

S PARED FROM THE SPEAR

TRADITIONAL SOMALI BEHAVIOUR IN WARFARE



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Table of Contents

Preface	1
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Causes of conflict	11
3. Traditional conduct of warfare	23
4. Traditionally immune groups	29
5. Prisoners of war	45
6. Private property.....	49
7. Conflict and Islam	51
8. Treatment of the wounded	53
9. Weapons and practices prohibited in conflict	55
10. Negotiations and peace settlements	57
11. Conclusion	61

SPARED FROM THE SPEAR

Preface

The disintegration of the Somali Republic in the bitterly protracted internecine wars of the early 1990s, and the associated large-scale displacements of refugees within and beyond the confines of the former state, have tragically highlighted the bellicose tradition in Somali culture. The particularly savage killings and other atrocities perpetrated in the course of what Somalis have come to call 'clan-cleansing' have made the former capital, Mogadishu, notorious, encouraging superficial reporters to paint a general picture of uncontrolled, and uncontrollable, violence in an 'anarchic' population devoid of rules and social conventions or any effective means of conciliation. The implication here is that, at best, Somalis are genetically programmed to murder each other mindlessly.

This, of course, is very far from being true. As elsewhere, violence here occurs in a cultural context and is subject to a complex range of values. Anyone seriously concerned to contribute to the cause of peace and political recovery, needs to have a realistic understanding of the nature and causes of conflict and its constraints in 'traditional' Somali culture. As the contributors emphasise in this timely report on the codes that ideally regulated, and always influenced, the conduct of fighting and the treatment of prisoners and wounded, this predominantly nomadic culture is indeed one in which armed conflict traditionally plays a major role. Sociologically, it follows automatically that conventions existed (and to varying degrees still exist) to regulate conflict, and institutions to facilitate peace-making. Thus, Somali society traditionally offered men a choice of two ideally contrasting, and mutually necessary roles: that of warrior (*waranle*, literally 'spear-bearer') or man of God (*wadaad*). It was the task of the latter not only to mediate between man and God, but also between men in the cause of peace and harmony within the Islamic community.

Of course, many other institutions were regularly mobilised to terminate hostilities, or prevent their outbreak between rival groups. Married women, particularly, who had dual loyalties, on the one hand to their husband's, and on the other, their father's clan (not usually the same), were ideally placed to act as go-betweens, as in fact they still do. The oral poetry which is so highly esteemed in Somali culture was not only employed to fan the flames of inter-clan animosity, but also to promote peace between hostile groups.

Given the frequent recourse to violent confrontation in contesting access to scarce resources (as our contributors to this study detail), these mediatory agencies were regularly invoked. They operated within what amounts to a system of international law, according to which acts of aggression against people and property entitle the victims to compensation according to a general, nation-wide tariff variable only in its details. This tariff of indemnities for what Somalis define as wrongs ('torts' in legal parlance) rather than as crimes, is based on the Islamic shariah code, according to which a man's life is formally valued at 100 camels, and a woman's at 50. This is activated by customary agreements, or treaties (*xeer* in Somali), which, first of all, bind close kinsmen within the clan as those who pay and receive blood-money (*diya*) and other compensation jointly. The whole national system is ultimately conceived as

deriving from these more immediate treaties, or contracts. Today, as in the past, these 'diya-paying groups' within the clan are actually the basic political units in Somali society. These units are larger and more stable among the inter-riverine agro-pastoralists than among the pastoral nomads, who surround them on all sides, where political solidarity, within the framework of kinship ties, is mercurially fluid and changing.

Thus, although prior to their colonial partition, the Somali people did not constitute a single state, these shared compensation arrangements and arbitrating procedures provided a loosely integrated 'national' politico-legal framework that contributed to sentiments of unity based on language and culture. (This, of course, did not exclude sharp regional cultural variations and differences within this wider, globalising framework.)

While these are all already well-documented features of Somali political sociology, the actual conduct of battle and the treatment of captives and wounded has not previously been systematically investigated by researchers. The present collaborative study by a small group of Somali oral historians, thus breaks new ground in exploring in detail the conventions which Somali warriors were expected to observe in the conduct of battle. It highlights the ideal immunity from attack (the *hiri-ma-geydo*) of women, children, men of God, honoured guests, and community leaders. The former fall into a general social distinction drawn by Somalis between the weak and the strong. The weak who lack physical strength, or material resources, are considered to fall under the special protection of God. Hence, their molestation is potentially likely to entail divine retribution. Pragmatic considerations also, of course, make it sensible to treat with respect potential go-betweens (women) and leaders with whom it may prove eventually necessary to negotiate peace terms. The force of these practical constraints is further enhanced by the Somali concept of honour and good-name, and the anxiety to avoid being publicly shamed and held up to general ridicule and contempt. Reputation was a serious issue. Traditionally, one section of the list of nationally recognised indemnities related specifically to verbal insult (*xaal*) which would be claimed just as relentlessly as compensation for death and physical injury. The sensitivity to unmerited insult evident here was fully justified, given the widespread use of poetry as moral commentary, spreading condemnation as well as calumny and character assassination in this pervasively oral culture.

In recreating the atmosphere surrounding feud and fighting in Somali culture before the kalashnikov, our contributors have relied on the memories of well-informed traditional leaders, and the testimony conserved in oral literature, especially poetry. While these sources inevitably conserve a somewhat idealised view of traditional values and behaviour, our contributors are aware of this hazard, and have tried to allow for it in their presentation of this material. Since they do not make any use of the existing sociological literature, their work is entirely original and represents a valuable novel contribution, all the more remarkable for having been accomplished in the present insecure circumstances of the country which are scarcely conducive to dispassionate research. Our authors, moreover, do not claim to have exhaustively treated their subjects, and modestly appeal to readers with more information on these matters to submit it to the ICRC who commissioned the study. The objective is thus to encourage dialogue, and promote an accurate understanding of the past as a valid perspective for considering the present.

In my opinion, even if it is in some respect incomplete, this welcome new research shows how traditional Somali society had its own 'Geneva Convention' with norms and rules of

battle which, like their counterparts in Europe, had primarily ideal force and could be appealed to in assessing personal and group reputations more easily than they could be actually enforced. In the Somali case which is our concern here, these ideals belonged to a familistic culture, where individual and collective honour was a social (and political) resource. The technology of violence was also appropriate to this kinship-based culture. Aggression was generally narrowly focused and accurately targeted, and thus more readily controlled even in this politically uncentralised society of constantly changing alliances. The contemporary technology of death, with the pervasive distribution of automatic and high-powered weapons, and the random and promiscuous killing and wounding which it promotes, obviously radically challenges these traditional values and greatly complicates the process of peace-making.

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1. Introduction

The internal wars that have raged in Somalia over the past six years or so, and still continue to flare up occasionally, have induced feelings of shock and indignation in many people, including some of the Somalis themselves. Many of those who have closely monitored events in Somalia have been given the impression that the Somali people lacked any common traditions or codes of conduct pertaining to warfare. Such a conclusion, no matter how erroneous or unfair, may find justification in the fact that the conduct of current Somali wars has failed to conform to any pattern of logic or morality: residential dwellings have been shelled; private property has been looted and the traditionally immune groups, those "spared from the spear" such as children, women, the aged and the learned men of religion, have been indiscriminately killed or abused. Such atrocities have naturally horrified the world and have reflected negatively on both the Somali people and their culture.

The Somali tragedy has generated a lot of curiosity world-wide regarding whether the Somali people ever had a universally acknowledged set of rules and regulations pertaining to the behaviour of combatants in times of war. It has also given rise to proposals of research into the traditional conventions and war-time practices of Somalis which in fact still continue to operate among some sections of the population. In order to do that, the ICRC and the SRCS commissioned some experts in Somali oral history and literature for the task of researching the material of this study taking into consideration the different geographical settlements of the Somali people. This study is, therefore, based on the interviews conducted by these researchers with many persons who are knowledgeable where Somali history and traditional customs are concerned.

Copies of the resulting draft were then distributed to some scholars within the country and without. These included Somali nationals as well as foreigners. In this final draft many of their recommendations and suggested improvements have been accommodated.

The object of this study is to provide answers to the above mentioned questions by laying out the traditional customary laws of Somalis, especially those of them that related to warfare, and to draw the attention of the Somali general public to the advantages deriving from the application of these rules and the disadvantages attendant upon their dismissal. This project has also been undertaken with a view to demonstrate to all those interested that the long-standing Somali conventions of warfare, whose provisions are generally consistent with those of the Geneva Conventions, existed long before the latter were formulated and adopted.

Somali pastoral society was, and remains, made up of clan groupings in which kinship was based on patrilineal descent from a common ancestor. Those bound together by this kind of kinship tie were obligated to support each other in war and in peace (i.e. economically). Whether it was for the purpose of common defence against the attacks of outsiders or for helping each other out in times of economic hardship, kinsmen were expected to stick together and stand by one another. It was not normally considered proper, however, for kinsmen to unite for the purpose of engaging in acts of provocation or outright aggression against others. Instead, one counted on his kinsmen to dissuade him from transgression, rally to his support if he were wronged, and assist him in accomplishing any commendable goal he

aspired to. Charitable deeds were generally preferred to morally reprehensible actions and attitudes, as indicated by the following words of a man called Abdalla Aaggane:

I have come to place my trust in giving away, rather than
in holding back; and in peace rather than in war.

All people in traditional Somali society shared paternal kinship or affinal ties, and were thus held together by blood as well as socio-economic relationships. In addition, there were considerations of potential marriage relations and, beside one's own lineage, one was also bound to the clan of his/her maternal uncles and that of his/her spouse and in-laws. Therefore, people normally treated one another with respect and proper reserve. The violation of others' rights and disruption of the norm associated with war were attributed to someone who lacked any moral inhibitions. Such a person is certainly the one referred to by the traditional poet in the following line:

Lo! An immoral person cares not about [the devastation of] war.

Since all people were bound to one another by any one, or more, of the afore-mentioned relationships, it could be said that they were all kinsmen and kinswomen, and any war among the members of a society so characterised would ideally be inappropriate and undesirable in accordance with the old wise saying that advises:

Do not rush into a fight; least of all one against kinsfolk.

The customary codes regulating the conduct of warfare, as well as the other traditional conventions adopted with a view to safeguarding the general interest and welfare of society were laid down in times immemorial by wise Somali elders who had the common good at heart. They were subsequently preserved and kept alive by continued reference and application and were, in this manner, passed down the successive generations. Along the way, these codes were added to and modified as new circumstances and novel situations were encountered until they attained a high level of sophistication and specialisation and formed the basis for a complete legal system.

Now, the question may arise of what motivated people to adhere to these rules given that traditional Somalis did not have a common government or any other unifying central authority responsible for their enforcement. In answer, we would like to cite the following factors which, taken together, certainly acted as a strong deterrent against the violation of the traditional conventions pertaining to warfare:

a) Social Pressure

These codes were adopted and sanctioned by society as a whole because they were pragmatically judged to be in the best interest of all, and because they were deemed to ensure adherence to a humanitarian (morally sound) type of behaviour. This made society take certain punitive measures against violators, consisting mainly of condemnation and ostracisation. To traditional Somalis, a people highly sensitive where matters of pride and honour are concerned and who were very keen on attaining social acceptance and approval, such punishment was certainly a very serious one that could not be deliberately incurred.

b) Precedent-setting

Somalis believed in a concept they called 'nabsi' which referred to the changing nature of one's fortunes in life. They held that peoples' material conditions, social positions etc. never remained constant, and that if someone was rich today he could live in poverty tomorrow and vice versa. Likewise if a certain party had got the upper hand in one battle, they could lose the next. If, therefore, they had gone to extremes in their treatment of the enemy the first day, sparing no one and looting or destroying any property they came across, all they could expect on the day of their own defeat would be for them to be subjected to the same or worse treatment, with the enraged and revenge-seeking enemy killing their women and children, burning down their homes and taking away or destroying all their property. Since no group liked to be on the receiving end of such excessive violence, they took great care not to be the first to perpetrate it. They had every reason to believe that the example they set in victory would be the one followed by their opponents in the event of their own defeat. Thus, adherence to the traditional code of behaviour during hostilities was dictated more than anything else by the pragmatic consideration of ensuring protection for one's own vulnerabilities in the swinging fortunes of war.

c) Fear of 'Cuqubo' or Divine Retribution

Even if acts of unsanctioned violence were not deterred by considerations of the vicissitudes of fortune, they were discouraged by fear of 'cuqubo' a curse that Somalis believed was brought down upon transgressors as a form of divine retribution. Somalis held that those who perpetrated cruelty on the helpless, holy and revered persons, animals and useful trees, etc. would be unfailingly punished by Allah in one form or another. In this regard, a Somali saying maintains that:

Neither the plaintive cry of a kinsman nor the distressed squeal of a dikdik fail to be answered.

