

State Making in Somalia under Siyad Barre: Scrutinizing Historical Amnesia and Normative Bias*

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Diverse national and international efforts at rebuilding Somalia ever since its foundations collapsed in 1991 have registered but limited success. While the holding of major donor conferences and installation of Western-backed governments has evoked much hope and optimism time and again, the country in the Horn of Africa has remained the world's "quintessential failed state."¹ In an attempt to steer Somalia out of conflict and fragility, national and international actors alike have sought to distil lessons from the past—an endeavor complicated by the fact that Somalia's state history has allegedly been characterized by a seamless trajectory "From Tyranny to Anarchy."² Thus, the prevailing view holds that the breakdown of the 1990s constituted a logical consequence of the preceding authoritarian rule of the 1970s and 1980s, which is summarily dismissed as having marked the onset of state disintegration.³

Building a functional state may thus seem to be a task that has yet to be invented by (or allegedly even for) the Somali people. However, discounting the rule of Mohamed Siyad Barre in its entirety and concluding that state making had not taken shape in Somalia to date fails to acknowledge historical realities as well as the initial successes and complexities of past attempts at state making. First, dismissing the military government of the 1970s and 1980s and its centralized structures of governance in their totality ignores the widely acknowledged fact that the Ogadeen War of 1977/78 constituted a watershed

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¹ Tatiana Nenova and Tim Harford, "Anarchy and Invention—How Does Somalia's Private Sector Cope without Government?" *Public Policy for the Private Sector* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004), 1; Kenneth Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia—Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping," *International Security* 31, 3 (2006/07); The Fund for Peace, "The Failed States Index 2015" (Washington, DC: Foreign Policy, 2015).

² Hussein M. Adam, *From Tyranny to Anarchy—the Somali Experience* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2008).

³ Abdurahman Abdullahi, "Perspectives on the State Collapse in Somalia," in Abdulahi Osman and Issaka Souaré, eds., *Somalia at the Crossroads: Challenges and Perspectives in Reconstituting a Failed State* (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers, 2007), 43; Daniel Compagnon, "Ressources Politiques, Regulation Autoritaire et Domination Personnelle en Somalie—Le Regime Siyyad Bare (1969–1991)" (Political Resources, Authoritarian Regulation and Personal Domination in Somalia—the Regime of Siyyad Bare (1969–1991) (Ph.D. thesis, Universite de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, 1995).

for Somalia's state trajectory,⁴ which hints at distinct developments in the pre-war as compared to the post-war era. Second, blaming Somalia's post-1991 fate on the repercussions of Barre's dictatorial rule is not only simplistic, but glosses over the fact that already the post-independence decade of the 1960s entailed seeds of state fragility and social fragmentation—sown, not least, during colonialism. Finally, normative assessments of central versus federal and democratic versus autocratic rule are problematic for confining the debate's scope to different types of governance, which might not be the most vital variable in the state-making equation after all.

This article argues that the early rule of Barre holds important lessons for state making, and furthermore proposes that the early to mid-1970s constituted the most promising state-making period in Somali history. Though not conforming to (neo-)liberal idea(l)s about governance and policy making, it was during this period that the country experienced increasing degrees of institutional and identity standardization, processes foundational to state and nation building, *cum* state making.⁵ Institutional standardization underlies state building and is conceived of as a process whereby a single set of “rules of the game”⁶ gains dominance within a given society—a condition in which all major role relationships are regularized by a preponderant organization. Likewise, identity standardization underlies nation building and is defined as a process whereby one common set of “rules of the mind”—sociocognitive elements such as language, social norms, or mental maps—becomes dominant within a politically defined population.

This novel yet historically and theoretically rooted conceptual framework allows for an understanding of processes of state making and state breaking that shed new light on state-making trajectories. In contrast to neopluralist concepts that are normatively laden and focus primarily on different forms of governance, this prism focuses on particular processes that underlie state trajectories and reunites the long-divided concepts of state building and nation building. Moreover, the framework advances the debate on “hybrid political orders”⁷ and “institutional multiplicity”⁸ by depicting how the plurality of coexisting and competing rules is characteristic of state fragility—as evidenced by the

⁴ Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia: Rome and Mogadishu; From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1999), 1.

⁵ State building refers to the establishment of institutions and organizations of government. Nation building addresses issues of identity rather than government and implies the creation of a nation. Finally, I use the term state making as an umbrella term for processes that encompass state building and nation building. The term state breaking is applied in juxtaposition, used to replace terms such as “state failure” or “collapse.”

⁶ Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷ Volker Böge, Anne Brown, Kevin Clements, Anna Nolan, *On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: State Formation in the Context of “Fragility”* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center, 2008).

⁸ Crisis States Research Center, “War, State Collapse and Reconstruction: Phase 2 of the Crisis States Programme,” CSRC Working Paper Series (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2005).

Somali state trajectory of the 1960s—and needs to be replaced by rule conformity and unity for state making to take root. Gaining a better understanding of whether and how the Somali state reached its “high tide” during the early to mid-1970s⁹ is not only crucial to shed further light on prevailing debates about state fragility and resilience, but also carries essential implications for contemporary efforts to build a more stable and peaceful Somali state.

This article is based on a critical re-reading of existing scholarship and the analysis of further secondary data on the Somalia of the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s through the prism of rule standardization. The information thus discerned was amended by interviews conducted during field research in Somalia/Somaliland between 2008 and 2011. While the primary data obtained through these interviews was triangulated, the possibility of these interviewees having exhibited a certain bias cannot be excluded entirely. Although the majority of interview partners acknowledged their own enthusiasm for Barre’s state-building project back in the days, the receptivity of the wider society to these efforts cannot be determined conclusively.

The article is organized as follows. Section one introduces the prism of rule standardization, revealing that progress or regression in state making does not hinge on particular types of governance, but is largely dependent on creating predictable rule frameworks by enforcing common rule systems. Section two sets the empirical stage by briefly outlining the state-making project of the civilian governments during the first post-independence decade. Against this background, section three analyzes the state trajectory of the early to mid-1970s. Building on a historical analysis of state making in the 1960s,¹⁰ this section depicts how the rule plurality that had surfaced in the preceding decade was abated in favor of increasing institutional and identity standardization, allowing for an assessment of Barre’s early state-making project that challenges commonly held positions. Although a number of sympathetic accounts of some of Barre’s policies can be found in the literature,¹¹ there is a dearth of analytical investigations into the dictator’s state-making efforts in the early to mid-1970s—a gap this article aims to address. A conclusion summarizes the article’s main findings and reflects on their broader implications.

⁹ David Laitin, “The Political Crisis in Somalia,” *Horn of Africa* 5, 2 (1982), 60; Adam, *From Tyranny to Anarchy*, 7.

¹⁰ Dominik Balthasar, “Somalia: Unable to Escape Its Past? Revisiting the Roots of a Fractured State and Elusive Nation,” *Critical African Studies* 6, 2–3 (2014), 223–39.

