

This article was downloaded by: [Hesse, Brian]

On: 25 August 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 926280085]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Contemporary African Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713429127>

### Introduction: The myth of 'Somalia'

Brian J. Hesse<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Northwest Missouri State University, USA

Online publication date: 25 August 2010

**To cite this Article** Hesse, Brian J.(2010) 'Introduction: The myth of 'Somalia'', Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 28: 3, 247 – 259

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/02589001.2010.499232

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2010.499232>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## Introduction: The myth of ‘Somalia’

Brian J. Hesse\*

*Northwest Missouri State University, USA*

A myth can either be a false belief or an idealised conception. This introduction demonstrates why ‘Somalia’ is both.

**Keywords:** Somalia; clans; clannism; failed states; governance; Transitional Federal Government (TFG); Mogadishu; al-Shabaab; Hizbul Islam; terrorism; African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)

### ‘Somalia’ in abstract

‘Somalia’, a number-seven-shaped country on the north-eastern horn of the African continent, has long been a contested concept, even amongst Somalis. For example, at independence in 1960 when British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland united to form The Republic of Somalia, some Somalis agitated for a much larger version of a country. Their country, a ‘Greater Somalia’, would have included Somali brethren in what is today Djibouti, eastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. Indeed, it was in part with an eye to expand the contours of ‘Somalia’ that the Mogadishu-based dictator General Mohamed Siyaad Barre invaded the Ethiopian Ogaden in 1977/78. After suffering some 25,000 casualties in less than a year and losing the war, an array of opposition forces rose up, all intent on overthrowing the Barre regime. It ultimately fell after many bloody years, in January 1991. Thus began a definitive fragmentation of ‘Somalia’.

In the wake of the Barre regime’s collapse some three million Somalis (out of an estimated population of between 6.8 to eight million in ‘Somalia’) declared unilateral independence in May 1991; they continue to build their independent Republic of Somaliland in the northwest. In the northeast some 1.5 million Somalis declared their own autonomous state of Puntland in 1998; in the intervening years they have elected four presidents, the most recent having assumed office in January 2009. In the middle and south of Somalia various ‘autonomous states’ have been declared – Galmudug State in 2006, for example – albeit they have tended to look and function like much of the rest of the anarchic south, known for its shifting, often violent, patchwork of clan-based fiefdoms. And, of late, variations of yet another type of Somali nationalist have risen up: one wishing to forge a ‘historic Somaliland’ in the name of Islam. Presumably these Islamists’ geographic vision bears little resemblance to the distinctly shaped ‘Somalia’ of most maps.

The fact that the ‘Somalia’ of most maps endures owes much to the international community. From the United Nations down through its member states, including those in the African Union and the Arab League to the besieged Transitional Federal

---

\*Email: [BHESS@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:BHESS@nwmissouri.edu)

Government of Somalia in Mogadishu, the official line is that the territorial integrity of 'Somalia' is inviolable and indivisible. Granted, this tenet often tends to be self-serving: many states were products of less than organic processes themselves with borders drawn by, say, colonial powers; the governments of such states fear that a fractured 'Somalia' might encourage separatist movements within their own countries. Regardless, the prevailing view is this: that a majority of Somalis can be and will be united in a viable state one day. Such a view belies the fact that in the modern era Somalis have nearly always lived with a dizzying array of flags, but rarely united under one of their own.

### **An allegorical flag**

The official, internationally recognised Somali flag consists of a five-pointed, white star on a field of light blue. Each of the star's points represents one of five parts of the Horn of Africa where ethnic Somalis live. But over the Ogaden, it is Ethiopia's flag which flies. In the Northern Frontier District, it is Kenya's. In former British Somaliland, the flag of The Republic of Somaliland now predominates. In Djibouti, it is that sovereign country's standard. And in a fifth part of the Horn, the part that used to be Italian Somaliland (that is, the north-eastern parts of Somalia to southern Somalia), even here the Somali national ensign is rarely seen, replaced in some instances by the banner of Islam.

As for the field of light blue on the Somali national flag, it is a similar shade to the blue on the United Nations' flag. When the Somali national flag was created in 1954 the blue might have signified hope for an end to the UN's trusteeship era, then being carried out by the United Kingdom and Italy. Later, the field of blue might have come to signify the UN's unwillingness to stop Ethiopian military incursions into, and outright occupations of, Somalia (the latest Ethiopian occupation lasted from 2006 to January 2009, and placed between 8000 and 15,000 forces on Somali soil). Or the field of blue might signify the various UN-blessed military interventions in Somalia since 1992: from America's 'Operation Restore Hope', which reached a peak of 30,000 US and other troops; through UNOSOM II of 'Blackhawk Down' fame, with a multi-national force of 28,000 personnel and 3000 civilians; to the African Union's deployment from January 2009 of up to 8000 peacekeepers, of which just over 5000 were on the ground as of February 2010.

