

SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE HORN OF AFRICAby A. Castagno¹

Since its inception in 1960, it could be claimed that the Somali Republic has remained one of Africa's most stable and democratic states. Yet it has been the only country in Africa to pursue a vigorous policy of irredentism. Interestingly, the first articles on the Horn in the sixties underlined conflicts between Somali and the contiguous states: today more is written on detente and rapprochement.

Given the dramatic events which have taken place in the Horn during the sixties and their implications for the future, it is fitting to review some of the literature that has contributed to an understanding of the current issues and their background. Emphasis will be on works in English but prefatory comments on major Italian contributors are merited since Italy has played and continues to play an important role. Recent significant books by Richard Hess and by Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff are reviewed in some detail.

Italian Sources:

The current problems of the Horn can be said to have begun with the Italian acquisition of the Somali Benadir in 1885. Coincident with the first few years of Italy's domination, one of her most intrepid explorer - travellers, Antonio Cecchi, published what remains the most extensive account of the area's flora and fauna (Da Zeila alla frontiere del Caffa, 1885-1887, 3 vols). Books by other travellers, such as Robecchi-Bricchetti, followed, but it was not until the writings of the doyen of Cushitic studies, Enrico

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1. Professor A. Castagno, Director of the African Studies Centre of the University of Boston, is Visiting Fulbright Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science.

Cerulli in the 1920's and 1930's, that we find the first serious scholarly commitment. Cerulli's linguistic, ethnographic and historical writings (collected in his three-volume Somalia: scritti variati inediti) did much to stimulate similar research by such scholars as Colucci, Crottanelli and Puccioni. The Italo-Ethiopian war produced a voluminous literature on the Somali but much of it was propaganda.

Since the Trusteeship period, there has emerged a new group of Somali specialists such as Costanzo, Giglio and Finazzo, whose works are largely constitutional or historical. But there is little in these writings that shares the politico-sociological approaches of American scholars. The heavy weight of Croce's neo-Hegelianism crushed the nascent tradition of political sociology established by Mosca and Pareto. And since Italian anthropology remains caught in its physical and ethnographic biases, there is little in the way of structural-functional analysis.

British Sources:

Britain also established her foothold in the Horn in 1885. But long before then Sir Richard Burton traversed the area between Zeila and Harrar and produced the most vivid and trenchant account of the Somali national character yet to appear (see especially the 1966 edition of his First Footsteps in East Africa). The observations of this prolific writer -- famed also for his translations of Arabian Nights -- are as germane today as they were a century ago. Later, other English works expanded or elaborated on Burton; here we need only mention D. Jardine's Mad Mullah of Somaliland (1923), which painstakingly described one of Africa's most lengthy and intractable struggles against colonialism. But it was not until the appearance of I.M. Lewis' Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar and Saho (1955) that we find the first serious English study of Somali society. Lewis' book, a successful synthesis of

the major literature, is a primer for Somali ethnography. The long barren period of scholarship undoubtedly reflected an early British lack of concern for this "most costly" and "troublesome" colony.

Since 1955, Lewis has written profusely; his penchant for accurate and meticulous scholarship is hard to match. I regard his A Pastoral Democracy (1960) as a singular contribution to political anthropology and to Somali studies. In this work the complexities of the Somali social system, with its feud-force-contract basis, is unravelled with clarity. His History of Somaliland (1965), although it ignores many features of Italian colonialism, was intended to provide the non-specialist with a general account. Lewis' many articles on Somali Islam, which add substantially to Cerulli and to S. Trimingham's Islam in Ethiopia (1965 ed.), give insights into the relationship between religion and politics and into Somali Muslim-Ethiopian Coptic competition in the Horn. Without question Lewis has emerged as the leading authority on the Somali and though he has now turned his attention to broader theoretical questions we anticipate other salient works on the Somali from him.

