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

Conclusions
Somalia: Beyond the Collapse of the State

9.1. Introduction

It is now time to try to bring together the threads of the study. Firstly, in this chapter, I summarise what I modestly hope will contribute to the understanding of why the Somali state collapsed, to the research in the field of Somali studies and also to the search for a ways of rebuilding a viable political order in the country. The primary aim of this study is to present a comprehensive historical processes which advance continuity and change explanations that offer different interpretations for the collapse of the state to those hitherto available.

Secondly, after the summary, I shall give a brief account of the attempts that the Somalis have so far made to restore a political order in the country. Since the Somali state collapsed in 1991, both "top down" and "bottom up" efforts have been undertaken in order to reconstitute the state. Thirdly, I describe the serious political tensions between the regional and the centralised-based attempts in establishing a viable political system in Somalia. Finally, I delineate the political uncertainty that confronts Somalia at the present and which is likely to prevail in the foreseeable future.

9.2. Alternative Propositions

In this study, taking a cue from a historically informed theory, I have attempted to advance alternative explanations for the collapse of the state. I have explained how the constraints in the material environment and the misfortunes in the Somali history across time have set in motion the destructive turn of events in the present Somalia.\(^{289}\) I also attempted to construct a coherent explanation of the cumulative structural crises that the pitfalls of the triple history - pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial dynamics - have produced. In this long-term view, I considered how the impact of the harsh ecological conditions, extreme poverty of the pastoral economy, colonial partitioning of the country, Cold War imperatives, decades of armed struggles and crisis of governance have all contributed to the collapse of the state.

The constraints in the material environment in the country had been a source of conflict and struggle for survival among the Somalis in much of their history. The Somali livestock husbandry that is the dominant means of economic existence even today is fit only for the most basic of subsistence and does not generate a surplus which can be used in building local administrations and a governing authority. Historically speaking, this precarious material existence among other factors has largely condemned the Somali people to develop a rudimentary political organisation that does not advance beyond lineage and kinship relations. To put it simply, the pre-colonial Somali social formation had a weak social stratification, lacked a class of political leadership and was stateless in the very sense of the word. Furthermore, as I demonstrated in this dissertation, the limited nature of the domestic

\(^{289}\) Both aspects are paramount to this study because of their centrality for the purpose of clarifying the narratives of the collapse of the state.
economy is what aggravates the crisis of accumulation that the colonial and post-colonial Somali political elite perennially endure. In reality, this grinding material deprivation forced the political elite to become rivals for the control of state power as well as its resources and opportunities. Also the meagre pastoral economic existence, which hardly grows beyond bare subsistence level, was what condemned the modern state of Somalia to survive on foreign aid handouts from its colonial inception until its implosion in 1991. The Somali state collapsed after the external financial aid was cut off.\textsuperscript{290} In short, as I argued in this study, examining historically the poverty of the domestic economy provides better insights as to why the state collapsed after the Cold War ended in 1989 and the domestic elites consequently became embroiled in a survivalist civil war. This political economy approach is superior to the explanations based on primordial clan animosity and other essentialist explanations.

As I described in this study, Somalis have also been unfortunate victims of the predicaments they have been placed in through the ages. The history of the Somalis has always been a history of struggles against foreign aggressions, conquests and occupations. For instance, the Somali people have been struggling against the expansion of the neighbouring feudal Ethiopian state, the colonial occupation and the partitioning of the country among colonial powers in much of its recorded history. Furthermore, since the colonial state was imposed, the struggle of liberating the country from foreign occupation and re-uniting all the territories inhabited by the ethnic Somalis had become the overriding priority in the agenda of the Somali political elite and governments. In fact, this Pan-Somali agenda was the most salient political project that defined the policy priority of the post-colonial Somali leadership over domestic social concerns and economic development. More markedly, the struggle to regain the missing territories led the subsequent Somali governments to pursue a very risky and untenable policy of irredentist adventure against the neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, the failure of the irredentist liberation struggle was what gradually militarised the institutions of the state and precipitated the crisis of governance in the 1980s. The militarisation of the state apparatus and the crisis of the governance have had grave results as they led to domestic social tensions, elite conflicts and to a civil war that ultimately resulted in the implosion of the state.

