980, because of the lack of firewood, fuel had to be imported for domestic cooking in certain camps (Lewis 1993). Hanne Christensen who surveyed three refugee camps in 1981 on behalf of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development noted that these areas “are slowly being transformed into stony, arid desert”. Furthermore, some of the refugees who were outside the camps brought with them their livestock and the crowding of this additional animal population in the countryside led to overgrazing and environmental degradation.

Even more ghastly was the exploitation of the refugee population by the military regime for its own domestic political survival. The commandants in the army unscrupulously manipulated the susceptible refugees, recruiting them to defend the regime against the rebel uprising. For example, many of the male refugees were armed, illegally recruited and conscripted as a paramilitary militia into army force. Subsequently, they were forced to fight in the suppression of the growing internal dissent against the beleaguered military regime. They were also encouraged to misappropriate the property of the dissidents. This then created a deep animosity and soured the relationship between the refugees and many host groups, especially those in the north of the country that earlier received them as guests (Lewis 1989).

---


209 This is how Major General Jama Mohamed Ghalib, Minister of Local Government and Rural Development described the overwhelming burden of the refugees on the scarce vegetation and water in the country: “For the pressures triggered off by this influx are fast affecting the country as a whole, and especially the nomadic life of inhabitants, particularly in terms of grazing and water, for over-grazing in the countryside will automatically affect the vegetation, thereby endangering the ecological balance, which in turn threatens the existence of livestock, the main national resource, which may develop into famine” (UN Doc. A/AC.96/SR.307).
Thus, the susceptible refugees were become party to the brewing domestic social tensions and in this way their presence in the country also contributed to the political crisis of the state.

7.4. Militarisation of the State Institutions

As I discussed in the last chapter, the failure of the militarism of the state in an irredentist war, gave away to the heavy militarisation of the state institutions in the 1980s. The defeat of Somalia in the Ogaden war of 1977 to 1978 caused the collapse of the militaristic adventure of the state that was pursued for the realisation of a Pan-Somali unity or the making of a Somali-wide state.\(^2\) This state-making project was what largely preoccupied the government of Somalia from 1960 till 1978. After this period:

"Somalia slipped from a nation on the move to a nation adrift. Plagued by internal opposition, by lack of a reliable foreign patron, and by the threat of an Ethiopian-backed invasion, Siad Barre's chief preoccupation since 1978 seems to have been to hang on to power at whatever cost. It is therefore just to say that since then his regime has operated in a void" (Laitin and Said Samatar 1987:155).

Consequently, the failure of the Somali-wide public pursuit led the state to retreat from its external cross border venture and withdraw inward. In essence, the defeat of Somalia in the war marked a major watershed.\(^3\) It accentuated not only the economic but also social and political problems in the country. Internally, the military regime confronted a new and difficult reality: weak social cohesion and harmony among the clan divided Somalis, fragile political institutions which should have imbued the population with a sense of national unity and lack of tangible social reforms that the government had neglected to address seriously over the past eight years. Other problems were domestic uprisings, open criticism of and dissatisfaction with the political management of the military regime. Consequently, the people, frustrated with the misery of the economic conditions they endured and the defeat of government in the war (which resulted in massive refugee influx into the country) demanded better administration and good governance. They demanded political reforms, clan equity, equal power sharing, regional equality, economic advancement, social development, etc. Furthermore, many of the political elite, particularly the generals, who were extremely demoralised by the humiliating defeat in the war, directly challenged the top ruling leadership and demanded representative government and responsible leadership (Galaydh 1990). The regime was then confronted with a crisis of political legitimacy both from within its own ranks and in the wider society. The military government however lacking prior experience of how to deal with and regulate such growing societal disenchantment employed a militaristic solution. Brutal and disproportionate repression was used to control and discipline the population. The National Security Service (NSS) created by the military regime was given the

\(^1\) "The military debacle of 1978 shattered all hopes for achieving a Greater Somalia and signalled the demise of pan-Somalism. Betrayed by their socialist allies, Somalis bitterly criticised Siad Barre's leadership for bungling the 'liberation' venture and soon turned against each other" (Geshekter 1997:75).