Specifically dealing with the sources of international conflict, albeit from the Somali viewpoint, is the director of African Research Limited, John Drysdale. His Somali Dispute (1964) stems from two decades of service with the Somalis in the British colonial administration and as an advisor to the Somali Government. The book concentrates on the colonial scramble, the Wal-Wal dispute, the Haud fiasco, Somali-Kenyan hostilities, and events which led to Somali-British diplomatic rupture. Of particular relevance are his observations on events since 1955. Like other colonial officers who wanted their country to do more and who passionately identified with their particular areas, Drysdale castigates Britain for what he regards as her duplicity on the Somali issue. He ends with a

plea for international acceptance of Somali's irredentist claims. Few Ethiopian scholars have taken issue with Drysdale's work, but a notable exception is Mesfin Wolde Mariam's "Background to the Ethio-Somalian Boundary Dispute" (Journal of Modern African Studies, 1964) which is an effective rebuttal to Drysdale and to an article by your reviewer on boundary disputes.

I have stated in review that Greenfield's Ethiopia - A New Political History (1965) tends to treat Somali irredentism too lightly but apart from drawing attention to Mesfin's article, he refers to Mesfin's Amharic articles in Addis Zemen and elsewhere and he also comments that "the student seeking to understand the Ethiopian position might consult a file of the Ethiopian Observer; the works of S & R Pankhurst especially Ex Italian Somaliland, London 1950; Ethio-Somalia Relations, Imperial Ministry of Information, Addis Ababa, 1962 and the speech of Prime Minister Aklilu Habtewold at the African Summit Meeting 1963, in Ethiopia Observer, Vol. VII, No.1, 1963". A file of the Ethiopian Herald is of course a similar source.

Greenfield apart, British writers on Somalia have, like Drysdale, tended to sympathize with the Somalis. R.W. Andrzejewski, the outstanding Somali linguist (see his work with Lewis, An Introduction to Somali Poetry, 1964) and Margaret Laurence, the sensitive commentator on Somali Poetry (A Tree for Poverty), and on Somali life (The Camel's Bell, 1963) both identified with the Somali cause. More effective politically was Lord Lytton, whose Stolen Desert, 1966 is a good index of his vigorously pro-Somali position in the House of Lords. Another 'dissident' can be noted in that Elspeth Huxley's rather alarmist articles seem bent on showing that Somali irredentism is part of a wider Egyptian and Soviet scheme of things.

American Authorities:

The majority of American or American-trained scholars who have written on the Horn did their graduate work in history or in international relations. Your reviewer belongs to that group. My third piece, Somalia (1959) is a comprehensive, if brief, study of the social, economic and political aspects of Somali Trusteeship. My chapters on Somali education (in Sloan and Kitchen, The Educated African, 1962) were more detailed and put in the developmental context. Since 1959 my articles have sought to stress the ethnic correlations. Following the general conclusions of Lewis, I have analyzed in detail how the pattern of clan allegiances and cleavages imposed itself on domestic politics and on Greater Somalia aspirations (in Coleman and Rosberg, Political Parties and National Integration in Africa, 1964).

On the political level, other Americans have added to the literature. Ravi Kapil, a former Peace Corps representative, has contributed several articles on the boundary and on Somali integration. Paolo Contini and his wife, Jeanne, long with the UN in the Horn, have excellent pieces on Somali law and politics. James Farrell, who also spent several years in the area, has given us a penetrating analysis of the Somali army and E. Bayne's many reports for the American Universities Field Staff are probably the most colourful and lively accounts on Somali politics yet available.

A book which is probably the most objective treatment of the international problems of the Horn can perhaps be included with American writings. It is Saadia Touval's Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa (1963). Touval, an Israeli who received his Ph.D. from Harvard, is presently concentrating on the problems of African boundaries in general. Though it seems to your reviewer

that his work lacks the authoritative basis found in Drysdale, it certainly explores more broadly the involvement of the major and minor powers. Touval deals inadequately with Somali nationalism per se but he succeeds in defining the relationship between that ideological force and the boundary questions. He is not optimistic about an early resolution of the controversy but concludes that the best hope rests in the "political realism" of the leaders. It is precisely this recent political realism of Somali, Ethiopian and Kenyan leaders which has done much to bring about the current detente.