It was commonly believed that the moment someone wantonly killed another, or did so over a trivial matter, he ceased to be at peace with himself and lost his mental and psychological stability. It was also held that such a person would never come across any good and that his every step will be dogged by misfortune for the rest of his life. He would become a social pariah, with people pointing him out to one another and saying "he is a cursed one with blood on his conscience. Avoid him!" Even among places, that spot in which an unwarranted act of excessive violence was committed, especially against those protected by custom, achieved widespread notoriety and was avoided by nomadic hamlets as a site for their settlement. Abdi Gahayr, referring to a town in which he was imprisoned, said the following:

May the chant of [Koran] students not come from thee;
And may wedding dances not be held in thee;
And may neither the camels that roar calling out to one another;
Nor sheep and goats go out to graze from thee;
How accursed a site this place is!
Have [pious] mullahs from the Ashraaf clan;
And [helpless] orphans been killed in it?!

d) Providing for Eventual Peace

Pastoral nomads were engaged in a constant struggle with nature for survival in the harsh conditions of their environment. The demands of life consumed most of their energies for the

greater part of the year and left them with no extra time or resources to engage in prolonged conflicts. This, in addition to the fact that Somalis were bound together by a web of kinship relations, made them try their best to limit hostilities to moderate levels that could be readily reversed in order to allow for the restoration of peace and harmony. This could be made possible only by fighting with restraint and observing the code of honour during hostilities.

e) The Influence of Islam

The Somali people's adherence to Islam also contributed significantly to the reinforcement of their traditional code of wartime behaviour, since those acts that were proscribed by Somali custom were also forbidden by Islam, while the categories of persons, animals and things that were accorded immunity by tradition were also protected by Islam. Somalis referred to this fact in their common saying that:

Men's [sound] judgement concurs with that of the book of Allah.

Islam reinforced Somalis' traditional fear of 'cuqubo' with the fear of damnation in hell that awaits those who commit barbarous acts of violence which violate the ordinances of Allah, regardless of whether such acts are committed in war-time or in peace-time.

f) The Enforcement Powers of Society and Clan

Apart from all the foregoing deterrents there was the physical punitive power of society which it could exercise against that clan which engaged in wanton aggression or was guilty of committing flagrant violations of the traditional code of behaviour governing the conduct of hostilities and the protection of immune groups. Such punishment took the form of either joining the fight against the villain group or providing their adversaries with weapons and other supplies.

The lineage group (especially at the diya-paying level) also exercised quite some control over the behaviour of its individual members and penalised errant ones who violated the established custom with such measures as physical detention, the slaughter of favourite animals (maraado) or, in the case of a member being guilty of murder, handing him over to the family of the deceased for execution (qisaas).

Oral literature, an important component of Somali culture, has an abundance of poems, proverbs and sayings which promote peace and extol its virtues while pointing out the loss and devastation of war. Some examples of these are:

Do not fight: if you win, you pay with your stock; and if you lose, you pay with your life.

War results in the death of a son, but not in the birth of one.

Acting on your bitterness begets you more bitterness

If some people do not act more sensibly than others, there would be no rainfall. (In Somali culture, rain is the symbol of everything good and desirable).

Men's ideal bedding is peace.

Is wrongfulness not a hidden cause of death [lurking for you] in every path you take?!

Is peace not [the equivalent of] food provisions that you always carry with \$ you ?!

It is peace [rather than war] that provides milk.

[All] men share three things:

1. The name [i.e. man];
2. The [amount of their] blood compensation;
3. The type of sex (i.e. their maleness);

But they differ in three things:-

1. The ability to forget past grievances;
2. The ability to concentrate on issues relevant to the present;
3. The ability to foresee the future.

What you cannot attain through calm reasoning, you will not by affecting craziness;

People are not subdued by [the threat]: by Allah, I will decapitate you!

He who repeatedly pricks a 'darkayn' tree, and then passes under it, shall have his skin burned off, Allah willing;

A vessel cannot hold more than its capacity; may the dam [of patience] not be broken down! (from a poem by Saahid Qamaan)

Thus, although war was a constant feature in the life of the traditional pastoralist society, acts of excessive brutality were seldom committed. This was due mainly to the strict conventional codes that prevented hostilities from getting out of hand.

It should be mentioned that the events narrated in this study are not based on written history but are mainly orally transmitted stories and historical accounts which have probably undergone some alteration in the process of transmission. We would therefore like to remind anyone who detects any imprecisions or shortcomings that nothing has been deliberately distorted and that any mistakes that may be found are solely the result of either ignorance or oversight, offences which are pardonable according to the Somali saying:

God, forgive us not for partiality, but punish us not on account of our ignorance.

We would also like to apologise for our failure to draw the examples of this study from all the Somali inhabited regions due to the state of insecurity that prevailed in the country during the time of the research, the scarcity of funds and the limited time available. We believe, however, that those we have used give a more or less sufficient picture of war related customary laws in traditional Somali society. We realise that there are probably stories and other literary items which could have served as better illustrations than the ones used here. We intend to add any new material that reaches us to the second edition of this booklet if such material is found to be useful and interesting. We therefore welcome anyone who would like to contribute any literary items, accounts of historical events or suggestions for improvement relating to the subject of this study.

This study contains stories, poems, proverbs and wise sayings that illustrate the traditional causes of conflict, the methods of conflict resolution and the ways of protecting the lives and the rights of vulnerable people and those deserving respectful treatment. These groups who came under the general category of 'biri-ma-geydo' or 'those immune from the 'attack of the spear' included women, children, the aged, the chronically ill, protected ones, guests, the enemy captives and wounded, traditional leaders, etc.. Likewise, with a view to safeguarding the life and welfare of society, there were certain animals, plants and material property that enjoyed immunity from abuse during armed conflicts. These conventions were acknowledged and subscribed to by the majority of the Somalis. Although it sometimes happened that some of these conventions were broken, these were isolated incidents whose effect was nowhere as widespread or as catastrophic as that of the current civil war, a situation which could have resulted from the abandonment of long-standing traditions and conventions. But this study is a historical one dealing with the way things were in the past and as such, does not contain any account of events from the civil strife currently going on in Somalia.

2. The Causes of Conflict

Somalis were, and still are, mainly livestock rearing nomads blessed with an abundance of animal wealth comprising sheep, goats, camels, cattle and animals of the horse family (horses, donkeys and mules). There also was, and still is, an important part of Somali society that engaged in soil cultivation in addition to animal husbandry and still others who relied for their livelihood on soil cultivation alone. Generally, conflicts among traditional Somalis were caused by any one or more of the following:

1. Camels and Horses
2. Grazing and Water
3. Women
4. Pride and Arrogance
5. Farms
6. Religious Sects
7. Culture

2.1. Camels and Horses

Camels and horses constituted the only property whose looting in time of war was sanctioned by Somali custom due to the high value attached to these animals by society. For example, camels were the economic mainstay of Somali nomads providing them with milk, meat and hides. They were also used as burden animals. The camel enjoyed this important position because of its exceptional ability to endure the harsh climatic conditions of Somali country. Referring to the camel's extraordinary powers of endurance, a poet called Omar Istreliya said in a composition dedicated to the animal:

It is a living boulder placed by God in the wilderness;
Damel and her young ones are as vital to life as the tendons of one's back;
Had it not grown out of solid rock it would not have been so highly
appreciated.

Another poet, Samatar Bahnan, pointing out the usefulness and indispensability of camels to his wife, had this to say:

At Aqallaale when people could not move on account of hunger and thirst;
When the starving mothers could not get so much as a mouthwash;
A pot of sour milk hung from the side of your loaded burden camels;
Whenever you drank some, you would refill it with more fresh milk;
One should pay off a debt with cattle, goats or sheep;
But the camels, may they be killed by a lion, should be kept as security for
oneself;
You should not trust them with anyone else even if it were your own father.

Apart from its economic importance, the camel also performed an important social function since it was the only acceptable medium for the payment of blood compensation and bride

wealth. In fact, camels provided the standard of measurement for all wealth. That is why Somalis have a saying that:

Camels are camels; and they could only be assessed in terms of camels.

The status of camels in Somali pastoralist society is best reflected in the words of the following camel song in which the camel owner addresses his favourite she-camel, placing her before his woman and after himself in importance:

The consequences following from,
The death of a wife,
[Are] the combing of one's hair,
And the contracting of a [new] marriage.

And [resulting from] your death,
Would be empty milk bowls,
And hunger.

And [resulting from] my own death,
Would be destroyed homes
And parental bereavement.

The importance attached to camels made them a symbol of wealth and social rank. Generally, a man without a large stock of camels did not have much social significance or political weight. That was in fact so true that Abdi - Gahayr, a renowned classical poet, went so far as asserting in one of his famous compositions, that a man without camels, and the social status attendant on their possession, in this world, could not hope to fare any better in the life after death:

The male baby camel born to Idin - Bacasa
And the young camels that were in her company;
Were the source of benefit even to the early followers [of the Prophet];
Even in the hereafter being without camels has not been recommended.

Thus, in the traditional pastoralist society, every man tried to acquire camels in any way possible, as can be seen from the words of the following camel song:

Whether acquired through legitimate means or by force;
As long as they are in the pen;
In neither case are they undesirable.

This often meant the launching of raids on other settlements with the aim of capturing their camel herds. Naturally, this led to clashes between raiders and defenders resulting in death and injuries to both parties, and escalating sometimes into a prolonged conflict between the groups involved. Such an outcome of camel-looting raids could only be expected, since no one could own a herd of camels for long unless he was willing to defend it, and possessed the capability to do so. Describing the constant alert and apprehension that went along with maintaining a camel herd, a poet called Abdi Galayah maintained that:

Acquiring Boga and Hemaal she-camels is not an easy or risk-free enterprise;
A man who does not strap gunpowder to his back does not continue to lead
Baar, the she-camel, out to graze;
Slain men, blaring horns and bullets; wailing and shouts;
And a day in which a hundred die between two groups;
It is amid crisis and hostilities that Barah the she-camel is reared.

The risks involved in camel-looting adventures are expressed by the old Somali saying that:

To go on a camel rustling mission results in blood-covered heads.

Nevertheless, anyone who met his death while trying to loot camels or retrieve them was considered by Somali pastoralists to have died honourably in the course of a worthy undertaking. This attitude is depicted in the saying:

What men [should] die for is a camel-related operation.

Thus it came to be that as long as there were camels in Somalia, there were also disputes and clashes revolving around their possession. This is expressed well by the words of the following camel song:

Since the time they were first acquired,
And the men [who owned them] were beaten back;
They have been the subject of [constant] dispute;
And no settlement has yet been reached.

Somalis even claimed that camels belonged to no one in particular, and that looting them was a lawful enterprise. One of their sayings in this regard maintained that:

Red-haired camels are [the property of] whichever man happens to be nearest them.

Or according to another version of the same,

Red-haired camels are the [property of] any man who gets hold of them last.

Alluding to the popular theory that camels were the common heritage of all Somali men, and that anyone's possession of them was only transient, Sayid Mohammed Abdallah Hassan said in a poetic message addressed to the men of a distant settlement:

Look well after the camels for they belong to us all.

The belief in the theoretically common ownership of camels was even stronger where a single clan was concerned, since the herds of individual members were regarded to be the corporate property of the group. The following short story provides an apt illustration of this fact:

There was once a man who owned a large herd of camels, but who would not give milk even to the occasional guest. His herd stood out from the rest of the herds because it had a white she-camel in it. One day a raiding party attacked the camel

grazing grounds and looted the herd with the white she-camel. Most of the notorious owner's kinsmen rejoiced secretly in his misfortune and wanted to make no effort to help him retrieve the camels. However, one of them objected to this attitude pointing out that "those who have looted the camels will not say that they had taken away the camels belonging to such and such a man, but will rather brag that they had made off with the camels belonging to clan so and so. The next thing we know, everyone will mount looting raids against us, wanting to drive away the rest of our herds because all potential looters will be emboldened when they are told that our clan is unable to retrieve its looted camels". The men were so convinced by the logic of this argument that they immediately put together a pursuit force that set out after the raiders and retrieved from them the herd with the white she-camel.

Besides camels, horses were the other animals which enjoyed the general esteem and appreciation of the Somali nomads. They were used as a means of travel, communication and for displays of splendour during celebrations. The horse was also the traditional warrior's indispensable companion in the battlefield as indicated in the following lines of "geeraar" by Raage Ugaas, composed in praise of his favourite stallion, Walhad.

If men are fighting somewhere, hand to hand;
And spears are hurled from one side to another;
Through him I can restore the wholeness of my heart;
Is he not like a son given you by God;
Or like a brother, blood of your parent's blood?

He deflects from my side;
The spear that quarters the flesh;
The arrow tipped with black poison;
The hurled javelin swishing through the air;
And the sling-shots of bullets.
Is he not like a renowned cleric;
Well-versed in reciting the Forty Suras;
Who for your protection will read;
Those of the Forenoon and the Night;
After you have slaughtered a ram for him?

(translated by B. W. and Sheila Andrzejewski)

However, the greatest value of horses derived directly from the importance of camels since the horse was indispensable for maintaining camel herds as well as for looting or retrieving them. This is illustrated by the following lines from a poem by Duale Fagase who boasted to the Dervishes:

Even the Sayid has shied away from interfering with our camels;
[Because] they are reared with the help of a strong horse and a brave fighter.

The many songs composed by Somalis in praise of the horse's role in camel-related fighting included the following:

If during the first half of the day;

The camels are taken away;
And the news spreads around;
In the late afternoon;
How you would sway in your gallop;
Through all corners of the Nugal [valley]!

