Why Western Multi Party Democracy will Fail in Somalia.

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Many commentators and scholars represent Somalia as a space where modernity and democracy fail consistently. Most of the analyses by scholars focus on the extent in which Somalia and other war-torn countries fail to understand or apply the basic principles of western multiparty democracy and human rights (Jarstad, &Sisk, 2008). Mostly, the premises of such analysis are based on the notion that Africa is underdeveloped because most African countries lack "democratic good governance" Which is the only way to achieve good governance, political stability and prosperity (Leftwich, 2007). Furthermore, the same argument is based on another implicit premise that is "democracy is solely a Western creation, stems from a confusion between the principles of democracy and their institutional manifestations"(Ake,1991,p.34). In this paper, I will argue that Western "multiparty democracy" may not be the solution to the political turmoil and instability in Somalia, because Western democracy in practice is not compatible with the structure of the political organization and the socio –cultural history of Somali people since "traditional Somali society, the clan was a social and political unit of organisation and government"(Ssereo, 2003, p, 26).

Accordingly, I will argue that there is a major difference between the end result of Somali traditional system of governance and the political objectives of Western multi party system. Wiredu, (1995) argued, that some African traditional governance, such as the Ashanti group is based on "cooperation, not confrontation" (187). Following Wiredu (1996), I will shed light on how "consensus" is both the content and the objective of Somali Traditional way of governance, while " competition" is main aim of Western

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multi party system. Hence, if we do not understand such differences between cultures around the globe, imposing or importing the contemporary concept of democracy may seem 'Eurocentric' notion that brings more problems than solutions to Africa.

The contemporary Western multiparty democracy is a product of a long social process that western culture under went in the last three hundred years (Downing, 1993). Sociologically, throughout this process, Western societies were exposed to scientific and cultural revolutions, which changed dramatically their political systems into multiparty democracy (Tocqueville, 1969). It is too simplistic to assume Somalia, or another country in Africa will achieve success and development only, if they import western multiparty democracy without the critical analysis and self-reflection needed to understand the socio-historical process and the evolution of western democracy. Thus, the starting point for this debate- why western multiparty democracy will fail in Somalia, should start at the level of historical analyzes and the examination of cultural differences between African societies and western societies. Though the essence of democracy "as a universal value" that can be found in any culture around the globe, cultures differ in understanding the meaning of democracy as a concept and also the implementation of its process when it comes to modern governance (Se,1999).

In the last three hundred years, European societies underwent dramatic changes politically, socially, and also economically (Immanuel, 2001) .The historical process of this change was not a linear process but rather a complex one. After the fall of the Roman empire, Europe experienced what historians call " The dark ages". In this period of history, life was stagnant for Europeans because there was no any development or

innovation. As Immanuel (2001) writes "During the last centuries of the Roman Empire as during the Middle Ages, society was paralyzed by the growing expense of a social and political superstructure, an expense to which corresponded no compensating increase in the productive resources of society." (p.23). At this point in history, Europe was ravaged by constant wars in which opposing warlords carried out throughout the continent. Political stability, economic development and cultural production were absent in the spheres of European lives.

The political system that most rulers in Europe employed at that time was totalitarianism in which the ruled- individuals had no freedom and rights. In that context, the social and economic institutions allow totalitarian rulers to maintain their power over the rest of society (Tocqueville, 1969). For example, Catholic Church as the main religious institution in Europe represented kings and their totalitarian rules as divine in which society should obey without question. Such representation led the historical persecutions of oppositions and heretics by rulers and Church leaders respectively. Furthermore, the economic system in the dark ages was part of the autocratic system because it was based on feudalism. Thus, the economic relationship in feudalism does not foster development or innovation because individuals could not exercise choice or freedom, as we know today in the market economy (Immanuel, 2001).

