



Banadir discontent-critical public discourse on Clan Identity is the only way out.

Arguing for an Alternative Narrative

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This piece attempts to contribute to the current debate concerning the future status of Mogadishu in-unashamedly along clan-line federated Somalia. In doing so, the author will first, revisit the internalised historical, social, political and economic meanings attached to the city. Second, examine the Mogadishu's debate in the context and the backdrop of the current federal model, as opposed to the old centralised republic.

To help the reader understand what is at stake in the debate, the author utilises theory of Clan-Nation Disjoint, which calls for critical rethink about how clan identity is treated in Somali-led public discourses. Finally, the author puts forward a suggestion to the current



impasse on the question of the future status of Mogadishu- while arguing for an equitable and win-win settlement that takes into account the current federal set-up and its dispensation.

History of Mogadishu- revisiting the Economic, Political and Social Imperatives

Since its early settlers in the 10th Century-Mogadishu, despite changing hands of ownership between dozens of dynasties, remained the centre to all that interfaced with ethnic Somalis wherever they are found. Fast forward to the latter part of the 20th century after a tumultuous period of colonial powers travestyng the African continent, Mogadishu becomes the capital of Italian Somaliland during the Italian trusteeship period. After the independent and the birth of unified Somalia, there were no other choices, but to make Mogadishu the capital of independent Somalia in 1960 (cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

Economic, Political and Social Imperatives-the Internalisation



Pre-Somali civil strife-in the dying decade of the 20th century, Mogadishu boasted the most developed seaport, well-functioning international airport and the largest and most educated population in Somalia. Of course, these features would all disappear owing to the collapse of the centralised republic followed by the civil war. The genesis of the economic and social rises of Mogadishu is subject to contestation between two historical accounts. The first account attributes to an event that took place in 1948- after the UN agreed to place southern Somalia under Italian trusteeship (Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana Della Somalia--AFIS) so that it can be prepared for independent over ten years. However, the relationship between the newly-UN mandated AFIS and the SYL, who was by far the most organised political entity in Somalia at the time, started to deteriorate, which led to all out violent riots. Due to the discontent and protests by SYL led Mogadishu residences-the account asserts, AFIS had no other options, but to embark on massive economic and social development, planned and executed over a period of 7 years, where schools, higher learning institutions, and road infrastructure projects were initiated (Helen Chapin, 1992).

The second historical account points out to the medieval period of the city, its pre 16th century period, where trade, as well as people to people relationships with Persia, Arabs and Portugal started to take shape.

In this period, the name Banadir- which is a Persian, meaning ‘Port’ was coined after the city owing to its booming commerce and trade (Elfasi & Hrbek, 215).

On the top of these two historical claims about the origins of the rises of economic and social development of Mogadishu, the author of this article argues for a third historical account- the period between 1969 and 1976. This period saw the implementation of mega developmental projects carried out by Siad Barre’s revolutionary government.

It is critical to note that all these developmental projects were either fully located in Mogadishu or partially located in its vicinity. The centralisation of everything in Mogadishu, made it the mother of all that is modern in Somalia- hence the internalisation, of which Mogadishu is indelibly attached to the emotions of every Somali citizen. During this period Mogadishu became where every aspiring student goes for his/her university education, where the middle class and the rich from all over the country compete for property ownership. Finally, the accumulation of the above over time, made Mogadishu the only city up and down the country that is at the centre of collective ownership claim by every Somali citizen.

Theoretical framework

This piece draws on the theory of Clan-Nation Disjoint to help the reader understand the debate and the factors that shape and as well as drive it. The theory is based on three problematized premises-

- There is an internalised perception (by the clans) of persistence divergence between clan and national interests.
- Clans developed and internalised (over the years) their own interest based on two pillars; Resource acquisition and availability of Security for their members.
- There is widespread disapproval (among Somali elites) of clan identity promotion (publicly) though they privately approve it-to serve specific interests of the clan either in power or one closer to power.

