The Struggle for the Soul Mogadishu: AMISOM/UPDF, Villa Somalia and Al-Shabaab
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I will start my talk with a question, which I will challenge my panel with field experience to respond to at the end: What Somalia does AMISOM leave behind after defeating Al-Shabab? The assumption (or hope) that in the next five years, there will be no Al-Shabaab should be allowed to stand. In the course of this paper, I spell out an abridged political-historical context for Somalia and how a Pan-Africanist inspired intervention ought to be positioned. The comments in this paper are critical of the present efforts in Somalia, and thus broadly point to the limits of armed peacekeeping/ enforcement missions as responses to violent conflict – especially on the African continent.

Let me show the map below for our knowledge of Somalia. Somaliland is a region in northwest of the country continues to seek international recognition Mogadishu having declared independence on 18 May 1991. For the last 27 years, the region holds presidential and parliamentary elections; has own central bank, army and is an enclave of more sustained peace in all Somalia. They have semi-recognised offices in the UK, Ethiopia and are trying to set up one in Uganda. In the course of the talk I make bold references to Somaliland. The other section on the map below shows the territorial split between Al-Shabaab and the central government of Somalia.
The fight over numbers dead

On 31 April 2018, Al-Shabaab insurgents attacked the forces of the African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) at one of its bases in Buulo Mareer in the south of the country. During this rather bold attack—as President Museveni described it—the insurgent group claimed to have killed 59 AMISOM soldiers, and lost 14. Ugandan President tweeted that AMISOM had killed 36 militants. The UPDF spokesperson in Kampala claimed AMISOM had killed 22, while his counterpart in Mogadishu said they had killed 30. Earlier, Uganda forces had claimed that only four men had been killed. Like in all previous Al-Shabaab attacks on UPDF since 2007, numbers of casualties on either side have come to define the ways in which we think about AMISOM/UPDF contribution, and by extension, the future for Somalia. For AMISOM, Villa Somalia and the international community, especially the United States (which has continued aerial bombings attacks on Al-Shabaab commanders) more numbers of dead insurgents is read as recipe for peace and stability. But that this stand a scrutiny of history and fieldwork?

Let me return to this question right here: In the spirit of Pan-Africanism, what is Somalia after Al-Shabaab and without AMISOM. I posed this question to many of my respondents as I prepared for this talk, who despite all agreeing that Al-Shabab was a small problem in the Somali puzzle, they were overly sceptical to the fact that a defeat of Al-Shabaab would translate into an end to violence and discord in the country.

Over ten years since its deployment, the UPDF/AMISOM roadmap on Somalia remain unclear. Besides the 2011 change/improvement of mandate from simple peacekeeping to
enforcement, and with the Somali government in Mogadishu remaining fragile, it is not clear when the mission will be accomplished. Certainly, no country can ever develop/transform itself under the auspices of a peacekeeping mission. Although Al-Shabaab controls most of the Somali territory (as seen in the map above), and has continued launching dangerous attacks in Mogadishu in areas supposedly under the control of government/AMISOM, the narrative of the conflict favours the government in Mogadishu and the successes made by the peacekeeping and enforcement mission (see for example, Williams, 2014; Oloya, 2016).

From interviews with respondents in Mogadishu and Kampala, everyday narratives of residents, and news reports, and reading of Somali history, this paper seeks to demonstrate two things: Firstly, although Al-Shabaab does not have permanent presence in Mogadishu after retreating from Suuqa Bakaraha in 2011, its network in the city and country remains powerful. This is in spite of the fact that there is general dislike for Al-Shabaab from most quarters of Mogadishu. Known for its militant disciplinarianism, use of fear to govern, and martinet and somewhat extremist approach to fairness, Al-Shabaab has come to symbolise the anti-clannist and fairer world that Somalis continue to yearn for. Against a context of a weak and indiscriminate central government, and as a professed use of extreme violence, Al-Shabaab has learned to exploit this hue and offer a complex function—as guarantor of security—enabling it to draw (or actually extort) funds from big businesses in exchange for security. In other words, the UPDF/AMISOM could have occupied territory in Mogadishu, but Al-Shabaab controls the city. Thus we need to revise our appraisal of the victories made in the Mogadishu against the Al-Shabab insurgents.