Horses, having been a symbol of honour and grace, were sometimes added to payments of bridewealth and bloodprice in order to make them more attractive. They were also the most precious thing to be given away as a gift. Sayid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, expressing his reluctance to part with his legendary horse, Hiin Finiin, that was required to be included in the bride wealth payment for his intended bride, Fadumo Islaan, finally gave the animal away with the words:

It is a bay; some horse colours are more attractive than others;
The straight-limbed animal is in a special category by itself;
It is dearer to me than anything else but the letter of religion;
But since a sultan worthy of my respect has requested it from me;
Take hold of its reins; I would not have honoured anyone else with [such a gift].

The great value of horses and their wide-ranging uses were summarised by the saying:

If you want wealth, stay close to the bay mare;
If you want a wife, stay close to the bay mare;
And if you want elegance, stay close to the bay mare.

Since horses were held in such high esteem, it was inevitable that they would be looted, just as camels were, and that they would be at the centre of many disputes and the cause of many a violent confrontation.

2.2. Water and Grazing

The greater part of Somali country is characterised by being dry and semi-arid. During the long dry seasons, people and livestock congregated around the wells and other water points (i.e. before the advent of artificial ponds and drilled bore holes). That brought about friction and quarrels over the sharing of scarce water resources and over priority in the drinking and watering schedule. Also, due to the scarcity of places with accessible underground water, there was constant strife among the various clans for control of these water sources, which sometimes took the form of armed confrontation.

Among cultivators, in general, disputes arose over irrigation turns with usually someone violating the agreed arrangement for the distribution of available irrigation water. The resulting quarrels had the potential of developing into a confrontation between lineage groups.

Areas of good grazing were likewise the object of constant disputes, with the resident clans trying to reserve them for the exclusive use of their own herds and other groups trying to have

access to them or to completely supplant the occupants. Usually, grazing-related clashes happened when, after a long dry season, the rains came to one area before the rest of the country and many groups together with their herds moved simultaneously to a locality which was reported to have abundant fresh grass and foliage. The excessive concentration of people and livestock in a single spot with a limited area gave rise to friction and clashes which were sometimes ignited by such trivial issues as youth quarrels during evening dances or by the attempts of owners to claim back some long lost animals which were suddenly found among other herds.

2.3. Women

Another cause of conflict among Somalis in general was related to the abduction of married women or the unredressed sexual abuse of a maiden. It used to happen in the past that a woman who was married or betrothed to a certain man would be kidnapped by another for the purpose of making her become his own wife. A famous example of this is the story of the woman who became widely known by the name of "Tafa-Dhiig" meaning "the one with the bloody dress hem". She was so named because of the bloody nature of the fighting that took place between Ali Duullane and Af-Hakame, two men who vied bitterly for her, and their respective lineage segments:

"The One With The Bloody Dress Hem" was first betrothed to Ali Duullane who had paid a generous bride price for her. She was sent to Ali's settlement in a caravan of camels loaded with the components of the matrimonial home, foods and other domestic articles. On the way, the bride and her caravan were waylaid and intercepted by Af-Hakame, a man who belonged to a different segment of the same lineage section as Ali. He was so struck by the beauty of the bride that he decided to keep her for himself saying that Ali did not deserve such an attractive woman and that he was the right man for her. With this, he ordered the camels unloaded and started to prepare for the wedding while sending a handsome bride price to the woman's family.

News of this incident was widely circulated, and it became the talk of the pastoralists in both near and far-away settlements. It created a lot of tension between the groups involved, and the fires of hostility were fanned by those who desired an armed clash between the two men and their followers. To achieve this end, they composed provocative poems, one of which included the following lines:

Camels changed hands by force; That is normal misfortune for men;
He gets castrated he who gets his woman taken away by another..

Sufficiently incensed, Ali Duullane raided Af-Hakame's settlement while the men were away and carried away the contested woman. Those wishing to further exacerbate the crisis continued with their inflammatory verses which were directed now at Af-Hakame and his kinsmen. One of those verses ran as follows:

That woman who resembled the sun, or the rainy sky;
That woman who wore the "ureji" light-coloured dress,

That woman who looked as fresh as the cloth fabrics in [the stores of] Aden;
That woman for whom fattened camels were loaded down to their heels;
She, with the [soft and clean] feet of a priest, falls alternately in love with
either man;
So, this time, has She With the Graceful Gait run off with Ali?

The matter came finally to a head when Ali and Af-Hakame, each at the head of a force of kinsmen, decided to settle the issue on the battlefield. In the fierce fighting that followed, many men lost their lives, including the two arch-rivals and contenders for the love of "The One With The Bloody Dress Hem."

Commenting later on the folly that had led to such unnecessary loss, Ismail Mire said in one of his poems:

Af-Hakame reaped the fruits of the crisis and tension [he had created];
He planned to outlive Ali while he married the Radiant One ;
And the other one had a broad-bladed spear made [to kill him with];
And concocted poison [for the same purpose];
O men! Arrogance brings about one's downfall;
Be ever mindful of that!

There were also frictions that developed among young males in the evening dance circles where two or more youths would compete for the attention of the star girl in the dance, with the matter occasionally developing into a physical fight. At other times, the star dancer's brother or father would come to the dance wanting to take her away and some youths would try to prevent him from doing so whereupon a quarrel and a fight would take place, with the likelihood of this escalating into an armed confrontation between lineage groups.

In the agro-pastoralist society of the south, sharp disputes concerning women took place, leading sometimes to a total breach of relations between the two groups involved. This usually arose from a violation of the code of conduct relating to women. For example...

Two clans indigenous to the area of Wanlaweyn ceased to intermarry since a young woman belonging to one of them was abducted by a young man from the other, married and kept for a week (the duration of the wedding festival) and then returned to her family without the expected restitution payment. The young woman's family was so enraged that they kept their daughter at home and shaved off her hair except for a little patch on the front of the head (symbolising that their daughter was not yet ready for marriage). The groom's family launched an attack and abducted the young woman again, which led the bride's people to send a pursuit force that retrieved her and took her back home again. This series of events resulted in a serious quarrel between the two parties which necessitated the intervention of neutral groups before the matter got out of hand. Finally, the two parties agreed to never marry from each other again.

The agro-pastoralists had a custom which required someone who had eloped with a betrothed woman to make a restitution payment called "min-dumis" or 'the destruction of a home' meaning that such a person had destroyed a family in the making.

2.4. Pride and Arrogance

The worst wars in traditional nomadic society were sometimes those arising from the defiant refusal of one of the parties or individuals involved in a dispute to submit to the process of arbitration coupled with arrogance and a slighting attitude toward the adversary, as happened when:

A man called Aadan Galaydh refused to contribute a lone she-camel to the blood compensation of a man killed by his own son, and added insult to injury by replying mockingly to those soliciting the she-camel from him "I would have contributed the she-camel were it not for the distinctive brand burnt onto its skin! I cannot so much as bear the thought of a she-camel bearing my own mark grazing with camels other than her own similarly branded herd!" Despite the repeated pleas of kinsmen as well as those of his son who had perpetrated the killing, Aadan was steadfast in his refusal to part with the she-camel. His attitude resulted in the suspension of the mediation and reconciliation efforts and the outbreak of open hostilities between his own group and that of the murdered man. In the ensuing feuds and fighting, the first casualty was Aadan's son whose life he had refused to buy with a single she-camel, although his stock of the animals was exceptionally large. This particular war proved to be one of the fiercest and most prolonged in the history of nomadic clan wars, and resulted in considerable loss of life on both sides. Aadan himself was killed in battle by Boos the Single-Eyed, who had been slighted and underestimated by Aadan and his group. In a raid, they captured him and three of his brothers, killed his brothers in front of his own eyes, and then chose to release him with the words, "this single-eyed moron is of no consequence. Let him go so he can fetch water for his aged mother!" When still alive but mortally wounded, Aadan was asked, "now what have you got to say?" His parting words were "I have been deluded by wealth! When I had ability, I did not have the wisdom; now that I am wise, I do not have the ability".

Generally, those wars that had pride and arrogance as their underlying theme reached the level of intensity they did because of the disrespect born out of blinding arrogance on the part of one of the protagonists which was also usually coupled with a condescending statement. It was the words that rankled more than the act itself, and rekindled the desire for revenge and more revenge in the heart of the targeted person anytime he recalled them or had others repeat them to him. As the following line from an old poem puts it; .

Uncharitable speech creates poison and venom.

And according to another poem,

Speech has the same power as the dagger that [can] take your life away.

It has also been said that,

Foul language removes you from a state of peace, and does not come to your help in a fight.

Thus, it was often the bitter taste of disrespectful and condescending words rather than the deliberate act of transgression that ignited some of the more intense and long-lasting feuds among the pastoralists.

2.5. Farms

There also was, and still is, a significant section of Somali society who, in addition to raising livestock, engaged in soil cultivation and sedentary farming, and some who totally depended on agriculture for their livelihood. These people are settled mainly in the area between the two rivers, Juba and Shabelle, the region of Jigjiga and the districts of Borama and Gebiley. Among them, there sometimes also arose conflicts, although these were less significant, in terms of their magnitude and frequency of occurrence, than the wars of the pastoral nomads.

Generally, two groups clashed over land rights (this being the main cause of conflict among the cultivators) if the disputed piece of land had originally been communal property utilised by all for grazing their animals and then one group decided unilaterally to convert it to farmland and claim it as its own exclusive property. The heated arguments resulting from this could sometimes develop into an armed conflict between clans. For the most part, however, their conflicts were limited to personal quarrels over rent or the demarcation of farm boundaries.

In the regions of Bay and Bakool, farmers' conflicts often took the form of disputes over farm boundaries involving a practice that is known locally as *Dacar-siib* or "aloe uprooting": the most common way of marking farm boundaries was to plant a row of aloe plants along the borderline between two adjacent plots. It sometimes happened that an unscrupulous farmer would sneak out at night and uproot the aloes and then proceed to replant them along a new line some distance into his neighbour's plot thus shrinking its size while enlarging that of his own. The argument arising from these acts resulted sometimes in a widening of the conflict to involve the respective clans of the original disputants. Such incidents did take place despite the fact that the inter-riverine people were a relatively peaceful people who often prayed that:

May Allah not throw us into the fire [of hostilities] ignited by a wicked man.

It also happened sometimes that someone would drive his animals to graze in the farm of another when the crop was still unharvested, thus causing it to be ruined. Such an action could also lead to violence and group conflict which, nevertheless, rarely went out of control. Even in such cases, recourse to violence was made only if the offending party refused to pay the necessary compensation.

2.6. Religious Sects

In addition to the foregoing causes of war, most Somalis were also involved in religious and territorial wars pitting them against neighbouring peoples of other religious and ethnic affiliations. Likewise, religion-based clashes related to different interpretations of Islam did sometimes occur among the Somalis themselves. Of these the most famous is the war of the Bardhere Community whose events were related to us as follows:

In the land between Afgoye and Wanlaweyn, which once came under the rule of the Sultanate of the Geledi, only the Qadiriya Sufi sect of Islam was practised, and this was headed by the Sultan himself. A mullah by the name of Sheikh Hassan Jeberow tried to initiate an Ahmediya brotherhood in the same area, but his efforts were thwarted by the sultanate. Sheikh Jeberow migrated therefore to the area of Bardhere in 1820 and there he successfully established the Ahmediya brotherhood whose followers engaged in cultivation and religious study. The centre was called 'the Bardhere Community'. After the passing away of Sheikh Jeberow, he was succeeded as leader of the Community by Sharif Ibrahim with Sharif Abdirahman as his deputy.

Sultan Yusuf Ahmed of the Geledi strongly resented the success and growing appeal of the Ahmediya sect based in Bardhere which he saw as a threat to his own Qadiriya branch. He, therefore, decided to destroy it. To this end, he ordered his subjects and co-religionists to prepare for a jihad campaign to eradicate the offending community which threatened the existence of their own sect. This was done in 1843 when Sultan Yusuf, at the head of an army of about forty thousand men, launched an attack on the Bardhere community which became the scene of intense fighting and merciless killing. The members of the community, who were outnumbered by a ratio of five to one, were conquered and brutally massacred. Among the casualties were Sharif Ibrahim and Sharif Abdirahman, the two leaders of the community. Also, the community's homes and farms were burned down completely. The ruins kept smouldering for a long time and Bardhere was a desolate and uninhabited place for the following twenty years or so.

In another confrontation of religious communities, Sayid Mohammed Abdulle Hassan arrived from Arabia towards the end of the 19th century bringing with him a new Sufi sect called the Salihya and calling on the people to take up arms and launch a jihad on the foreigners who had appropriated their country and were trying to change their religion. However, he soon found himself locked in a bitter ideological conflict with the leaders of the already established Qadiriya and Ahmediya sects, who felt threatened by his new brotherhood and suspected him of aspiring to attain political power through religion. In his turn, Sayid Mohammed accused these leaders of being stooges used by the colonial powers to undermine his freedom movement. The antagonism between the two camps reached its highest point when in 1909 Sayid Mohammed's Dervishes executed Sheikh Aways Mohammed Al-Barawi (better known as Aways Al-Qadiri) who was the leader of the Qadiriya sect in the south and had his seat at the village of Biyoley.

