

In Siyaad Barre's Prison: A Brief Recollection

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I. Introduction

In my view and in the view of many witnesses of Somalia's recent history, an important element of the terrible abuse of power and authority during the dictatorial regime of the late Gen. Mohamed Siyaad Barre was the arbitrary and widespread detention of dissidents, political opponents, and even ordinary Somalis who just expressed an honest opinion on the state of affairs in their country. These incarcerations were usually without any charges, and, in the end, without trial. For this reason, men like Aden Abdillah Osman, the first President of the Somali Republic; Premier Abdirazak H. Hussein; the late Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, ex-President of the self-declared Somaliland Republic and former Prime Minister of Somalia; Abdillahi Issa, First Foreign Minister; Gen. Mohamed Abshir Muse, former Commander of Somalia's Police Force; Michael Mariano, pioneer nationalist, Parliamentarian, and distinguished civil servant; Col. Abdillahi Yusuf, current President of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia; the late Gen. Mohamed Farah Aideed, former USC leader; and Col. Jama Ali Jama, one-time president of the Puntland region; each had to spend months or years in detention, some in solitary confinement. But they were never brought to a real court of justice because they were simply being persecuted for reasons that included possibly rallying righteous disapproval and discontent, competition for power, or because Siyaad Barre disliked them personally.

The injustices of the dictatorial military regime that turned many Somalis against that government—despite its popularity at the beginning of its reign in 1969—were, in the opinion of many experts on Somali affairs, the main cause behind the inception of the armed rebellions against the old regime and its eventual downfall in 1991. However, these pernicious acts and gross violations of the human rights of the Somali people have never, to the best of my knowledge, been chronicled or adequately recorded, with the possible exception of a small booklet in Somali, entitled *Xabsigaygii* (My Imprisonment), which was published in 2000 by Prof. Yusuf Hersi Ahmed, the renowned TB specialist (who now lives in exile in Pakistan). I think such a record-keeping is of paramount importance so that future Somali generations will draw useful lessons from it. It is my firm belief that this nefarious exercise of absolute power was one of the catalysts of the catastrophe that followed, and led to the collapse of the Somali state and the devastating—indeed seemingly never-ending—civil war that Somalia has been experiencing for the past fifteen years. Consequently, the impetus behind my article is to initiate an autobiographical and truth-telling exercise. As a former political prisoner, albeit for a comparatively brief duration, under Barre’s regime, I must relate the suffering I endured and how this painful experience later helped me in rebuilding my life.

II. Pick Up

It was around 9:00 p.m. on an ordinary night in mid-May 1976, one of the saddest and most memorable times of my life. I was resting in my house, situated in the Hawlwadaag District of Mogadishu, because I was not feeling well and had not reported to work for a couple of days. Although I had just married a few months earlier, I was alone at home, as my wife was visiting with some of her relatives in the city of Kismayo. As reading had for many years been my main hobby, I was passing time by going over an interesting book by the late President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere, titled *Ujamaa* or “African Socialism,” as the Mwalimu would have liked to call it. At that time, I was interested in the subject because Siyaad Barre’s Administration had already adopted socialism (*hantiwadaag*) to be applied in Somalia, and as a senior government official I wanted to have a deeper understanding of this doctrine and its various schools of thought. A few years earlier, I had undergone a six-month training stint in what was then the Soviet Union to study Scientific Socialism (or Marxism-Leninism) at the Party High Institute

near Moscow, but I had come back unconvinced by that system after experiencing its concrete application in Russia. This reminds me of the former President of Ghana, the late Kwame Nkrumah, who is reported to have once made the following instructive remark: “When we want our youth to embrace socialism, we send them to America, but when we want them to love capitalism, we send them to the Soviet Union!”

While I was sitting on the verandah of my house, absorbed in Nyerere’s book and oblivious to what was going on around me, I suddenly heard a knock on our front door. When I opened it, I found two plain-clothesmen standing there. Upon letting them in, they told me that I was wanted at the Mogadishu Branch of the dreaded *Nabad-Sugidda Soomaaliyeed*, i.e., the National Security Service or NSS for short. (Incidentally, some officials of the NSS used to boast that they had been able to coin for their fearsome organization a name whose initials were the same in English and Somali!) These secret police agents, who were known in Egypt during Nasser’s time as *zuwar al-fajr* (dawn visitors), always chose the darkness of night to arrest dissidents or political prisoners because: (a) they knew that what they were doing was wrong, so they did their level best to hide it; (b) they wanted to terrorize and silence government critics; and (c) they did not want other inhabitants of the neighborhood to know about it.