The relationship between economics and politics is too well-established to be stressed here. There is no doubt that the present detente stems in large part from the closure of the Suez Canal and its impact on the Somali economy. Somalia's economic dilemma has compelled her to strive for amicable relations with her neighbours and for entry into the East African Federation. The economic reasons for these new directions are found, explicitly and implicitly, in Mark Karp's The Economics of Trusteeship in Somalia (1960). Based on field work and exhaustive study, the book is an excellent analysis of Somalia's subsistence and money economies and of her international trade and finance. On the theoretical level, Karp is convincing in his arguments that the nomads can modernize and that the Somali case shows the need for the predominance of economic rationality in political decisions. Further, the book reveals the extent to which Somalia remains heavily dependent on foreign aid, which partly explains the intensive foreign involvement in Somalia's destiny. Apart from some excellent studies by international organizations and by the Somali, Italian and American governments, little has been written on Somali economics since Karp's book.

Turning now to the historical writings on the area, the best work yet produced in English is Robert Hess's Italian Colonialism in Somalia (1966). This book is

essential reading for those who need to fill this gap in the literature on European and Italian imperialism. Because Hess earlier followed in the tradition of Harry Rudin, his emphasis is on the European components of colonialism and not on the indigenous forces. For this reason the book will not meet the requirements of those who regard oral history as a crucial part of African history or of those scholars who view microcosmic field studies as the most effective means of revealing the nature of European administration.

The strength of Hess' work lies in its analysis of Italian colonialism in the early period, 1885-1923. He unfolds a fascinating story of the diplomacy that made possible Italy's control of Somalia. In some considerable detail, he describes the work of the chartered companies and the first colonial administrators in establishing the permanent bases of Italian administrative policies. His conclusions concur with my own findings that the colony was an economic burden, that the announced racial policy was not pursued effectively (though there were more racists than he implies), and that the Italian colonial experiences did not differ too sharply from those of other European powers.

Since Hess' chapter on "La Grande Somalia" (the Fascist period) and his "Epilogue" were probably added to bring the book up to date, their incompleteness should not be too severely criticized. However they are the sections most relevant to current issues. Contrary to the author's implications, the Italian scheme of Greater Somalia and its later implementation by the British were important precedents for Somalia's cry for unity. Prior to World War II, as Hess points out, Somali proto-nationalists were few - if not so few as he suggests. The Somali Youth League, after all, had its origins in 1943, and in 1948 the party viewed the unification of the Somali areas as its primary aim. Many prominent members of the party either served in the Italo-Ethiopian war or in the administration. But none of these points

detract from Hess' major scholarly intent and contribution -- that of providing a first-rate work on the early period of Italian colonialism. The author has now shifted his concern to Ethiopia and it is hoped that he will continue to give his attention to some of Ethiopia's problem regions including the Somali-inhabited Ogaden.

None of the studies so far cited have adequately dealt with the fifth point of the Somali star -- the Territoire Francais des Afars et des Isaas (formerly French Somaliland). The territory has been largely ignored, though Drysdale and Lewis have written brief articles on the subject. The bulk of French literature is inconveniently scattered among numerous French periodicals and only the books by H. Deschamps (et al., Cote des Somalis-Reunion-Indie, 1948) and J. Poinot (Djibouti et la Cote Francaises des Somalis, 1964) seem to be germane to current political questions. Therefore to say that Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff's Djibouti and the Horn of Africa (1968) is a "welcomed and an important contribution" is to do more than cite a cliché. Readers familiar with those authors' many books on Southeast Asia and on French-speaking Africa will not be disappointed: they maintain their usual high scholarly standards.

The book is divided into two sections: Part I deals with the historical and socio-anthropological background, the governmental structure and domestic and international politics. Part II is concerned with social and economic policies and development. Of primary interest to our review are the two chapters on politics and these seem also to be the authors' main concern despite their equal treatment of all subjects. Djibouti, after all, is France's last African mainland territory and her major naval and air relay station between the Mediterranean and the East. To Ethiopia, the port is of crucial importance for it houses the Ethiopian-Djibouti railway terminal and is a major egress to the

sea. The territory is also coveted by Somalia on nationalist, religious and economic grounds.