Simultaneously, countless non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have shown their colours in Somalia, from the ACF (*Action Contre la Faim*) to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Today there are no less than 50 NGOs in the field (United Nations Relief Web 2010; Somalia NGO Consortium 2009), their banners signifying activity and projects the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia cannot do alone, or is incapable of doing at all.

Finally, there are the flags associated with Somali refugees and the Somali diaspora. In Africa large Somali populations are found in Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. In the Middle East significant Somali communities are found in Yemen and the United Arab Emirates, and smaller ones in Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States and Egypt. In Europe, the United Kingdom hosts the largest number of Somalis, while the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, too, have sizable communities. And in North America one can find substantial Somali communities in the United States and Canada, especially around Minneapolis and Toronto. In total

more than one million Somalis live outside Somalia, or stated another way, about 14% of all Somalis live abroad (UNDP 2009). From abroad the Somali diaspora is estimated to send home between US\$750 million and US\$1 billion annually (Lewis 2008, 134; Maimbo 2006, 20). The remittances are meant *not* to support 'Somalia' per se, but family- and clan-members. And it is families and clans to which Somalis typically show their highest degree of loyalty.

### **A clan-driven narrative**

In Somali genealogy most Somalis are born into one of six 'big tent' clans. Four of these clans – the Darod, Dir, Hawiye and Isaaq, collectively known as 'Samaale' clans<sup>1</sup> – share the closest linguistic and cultural ties. These historically nomadic clans together constitute somewhere around 75% of all ethnic Somalis. Two more clans – the Digil and Rahanweyn of southern Somalia, sometimes called Digil-Mirifle – together comprise about 20% of all ethnic Somalis. They speak af-maymay, distinct from the af-maxaa of Samaale clans, and have historically practised a more sedentary lifestyle of farming and/or pastoralism. Additionally, and in contrast to the borderline xenophobia of many Samaale clans, Digil and Rahanweyn clans have had a custom of assimilating clansmen, from non-ethnic Somalis to former slaves and their descendants. Indeed, in the Rahanweyn's language their clan's name means 'large crowd'. A divide between Samaale clans and the Rahanweyn and Digil clans is pointedly evident when Samaale clan members use the derogatory word *sab* (translation: 'ignoble') when referring to some of their Rahanweyn and Digil Somali brethren.

Somalis further classify themselves into subclans, or even sub-subclans and beyond. For example, in the Isaaq clan, which falls under the umbrella 'Samaale' clan structure, there are no less than three (some scholars say as many as eight) subclans: the Habar Awal, Habar Jaalo, and the Harhajis. The Habar Awal are then divided into at least two sub-subclans: the Sa'ad Muse and the Lise Muse . . . and so on. Classification can even extend right down to the household level: if a man has more than one wife, for example, some in the household might stress the clans, subclans or sub-subclans associated with one maternal line over another. What is more, not all Somalis agree to which lineage lines other Somalis belong. Somali genealogy presents individuals with a seemingly infinite number of ways to affiliate with, or disassociate from, fellow Somalis – which may be the point.

Whether one is looking at those in a day-to-day nomadic existence in a semi-desert, day-to-day existence in an urban area of a failed state, or day-to-day existence as newly-arrived émigrés in a foreign land, Somalis need to have durable yet malleable ways to negotiate limited opportunities and limited resources. The Somali lineage system accomplishes this.

Whereas outsiders usually see an *impractically* complex, shifting system of genealogy, many Somalis see a *practically* complex, shifting one. Has a water hole or grazing area become too small for the number of clansmen using it? A subclan or sub-subclan can break away and assert control over it. Has another clan come to monopolise an area of commerce, to the detriment of all others? A number of subclans can pool their resources to start their own rival enterprise. Have members of a particular household established themselves in London or Minneapolis? A new arrival of the same lineage can tap these distant relatives for advice and support.

What cannot be debated is the consequence and prominence of such fraternal schisms, evident in the traditional Somali greetings: ‘Is it peace?’ and ‘What is your lineage?’