When I inquired about the reason for taking me away, their terse reply was that they didn’t know, but that I must go with them. Myself, I knew, of course, that under Siyaad Barre’s tyranny, one could be thrown into jail at any moment and for no apparent reason. It was just sufficient to be labeled *kacaan-diid* (anti-revolutionary) and then be detained without an arrest warrant or recourse to a court of justice, a lawyer, or any of these legal niceties. You could be severely punished in order to persuade you to behave better in the future or merely receive what was then known in Somali as *edbin* (rebuke). I thought I would be asked a few questions and then brought back home. Moreover, being one of the Deputy Mayors of the city, I assumed, rather naively, that I would not be thrown into jail so easily and without proper formalities. So, I did not even take with me—and this was a serious lapse of judgment—any shirts, towels, sandals (*dacas*), Somali-style wrap-around pajamas (*macawis*), toothbrushes (*caday*), toothpaste, or books. All of these would have come in very handy and would have been very useful to me in detention. Then I went with them in their fairly new Land Rover, of which the windows were covered with black curtains.

Soon after, I was taken to the Mogadishu Branch of the NSS in Bondheere District, better known to many Somalis as *godka* (the hole; because, presumably, once you entered there, you might not get out for many years to come). I was led to an office where the much dreaded secret service man, and one of the greatest loyalists in the regime, Col. Ahmed Hassan Jili'ow (from Mogadishu), was sitting. Jili'ow and I knew each other rather superficially because, before my marriage, our paths had crossed accidentally on several occasions at a house where I used to buy or chew *qat* and socialize with some friends, both male and female. I foolishly trusted the lady who lived in the house and was offering us these services, because she was from my hometown. Unbeknownst to me, Col. Jili'ow was frequenting her house for the main purpose of eavesdropping or spying on us, her customers, and she was working with him. In those days, you could be betrayed by your closest kin or friends, who might desire to curry favor with the regime. When I was brought in front of him, Jili'ow did not ask me a single question, not even my full name and date of birth. He just nodded his rather large and balding head in a way I assumed was well known to the soldiers accompanying me. I was immediately thrown into the main room, which served as the jail in that branch. It was only when I saw some of my acquaintances who had previously been detained for political reasons that I realized that I, too, was a prisoner.

III. Prison

Around 4:30 that morning, when the number of political prisoners the NSS had been looking for was complete, and as the call for dawn prayers was starting to ring in some of the city's numerous mosques, they took us away in the large blue bus that belonged to the Police Force's musical band but had always served multiple purposes. A couple of hours later, we were dumped at Laanta Buur Prison, situated in the middle of nowhere, about 90 kilometers to the south of Mogadishu, on the road to the coastal city of Merca. This was an extremely harsh detention center built by the military government in that remote area specifically to punish dissidents or political prisoners more severely, as they were not allowed to be visited by families, friends, or loved ones, or be brought decent food and reading materials from home.

On that night, about fifty of us, ordinary civilians, most of whom were from Galkayo, Boosaaso, Hargeisa, Burao, and Hobyo, were rounded up. Men like Prof. Yusuf Hersi; Yusuf Osman Samantar,

“Barda’ad,” the man who, ironically, had set up the first socialist party in the country in the early 1960s; Abdi Farah Bashane, one-time Attorney General of Somalia; Abdirahman Abdi Gole “Aswad” and Ali Haji Mohamed, “Ambe,” both of them former high-ranking public administrators; and Nasir Nahar, an ordinary businessman from Hargeisa; were all with me in prison on that fateful night. In our midst there was, curiously, a simple trader who belonged to Siyaad Barre’s clan. His crime? We were told he had said something that Barre’s senior wife, Mama Khadija, did not like. So he was thrown into jail with us. In addition, there were three teenage high school students, whose only crime was that they used to listen to the explanation of the Quran in Somali by the late Sheikh Mohamed Ma’allin at the famous Abdulqadir Mosque in the heart of Mogadishu.