2.7. Culture

It should also be noted that the Somali culture itself contributed, to some extent, to the promotion of violence and the resolution of conflict through the use of force. A man who was engaged in killing and looting was usually admired and praised, while a peace advocate was scorned and dismissed as being weak and worthless. Also, Somali oral history has preserved a disproportionately large number of stories related to those men who had achieved notoriety for their aggressive attitudes and their war-mongering. This may be attributed to the harsh conditions of life in the nomadic setting which mandated constant competition for the limited

natural resources available (e.g. water, grazing and animal stocks) and the culture of raids and camel looting which conditioned a person to always brace himself for attacks and their associated shocks and to distance himself from any appearance of softness and sentimentality. Such a difficult existence forced everyone to try to get more, rather than less, of his share and to brag about any wealth he had secured in this manner, as is demonstrated in the following short poem with which a poet wooed his beloved:

O daughter of Diriye, our saddles are kept [ready] outside;
We are a people who have benefited by attacks and raids;
[So] just travel hither; I will take you to a home full of fermented camel milk.

The bellicose attitudes thus evolved tended often to encourage friction and clashes. Nonetheless, the traditions of fighting with honour and observing the immunity code were never completely abandoned.

3. The Traditional Conduct of Warfare

In speaking of the traditional Somali society, we are not referring to an extinct people who used to exist a long time ago. We are rather referring to the customs, attitudes and beliefs of, mainly, the Somali pastoralists, a culture which is still in place, although it has been affected by many modern influences. When undertaking this exposition on the war culture of such a society, we have in mind an audience of mainly young people who have been born and brought up in the towns, and for whom this way of life seems something that belongs in the past. In this, we are influenced by the dictum that "only when you know your past can you chart your future." One should abandon the negative aspects of one's past culture, while adopting its more positive parts.

3.1 The pastoral nomads

Before going into a description of the positive elements in the culture of earlier Somalis, it is probably more appropriate at this point to shed some light on the nature of war in traditional Somali society. Different war operations in the inter-clan wars of the past were given different names in accordance with the specific objective that each of them was intended to achieve. Therefore, war operations could be classified into the following:

1. Offensive or Raid (*Duullaan*)
2. Pursuit (*Raacdo*)
3. Rearguard Action (*Gaaddan*)
4. Commando Action. (*Wareemato*)

Following is a description of each of these operations:

3.1.1. Offensive or Raid (*Duullaan*)

This was a large force formation that had been assembled for the purpose of carrying out an attack on the enemy. When the force had been fully mobilised and its provisions readied, a commander was chosen and acclaimed, and his lieutenants (who would take over command in the event of his death or incapacitating injury) also appointed.

The qualities sought in a commander were bravery, knowledge of war tactics and possession of force management skills. He was expected to be a leader who never abandoned his wounded men and who abstained from any act of war that would disgrace his lineage. In addition, the force leader was supposed to have an awe-striking personality, and to have the reputation of having luck on his side. Finally, he should have led his men to victory in past engagements.

Usually, an attack force was made up of the fighters of a single clan, or those from two or three related lineages who had the same interests and lived in the same area of settlement. The commander started the organisation of the force by dividing his men into units according to their clan or sub-clan affiliation. He did this so that no unit would abandon its wounded members. Next, he would take stock of the total number of weapons carried by the force and

its different categories as well as the quantity of ammunitions available so that he could ensure their balanced distribution to the various units.

When the men were ready to move, the commander would announce the names of the poet and the fortune-teller of the force for the duration of that particular operation, the different routes to be taken by the different units of the force and their point of reassembly prior to launching the attack.

When the force had reached a place that was within attacking distance from the enemy settlement, the commander would dispatch a reconnaissance party with the mission of gathering information on enemy whereabouts, the location of the grazing grounds of their camels, whether they had been forewarned to the impending attack or not, etc. He would also tell them to meet him upon their return at a specific time and location .

When the scouts had returned with certain information, the commander would order the force to kill some animals for meat, water the horses, tighten their shoe-straps and, in general, get ready for the action ahead. While, on his part, he would take his lieutenants aside so they could together put the final touches to the plan of attack. When all preparations had been completed, he would mount a horse or a camel and address the men of the force, giving them his final instructions related to their conduct during the operation.

The behaviour of the commander and his men during the raid was normally determined by the objectives of that particular operation, which would have been clearly defined beforehand. Generally, attack operations had either of two aims, and were named accordingly: there were *dhiig-doon* or "blood-seeking" and *dhaqan-doon* or "wealth-seeking" raids. The two were the same, however, as far as organisation and planning were concerned. The leader specified the nature of the attack to his men and, in the case of a "blood-seeking" or murderous operation, gave out the following instructions which were to be strictly followed:

1. There should be no violation of the traditional Somali war conventions;
2. We should not disgrace our lineage; we must fight with integrity and moral reserve;
3. Any male member of the enemy, who is not covered by traditional immunity, should not be spared;
4. The weak and vulnerable members of the enemy such as women, children and the aged should be left unharmed;
5. The men of religion who are loaded with holy books in the service of Allah's cause should be left alone;
6. Those individuals who are unconcerned with, and oblivious to, the war and who are not involved in the fighting, should not be killed;
7. We should not abandon our wounded on the battlefield. We should rather fight tenaciously to rescue them and evacuate them to safety;

8. The wounded of the enemy must not be finished off; you should rather leave them alone;
9. If certain men belonging to the enemy (specified by their names) are taken alive, they should not be killed but delivered to the commander;
10. If one of us pledges his personal protection to a man from the enemy, or if a captured man belonging to the enemy invokes the name of a member of our clan, and declares that he seeks the protection of that particular kinsman of ours, he should not be touched with harm;
11. You should concentrate on looting the horses and camels and driving away as many of these animals as possible. You must also confiscate whatever weapons you can find;
12. You should leave the cleft-hoofed animals (i.e. cattle, sheep and goats) for the use of weak household members; and if a woman comes to you crying on account of a particular animal, then leave it behind for her.
13. The sanctity of private homes should not be violated, and their contents should not be touched, except for the purpose of getting a drink of water;

The above set of instructions was given out in the particular case of serious hostility when the objectives of the raid had been set out as being: to exact revenge, to loot the enemy's stocks of camels and horses, and to kill any adult male from the enemy not protected by the provisions of traditional immunity.

In certain parts of Somali country, the following directions were added to the above list of instructions in the event that the raid was being launched against the settlement of a related lineage:

1. The body of a man who is killed should not be searched for gain and any property that he had with him should not be confiscated;
2. The bodies of the enemy dead should not be mutilated or burned; and particularly inhuman methods of killing such as choking or strangulation should not be used;

Although it was natural for anyone leading a raid to hope for the success of his operation, the careful commander usually expected to meet with any of three eventualities and made his plans accordingly. These were:

- That the enemy had not been forewarned and was therefore completely uninformed and unprepared for his attack.
- That the enemy had been alerted to the impending attack and had taken defensive measures including the deployment of its fighters around its livestock herds. In such a case, there would be no alternative to joining battle with the enemy, whatever the outcome.

- That the enemy had learned about the attack and had therefore moved away together with its animal stocks, in which case his force would hit an empty settlement, and would therefore suffer from the effects of hunger and thirst.

If events went according to the first of these scenarios, and the raid was successful, a poem of boast and exultation would be composed and sung by the poet of the force on the way back home.

3.1.2. Pursuit (*Raacdo*)

The pursuit force was one that was mobilised for the purpose of giving chase to the raiding force that had killed people and looted stock, or that had not killed any people but had only made off with livestock.

3.1.3. Rear-guard (*Gaaddan*)

The rear-guard was made up of a band of warriors who were deployed behind the main raiding force on its return journey so they could protect it from attacks to the rear. Such a formation was also called *Raacdo-Reeb*, literally meaning "Those who hold back a pursuit force".

3.1.4. Commando (*Wareemato*)

This was the name given to a small force that set out with the specific mission of launching a surprise attack into enemy territory, killing some people and returning quickly to its own settlement following the successful completion of its task.

3.2 The Agro-Pastoralists (in the land between the two rivers)

Among Somali agro-pastoralists, specifically those who lived in the land between the two rivers, the management of a community's fighting force was the responsibility of two men who carried the titles of *Malaaq* and *Garaad* respectively. The *Malaaq* was the chief of war operations and military commander whose duty was to lead the tribal (or communal) force into battle, while the *Garaad* played the role of assistant to the *Malaaq* and was responsible for mobilising the clan force. During an operation, he took his position at the rear of the force, exhorting his men to go forward while keeping an eye on malingers and potential deserters. Both titles were permanent, and their holders were selected by the council of community elders.

Both the *Malaaq* and *Garaad* were expected to be men of great fortitude and exceptional courage who would never run away from a fight or display any signs of fear. In the unlikely event that one of them did so, he would be severely punished and stripped of his title. In addition, the strong social stigma associated with his action would even render his daughters unmarriageable. That is why the people of this area have a saying that:

A *Malaaq* only goes forward, but does not run away [in fear]; a *Garaad* may only maneuver, but may not turn back.

The people of the two rivers accorded great respect at all times to their *Malaaqs* and *Garaads* and readily carried out their instructions as evidenced by the proverb;

To an elephant, its tusks are impressive; and to any man, his own *Malaaq* is impressive.

Also one of the war-related customs of this mainly agricultural part of Somali society required that the fighters descended from the first-born son of the common lineage ancestor go into battle ahead of the rest, thus usually incurring an unproportionally high number of casualties. There is a dance song, for example, which makes the exhortation:

O [descendants of] *Hiyaamow!* the front position is yours; refuse not the feeding of vultures [on your dead flesh].

If one of the two sides in a fight retreated in defeat, it was against the customary rules of war to pursue it any further.

In the case of intra-Rahanwein wars, the *Malaaqs* and the *Garaads* urged their men to confiscate as many of the enemy's weapons and other fighting gear as possible, but forbade them to loot any livestock whatsoever, or to plunder any other private property. The looting of animals was, however, permitted during wars with non-Rahanwein clans who were the first to engage in such a practice.

Due to the fact that the inhabitants of the land between the two rivers were mainly settled farmers, no displacement of people or occupation of territory normally resulted from their conflicts. The fighters of the victorious clan usually marched triumphantly to their own settlement, celebrating their battle success with jubilant dance and song.

4. Traditionally Immune Groups (Biri-Ma-Geydo)

The term has its origins in the practice of abstaining from felling certain trees on account of their shade, fruits, rarity or religious associations. It was also used in reference to certain animals whose slaughtering was disapproved of such as burden camels, lactating and pregnant animals, etc.. Later, it came to be applied to those categories of persons who were to be spared violence at all times because of fear of disgrace or divine retribution or because of other practical considerations.

Although the concept is universal among Somalis, it is expressed by different terms in different areas. Some of the alternative terms are "Xushmadleyda Xumaha ka Reebban" (The respectable who are spared abuse); "Lama Taabtaan" (the untouchable); "Lama-Dilaan" (those who are not killed).

As has been mentioned already, armed conflicts did take place in the past among the various Somali lineages as well as the various segments thereof, whatever the causes giving rise to confrontation. Yet, Somalis were always aware of the fact that they needed one another, and were bound to live together. They also knew full well that every war, no matter how intense it was or how long it lasted, would ultimately give way to peace. They went to great lengths, therefore, to try to prevent hostilities from getting out of hand and reaching such a level where feelings of extreme hatred and bitterness would be generated, making it difficult in the end to achieve reconciliation, and to restore the relations of kinship, affinity and good neighbourliness that had previously existed between the members of any two warring groups. Thus, although wars and friction were commonplace, the parties to a conflict exercised some restraint and submitted in their actions to certain culturally defined rules and principles, as indicated by the following line from a poem by Sayid Mohammed Abdulla Hassan:

O junior, abandon not charity even though you be committing a wrongful deed.

Or as laid out in the Somali wise saying that states:

The noble do not cut down a tree; and if they do, they do not cut it down at its base.

Traditional Somalis were a people who set great store by considerations of honour and who cared greatly about their reputation (literally 'name'). Any person, or group, that committed abominable acts running counter to religious principles and violating cultural norms during a war, would risk later being shunned and ostracised. The perpetrators of such an ugly deed would also have the memory of their shame preserved for posterity by always referring to the time of its incidence as the year in which individual X or clan X had debased himself/itself, and had ceased to be part of the Somali mainstream. In order to avoid such a fate, Somalis used to exhort one another in times of crisis and difficulty by saying:

O men, the rains will [eventually] come; let us not disgrace ourselves in the meantime!

Any act of war that was characterised by its excessiveness and exceptional brutality was traditionally referred to by Somalis as *cuqubo* or *caaqilo*, meaning an abominable or evil deed; and it was believed that such an act would certainly bring divine retribution to the perpetrator or his offspring even if it took several generations to do so. This belief has been given literary expression in the poem that says:

An act of evil lies dormant at the spot where it was committed;
It kills the off-spring of him who had drunk ill-gotten milk.

In order to ensure that the values of honour and nobility were maintained at all times, traditional Somali society evolved a strict code of conduct that clearly defined the categories of people and things that were not to be abused in any way during a war. This convention of war, acknowledged and respected by almost all Somali pastoral nomads, is commonly known as *xeerka biri-ma-geydada*, or the "spared from the spear" code. Referring to this code, a poet by the name of Dallaayad said in one of his verses:

When the sky has dried up, and the earth has failed to provide a mouthful of grass;
When the axe and the *hangol* are used to provide the animals with feed until the coming of the rains;
Even among plants there is a revered tree that is spared the hitting;
So too are there among people those who are immune from violence and should not be subjected to abuse;
He who is known for neither aggression nor impulsive violence;
And who has only his walking stick as a weapon; [such a man] ought to be assisted;
Save for one begotten by an evil mother [i.e. a prostitute]; and is [therefore] a bastard;
Elders are not harassed by him who is the [true] issue of a man of religion.