¹¹ For a favorable account of the literacy program, see e.g., David Laitin, *Politics, Language, and Thought—The Somali Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Ioan Lewis, “The Politics of the 1969 Somali Coup,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, 3 (1972); Ahmed Ismail Samatar, *Socialist Somalia—Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Zed Books, 1988); Adam Hussein Mohamed, *The Revolutionary Development of the Somali Language*, Vol. 20 (Los Angeles: African Studies Center, University of California, 1980). Others have lauded the military regime’s accomplishments regarding democratization and “scientific socialism” (Basil Davidson, “Somalia: Towards Socialism,” *Race and Class* 17 [1975]); Gary Payton, “The Somali Coup of 1969: The Case for Soviet Complicity,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 18, 3 (1980), 494. For a more general laudation on Barre’s accomplishments, see Luigi Pestalozza, *The Somalian Revolution*, trans. from Italian by Peter Glendening (Paris: Editions Afrique Asie Amérique latine, 1974).

State Making as Rule Standardization¹²

Subsequent to a period dominated by the Washington Consensus and its optimistic emphasis on the market, an incremental realization of the need for “Bringing the State Back In”¹³ emerged based on the general acknowledgement that the state plays an “extensive role in strengthening and safeguarding human capabilities.”¹⁴ Ever since, largely liberal ideas have guided the international community’s handbooks on how to supposedly “fix” fragile states.¹⁵ While the decade after 1991 saw attention focus on “weak,” “failed,” and “collapsed” states,¹⁶ the post-2001 era experienced a shift to the more programmatic issue of “state-building.”¹⁷

As the 2000s drew to an end, concepts of “twilight institutions,”¹⁸ the “negotiated state,”¹⁹ and “hybrid political orders” (HPOs)²⁰ heralded a further rethinking of the state and issues of governance in contexts of contested statehood. Despite the valuable contributions made by conceptualizations that put notions of hybridity and pluralism at center stage, they also exhibit important limitations. Among other things, they are conceptually limited to distinguish those HPOs that are constitutive of state making from those that are detrimental to it. Moreover, they remain captive to the neoliberal “diversity

¹² For a more detailed elaboration of the analytical framework presented here, see Dominik Balthasar, “From Hybridity to Standardization: Rethinking State-Making in Contexts of Fragility,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 9, 1 (2015).

¹³ Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 5.

¹⁵ Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Seth Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States—A New Paradigm for Development* (London: Praeger Security International, 2008).

¹⁶ Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (New York: Longman, 1993); William Zartman, ed., *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

¹⁷ Derick Brinkerhoff, “Governance Challenges in Fragile States: Re-Establishing Security, Rebuilding Effectiveness, and Reconstituting Legitimacy,” in Derick Brinkerhoff, ed., *Governance in Post-Conflict Societies—Rebuilding Fragile States* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), “Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations—From Fragility to Resilience,” ed. Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (Paris: OECD, 2008).

¹⁸ Christian Lund, “Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local Politics in Africa,” *Development and Change* 37, 4 (2006).

¹⁹ Menkhaus, “Governance without Government.”

²⁰ Böge et al., *On Hybrid Political Orders*.

myth,”²¹ according to which societal pluralism is a precondition for, rather than an outcome of past and present state development.

Re-Conceptualizing Contested Statehood

There are grounds to argue that state making is propelled more by developments that enhance degrees of unification, homogenization, or standardization than by policies geared toward strengthening liberal pluralism. Levene,²² for example, argues that states did not exist to promote diversity, but, “on the contrary, their role is to streamline, make homogeneous, organize people to be uniform in some sense.”²³ Such thinking is broadly compatible with classical approaches to state building,²⁴ all of which propose that the conflicting plurality of actors needs to be replaced with a “Principe” or “Leviathan,” who holds a monopoly of the legitimate means of physical violence.²⁵

Casting such reasoning in the language of new institutional economics,²⁶ according to which institutions can be understood as “humanly devised, recognized and enforceable ‘rules of the game’ that govern the behaviour, rights and obligations of two or more individuals by creating regularised role relationships,”²⁷ state making appears as a process by which “institutional multiplicity” or the patchwork of “political orders” is replaced by a framework that dispenses with ambiguities emanating from the coexistence of diverse and competing sets of “rules of the game.” Whether such standardization is achieved by introducing new institutions in addition to or in lieu of existing ones, or by altering the prevailing institutional framework by means of establishing hierarchies—which can be conceived of as institutions by other means as they, too, contribute to reducing

²¹ Benjamin Schwarz, “The Diversity Myth: America’s Leading Export,” *Atlantic Monthly* 275, 5 (1995).

²² Mark Levene, “The Limits of Tolerance: Nation-State Building and What It Means for Minority Groups,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, 2 (2000), 21.

²³ See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 92; D. Conversi, “Homogenisation, Nationalism and War: Should We Still Read Ernest Gellner?” *Nations and Nationalism* 13, 3 (2007), 372.

²⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, “The Prince. Edited by Skinner, Q. & Price, R. (1988)” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1513); Jean-Jaques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social ou Principes du Droit Politique* (Amsterdam: Chez M.M. Rey, 1763).

²⁵ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in D. Owen, T. Strong and R. Livingstone, eds., *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishers, 1919).

²⁶ R. Coase, “The Problem of Social Cost,” *Journal of Law and Economics* 3, 1 (1960); North, *Institutions, Institutional Change*.

²⁷ Douglas North, “The New Institutional Economics and Third World Development,” in J. Harriss, J. Hunter, and C. Lewis, eds., *The New Institutional Economics and Third World Development* (London: Routledge, 1995); James Putzel, “Survival of an Imperfect Democracy in the Philippines,” *Democratization* 6, 1 (1999); J. Harriss, “Institutions, Politics and Culture: A Case for ‘Old’ Institutionalism in the Study of Historical Change,” in Destin Working Paper. Development Studies Institute (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2002).

uncertainty²⁸—is secondary; what is key is that the same institutions are broadcasted and enforced among a given population.

Interestingly, it is in this line of thought that fragile and contested states have—despite the celebration of pluralism—come to be understood as “places in which diverse and competing claims to power and logics of order co-exist, overlap and intertwine,”²⁹ allowing actors to “[switch] strategically from one institutional universe to another.”³⁰ If this characterization of fragile states is correct, then their very quality defies the larger purpose of institutions, namely to “reduce uncertainty.”³¹ In order to overcome such institutional insecurity, the “hybridity” of “political orders” or multiplicity of institutions logically needs to give way to the enforcement of an authoritative set of “rules of the game” and “rules of the mind.” Thus, it is the standardization and hierarchization, rather than pluralization and equalization of rules that apparently lies at the heart of state consolidation.

“Bringing the Nation Back In”

The scholarship’s ubiquitous focus on institutions glosses over another critical aspect of state making: identities in general, and the nation in particular. Yet, given inherent links between the state and society,³² “simply putting in place the formal rules is a recipe for disappointment, not to say disaster.”³³ Consequently, Lemay-Hébert correctly argues that the process of (re)building states cannot be effective, if focusing on state institutions alone, but that it also needs to take sociopolitical aspects into account.³⁴ As “the creation of institutions has concrete repercussions on the nature of the socio-political cohesion,”³⁵ state building and nation building are anything but “opposing forces.”³⁶ Rather, they are dialectic processes, leading us to propose in a manner analogous to the dictum of Evans, Rueschmeyer, and Skocpol on the state, the need of “bringing the nation back in.”³⁷

As shown elsewhere,³⁸ nation building can be understood in similar terms as state building; a process in which a common, state-related identity comes to be shared by a

²⁸ Douglass North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1.

²⁹ Böge et al., *On Hybrid Political Orders*, 10.

³⁰ Crisis States Research Center, “War, State Collapse and Reconstruction,” 8.