In essence, the contribution of this study in the field of Somali studies is to show how the constraints of the material environment and predicaments in the history of the Somali people across time, have largely determined the present social and political condition in Somalia. The central argument of this thesis is that the deleterious effects of both misfortunes – the poverty of the domestic economy on the one hand and the pitfalls of the colonial intervention and the division of the country on the other hand – have generated cumulative structural crises over time, which led to perennial conflicts and struggles that eventually destroyed the state. Presumably, if the domestic economy has had a sufficient surplus and colonial powers had not partitioned the country, the Somali state would probably not have withered away by now.

Theoretically, in this study, I examined the problematic nature of the collapse of the state both within the premises of the general theories (both modernisation and dependency) of state in Africa and within the specific debates in the Somali studies. In other words, I have adopted

\textsuperscript{290} "Somalia in the Cold War era received a higher level of foreign aid per capita than any other country save Israel; the Somali state was literally run on external assistance and collapsed soon after that aid was withdrawn. Somalia earned a reputation as a 'graveyard' of failed foreign assistance projects. Both the sheer quantity of aid and the politicized and poorly conceived quality of external assistance during the 1960–1990 period left an indelible mark on Somali society and its response to foreign aid agencies" (Menkhaus 2001:311). Perhaps an indelible trait worth noting here is that the availability of massive foreign assistance is what by and large fostered a political culture of dependence and opportunism among the ruling Somali political elite (see chapter 5).
both the universal and the local levels of analysis to seek to understand how and why the state collapsed. However, the existing grand theories of the state in Africa, despite their divergent insights and concerns hardly shed enough light on clues that point to the processes leading to the fragmentation of the state, simply because the proponents of these universal approaches have taken for granted the permanence of the state world-wide. It is because of this certainty that the survival and the future existence of the state is not considered as a unit of analysis. The substantial issues these general theories of state mainly deal with regarding the state in Africa since the 1960s affirm this shortcoming. For instance, while the modernisation theory focused on the idiosyncrasy of the political system, the dependency alternative emphasised the external exploitation and the statist writers stressed the instrumentalist and the patrimonialist nature of the state in Africa. Thus, none of the approaches seriously questioned and/or addressed the basic structural crisis of the state in Africa, a subject which requires rigorous research elsewhere since it is not the aim of this study to pursue it any further. This weakness therefore certainly prevented those grand perspectives from foreseeing the implosion of states like that of Somalia during the 1990s.

The theoretical proposition of this study in contrast to the highly abstract universal level of analysis advanced by grand theories is that the crisis and in some cases the collapse (i.e. of Somalia) of the state in Africa can better be explained if we examine each respective state against its own historical conjuncture and specificity. In other words, the problematics of each state in Africa must be analysed within the dynamics of its own concrete historical trajectories and specific formation. In this instance I have analysed the collapse of the state in Somalia in the light of its own long-term historical trajectories through which the political institutions of the Somali people have evolved. The explanatory value of this approach is that it provides us better insights into both the specificity and the process of the legitimate normative evolution of the state.

With respect to the national and domestic level of analysis, the study takes cues from the existing debates of the Somali studies. I have tried to construct in a coherent manner a continuity and change explanations as to why the state collapsed. This is the point of departure of this study since the continuity and change debates link together internal and external dynamics that have been shaping the Somali social formations over a long period of time. For instance, the traditionalist scholarship of Somali studies claims that it is the continuity of the primordial socio-cultural aspects in the society, which is the fundamental source of the contemporary predicament in Somalia. By contrast, the transformationist writers of Somali studies alternatively contend that is the change of the political economy and power relations of the production wrought by the external dynamics (e.g. the colonial intervention), which exacerbated the domestic conflict that set the course for the fragmentation process of the state.