The traditional *Biri-ma-geydo* code covered certain categories of people who, far from being killed or harmed, were supposed to be cared for and assisted at all times. Adherence to this code was specially enjoined during hostilities. Among the types of persons afforded protection by this code were the women, children, the aged, men of religion, the sick, protected persons, guests, envoys etc. Following is an examination of each of these categories:

4.1. The Weak and Vulnerable (Maato)

This category included women and children who were referred to by the common term of 'Maxas' (weak household members) plus the aged and the chronically ill.

4.1.1. Women and Children

Women and children belonged to the category of weak and vulnerable persons whose harming or abuse was generally regarded with strong disapproval. Any man who allowed

himself to come down to the lowly level of using force against women and children was rightly regarded as a coward who could not face the men in battle and was, instead, taking out his anger on the weak and helpless. Looking at this matter from another angle, women and children were believed to constitute the "farms" and "seeds" that ensured the survival and continuity of society; and killing them was viewed as being tantamount to "cutting down the tree at its base", leading society down the road to annihilation and extinction.

For the man who had the weak and vulnerable members of his family killed, it was something that he never forgot or forgave. Thus, the killing of weak household members was often the cause of long-lasting hostilities and feuds, as made clear by the saying:

The killing of weak family members leaves behind a festering wound.

Violence against women and children, as well as any other particularly inhumane act of war, was also referred to as *Hiiro*, meaning "that act which gave rise to lasting resentment and bitterness", and it is such an act that is referred to in the old saying:

One forgets about [confiscated] property; but one does not forget an act of *Hiiro*.

The deep and lasting sense of grievance and the intense desire for revenge which were usually associated with the killing of women and children are demonstrated by the following story:

A man called Hussein Gaafoote was told as a child about how his father had grown up a motherless orphan after his (i.e. Gaafoote's) grandmother was killed while trying to prevent a raiding force from driving away the family's stock of camels. She had stood in front of the camels trying to stop them, and the raiders made the animals run over her and crush her body under their feet. Whenever he heard this story, Gaafoote felt very bitter and resentful toward the perpetrators of that exceptionally cruel crime, and grew up nursing that grudge. After he had reached adulthood, he came upon the opportunity of working as a camel boy for the same family some of whose members had been responsible for the painful death, long ago, of his paternal grandmother; so he took it readily. He whiled away the time, waiting for a suitable opportunity to present itself so he could avenge the ugly killing of his grandmother. This came when one night all the men fell asleep in front of the camel's pen, exhausted from their day's toils. Gaafoote rose silently, took out his dagger, and slit their throats one by one. He then disappeared from the scene. Some time later, Gaafoote recited a poem in which he justified his act as legitimate revenge for what some of his victims' fathers and grandfathers had done long ago to his grandmother. In his verse, he said:

My caring grandmother;
Why was she killed, and;
Had her jaws crushed?!
Was she leading a raid?!
Fighting is familiar;
And men are known to kill one another;
But the execution of women;
Was it part of our tradition?!
And I, because of long-standing bitterness;

That had discoloured my skin;
Have slain the braves;
It was they who would not settle the matter;
So let the war break out!

Although the death of Gaafote's grandmother had taken place a long time ago, it was up to the family of her killers to address the grievance resulting from her shockingly cruel demise. The killers of the elderly woman had indeed committed a crime that violated both the teachings of Islam and the regulations of Somali custom. The grave sin they had committed was, thus, finally visited on their sons and grandsons.

Women, in traditional Somali society, were treated with respect and reserve. They were not associated, like men, with a single lineage; but were treated in practice as though they were neutral with regard to clan affiliation. This was so because every woman was considered a daughter of the clan by her paternal kin, and a potential spouse by the men of all other clans when she had not married already. After her marriage, she would still be a daughter to her paternal clan, but she would also be a respected wife to the clan she had married into, and a potential mother-in-law to all others. Therefore, women were accorded a neutral status during hostilities, war being regarded to be strictly a men's game. Even in the rare event that a woman joined the fighting on the side of one of the warring groups, and then fell into captivity, she should not have been harmed, but treated respectfully and later returned safely to her own kin.

In fact, women were exceptionally affected by the loss of war, since it often happened that the fighting would involve a woman's paternal lineage to which belonged her father, brother and paternal cousins on one side, and her clan of marriage which included her husband, sons and brothers-in-law on the other side. Here, a woman found herself in a situation similar to that of the man in the proverbial puzzle who was asked "Which of your two parents, your mother or your father, should be assigned to hell?" and who answered "By Allah, I can respond to that question with only open-mouthed indecision!" Or it was like in the proverb that says:

A she-camel that is thrashed by someone who is ambidextrous ends up
with neither of its two sides in a sound condition.

Due to the extreme painfulness of finding oneself in such a predicament, women prayed habitually against it, and demonstrated the degree of its seriousness by swearing, when taking a most solemn oath, by saying:

May I lose both my sons and my brothers [if I am not telling the truth etc.]!

Thus, when women were already subjected to so much stress and grief by war, men normally shied away from adding to their misery by visiting more violence on them. Particularly, the practice of raping women or subjecting them to any other indignity, be it in war-time or in peace-time, was something alien to Somali culture. Since every woman was regarded as either a "daughter" or a potential spouse or a potential mother-in-law, she could not be treated except with respect, care and kindness. If, however, it happened at all that an immoral criminal violated a woman's dignity by raping her, there were strict customary laws that were invoked and agreed ways of redressing the damage. Taking the Issa convention as an

example, an act of rape was compensated for in the following manner, depending on the category of the victim:

1. A girl of pre-adolescent age (under 15 years) was compensated for with 15 she-camels.
2. A maiden, betrothed to a man, but not wedded yet: 15 she-camels.
3. A woman whose husband had died and who still wore the mourning dress: 15 she-camels.
4. An elderly woman, enfeebled by her years: 15 she-camels.
5. A woman who nursed a baby boy: 50 camels.
6. A maiden of marriageable age who, nonetheless, was neither married nor betrothed to anyone was to be compulsorily married to her assailant with payment of the full bride price she would have normally fetched. If he refused to do so, then he was obligated to pay her full blood compensation, amounting to 50 camels.

There was general consensus among Somalis that women should not be abused during a conflict and that their dignity should not be assailed. In fact, the incidence of such acts as rape in the context of conflict were quite rare in traditional Somali society, if they took place at all. Rather, sexual attacks took place in times of peace and plenty, and were typically perpetrated by young camel herders who had been removed from female company for a relatively long period of time.

4.1.2. The Aged

When a man had grown so old that he was no longer capable of carrying weapons and taking part in a fight, he was considered to belong to the class of weak and vulnerable persons. Regardless of the intensity, duration and level of mutual enmity in any war, the killing of such a man, just like the killing of women and children, was cause for disgrace and for the further aggravation of hostilities. A story about the resentment that usually arose from the maltreatment of the old runs as follows:

A severe drought once affected the area of El-Bur in central Somalia. The famine gave rise to groups of bandits who roamed the countryside and robbed people of whatever belongings they carried with them. One day, they came across an elderly man who was travelling alone carrying some milk that provided his only means of sustenance on the way. They robbed the old man of the milk and drank it themselves. The old man continued his journey surviving on wild fruits and edible gums. Very exhausted and on the brink of starvation, he was barely able to reach the settlement of his own kinsmen. When he related his experience on the way to the men of the settlement, they were incredulous and viewed the incident as an act of murder targeting the old man since depriving him of his only form of food must have been calculated to kill him. An atmosphere of tension was created as angry youths related to the old man started to mobilise themselves for a punitive raid against the settlement

of the bandits' clan. In order to dampen tensions and prevent an armed clash over the matter, a man called Aynab Dirshe, restrained the young men of his settlement and, to appease them, recited the following poem in which he criticised the bandits' lineage for the cruel act of its young members:

The news that has been relayed concerning the misdeed by the men in El-Bur;
[Is one] which I am still unable to comprehend or describe;
Our traditions are unique; and what has never been told;
[Is] an eighty-year old man whose eye-brows have been denuded by age and
who was wearied by his long walk;
And who was on the road; some people are in better condition than others;
The maltreatment he was subjected to by the thieving bandits;
Who confiscated his milk container; his only supply in the season of drought;
And for which act no explanation and no apology were given;
Now, who would be blamed for the deaths if hostilities do break out?!

When this poem was relayed to the settlement to which the culprits belonged, the responsible members of the community got together and dispatched a delegation to the old man's clan. When the elders of the two sides jointly reviewed the customary rules related to the maltreatment of the weak and vulnerable, they agreed that (1) a restitution payment be made to the old man's family to erase their bitterness over the incident; (2) that in principle that particular act was tantamount to committing murder against the aged man, for which his clan was entitled to receive the full payment of his blood compensation.

The clan of the culprits agreed to both points but were exempted from carrying out their obligation under the second point, the old man's kinsmen having been satisfied by the fact that they had accepted their guilt and had seemed to genuinely regret the incident.

4.1.3. The Sick

Somali convention dictated that, during a war, one was to fight only those who could fight him back. Therefore, if, during a raid on a settlement, a sick man, who was bed-ridden with illness, was encountered, it was against the established custom to kill him or cause him harm in any other way, since the sick also belonged to the general category of weak and defenceless persons whose killing was strictly prohibited.

4.2. Men of Religion

Somali men were traditionally divided into two general categories: priests and warriors. A man of religion was one who was dedicated to the worship of Allah and to the dissemination of his word, and who did not engage in certain practices that were the special preserve of laymen such as killing and looting. Priests and full-time students of religion did not act on clannish sentiments, did not carry weapons and took no part in clan wars. Due to this image

of neutrality, they often played an important role in the mediation and reconciliation of warring clans.

As a result of their holy and neutral status, men of religion could travel anywhere without the need to carry food rations around with them, for they felt confident that they would be welcomed and fed in any settlement they came across. The widely held attitude of extending hospitality to priests is depicted in a poem by Sayid Mohammed Abdulla Hassan, himself a mullah, as follows:

For a priest with [holy] books, I should kill a ram;
A mat of treated skin, I should spread out for him in a sheltered spot;
And he should gorge himself on the fat-covered meat of the chest.

Moreover, men of religion were generally believed to possess supernatural powers bestowed upon them by Allah as a reward for their piety, and that their blessings and curses were effective. Thus it was a commonly-held belief that anyone who killed a priest, or caused him harm in any other way, had committed the most evil of deeds, and that the inevitable punishment for such a crime would soon come to the perpetrator in this world as well as later in the other world.

Illustrative of the lengths to which traditional Somalis went to avoid incurring the grievance of Mullahs is the following story:

A raiding force from Hiran attacked a settlement in the area of Abudwaq and made off with some camels. Half way on their return journey, while they drove their loot of camels in front of them, the men of the force noticed a stranger who was following them. They stopped, and the man also stopped. When they started to move on again he resumed following them. The men became suspicious and despatched one of them to go and kill the man. The warrior readied his spear and went back to carry out his mission, but as he approached the stranger the latter turned back and fled. The warrior saw a book in a cloth case swinging down from the stranger's armpit as he ran for his life. So the warrior returned to his force and told the men that he thought the stranger they sent him to kill was a holy man since he carried a book with him. Therefore, he said, he left him alone since he could not bring himself to harm a man of God.

On the evening of the same day, the mullah approached the men of the force who had camped for the night and killed some camels for meat. He greeted them in the Muslim way and then said, "I am a priest; and some of these camels you have looted belong to me. I request you to give me back my camels." The men of the force conferred briefly, and then asked the mullah to swear on his own holy book that he would take out from the herd only those animals that belonged to him. And so he did. In this manner the mullah, who was called Ahmed, was able to get back his looted camels.

4.3. Protected Persons

Any man who lived with his mother's people or his affines, or who otherwise happened to be in a settlement where his own lineage was in the minority, was considered a *Magan* or protected person in the event that war broke out between his own clan and that in whose midst he lived. The responsibility for protecting him fell to the whole clan in general, and to a certain group or individual within that clan, in particular. It was also common that some people belonging to one or the other of the two warring lineages would seek protection with a third, uninvolved lineage. In addition to these two categories, there were those war captives who had sought, and received, the protection of an individual, or group, belonging to the lineage of their captors. Whatever their case, protected persons were not killed by those under whose protection they had placed themselves; and if an outside group killed them, it was considered by the protectors as a serious affront to their honour and a direct challenge to their power and credibility which could only be settled through engaging the offenders in direct combat. To the man whose protected ward had been killed, it was as if the perpetrators had targeted him with their act. The intensity of the emotions associated with such a situation is illustrated by Abdillahi Hinnig in the following lines of poetry:

If your brother is subjected to a night attack, you may claim compensation;
Any other offence may be ignored; the opportunity will come for you to repay
it;
[But] He who has killed your protected ones has targeted you [as surely] as is
if he were [the angel of] Death.