Our lot also included two young blind men chosen by certain conservative Somali women to teach them about Islam. Due to the blindness, these ladies would not have to wear veils in the men’s presence! One episode that I still vividly recall from the events of that unhappy night was that, before putting us on the bus on our way to Laanta Buur Prison, the NSS officers made sure that every two of us were handcuffed together, so that we would not be able to run away. When they tied the two blind young men together, I could not help laughing at how dense soldiers can be in carrying out the mindless instructions in their books. These two blind men were already handicapped and even if they had been left loose, they could not have escaped, because they could neither know where they were at any point in time nor what direction to take.

The presence of experienced men like Prof. Yusuf Hersi and Yusuf Barda’ad was reassuring, because they used to calm us down, console us, and offer us sincere advice. Some of them used to give lectures on their specific field of specialization or high points of their lives. The religious men also used to remind us constantly that the experience we were undergoing was preordained by Allah; that He was testing us, and that we should go back to our Islamic religion and seek Allah’s guidance and mercy, not that of Siyaad Barre and his “atheist” regime.

When we arrived at Laanta Buur, we were all thrown into an isolated, large rectangular room, which used to house common criminals and had probably been vacated a few hours before our arrival. As one can imagine, it was a filthy room with only one toilet but no other facilities whatsoever. It did not even contain a sufficient number of simple Somali-type mats (*derin*), let alone beds and pillows. The only

redeeming feature was that it contained a big open courtyard where we inmates were allowed to gather in the evening and pass the time by talking and comparing notes. In addition, being in a big room with another 49 individuals gave each enough elbow room to do his own thing—some talking, some praying with loud voices, some snoring, and some going back and forth to the toilet. However, it was extremely difficult to sleep. Consequently, I could not sleep at all for the first week. My health deteriorated further, and I had to be admitted to a very modest one-room clinic inside the prison.

As I alluded to earlier, the conditions at Laanta Buur were extremely rough. The food was awful, but we had to consume it in order not to starve to death. Health services were very scanty or practically non-existent. We were deprived of radios (let alone TV, which was not then available in Somalia as a whole) and visits from our families, relatives, or friends. We were also not allowed any reading or writing materials, and we were not permitted to do any work—something that would have kept us a bit busy and made us forget, at least for a few hours per day, our appalling prison conditions. But to be fair to the regime, we were never physically tortured or even interrogated. However, we were completely cut off from the rest of the world and knew nothing about what was happening outside the fortified gates of our prison. It was only after having been there for several weeks that our guards, who either knew that we were being persecuted for political motives or sympathized with some of us on kin grounds, started passing to us some tidbits of external news from time to time.

In comparison, the living conditions of the common criminals at Mogadishu's central prison—some of whom might have committed murders or embezzled huge amounts of public funds—were better than ours, because they had all kinds of privileges. Again, even detention under the despicable apartheid system in South Africa seemed more humane, because Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, and their other colleagues at Robben Island Prison (like us imprisoned for political reasons) were allowed one letter and one visit every three months! Not so in Siyaad Barre's prison at Laanta Buur or the much harsher concentration camp at Labaatan Jirow (near Baidoa city), which, I was told, was designed and built with the financial help of East Germany. In this dungeon, all detainees had to spend their days in solitary confinement, in terrible individual cells with no amenities worth mentioning. The only recreation they had was for each political prisoner to walk, one at a time, for a mere 20 minutes per day in

the corridor outside his cell, under the strict watch of a prison guard. It was in this horrible place that many distinguished Somalis like Mohamed Abshir Muse; Mohamed Ibrahim Egal; Sheikh Mohamed Ma'allin (whose only crime was to teach the Quran in a society that was supposedly Muslim); Col. Jama Ali Jama; Gen. Abdullahi Sheikh Mahamud "Matukade," former Police Commander; Mr. Omar Arteh Ghalib, ex-Foreign Minister; Gen. Ismail Ali Abokor, former Vice President of Somalia; Col. Osman Jelle, ex-Minister and former Mayor of Mogadishu; Gen. Abdullahi Farah "Holif," ex-high ranking officer of the Fiscal Police; Sheikh Abdul-Ghani Sheikh Ahmed, former Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs; and Dr. Mohamed Aden Sheikh, the well-known medical doctor and ex-Minister of Health during the early years of Barre's regime, had to spend many years enduring all kinds of hardships. Most of these men were Barre's associates at one time or another. I am still amazed how resilient these men were. Moreover, I often wonder how most of them were able to get out of there in one piece and without becoming insane.