By showing the network of Al-Shabaab’s presence and power inside the capital Mogadishu (see also, Bryden, 2015), I seek to demonstrated the proposition that for a secure and peaceful Somalia, Al-Shabaab—or its ideations—have to form a core part in the conversation on the envisioned secular and democratic government in Mogadishu. Thus, all major actors (AMISOM, Villa Somalia, and the international community) will have to make compromises with the symbolism of this group. My contention is that Al-Shabaab symbolically ought to be seen as part of the solution. This argument thus seeks to problematize our obsessive focus on the movement’s tactics of violence, its cultural-social excesses on women and sexuality (which I do not seek to downplay) extremist pronouncements, and international connections with militant groups elsewhere, which are often narrativised in the language of culture (Maruf and Joseph, 2018; Aynte, un-dated; Kisiangani, 2011). In the process we have turned a blind eye to the vacuum [or the actual concerns] that the movement exploits. Scholarship and interventions often forget the local ingredients—such as the yearning for justice and fairness, anti-clannism, corruption-free public service, and the west’s manifest anti-Islamic posturing inside and outside Somalia — that grant Al-Shabaab [moderate] recruits who believe its rhetoric and practices. Despite its extremist hue, Al-Shabab is often perceived as fortress for Islamic identity and personhood.

Secondly, by making visible the symbolism of Al-Shabaab, my argument is that to understand Somalia’s present crises, one has to return to Somalia before Al-Shabaab. The
conditions that made Al-Shabab emerge need to be understood and contextualised in the Pan-Africanist ambition to rebuild the country. This requires returning to the tyrannical but pre-anarchic Somalia under the regime of Mohammed Siyad Barre. The period after 1991 and 2007 when Al-Shabab emerges need to be carefully studied as these are central to efforts in the campaign towards rebuilding Somalia.

the clan challenge

A story is told of a property conflict in the Somali capital Mogadishu that could only be arbitrated to its logical conclusion, not through the state legal structures, but through a mediated settlement under the auspices of Al-Shabaab. Following the war and the cataclysmic levels of violence that defined Somalia civil war especially between 1988-1991 (Kapteijns, 2013; Issa-Salwe, 1996; Besteman, 1999), many people fled the country as refugees. These people are now returning following the relative moments of calm. For the period that it took for these conditions of calm to prevail, many returnees have actually acquired citizenship of the countries that hosted them as refugees. However, as is known about diasporas, they often retain a longing to return home when the conditions at home become suitable for return (Safran, 1991). Many host countries especially in Europe also have a tendency of constantly reminding their visitors that they will have to return to their country (ibid).

Indeed, the return of these former refugees has been credited for the ongoing growth of Somalia (and Somaliland) and the continuing peace and security under the auspices of AMISOM. But besides their story of transforming the country, negotiations for the return of abandoned property occupied by are on the rise. After the violence, abandoned properties especially houses were occupied by people who stayed behind. In the wake of these massive returns, squatters are asked to vacate the property for the owner. Courts have been central to this effort but they remain heavily encumbered by corruption and clannist sentiments. One respondent told me about a diaspora returnee who abandoned efforts to reclaim his property after spending $40,000 on corruption for a house he estimated to be valued at $80,000. In most cases, returnees have offered small compensation or some token fees to squatters and asked them to leave their property. Many times, squatters have graciously left. But there are cases of protracted cases of reclamation. These cases have remained definitive of the country’s return to normality.

The map of Mogadishu showing districts and the predominant clans residence (clans yet to be inserted).
In one incident in Karaane district, the squatter who had occupied an abandoned property refused to vacate the property on the grounds that it was located in an area owned by his clan. The claimant, a Banadiri had property in an area predominantly occupied by the Abgaal clan. After months of negotiation through the court systems, he would not have his property back. The squatter enjoyed not only the support of his neighbours, but he also had leverage in the court system. Courts are mostly headed by the Isaaq clan people who are predominantly resident in Hargeisa, and are believed to be impartial in adjudication inside Mogadishu where they have no clan relations. But they are also perceived to be extremely corrupt and disinterested since they do not belong.