### **An old story today told**

An argument could be made that today’s clan dynamics amongst Somalis were largely established in pre-colonial times, when nomadic realities worked against state formation. For example, how does a government form, represent or tax constituencies which are always moving, sometimes across international borders? Says one academic: ‘The very idea of the state is totally alien to Somali culture and was unknown before the colonial period. A settled population is needed before any form of state can be established. . . Nomad society is essentially anarchic’ (Prunier 1997). Further, the assertion could be made that most Somalis’ nomadic heritage in a near-desert environment produced a sort of enduring ‘rugged individualism’ in the extreme. As Professor I.M. Lewis notes: ‘In the harsh struggle for survival which is a nomad’s lot, suspicion is the natural attitude towards those with whom one competes for access to scarce pasture and water. This defence mechanism is extended to all contexts of social interaction and hence becomes a national characteristic’ (Carlson 2009). This has been to the detriment of widely-held notions of modern governance, which ultimately require a citizen to defer to a higher sovereign authority beyond one’s clan, subclan, and/or sub-subclan.<sup>2</sup>

Of course it could be maintained that it was the colonial- and trusteeship-eras which most exacerbated Somali clannism, and thereby most hindered the formation of a unified Somali state. Most obviously colonial powers sliced up the Somali nation with colonial boundaries. Yet perhaps of equal or greater consequence within British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland, authorities were in the practice of appointing clan chiefs. This caused tensions inside clans because the Somali *shir* custom obligates *all* adult males in a clan to deliberate and decide political and economic affairs by council, rather than by individual chiefly fiat (hence the nineteenth-century British explorer Richard Burton’s claims, oft-quoted, that the Somalis are ‘a fierce and turbulent race of republicans’, based on his observations of *shir*). Relations across clan lines were likewise aggravated due to colonial favouritism, real or perceived, as some clans’ chiefs were elevated over others.

Finally, it could be said that the clan-induced groundwork for a failed Somali state occurred in the wake of independence in 1960. In what was to be a unified Somalia, northern clansmen from former British Somaliland (the Isaaq mostly, but also some Dir) came to fill most technical posts. Clansmen from former Italian Somaliland (mostly the Darod and Hawiye, at the exclusion of the Rahanweyn and Digil) came to fill many political ones. Why this happened is sometimes attributed to the educational preparedness the British and Italians meted out before independence. The British, thinking mass education was too uncertain in nomadic cultures, set up only a few schools in their part of Somalia, but schools which offered a high standard of education. A select few Somalis were then sent to British universities. By contrast, the Italians introduced mass education, but at a low standard and with a heavy hand (Somalis were expected to adopt the laws, customs and economic preferences of the Italian state). At independence, then, certain Somalis were better positioned to seize political and economic spoils, but almost always in the company of clansmen.

Consequently, centres of governmental power and authority came to be associated not with the state so much as with clans. Had the filling of governmental positions not been so segregated and the allocation of governmental power more genuinely broad, unified Somali statehood might have been advanced. As it was, the immediate post-independence era was marked less by national unity and more by heightened clan rivalry. This rivalry came to a head in October 1969 when Somalia's president, Abdirashid Ali Shermaake (a Darod), was assassinated. The military ultimately took control and government rule evolved into a dictatorship with Major-General Mohammed Siyaad Barre (a Darod) as president.

Initially Barre's rule was marked with a totalitarian effort to stamp out clannism through an ideological mix of Lenin, Marx, the Koran, Mao and Mussolini, obliquely known as 'scientific socialism'. As part of scientific socialism all political parties were banned except Barre's Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party, the premise being that parties were merely products and tools of clans. People were forcibly settled on communes where clans were deliberately mixed. It became illegal for Somalis to inquire about or refer to a person's lineage, not even at weddings, burials or religious rites. All Somalis were to call each other *jaalle*, or 'comrade'. Traditional institutions were dismantled, replaced by government-appointed officials.

As noted earlier, Barre's rule was eventually challenged after his failed Ogaden campaign. When faced with the prospect of losing power, though, he quickly abandoned efforts to stamp out clannism and instead resurrected and ratcheted up clan differences. But he also continued to outlaw and undermine traditional clan institutions, such as *shir* councils. His goal was to divide, weaken and conquer his opponents while diverting attention away from his regime's failures. Simultaneously he turned inward, to his own clan base – to the point his government came to be known amongst Somalis as MOD: Mareehaan, Ogadeni and Dulbahante, three sub-subclans of the Darod clan to which he, his mother, and son-in-law belonged. These actions were to have lasting consequences.