I did not mind other hardships, but the thing that bothered me most at Laanta Buur was sitting idle, day in, day out, and not knowing why I was imprisoned. What were the specific charges against me? How long would I remain there? If you commit a crime you are aware of and are brought to book, you accept the court's decision and start counting the days, no matter how long or harsh your sentence is. I can, therefore, summarize the most difficult part of my detention experience in one word: boredom. This reminds me of a famous Egyptian journalist, the late Mustafa Amin, founder of the well-known Cairo daily newspaper *Al-Akhbar*. He wrote in one of his books, *Year One of Imprisonment*, after spending several years in Nasser's prisons: "If the year of an ordinary person consists of 365 days, the day of a prisoner is made up of 365 years!" This is so, because when you are sitting inside that wretched place, doing nothing at all, the hands of your watch seem not to move and, hence, the day becomes longer than normal. Even if you have fifty other political prisoners in your company, that does not help you much, because, in a week or two, you will more or less know the stories of their lives, even if they are total strangers. Then there is nothing more to talk about. In this regard, when you read Nelson Mandela's fascinating autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, you will realize how much luckier, in one sense, he and all the great ANC leaders in Robben Island were compared to us at Laanta Buur. This legendary African freedom fighter and his comrades in prison were doing some physi-

cal work to occupy them: they were working with picks and shovels at a lime quarry, and that killed some time. They were also allowed to study for university degrees by correspondence while still in prison.

We were detained indefinitely, because, in the jargon of those “revolutionary” days, we were simply known as *la-hayeyaal* (people in custody), without any charges against us and without access to lawyers, family members, or anybody else. Now you may wonder why the Siyaad Barre regime and the dreaded NSS were treating their citizens in such a cruel manner? The answer is simple: it was part of the regime’s coercive control method and its main instrument for keeping absolute power. The purpose behind this harsh detention was to break the will of dissidents and those who opposed or dared to criticize the militaristic tyranny. These tactics also terrorized other Somalis who knew that this might happen to them as well. Thus, the ultimate goal was to silence the citizens regardless of how misguided and harmful the policies were to the national interests of the country. In fact, an old government colleague, Mr. Warsame Juguf, a well-known patriot and trade union activist, died in the late 1970s while languishing in solitary confinement at Labaatan Jirow.

The regime’s main goal was to make you feel hopeless. It constantly endeavored to instill a feeling of fear and helplessness. Here, we know from the recently declassified archives of the ex-Soviet Union that their Secret Service (or KGB) had a certain quota or arbitrary number of political prisoners who had to be put behind bars every single year in order to intimidate the civilian population and make them think twice before uttering a word against the communist state and its one-party system. One of the interpretations that I heard after coming out of prison in the summer of 1976 was this: Siyaad Barre’s regime was formally establishing its own one-party system, namely, *Xisbiga Hantiwadaagga Kacaanka*, or Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party (SSRP), therefore all potential opponents or “troublemakers” and Islamists had to be locked up.

IV. Survival

In Laanta Buur for several months, I had to calm down, accept my fate, and devise ways and means of surviving in its terrible conditions. Having been sick from the first day of my arrest turned out to be an advantage, because the prison authorities had to transfer me, as I indicated earlier, to a very small clinic inside the prison, where I shared

accommodations with three or four other prisoners. Besides being less crowded, this single room had one main advantage: you could sleep on a real bed and a pillow. Such apparently mundane things that we normally take for granted thankfully made a huge difference for my sleep and rest.

I still remember an interesting event that happened to me in that one-room clinic. A foreign naval captain, a man who I think was of Greek origin, was sharing the place with us. I was told the reason he was in jail was as follows: Somalia was running short of rice, so one of the ministers in Barre's regime, a military man with no background in commerce or banking, was entrusted with the task of importing rice from Thailand. This undereducated colonel or general kept procrastinating for a long time. Then he started running around at the last moment. But more importantly, he committed the unforgivable blunder of transferring the money (several million dollars) to the alleged trader in Bangkok without first making sure that an irrevocable letter of credit was opened at a reputable bank in Thailand. When the awaited ship docked at Mogadishu seaport, there was not a single kilogram of rice from Bangkok in its cargo, but hundreds of bags full of sand instead! Naturally, Siyaad Barre's government was greatly upset about this embarrassing event and was determined to punish or get even with the perpetrators, and wanted to keep the ship in question indefinitely. However, they were told that the only way they could "detain" the ship, under international maritime law, was to detain the captain first. So they threw the poor Greek fellow in Laanta Buur to languish there with us!