It was this principle of providing protection to those seeking it that Somalis observed with a great degree of seriousness. Anyone who violated this custom was considered guilty of the worst crime. The seriousness with which this customary obligation was regarded by traditional Somalis is illustrated by the following story:

It is said that a certain man's cow had given birth to a male calf, whereupon he decided to kill the calf in order to save for his family the share of the cow's milk that would be consumed by the calf if it lived. The little calf ran into the house of a newly-wed couple. Its owner, wielding the knife with which he wanted to slaughter it, followed it into the house. However, he was intercepted by the house owner and groom who asked him, "What do you want to do with the little calf?" "I want to kill it," said the owner of the little calf. "Do I hear you say that you want to kill the little animal that has sought my protection?" asked the bride-groom with incredulity. "What business of yours is it? It is my calf and I will do with it whatever I please!" retorted the owner of the poor little beast. The argument became so heated that it led to a fight between the two men in which one of them was killed. The incident immediately triggered a split in the community, and ignited a war of such intensity that there were hardly any survivors.

Of protected persons, those related to their protectors through marriage enjoyed a special position and were the least likely to be harmed, no matter what the circumstances. The following story serves to illustrate this point:

About 160 years ago, two clans inhabiting the region of Galgadud became involved in an armed conflict with one another. On a particular day, after several important men belonging to one of them were reported to have been killed in the fighting, some young men lost their heads and started to round up some men who belonged to the adversary clan but who were married to daughters of the aggrieved group and lived with their in-laws. They brought them, tied up in ropes, to a place where the settlement's force was being mobilised, so they could be executed there. Among those taken captive in this manner was a man called Koshin Ugas. He requested that he be allowed to speak before he was killed, and he was granted permission to do so. He said that if he and the others were killed, their deaths would serve to further aggravate the existing hostilities, and that the only loser will be him whose daughter will be made unmarriageable because of his violation of the rule for protecting in-laws living with him. He urged them to think well before they took any action that they might regret later. The leaders of the assembled force conferred for one brief moment, and decided that the men who lived in their midst and were married to the daughters of the clan should be immediately set free and that they should be compensated for the ill-treatment visited on them by some irresponsible youths. Later, Koshin Ugas and the others acted as intermediaries between the two warring clans and were able to bring about a cessation of hostilities.

It also happened sometimes that a minority lineage shared the same settlement and moved with a larger clan, which made it obligatory on the larger lineage to defend the smaller one against attacks from outside since the latter was considered to be under its special protection.

4.4. Peace Delegates

A peace delegation consisted usually of a group of responsible persons who had taken it on themselves to seek to restore the peace between two warring groups. The members of such a delegation could belong to one or both of the two sides to the conflict or to uninvolved third clans.

Somali custom dictated that the members of a peace delegation should not be harmed while they are travelling on their way through the territory of other clans as well as during their stay with the clan of their destination. Far from committing violence against them, the members of a peace delegation were to be welcomed and hospitably entertained throughout their stay, even if the peace offer they carried was to be rejected. From what has been preserved of Somali history one can find very few occasions in which acts of homicide were committed against the members of a peace delegation; and in the rare instances when such a serious violation of established custom had taken place, the news had travelled throughout the length and breadth of the Somali territory, creating a reaction of deep shock and indignation everywhere. The shame of those who were responsible for the abominable deed was perpetuated by having the story passed down the successive generations. The sense of stunned disbelief in which the news of such an unconventional act was received is portrayed in the following two lines of poetry:

Since *Deryaale* and as far back as the time of Prophet Adam;
The slaying of delegates in the shelter of one's own home is [something]
unprecedented in the world.

It was a commonly accepted rule that even if a single member of a peace-seeking delegation was killed, it was considered to be the same in its moral effect as killing all members of the delegation and the guilty party was required to pay the blood compensation due for all of them.

Once upon a time, two lineages in the North East of Somalia became involved in an armed conflict with each other. Following a long drawn-out war, one of them decided to send to the other a peace-seeking delegation of 25 men. Unfortunately, one of the peace delegates became involved in an argument with a member of the host clan, which ended in the delegate being seriously wounded. The men of the host clan pointed out to one another that if the man died of his wounds, all twenty-five members of the peace delegation would be considered to have been killed. They concluded, therefore, that if the wounded man died, they would also kill the rest of the delegation since they would be required to pay their blood compensation, anyway. The man died and, therefore, the rest of the delegation was put to death, with the exception of one man who sought and received the protection of his maternal uncles. After being safely taken to the territory of his own clan, this lonely survivor related to his kinsmen the tragic fate of the other members of the delegation. The news occasioned a most stirring poem that has become widely known by the name of 'Darbadaaley' by a poet called Aw Musse. This inflammatory poem in which the author exhorts his kinsmen to avenge the death of the slain peace delegates, led to a resumption of hostilities on an unprecedented scale. The all-out war that followed this incident took a long time to die down, and resulted in untold destruction to both life and property. This particular story of the slain peace delegates spread rapidly to all corners of Somali territory and the act was strongly condemned.

The peace seeking delegation sent by one of two warring groups to its adversary is known in some regions as 'galliin' (meaning peace offer), and there is a common saying in those places that :

Rejecting a peace offer is followed by regret. '

It was obligatory that a peace offer be accepted. If the party receiving the offer reacted negatively to it, it was considered by all to be the aggressor, and any measures taken by its adversary to counter this arrogant attitude was deemed to be quite legitimate. For example, it is said that...

...two sections of a clan indigenous to the Middle Shabelle region were involved in mutual hostilities. One of them sent a delegation with a reconciliation offer to the other, but the delegation's message was rejected. Two more delegations followed, but they too were rebuffed. Finally, a warrior called Harur Dabajaw, who belonged to the clan section that was seeking peace, selected a force of 99 well armed fighters and led them to the vicinity of the enemy's settlement, where as it happened most of the adult males were present in an assembly or war council. Dabajaw ordered his men to move forward while looking down at their feet. He made them march in this state until

they had arrived at the spot where the men of the enemy were assembled. Then he told them to raise their heads and go to work. A bloody battle ensued, at the end of which many men lay dead, while many more were wounded. In the end it was the party that had consistently rejected the offers of peace that now sent a delegation seeking an end to the hostilities. Its overture was welcomed, and reconciliation soon followed.

Sometime later Harur Dabajaw was teased by some men from his own clan segment who told him, "Harur, you made the worst decision by leading an attack force all the way from Aqab Du'o to Aga Sa'ab!" "I did not do so to make us thrive in numbers," he retorted, "I did it rather so our mettle would be recognised, and it was!"

4.5. Traditional Leaders (Titled Clan Heads)

Somali society was made up of clans each of which normally had its own titled head whose accession to the position was endorsed by most or all of the segments of the clan and whose counsel and advice were given due respect. Although the office was usually hereditary, its occupant was expected to possess the qualities of responsibility, tolerance, generosity, refined behaviour, commanding appearance and religious piety. The titled head of clan was a man who had the common good at heart, and who worked for the promotion of peace and the prevention of hostilities. Therefore, a traditional leader (e.g. *Sultan, Ugas, Boqor, Wabar, Garad, Imam*, etc.) was considered to belong to the category of immune persons. Committing acts of homicide or humiliation against such a person was strictly discouraged. Somalis have a saying that:

The three categories with head dresses should be spared (i.e. clan heads, mullahs, and women)

The role of traditional leaders was in general a mainly advisory one. Their rule was based on consensus building, holding together the various sections of the clan and officiating in their quarrels with neutrality. It was not based on the use of force and the exercising of dictatorial power, practices which went against the love of independence and equality inherent in the Somali character. In the event that the leader failed to live up to his role of consensus making and impartiality, it was possible to strip him of his head dress (symbol of authority) or to withdraw one's allegiance to him as happened when....

...Ugas Hashi who was the titled head for a Somali clan whose native settlement is in the area of Dollo and Hawd abused the responsibility of the office entrusted to him by his clansmen and engaged in favouritism, nepotism and dictatorship. These practices of the Ugas angered so many of his kinsmen that an assembly was called to which both he and his detractors were invited so that both sides could present their case to the general membership of the clan. Many people addressed the meeting, but only the arguments presented in poetic form have been preserved, poetry having always been more impressive and more memorable than mere prose. It was also mainly due to the powerfulness of the verses recited in that meeting that many sections of the clan decided to withdraw their loyalty from Ugas Hashi and install their own separate

heads. The most famous poem recited on that occasion is the one by Sahid Qaman to which the following lines belong:

When the majority of trees perish in the heat of the dry season;
When people converge on the wells where the animals are taken to water;
A lineage whose ranks are united will even share the water of a single well;
If I am not given so much as a mouthful of clear water that is being
collected by all;
And if I help in the distribution of honey that is being poured out for other
men;
While I just stand there without licking so much as a finger's load;
To carry long spears in defence of a bark that is not tied around my own head;
And to stand ready at all times with acclamation and greetings;
By the three names of Allah I will not be made to accept such a state of affairs;
One thing that was transmitted to me by my illustrious father and by [my
ancestor] Magan is:
That I should honour men and base the management of their affairs on the
principle,
That we are equal and that kinship obligations are reciprocal between us;
And that my share in such an arrangement is clear; but I reject discrimination;
I will not shake hands with him who will not spread out the mat [of
hospitality] for me,
I will have nothing to do with him who [thinks he] can do without me;
Of all places I will not seek assistance at the fence where the Son of Afey
lives;
I will not submit, like a castrated camel, to having a leading rope around my
neck.

Somali oral history has also transmitted the stories of overbearing and unjust traditional leaders whose excesses provoked such a violent reaction on the part of some of their subjects that they were put to death in violation of the traditional injunction against the killing of titled clan heads. One of the leaders who met their deaths in this manner was Imam Shafe'alawe (meaning the 'Unbeneficial Imam') who it is said ...

... was the traditional ruler of a clan in the middle Shabelle region about 200 years ago. As indicated by his nickname, the 'Unbeneficial Imam' was a cruel leader whose reign was characterised by general oppression and the violent suppression of dissent. One day, a man openly criticised the opinions of the imam who was not used to being contradicted on any matter. The imam was so angered by the man's audacity that he ordered him hanged to death so that his death would serve as a deterrent to all potential dissenters. After the man was thus executed, a brother of his, who was embittered by the wrongfulness of his brother's death became so enraged that he took his spear and thrust it through the imam's heart on the same day thereby instantly killing him. Thus, the 'Unbeneficial Imam' and the critic he ordered hanged were buried on the same day.

Likewise, history has recorded the violent deaths of Imam Issa, the last ruler of the Gareen (Ajuran) dynasty, and Boqor Mahmud Yusuf who was a traditional ruler in Somalia's North-East region after they were accused of being high-handed and unfair.

Such exceptional incidents notwithstanding, traditional leaders were generally held in deference and were not subjected to abuse of any sort.

4.6. Guests

Somalis also greatly cherished the tradition of hospitality towards guests. A guest was a protected person just as a protected person was a guest. If a member of the enemy was captured in war and held for the purpose of exchanging him for persons taken prisoner by his own group or for any other reason, he was treated as a guest, and provided with food, clothes, bedding and medical care. A man could consider himself to be absolutely safe as long as he was your guest even though the worst of hostilities might exist between your two lineages. Generosity towards guests was one of the qualities that were highly valued in a man while he lived and for which he was remembered after his death. For example, Ali Jama Habil, in an eulogy dedicated to the memory of a dead kinsman, had the following to say;

Whenever guests arrived while he happened to be with us;
When he, God rest his soul, took home a whole bunch of them;
When you thought the food he had brought was [as plentiful as the waters of]
of a pond or a torrential flood.
It is a miser who grimaces; the easy laughter he used to let out;
And the anecdotes with which he entertained them, is probably what I miss
about him [the most].

4.7. Travellers

Although their lineages might be engaged in hostilities, the people of adversary clans travelled through each other's territories when the need to procure essential goods arose. A traveller's life and his goods enjoyed traditional immunity if his journey was not for a war-related purpose. To commit violence against a traveller or loot his goods was considered to be a serious moral offence and a grave violation of the established social norms - it was the cause of lasting disgrace. Ali Jama Habil, one of Sayid Mohammed Abdulla Hassan's main political opponents, said in a poem aimed at discrediting the latter:

A caravan of travellers used to be assisted; not harmed;
What he does, instead, is cut off their limbs and help himself to the dates;
Do you call such an 'Italian' a Mahdi? that is astonishing indeed!