Historically Somalis have organised themselves into social insurance cooperatives called *diya*-groups (*diya* meaning 'blood wealth'). *Diya*-groups can consist of clans, subclans and/or sub-subclans, but members are always contractually bound to pay or receive damages collectively. Within this framework there is no concept of individuality. So, in the case of murder, a killer is expected to have his *diya*-group deliver just compensation to the victim's *diya*-group. Should compensation not be received, then the victim's kin are expected to exact blood revenge not only on the perpetrator, but also on *any member* of the perpetrator's lineage – which often touches off even more claims and counter-claims for *diya* payments or revenge. As noted above, the Barre regime in its latter years had stressed clan divides yet continued to outlaw *diya*-groups. As a result, when the regime fell in 1991 and Somali clans scrambled to seize what was left of the Somali state, many were killed in the chaos. Barre-inspired rhetoric had primed clansmen to expect such killing from 'others'. Yet the regime had also precluded the formation or adequate functioning of *diya*-groups which could have adjudicated conflicts and maybe mitigated violence. Consequently, cross-clan and internecine clan bloodshed took place on a massive scale.

Undoubtedly clan dynamics continue to drive conflict amongst Somalis, albeit these dynamics are not always obvious to the casual observer. For example, al-Shabaab, Hizbul Islam, Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a and the Transitional Federal



Government are all players in Somali politics. All purport to be Islamist organisations to varying degrees. Members of al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam profess a Saudi-inspired version of salafist Islam. Members of Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a embrace a version of Sufi Islam. The Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu accommodates a range of Islamist views. As a result, when the BBC published a 15 March 2010 report on fighting in central Somalia, it is perhaps forgivable that editors chose to go with the headline 'Somali Sufi group joins government to fight al-Shabaab' (BBC 2010). The byline elaborated further, stating 'A powerful Sufi Muslim group has joined Somalia's government to tackle the al-Qaeda-inspired al-Shabaab insurgents who control large parts of the country'. What followed was a 144-word article.

Needless to say 144 words is not enough space to explain that Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a fighters in central Somalia were mostly an alliance of: 1) the Dir clan; 2) the Harehaan (a Darod subclan); and 3) the Habar Gidir, Ayr and Hawaadle (the first a subclan of the Hawiye clan, the last two sub-subclans of the Hawiye clan). In turn, al-Shabaab's fighters in central Somalia were mostly an alliance of Muroside, Duduble, Gaalje'el and Gugundhaab (all Hawiye sub-subclans).<sup>3</sup> Long before the rise of al-Shabaab – that is, well before 'Sufis vs Salafists' became a headline – these various clan interests had vied for control of the Shabelle River Valley, the 'central Somalia' of the BBC piece, because the Shabelle has some of the most productive land in all of Somalia for grazing and agriculture. Throw in a healthy dose of *diya* history, with cycles of cross-clan fighting, internecine feuds and shifting alliances, plus an ongoing drought (the Shabelle River is one of only two permanent rivers in the region), and a considerably more complex story emerges than what was conveyed in the BBC piece.

#### **A Somali epic: Central governance, part 15, version 4.5**

It was with an eye towards accommodating Somalis' complex ideological, historical, social, political and economic concerns that the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia was founded. Getting to its founding took 13 years and marks the fifteenth attempt since 1991 to restore central governance in Somalia.

The TFG was born in 2004 in hotel conference rooms in neighbouring Kenya, the product of protracted negotiations rather than elections. Reflecting the influence of clans, the TFG adopted, and still utilises, a '4.5 Formula'. Representation in the parliament is evenly divided amongst four main clan groups – the Darod, Hawiye, Dir and Digele-Mirifle – plus five minority constituencies. The minority constituencies include 'minor clans', non-ethnic Somali groups, members of the Somali diaspora, citizens' groups, and various Islamist organisations. In total the TFG's parliament has 550 representatives, having grown from an original 275 members. The TFG has a president, who parliament elects, as well as a prime minister; the TFG Charter is not clear about the division of labour between the two. All members of the TFG from the president down were originally to serve a maximum five-year term, during which time they were to oversee a popular referendum on a federal constitution for Somalia. Having failed to achieve this, the parliament has since voted to extend all terms until 2011.

From its founding in 2004 until June 2005 the TFG had to meet in neighbouring Kenya. From June 2005 until February 2006 the parliament did not convene, and the

president and prime minister vied openly to serve their Darod- and Hawiye-clan bases, respectively. When the parliament finally did convene again in February 2006 it was at last on Somali soil, but from a converted grain warehouse in the western city of Baidoa. During this time it was not the TFG which expanded its writ in Somalia; rather it was the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). In the first half of 2006 the UIC, a broad umbrella group of moderate to fundamentalist Islamists and Somali nationalists, racked up military victories against 'The Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism' – in reality little more than a coalition of US-backed clan militias. A semblance of peace and stability followed. For the first time in 16 years Mogadishu's seaport and international airport reopened, large swathes of central and southern Somalia fell under a unified administration, commerce surged, and members of the Somali diaspora returned – including many members of the TFG, to Baidoa.