The theoretical proposition of this study in contrast to the traditionalist scholarship of Somali studies is that the causes of the state collapse in Somalia are determined internally by the continuity of private pursuit (understood here as spoils politics) rather than primordial clan animosity. This study also contests the theoretical proposition of the transformationist scholarship of Somali studies as it argues that the causes of the state collapse were wrought by the tendency towards public pursuit which the change brought about by the external colonial imposition and the partitioning of the country has given rise to. Thereafter, the grave consequences of the colonial divisions were later exacerbated by the imperatives of the Cold War politics in the Horn of Africa and by the militaristic policy of the Somali state that opted for an irredentist adventure. As I explained in the main body of the dissertation, the premises
concerning private and public pursuit that I have developed advance alternative explanations to the collapse of the state to those hitherto available. In a nutshell, this alternative proposition is the essence that this thesis contributes to the theoretical debates in the field of Somali studies.

The added value of this study in the field of Somali studies and particularly the part dealing with the formation and the fragmentation of the state is that it attempts to present a continuity and change explanations that offer different interpretations for the collapse of the state. I have formulated these new interpretations after examining critically the history and the political economy of the Somali society across time. For instance, the continuity of the tendency towards private pursuit given rise to by the extreme material deprivation in the country helped to accentuate the persistence of narrow clan identity, kinship-based polity, wild chase for private spoils as well as all sorts of parochial interests. In this respect, the tendency towards private pursuit has positive impulses at the sub-national and sub-state levels but negatively affected the aspiration geared to promote the pursuit of the public good at the national and state levels. By contrast, the tendency towards public pursuit which the colonial fragmentation of the country awakened, inspired Somali-wide struggles against foreign aggressions and conquest and also fostered the idea of collective identity. In this sense, the positive impulses of the tendency towards public pursuit pushed the process of the social formation towards wider political identity, unity and nationhood while its negative repercussions (notably the militarisation of the state and the very risk irredentist adventure), undermined the viability of the post-colonial state of Somalia.

In a nutshell, the tendencies towards private and public pursuit which are indeed the two sides of the same coin, group certain decisive dimensions (including those elements already advanced by the dominant schools of Somali studies) that led to the historical demise of the Somali state project. Furthermore, in this study I tried to demonstrate how dialectic does not always lead to a new synthesis but sometimes to meltdown as the negative impulses of both historical dynamics have eventually fragmented the state. This study thus attempts to construct a mode of analysis and interpretation in the hope of shedding a new light on our understanding of the current political upheavals in Somalia. More importantly, this research contributes to practical policy approaches and proposals of post-conflict reconstruction in Somalia. The challenge that Somalia now faces is the development of institutional mechanisms that facilitates peace and development at the local and national levels. In this respect, the present post-conflict political development in Somalia demands innovative, strategic and systematic approach as well as a high level of creativity.

With respect to the general debate on the state in Africa, the contradictory tendencies towards private and public pursuit affirm the incompleteness of state making in the continent. For example, in a wider context, the tendency towards private pursuit demonstrates the persistence of parochial ties and sentiments based on kinship, ethnic loyalty, religion, language, regional, cultural identity and a host of other ascriptive criteria that still hinder the project of state building in Africa. By contrast, the tendency towards public pursuit is denoted by the diverse policy strategies adopted by the most ruling elites in the continent that were aimed to foster social reforms, embark on programmes for economic development and build viable state systems in the continent following independence. Thus, these concrete manifestations demonstrate how the working of the opposing tendencies towards private and public pursuit can also be observed on the continental plane. Let me make one point clear: I am not introducing here new definitions of these phenomena since these contradictory dynamics are discernible, albeit as different facets, in any given country in Africa. In this
study I have only considered the workings of these frameworks within the context of Somalia. For example, with respect to public pursuit while most of the post-colonial African elites attempted to foster social coherence with the aim of building nations within the borders of their respective countries, the Somali elites by contrast embarked on the task of enlarging the boundaries of the state by irredentist adventure since according to their view Somalis are already a nation. Eventually in Somalia the contradictory dynamics of these processes reinforced the total collapse of the state while in many countries in Africa these tendencies remain the underlying causes for the crisis of the state. The challenge confronting most states in Africa is how to develop economic resources and construct effective social institutions that promote the pursuit of the public good, which in the long run restrains the tendency of the politics of private pursuit.

