

Were Hitler and Siad Barre 'Robin Hoods' Who Felt Humiliated by Their Own Followers?

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Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2001). Were Hitler and Siad Barre "Robin Hoods" Who Felt Humiliated by Their Own Followers? (Part II). In *Medlemsblad for Norske Leger Mot Atomvåpen, Med Bidrag Fra Psykologer for Fred*, 1, pp. 20-23.

Abstract

'When Democracy Fails, the Stage Is Prepared for a Dictator': this is the introductory headline of this text. It probes the hypothesis that Hitler, as well as Siad Barre in Somalia began their 'career' as 'saviours' or 'Robin Hood' figures who lifted up the spirits particularly of the 'little people.' Later, when destruction engulfed Germany, or Somalia, not only the 'little people' felt disappointed by their saviour, but, surprisingly enough, also the dictator himself felt let down by his followers. The hypothesis is examined whether such a dictator has a history of personal humiliation in his biography, a history that makes him able to attract the masses on one side, however, makes him on the other side unable to lead them constructively.

Introduction

This text¹ is part of a social-psychological research project currently being carried out at the University of Oslo whose aim is to better understand the notion of humiliation.² The interest in studying this issue was triggered by historians' tendency to describe the Treaty of Versailles after the First World War (28th June 1919) as 'humiliating' for Germany ('Schmach,' 'Schande'). It is widely argued that this humiliation 'pre-programmed' Germans for World War II.³ The research entailed fieldwork in Germany, Somalia and Rwanda and

¹ This text draws upon several articles, particularly on Lindner, 2000a and on a dissertation Lindner, 2000b.

² Its title is *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts. A Study of the Role of Humiliation in Somalia, and Rwanda/Burundi, Between the Warring Parties, and in Relation to Third Intervening Parties*. See project description on www.uio.no/~evelin/. The project is supported by the Norwegian Research Council and the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I am grateful for their support, and would also like to thank the Institute of Psychology at the University of Oslo for hosting it. I extend my warmest thanks to all my informants in and from Africa, many of whom survive under the most difficult life circumstances. I hope that at some point in the future I will be able to give back at least a fraction of all the support I received from them!

³ This treaty included the now infamous war-guilt clause imposing complete responsibility for the war on the Germans and demanding that they 'make complete reparation for all... loss and damage' caused: 'The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated

Burundi. 216 qualitative interviews were carried out, from 1998 to 1999 in Africa (in Hargeisa, capital of Somaliland, in Kigali and other places in Rwanda, in Bujumbura, capital of Burundi, in Nairobi in Kenya, and in Cairo in Egypt), and from 1997 to 2000 in Europe (in Norway, Germany, Switzerland, France, and in Belgium).

When Democracy Fails, the Stage Is Prepared for a Dictator

Somalis are united by language, culture, devotion to Islam, and a common ancestor, the Samaal.⁴ Seventy five percent of the Somali population are traditionally pastoral nomadic clans (Dir, Daarood, Isaaq, and Hawiye).⁵ During colonial times the North of Somalia was the 'British Protectorate of Somaliland,' while a large part of the rest of the country was 'Italian Trust Territory of Somalia.' After independence in 1960, Somalia established a political democracy, which ended in 1969 in a feeling, similar to the Weimar Republic in Germany, that democracy generates chaos rather than order and fairness.

In *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa* (Lewis, 1961) Ioan M. Lewis describes how decisions are made in an egalitarian society of nomadic clans. During my fieldwork in Somalia (1998) I was given the account: 'Elders preside over meetings without leading or dominating them, let alone deciding anything. They wisely summarise what has been said after every participant [men] has spoken. Decisions are made by consensus.'⁶

In Somalia, contrary to modern Western democracies, to be defeated in a vote is humiliating for the loser, potentially to such an extent that the effects – resentment, anger, and revenge – may disrupt the whole system. People in the West who have been living within democratic structures for generations may not be able to grasp such reactions because they are used to the idea that in democracy defeat must be accepted and not be defined as humiliation. Democracy in the West takes the humiliation out of defeat, thus defining defeat in more tolerable terms.

Egalitarian nomads, however, who are accustomed to decision-making by consensus, cannot take such a sanguine view of defeat. The speaker of the parliament in Hargeisa, capital of 'Somaliland,' explains in November 1998 in an interview: 'When people are voted down in parliament, I will go to them afterwards and calm them down. I will make it clear to them that their ideas are good and that they will be heard another time.' He explains that it is in this way he removes the aspect of humiliation from defeat by majority vote. He adds: 'In the traditional clan meeting decisions are made by consensus, everybody has to be convinced. If not, war will start.'