Small as Djibouti and its environs may be, it has been one of France's most difficult territories to administer. The main problems have centered around traditional rivalries between the nomadic Somalis and Afars (a group religiously and ethnically close to the Somalis) and around the cleavages that have sprung up between the urbanized Somalis and the nomads. Added to this congeries of competition are the Arab labourers and commerciants who have vacillated in their political alignments but have remained steadily attached to France's policy. The details of these inter-group relations as they interact with French rule are well defined by Thompson and Adloff. In its essentials, the struggle for power -- begun in 1946, accelerated in the 1958 referendum, and exacerbated by the 1967 vote -- has taken on all the attributes of the vacillating politics found in Somalia. But here, as the authors correctly imply, the similarity ends. In the crucial 1958 and 1967 votes, the French use of economic, political and military power (including forced emigration of Somalis) did much to frustrate attempts by local Somalis and by Mogadishu to secure majorities for independence.

How in this context the pattern of leadership evolves and how the less politically astute, but more numerous, Afars were able to gain political ascendancy is one of the most incisive stories in the book. In their judgements on French rule, the authors are cautious, for they fully recognize the difficulties confronting France in dealing with (or intensifying?) conflicting local forces and indelicately preserving the status quo between two competing African states. They also appreciate the paramountcy of French interests: at stake has been De Gaulle's image as "liberator" of French Africa and "champion" of the Third World. France is indeed in an unenviable position and neither she nor Ethiopia have deceived themselves that the 1967 vote

secured a permanent solution.

The chapter on "External Relations" further defines the intricacies of foreign involvement which have been described by some of our other authors. Besides Ethiopian and Somali interests in Djibouti, foreign governments such as the Arab states, the USSR, and the United States have been directly or indirectly involved. These broader international aspects were one reason why both the UN Decolonization Committee and the OAU sought to deal with the Somali complaint, albeit unsuccessfully. Another source of tension was the connection between the Eritrean revolts in Ethiopia (the Eritrean federation was terminated in 1962) and pro-Somali events in France's enclave. In reviewing these developments, the authors also point to the efforts taken by Somalia to secure world wide Muslim support for her goals. But, as this reviewer noted a decade ago and as the authors confirm, the France-Ethiopian (tacit) dual entente has proved to be the major obstacle to Pan Somali goals in Djibouti. Today the Somalis accept this limitation, but it is to be noted that Magadishu has taken pains to stress that the Somali Government has not abandoned its historical objectives, it has only altered the means.

There is little in the book that can be severely criticised. Political scientists, historians and economists could all ask for more -- but the authors accomplish their primary objective of providing a multi-disciplinary work on an area long neglected by academics. Personally I could have wished that they had gone more deeply into the role of the Arab states and into the earlier attempts by modernist Afars and Somalis to forge solid political and ideological links.

Conclusion:

In this review of the literature of the past decade several conclusions are apparent: (1) the

Somali capacity for self-rule is clear in spite of disruptive ethnic factors and the legacy of two different European administrations; (2) Pan-Somali and Pan-Islamic ideologies have done a great deal to strengthen nationalist sentiments and to shore up the political system; (3) Somali politics can be highly realistic and pragmatic, as the abrupt shift from a forceful Pan-Somali policy to a detente suggests; (4) while the more vigorous approaches to Greater Somalia have been toned down, Pan-Somali unity remains a cardinal objective of Somali modernists; and, (5) in no other area in Africa does the political and economic security of the state depend so heavily on such a complex balancing of major and minor powers.

Yet while these conclusions may seem relatively firm and although we have been enriched by recent publications on the Horn, the student of African affairs can only remain dissatisfied with the state of research. It would be presumptuous for this reviewer to indicate all the subjects which still require study. However, past and present developments in the Horn might suggest three priorities. First, linguistic and language studies, both aesthetically and behaviourally oriented, need to be more energetically pursued if we are to gauge more accurately the problems of integration and the cross-cultural attitudes of the area. Second, microcosmic rural and urban studies in political science, sociology, anthropology and economics could add considerable precision to our analysis of the problems of political and social change. Third, studies dealing with the feasibility of and limitations to the functional, political and economic aspects of regional integration and with the behavioural aspects of conflict and conflict-resolution, could help to provide better understanding of the tensions and hostilities that have long prevailed in the Horn.

Increased knowledge and perceptions do not a priori lead to more rational political conduct but they do provide a basis for that ideal condition. Africanists and non-Africanists alike, have during this period of detente, a rare opportunity to contribute more than sheer description, analysis and theory. Their work may help engineer a more enduring detente, one based on equitable solution.