absolute power to arrest and detain without trial for long periods any person suspected of being anti-government. In certain regions of the country, the regime using the national army pursued a scorched earth approach against the hometowns of the dissidents. They and their sub-clan families were subjected to severe economic punishment and systematic social harassment (Lewis 1993). Many were dismissed from the government service and arbitrarily arrested. In their home areas, the constructed water wells vital for the livelihood of the wandering pastoral nomads and their livestock were poisoned and demolished. And in this way their lives and their livestock economy were cruelly destroyed. In a nutshell, “the progressive popular disenchantment with Siad Barre’s regime correlates closely with the progressive militarisation of government services” (Rawson 1994:158). After the 1980s, for all practical purposes, the population in those targeted regions in north and northeast was inflicted with a harsh military rule. As Ali Galaydh noted:

“Detention and torture of members of the political elite were pathetically familiar features of the political landscape. What was new, disturbing and monstrous was the targeting of an entire clan or sub-clan as enemies of the regime. These scorched earth measures carried out by the state organs did irreparable damage to the warp and woof of the Somali society” (Galaydh 1990:21).

At the same time, as the internal power struggles among the political elite sharpened, the government reacted to those challenges by constant shuffling the cabinet, purging the top commandants of the national army and instead promoting to higher posts cadets without any professional military experience. According to Abdi Samatar:

“The arbitrary way that the public service was managed and the uninformed and unsystematic nature of the decision-making process undermined the legitimacy of the regime. The promotion of unqualified individuals, who had connections in high places, into senior posts, displacing more seasoned and skilled employees, dealt a deathblow to the morale of public servants” (Abdi Samatar 1997:702).

The only criteria for those cadets who were promoted into senior posts in the military was loyalty to the regime of Siad Barre. In fact, in Somalia, between 1978 and 1986 the rule increasingly became autocratic within a narrowed political base, which

212 According to Ahmed Samatar, “With the creation of the National Security Service, harassment, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, denial of a fair public trial, and invasion of the home were common features in the life of the Somali citizen” (Samatar 1988:113).

213 As Abdi noted, “From then on, and with the General and his aides embarking on crushing Somalia’s ‘domestic enemies’, Somali politics seems to have completely focused on internal conflict and repression. That started with the targeting of the people of the north-eastern regions” (Abdi 1997: 54).

214 According to Compagnon, “Colonels and generals were part of the president’s patronage network; they had to remain loyal to him and his close relatives, whether they had command or were temporarily in the Cabinet.... The military apparatus offers a good example of Somali institutional decay as a result of the state’s patrimonialism” (Compagnon 1992:9).

215 Jackson and Rosberg’s theoretical characterisation of personal rule in Black Africa offers categories such as Prophet, Prince, Autocrat and Tyrant. The four types represent more or less the kind of personal rule for a given country in Africa. For more discussion, see Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, Personal Rule in Black Africa, University of California Press, (Berkeley, 1982).
channelled power and its perquisites into the hands of the President’s kin and cohorts. This ruling clique then in order to survive resorted to patronage and prebends politics. In this survival strategy, coercion to punish opposition groups and reward loyal cronies were both sides of the coin. Furthermore, the ruling clique extensively exploited the latent tensions between lineage groups and used the clan differences within the population as a political instrument. According to Daniel Compagnon, “by giving money and weapons to the clan segments whose goodwill he wanted to win, thereby weakening lineages hostile to his rule, Said Barre re-politicised lineage competition, deliberately breaking with the postcolonial state’s long-term efforts to appear neutral” (Compagnon 1992:10). Divide and rule politics damaged the cohesion and the social fabric of the society and also weakened the very foundation and the societal infrastructure of the state. Moreover, it resulted in increasing the divisions between the segmented lineages and clans, which politicised further their social co-existence. Furthermore, the regime promoted certain sub-clans to the political and economic disadvantage of other sub-clans and lineages. This deliberate tactic of creating political and economic inequality among the clans served further as a recipe for tension and communal conflicts.