In other words, when Somalia became independent and 'tried' democracy, it created new mechanisms for creating suffering through humiliations that were not there before. Worse, democracy was increasingly perceived as chaotic in almost every respect: 'before elections

Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies' (Versailles Treaty 1919, part VIII, section I, article 231). See also Sebastian Haffner & Bateson, 1978, and Norbert Elias, 1996.

⁴ See for example Ioan M. Lewis 1957, 1961, 1965, and 1994.

⁵ The agricultural Digil and Rahanwayn constitute only about 20 percent of the population. A minority exists which is not included in the six clan-families, among them occupationally specialised caste-like groups (whose daughters are not considered as being eligible for marriage by the six clan-families).

⁶ This account was independently confirmed by everyone I spoke to.

the number of parties multiplied, every clan a party, just to join the party in power after elections; also corruption was rife... people were increasingly disillusioned and many were very relieved when a 'strong hand' seized power (interview in Hargeisa, 1998).

With the Weimar Republic Germany went in for a similarly disappointing 'experiment' of democracy. In the case of Germany, however, the reasons for this disappointment were not the same as in Somalia. Unlike Somalia, Germany at the times of the Kaiser was not an egalitarian society of proud and independent nomads. It was a thoroughly hierarchical society, and 'consensus' was a rather unknown term in this context.

To conclude, for Somalis democracy entailed, so-to-speak, 'too much' coercion and not enough 'consensus,' while it was the opposite for Germany, where democracy was perceived as too 'loose,' as allowing for 'too many' voices, and lacking strong leadership for a 'disciplined' hierarchy.

Dr. Gaboose, personal physician of late Somali dictator Siad Barre and member of his cabinet fled the country when he felt that he could no longer support the regime. In several long interviews in November 1998 he explained to me his views of the late dictator: 'I think then -why a dictator comes, why this man comes forward and arrives at such a powerful stage -probably it is the atmosphere that helps the dictator to be created. Why? Because at a certain stage of a nation, people are fed up of things: wars, poverty, so many mistakes ... and then ... that light comes!!! You see the light and hope in the personality of that person. And then the whole nation is lost into identifying with the personality of that person.'

A Dictator as 'Robin Hood'

A 'strong hand' was yearned for who could 'put order into things'⁷ – similar to the state Germany was in just before Hitler was elected. President Mohammed Siad Barre from the Southern Marehan sub-clan was enthusiastically welcomed, established a strictly centralised political order, and gave people new hope. He did that, similar to Hitler, by lifting up the economy (among others by turning to the Soviet Union for help) and by creating a feeling of a national mission. His oral and rhetoric talent was legendary – like Hitler, he was able to capture audiences of thousands of people for hours.

The colonial powers had split the Somali people five ways. There was during the colonial period a British Somaliland, an Italian Somaliland and a French Somaliland. A section of the Somali people had also been absorbed separately into Kenya under British colonial rule. The fifth component became the Ogaden (or Haud, a semi-desert), as part of Ethiopia.

It was England that gave away the Ogaden to Ethiopia, against the promises they had made to the Somalis, a betrayal that made the Somalis very angry. An Australian humanitarian aid worker described to me in an interview on the 29th November 1998 how the Somalis are said to have exclaimed to the British, 'You are our friends (!), how can you betray us!' And also the British officers themselves were annoyed with London, who just gave the Haud away as a kind of usual bargaining chip.

⁷ Interview in November 1998 in Hargeisa, 'Somaliland.' I do not want to disclose the name of my interlocutor.

The dream of independence for the Somali was in part a dream of reunification. Two of the components were indeed reunited at independence - former Italian Somaliland and former British Somaliland coalesced into the new Republic of Somalia. But neither Kenya nor Ethiopia were prepared to relinquish those areas of their colonial boundaries which were inhabited by Somali. As for French Somaliland, this became the separate independent Republic of Djibouti. 'Most other African countries are colonially created states in search of a sense of nationhood. The Somali, by contrast, are a pre-colonial nation in search of a unified post-colonial state. Most other African countries are diverse peoples in search of a shared national identity. The Somali are already a people with a national identity in search of territorial unification' (Mazrui, 1986, 69-71).