³¹ North, *Institutions, Institutional Change*, 3.

³² Joel Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³³ North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*, 161.

³⁴ Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, “Statebuilding without Nation-Building? Legitimacy, State Failure and the Limits of the Institutionalist Approach,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 3, 1 (2009), 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁶ Marina Ottaway, “Nation Building and State Disintegration,” in Ken Menkhaus and Diane Davis, eds., *State Building and Democratization in Africa—Faith, Hope and Realities* (London: Praeger, 1999).

³⁷ Evans, Rueschmeyer, and Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In*.

³⁸ Balthasar, “From Hybridity to Standardization.”

territorially defined population. This process can be nurtured by spreading and standardizing existing sociocognitive elements (e.g., by declaring one vernacular as the official language) or by introducing a new set of “rules of the mind” across the whole population (e.g., by announcing a political ideology). That nation building is eventually about the standardization of social and/or cognitive patterns is the theme underlying numerous accounts of nationalism. Whether brought about by linguistic unification,³⁹ media and education,⁴⁰ industrialization,⁴¹ urbanization,⁴² or warfare,⁴³ the common denominator of these accounts of nationalism lies in the convergence of a society’s “rules of the mind,” i.e., identity standardization.⁴⁴

While Ottaway warns that “[a]ttempts at ‘homogenising’ a state from an ethnic perspective are not appropriate,”⁴⁵ Conversi⁴⁶ and Levene⁴⁷ argue that “homogenization” played a central role in nation building. Connor, for another, even understands a nation to be a “social group that shares [...] a sense of homogeneity.”⁴⁸ Just as “[t]he powerful influence of myths, superstitions, and religions in shaping early societies came from their role in establishing order and conformity,” so nationalism to this day is “a major force in reducing the costs of maintaining order.”⁴⁹

Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that with regard to aspects of ethnicity, for example, the process of “homogenizing” necessitates neither the cleansing of ethnic minorities, nor cleaning the minorities of their ethnicity. In fact, such efforts can seriously backfire on state-making projects, as they are likely to elicit an affirmation of subnational identities, rather than allowing for the construction of an overarching identity. While the elimination of ethnic, religious, and other minorities has historically constituted a common means to arrive at institutional and identity standardization, the latter has also frequently resulted from adding another, overarching set of “rules of the mind,” such as a national

³⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁴⁰ E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789–1846* (London: Cardinal, 1977).

⁴¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

⁴² M. Szilagy-Gal, “The Nationality of Reasoning: Autochthonist Understandings of Philosophy in Interwar Romania,” in Balázs Trencsényi, Dragos Petrescu, Cristina Petrescu, Constantin Iordachi, and Zoltán Kántor eds., *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies* (Budapest: Regio Books, 2001).

⁴³ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990–1990* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1992).

⁴⁴ Something that Deutsch might call “assimilation.” Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1953).

⁴⁵ Ottaway, “Nation Building and State Disintegration,” as quoted in Z. Scott, “Literature Review on State-Building” (Birmingham: Governance and Social Development Resource Center, 2007), 5.

⁴⁶ Conversi, “Homogenisation, Nationalism and War.”

⁴⁷ Levene, “The Limits of Tolerance.”

⁴⁸ Connor, *Ethnonationalism*, 92, my italics.

⁴⁹ North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change*, 42.

identity, to a society's identity framework. Such a procedure could not only counter a society's potentially perceived need for ethnic standardization—a process likely to be violent due to the rather rigid and exclusionary nature of ethnic identities⁵⁰—but could also provide the basis for a better social integration of ethnic minorities.

Advancing Somali State Making in the Early to Mid-1970s

Fragility Sets the Stage

Five days after the assassination of Somali President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, the army carried out a bloodless coup d'état on 21 October 1969. Having occupied strategic locations within Mogadishu, coup leader Mohamed Siyad Barre immediately moved to dissolve the institutions of civilian government.⁵¹ While he suspended the National Assembly and the Supreme Court, abolished all political parties, and abrogated the constitution within hours of the coup, Barre announced the drafting of a new constitution and the ruling of the country by decree in the interim. Subsequent months saw the creation of an “institutional tabula rasa,”⁵² followed by several institutional and administrative alterations,⁵³ seeing the population benefitting from “improved economic performance, expanding social services and a better culture of governance.”⁵⁴

Indeed, the military take over marked a decisive turn in Somali state development. The most fundamental change was in the trajectory of prevailing rule frameworks, which was characterized by a switch from institutional and identity plurality to a process that registered a standardization of dominant “rules of the game” and “rules of the mind.” While scholars had described Somalia as being marked by ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious homogeneity in the years around and subsequent to independence in 1960,⁵⁵ suggesting that Somalis formed one of the rare true nations on sub-Saharan African soil,⁵⁶

⁵⁰ D. Turton, *War and Ethnicity: Global Connections and Local Violence* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 3.

⁵¹ Born in 1919 to a pastoralist family, Barre was educated as police officer under Italian colonial rule. Upon independence, Barre became vice commander of the Somali army, and became commander in chief in 1966.

⁵² Compagnon, “Ressources Politiques,” 305.

⁵³ International Center for Public Enterprises in Developing Countries, “The Role of the Public Sector in Developing Countries,” in ICPE Country Studies Series (Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, 1983), 38; David Laitin, “Somalia's Military Government and Scientific Socialism,” in Carl Roseberg and Thomas Callaghy, eds., *Socialism in Sub-Saharan Africa—A New Assessment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 18; Ioan Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing for the International African Institute, 1982), 178; Adam, *From Tyranny to Anarchy*, 7.

⁵⁴ Abdullahi, “Perspectives on the State Collapse in Somalia,” 43.

⁵⁵ Alphonso Castagno, “Somalia,” *International Conciliation* 522 (1959), 340; C. J. Martin, “The Somali Republic” *The British Survey* 203 (1966), 2.

⁵⁶ Louis Fitzgibbon, *The Betrayal of the Somalis* (London: Rex Collings, 1982), 2; David Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987), xiv.

this claim was not supported by the underlying institutional plurality. This plurality, which had partly been inherited from colonialism, constituted a significant obstacle to state making.⁵⁷

While the Ise Somalis residing in French Somalia (today's Djibouti) shared a political vision distinct from the ones of other Somali communities,⁵⁸ Ogaden Somalis moulded an identity of their own given the different institutions they had been subjected to under Ethiopian rule.⁵⁹ But also within the newly formed Somali Republic, institutional and identity fragmentation prevailed as the two territories differed in administrative, legal, fiscal, and linguistic terms, among others.⁶⁰ The fact that the 1960s also witnessed increasing social stratification based on urban-rural, regional, and linguistic differentials,⁶¹ and that Somali society developed into a "semi-anarchy" of clan-based camps further indicates how the 1960s were marked by a pluralization rather than standardization of rules.⁶² This "disorder that had discredited and deadlocked the previous parliamentary system" stood in stark contrast with the "order that the military brought to Somali politics."⁶³

Streamlining the Administration: Setting the Conditions for Rule Standardization

With the take over of the military government, administrative structures experienced a significant boost and reorganization. At the central level, Barre replaced the cabinet and the National Assembly with the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), which consisted of twenty-five high-ranking members of the security forces and ruled, in the form of an executive committee, along the institutional and ideological framework set out in the First Charter of the Revolution of 1969. The SRC was complemented by a subordinate Council of the Secretaries of State, which was composed of fourteen mainly civilian secretaries who were responsible for the day-to-day government operations.⁶⁴ While the SRC

⁵⁷ Balthasar, "Somalia: Unable to Escape Its Past."