According to Lewis, the Head of the State was the very one who covertly orchestrated the deleterious segmentation of the Somali society. For instance, Siad Barre promoted three sub-clans of the Darod clan family in the process of constructing an inner power circle for himself. The three sub-clans were the Marehan, Dolbahante and Ogaden. This then sewed the seeds of hatred of the members belonging to the three dominant sub-clans by other marginalised clans. Furthermore, the survival tactic of the military regime militarised the whole of Somali society. For example, the state deliberately armed the loyal clans who used the armaments to settle old scores with enemy clans. This strained the relations between the neighbouring clans and increased inter-clan feuds even among the pastoral nomads in the hinterland. Consequently, the militarism of the state institutions resulted in the extreme militarisation of Somali society. On top of the deliberate militarisation of the population in the country, there was also a dragging war of attrition across the border. Although a direct military confrontation between Ethiopia and Somalia subsided after the Ogaden war of 1977/78, sporadic border clashes continued to drag on. This war of attrition also forced the military regime of Somalia to purchase more arms and increase the number of its military force staggeringl (see chapter 6). For example, in 1981 the number of the army was 50,000-man strong and in proportion to the population of the country which at the time was 4.3 million, Somalia had the largest armed force in Africa (Nelson 1982:231).

216 See the Africa Contemporary Record (1987-88): 393.

217 “Promotions and postings were decided not on professional criteria and standard norms but pre-eminently on patronage, which was not determined solely by clan politics. Personal factors such as friendship, marriage, district-regional background and ‘entrepreneurship’ were also at play. The constant purging, selective recruitment, and the patronage system ‘politicised’ the army force” (Galaydh 1990:19).

218 As I.M. Lewis noted, “It is important to emphasise that these clans (the President, his mother’s brother’s and his son-in-law’s) all belong at a higher level of segmentary grouping to the Darod clan family. Although the regime at all times included representatives of other non-Darod clans, the magic letters MOD (Marehan, Ogaden, Dulbahante) represented the inner circle of power” (Lewis 1989:574).
7.5. Emergence of Organised Violence

As the Somali-wide public pursuit project faltered after Somalia was routed in the Ogaden war, the race for control of the state intensified. The rivaling state class began to stake their claims for a more equitable distribution of the state benefits and access to its upper-echelon positions. John Markakis in his seminal book ‘National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa’ (1987) identified the centrality of the state for the emergence of the organised violence in the region. According to Markakis, “everywhere the target of the attack is the state; the custodian of wealth and protector of privilege. The state is both the goal of the contest and the primary means through which the contest is waged” (Markakis: xvi). Consequently, the already beleaguered military regime faced not only opposition within the country but was also confronted with an organised insurgent groups operating across border. This last development in fact threatened the very existence of the regime.

As the state practically became the private property of a small oligarchy hand-picked by the President himself, marginalised political elite formed dissident groups. The marginalised political elite were former military generals and civilian ministers of the regime who lost their positions in the government through the internal power struggles of the state class. The first organised group which opted to wage an armed struggle against the regime was the army officers belonging to the Majeer teen clan, which inhabit mainly the central and north-east parts of the country. In April 1978, the army officers first staged a coup against the government but it was aborted. Afterwards, they left the country in order to escape arrest and formed the first organised opposition movement: the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and sought an operational base in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The movement was committed to the violent overthrow of the military regime of Siad Barre and was supported financially, logistically and militarily both by Ethiopia and Libya. And from 1980s onwards the SSDF movement, which was led by Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf, had launched intermittent cross-border military operations against the government but hardly posed a real threat to the stability of the regime. Yet the response from the government to these border attacks was disproportionately ruthless. According to Said Samatar, the scorched earth policy of the military regime against the civilian sympathisers of the movement resulted in the death of more than 2,000 Majeer teen clan members in the central region of Mudug between May to June 1979. In 1986, the SSDF movement collapsed when its leader Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf was arrested by the Ethiopian government, which was seeking at the time to normalise relations with the military government of Somalia. The movement was reconstituted in 1989 and is now playing a predominant role in the prevailing clan politics of Somalia.