The theory argues that in order to understand the seemingly perennial disconnect between clan and nation in Somalia, there must be a complete and radical re-think of how clan identity is on one hand mistreated in public discourse and on other hand glorified in private spheres.

The Current Impasse on the Question of the Future Status of Mogadishu- The debate.

Before the debate and its participants are revealed, it is worth prompting the reader of the origin and the factors that shape and drive the debate. One place to start first, is the change of forms of governance- from centralised republic of old to the current-still not fully internalised clan-based federal model in Somalia.

The Centralized Republic of old vs new Federal Republic of Somalia

Somalia is neither alone when it comes to the disbandment of centralised form governance to the selection of new form of federal governance, nor is it the only country to choose ethnic, language or clan-based federal model- neighboring Ethiopia has one, Belgium and Switzerland have too federal systems along language and ethnic lines (See Hooghe, 2007). However, Somalia is alone in the sense that this new form of governance is not entirely of its own choosing. To qualify the assertion that the new federal system in Somalia is imposition rather a natural choice, two factors demand the readers' attention- one factor being the direct consequence of the other.

The civil war- the First Factor

The Somali civil war arguably needs no introduction to the readers of this piece, the only statement worth mentioning is that it was egregious war-it represents and occupies one of the darkest hours in the history of Somalia. The war left hundreds of thousands of people dead, millions displaced and above all left generations knowing nothing other than inter-clan warfare and violence. The pain delivered by the civil war is with little or no contestation, a key factor that pushed Somalis (the imposition) to think in a way that advocates clan-based regionalism rather than to the return of the old unified and centralised republic.

The Consequence- the Second Factor

The Somali civil war did not come and go, it lingered and left the country in limbo- with no functioning authority for an extended period of time (*though attempts to reconcile were many and numerous- see TNG and TFG etc.*), and finally unlike other wars, there were no winners- just losers on all sides. However, this extended period of time delivered two unintended consequences, one being the declaration of a breakaway Somali region (*although this happened in the early years of the civil war*) and the other-the formation of self-governing regional entity capable of calling itself a country within a country (*while this took place years after the first*).

As the war and instability of without functioning authority continued to devastate the rest of the country, above mentioned regions- namely Somaliland and Puntland respectively, developed the trappings of systems that resemble stable mini-governments. These did not go unnoticed by others in the country as well as the international community- hence the second imposition of a federal-based form of governance on Somalia and the abandonment of the old centralised republic. The pain of the civil war and its unintended consequence, which resulted in a relative peace, law and order and functioning authorities in Somaliland and Puntland, supported by the international community, are arguably the two main factors that imposed the current federal model on Somalia, and in this context and backdrop is where this debate should be located and analysed against.

The Heroes and Villains-the Debaters

From the outset, it is to be noted that, it is not the author of this piece's intention to label one side of the debaters as heroes while the other is characterised as the villains and the bad- but it is merely the prevailing perception of the majority of the audience of this debate, that one is seen as heroes and the other as the Villain.

In the current Mogadishu's debate (*although it seems to have subsided since the sacking of the former governor and the mayor of the city*) - the discontent and passion are as raw as it was before the sacking of the city's mayor. This debate has two groups in it-competing against one another. One group is the instigator and the driver of the debate- this group consists of those who are pushing for Mogadishu to be granted federal dispensation equal to the one enjoyed by other Federal member states (namely Puntland, Jubaland, South West, Galmudug etc.). The opposite to this sits a group that holds the completely different view- a one that uses the current draft federal constitution and the historical position of the city to push for status quo i.e. Mogadishu to remain the undisputed capital city of federated Somalia as it was in the old centralised republic.