⁵⁸ Ioan Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 136.

⁵⁹ Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 107; Ian Spears, *Civil War in African States: The Search for Security* (Boulder, CO: FirstForumPress, 2010), 122.

⁶⁰ Ioan Lewis, "Integration in the Somali Republic," in Arthur Hazlewood, ed., *African Integration and Disintegration—Case Studies in Economic and Political Union* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 272; Abdi Ismail Samatar, "Structural Adjustment as Development Strategy? Bananas, Boom, and Poverty in Somalia," *Economic Geography* 69, 1 (1993), 27.

⁶¹ David Laitin, "The Political Economy of Military Rule in Somalia," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 14, 3 (1976), 463.

⁶² Adam, *From Tyranny to Anarchy*, 1.

⁶³ Spears, *Civil War in African States*, 134.

⁶⁴ Samatar, "Structural Adjustment as Development Strategy?" 38. With the exception of police commissioner Major-General Jama Ali Korshel, who was put in charge of Internal Affairs in addition to being vice-president of the SRC, the other thirteen secretaries of state were "youngish civilian technocrats," whose appointment was allegedly marked by "an attempt at subordinating ethnic considerations to individual

“embarked on an energetic revitalization of the country’s government, economy and social services,”⁶⁵ the organizational alterations were mirrored on lower administrative echelons.

The regional governors and district commissioners, which had formally existed under civilian rule,⁶⁶ were replaced with regional and district revolutionary councils.⁶⁷ According to law no. 9 on local government reform of 9 August 1972, “[l]ocal councils, composed of military administrators and representatives appointed by the SRC, were established under the Ministry of Interior at the regional, district, and village levels to advise the government on local conditions and to expedite its directives.”⁶⁸ Whether these administrative alterations were designed to provide “control of the masses”⁶⁹ or rather constituted a genuine attempt to bring governance closer to the people,⁷⁰ they considerably enhanced the administrative penetration of Somali society,⁷¹ thereby laying the grounds for implementing common rule systems throughout society within the state territory.

Yet, the administrative restructuring was not only geared at boosting those sets of institutions and identities devised by the central government, but also helped to counter alternative rule frameworks such as the clan. With the decentralization law of 1974, the eight regions and forty-seven districts that had existed during civilian rule were reconstituted to fifteen regions and seventy-eight districts.⁷² The new regions and districts were designed in such a way as to cut across traditional clan boundaries and were, where necessary, renamed so as to exclude tribal or clan names, placing emphasis instead on the settlement (*digmo*) as the basic unit of association and identification in an effort to extirpate lingering lineage loyalties.⁷³ Thus, this territorial reorganization directly confronted the institutions and identity of clan.

talent,” *Africa Contemporary Record (ACR)*, (London and New York: Rex Collings and Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969/70), B188; Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 208; Compagnon, “Ressources Politiques,” 324.

⁶⁵ Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 208.

⁶⁶ Ioan Lewis, “Kim Il-Sung in Somalia: The End of Tribalism?” in William Shack and Percy Cohen, eds., *Politics in Leadership—A Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1979), 23.

⁶⁷ Somali Democratic Republic, “Administrative Changes in Somalia (October 1971–October 1972)” Somali Institute of Public Administration (Mogdishu: Somali Institute of Public Administration, 1972), 1; Abdisalam Issa-Salwe, *The Collapse of the Somali State—The Impact of the Colonial Legacy* (London: Haan Associates, 1994), 49.

⁶⁸ Ibrahim Megag Samatar, “Light at the End of the Tunnel: Some Reflections on the Struggle of the Somali National Movement” (London: Save the Children Fund, 1993), 38.

⁶⁹ Laitin, “Somalia’s Military Government and Scientific Socialism,” 178.

⁷⁰ Davidson, “Somalia: Towards Socialism,” 29; Spears, *Civil War in African States*, 134.

⁷¹ Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy*, 18; Laitin, “Somalia’s Military Government and Scientific Socialism,” 178.

⁷² Lewis, “Kim Il-Sung in Somalia,” 23.

⁷³ Ioan Lewis, “The Ogaden and the Fragility of Somali Segmentary Nationalism” *African Affairs* 88, 353 (1989), 573.

Similarly, the Somali Land Law of 1975 can be understood as a measure to standardize administrative practice. Introduced in an attempt to regulate Somalia's agricultural economy, the law was "designed to legislate land allocation and legalize inherited claims by a registering process."⁷⁴ This measure challenged customary institutions of inheritance and land allocation, seeking to abolish customary ownership in rural areas,⁷⁵ and withdrew those traditional authorities charged with adjudicating customary land tenure cases the economic basis to maintain their set of rules and, thus, power. Instead, the state established itself at the pinnacle of rule making and attempted to broadcast uniform rules across the territory. This theme of shifting rule-making powers from the sphere of kinship/clan to the state is one to which we shall return shortly.

Given that "[t]he military, both before and after the coup, has respected lines of authority, and its members have adhered closely to their rôles,"⁷⁶ the militarization of the administrative apparatus served the important function of making it more effective and efficient.⁷⁷ Furthermore, it provided the state with so much control over the population that even skirmishes among Somali nomads in the hinterland were effectively stopped and disputants were coerced to bring their conflict to the central government.⁷⁸ Lewis emphasizes that "[t]he command structure of the Somali army thus forms the backbone of the state,"⁷⁹ and Compagnon observes that, by the mid-1970s, the administrative architecture reflected the tight control that the SRC maintained on all levels of administration via its military intermediary.⁸⁰

The immediate "battle for the renewal of the administration"⁸¹ enabled the SRC to transmit its power throughout the country.⁸² Consequently, different observers spoke of a "bureaucratization of public life"⁸³ and a "fantastic expansion of the bureaucracy,"⁸⁴ which

⁷⁴ Dustin Dehérez, "The Scarcity of Land in Somalia: Natural Resources and Their Role in the Somali Conflict," in Occasional Paper III (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2009), 9.

⁷⁵ Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "Housing, Land and Property Issues in Somalia: Persons of Concern in Somaliland and South-Central Somalia". (London: Legal Action Worldwide, 2014), 31.

⁷⁶ Laitin, "The Political Economy of Military Rule in Somalia," 452.

⁷⁷ Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1969/70), B177; Lewis, "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia," 23; Compagnon, "Ressources Politiques," 334.

⁷⁸ Laitin, "The Political Economy of Military Rule in Somalia," 456. Interview by author with official of the Somaliland Ministry of Education, Hargeysa, 10.07.2011; Interview by author with SNM veteran, Hargeysa, 19.07.2011.

⁷⁹ Lewis, "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia," 21.

⁸⁰ Compagnon, "Ressources Politiques," 334.

⁸¹ Pestalozza, *The Somalian Revolution*, 81.

⁸² Compagnon, "Ressources Politiques," 334; Laitin, "Somalia's Military Government and Scientific Socialism," 178.

⁸³ Laitin and Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, 683.