Another clan-based uprising followed this insurgent movement. In 1981, disgruntled clan associated groups formed another armed opposition against the military regime of Siad Barre. The members of the movement largely belonged to the Isqa clan, which inhabit the north of Somalia. They named their political organisation the Somali National Movement (SNM) and like the SSDF it was granted an operational base in Ethiopia. Similarly, the SNM, like the

---

219 As Hashim noted, “at the site of elite class formation, Barre wanted to form a hand-picked oligarchy that would serve him rather than the nation or the state” (Hashim 1995:190).

220 Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf, the leader of the insurgent movement, Interview, July 11, 1997, Addis Ababa.

SSDF was also determined to overthrow the military regime by the force of arms. The chief grievances of this opposition group were that: they were not sufficiently represented in the economic and the political power of the state and their northern region was left underdeveloped. Moreover, they were not happy with the government interference and regulations of the livestock and the Qat trade, the only economic lifeline in their region.

The emergence of the SNM as the second armed movement alongside the SSDF heavily exerted a destabilising pressure on the state. The armed rebels of the two movements started launching violent attacks and causing increased security problems both in the border areas and inside the country. Therefore, the military regime in order to survive had to find a solution that stemmed the growing armed struggles of the dissidents. Accordingly, in a bid of desperation, the military regime of Somalia signed a treaty of non-aggression and non-interference with the government of Ethiopia in April 1988. In the treaty, both governments agreed to stop supporting each other’s insurgent groups; and as a further step, Ethiopia closed the military bases of both the SSDF and SNM opposition groups. This unexpected peace accord between the two traditional enemies of Ethiopia and Somalia caught the leaders of the SNM by surprise. In particular, the commanders of the fighting army became confronted with a strategic military dilemma as they quickly decided to launch an all-out offensive war against the state. By sheer force, they swiftly and briefly captured the most important strategic towns in the north of the country such as Hargeysa, Berbera and Burao where the Isaq clan from which the SNM derives its main supporters, largely inhabit. The military government reacted to this surprise attack from the SNM fighters with extreme violence. The government dispatched a well-armed military force to the region in order to put down the uprising. The ensuing battles between the government forces and the SNM repels were fierce and brutal. Finally, the government forces mercilessly crushed the insurgency and took over the control of the captured towns. However, the consequences were devastating as Hargeisa, the second largest city of the country was largely destroyed and most of its inhabitants fled across the border to Ethiopia and became refugees. According to Africa Watch, an estimation of 50,000 inhabitants in the region, were killed by the government forces between May 1988 and March 1989.

Another dire consequence of the war was that after 1988 the government lost control of this northern region of the country as it had become ungovernable. Furthermore, the military forces stationed in that region became trapped in a protracted guerrilla war with the SNM fighters wandering in the countryside. In a nutshell, the clan-organised uprising in this northern region marked a major watershed as the central government began losing control over the provinces of the state one after another. Actually, since that uprising the state began shrinking from its provinces while clan-based insurgencies were emerging one after another in order to take over the control of the abandoned peripheries. This means that the Somali state first collapsed in the peripheries before it finally exploded at the centre.

As the north and central regions were breaking off from the centre, political turmoil also started in the south of the country. In April 1989, a third clan-organised armed opposition movement emerged in the southern port of Kismayo. This new opposition movement, which was named the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) was formed by a mutiny of soldiers

---

222 Qat is mild narcotic leaves whose Latin name is (Catha Edulis Forsk), which the Somalis habitually chew as a social past time. Qat trees largely grow in the mountainous parts of Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen.


130
belonging to the Ogaden clan. The main grievance of the mutinous soldiers was that the President sacked and subsequently arrested General Mohamed Gabyo, the defence minister of the national army who was also an Ogaden by clan affiliation. General Gabyo was sacked because among other matters he was not happy with the naked patronage politics of the President as Siad Barre arbitrarily appointed many of his kin-family members in the higher positions of the military. Nonetheless, the dismissal of the defence minister was a signal of how the beleaguered ruling clique was cracking from within. It was also a clearly frantic attempt of the desperate President to save his power.