Cumulatively, these economic and political hardships in early European societies forced people to demand their rights. For example, the French revolution was successful attempt to overthrow the autocratic regimes that caused European societies to endure such hard ships and seeking political equality (Tocqueville, 1969). Similarly, the French

revolution represents the starting point of evolution for the contemporary multi party democracy in Europe. On the other hand, the industrial revolution in England laid down the foundations of Market economy throughout Europe " in the seventeenth century the first industrial capitalists were rising from the ranks of petty producers. Capitalism had arrived" (Prak, 2005,p.3). Thus, such developments of political economy in 17th century, mediated the scientific and socio-cultural revolution that allowed Europeans to adopt the multiparty democracy. As Tocqueville, (1969) observed, political institutions in capitalist society force all classes into constant contact that reminds them of their equal conditions (p,569). Contrary to Europe, the social-historical context of Africa may explain why Western democracy will fail In Africa. Somalia as a case study may offer insightful information for the explanations we need to answer the above question.

As one of the nomadic ethnic groups of East Africa, Somali people inhabit large area of land of Horn of Africa. Many scholars believe that Somalis as an ethnic group share common language and nomadic culture rather than common blood. The Somali ethnic group   consist several clans, and each clan believes that they share one common ancestor "the Somali segmentary lineage system is based on various breaks in the line of male descent" (Leonard and Samantar 567). The constant movement of nomadic herders and the environmental conditions of horn of Africa may explain why Somalis inhabit the largest area of horn Africa. Historically, the social and political system of Somalis derived from the nomadic traditions (Lewis, 2002). As the economic system of pastoralist communities depend on constant search for water and food, people have to move with their livestock in different seasons of the year and settle in areas where pasture are

available. As British anthropologist I M. Lewis explored, Somali traditional structure can be summarized into three main elements namely: clan, customary laws and traditional authority (Lewis,2002, p. 12). Since pasture and water is scarce in some seasons such as winter, conflict among clans happens constantly. Traditionally, disputes and conflicts within this clan structure are resolved through customary laws (Lewis, 2002, p.11).

Somali clans enjoy relative peace that is guarded by traditional system in which conflict and inter-wars are resolved. Somali customary law in clan systems is a contract between individuals and between groups. Clan elders employ "social contracts when conflicts between individuals or between clans arise"(Lewis, 2002, p11). The nature of this conflict may take the form of social, political and economic interest. The principle that guides Somali customary law is to protect social cohesion among the clan. Also, under such traditional system of governance, each clan is independent from other clans economically and territorially. As Ssereo, (2003) writes "The council of elders and traditional chiefs, who ensured harmony and sustained peace in the clan communities, defined the rights and obligations of the members and their relations, together with the rights and limitations of neighbouring clans" (p, 26) With such independence of each clan, there was interdependence among clans to survive in a semi-arid environment. As As Wamala(2006) observed, the consequence for such interdependency among African clans would be traditional system of governance based on "consensus." For example, if there is a seasonal drought, Somali clans agree to share resources such as water and pasture in a limited area. Even clans, who have animosity and inter-clan wars, may stop

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fighting in the periods of drought because of the "inter-clan conflict, constituent dia-paying group loyalties would be set aside for the duration"(Lewis 1972, p, 390).

Thus, the traditional system of Somali clans evolved into a system that aims to reach "consensus" among clans. Similar to many other traditional African system of governance, consensus and reaching agreements that reflect on the mutual interest of all clans was the core of Somali traditional system of governance (Weridu, 1995). Historically, there was not central system that governed all Somalis. As we noted above, each clan was independent, and the same time that there was interdependency between clans that is based on mutual interest (Ssereo,2003). The social and economic landscape of Somalia changed dramatically when European colonized Somali people as the rest of African communities.

As Callinicos, (2007) illustrated the industrial revolution in England led the development of Market economy in Europe in which caused many Europeans empires to colonize different parts of Africa to extract the resources in order to meet the increasing demand of their local markets. In the colonization process, African societies endured exploitation and subjugation to adopt colonial cultures and traditions British, French and Italy colonized different parts of the horn of Africa, where Somali ethnic group inhabit largely. For example, British colonized northern areas, currently known as "Somaliland" while Italians invaded the southern part of Somalia (Lewis, 1972). It is a long history how the process of such colonization happened and its impact on Somali people, but we will focus on the introduction of central governance system to Somali society. Similar to the fate for many societies in Africa, colonialism destroyed the traditional system of

governance that Somali people govern themselves for long period of time, and imposed policies of divide and rule to achieve their political and economic objectives (Lewis, 2002).