Anyway, this Greek man had a chessboard in his possession and we used to play that game often. At that time in my life, playing chess was one of my passions and I was very good at it. And so I used to beat him most of the time. Like some white men with a racist attitude, he could not accept being outsmarted by a black African, of nomadic Somali origin, so he stopped playing chess with me. That was another blow, because playing chess was a very good way of killing time in these monotonous living conditions. With the benefit of hindsight (which is always 20/20), I now realize that I should have deliberately allowed him to win the game from time to time so that he would not have been turned off and would have permitted me to use his chessboard regularly.

Apart from the brief period of playing chess, another thing that helped me to survive was reading. I was fortunate, because one of the

inmates had a Quran and oftentimes I would borrow it. Consequently, I was able to read the entirety of the holy book and understand the greater part of it for the first time in my life. Although I had started my formal education at a Quranic school (*dugsi*) in my hometown of Galkayo at the age of five, and knew the whole 114 chapters, or *suras*, by heart at the age of twelve, I did not understand the meaning. It was only after having spent seven years in Egypt in the 1960s and having mastered the Arabic language that I was able to decipher the Quran while languishing at Laanta Buur. In addition to that, I was able to read the classics and other books for which I had had no time before my imprisonment. That was one of the few positive aspects of my painful experience.

At that time, we were lucky to have Adan Bahnan from Burao imprisoned with us. Mr. Bahnan, a former high-ranking government official, was in jail not for political reasons, but for a normal criminal case, and he had already been sentenced for several years. He therefore had more privileges than us, and he used to work as an administrative assistant to the commander of Laanta Buur. One of his privileges was to go to Mogadishu and visit with his family once a week, I think. He would bring back a lot of reading material and smuggle some of the books to us. Because of Adan Bahnan's efforts, I was able to read several classics like William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *A Midsummer's Dream*, as well as more recent literature, such as Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka's book *The Man Died*. I still remain greatly indebted to Adan Bahnan because he helped me endure the hardships of Laanta Buur and assisted me in gaining some additional knowledge as well.

Incidentally, one of the inmates of our prison at the time was Cap. Ali "Shigshigow," or Ali the Stammerer—a reference to a natural speaking handicap of his—one of Siyaad Barre's sons, and an officer in the Somali Army, who was put behind bars to force him to quit his habit of very heavy drinking.

Adan Bahnan's help reminds me of a similar story that Gen. Mohamed Abshir told us in person, while he was living here in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, several years ago. It shows that despite their differences in politics or occasional kin antagonism, Somalis get along well on a personal level and can even be very kind to each other. Mohamed Abshir told us that while he and the late Mohamed Ibrahim Egal were in prison at Labaatan Jirow, the prison guards wanted to deepen Abshir's suffering, so they forbade any reading materials and

even confiscated his single copy of the holy Quran. When Mohamed Ibrahim Egal learned about this, he took an exercise book and copied by hand as many Quranic verses as he could, until it was full. He then smuggled the Quranic exercise book to Mohamed Abshir's cell after distracting the attention of the guards. Gen. Abshir told us that he learned all the Quranic verses that were in that exercise book by heart and it was Egal's humane gesture that helped Gen. Abshir endure these great hardships for another three years.

The story of the books also brings to mind another episode in my life. After half-a-dozen religious men had been hanged in Mogadishu in the mid-1970s because they had condemned the new Family Law (*Xeerka Qoyska*) promulgated by Siyaad Barre's socialist government as against the teachings of Islam, my revulsion against the oppression intensified. Hence, I started reading anti-socialist, anti-dictatorial literature—classics such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *The Gulag Archipelago*. All of these contributed to my dislike of the military regime's heavy-handed policies. Perhaps as a premonition of what was in store for me, I had started smuggling these books to political detainees, men like the linguist and storyteller Hersi Magan, and others at Mogadishu's Central Prison.