However, more worrisome to the ruling clique was the domestic civil strife that was spreading unabated and this time in the southern part of the country. Within less than two months, a second Ogaden organised uprising suddenly occurred. This second opposition front was formed by an Ogaden Colonel Ahmed Omar Jess, who defected with some armed men from a military garrison based in the north of the country. The regime that was already losing both the north and the central regions of the country because of the escalating civil strife was now confronted with a serious armed uprising in the south. Both of the Ogaden-organised resistance movements were destabilising the agriculturally fertile regions closely located in the south of the capital, the seat of the ruling military clique. Furthermore, the spreading civil strife was gradually moving ever closer and was engulfing the capital city from several directions. In the capital, the situation was becoming more ominous as the political power of the government was shrinking towards the city. In fact, during 1989, the authority of the government hardly existed beyond the frontiers of the capital city as the peripheral regions of the country had already been seized by clan-organised armed rebels. As the internal armed dissidents carved the outlying regions of the country from the centre, The Economist started addressing the President of Somalia as “the mayor of Mogadishu” (The Economist, September 29, 1990). Therefore, Somalia represents a perfect example of a state where the peripheries of the country collapsed before the centre finally exploded. The military regime for a very short while defended Mogadishu, the only place in the country which remained under its control, but that also became a mission impossible.

The emergence of a fourth armed rebel in the central regions and in the southern region where the capital city is located, has indeed precipitated the final downfall of the military regime. After the appearance of this last armed opposition movement named the United Somali Congress (USC), the military regime was in fact cornered as its defence tactics even in the capital had collapsed. The appearance of this last clan-organised dissident movement which was also a clan-based uprising was precipitated by a mutiny of Hawiye soldiers in the town of Galkaïyo, located in the central region of Mudug in October 1989. The mutiny of the armed soldiers quickly spread to the other central regions of Galgadud and Hiran. The government retaliated by bombing the towns and villages inhabited by the Hawiye clans, which resulted in

225 As Ahmed Samatar noted, “the spreading of resistance to Southern Somalia had a number of critical implications. The scope of civil strife assumed truly national proportions. With the economic base --- e.g., livestock trading --- in the North severely disrupted, Southern Somalia, the most fertile and productive part of the country, began to slide into anarchy --- accentuating the fiscal enfeeblement of local and national institutions. In the end, unable to conceive of more positive ways to assuage this downward spiral of de-legitimacy, the Siad Barre regime deployed the same punitive tactics applied in the North to cow the peasant populations and small town communities in the South where the SPM was suspected to operate (Ahmed Samatar 1993:88).

226 As Ali Galaydh writes, “the regions have been written off and now it is Mogadishu which is burning. The Diplomatic Corps have barricaded themselves in their compounds. The capital has imposed a voluntary 6:00 p.m. -6:00 a.m. curfew on itself, and the people are waiting anxiously for the nightmare to come to an end” (Galaydh 1990:27).
the death of many civilians. However, by that time, the clan uprising was spreading fast and the government had no military power to stop it or to put it down. Consequently, when the war finally reached the capital, the frightened red beret commandos guarding the Presidential Place turned their heavy artillery shells on the quarters of Mogadishu occupied by the supporters of the USC.  

Finally, the centre collapsed when the rebel forces from the peripheral regions conquered Mogadishu and forced Said Barre and his cohorts to flee the city on January 26, 1991. The armed resistance which captured Mogadishu was led by General Mohamed Farah Aideed. General Aideed was the successor of Mohamed Wardhigley, the first leader of the USC movement.

Before Mogadishu collapsed, there were locally initiated peace attempts aimed at changing the course of the present history of the country. The most significant of these peace initiatives was that put forward by prominent national figures, which were later called the Manifesto Group. The group composed of more than 100 respected intellectuals and moderate politicians drafted an open manifesto. In the manifesto, they appealed to the President to start a peaceful dialogue with the insurgent groups and also put in place a provisional government. Their aim was to find a solution to the escalating political turmoil in the country and try to avert the total collapse of the state. However, the President was not ready to change the dramatic course of the political history of the country as he immediately arrested 45 of the signatories of the letter.  