9.3. Post –Conflict Development in Somalia

Somalia is the only country in the world, which has remained stateless over the past ten years. In this respect, Somalia has achieved the longest record of a withered state in the modern world, where the state system is the only internationally accepted mechanism for human organisation. Since 1991 after the state collapsed, the social landscape of Somalia has completely changed. Somalia as a country has broken down into a series of clan-based fiefdoms that frequently clash over territory. This means that the country disintegrated into its traditional clan geography, which was the case before Somalia achieved the title of statehood in 1960. The Somalis, wherever they were in the country before the conflict exploded, returned to their traditional homelands. The clan-based civil war that broke out in the aftermath of the state collapse forced them to seek safe havens in their respective clan areas. Consequently, Somalia now is a place where there is hardly a national state but numerous clan-based localities. The civil war in 1991 particularly created an atmosphere of deep mistrust and fear and badly damaged the social harmony among the Somali clans. Furthermore, the civil war caused a lot of grievances that many people will not easily forget. Today, ten years have passed since the state collapsed yet the social fabric of the society is still in tatters while the political authority at all levels is up for grabs.

Since the state collapsed, two parallel peace and reconciliation processes were initiated. One was a “top down” approach launched to restore a fully-fledged national government in the country. This traditional diplomatic “top down” approach was the strategy preferred and adopted by the UN, regional organisations, governments and the Somali political elite such as faction leaders to achieve national reconciliation. The external actors have initiated this high-level national process without understanding the complexity of Somali society. They also failed to envision the collapse of the external economic backing and the ideological and

291 For further information, see David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, Somalia: Nation in Search of a State, op. cit: 129-152.


293 Traditional clan-based geographical zones had existed in the country throughout Somali history (see chapter 3).

political underpinnings that sustained the survival of the crumbled centralised authority after
the global history changed course at the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, they did not at all
realise that the local social forces and the political leadership, which represented the collapsed
central government, were in disarray and had fragmented into a bunch of individuals of
irreconcilable political differences. Through this “top down” approach, twelve national
reconciliation conferences (between 1991 and 1997) were convened with the goal of restoring
a central authority in Somalia yet no success was achieved. The immediate reason for this was
that the faction leaders and warlords who sign the peace deal and agreed to form a national
government frequently failed to honour their promises.295

However, more fundamental reasons can be cited as to why the “top down” approach to
restore a central authority in the country faltered dozens of times. First, the faction leaders and
warlords who played the dominant role in the process of national reconciliation had neither
legitimacy nor a real social base in the country. The only power they had was the barrel of the
gun and the threat of this means of violence enabled them to keep the population hostage. No
one nominated them to attend those conferences, which were held abroad. The ordinary
people knew that those self-styled leaders were concerned only with their private vanity rather
than the public good. Second, the civil war created a deep hatred and distrust among the
Somali clans and no clan desires to be ruled by a leader(s) from other clans. Somalis in
general feel wary of the establishment of a centralised political authority in the country, at
least in the present situation, where power has become increasingly unrestrained due to
degeneration of the social fabric and the normative social values of the society. Furthermore,
“it is part of the Somali culture to care about the specific part of the country where one lives.
With local identity and a sense of community among kinsmen narrowly conceived, rebellious
clan factions were unwilling to accept a singular rule of law from any central authority”
(Geshekter 1997:66).296 Third, the people had a terrible experience of centralised government
under the military regime of Said Barre. The central authority of Somalia was oppressive and
brutal and many people became victims because of its arbitrary misrule. It is for this reason
therefore that many people are unwilling to risk this oppressive system of rule for the second
time.297

Even if the external actors had succeeded in establishing a central government in the country
through a “top down” approach, its survival could not have been guaranteed because of the
lack of domestic resources. As I discussed in chapter three and chapter five, the camel economy
in the country is very limited and cannot afford to sustain a centralised system of
authority. The experience of the vanished Somali state is a clear testimony for this. The post-
colonial Somali state in fact survived through foreign assistance from its birth in 1960 till its
demise in 1991. The concrete proof is that the Somali state collapsed immediately after the
Cold War ended. As the foreign assistance was stopped the state tumbled. Thus, those who
are in favour of the restoration of a central authority must not underestimate the depth of the

295 Mark Bradbury notes that, “there was little incentive for military leaders and their militias, who were
profiting from an economy of plunder and extortion, to implement any peace accord. With the peace conferences
held outside Somalia there was little pressure on the factional leaders to adhere to the agreements” (Bradbury
1997:42).