At the peak of frustration, the fellow who could not get his property back after over half a year was advised to drive into Al-Shabaab controlled territory and table the matter before the Al-Shabaab courts. The Shabab leadership listened attentively and demanded $500 as fees for the investigation. When they confirmed he actually owned the house, they sent a letter to the squatter and demanded that he vacated the house in a period of a week. The squatter left before the week ended, and the owner got his house back (and he sold it off thereafter).

What the court system could not deliver justice under the incapacitating cloud of clan and corruption, the Al-Shabab delivered in a month. This story terribly exposed the justice system
and general leadership in the country. But is also signalled to clan as a major constituent part of the Somali conversation. It is also worth noting that Al-Shabab uses this same clout to extort from propertied Somalis. I learned that oftentimes, bomb explosions are not about terror per se, but individualised collections of money from people. As renowned causers of violence, Al-Shabab networks often demand security dues from individual businessmen in Mogadishu. Failure to commit these dues results into attacks on one’s property to as to send signals to another businessman who might have been reluctant over sending his contribution the Shabab.

The picture that emerges here is that Al-Shabab has learned to exploit violence for good and bad causes. As it helped a diaspora returnee get his house back under the threat of violence, using the same tactics, the outfit extorts money from businessmen in and around the city. Worth noting is that all these thrive on the weaknesses in the central government, which is toiling under the weight of clannism and sheer incompetence. Against the above, I also question about the Pan-Africanist approach to sending peacekeeping forces, which actually reduces Africa’s conflicts to simply fighting without considering the ingredients that actually explain the violence.

Let us jump to a 2018 event to put my concern in context.

The Prime Minister Vs House Speaker
In March 2018, a standoff between Lower House Speaker of Parliament, Mohamad Osman Jawari and Prime Minister Ali Kheire could only not take a violent turn after the intervention of the AMISOM/UPDF forces. UPDF’s officer, Brig. Paul Lokech had to talk to these two warrying factions from going to war with each other after both had invited officers loyal to them from the Somali military for protection. Respondents have noted that “idea of forces loyal” to any politician are mobilised around two lines, money or clan or both.

The standoff followed foreign interests from the Middle East which have close trading rights and influence in the Somali territories. Beginning 2018, the Middle East was plunged into crisis pitting Qatar on the one side and Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Oman on the other. The many sought sanctions against Qatar and among other demands to rescind their blockage demanded a disbandment of Al-Jazeera news network. Somalia was expected to choose the side of the many especially since it is member of the Arab League and has huge trading links with the Middle East especially UAE and Saudi Arabia – where it sells most of its livestock. Somalia Mogadishu refused to support the many against Qatar, a move with angered UAE and Saudi Arabia. and thus sought to extend their ire against Qatar to all those in support of it. As the conflict escalated in the Middle East, Qatar saw an ally in Mogadishu, while Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and UAE saw an ungrateful Third World country and an enemy. They thus sought to jeopardize the integrity of Somalia or work with sections of Somalia that were willing to cooperate. Somaliland supported the many against Qatar, which would come with compensation. United Arab Emirates (UAE)
signed a contract with Somaliland – a self-declared breakaway region – to develop the Port of Berbera.

For the last 27 years, Somaliland in the North-western part of the country has gone independent from Somalia. Despite its stability and enormous appeals for international recognition as an independent nation state, it has failed to get recognition. In an effort of hasty recognition as reward for cooperation, UAE signed $442 million deal to develop the Port of Berbera, and also recognised the Somaliland passports. Villa Somalia was not impressed and thus sought to quickly issue a statement terminating the deal. In a parliamentary sitting presided over by the speaker of the Lower House, Osman Jowari, the bill was tabled and immediately passed. It did not involve the President, nor was the Prime Minister invited. Although the leadership in Mogadishu generally agreed with the parliamentary decision to stop DP World and Ethiopia from signing trade deals with one of their regions without proper authorisation from Mogadishu, disagreement ensued over who had to preside over this cancellation in Mogadishu. What hadn’t Jawari not consulted with the Prime Minister?