Khartoum-based talks followed as regional actors tried to bring the TFG and UIC together to forge a unity government. Neither side trusted the other. The UIC was suspicious of the corrupt 'per diem culture' of the TFG. The TFG's members suspected they would lose power and patronage in any unity government. At a deadlock, the UIC tried to impose a victor's peace. In pushing westward, towards Baidoa, the UIC came in increasing contact with Ethiopian forces – officially in Somalia as 'trainers' for a nascent TFG national military. As clashes escalated some of the more radical leaders within the UIC began to call for a 'holy war against Christian Ethiopia'. Ethiopian leaders in turn articulated their own radical claims, saying the UIC had extensive links with al-Qaeda and that there was a real danger of a Taliban-like regime appearing in the Horn of Africa. A full Ethiopian military invasion followed and by January 2007 the Union of Islamic Courts had been forced out of power. This paved the way for the TFG to set foot in Mogadishu for the first time since its inception – but only under the protection of upwards of 8000 Ethiopian forces. When Ethiopian forces left Somalia in January 2009 a UN-blessed African Union force arrived in their place. Today the TFG is besieged, controlling little more than a few blocks in Mogadishu. That it has been unable to control much more is not for want of trying.

In January 2009 the TFG parliament saw off the divisive Abdullahi Yusuf (a Darod clan member), the TFG's first president. In Yusuf's place TFG parliamentarians elected Sheik Sharif Sheikh Ahmed – the very chairman of the Union of Islamic Courts they had battled in 2006 and a member of the Hawiye clan (Abgaal subclan), the clan whose members disproportionately comprise al-Shabaab, the main insurgent group now fighting the TFG. In February 2009 parliament and the new president oversaw the induction of Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke as prime minister. In many ways Prime Minister Sharmarke was the TFG's '4.5 Formula' incarnate: his Darod credentials provided clan balance within the TFG's leadership; the assassination of his father in 1969 as the first civilian president of the Republic of Somalia evoked broad sympathy and a historical sense of central governance; his dual-national status as both a Somali and Canadian appealed to Somalis at home and abroad; and finally, he and President Ahmed seemed to prefer to work together rather than against one another, in marked contrast to the president and prime minister who preceded Ahmed and Sharmarke. In March 2009, then, the TFG cabinet adopted a Somali version of Islamic *sharia*. These moves collectively and in quick succession – the removal of Yusuf; the election of President Ahmed; the



election of Prime Minister Sharmarke; the adoption of *sharia* – had interrelated hopes associated with them. First, it was hoped that the moves would sap momentum from the multifaceted insurgency the government faced. Second, it was hoped that the moves would help extend the central government's sovereign reach. They did neither. Today the TFG is 'in residence, but not in power' (Hassan and Barnes 2007). The UN Somalia Monitoring Group has come to a similar conclusion. Indeed, in its March 2010 report the Group observed that the only thing between the surrounded 'bunker government'<sup>4</sup> of the TFG and well-armed insurgents is a mere 500 metres and a thin line of African Union troops to which 'the government owes its survival' (UN Security Council Somalia Monitoring Group 2010, 6, 19).

Of course members of the TFG are not the only ones concerned with survival. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says some 3.5 million Somalis are in need of aid and over 1.2 million are internally displaced. Fighting in Mogadishu alone in recent months has led to an exodus of more than 100,000 civilians from in and around the city, with hundreds killed and thousands injured. All told, it makes for the worst humanitarian disaster on the planet.

### Parables of predation

*The lion, the jackal, the wolf and the hyena agreed to hunt together, and to split their kills. After cooperatively killing a camel, the lion asked 'Who divides the meat?'*

*The wolf volunteered to divide the meat, as he could count. He promptly cut four pieces, each of equal size, and placed the pieces in front of the hunters.*

*Angry, the lion swiped the wolf across his eyes with his massive paws and claws causing the wolf to cower in bloodied pain. 'Is this any way to count?' roared the lion.*

*The jackal intervened. 'The wolf does not know how to count. I will divide the meat'. The jackal then cut three small portions for the wolf, the hyena and himself. He placed the largest, best piece in front of the lion, who promptly collected his share and departed. The wolf, the hyena and the jackal were left with their relative scraps.*

*'Why did you give the lion such a large piece? Why is he entitled?' asked the hyena.*

*'I learned from the wolf', replied the jackal.*

*'You learned from the wolf?' cried the hyena. 'How can anyone learn from the wolf? He is stupid'.*