V. Conclusion

After an appeal from my family, I was released from prison after four painful months. Prof. Yusuf Hersi and others spent around three more years in jail. Although I could have gone back to my job as Deputy Mayor of Mogadishu, I refused to do so. I asked instead to be transferred to the then Somali Institute of Development Administration and Management (SIDAM), an entity that had been set up by previous civilian governments with the help of the United Nations to train the fledgling civil service of Somalia. I took the option to be a simple lecturer in accounting and financial management because, after the traumatic political imprisonment, I wanted to put the pieces of my life together. I also wanted to cut off my ties with the dictatorship.

An important reason for opting to be a simple lecturer was that I planned to do graduate studies either in Britain or the U.S.A. I knew the U.N. gave yearly scholarships to the teaching staff of SIDAM to pursue further studies. Sure enough, after three years I was awarded a

scholarship and enrolled at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where I obtained an MBA and a Ph.D., after spending five most rewarding years. Furthermore, as part of my recovery, I became an active member of the University's branch of Amnesty International, where we tried to help political prisoners, especially in the Third World, by writing support letters to them and exposing abusive governments.

Upon finishing my studies, I went back to Somalia because I felt that I owed a great deal to my homeland and I wanted to repay some of that debt. However, after spending six months in Mogadishu, I realized that the situation in the country was hopeless and that serious troubles were looming on the horizon. That is why I decided to jump on a job opportunity in Saudi Arabia, and I left Somalia for good in October 1985. When I tried to resign from my job at SIDAM, its Dean, the late Prof. Ibrahim Mahamud Abyan, tried to dissuade me, but I stuck to my guns. Ironically, when the civil war broke out six years later, Abyan, one of the finest of Somali intellectuals and educators, was among the hundreds of innocent civilians the United Somali Congress murdered in cold blood. His crime? He was from the wrong kin group!

Although I was initially bitter about my political imprisonment in Somalia, I don't feel that way anymore. I have now come to terms with that incident. Due to this experience, I was able to change the course of my life. As a result, I was able to obtain degrees and jobs that I never would have dreamed about, because I discovered a meaning of life that transcends the limits of this personal tragedy. As the famous Egyptian woman writer Nawal Al-Saawadi, who spent several years as a political prisoner during the regime of former President Anwar Sadat put it, this kind of painful experience is the price we pay for being honest to our opinions and beliefs. Another important factor that helped me come to terms with my internment experience was a visit I paid to South Africa in October 2002. When I toured Robben Island and saw the miserable 2 x 2 meter cell where the great Mandela (or Madiba, as he is affectionately known) had spent 20 out of his 27 years in the apartheid regime's major prison, I was really humbled, perhaps I should say ashamed of myself, and I totally forgot my old wounds. That is why I decided long ago to forgive Siyaad Barre and his dictatorial regime, because there is no point in dwelling on a past that you cannot change. As they say in Arabic: "*Elli faat, maat*" (what is gone, is dead). I even at times feel thankful and offer prayers or "*duco*" to Col. Ahmed Jili'ow and Ali Adde, former Deputy Mayor of Mogadishu, the

two men who were instrumental in my imprisonment mainly out of clanist animosity. They offered me, unintentionally, a crucial wake-up call that changed my life for the better. Another person who helped me in reaching this decision and in forgiving Barre's regime and its sycophants was my colleague in prison, Ali Ambe (from Burao), with whom I later worked in the same bank here in Saudi Arabia for many years. He made me understand that it was not that ruthless regime that put us in jail, but it was God's way of awakening us to greater future opportunities. Incidentally, I was told that Jili'ow is now stuck in lawless Mogadishu, where he survives by spying on students of Islam in Somalia on behalf of foreign governments. But it is, on the other hand, very disheartening and it is Somalia's great misfortune that some of the same men who caused untold suffering and contributed to the ultimate destruction of the Somali state now want to come back to power and be the leaders of a ruined homeland.

Finally, had I not gone through this traumatic experience and learned from it, I would today be haggling with semi-illiterate, unscrupulous, and clanist-minded former truck drivers, police sergeants, and office messengers over a position in Somalia's new Transitional Federal Government in anarchic Mogadishu. Or, alternatively, I would be living in exile in Europe or North America, like most of the high-ranking officials of Siyaad Barre's regime, surviving on the dole or handouts that the "capitalist," "reactionary" governments of these nations throw at them.

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