296 This quotation appears to contradict the irredentist politics of the Somali state over the past decades. But this
is not the case. As the experience of past Somali history demonstrates, it is easier to mobilise the fragmented
Somali clans against foreign threats and aggressions across borders than to appeal to them cooperate together in
the domestic affairs of the country.

297 Dr. Omar Ma’alim Mohamed, Interview, June 9, 1996, Addis Ababa.

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poverty of the domestic economy in the country.\textsuperscript{298} This is an aspect which both the external actors and the Somali political elites overlook or perhaps are not sufficiently interested to address in diplomatic official circles. The other crucial issue that I have attempted to highlight in this search study is the societal aspect of making a central authority in Somalia. As I asserted in chapter three, because of the low productivity of the camel economy, which is still the primary source of livelihood in Somalia, the social organisation of Somali society cannot advance beyond the kinship system. In other words, the prevalence of this kin-ordered mode not only prevents the institutionalisation of political power but also perpetuates the tendency of lineage or clan loyalty rather than a Somali-wide solidarity. Thus, the important question is: Is it realistic or even possible to establish a viable central authority in Somalia without a cohesive community? This is a daunting challenge, which the Somali political elite must ponder and deliberate on before taking a hasty decision that may not produce a durable political structure.

The other reconciliation process was a “bottom up” or a building block approach.\textsuperscript{299} This peace initiative hardly received any media publicity and was neither encouraged nor supported externally. It was basically an internal affair and a locally driven peace process. The dominant players were the local-level leadership such as the traditional elders, religious leaders, locality and community leaders, local traders and networks of grass-roots civic associations such as women, intellectuals, etc. The local-level leadership initiated the reconciliation procedures as a gradual process and attempted to build the peace step by step. They took time and they had the patience to realise a durable peace settlement in their respective localities. They were also committed and had a strong resolve to secure lasting peace agreements between the different interest groups. The reconciliation process was gradual and measured and the conflicting parties had to negotiate for weeks and in some cases months in order to reach a consensus on a given issue. However, this time-consuming process was not what the external actors and the rivalling Somali faction leaders and warlords were prepared to endure since what they wanted was a quick convention and the declaration of a quick victory.

This initiative of building peace painstakingly at grass-root levels began in the north-west and north-east areas of the country after the central authority collapsed in 1991. The local-level leadership in both areas has done its utmost to save this part of the country from the civil war. They have greatly succeeded. The civil war that started in 1991 remained confined mainly to the south of the country. But, they have done more than preventing the civil strife in their respective regions. They have also set in motion a local level or grassroots peace process whereby the clans and sub-clans inhabiting those areas have to settle their differences through dialogue rather than through the barrel of a gun. The communities in both zones have to negotiate everything starting from the basics such as security matters, sharing resources all the

\textsuperscript{298} According to Kenneth Menkhaus and Louis Ormayer, “this disjoint between the country’s internal capacity to finance a government and the actual costs of an even-minimalist state structure was laid bare by UNOSOM efforts in 1993-1995 to assist in the rebuilding of a ‘sustainable’ government in Somalia. Reviewing the actual size of the prewar Somali GNP and the country’s likely tax revenues, UN officials concluded that even a bare-bones national police force would cost more than the entire annual budget of a future Somali state. All of the rest of the trappings of the contemporary state were well beyond the means of this impoverished country. Sustainability, as it turned out, was never an operative principle during the rise and expansion of the Somali state” (Menkhaus and Ormayer 2000:392).

way to the establishment of district and regional administrations. The reconciliation dialogue was not without difficulties since the peace process was sometimes one step forward and two steps back. Nevertheless, the process was democratic as every interest group was allowed to participate in it. The local-level leadership peace platform helped the communities in both areas to tolerate their differences, created a culture of compromise, concession and discussion through which the interest groups can settle disagreements without recourse to violent means.

