

## Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: Culture, History and Society by Ioan M. Lewis London: Hurst and Company, 2...

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Eritrean independence from Ethiopia in 1993 came at an enormous price. Hundreds of thousands of martyrs and exiles were produced by the liberation war, while the majority of the people at home who survived the war suffered unprecedented internal displacement and hardship. But more significantly, political independence came with an unbounded feeling of hope and possibilities.

The strong vision and energy to rebuild the nascent war-torn state was particularly vitiated and somewhat reversed by the events of the 1998–2000 Ethiopia–Eritrea border war. ‘Intensified processes of militarization and authoritarian rule’ (p. 219) have been entrenched by the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) government that has ruled Eritrea as a one-party state since independence. Forced nationalism, including mandatory military service and extraction of taxes from the scattered diaspora populations, prolonged detention and torture of dissenting voices in various military camps and secret prisons, crackdown on civil society and the private media, have taken centre stage in contemporary Eritrea. Evidently, the PFDJ government is paranoid with imagining adversarial subversion and attack. A major consequence of the instituted police state is that an increasing number of refugees flee Eritrea, while many exiles of the liberation war originally intent on returning to post-independent Eritrea remain trapped in the diaspora. Paradoxically, transnationalism – which historically facilitated the achievement of independent statehood – has been re-instrumentalised by Eritreans to challenge the vision and modus operandi of the dictatorial party-state. This painful twist in transnational struggle within a generation is rigorously portrayed and analysed by the author.

In response to the shifting paradigm in political struggle, the party-state creates boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within the political community by reference to such categories as ‘soldiers, martyrs, traitors and exiles’. In the state’s propaganda, soldiers and martyrs are depicted as pillars of the revolution that deserve honour. Local dissidents and exiles are variously vilified as traitors deserving nothing but shame and punishment.

Tricia Hepner’s book is outstanding in both substance and style. The author deserves commendation for her extraordinary capacity to bond with the research participants, supporting many in the vicissitudes of life, without compromising her investigative and analytical rigour as an academic researcher. Hepner’s book is at the cutting-edge of qualitative research methods in African studies and the social sciences. It is a *must read* for everyone desiring to improve their skills in qualitative research and methods of analysis.

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### **Understanding Somalia and Somaliland: culture, history and society**

by IOAN M. LEWIS

London: Hurst and Company, 2008. Pp. 139, £16.99 (pbk).

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Ioan M. Lewis is undoubtedly the most renowned ethnographer of the Somali, particularly of their pastoral-nomadic branch. He began his pioneering work in the mid 1950s, when he published his first book *Peoples of the Horn of Africa*. Therein

Lewis reviewed an impressive amount of literature by European and Arabic travellers and early ethnographers on three related groups: the Somali, the Afar, and the Saho. This formed the basis of his own initial field research in north-western Somalia (then British Somaliland) and, very briefly, in the Italian administered south in the late 1950s. After Somalia's independence in 1960, Lewis repeatedly visited the country. From near and far he accompanied Somalis in the Horn (and also in London) on their way through state-building, revolution, natural disasters, wars and civil wars, and, partly, reconstruction. Lewis' name became a trademark for anything connected to Somali society, culture, history and politics.

The book under review is the most recent of a long series of academic and popular texts on Somalis/Somalia over the last five decades. As could be expected from a master of the field, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* provides a formidable introduction to an, up until today, often poorly (or wrongly) understood people and their lot. Parts of the earlier chapters were originally published under the title 'Understanding Somalia'. Nonetheless, the current volume has been extensively reworked and expanded.

The first chapter on the people and their traditions (pp. 1–26) outlines the most salient characteristics of a Somali society that is far more complex than the stereotype of the (northern) Somali pastoral nomad suggests. Lewis also responds to social and cultural variations and changes over time. The latter have frequently been driven by war, natural disasters, social reforms, extensive labour migration and flight.

Chapter two (pp. 27–70) provides a profound historical outline from the colonial partition to the escalation of civil war in Somalia in the late 1980s. The chapter, however, remains remarkably silent on the impacts of Italian and British colonialism in the Somali peninsula. While most major political events and developments between circa 1880 and 1960 (when British and Italian Somaliland gained independence) are touched upon, Lewis not once mentions the socio-political transformation throughout the imposition of colonial state structures upon a previously acephalous society. Yet, some other authors suggest that the relations of traditional authority that were previously characterised by a high degree of flexibility were gradually stabilised (or 'frozen') within the context of 'indirect rule' of both Italian and British administrations. This lack of consideration is even more astonishing, since on p. 34 Lewis himself criticises the UN (which was responsible for granting southern Somalia independence, as the territory was under Italian trusteeship on behalf of the UN after the Second World War) for not having seriously thought about establishing a European-style centralised state and corresponding administration in a highly decentralised social setting.