Siad Barre became the embodiment of his people's national feelings even more when he tried to fulfil Somalia's dream of unification and put right the national humiliation inflicted upon Somalia by the colonial powers. He attempted to capture the Ogaden from Ethiopia in 1978, just as Hitler fetched 'heim ins Reich' ['home into the Reich'] those territories that had been lost to France during World War I.

Siad Barre had the whole of Somalia behind him when he attacked Ethiopia to capture the Ogaden, just as Hitler, who had all Germany support him, more than at any other time during his rule, when he 'took' the Alsace and thus 'healed' the humiliation of Versailles. Early on, in 1933, the Germans were not necessarily all in favour of Hitler, but in 1940, after this 'heroic' recapture of 'homeland,' nearly 100% of the population, even the communists, stood behind him. For the subsequent 'peace accord' with France, Hitler used the same train railway wagon in which the humiliating Versailles Accords had been signed in 1919, and thus underlined with strong symbolism a sequence of feelings that went from humiliation to resentment and finally revenge.

When 'Robin Hood' Is an Autodidact Who Has Suffered Humiliation

Siad Barre, an autodidact just like Hitler – intelligent, but lacking formal education, – was part of a larger national context within which the Somalis from the formerly Italian South (and Siad Barre came from the South) were surpassed in education and efficiency by their Northern fellow countrymen, who had learned English under their colonial masters – more internationally applicable than Italian – and had, altogether, among others through their traditional occupation as traders, acquired more managerial skills than Somalis from the South.

Siad Barre, it must be presumed, shared the feelings of other Somalis from the South – who bitterly protested to me: 'You know, these people from the North, when they complain about genocide and how they were humiliated by the South: they were humiliating others before, but this they do not tell you! They behaved arrogantly and humiliated us!' (conversation in December 1999, the Somali interlocutor, himself from the South, does not want to be named).

We may hypothesise that Siad Barre, the autodidact aspiring to be a leader, may have felt particularly humiliated during his early years of apprenticeship in the army. 'You Issaq, you are so arrogant,' he told a Somali woman, who reported his words to me during my fieldwork in 1998 (and wants to stay anonymous).

Hitler – a gifted autodidact just as Siad Barre – felt bitterly neglected by his own people when he grew up and made his first steps into adult life, and, perhaps, this neglect had a humiliating

effect on him. Hitler devotes a large part of *Mein Kampf* to less well-known historical facts, namely the humiliating position Germans suffered from in Austria. Hitler describes how the Czechs tried to 'eradicate' German influence, and how enraged he was that only a handful of Germans in the Reich had any idea of the 'eternal and merciless struggle' under way 'for the German language, German schools, and a German way of life' (Hitler, 1999, 10).

This piece of evidence illustrates that Hitler started his career in a very complicated situation, - not as a subject of the powerful and prestigious German Empire, but as a member of the German population in Austria who felt increasingly excluded and humiliated by Czech influence, and, even worse, who felt thoroughly neglected and betrayed by their own kin, namely the Germans in the Reich. The Germans in the Reich did not take their brothers' sufferings in Austria seriously at all, but, instead, humiliated them with turning a cold shoulder, worse even, with allying with the 'perpetrator,' the Austrian government.

When 'Robin Hood' Fails

Siad Barre failed in his attempt to capture the Ogaden from Ethiopia, and Somalia was utterly defeated. Said S. Samatar bitterly reflects on an unprecedented historic twist that turned a near Somali victory into a devastating defeat: 'The resourceful Ethiopians, as usual, bushwhacked the Somalis through international diplomacy. They declared themselves socialist and appealed for help from their "fraternal Soviet Socialist" people. The Soviets were only too happy to oblige. Switching support from the Somalis, they shipped into Ethiopia in February and March 1978 some \$US 1.5 billion in military hardware, together with two leading Soviet generals and 1500 advisers. The majority of the advisers went straight from their advisory positions in the Somali army and, in a tragicomic turn of events in keeping with Somali history, took with them practically all of the Somali maps of the region, showing to the enemy the troop movements and disposition of the Somali army. For good measure, the Soviets directed Fidel Castro, wager of Soviet proxy wars in Africa, to pitch in with 11,000 Cuban troops. Ethiopia, by the region's standard, had now an awesome force. Within weeks they had the Somalis ejected from the Ogaadeen' (Samatar, 1995, 18).