4.8. The Unarmed and the Neutral

Those people, living among two warring camps, who belonged to neither and were not involved in the fighting, be they affines or protected persons, as well as their animals, were not touched with harm. Likewise, the man who, although belonging to one of the two groups involved in the conflict, did not himself take part in the fighting and did not carry any weapons, and the man who happened to be completely unaware of the outbreak of hostilities were both generally spared. However, it did sometimes happen that a hamlet which was

completely ignorant about the recent involvement of its general lineage in a war would be attacked by the enemy who took full advantage of its ignorance and lack of preparedness. It also occurred that an innocent man would be killed in revenge for someone who was killed by a member of his general clan, and about whose death he probably knew nothing. A story illustrating the treatment of unarmed enemy members during a war runs as follows:

Once upon a time, a force, armed with swords, that was dispatched by king Menelik of Ethiopia, launched an attack on a settlement in the west of the Somali territories. In addition to swords, the members of the force were also armed with spears whose blades and shafts were both made of iron. Such spears were called 'Abyssinian' spears. The expedition was sent out to collect taxes by force. The local Somalis refused the payment of taxes, and fighting broke out in which the raiding force was defeated. Apart from the fighting soldiers, the attacking force included men who cooked food for the officers and did other ordinary chores. A man called Abdulle Aaggane swore that they would not be executed because, he said, they were unarmed and were not involved in the fighting. These men were held for some time during which they were fed well and were each clothed with the common dress worn by the local people, consisting of a loin cloth and an upper robe. After a while, a message was sent to the Ethiopian government informing it that the members of the auxiliary staff were alive and well, and were being held by the inhabitants of the settlement. The government replied by saying, "Let the men be brought to us, and their ransom money collected." This was done; the men were handed over to the Ethiopian authorities, and the ransom money was collected. It is said that when King Menelik was told the news, he decreed: "Those who have done this are a noble and responsible people. They should be subjected to no more raids." With this, the tax collection raids targeting that particular area were suspended.

During a conflict great care was taken that those people who belonged to neither of the warring groups were not affected. This is demonstrated by the following story:

Once upon a time there was an outbreak of hostilities between two segments of a clan inhabiting the Middle Shabelle Region. As the feuding intensified, the two groups moved their camps away from one another, and the area between their two settlements became an uninhabited war zone, criss-crossed by scouts on the look out for enemy movements. After some time hamlets from a third unrelated clan moved in and settled in this belt of no-man's land, attracted by the abundance of lush grazing and water which could not be used by the herds of the two warring camps. Since they were neutral, they did not fear attacks from either of the parties to the conflict. One day, one of the two groups involved in the conflict held a religious feast at a place called Buuraas and members of the neutral clan were invited to attend. On that occasion, a man called Warsame Ruygare stood up to recite a poem in which he registered his apprehension regarding the safety of the neutrals because of the dangerous zone of hostilities where they decided to set up camp. Addressing them, he said:

Two groups of men have growled at one another;
They have recently had a bitter clash;
And are even now intent on attacking one another;

So with all due respect, O men!
Please move your camp to one side;
So we can go and search for [the enemy's] foot marks.

Acting on this piece of advice, the neutral lineage moved its camp away from the zone of hostilities and was thus able to avoid being harmed by mistake.

4.9. The War-Wounded

There is a controversy as to whether the enemy wounded belonged in the 'biri-ma-geydo' class or not. But the issue may be viewed in two different ways: (1) If a wounded warrior is finished off in the heat of the battle, while the fighting still raged on, and neither side had achieved victory, it would be regarded to be something normal and quite legitimate. (2) If, on the other hand, after the battle was over, a wounded man from the enemy was found on the battlefield, the traditional immunity code would require that he should not be killed but rather cared for and nursed until he was well again. This is so because a wounded man would in this case be as helpless and as vulnerable as those belonging typically to the category of weak persons such as women, children, the elderly and the sick.

Examining the actual treatment of the war-wounded in traditional Somali conflicts, we find that, generally, Somalis followed the practice of sparing the enemy's wounded who were found lying on the battlefield. These were rather taken home, treated for their wounds and given nutritious food to enhance the process of their healing. When they had fully recovered, they were made to choose between going back to their own lineage or remaining with the family that had taken care of them. It happened often that the man who had been nursed and cared for in such a manner would opt to continue to live with his benefactors, in which case he was given one of the family's daughters in marriage as well as a home and animals to enable him establish his own family. He thus became an *Inan-la-yaal* or someone living with his in-laws.

It was, however, the case that the treatment of the wounded members of the enemy who were captured actually depended on the level of hostilities and the precedent established by that party which seized wounded prisoners first. If they had finished off the wounded men who fell into their hands, it became the established practice for that particular war to kill any wounded warriors who were captured. Likewise, if hostilities had reached a very grave level, and a number of important men had been killed on either side, then too any wounded members of the enemy who were found were not spared but killed on the spot.

Such exceptional situations notwithstanding, Somalis normally spared the war-wounded and cared for them as indicated by the following story.

About a hundred and fifty years ago, a raiding force from the region of Mudug attacked a settlement in the region of Hiran. Battle was entered into and the raiding force was defeated. It was also forced to leave behind some of its wounded men, including one by the name of Liban the Short. Some days later, he was found hiding in the bush by a group of four brothers. Asked to identify himself, Liban said, "I am a wounded man as you can see for yourselves. I was with the force that attacked your

settlement the day before yesterday. So, you may either finish me off or give me some help." Two of the men counselled that he be put to death. But the eldest rejected their suggestion saying "No! This man will not be killed. Leave him to me."

With these words, he carried Liban to his own home. There, Liban was nursed and fed with specially nutritious foods until he was able to recover fully, whereupon he was told that he was free to go home. Instead of doing so, Liban chose to stay on with the family of the man who had saved his life and cared so well for him. To this day, his descendants live and, for all practical purposes, belong to the same family as those of his saviours.

The humane treatment of the captured war wounded was a gesture of goodwill that was appreciated by the other side which responded by doing the same. Thus, it contributed greatly to speeding up the cessation of hostilities and the restoration of peace and harmony.

As in the case of murdered women and children, the killing of a wounded man, in the absence of justifying precedent, gave rise to long-lasting hostility and an enduring desire for having justice done. This fact is illustrated by the following story whose events took place in the area of Bay and Bakool:

Following the end of a battle between two groups, a wounded man who lay in the field called out to the 'Malaag' of the enemy force who was passing nearby. When the 'Malaag' saw the wounded man, he made out to finish him off. The wounded man pleaded with him to wait until he had told him three things. "First" he said, "I have deliberately attracted your attention when I saw you passing by, hoping that you would save me. Second, if you kill me you will not have killed a whole fighter but a helpless, wounded man. Far from getting you any merit, such an act will be the cause of disgrace to you. Third, my wife is pregnant. It is possible that she will give birth to a son who will grow up to avenge my death on you if you kill me." But the 'Malaag' killed him, anyway.

The dead man's prophesy came true, and his pregnant widow delivered a baby boy who, over the years, grew up into a strong youth. One day, the 'Malaag' who was travelling alone, came upon the hamlet of the young man whose father he had killed long ago. He decided to spend the night there as a guest, thinking that the young man would not recognise him. The young man, who knew the true identity of his guest, brought up the subject of his father's death in casual conversation, saying "my father was killed in the battle called so and so after he had been wounded. Since his death was not a regular war-related casualty, I intend to claim his full blood price." The 'Malaag' feigned annoyance, and rebuked his host with the words "the incident you are talking about, if true at all, must have taken place a long time ago. There have been so many other incidents after that; and all of them have been laid to rest. You, too, should forget and stop bringing up the past." The young man then stood up casually, went into his hut, and soon returned with a weapon which he used to kill the 'Malaag'. When, a little later, he heard some of the womenfolk in the compound crying out in alarm upon discovering the dead body of the 'Malaag', he announced in a loud voice "I, the son of so and so, am the one who has killed the 'Malaag'. Let no one else be blamed for his death!"

5. Prisoners of War

As in the case of wounded warriors falling into the hands of the enemy, it was rare for a man captured in battle to be spared when the two sides in a conflict were involved in all-out, unreserved hostilities and were said to have a *dhiig-mayr* or "blood-bath" ensuing between them. However, when the fighting and mutual enmity had not reached such a desperate level, and each side wanted to achieve a clean victory over the other, the common practice was to spare anyone who was captured in battle, and release him immediately so he could go back to his own camp. His mere capture was enough cause for embarrassment to his kinsmen as it was the source of exultation and boastful pride to those who had captured, and then released, him. It was the general rule that a man who had been taken prisoner in the fighting and then released would never again take part in fighting against those who had given him his life:

A man called Hassan Samatar Khalaf, who lived in the region of Mudug, four generations back, once led a raid against a settlement in the region of Galgudud. In the fighting that took place, his force was defeated, and he himself was taken prisoner. He was asked by his captors, "Why have you raided us? did we owe you a score that you wanted to settle?" "No", replied Hassan, "I did not have any score to settle with you, but I have heard that you were a vain and arrogant lot, and I wanted to beat some humility back into your heads. Unfortunately, the tables have been turned on me and here I am your prisoner to do with as you please!" At that, he was treated well, had his mare watered for him and then told, "Go after your men, and do not launch another attack on us".

Sometime later, his son, Mohammed, came leading a raid on the same settlement. He too had his force defeated and himself captured in the fighting. He was taken to the spot where his father was released before and asked, "Do you have a grudge against us? Why have you attacked us?" Mohammed responded by saying, "My father was humiliated during the last raid, and I wanted to wipe out his shame, but things have not gone according to my plan, and now I am a captive in your hands, awaiting your decision on my fate." Like his father before him, he was treated well, had his horse watered for him and then told, "You may go now. But remember if either of you comes back to attack us again, we will not spare you".

Even during extreme hostilities, a war captive had to be taken to the commander and other leaders of the force so they could decide what to do with him. Even then, some men benefited from the tradition of according personal protection to war captives. A member of the captor group who knew the captive and was either related to him in some way or owed him a good turn, would come forward and declare loudly that the captive enjoyed his personal protection and that no one could touch him. In order to avoid a split in the ranks of the force which could lead to internal fighting, the captive would be handed over to his saviour and protector. He remained the honoured guest of his protector until he was conducted safely back to his own people's settlement.

Sometime during the middle of the nineteenth century, a raiding force from Galgudud attacked a settlement in the Hiran area. A man called Ahmed Musse fell into captivity after his raiding force had been defeated. Two families from the lineage of his

captors disagreed on whether he should be executed or spared. Those advocating his release won the day and, after a while, Ahmed returned to his own people's settlement, accompanied by his main saviour. After entertaining him as a guest for a while, Ahmed presented the man with a horse and some camels as a sign of gratitude and saw him off with the following poetic verse:

It is infidels who fail to pay back a favour they have received:
I vividly remember the events at *Koora-gooye* and *Galgalad*
Our meeting then was in a troubled atmosphere;
That day, it was you who made the vulture that tore out men's kidneys fly
away [in disappointment]
I would like to have the sons of *Kahin* envy you;
So, lead away this bay horse that has just been trained.

Thus, every man who had been granted his life after being captured in a battle felt greatly indebted to his saviours, and tried to pay back the debt he owed in any way possible. Another story related to the same theme runs as follows:

*Once upon a time, there was an outbreak of hostilities between two clans inhabiting the North West of Somalia. One of them launched an attack on the other's camp, and battle was joined. The raiding force was led by a famous warrior called *Robleh Af-Deb*. His men were defeated and he himself had to hide in the bush, unable to flee since his horse had broken a leg. *Robleh Af-Deb* was stuck in the middle of nowhere. He was trapped in enemy territory and without his horse, he was unable to travel far. So, he slipped one night into the camp of his enemies and gave himself up to their leader, who was called *Robleh Awl*. The latter fed him and gave him his own horse so he could use it to get away.*

*To be in a position to pay back the debt he owed, *Robleh Af-Deb* launched a second raid on the same settlement at some later time. This time, his men got the upper hand. In the confusion that broke out in the settlement, he saw a little boy who tried to escape the rampage. *Robleh* caught the boy and lifted him onto the back of his horse. He took the child back home with him and learned upon asking him for his identity, that he was the son of *Robleh Awl*, the man whose help he had sought in his distress, telling him, "Either save me, or earn yourself a feather (by killing me)", and who had chosen to save him. He took the boy into his fold and cared for him like he would any of his own children.*

*When the boy, whose full name was *Idleh Robleh Awl*, had reached twenty years of age, *Robleh Af-Deb* gave him one of his daughters in marriage, and gave the couple enough animals to establish their own family. After that, he gave him his own horse and told him to go to his father, *Robleh Awl*, who had long ago given up the hope of ever finding his lost son alive, to let him know that he, *Idleh*, was alive and well, and that *Robleh Af-Deb* had repaid the good turn that he owed. To this day, the descendants of *Idleh Robleh Awl* are so closely associated with those of *Robleh Af-Deb* that they pay and receive blood compensation together.*

Even if he had no relatives among his captors, a man of note, such as a warrior renowned for his bravery, a famous poet or a clan leader, was normally spared in recognition of his status

and, more pragmatically, in realisation of the fact that his influence could be useful if fortunes changed and places were exchanged:

The camels that were looted by the 'Dervishes' in the operation known as 'Dayax - weerar' or the 'Moonlight Raid' and belonged to a lineage whose area of settlement is in the North West of Somalia, were taken to a far-away settlement. A man from the Dervishes, probably Sayid Mohammed Abdulla Hassan himself, asked for the hand in marriage of the daughter of a clan head who was nick-named 'Udub-la-Aslay' or the 'Dyed Centre Pole'. While accepting the request, Udub-la-Aslay said, "It is the camel herds looted by the 'Dervishes' whose potential claimants are the farthest away from here. Of these, it is the camels of the 'Moonlight Raid' whose owners are the farthest removed. So, I want the bride price to be given me out of these latter camels." He was given his request.