⁸⁴ Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy*, 18. Interview by author with former minister of the governments of Somalia and Somaliland, Hargeysa, 07.08.2008; Interview by author with official of the Somaliland Ministry

“brought about internal discipline.”⁸⁵ The resulting standardization of institutions was enhanced by changed recruitment patterns for administrative personnel. Civil servants were now nominated on meritocratic rather than clan parameters⁸⁶ and the civilian administrators of the previous government were either replaced by young police and army officers,⁸⁷ or required to undergo military training and political education, as ideological conviction was considered “an indispensable quality.”⁸⁸ As “those found to be incompetent or politically unreliable were fired,”⁸⁹ the state machinery soon comprised a unified class of administrative technocrats with military obedience.⁹⁰ Coupled with the expansion of the civil service,⁹¹ rule standardization could be realized on a broad level.

Challenging Alternative Rule Systems: Confronting Clannism

The reorganization of the administrative architecture had been carried on a flood of anti-tribalism and anti-nepotism,⁹² as the aforementioned Somali Land Law of 1975 exemplifies. Aiming to eradicate “the divisive force of tribalism and clan rivalry”⁹³ and to arrest trends of social stratification,⁹⁴ the military government embarked on a “war on tribalism.”⁹⁵ Interestingly, this was anything but a novel policy to Somali people, as the

of Education, Hargeysa, 10.07.2011; Interview by author with former advisor to the Guurti, Hargeysa, 19.07.2011.

⁸⁵ Mohamed Osman Omar, *Somalia: A Nation Driven to Despair—A Case of Leadership Failure* (New Delhi: Somali Publications, 1996), xiiv. Interview by author with SNM veteran and former minister in the government of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 13.07.2011.

⁸⁶ Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 208.

⁸⁷ Issa-Salwe, *The Collapse of the Somali State*, 53. Interview by author with former minister of the governments of Somalia and Somaliland, Hargeysa, 07.08.2008.

⁸⁸ Somali Democratic Republic, “Administrative Changes in Somalia (October 1971–October 1972)” 2; Adam, *From Tyranny to Anarchy*, 59.

⁸⁹ Said Sheikh Samatar, “Historical Setting,” in Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Somalia: A Country Study* (Washington DC: Library of Congress/ U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 38.

⁹⁰ The standardization of rules was expanded to all students who had completed four years of secondary education and who were to undertake a six- to nine-month placement as “national volunteer teachers” (Anthony Hughes, “Somalia’s Socialist Road,” *Africa Report* 22, 2 (1977), 44.

⁹¹ Astrid M. Slottved, “Eco-Development: The Somali Experience” (paper presented at the Somalia and the World—Proceedings of the International Symposium, Mogadishu, 1980), 219. “As of 1976 it was estimated that approximately 72,000 Somalis, out of a paid work force of 167,000, worked for government salaries” (Laitin and Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, 107.

⁹² Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1969/70), B177.

⁹³ Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy*, 18.

⁹⁴ Abdi Sheik-Abdi, “Somali Nationalism: Its Origins and Future,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 15, 4 (1977), 662.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Somalia: A Government at War with Its Own People—Testimonies About the Killings and the Conflict in the North.” Africa Watch Committee (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990), 23.

civilian governments of the 1960s and the nationalist parties prior to that had also sought to eliminate clannism in pursuit of unity.⁹⁶ Just as was the case for previous elites, the military dictatorship “saw the destruction of tribal society as a necessary step toward the creation of a new social, political, and economic order based on ‘scientific socialism.’”⁹⁷ Compared to his predecessors, however, Barre progressed further in this endeavor, at least in the medium term.

Condemning “tribalism” as the “most serious impediment to national unity,”⁹⁸ Barre stated in a menacing address to regional judges that:

[t]ribalism and nationalism cannot go hand in hand.... It is unfortunate that our nation is rather too clannish; if all Somalis are to go to Hell, tribalism will be their vehicle to reach there.⁹⁹

The dictator thus banned the use of specific terms that carried a clannish connotation, replacing, for example, the traditional Somali term of address “cousin” (*ina’adeer*) with the socialist notion “comrade” (*jaalle*) and renaming local lineage headmen (*akils*) “peace-seekers” (*nabad-doon*).¹⁰⁰ Moreover, “[t]he legal and political functions of clan elders, the *aqils*, were placed under increased state control.”¹⁰¹ This was evidenced in the fact that the establishment of the Regional Courts of Appeal on 11 March 1971 was accompanied by a Supreme Court ruling that sharia practitioners and *akils* could not represent litigants in the Supreme Court,¹⁰² thereby clearly undermining clan institutions. Furthermore, the dictator confronted clannism by decreeing that social events were to be held in the orientation centers, rather than within the traditional context of clan families. This effectively put social interaction under the purview of the state, rather than the clan, thereby strengthening the former at the expense of the latter. Barre’s repression of the clan also entailed the

⁹⁶ Interestingly, also Sayid Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan, who had established the Dervish State and fought a “jihad” against the colonialists between 1900 and 1920, had tried to abolish clannism. Yet, as with later Somali leaders, he failed to overcome clannism and had to resort to it in order to wage his war. See Alphonso Castagno, “The Political Party System in the Somali Republic,” in James Coleman and Carl Rosberg, eds., *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 518.

⁹⁷ Allan Hoben, “The Political Economy of Land Tenure in Somalia,” in R.E. Downs and S.P. Reyna, eds., *Land and Society in Contemporary Africa* (London: University Press of New England, 1988), 205.

⁹⁸ Samatar, “Historical Setting,” 39.

⁹⁹ Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 222.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 209. Interview by author with former advisor to the Guurti, Hargeysa, 19.07.2011. Across the globe, such standardization of greetings has been used to effect everyday identification with a particular regime (see e.g., the raised arm in Nazi Germany, the raised fist in communist societies, etc.).

¹⁰¹ Maria Brons, *Society, Security, Sovereignty and the State in Somalia—From Statelessness to Statelessness?* (Utrecht: International Books, 2001), 173.

¹⁰² *Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1971/72)*, B188.

replacement of traditional blood compensation (*diya*) given by one clan to another by the death sentence for the perpetrator in cases of murder.¹⁰³

A central tool to boost the state's new rule framework while simultaneously repressing competing sources of institution making and identity formation lay in "orientation centres," which were established in every permanent settlement throughout the country.¹⁰⁴ These "indoctrination centres"¹⁰⁵ were the loci where public lectures on "scientific socialism" were held, and where also other social events that had originally taken place in the traditional framework of the clan, such as weddings and funerals, were hosted. Consequently Dool argues that "[t]he centres penetrated into the heart of the society,"¹⁰⁶ not least as the nomadic population was encouraged "to regard the orientation centre at a regularly frequented water point as the hub of social and political activities."¹⁰⁷

The orientation centers "were reinforced by other agencies which checked deviations from official policy."¹⁰⁸ Prominent amongst these were the National Security Service, founded on 3 January 1970, and the National Security Courts, established on 15 February 1970, which jointly dealt with a wide range of "political" offences including nepotism and tribalism, as well as with such charges as "lack of revolutionary zeal" and treason.¹⁰⁹ The internalization of revolutionary fervor was further assured by members of the people's vigilantes, called the "Victory Pioneers" who were mainly recruited from amongst the unemployed.¹¹⁰ Soon after its formation in the summer of 1972, this organ counted some 20,000 members and was feared among the population, as it collaborated closely with the revolutionary councils that could—according to decree no. 1 of 10 January 1970—arrest anyone suspected of subverting the revolutionary government.¹¹¹

The national campaign against tribalism culminated in early 1971, when effigies representing tribalism, corruption, nepotism, and misrule were symbolically burnt or buried in the Republic's main centers.¹¹² As "[t]he intense clan factionalism that characterised the political life at the end of the 1960s was still fresh in memory,"¹¹³ the

¹⁰³ Lewis, "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia," 24. Brons, *Society, Security, Sovereignty and the State in Somalia*, 173, argues more generally that "[c]lanism was officially banned and punished by death."