*Still nursing his injured eyes, the wolf ended the debate: 'The jackal is right. He knows how to count. Before, when my eyes were open, I did not see. Now, though my eyes are wounded, I see clearly'.*

The above Somali parable features four main predators. Likewise, there are four main 'predators' currently arrayed against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu. They are:

- al-Shabaab, with militiamen mostly drawn from the ranks of Hawiye clansmen;
- Hizbul Islam, with militiamen drawn mostly from the ranks of Darod clansmen;
- Raas Kaambooni, with militiamen mostly drawn from the ranks of Darod clansmen, but from the Mohamed Subeer subclan; and
- Anoolle/al-Furqaan, with militiamen mostly drawn from the ranks of Darod clansmen, but from the Majeerteen, Warsengeli, Dhulbahante sub-subclans of

the Harti subclan of the Juba River Valley (collectively referred to as 'Harti Waamo' in the Juba Valley).

While events dictate which insurgent group might correspond to what animal in the 'Parable of the Predators', it is clear some, probably most, desire a lion's share of opportunity, power and influence. Shared scraps – whether in a '4.5 Formula' or some other form – hold little appeal. In fact, some insurgents' desire to exert unrivalled control goes beyond trying to subjugate obvious enemies. At times it means they have sought to overpower sometime- and would-be allies, as has been seen in Kismayo.

From 2008 until late into 2009 Raas Kaambooni militiamen in the port city of Kismayo seemed to be allied with both Hizbul Islam militiamen *and* al-Shabaab militiamen. With regard to the latter, a deal had been struck where Raas Kaambooni forces and al-Shabaab forces were to take six-month turns controlling the city port, thereby benefitting from its lucrative import and export activity. But in October 2009 al-Shabaab leaders reneged on the arrangement. In response Raas Kaambooni fighters mobilised to take the port by force. Fearing inter-insurgent fighting would damage efforts to defeat their common enemies, Hizbul Islam's leadership appealed to Raas Kaambooni's leaders for calm. Instead, Raas Kaambooni leaders broke with Hizbul Islam's leaders *and* commenced an attack on al-Shabaab militiamen (Insidesomalia.org 2009a, 2009b; IRIN 2009; AEI Critical Threats 2009).

Parallels most certainly can be drawn between what happened in Kismayo in late 2009 and what occurs in 'The Parable of the Predators': the port could be represented as the camel in the story; Hizbul Islam's leadership as the jackal; Raas Kaambooni and al-Shabaab militiamen as aspiring lions. But setting aside a Somali tradition of symbolic storytelling, most explicitly the events show in microcosm key Somali social, political and economic dynamics in that: a) clannism proved capable of trumping nearly all else as Darod fought Hawiye, trumping even the ostensible solidarity Raas Kaambooni and al-Shabaab militiamen professed to share in terms of a common salafist religious ideology; b) clan solidarity proved susceptible to subclan schisms, as seen when Darod clansmen in Raas Kaambooni split with their Darod brethren in Hizbul Islam and; c) the TFG exerted little to no influence on matters, indisposed or impotent, say, to take advantage of the insurgents' infighting.

Ultimately it is 'c' which most concerns many in the international community. A hope exists that the TFG, with its inclusive '4.5 Formula', the right leaders and correct action, can get past the historic Somali excesses associated with 'a' and 'b'. Yet this could be as futile as trying to divide a camel equally amongst unequal predators. If past is prologue, Mogadishu-based central governance going forward might prove just as unfeasible as it has in past decades. This begs the question: what if the TFG in Mogadishu falls? What then?

A complete dissolution of Mogadishu-based central governance would not necessarily lead to absolute anarchy; for example, there will continue to be functioning governments in the northwest and northeast, in Hargeysa, Somaliland and in Garowe, Puntland. But elsewhere in 'Somalia' there could be a 'radical localisation of politics' (Nurhusein 2008, 10). Under such a scenario governing authority could potentially revert more fully back to traditional sources: the *shir* and the *sheikh*. In the former, law and order stems from collective clan discussions (especially amongst elders) and consensus. In the latter, law and order is derived from

the legal precedents of learned religious figures, historically adhering in Somalia to the more moderate Shafi'i school of jurisprudence rather than an ultra-conservative salafist school. As Ken Menkhaus explains in his book *Somalia: State collapse and the threat of terrorism*, the 'law and order Somalia enjoyed prior to the late 1980s – and Somalia was unquestionably one of the safest places in Africa – was a reflection of the social contract more than the capacity of the police (or of a central government)' (Menkhaus 2004, 32–3). Conceivably a localising trend with a corresponding increase in law and order would then allow for an easing of the massive humanitarian crisis many Somalis now face: internally displaced persons and refugees could return home; land could be put back into more productive use; commerce could better take place.