However, UAE had other ideas. It had shipped 9.2 million in cash, which would be the centre of great speculation. UAE authorities claimed that the money was meant for arrears of Somali security forces. But questions remained as to why these monies had come in cash and not through a bank transfers. Speculation started that this was money meant for the speaker of Parliament to buy a section of the MPs into supporting the deal. This thrived on other allegations that the Speaker Osman Jawari supported UAE in the Middle East saga. Indeed, after the seizure of the man and the resignation of Osman Jawari, UAE is seen dismantling all its installations from Mogadishu.

But the most fascinating part of the story is how the issue get resolved before the resignation of House Speaker Osman Jawari. In the heat of the contest, for two weeks, the house speaker locked himself and a couple of loyalists inside Parliament and did not allow the debate to impeach him to go ahead. He was not going to resign. Sections of the Somali security forces in the police and military – drawn especially from his Reewin clan – entered Parliament to offer his security. Some narratives say that private guards of the speaker – drawn from his clan entered parliament to protect their own. Prime Minister Kheire also deployed around Parliament, and both were on the ready. A violent showdown was anticipated. It took the intervention of UPDF’s officer, Brig. Paul Lokech who through a translator, pleaded for peace. President Mohammed Farmajo would enter Parliament and negotiate with the speaker who then agreed to resign.

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The two stories above seek to demonstrate three things: The position of clan affiliation in the Somali political sphere. A great deal of scholarship continues to claim that clan is not a concrete category in Somalia and clan affiliations have often shifted (Besteman, 1999; Kapteijns, 2010). Despite the tempting appeal of this claim, the matters on the ground do not
lend it credence. Over the years, clan as a category has become even more concrete in the social-political negotiation in Somalia. The institutionalisation of clan into the presidential and parliamentary electoral processes of Somalia from 2000 during the Djibouti conference to the present (4.5 arrangement) signals to the salience of clan as a constituent category in the Somali political and cultural discourse. What is interesting to note is that governments, right from 2000 have been tasked to end 4.5 and oversee a return to universal adult suffrage. All have failed and we have now have our eyes fixed on the present government. This anti-clan ambition of the central government is actually consistent with Al-Shabaab’s anti-clannist hue. But both regimes, Al-Shabab and villa Somalia appear to be escaping the reality in their midst – where clan is a core constituent part of the political-social negotiation and needs to be more integral to the conversation on Somalia’s futures.

The second issue that the stories make visible is the position of external actors in the present political conversation: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE have competing interests in Somalia, which have potential to derail the progresses made. Turkey has been involved in the negotiation between Somalia and Somaliland. However, it is not clear how deep non-African players, who come with money (in aid and humanitarian help), religious links and trade influence have been central to the post-Al-Shabab and post-AMISOM Somalia. Otherwise, if UAE had been greatly involved, there would no way it would seek to jeopardise the gains made. My sense is that the continent has tended to over emphasise its Africanness and ignored stronger ties with other non-African powers.

**Historicising the Somali challenge**

Let me bring back the question I spelled out at the beginning. How should we think about a post-Al-Shabaab and post-AMISOM Somalia? My sense is that going to the roots of this problem will require understanding how we got there in the first place. This may demand taking two conscious steps backwards. This is the period before Al-Shabaab, and the cause of the 1991 violence.

Like all other post-independent African countries, Somalia was met by similar challenges including the struggle to build a democratic dispensation, a truly representative modern but yet traditional state. The challenges of corruption and tribalism were by no means widespread. Soon, democratic leadership was abandoned and Mohamed Siyad Barre became President of Somalia in 1969 through a military coup. For the entire time, Siyad Barre held office, his regime was characterised by military rule to the point of growing the military to 120,000. This was the biggest in sub-Saharan Africa by the time Siyad Barre’s regime collapsed.