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia," 23. Interview by author with official of the Somaliland Ministry of Education, Hargeysa, 10.07.2011; Interview by author with former advisor to the Guurti, Hargeysa, 19.07.2011.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Greenfield, "Somalia: Siad's Sad Legacy," *Africa Report* 36, 2 (1991), 15.

¹⁰⁶ Abdullahi Dool, *Failed States—When Governance Goes Wrong* (London: Han Heritage, 1998), 18.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 214.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 212. Interview by author with senior official of the Somaliland Police Force, Hargeysa, 22.03.2009.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Lewis, "Kim Il-Sung in Somalia," 22.

¹¹¹ Compagnon, "Ressources Politiques," 344.

¹¹² Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 209.

¹¹³ Compagnon, "Ressources Politiques," 210; my translation.

population largely welcomed the rigorous policy,¹¹⁴ and “Somali nationalism had reached its peak.”¹¹⁵ No matter if motivated by a broader ideological vision or a personal agenda for political survival,¹¹⁶ the displacement of plural (clan) identities with a singular (state) identity contributed to identity standardization.

From Rule Control to Thought Control: Boosting National Identity

The “war on tribalism” Barre had declared early on was destined to “create a stable sense of national identity,”¹¹⁷ and was substantiated with a “crash programme of nation-building.”¹¹⁸ On the first anniversary of the revolution on 21 October 1970, Barre announced “scientific socialism” as the country’s official and overarching ideology. While the civilian governments had played the non-alignment card during the Cold War, Barre “adopted “Scientific Socialism” to unite the nation and eradicate its ancient clan divisions.”¹¹⁹ Succinctly, this was stated in the slogan “tribalism divides where Socialism unites.”¹²⁰ Whether “scientific socialism” was “a political instrument to repress the civil rights and freedom of the citizens,”¹²¹ or constituted more a “bluff” than a “good hand,”¹²² this ideology, which “mobilized and excited Somali citizens,”¹²³ aided in the creation of a unified framework of “rules of the game” and “rules of the mind.”¹²⁴

The objective to create common identity markers and dispense with divisive differences among Somalis—particularly between those communities that had been subjected to distinct colonial rule—also undergirded the long-desired introduction of a Somali script. While the linguistic legacies had challenged post-independence unification in important ways,¹²⁵ civilian governments had been unable to resolve this issue. As the Somali language was “the most powerful sign of their nationality”¹²⁶ and played “a crucial

¹¹⁴ Interview by author with SNM veteran, who later became minister in the government of Somaliland, Hargeysa, 10.02.2009, 30.03.2009.

¹¹⁵ Adam, *From Tyranny to Anarchy*, 192. Interview by author with former official of the Somaliland Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Health, Hargeysa, 08.07.2011; Interview by author with former official of the Somaliland Ministry of National Planning and Coordination, Hargeysa, 04.08.2011.

¹¹⁶ Laitin, “The Political Crisis in Somalia,” 60.

¹¹⁷ Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy*, 18.

¹¹⁸ Sheik-Abdi, “Somali Nationalism,” 662.

¹¹⁹ Lewis, “The Ogaden and the Fragility of Somali Segmentary Nationalism,” 573. This was followed by the signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Somalia and the USSR on 11 July 1974.

¹²⁰ Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 209.

¹²¹ Mariam Arif Gasseem, (Nairobi, Kenya: Central Graphics Services, 1994), 24.

¹²² Hughes, “Somalia’s Socialist Road,” 41.

¹²³ Laitin, “The Political Crisis in Somalia,” 63.

¹²⁴ Sheik-Abdi, “Somali Nationalism,” 662.

¹²⁵ David Laitin, “Revolutionary Change in Somalia,” *MERIP Reports* 62 (1977), 6-18. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3010954.

¹²⁶ Ali A. Warsame, “How a Strong Government Backed an African Language: The Lessons of Somalia,” *International Review of Education* 47, 3/4 (2001), 343.

role in the formulation of Somali identity,”¹²⁷ it came to be a key criteria for Somali citizenship.¹²⁸ In line with the proposition that Somalis constituted not only a “nation in search of a state”,¹²⁹ but also a “nation of poets in search of an alphabet”,¹³⁰ the leadership realized the importance of not only being able to speak but also read and write the same language.¹³¹ Hence, on the third anniversary of the revolution, Barre announced the SRC’s decision to utilize Roman characters for writing Somali and, in a speech on 8 March 1974, postulated that alphabetization “will be the weapon to eradicate social balkanization and fragmentation into tribes and sects. It will bring about an absolute unity.”¹³²

And, indeed, “[t]he conscious attempt to link nationalist sentiment and modernization by creating an “imagined community” of people who could speak, read, and write the same language could not be more clear.”¹³³ Once the Somali script was adopted, replacing English, Italian, and Arabic as the official tongues, the government wasted no time in introducing its blanket implementation within the administration¹³⁴ and in all schools.¹³⁵ Partly due to the introduction of a common script and the fact that “[b]ooks on every subject were immediately translated into Somali and introduced into the schools with military precision,”¹³⁶ Somalia acquired, for the first time in its history, a “standardized educational system.”¹³⁷ The latter was further homogenized with law no. 61 of 23 July 1972, which ruled that all private schools were to be integrated into the public system.¹³⁸ Barre abolished school fees in 1971 and “as a result of the new emphasis on literacy and

¹²⁷ Hussein Mohamed Adam, “Language, National Consciousness and Identity: The Somali Experience,” in Ioan Lewis, ed., *Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa* (London: Ithaca, 1983), 31.

¹²⁸ Laitin, *Politics, Language, and Thought*.

¹²⁹ Laitin and Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*.

¹³⁰ Jeanne Contini, “Somali Republic: A Nation of Poets in Search of an Alphabet,” *Africa Report*, 8, 11 (1963), 15-18.

¹³¹ See Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, and other theorists of modern nationalism, for whom literacy is a decisive ingredient in national self-consciousness.

¹³² Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 217.

¹³³ Catherine Besteman, “Violent Politics and the Politics of Violence: The Dissolution of the Somali Nation-State,” *American Ethnologist* 23, 3 (1996), 588.

¹³⁴ Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1972/73), B230.

¹³⁵ Dool, *Failed States*, 55; Warsame, “How a Strong Government Backed an African Language,” 350.

¹³⁶ Dool, *Failed States*, 55.

¹³⁷ Warsame, “How a Strong Government Backed an African Language,” 349.