Subsequently, they were released when the mass public demonstrations in the capital coupled with international diplomatic pressure forced the President to change his mind and set them free. By that time, everything was falling apart and all the efforts of the international mediators aimed at reconciling the armed opposition groups and government had come to naught. For example, in the last hours, both Italian and Egyptian governments did their utmost to prevent the Somali state from falling apart. Unfortunately, after two months of intense fighting, the capital finally fell, resulting in the complete collapse of the state.

227 Mohamed Sh. M. Guled (Gacamadheere), Interview, July 12, 1997, Addis Ababa. Guled was an eyewitness of this account.

7.6. Conclusion

As I demonstrated in this chapter, the Somali state did not collapse suddenly. The state was first plagued by multiple crises resulting from the pitfalls of the politics of private and public pursuit that the Somali political actors had been pursuing since the country achieved statehood in 1960. These accumulated crises gradually weakened the overall capacity of the state and ultimately led to its collapse. During the 1980s, the multiple crises affecting the state manifested themselves in an acute economic deterioration, refugee problems, militarised political and social institutions and finally the emergence of organised armed groups.

The acute economic deterioration which started early in the 1980s impoverished the majority of the population and depleted the coffers of the state. For example, the extremely high inflation caused by the rapid downward slide of the economy deeply affected the purchasing power of the civil servants in the administration. The monthly salaries they earned could not enable them to sustain their families. As a result, most of the civil servants started looking for private jobs in order to boost their monthly incomes. Gradually, this practice resulted in the collapse of the government administration. Worse of all the state also became abjectly poor at a time when the population of Somalia experienced a spectacular acceleration of growth rate, causing a demographic explosion. The accelerated growth rate of the population meant that many mouths had to be fed in a situation where the national resources were dwindling. The abject poverty of the state and the population explosion then led to all sorts of increased social and class tensions, mainly in urban areas such as Mogadishu. Furthermore, in the 1980s, the economic collapse of the state was further exacerbated by the massive influx of refugees into the country, fleeing from the Ogaden desert as the result of the border wars between Ethiopia and Somalia. This massive influx of refugees also imposed a heavy burden on the meagre resources of the state, aggravating the already impoverished domestic economy.

To add to the problems of the extremely impoverished population and bankrupted state, the political institutions of the state also became militarised in the 1980s. The government started using violence to suppress any kind of domestic resistance. The government also brutally punished any person or a group who disagreed with its policy. Gradually, this militaristic solution to the domestic challenges became rampant and widespread. In certain regions of the country, such as the north and north-east, where about a third of the Somali population live, the government imposed a harsh military rule. Eventually, this repressive political behaviour of the government militarised the political and the social institutions of the country. Consequently, violence bred violence and that resulted in the emergence of organised armed groups. These armed dissidents also used violence to fight against the government. Subsequently, the most tragic outcomes of this vicious violence were the disintegration of the national army (the custodian of the monopoly of coercive violence) and the ruling elites. Thereafter, as the social and political institutions in the country were militarised, the domestic political violence took on its own dynamics and then developed into a fully-fledged civil war. And that civil strife kept dragging on until it dismantled the very state. Finally, the Somali state collapsed after the bureaucratic administration, the national army and the ruling elite...
A theoretical importance worth noting here is how the contradictions of the tendencies towards private and public pursuits do not lead to new synthesis in the case of Somalia but to meltdown as the collapse of the state testifies. Throughout the Somali history, the contradictory tendencies towards private and public pursuits which are the two sides of the same coin, presenting one historical rather than two separate historical processes, have negative and positive impulses in the contemporary making of the Somali society. For example, the parochial tendency towards private pursuit has positive impulses at the sub-national and sub-state levels but negatively undermines efforts geared towards wider political identity and nation building at the state levels. By contrast, the tendency towards public pursuit has positive impulses at the national and state levels as its inspired struggles against colonial occupations during the colonial period, national awakening and the state making project in the post-colonial era. However the negative effects of this tendency towards public pursuits such as a very expensive military build up, militarisation of the state and the untenable policy of irredentist adventure against the neighbouring countries have also contributed to the weakening of the state. In short, the negative effects of the contradictory tendencies towards private and public pursuits have in combination led to the meltdown of the post-colonial state in Somalia.