As the European's aim to colonize Africa wa to extract natural resources and export them back to Europe, they built administrative urban cities around the coastlines In these cities, they constructed schools, hospitals and churches, and implemented administrative rules, which they imported from Europe to manage their activities (Hiller, 2014). Today most major urban areas in Africa originate from colonial administrative cities. For example, Mogadishu, the Capital city of Somalia, was an administrative center for Italians and most of the schools, hospitals and churches in Mogadishu in 19th century were built for the families of colonial administrative officers. In this context, Somali society was exposed to European world-views, religion and culture through violence, force and coercion.

Accordingly, in the context of colonialism, Somali culture was regarded as primitive culture, which has no value and validity in this modern ere (Lewis, 2002). Thus, as many other African elites, Somali elites internalized the notion that European culture is modern and progressive, while they perceived most of their cultural elements and values as backward. Such internalization can be seen the way African elites adopt colonial rules and traditions after many African countries gain their independence from colonialism. The extent of such internalization of European values in Somalia depends on the success of colonialists institutions such schools and churches to train young people in the era of colonialism (I, M Lewis 1999). Without reflection and critical analyses,

educated people and leaders of Somali state after independence adopted colonial system of governance and ideologies. For example, the concept of "multiparty democracy" was the first system that Somali elites borrowed from Europe. Nine years of multiparty democracy in Somalia after independence, is a good historical case to understand and analyze the reasons why Multi Party Democracy will not work in Somalia.

In the first decade of independence, Somali had three elections throughout the country. In these elections, numerous political parties participated in the process. It is important to note that the political parties at that time were based on clan alliances, because historically, clan was the only social mechanism that mediates social group formation in Somalia (Lewis, 1999). As we mentioned above, European societies, had experienced different types of centralized system of governments and industrial revolution in the last three hundred years, which facilitated the formation of political parties based on social or economic interests (Tocqueville, 1969). This was not the case for political parties that formed in Somalia after the independence because most of these parties represent only clan interests (Lewis, 1999). Despite the common struggle for independency, Somalis, as many other African societies had not experienced central governments, and they did not understand fully the functions of colonial state institutions that they inherit from Europeans. Thus, I argue that such imitation of western multi party democracy by Somali politicians without reflecting on the socio-cultural difference between Europeans and Somali society was a big mistake and I argue that it is the implicit cause of twenty years of dictatorship and twenty-five years of civil war that followed since the independence. Corruption, endless race for presidential office,

incompetent leaders and lack of development were the consequences of clan based political parties in Somalia in 1960s (Lewis, 1999).

Many scholars pointed out that each clan or tribe in Somalia enter the race for multiparty democracy system with the believe that they can gather enough votes from the clan members because " For the Somali party politics reveal very clearly the interplay of traditional lineal loyalties" (Lewis, 1999, p.266) Thus, the result was the formation of more than a hundred political clan parties, which participated in the election of 1967. Since, all clans cannot win for a single presidential position at the sometime, mistrust and animosity toward the president and his clan dominates Somali politics. Some scholars believe that, the assassination of the democratically elected president, Mr Sharmarke in 1967 was the result of such enmity between clans (Adam,1992). Thus, I argue the implementation of multiparty democracy in Somalia in 1960s failed because it was imported from outside and was not compatible with the clan politics and the traditional system of governance. The main reason for this incompatibility was the lack of transformation of the socio economic status of most of Somali people. The lack of economic development of Somalia in the colonial period is not a surprise, because the logic of colonization is not to develop, but rather the logic was to extract resources from hinterland to the core areas (Callinicos, 2007). Thus, professional associations and interest groups wrre absent in Somalia at time of independence. We noted above, the evolution of multiparty democracy in Europe was coupled with industrial and scientific revolution, which enabled people to organize politically along their socio economic interest(Tocqueville, 1969).