¹³⁸ International Center for Public Enterprises in Developing Countries, “The Role of the Public Sector in Developing Countries,” 76; Warsame, “How a Strong Government Backed an African Language,” 350.

language, new schools were built, even in some of the most remote areas,”¹³⁹ increasing levels of education.¹⁴⁰

Six months after Barre’s announcement introducing a common script, a National Literacy Campaign was launched on 8 March 1973. Both the Urban Literacy Campaign (1973/74) and the Rural Development and Literacy Campaign (1974/75) were considered “highly successful”¹⁴¹; they boosted adult literacy rates from 7–10 percent in the late 1960s to 60–65 percent a decade later.¹⁴² Another aspect of this success could be found in the political realm. According to Laitin

The new rulers have not faced regional fission, and their use of authoritarian control only partly explains why they have not. Their attempt to build a Somali nationality in the Somali language rather than one in the English language is, it seems to me, part of that explanation. Somalia’s regions were united on a domestic issue, and common external enemies were no longer necessary to maintain Somali unity.¹⁴³

Similarly, Lewis proposes that the “literacy campaign has quickened sentiments of national identity and self-awareness.”¹⁴⁴

One of the changes the introduction of the Somali script and literacy campaign entailed concerned the media landscape as the Barre government sought to disseminate its ideology. The availability of a Somali script implied that the foreign language newspapers were subjected to competition—competition that the authoritarian political climate quickly decided in favor of Somali newspapers. In fact, the two daily newspapers at that time, the Arabic *Najmat October* and the Italian *Stella d’Ottobre*, and the weekly English paper *Dawn*, closed down on 21 January 1973, being replaced with the government’s daily

¹³⁹ Ahmed Ismail Samatar, “The Curse of Allah: Civic Disembowelment and the Collapse of the State in Somalia,” in Ahmed Ismail Samatar, ed., *The Somali Challenge—From Catastrophe to Renewal?* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 116.

¹⁴⁰ Total school enrollment amounted to 30,408 in 1966–67, and 38,439 in 1968–69; the military government boosted these figures to 45,944 in 1970–71, and 107,403 for the period of 1973–74. See Laitin, “Somalia’s Military Government and Scientific Socialism,” 186. On education progress, see e.g., Tom J. Farer, *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979), 112. Or Warsame, “How a Strong Government Backed an African Language,” 349.

¹⁴¹ Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 216.

¹⁴² Slottved, “Eco-Development,” 218. See also Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 103. Yet, despite the successes, it should be borne in mind that the literacy programs were less successful in the medium-term. Still in the 1980s, Italian remained the language of instruction at university level (International Center for Public Enterprises in Developing Countries, “The Role of the Public Sector in Developing Countries,” 24). The report is an evaluation of the Somali public administration in the early 1980s—which might have been partly due to the fact that Somali did not lend itself to teaching scientific subjects.

¹⁴³ Laitin, “Revolutionary Change in Somalia,” 129.

¹⁴⁴ Lewis, “Kim Il-Sung in Somalia,” 28.

newspaper *Xiddigta Oktoobar* (*October Star*).¹⁴⁵ The latter not only provided the population with news, the latest achievements of the government, and information about “scientific socialism,” but also supplied its readers with a “thought for the day” in general pursuit of ideological hegemony.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, Barre vastly increased radio propaganda.¹⁴⁷ During the 1970s, a network of loudspeakers was installed in every city quarter and each orientation center, diffusing the song *Guulwaadde Siyaad*, which opened and closed the daily radio transmissions. This song, which was part of Barre’s personal cult and had started being broadcasted in 1971, was listened to and sung by civil servants, pupils, urban blue-collar workers, and others at least once a day.¹⁴⁸ With the exception of the Somali Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the state had a “monopoly of the media of communication, and plays, songs and poems were widely used to convey the message of the revolution to the illiterate masses.”¹⁴⁹ While the International Center for Public Enterprise in Developing Countries (ICPE)¹⁵⁰ judged that Somalia’s communication outside the main cities remained “primitive” even during the reign of the military government, Markakis assesses that the Public Relations Office “grew octopus-like into a multifaceted organisation whose tentacles reached every corner of Somali society.”¹⁵¹

A State Marked by Rule Standardization

The years prior to the Ogadeen War have frequently been described as “successful.”¹⁵² While Omar justifies this judgement with reference to the country’s “enhanced image abroad,” there are good reasons to argue that some progress was also achieved on an internal level. Viewed through the rule standardization prism, the early to mid-1970s were characterized by the standardization of an authoritative set of “rules of the game” and “rules of the mind.” In this sense, other observers considered that “Barre elicited a higher degree of societal cohesion in Somalia than had previously existed,”¹⁵³ and that “[w]e may

¹⁴⁵ *Xiddigta Oktoobar* (Mogadishu) had a daily circulation of about 10,000 copies, compared to the combined print run of the foreign language newspapers of approximately 6,000 copies per day. Warsame, “How a Strong Government Backed an African Language,” 357.

¹⁴⁶ Lewis, “Kim Il-Sung in Somalia,” 18.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23; Suleiman M. Adam, *Gather Round the Speaker: A History of the First Quarter Century of Somali Broadcasting; 1941–1966* (London: Haan Associates, 2001), viii.

¹⁴⁸ Compagnon, “Ressources Politiques,” 355.

¹⁴⁹ John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 219.

¹⁵⁰ International Center for Public Enterprises in Developing Countries, “The Role of the Public Sector in Developing Countries,” 1983.

¹⁵¹ Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, 219.

¹⁵² Omar, *Somalia: A Nation Driven to Despair*, 73.

¹⁵³ Robert Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 41.

take the years 1974–76 as the high tide of the Somali state system.”¹⁵⁴ Having used strong state organs to build nationalism,¹⁵⁵ the Somali state appeared to have reached—despite certain shortcomings—an unprecedented level of standardization of its institutions and identity systems.

Quite in contrast to civilian rule, which had largely witnessed a fragmentation of “rules of the game” and “rules of the mind,” military reign brought about a process of institutional and identity standardization. While alternative rule systems were either banned (clan), co-opted (regional), or subdued (religious), the state’s rules were broadcast through an elaborate administrative infrastructure and with military precision. Hence, the argument that the Somali “state collapse” started with the drift towards one party rule in 1969¹⁵⁶ appears to be unjustified. Similarly, and in light of the fact that the military take over enjoyed popular support during the early years,¹⁵⁷ also the proposition that Barre’s government was, from 1970 onward, only concerned with political survival,¹⁵⁸ can be scrutinized.

Yet, while rule standardization had significantly increased during Barre’s early reign, numerous “building sites” remained. One example can be found in the clan with its long-established institutions and identity systems, which still played an important role in society.¹⁵⁹ Hence, Gorman points out that “[t]here were still clan differences, especially among the nomadic sections of the population, and there was still some resistance to the assertion of central and hierarchical governmental authority over the highly individualistic Somali.”¹⁶⁰ Another, antithetic building site lay with the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP), an organization without roots in history, which failed to instil significant participation of the population in the fortunes of the state.¹⁶¹ Also other policies designed

¹⁵⁴ David Rawson, “Dealing with Disintegration: U.S. Assistance and the Somali State,” in Samatar, ed., *The Somali Challenge*, 51; Laitin, “The Political Crisis in Somalia,” 60.

¹⁵⁵ Interview by author with local researcher, NGO worker and political activist; former official of the Somaliland Ministry of National Planning and Coordination, Hargeysa, 04.08.2011.

¹⁵⁶ Abdullahi, “Perspectives on the State Collapse in Somalia,” 43.

¹⁵⁷ Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1969/70), B175; see e.g., Louis Fitzgibbon, “Somalia—A Call for Justice,” *Contemporary Review* 240, 1394 (1982), 141; Gassem, *Hostages: The People Who Kidnapped Themselves*, 23; Jama Mohamed Ghalib, *The Cost of Dictatorship—The Somali Experience* (New York: Lillian Barber Press, 1995), 120; Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia*, 2.