The Siyad Barre military regime moved from appointing loyal officers in influential positions to clansmen. Hussein Adam (2008) has called this Clan-Klatura, and it involved

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1 The 4.5 arrangement means of the four major clans in Somalia, Hawiye, Darood, Dir and Digli/Mirifle have equal power, while the others, included the Isaaq, Dulbahante and several other have 0.5 power in politics. Thus, while all the major parties bring 61 MPs each, the others are allowed on 30.
Placing trusted clansmen and other loyalists into positions of power, wealth, control/espionage. It also involved creating Clan-Klatura organisations. One such organisation, Hangash, conducted military intelligence, the darbarjebinta, literally, the backbone breakers, was military counter-intelligence; then there was the military police, identified by their red berets. The majority of these forces were drawn from the President’s clan, the Marehan of the Darod.

With the advent of scientific socialism in 1975, Siyad Barre, instead of going the direction of Islam as happened under Nimeiri in Sudan, he used clannism as his guiding principle. Hussein Adam (2008) has noted that credited Siyad Barre for the rise of tribal dictatorship in Somalia (instead of bourgeois ones, who could be relied on to build the country). Tribal dictatorships never allow tribal members to gain roots in either education, business or professional competence. Instead, the rush to fill up posts is characterised by the rush to eat them up, and in the process, they are collapsed.

In this pursuit, Siyad also denied all the other tribes the opportunity to develop bourgeois roots. He jailed or killed those that seemed promising. In the process, hitherto respectful and peaceful clan relations were poisoned. After using troops to conduct punitive actions against potential adversaries, he then moved to arming loyal-clans and encouraged them to wage war against rebel clans. Since Siyad Barre organised persecution along clan lines, opposition was also structured along clan lines. The next battles would then be fought along poisoned clan lines.

When Siyad Barre fell, Somalia entered a period of absolute anarchy often playing out along clan lines. In fact, the violence in Mogadishu in 1991 has been described by Lidwien Kapteijns as a form of “clan cleansing” (2013). Along clan lines, warlords emerged guarding specific enclave and territories in Mogadishu and the countryside (see also, Adam, 2008; Issa-Salwe, 1996 for detailed narratives of this violence often occurring along clan lines). It was after the rise of the Islamic courts across Mogadishu, which later came together under the Union of Islamic Courts that peace returned to the country. In fact, one respondent described the six months UIC governed Mogadishu as the “six golden months in Mogadishu.” Interestingly, centrally to claims of misuse (extremist) of religion, fieldwork showed me that the UIC’s problem was threatening to attack Ethiopia, which would quickly brand them a terrorist organisation and get the help of the American government and kick them out of Mogadishu.

**Conclusion**

Culture is progressive. As Frantz Fanon (1961) noted, the process of making a national culture would have to move with the times. Over the years, clan has emerged as a constituent category in the Somali political milieu. Thus, all efforts to cleanse Somali politics of clan could be wasteful. It is indeed a contradiction that a parliament voted into office under a clan arrangement would be tasked to end the very process with which it went into office. What
needs to be done, among other things is depoisoning clan. There is need for a conversation on how inter-clan hatred should be avoided. There is a major difference with the way clan discourses are mobilised within the different camps: Although Al-Shabaab seeks to progressively end clan and establish a free market space, villa Somalia is rather caught up in its own confusion voting itself into office via clan, but speaking about disbanding it.

It is my contention that both villa Somalia and Al-Shabaab are wrong on clan. Clan is not the problem, but rather poisoned clannism as explored above. Drawing on lessons from Somaliland, which has managed to build a high-breed political regime. In Somaliland, clan elders under the House of Elders (the Guurti) deliberate and vote on issues of national importance and often have the final word. The executive and house of representative pay attention when this occurs. There is thus need to find ways of harnessing clan to more positive ends without the hatred that presently accompanies it.

Other points meriting discussion include Islam, and international community’s role.