After nine years of democracy failed in Somalia, twenty years of military rule followed. To protect the unity of the state was the logic behind the military coup in Somalia in 1967 as many other military regimes in Africa had argued when they overthrow the civilian governments (Adam, 1992). Though such argument cannot be legitimized, military rule was the consequence for corrupted democracy that is based on clan politics. Similar to many African authoritarian regimes, the military regime in Somalia centralized the power and limited the civic rights under the banner of developmental notions (Bhawoh, Dibua, 2003). As their democratic predecessors, military elites imported alien ideologies, which are incompatible with the Somali culture. For example, in the fist decade of the military revolution in Somalia, president Siyad Barre embraced the scientific socialism of Soviet Union and applied it through social and economic policies. As any other foreign ideology, the scientific socialism imported from Soviet Union failed. The next step for the military rule was an authoritarianism rule and corruption that is mainly based on by nepotism and clan politics. Thus, the consequence of nepotism and clan politics of twenty years is the ongoing civil war in Somalia since 1991 (Adam, 1992).

In the last twenty years, there have been several efforts to restore peace and the rule of law in Somalia. Mostly, these efforts were championed by the international community and neighboring countries (Leonard & Samantar, 2001 p, 566). However, most of the reconciliation conferences ended in failure. For instance, the Somali reconciliation conference in Nairobi in 2002 was the longest reconciliation conference . After two years of negotiation, Somali delegations in Nairobi, signed the first federal

constitution for Somalia. The next step in this conference was the formation of the transitional federal government of Somalia (TFG). Since 2004, different transitional governments came in to power. None of them succeeded to bring back the security and the rule of law in Somalia.

There are many possible explanations to the failure of all the attempts to rebuild modern and democratic state in Somalia in the last twenty years. However, I argue that the key explanation might be the attempt by international communities to impose Western style of democracy in the process of state building in Somalia. Such attempt would be against the social structure of Somalia society because clan politics is the perception that most Somalia politicians pursue in their career. Thus, multi party democracy based on clan politics will fail dramatically because such democracy failed in Somalia before as we noted above. Consequently, we need to ask ourselves how clan politics as the main structure of Somali culture can be part in the process of building a modern state? I argue that the possibility of modern state building can arise within the traditional system of governance.

After many peace reconciliations failed to rebuild central government in Somalia, some clans in northern regions of the country decided to build autonomous administrations that is based on their traditional system of governance. Clans in northern west regions established Somaliland government in the reconciliation conference of Burou in 1991 and declared to break away from the rest of Somalia. On the other hand, clans in northern west regions decided to establish regional state in 1998, and declared that they will only became a member of federal state institution in future. Both

administrations succeeded to restore the law and order and also to achieve social and economic development. The main explanation for the formation of the two administrations is the traditional system of governance that is led by the clan elders in the process of reconciliation. Contrary to the competition-based politics of multiparty democracy, traditional Somali system of governances allowed both administrations to practice "consensus" based democracy. As Michael Walls (2009), notes "However imperfect, the process of conflict resolution, peace building and state building in Somaliland in the periods up to and including the conferences in Burao and Borama offers a clear demonstration of a form of consensus-based democracy in practice" (p. 389).

Over all, the essence of democracy is a " universal" concept, because most cultures include political participation as a key element in the process of making collective decisions about governance. As we have noted above, " multiparty democracy" is a product of Western culture that has a distinct socio-historical process in the last three hundred years, which is mainly originated from the industrial revolution in England, and the political revolution in French (Tocqueville, 1969).Before colonialism, Somali society as many other African societies governed themselves through traditional laws with distinct political values (Lewis, 1999). As Weridu (1996), illustrated the democratic values among most African traditional system focus on " cooperation and consensus" while western multi party democracy mainly focus on competition for the political powers.

Thus, these two distinct conceptualization of democracy- consensus versus competition, would yield two different effects. For example, we noted above, the end result for democracy based on Somali traditional laws with "cooperation and consensus" values is relative peace and socio economic development as in the case of Somaliland and Puntland, while the rest regions of Somalia still is under anarchy and political instability. Contrary to this outcome, the consequence for Western multi party democracy in Somalia based on " competition' would be endless struggle and animosity between clans as we have demonstrated through the analyzes of multiparty democracy in Somalia in the first decade after independency. Finally, as I argued throughout the paper, the main reason for the failure of Western multi party democracy in Somalia is the difference between the socio cultural history of Somali society and the socio economic background of Western cultures, which is where competition based democracy for political office is originated.

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