To understand what is at stake in this debate and the merits and demerits of each group's argument, it would be useful to utilise the theory of Clan-Nation Disjoint. The central argument of the theory is that, in public, Somalis tend to stigmatise clan identity, but in private the opposite happens, and until this contradiction is resolved, there will always be clan-nation disjoint. In the debate and about the debaters- one thing is very clear, for those who are pushing more federal dispensation for Mogadishu, are simply motivated and informed by their internalised clan interests based on security and resources- to put it bluntly, they conceptualise a future scenario where Somalia is and will forever be federated along clan-line regionalism and where clan names are synonymous with the current member states' demarcation. For this group, Mogadishu (*although smaller geographically, but one of the most populated and important regions in the country*) is relegated to mere federal seat and collective ownership, and this is an unfavourable deal for Mogadishu and its indigenous. Does this argument have a merit? - it is for you the reader to debate.

The other side of the debate- you have a group spearheaded by the current federal government supported by a cross-section of other stakeholders. Likewise, applying the theory to this group's argument, it is not very difficult to see the clan- nation intersect doing its work in private, but not in public. The argument from this group is located in two preoccupations- first, despite the paradigm shift (from central to federal model),

Mogadishu is and will be the capital city that all Somalis call theirs, therefore it should not be a clan-line-based federal state similar to others. The second preoccupation is located in the unresolved and still outstanding issues bequeathed by the civil war (these includes but not limited to claims and counter-claims of Property and land ownership etc.). Does this argument have a merit? - it is for you the reader to debate.

Suggested solution on the future status of Mogadishu-and further afield

This suggestion, needless to say, may seem rather radical and not for everyone's cup of tea, but the author argues that if the federal republic is to function and work well for all that are concerned, we must treat clan interest in public in the way we treat in private. In doing so, its constructive aspect can be utilised, while its distractive facet can be neutralised.

To the first group (see above) Mogadishu cannot have its cake and eat it-too. The group can't push for further federal dispensation, while happily and conveniently retaining the current wide-ranging benefits afforded to the city and its inhabitants by the federal constitution. To the second group and its proponents (see above) you can't simply ignore the fact that Somalia is regrettably federated along clan-lines and Mogadishu can't be simply the exception to the rule, without making a tough adjustment to the rule (i.e. the current federal set-up). Mogadishu debate and any other future debates should be treated openly and fairly as civil war bequeathed clan-based preoccupations.

My four pointer suggestions in the form of recommendation-making tough adjustments to rule:

- Mogadishu should remain a chartered federal seat fully under the control and powers of the federal government.
- Mogadishu should remain (*as per the draft constitution*) the undisputed capital and the most important city of the federated Somali republic.
- All regional capitals should be given federal charter status- which gives the federal government the same power it has over Mogadishu.
- All cities with federal charter status (including Mogadishu and regional capitals) should have mayors selected from country-wide mayor's recruitment pools under the control and powers of the federal government.

Conclusion

This piece made an attempt to contribute to the current debate on the future status of Mogadishu and its region-Banadir. In doing so, the author revisited the history of Mogadishu and its economic and social imperative rise since the 10th century, retraced factors that led the adaptation/imposition of the new federal model by/on Somalia, located the debate in purely clan preoccupation based on internalised interest disconnect between clan and nation. Finally, the author put forward four pointed suggestions in the form of recommendation. In these, it is hoped that there are some rebalancing and hard choices that can address the clan-based preoccupation expressed by Mogadishu. Cities that are exclusively under the jurisdictions of federal member states, are suggested/recommended to be made federal seats/chartered cities similar to Mogadishu and should not be subject to specific regional ownership or control.

Final thought:

Somalia, unlike other post-conflict societies, has shown a remarkable resilience, human ingenuity and above a genuine desire to move forward as united country, but there are undeniable impediments to this ; the current imposed and yet to be fully understood (*as argued in this piece*) federal model is brazenly based on clan-line geography, one region has broken off the rest and destined to stay that way, the civil war legacy(*owing to the lack of comprehensive national reconciliation*) and its egregious memories are not fully banished from the collective conscious of Somalis, to the dustbin of remote history- they are raw and still sensitive.

It is the author's closing argument that given the above and despite the progress- the Somali elite need to adopt an alternative narrative when dealing with a clan interest in public discourse as opposed to within private spheres.

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Endnote: *Mogadishu is used interchangeably with Banadir.*

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