Somalia's defeat was a devastating humiliation. Samatar continues on the same page: 'Defeat in the battlefield often deals a disastrous setback to military regimes...Incredibly, Mr. Barre's power survived the humiliating trouncing in the Ogaadeen.'

Siad Barre attempted to preserve his power by finding scapegoats. In particular, he put the blame upon the Northerners, first the Majerteen and later the Issaq people. As quoted above, a Somali woman reported to me 'You Issaq, you are so arrogant.' She met the dictator when she pleaded for her imprisoned family members.

Siad Barre unleashed the military against the Issaq population with quasi-genocidal results. Issaqs were potential suspects everywhere, in the South they lost their jobs, they were detained, some executed, and subsequently their main cities fell pray to bloody destruction. Hargeisa, capital of the North, was bombed and destroyed in 1988. (These atrocities are being labelled 'quasi-genocide,' since Issaq were not systematically exterminated. This is different to Rwanda, where even 'half-blood' were potential targets for extermination. Until the end there were Issaq ministers, something that would not have been thinkable in Rwanda.⁸)

Report by a United Nations employee who does not wish to be named, December 1998, Hargeisa.

Dr. Gaboose reflects on the dictator's personality and why he succeeded to stay on so long (1969-1991). He recounts, using a form of English that reflects the style of Somali language and shows the oral talent that Somalis are famous for and proud of: 'I think that Siad Barre was different compared to the majority of the people. Probably that difference made him a dictator. He got some unique characteristics in his personality: vigorous, - active, - and charismatic. He got that ability of attracting the people around him, that energy, that atmosphere of making you secure!'

Dr. Gaboose continues: 'Siad Barre, I think, - he was brave, - I think many dictators have got this, - but perhaps it is not braveness, it is madness. These people confront challenges where the normal intelligent man would say, "no, no, don't do that!" But they have got this personality to go beyond normality, beyond the common people. So you think it is brave. But I think that it was not, - it was just beyond the normality of common people. Siad Barre was very intelligent. He had very little education in his life even though he was the general of the nation. When he was participating in a discussion or giving a speech, - without writing, without preparing anything, - the way he was articulating was just beyond imagination! Probably because of those speeches, that were so talented in the way they were articulated, he attracted many people, many Somalis.'

'So, he was intelligent, but more than that, he always tried to get close to the community. He was an expert in the Somali way of seeing things. Many Somalis believe that he did so many good things. Because he built roads, he built universities; he built so many things in the nation. But not only Siad Barre, all dictators in the first years build their nation.'

'So, I think that a dictator becomes a dictator because he thinks that he has got some talents, and in these talents he sees himself above other people, above everyone. So, he believes, at the end, that he is more intelligent than others, that he sees things farther than others, that he is more sincere, that he is more, more, more ...! So, of the word 'more' in every respect regarding humanity, he convinces himself. And the rest of the people becomes like children listening to him, - not like comrades or colleagues who are discussing, giving and taking ideas from each other!'

'I believe, if we take only the first ten years he could be described as a very nice ruler. But all dictators have got two faces. That was the first face and then comes the other face, which is not any more intelligent. Then you see him: Very instable government, instable economy, instable military, and at the same time he is doing a war here, a war there and a war every place! So you see that he is not any more the kind of man that you had seen before. Sometimes you think that this sort of men has consumed his energy before, and in the later years just sits on his seat because of the energy of the past. But he is not any more the same person. Probably he used in his campaigns all his personality and all his energy. And then what comes... first it is up and then down, down, down. And you cannot stop him, whatever happens, because the energy is less and less to stop. So, I think he was a person that many people will make a dispute in what they will write on him. Because he has got so many faces that everyone can write whatever he wants.'

What took a decade to unfold in the case of Siad Barre – from the glorious start of an acclaimed leader to utter destruction – Germany went through in half the time. It did not take Hitler many years to lead Germany, and its neighbours, into an abyss of devastation, and slaughter millions of Jews and other 'unerwünschtes Leben' ['unwanted life'] in gas chambers. And, indeed, as Dr. Gaboose says, the end was drastic.