In 1993, the political leadership in the north-west (or what is now called the Somaliland Republic), because of the race chase for private spoils, failed to restore peace and stability among the clans and the sub-clans in the area. After that the traditional elders and the religious figures stepped in and took the initiative of building the peace painstakingly at grass-root levels. The peace dialogue of the Council of Elders (Guurti) has taken four months to iron out the differences among the rivalling groups but finally helped to restore a relatively viable stability in Somaliland. According to Bradbury,

“The 1993 Borama conference was an impressive example of an indigenous Somali reconciliation process, in which the role of lineage elders as mediators in the internal affairs of the communities were clearly displayed. It provided an alternative model to the reconciliation process promoted by the United Nations in Somalia after the resignation of Ambassador Sahnoun” (Bradbury 1997:29).

The success of the peace initiatives of the traditional elders was that they first approached the settlement of disputes at the local level and then tried to build up to the sub-clan, clan and inter-clan levels. In short, the clan elders have succeeded where the political leaders have failed. In the Somali context, the elders and the religious leaders are the embodiment of tradition and moral order. They are seen as peacemakers who are also knowledgeable in cultural techniques of conflict-mediation and resolution (see chapter 3). For instance, during the Borama conference, the chairman of the Council of Elders, sheikh Ibrahim, stated that: “our task is to ensure security and reconciliation. The government’s responsibility is management, administration and development” (Omaar, 1993:48).

The other success story of a post-conflict peace settlement in Somalia, initiated at the local levels, was that promoted in the north-east regions of the country. In December 1993, a peace conference was held in the city of Growe. The participants were mainly traditional elders, community leaders, representatives of various interest groups, intellectuals and religious figures. In this conference, the armed faction leaders attended only as observers. The main objectives of the conference were to find ways and means of achieving peace and cooperation among sub-clans and larger clan-families living in the adjoining regions of Bari, Sanaag, Nugaal, Sool and Mudug in the north-east. The conference adopted far-reaching resolutions that included implementation of security, economic development, social policies and


301 Rakiya Omaar writes that, “the betrayal of the hopes for Somaliland by some power-hungry politicians and military officers has pushed traditional elders to take matters into their own hands. Conflict resolution within clans and between clans has always been the responsibility of elders” (Omaar 1993:46-48).

cooperation among the five regions. Since then, peace and security have prevailed all over those regions.

The peace and tranquility that the regions in the north-east and in the north-west of the country have enjoyed over the past ten years also enabled the local population to experiment with local administrations and authorities. The north-west regions of Somaliland had a head-start. After 1991 Somaliland had a regional authority and even succeeded in holding three local elections. Furthermore, the regional authority succeeded in achieving relatively a functioning administration although they did not get any help from the outside world. Likewise, in the north-east regions a protracted process of negotiation between the political leaders and the local level leadership finally resulted in the formation of Puntland Administration in 1998.

In both areas, the process of establishing local-level authorities has received little publicity and even little interest outside Somalia although it has been going on over the past ten years. In hindsight the intervention of the local-level leadership in the peace and the reconciliation process in both areas has been extremely important. They have not only helped to spare this part of the country from the civil war that destroyed southern Somalia but they also greatly contributed to the painstaking formation of local authorities from the “bottom up” approach, which is the best way to reconstruct a viable authority in Somalia at the present. Unfortunately, in southern Somalia, the local-level leadership was not allowed to emerge and reconcile the local communities as the armed faction leaders and warlords suppressed them and prevented them from doing so. The tragedy is that now ten years have passed since the civil war broke out and still southern Somalia remains in the grip of a vicious and unending violence. It has also become an area where lawlessness and banditry are rampant compared with those peaceful regions in the northern parts of the country. Worse still, the dragging on of the violent conflict in the area tore asunder the fabric of the social order.