But what if what if absolute anarchy does reign? Could 'Somalia' become a hive of terroristic activity? There is a reason Osama Bin Laden went from Sudan to Afghanistan in 1996 rather than from Sudan to Somalia; perhaps he realised in 1996 what became evident in Kismayo in late 2009: that amongst Somalis clannism tends to trump nearly all else, including religious solidarity. Still, if Bin Laden gave a pass to Somalia then, some Islamic militants are being enticed to fight 'the enemies of Islam' there now. For example, on 22 July 2009 Islamic militants posted a 42-minute audio segment on <http://www.alqimmah.net>. In the segment African Union forces were cast as infidel invaders. Listeners were then urged to support jihad against them (UN Security Council Somalia Monitoring Group 2010, 29, 51–2). In this light it is arguably 'the other' – embodied in everything from African Union troops to US military aid – which motivates many actual and would-be fighters. If overt foreign influences were removed from the equation it is quite likely an anarchic 'Somalia' would force most Somalis to look inward rather than outward. The precedent here is what happened in the mid-1990s when the last UN forces pulled out.

And what if Somalis or the international community come up against an outward-looking radical or an internationally-threatening despot? What if a Somali-based Osama Bin Laden character, or a modern-day General Mohamed Siyaad Barre, emerges from the ashes of 'Somalia'? It should be remembered that such leaders tend to have limited tenures in Somali politics. Bring to mind General Mohamed Farrah Aideed, the warlord of 'Blackhawk Down' fame. He more than any Somali is often credited with doing the most to force an end to the United Nations' and United States' military interventions in Somalia between 1992 and 1995 – all with an American bounty of US\$25,000 on his head. In June 1995, after the last UN forces withdrew, Aideed declared himself president of Somalia. By 1 August 1996, though, he was dead from gunshot wounds sustained in inter-clan fighting.

Recall, too, what occurred in 2006 when the Union of Islamic Courts brought a degree of peace and stability to central and southern Somalia, but then elements of the UIC started to impose a *sharia* system banning Sufi Islamic practices specifically, and those allowed under the Shafi'i School generally, calling such practices 'unIslamic'. Many let it be known they were not going to tolerate such prohibitions and claims. 'Our clan has agreed to defend our land, and we will fight the courts hiding under the cloak of Islam and trying to fool our people' one man was quoted as saying at a rally of thousands (Lacey 2006).

More recently some al-Shabaab leaders have been challenged because of their support for extreme and indiscriminate acts of violence. The first hints of dissent came in the wake of an al-Shabaab-orchestrated suicide bombing at the Shamo Hotel in Mogadishu on 3 December 2009. The operation killed four government ministers. It also resulted in the deaths of 19 others, some of whom were medical students whose graduation the ministers had come to celebrate (Hassan 2009; Geoghegan 2009). In response, a dissident branch of al-Shabaab leadership emerged, one named 'Millat Ibrahim'. These leaders made it a point to say the Shamo Hotel attack was excessive (UN Security Council Somalia Monitoring Group 2010, 15). That such a dissident branch came into existence within al-Shabaab suggests at a minimum the most extreme leaders are incapable of exercising total control over their organisation. At most Millat Ibrahim's emergence might be a harbinger of the marginalisation of more radical elements. Either case might portend a change in the predatory order Somalis have so long suffered.

### **The myth of 'Somalia'**

So what is a person to make of 'Somalia'? Authors to follow provide various insights. Apuuli Phillip Kasija, in 'The UN-led Djibouti peace process for Somalia 2008–2009', gives a detailed account of the emergence of Somalia's current unity government 'with the largest representation of Somali society so far', but why this has not guaranteed a stable and functional national government. Mohamed Ibrahim explores whether there is a growing connection between Somalia and global terrorism in his eponymous article 'Somalia and Global Terrorism'. In 'The Fourth Point', Donovan Chau examines the influence of ethnic Somali populations outside of Somalia on politics within Somalia itself, focussing specifically on Kenyan Somalis. Said Samatar, via 'An Open Letter to Uncle Sam', mines historical experience in order to offer cautionary advice to the United States and international community on how to respond to today's al-Qaeda-linked Somali insurgents and Somali pirates. J. Peter Pham provides a detailed overview of the political economy of Somali piracy and its connection to state failure in 'Putting Somali Piracy in Context'. Finally, in 'Where Somalia Works', this author (Brian Hesse) makes the case that select parts of the Somali economic, social and political landscape work quite well, yet paradoxically, also reflect some of what is most wrong with Somalia. In sum, a myth by definition can be either a false belief or an idealised conception. Given what is written above and what follows 'Somalia' most certainly is both, if not more.