How 'Robin Hood' Is 'Failed' by His Own People

The Dr. Gaboose reflects on the feelings of betrayal, both in Siad Barre's followers, but also in Siad Barre himself. First, Dr. Gaboose describes the process of disappointment how it unfolded in him:

'What I found in him [Siad Barre] and the humiliation that I, - not only me but I think many of my colleagues, - found, was that his plan and his intention was a road in his mind and he expected you to just follow, and not to judge, or not to discuss, or not to give any different opinion about that. So, you got just a path drawn before you, by him, and the whole cabinet, the state instrument, should follow that. And even if you saw that the end was dark, you had to tell others that it is not dark, but that there is light, there is paradise we see after that. So, when the line of communication is cut off, when you find a person who is leading the country, and you are so close to him, and the result is always a deaf ear, than you feel that the noble gift of all humans is misused, it is not valued any more, which is to communicate to each other; that through talking we can understand each other, that through talking our ideas and achievements could be larger than "I and I and I." Then when I understood that I could not reach any more that membrane of the ear that became so hard to me, I fled outside. I chose to be a refugee rather than a minister in that government.'

Dr. Gaboose describes now how not only the Somalis, but also Siad Barre felt betrayed, just like Hitler, how he felt that he had sacrificed everything for his people, '...later, he sees that his people were not grateful for what he did for them in the past. Because he sees himself as the one who was always right, he always gave them the best of his life and at the end there is sadness and sorrow, - not from foreigners, but from his own people. Because from them he expected the greatest appreciation. But he does not see that they have given him the highest appreciation for years: there were years that his name was like religion, that his personality arrived near to God and they did what ever he wanted and was always right. But at the end, when the things get to the end of the track, the blame was to the same people of the nation. He was right even at the end of his life. He helped the Somalis, he helped the Germans, he helped the Italians, but the Italian were not good, the German were not good, and the Somalis were not good.'

As Dr. Gaboose describes, Hitler blamed his 'Aryans' for failing him. When Germany was about to be utterly destroyed at the end of World War II, Hitler had, so-to-speak, the proof that 'his' Germans, repeatedly letting him down and ultimately disappointing him, had not really deserved him. They had not lived up to the ideal of 'meine Ehre heißt Treue' ['my honour is called loyalty']. But at the end, unlike before, there was no mercy to be had for them. They had brought upon themselves their 'just' punishment, namely total destruction, a punishment that Hitler might well have wished upon for them during his younger years when they neglected him, when he was suffering as a German outcast among the Czechs and Jews in Austria.

Conclusion

When the Barre regime collapsed in 1991, Somalia not only lost its leader, but also the institution of government. The Somali clans reclaimed their traditional independence and fragmented what was once the Somali nation. Initially only the Issaq in the North managed to pacify their region, particularly through their famous Borama conference in 1992; they

proclaimed their own state, 'Somaliland' (Somaliland is not recognised by the international community or by other Somali leaders).

The South of Somalia began to oscillate between high and low intensity civil war for about a decade. Never-ending in-fighting and violence inflicted unceasing sufferings on all inhabitants. There was no government, no ministries, no systematic maintenance of infrastructure – Somalia could not ratify any international convention since it 'did not exist' – a Somali, whose passport had expired, could not renew it anywhere since there was no functioning bureaucracy inside the country and no Somali embassy abroad, - this was the state-of-affairs until the Peace Conference in Djibouti this year brought a president, Abdulqasim Salad Hasan, and, for the first time, real hope.

During my fieldwork in Somalia I met a situation that may characterise the aftermath of any dictatorship. As in Germany, where Hitler, just like Siad Barre, was initially welcomed as a saviour, it is difficult for people to deal with memories following the dictator's disastrous downfall. Some profess never to have 'believed in him,' some do not want to remember that they ever believed in him and are accused of being liars by those who know that this is not the truth, while again others feel that their efforts during the dictators reign were authentically positive and that not all was bad... - the list of variations on this theme is almost endless. It was clear that several factions and groups in Somaliland, as well as in Germany do have problems with each other in this respect.

Currently the situation is changing in Germany. Germany is at present entering into a time of 'working through' the 'Nazizeit' [Nazi period]. 'Zeitzeugen' [witnesses of history] appear in documentaries and chat shows on German television, and also in their private homes people expose their feelings and opinions more openly than ever before. People who have been almost completely silent for over 50 years start talking now. Anyone who thought those times were forgotten has been deluded by a façade of silence. This may indicate that the 'Unfähigkeit zu trauern' [the inability to mourn], described by Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich, 1982, had its origins in an inability to talk, and that this inability takes time to heal. It will surely take many years, also for Somalis, to work through their painful past.

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