The success of the post-conflict local government experiment in these northern regions of the country could be a model or a catalyst for Somalia as a whole and also for others elsewhere who are trying their best to reconstitute their lives at the local levels. The war-torn communities in Sierra Leone, Congo, Kosovo and others could perhaps draw relevant lessons from this Somali experience. Furthermore, this Somali experiment of building peace, communal reconciliation and local level authorities from the “bottom up” approach needs to be studied and scrutinised in order to ascertain its long-term viability. Over the past ten years, Somalis have repeatedly failed to restore a central authority but succeeded in establishing locally and regionally based authorities. The reason is that the existing material environment and the social and political capacity of the contemporary Somali society cannot support any governing system beyond that of localised authorities. As Bradbury writes,


305 The reason is that in southern Somalia there are productive resources that can still be plundered. Southern Somalia possesses rich agricultural resources that the factional leaders and the warlords are still jockeying to capture and control for their zero-sum game private pursuits. Anyone interested in knowing more about this war hidden beneath southern Somalia’s seemingly perennial clan conflicts must read the book edited by Besteman and Cassanelli, The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War, op.cit.
"The political constitution of Somali society lies not in the centralised political institutions of a European model, but in a particular social system where the notion of a 'social contract' has more to do with regulating political and economic relationships between pastoral kinship groups, than with delegating responsibility to a central polity" (Bradbury 1997:43).

9.4. Regional Versus Central Authority

In August 2000, a reconciliation conference that was held in Djibouti resulted in the formation of a "top down" centralised transitional national government in Mogadishu. Since then political tension has been simmering between the already existing local and regional authorities and the newly created centralised authority. Both the regionally based authorities of Puntland and Somaliland were the first domestic powers to reject the formation of the central government in the country. They do not want to recognise it and they do not want to deal with it at any level. In fact, they see the Mogadishu-based transitional national authority both as a threat to their political power and as a challenge to the regional administrations they have been building gradually from the scratch since 1991. Their main concern is that the peace and the political stability they have diligently realised in their respective regions may be at stake if they join southern Somalia, which is still in the grip of anarchy. They therefore argue that the so-called central authority in Mogadishu must first bring under their control the violent situation in Mogadishu and the southern regions. And only after they succeed in normalising the political situation in the south, restoring peace and order and establishing effective local control in the southern regions will they enter into a dialogue with them. Otherwise, they are not going to have anything to do with them. In short, what the regional authorities in Puntland and Somaliland are saying is: we have already put our houses in order, let the authorities in Mogadishu do the same thing in the south of Somalia before they start dreaming of a Somali-wide government.

Since the "top down" authority was established in Mogadishu, Somalis were debating the pros and cons of both regional and central administration. The establishment of the central administration "has inspired considerable debate and commentary inside and outside Somalia.... These debates are very important in the battle for public opinion inside Somalia, and hence important for external actors to understand. At this point in time, the debate is fairly evenly divided" (Menkhau 2000:10). The supporters of local and regional-level authorities argue that building Somalia from the bottom up is the most sensible since this approach offers the best hope for the future. The local communities own the "bottom up" process and what they have built so far at the local levels they achieved because they diligently utilised their own cultural and political resources and societal capacity. This "bottom up" approach of building the social fabric of the Somali society will take longer to achieve tangible results, but at the same time it has the potential to realise a society built on a culture of peace and democracy. It can also help to lay the foundation of a tradition for viable governance. This is how one of the Somali regionalists summed up the argument:

"In the best case scenario, the country will be de-centralised into smaller manageable units. Each unit will need to develop its own economic base and modern institutions, including all levels of education, to allow it to exist as viable entity. The sum of the

decentralised units will make up a strong nation with many functioning elements” (Jama, 2000:48).

The supporters of the top-imposed central authority by contrast contend that Somalia is in dire need of a national government. Over the past ten years Somalia remained without a central government. The situation cannot and must not remain like this any longer. To survive as a Somali nation we urgently need a country-wide national government. Thus, the establishment of a central authority in the country is not only the best option but it is an utmost necessity, as this will restore the unity and the nationhood of the Somali people. In brief, keeping in mind the local political situation in Somalia at present, the essence of the debate centres on which system of governance is viable in the long run. The supporters for the “bottom up” local and regional administrations forcefully argue that the building block approach is the most sensible strategy in the process of establishing a viable system of governance in the country. By contrast, the advocates of the “top down” central authority on the other hand, claim that what is now urgently needed is a nation-wide administration acceptable to the outside world and one which also rehabilitates the tattered international relations image of Somalia.