### **Notes**

1. Samaale is the mythical founder of the Somali people.
2. In Somali history there were sultanates which looked quite state-like. However, these sultanates rarely extended sovereignty beyond the sultan's own clan, and traditional clan dynamics still trumped nearly all else.
3. For one of the better comprehensive breakdowns of current clan dynamics in Somalia, see the UN Security Council Somalia Monitoring Group's report from March 2010, <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/751/mongroup.shtml> and <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/246/89/PDF/N1024689.pdf?OpenElement>.

4. For a TFG minister's personal, first-person account of what 'bunker government' life is like see 'Life inside Somalia's bunker government', *Foreign Policy*, 5 March 2010.

#### Note on contributor

Brian Hesse is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Northwest Missouri State University in the United States. He is also a seasonal African Safari Guide for the US-based company Cowabunga Safaris. In addition to articles in the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *International Journal*, *The Journal of Asia-Pacific Affairs*, *African Studies Review* and other publications, Dr Hesse is the author of the book *The United States, South Africa and Africa: Of grand foreign policy and modest means*. He served as guest editor for the Somalia issue of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* and associated book. His email address is Bhesse@nwmissouri.edu.

#### References

- AEI Critical Threats. 2009. Gulf of Aden Security Review. September–December. <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/gulf-aden-security-review>.
- BBC. 2010. Somali Sufi group joins government to fight al-Shabaab. 15 March. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8568913.stm>.
- Carlson, A. 2009. Pirates of Puntland, Somalia. *Origins* 2, no. 9. June. <http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/origins/article.cfm?articleid=27>.
- Geoghegan, A. 2009. Bomb rips apart graduation ceremony. *ABC News*, 4 December. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/12/03/2761484.htm>.
- Hassan, H., and C. Barnes. 2007. A return to clan politics (or worse) in southern Somalia? 27 March. [http://hornofafrica.ssrc.org/Hassan\\_Barnes/](http://hornofafrica.ssrc.org/Hassan_Barnes/).
- Hassan, M. 2009. Somalian ministers killed in hotel bomb attack. *The Independent*, 4 December. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/somalian-ministers-killed-in-hotel-bomb-attack-1833855.html>.
- Insidesomalia.org. 2009a. 5 dead as rival Somali Islamist groups fight. 1 October. <http://insidesomalia.org/200910012354/News/Politics/5-dead-as-rival-Somali-Islamist-groups-fight.html>.
- Insidesomalia.org. 2009b. Somali Islamist factions clash in Kismayo. 21 October. <http://insidesomalia.org/200910212547/News/Politics/Somali-Islamist-factions-clash-in-Kismayo.html>.
- IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Networks, as part of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). 2009. Somalia: Islamists on 'war footing' in Kismayo. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86338>.
- Lacey, M. 2006. Protestors rally to challenge Islamists in Somalia. *The New York Times*, 7 June. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9800EFD61431F934A35755C0A9609C8B63>.
- Lewis, I. 2008. *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland*. London: Hurst.
- Maimbo, S. ed. 2006. Remittances and economic development in Somalia. Social Development Papers, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction, Paper No. 38, November. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTCPR/Resources/WP38\\_web.pdf?resourceurlname=WP38\\_web.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTCPR/Resources/WP38_web.pdf?resourceurlname=WP38_web.pdf).
- Menkhaus, K. 2004. *Somalia: State collapse and the threat of terrorism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nurhussein, S. 2008. Global networks, fragmentation, and the rise of telecommunications in stateless Somalia. Master of Arts dissertation presented to the Department of Geography, University of Oregon. [https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/6781/Safy\\_Nurhussein.pdf?sequence=1](https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/6781/Safy_Nurhussein.pdf?sequence=1).
- Prunier, G. 1997. Surviving without the UN: Somaliland, a forgotten country. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October.
- Somalia NGO Consortium. 2009. <http://www.somaliangoconsortium.org/memberlist.php>.

- UN Security Council Somalia Monitoring Group. 2010. Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008). 10 March. <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/751/mongroup.shtml> and <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/246/89/PDF/N1024689.pdf?OpenElement>.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2009. Somalia's missing million: The Somali diaspora and its role in development. March. <http://www.so.undp.org/index.php/Download-document/70-Forging-Partnerships-with-the-Somali-Diaspora.html>.
- United Nations Relief Web. 2010. <http://www.reliefweb.int/>.