Chapter three, dealing with the collapse in southern Somalia (pp. 71–92), is well updated until 2007/8. It clearly outlines the path to Somalia's ruin paved by power-hungry leaders such as President Siyad Barre and the warlords Mahamed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi, who skilfully manipulated followership based on patrilineal descent and instigated hatred between clans. External superpower involvement, however, is not discussed. Instead, Lewis accurately sketches the infamous UN intervention (1992–5) and names its mistakes, as well as those of a whole series of abortive externally backed 'peace conferences'. In Lewis'

perspective (shared by others, including the author of this review), it is largely the uninspired adherence to a 'top-down' approach to re-establishing a Somali central state that leads to continued failure and conflict. The most recent developments concerning the rise and fall of the Islamic Courts are outlined, yet without any reference to the group Al-Shabaab that has played a quite important role in the Islamist policies in southern Somalia since about 2005. This group was one of the main reasons why 'the West' and Ethiopia could argue that 'terrorists' and Taliban-like extremists had come to power in Mogadishu. This again was used as justification for Ethiopia's bloody military intervention in southern Somalia, backed by the USA. Moreover, Lewis' interpretation of the Islamic Courts as a largely clan-based movement (Habr Gedir wrapped in the flag of Islam, p. 86) is somewhat doubtful. Alternative analyses suggest a more complex mixture of motives and backgrounds involved on the side of the leaders and followers of the militant Islamic movements. A good number of die-hard Somali Islamists are not Hawiye/Habr Gedir but come from other clans/groups; some clearly have an international jihadist orientation; there is also substantial involvement of parts of the Somali diaspora in the 'jihad', particularly of those who replaced 'clanism' with strict adherence to Islam.

In contrast to the on-going fighting in southern Somalia, the way to relative peace and stability is shown in Chapter four (pp.93–108), which deals with Somaliland and Puntland. Somaliland in the north-west seceded from collapsing Somalia in 1991. Since then people there have managed to establish peace and political order from 'bottom-up', through local peace conferences and 'national' clan-conferences. At these a political framework was agreed upon that accommodated traditional Somali as well as modern state structures. Most remarkably, traditional authorities were installed in the upper house of parliament with the main responsibility for keeping peace in the country. Puntland in the north-east was founded in 1998. It is an autonomous regional administration, also based on consensus between local clans. In contrast to Somaliland, however, it provides less room for the involvement of traditional authorities on the level of government, and no room for political parties. This fosters autocratic tendencies among the leadership of Puntland. Despite a number of valuable details presented on Somaliland and Puntland, the quite serious political and military conflict between both political entities over the contested borderlands is ignored in Lewis' account. Since both Somaliland and Puntland are treated equally briefly in one chapter, one wonders why the title of the book is not 'Understanding Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland'. Lewis' title has outraged some members of the Somali diaspora, particularly those who support Somali unity. The title can also be understood as a provocation of the international community that still ignores Somaliland and sticks to a rather unrealistic notion of Somalia.

To sum up: *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* is a very readable and highly instructive introduction to Somali affairs. It can be recommended for those working in the area (e.g. UN and NGO staff), and can also serve as reading for policy makers interested in learning from past mistakes related to humanitarian intervention, top-down state-building and the 'war against terrorism'. Finally, it repeats and buttresses one of Lewis' main arguments with regard to Somali politics: that it is mostly influenced by clan-belonging, based on patrilineal descent. Already some years ago, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this perspective

provoked heated discussions. A number of Somali and non-Somali researchers, such as Abdi I. Samatar and Lidwien Kapteijns, have argued that the concept of clan/patrilineal descent has been transformed, and that the continuities which Lewis implicitly or explicitly draws from the pre-colonial time up until today are misleading. More than fifty years after his initial research, with his newest book, Lewis continues to challenge his academic opponents to come up with an equally readable and sound counter-analysis of the always dynamic and often astonishing Somali society and its affairs.

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**Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the making of a continental catastrophe** by GERARD PRUNIER

London: Hurst and Company, 2009. Pp. xxxviii + 529, US\$ 27.95 (pbk).