¹⁵⁸ Compagnon, “Ressources Politiques,” 428. Yet, it is true that Barre was careful to fortify his own position while ensuring that no other individual could build up a power base, see e.g., Daniel Compagnon, “Political Decay in Somalia: From Personal Rule to Warlordism,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 12, 5 (1992), 9; Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 207.

¹⁵⁹ Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1976/77), B327.

¹⁶⁰ Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa*, 41.

¹⁶¹ International Center for Public Enterprises in Developing Countries, “The Role of the Public Sector in Developing Countries,” 101. The SRSP was founded between 26 June and 1 July 1976, with seventy-four members—nineteen of whom had formerly belonged to the SRC, Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1976/77), B326. It had roughly 12,000 members at the end of 1976 (Hughes, “Somalia’s Socialist Road,” 49), increasing to only 20,000 two years after its creation (Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 223).

to enhance state control failed, thus missing out on enhancing levels of standardization even further.

From the mid-1970s onward, some policies not only failed, but initiated a reduction of levels of standardization. One of these was the introduction of the Family Law of 1975. In a speech to mark the United Nations' (UN) decision to make 1975 a year to improve the place of women in society, on 11 January 1975 Barre announced that the inheritance law was to be extended to female members of society,¹⁶² thus meddling with religious institutions. While most religious leaders did not rebuff the law, "some traditionalist religious leaders in the north [saw it] as further evidence of their belief that the SRC was trying to undermine the old structure of Islamic society."¹⁶³ Although none of the Somali Islamist movements¹⁶⁴ was strong enough to credibly challenge the rule of Barre,¹⁶⁵ ten of the religious leaders were sentenced to death.¹⁶⁶ The government's rash response shocked many Somalis and the incident served to radicalize Islamic groups in Somalia, some of whom were to resurface in new Islamic movements in the civil war three decades later.¹⁶⁷ As Abdullahi has it, this clash between the military government and religious leaders gradually led the two forces of Islamism and clannism to "unite in favour of regime change."¹⁶⁸ By the mid-1970s, further divisions emerged, leading to a renewed corrosion of common rule frameworks.

Conclusion

Unable to perpetuate processes of rule standardization, the military state-making endeavor ultimately faltered just as had been the case for the civilian state-making projects both prior and subsequent to it. Rather than undermining the validity of the rule standardization prism, this development points to the fact that processes of rule standardization are not immune against regression, and that state making occurs along a continuum, rather than in linear steps. In contrast to the state-making project of the 1960s, however, which had failed to overcome the rule plurality inherited from colonialism, the state-making endeavor of the early to mid-1970s was characterized by increasing institutional unification and identity cohesion. As Laitin has it, "the emergent social stratification based on urban-rural, regional, and linguistic differentials that became recognizable by the late 1960s was

¹⁶² Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1974/75), B266.

¹⁶³ Ibid., B271.

¹⁶⁴ Inspired by similar movements in Saudi Arabia (Wahabiyya) and Egypt (Ikwaan al Muslimun), small religious groups had started to emerge in the early 1970s. These Islamist movements actively promoted a regime that was founded on strict sharia rule.

¹⁶⁵ Roland Marchal, "Islamic Political Dynamics in the Somali Civil War," in Alex De Waal, ed., *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁶⁶ Africa Contemporary Record (ACR) (1975/76), B305.

¹⁶⁷ Andre Le Sage, "Somalia and the War on Terrorism: Political Islamic Movements and U.S. Counter-Terrorism Efforts" (Ph.D. thesis. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University, 2004); Marchal, "Islamic Political Dynamics in the Somali Civil War."

¹⁶⁸ Abdullahi, "Perspectives on the State Collapse in Somalia," 44.

discarded by the military government.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, rather than being solely marked by processes of “state collapse,”¹⁷⁰ Barre’s early rule brought about an enhancement of state making. By means of rendering state administration more effective, challenging alternative rule systems such as the clan, boosting an overarching ideology and, thus, common political identity, and providing and enforcing common institutions, Barre propelled state and nation building in Somalia, which “experienced for the first time the establishment of an efficient state.”¹⁷¹

The common argument that the differences in state trajectories stemmed from divergent institutions and policies¹⁷² can be scrutinized on the basis that there has been a considerable continuity with regard to the policy objectives and concomitant rules from the civilian to the military leadership. Both the civilian and military government(s), for example, aspired to acquit themselves of clannism and had a similar take on traditional authorities, tried to ensure a particular clan balance, attempted more or less successfully to introduce a script for the Somali language, and tried to stimulate national sentiments.¹⁷³ Thus, it seems that the major difference between these two state-making endeavors in the 1960s and 1970s lay less with different policy objectives or types of governance, but rather with the degree to which the respective leadership was successful in bringing about rule standardization. As Lewis remarks with regard to the policies of the military government: “These ambitions and slogans are not new; and dissatisfaction with the previous civilian leaders centred not on their aims, but on their failure to implement them effectively and sincerely.”¹⁷⁴

What the developments under Siyad Barre’s early rule also show, is that achievements in the spheres of state and nation building are not confined to liberal democracies. For what it is worth, the prism of rule standardization breaks with normative approaches to state making, revealing that even authoritarian African regimes can further state and nation building. Although treading such a path in pursuit of greater political stability might, for many reasons, not be desirable, this insight sheds important light on the currents underpinning state making. Thus, this article hopes to act as an important corrective to historical amnesia and normative bias, which have been catalyzed, for one, by the brutal policies of Siyad Barre’s rule of the late 1970s and 1980s, and dominant Western worldviews and policy paradigms on the other. While the dictatorial regime’s increasing brutality subsequent to the lost Ogadeen War against Ethiopia in 1978 prompted many observers to ignore or discredit the regime’s earlier accomplishments—especially with

¹⁶⁹ Laitin, “The Political Economy of Military Rule in Somalia,” 363.

¹⁷⁰ Abdullahi, “Perspectives on the State Collapse in Somalia,” 43.

¹⁷¹ Gorman, *Political Conflict on the Horn of Africa*, 40.

¹⁷² Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 206; Nuruddin Farah, *The Naked Needle* (Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks, 1976); Ghalib, *The Cost of Dictatorship*, 141.

¹⁷³ Compare e.g., Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, 156, and Hoben, “The Political Economy of Land Tenure in Somalia,” 205; for the civilian governments with Compagnon, “Ressources Politiques,” 213; and Brons, *Society, Security, Sovereignty and the State in Somalia*, 178, for the military government.

¹⁷⁴ Lewis, “The Politics of the 1969 Somali Coup,” 406.

regards to its efforts in building a unitary Somali state—such understandable, yet questionable comportment clouds a more apt analysis of the Somali state’s development.

In light of these findings, the article acts as a corrective to the widely held proposition that the success or failure of state-making endeavors depends on particular policies or forms of governance. While these are certainly of importance and while relevant debates should not be discarded, the analysis of Somali state-making trajectories of the 1960s and 1970s shows that, after all, such discussions might not be the most important ones to be had. Under the condition that the standardization of “rules of the game” and “rules of the mind” is indicative of state making, it might be more salient to think about means to allow for rule standardization processes to take place. Against this backdrop, I hope that this article’s proposition that Siyad Barre went further than any other Somali leader in attempting to lay the foundations for a strong (and unitary) Somali state provokes productive debate that helps to overcome historical amnesia and normative bias, and contributes to future attempts at reconstructing the Somali state.