In this discussion, I.M. Lewis, the traditionalist proponent of Somali study is in favour of building the country from the “bottom up” levels. Lewis admires the achievements that the local level leadership in Puntland and Somaliland regions have so far made by putting in place locality-based political units, which are formed organically and according to him must be considered exemplary examples of the post-conflict political development in the country. By contrast, Lewis is very critical with the newly created and top-imposed central government in Mogadishu and the role of the UN in this process. According to Lewis, the international community and the UN are attempting to re-impose on Somalia, “an archaic colonial structure that failed conspicuously to deliver ‘good government’ in the past. All those who have the interests of the Somali people at heart (and by no means all Somali politicians have that) should endeavour to understand how progress in Somaliland and Puntland has been achieved and how their successes might be replicated in the troubled south” (Lewis, 2001). Abd i Samatar, one of the transformationist critics, contests this view of Lewis as he supports the transitional government formed in Djibouti in 2000. Samatar argues that the political reconciliation process, which resulted in the formation of this new transitional government in Somalia is not an outcome dictated or imposed by the UN on the Somali people but it is a realisation made possible by the collective efforts of the Somalis themselves. This outcome of the political process was negotiated by all groups of civil associations and leaders of different communities and thus was indeed inclusive. Therefore, the new government is legitimately elected and chosen by the Somalis and in this respect the scathing critics of Lewis are misplaced (Abdi Samatar, 2001). The dynamics of the present political tensions between the local, regional and central authorities in Somalia are very important processes that need to be observed very closely in the following years.

On top of the power struggles between the regional and central authorities, the other issues which remain a source of tension in the foreseeable future is the fear of one clan domination over others and the sharing of the limited resources in the country. Generally speaking the

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308 See also this recent article of Lewis, “Why the Warlords Won: How the United States and the United Nations misunderstood the clan politics of Somalia”, TLS (June 8, 2001).
peace and political reconciliation in Somalia is still a very fragile process. In this respect, what the people now need is a committed leadership that build up the governing institutions in the country both at the “bottom up” and at the “top down” levels diligently and in complementary spirit. Yet, we must not forget one aspect and that is the domestic economy in the country is the most important single parameter of what institution of governance is and is not possible or viable in Somalia. As I repeatedly discussed in the dissertation, the lack of a viable economic existence from which to generate sufficient tax revenue will be the greatest obstacle in sustaining a central authority in Somalia. The existing meagre domestic tax revenue can only support the most minimal system of governance. This must be obvious to anyone who has being following the political development in Somalia over the past decade. According to Menkhaus, “since the only subnational polities that have really worked effectively in Somalia in the 1990s are municipalities, this scenario would be roughly akin to the league of commercial city-states. This scenario would in some ways be more ‘organic’ in the Somali context. Such a polity would develop very gradually, over years and even decades. Given Somalia’s weak tax revenues, this scenario is the only economically viable one, but this vision of a minimalist state runs deeply counter to the political instincts and habits of the current political class in Somalia, whose formative years were spent in large civil services supported by foreign aid and expansive government mandate” (Menkhaus 2000:19).

Establishing a central state with a minimum functional task will constitute a greater challenge and requires serious negotiations among all the political actors in the country. Perhaps the political power in the country can be reconstituted in a new alternative arrangement if the central authority is willing to delegate more political power to the local and regional authorities. However, the most difficult aspect is that the Somali power elite has to create and practise a new political habit which will not a minor feat. Still, as this saying goes: old habits die-hard. In the meantime, my position on this local, regional versus central debate will not differ from the statement that an old Somali made when the country was under the British Military Administration in the 1940s. A British officer once asked an old Somali man, “What do you want the most?” and the old man replied, “to be well governed, but to be left alone” (Hanley 1993:57). Keeping in mind this fundamental political wish of many ordinary Somalis and also their decentralised traditional polity down the ages the challenge of the contemporary Somali power elite will be how to put in place a system of governance that realises the equilibrium of this political desire.