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This is an important book because it creates order in events that have to be understood, but that are confusing by any standard. At the grass-roots, the war in the Congo must have seemed, and must still seem, a cosmic event – hence the designation of ‘Africa’s world war’ is taken as the title of this book. It was not a world war in the strict sense, but outsiders were deeply involved in it, including Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Sudan, South Africa, and to a lesser extent the United States and France. The list is not complete. It was also a very cruel war in which many lives were lost for no reason. Cannibalism and mass rape were ingredients of this warfare. Standard explanations in political science, whether from the right or the left, make no sense of it. Prunier argues cogently, for example, that the war cannot be explained in terms of Western economic interests. The last chapter is modestly entitled: ‘Groping for meaning: the “Congolese” conflict and the crisis of contemporary Africa’. Gerard Prunier deserves great respect for conscientiously following, documenting and interpreting the unfolding of these depressing events.

The Congo and Rwanda are areas outside my particular interests, but this war overwhelmed sub-Saharan Africa to such an extent that any person studying African politics needs to be informed about it. This book gives a clear chronology of events from 1995 to 2007, and that is very helpful in ordering the mind. First, there is the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide when there were masses of Rwandan refugees in Congo. Then comes the march from eastern Congo to Kinshasa and the fall of Mobutu. The third stage is the attempt from the east to unseat Laurent Kabila. A last stage is the peace process. The situation in eastern Zaire is all the time central and most intractable in the events. This enumeration is a simplification, just like the mention of the actors involved. I would have to study hard to pass a real examination on the topic. Nevertheless, the book leaves some very clear impressions. Firstly, it gives a fascinating account of Rwanda’s Paul Kagame. He appears as the great mover, if not the villain of the piece, in relation to what happened in Congo. Prunier describes with great honesty how he was first taken in by Kagame’s portrayal of himself. However, he had to conclude that Kagame tolerated, if not encouraged, wanton killings after taking power under the cover of a government of national unity. Kagame appears to be a very

Somaliland Somaliland is a de facto independent republic located on the northern part of the Horn of Africa within the internationally recognized borders of Somalia. Somaliland Official Website The Government of Somaliland. Puntland Puntland is a region in northeastern Somalia, bordering Somaliland in west, centered on Somalia's Garowe (Nugaal region). Puntland's leaders declared in 1998 Puntland to be an autonomous state. Puntland State Of Somalia The Government of Puntland. The Somali History The plight of the Agro-pastoral Society of Somalia (by Mohamed Haji Mukhtar). History of Somalia Wikipedia entry about the History of Somalia. Search. Banadir Somali portal SomaliNet Somalia web directory. understanding somalia and somaliland These main cultural divisions "nomadic pastoralist and cultivator" include significant numbers of people generally referred to by Somalis by a variety of derogatory names associated with servile status, and known by foreigners as "minorities". These do not strictly belong genealogically to the two main populations, but live in association with them, traditionally under their protection and sometimes in various stages of assimilation. Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Medieval World (4 Volume set) ( Facts on File Library Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World. 1,381 Pages 2007 25.43 MB 98,161 Downloads. Page from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer,. Encyclopedia of Society and Culture in the Ancient World ... The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Hidden History: The Ultimate A-Z of Ancient Mysteries, Lost Civilizations and Forgotten Wisdom. 551 Pages 2006 2.41 MB 54,786 Downloads New! , Benjamin Franklin, and Adolf Hitler. The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Hidden History Ancient Indian History & Culture. 244 Pages 2011 32.09 MB 51,946 Downloads. . Ashoku '. Think Somalia and what springs to mind? Pirates, Civil War, Islamic militants? Suffice to say it's not your average holiday destination. Somalia developed from a string of Arab sultanates along the northeast coast of Africa, which in turn had grown up from trading posts established from the 17th century onwards. As Arab influence waned, the British, French and Italians established protectorates on the Somali coast during the late-19th century. These were the subjects of various treaties, forged amid frequent border clashes between the colonial powers and the neighbouring Ethiopians. During the early years of the civil war several autonomous regions were set up including Puntland, Somaliland and Galmudug, which survive to this day. Somalia Culture. Religion in Somalia. 12: Search> (Maritime history of Somalia) Somalia in the medieval period possessed the largest merchant fleet in the Muslim world we dominated the Indian Ocean somalis got rich of the Indian Ocean trade we sold spices from India triple the price to Europeans and we never told them it came from India search> (Somalis in India). Somali is a one tribe we are one people one culture one religion one language and same origins we inhabit northern Kenya +eastern Ethiopia+ Djibouti search> (Arabisation). Search> (Somalis) 26: search> (recent African origin in modern humans) humans originated in Somalia+Ethiopia+Eritrea+Djibouti. You do understand that humans are still evolving, were evolving at that time, and continue to evolve? Somalis are not a living fossil.