The lineage that had owned the camels, incensed by those words and that attitude, mobilised a force and embarked on a long-distance raid. The attacking force targeted the camel herds of the lineage to which Udub-la-Aslay belonged, and was successful in taking them over. Udub himself was caught in the fighting and taken along with the camels. His senior wife, however, refused to remain behind and let her husband be taken away. Due to her persistence, she finally won the release of her husband and also had a hundred camels left behind for his sake. She herself was given an additional fifty camels. When Udub asked the men why they were doing that, they said, "We feel obligated to honour the titled head of a clan, since we have such an office ourselves. We could not stomach the idea of releasing you only to let you go back a destitute man." This gesture was the key to a new era of peace and mutual understanding between the two communities.

6. Private Property

As pointed out earlier, the only property whose looting was permitted in war-time, according to the custom of Somali pastoral nomads, were the horses and camels. Other animals such as cattle, sheep and goats, donkeys, mules and even burden camels (i.e. those used for transportation), were exempted from looting, since they formed the basic means of subsistence for the weak members of society such as women and children who did not take part in fighting. This was a measure designed to safeguard the general interest of society. In the same way, public utilities and resources which benefited all and belonged to no one in particular were not destroyed during conflict. For example, the setting of fire to bushes or grassy plains, thus destroying the grazing that supports the herds of livestock and the filling up or poisoning of water wells were strongly disapproved of and rarely done, if at all, since the damage resulting therefrom would affect everyone. Traditional Somalis used to say:

A well may be dug by one man, but its water is not used by him alone.

or,

The man who digs a well gets his name given to it and the right to drink first [only].

Similarly, going into private homes and plundering their contents was prohibited since it violated the cherished principle of fighting with honour.

In addition to the above, the destruction by fire, or through any other means, of dwellings and their contents was regarded with strong disapproval. The burning of crops and the destruction of fruit trees were also unacceptable. Likewise, it was forbidden to randomly kill livestock and to slaughter female animals in general, and pregnant ones in particular, unless compelled to do so by absolute necessity.

Among the agro-pastoralists in the land between the two rivers, no looting of animals or material property was allowed apart from confiscation of the enemy's fighting gear.

Such restrictions were based on the traditional view that fighting should be confined to men and that society and the resources essential to its sustenance should be preserved and protected in accordance with the Somali saying that:

The noble do not cut down a tree; and if they do so, they do not cut it at its base.

One of the least significant among the items mentioned above is household utensils. Nonetheless, the strictness with which their abuse was dealt is illustrated by the following story:

Once upon a time, a certain man was killed by another. As usual, the family of the man who had committed the homicide paid the costs of burial. All that remained was to fix a date for the payment of the blood price. While settlement proceedings were thus going on smoothly, a close relative of the dead man, called Af-Gaab, secretly put together a band of warriors and raided the camp of the family whose man

had killed his cousin. He failed to find any men or camels there and so gave vent to his anger by piercing with his spear a water bag that he found lying about, and damaging it irreparably.

When representatives of the two groups came together later to finalise the matter, the family of the dead man presented its case to the arbitration committee, and claimed the amount of one hundred camels owed to them in blood compensation. The other group immediately rebutted this claim, citing as a reason Af-Gaab's unseemly act that violated the established custom and spoiled the atmosphere of goodwill which had prevailed up to then. In the end, the mediating committee ruled that the dead man's family would receive only 50 camels out of the 100 they would have been entitled to under normal circumstances. The other 50 were deducted by way of a fine for Af-Gaab's unconventional act. After further deductions had been made on yet other grounds, the dead man's family ended up with only a very small portion of the normal blood payment. Overcome with anger and indignation over this unnecessary loss, one of Af-Gaab's own cousins, who was present at the meeting, stood up suddenly and stabbed him with a spear, exclaiming disgustedly, "look at how this fool has spoilt our case, and wasted our man's blood dues!" In this way, Af-Gaab lost his life and caused his kinsmen to lose the blood compensation for their dead man.

This story illustrates how strict traditional Somalis were about looting or destroying household contents, including utensils.

The act of trespassing on private homes during a conflict resulted in long-lasting shame to its perpetrators as can be seen from the following story:

Around the year 1930 a force from the area of Mataban in Somalia's central regions raided the village of Mahas in the same area. The objective of the raid was to loot animals, specially camels. The food supply of the force ran out before it had found any animals worth looting. Some youths who could not tolerate the hunger sneaked out without the commander's knowledge and entered a house in the village. There they found a vessel full of chopped up meat preserved in ghee. Since the container was tightly sealed, they tore it open with a dagger and gorged themselves on its contents. When the force leader learned about the misbehaviour of his boys he called off the whole mission and ordered the men of the force to go back to their own settlement. Now, Somalis had a tradition of naming every raid after the feat it had accomplished, the particular circumstances in which it was conducted, etc. Although the force leader tried to remedy the situation by cancelling the raid, this measure of his proved to be ineffectual since that particular operation he led came to be widely known as the raid of 'the Dog that Entered a House'.

7. Conflict and Islam

Somali-inhabited territory was among the first lands reached by Islam, and much of the Somali people's history is associated with the propagation and defence of this religion. At present, Somalis are virtually 100% Muslim, so much so that adherence to Islam has become a major criterion in defining the Somali identity. It goes without saying, therefore, that Islam has had a significant impact on the life, culture and war customs of the Somali people. For example, the system used by Somalis to compensate for injuries and deaths was almost completely based on the Islamic Sharia law. This law was also used to arbitrate in all civil cases involving marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc. Also, most of the "Immunity from the spear" code employed by Somalis were in accord with the Islamic teachings related to war-time conduct.

When Islam first appeared in the Arabian peninsula in the 7th century AD, it had found the Arabs divided and waging war on each other along clan lines just like the Somalis did traditionally and are doing today. Islam had to a great extent unified this people and had replaced their clan-based identities with one based on the Islamic faith. At the same time, Islam forbade any fighting between Muslims, be it at the personal or group levels. Prophet Mohammed, may Allah's peace be upon him, said: "If two Muslims confront each other with their two swords, then the one who kills and the one who gets killed shall both end up in Hell." Even when waging the 'jihad' against aggressive non-believers, Allah and His prophet enjoined on Muslims to display a morally superior behaviour that reflected the superiority of their faith. Muslims were forbidden to finish off the wounded or mutilate the bodies of their slain enemies. They were urged not to kill women, children, the aged or the hermits who meditated in seclusion. They were also forbidden to cut down fruit-bearing trees, burn crops, destroy buildings or needlessly kill animals.

Although all Somalis profess Islam, adherence to this faith did not prevent them from engaging in clan warfare and looting each other's animal stocks. This may be explained by the fact that, among Somalis, clannish sentiments were always stronger than loyalty to religious teachings, and that to be disgraced in this world was far more serious to them than being damned in the next, as evidenced by their oft-quoted saying:-

Men prefer damnation to oppression.

This attitude of defiance notwithstanding, Somalis greatly revered all apparent symbols and manifestations of religion. For example, in any war, places of worship and religious study e.g. mosques, Koranic schools, saints' shrines etc., were not violated. No weapons could be taken into them; no homicide or any other harm would be committed inside their walls; and no person who had sought refuge inside them could be dragged outside to be executed. Also, the destruction or looting of mosques and other religious places was something that had never taken place prior to the current civil war. Likewise, if someone from the enemy was caught by his pursuers and he raised a copy of the Koran or the wooden tablet used by students of the Koran saying, "O Koran of Allah, I place myself under your protection", he was usually left alone unharmed. A Somali saying that demonstrates respect for places of worship goes as follows:

A mosque is a house of God; he who shows reverence towards it shall not fail to be rewarded.

8. Treatment of the Wounded

When hostilities between two groups had reached an extreme level where neither of them would spare the lives of enemy wounded warriors who fell into its hands, a third neutral lineage, inhabiting the same area of settlement, would volunteer to render humanitarian assistance to the war wounded from both sides in the conflict. This neutral party evacuated the wounded from the field of battle and provided them with medical treatment and general care. The members of this clan who were engaged in this humanitarian task were not harmed or harassed by any of the two lineages involved in the fighting because their service was free from any considerations of material gain or any other selfish motivation. It was also in the interest of both parties to the conflict.

Sometimes, the responsibility for giving neutral assistance to wounded combatants was assumed by the men of religion who also took custody of looted livestock from both sides in order to hand them over to their owners after the feuding had been brought to an end.

The role played by such groups in past wars is comparable to the roles in today's conflicts of non-combatant medical personnel and humanitarian organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, an organisation that provides assistance, medical and otherwise, to persons affected by war.

9. Weapons and Practices Prohibited in Conflict

Based on the tradition of fighting with honour that was so cherished by Somalis, there were weapons whose employment in warfare was permitted, and others whose use was prohibited. Those allowed included spears, swords, clubs, daggers, sling shots, non-poisoned arrows, etc. While those that were banned included whips, poison, poisoned arrows, axes, machetes and the knives used for slaughtering animals. Likewise, the acts of violence that were prohibited included killing someone by strangulation or choking, burying someone alive, insulting one's lineage, spitting in one's face, hitting someone with a shoe or slapping him on the face. Also, to mutilate the body of a dead person or uncover its genitals were considered to be a particularly outrageous violation of custom.

Hitting someone with a whip, or a shoe, or spitting on her/him was construed as a sign of contempt and condescension towards that person and his lineage and led to some of the most intense hostilities. This point is illustrated by the following two lines of poetry:

He who fails to react to a slap of condescension shall suffer its dire
consequences;
A problem which you fail to ever address will only be passed on to your
offspring.

It has been reported that in some parts of the Somali territory the committee arbitrating in the extraordinarily hideous murder of someone would come to the arbitration tree carrying its full fighting gear composed of spear, dagger, shield, etc., which was not normally allowed on such occasions as indicated by the proverb:

An arbitration case and a shield cannot be brought together under a tree [of
arbitration].

In a case like this, however, this was done in order to impress the enormity of the deed on those guilty of having committed it. Members of the guilty party were themselves not allowed to bring any weapons with them.

When incidence of the criminal act and the identity of those responsible for it had been established, the committee would move to the settlement of the offenders and set up camp there. It remained there until the complete compensation had been paid. This consisted of one hundred live she-camels, the oldest of which had conceived a maximum of four times, and the youngest of which was to be no less than four years old. In addition to that, the guilty party had to pay for the dead man's burial rites and to pay an additional number of animals by way of an apology to the dead man's kin. Over and above all that, they had to meet all the expenses incurred by the arbitration committee during its deliberations.

If the lineage guilty of the horrible murder failed to accept the committee's rulings, then it would be subjected to an attack launched jointly by all the other lineages involved. Whatever casualties it sustained in such an operation went without compensation, while it was forced to pay for any damages to life or property that it caused.

10. Negotiations and Peace Settlements

[Every] war gives way to peace,

says a Somali proverb.

If two clans became involved in a war against each other, both of them sustaining damages in terms of human casualties and property losses, they eventually came together and effected a reconciliation, no matter how long or destructive their conflict had been.

There were many people who always advocated peace and conciliation and who tried their best to extinguish the fires of hostility and to establish relations of amity and harmony among the various groups, while some other people (e.g. maidens) were themselves used to cement the peace agreement concluded between two feuding families. The categories of persons who played an instrumental role in the cessation of hostilities included the following:

10.1. The Titled Heads of Clans

Somalis generally believed that a person's status in life was decreed by Allah. Therefore, they regarded the traditional heads of clans, who bore such titles as *Garaad, Boqor, Sultan, Ugaas, Malaaq, Wabar, etc.*, as persons who were willed by Allah to hold such offices and who enjoyed certain religious powers that made potent both their curses and blessings. These titled clan heads did not have the power institutions to impose their wishes but ruled rather, through the consensus of the clan, endorsing the positive decisions of clan councils, and using their moral influence to undermine negative resolutions.

A clan head was not supposed to counsel war, lead a raid, take a share of looted stock or in any way, be responsible for causing people to suffer. Once, a clan head was hurt in the course of hostilities for which he had been partly responsible. The following lines of poetry were, therefore, composed by someone who wanted to register his disapproval of the man's attitude and conduct:

If a Moslem chief goads on hostility;
If, with every new daybreak, he sharpens the weapons of war;
Like an aggressive bull that has been hit on the flank by another;
If he falls, bottom-first, into a pit then that is what he really deserves!

Thus, when the signs of war appeared over the horizon, it was all responsible men, in general, and the titled heads of clan, in particular, who hastened to intervene between the groups involved and to dampen the fires of hostility, or restore the peace if some fighting had already taken place. The clan heads were usually successful in their peace-seeking efforts because they commanded considerable respect, and because it was believed that the group which started fighting against the wishes of its own traditional head, or the advice of other heads, would suffer defeat in the ensuing war.

10.2. The Poets

Among the illiterate Somali pastoralists great importance was attached to the spoken word, and of all the forms of speech, poetry was the most highly regarded because it was the most potent and the easiest to memorise. An accomplished poet, therefore, enjoyed considerable respect and admiration in Somali society and continues to do so.

Although a poet would sometimes use his talent for the purpose of inciting hostilities and for making clannish boasts, there were many other times when he would employ his gift of words for the purpose of preventing war, for communicating his experience and wisdom and for reconciling two camps that had engaged in armed conflict. As an example of the latter role:

It is said that sometime in the beginning of this century, two segments of a clan inhabiting the Somali region of Togdheer had a conflict. When each of them had mobilised its fighters to engage the other in fighting, and everybody else's efforts to diffuse the tension had failed, a poet called Salaan Arrabey, who belonged to a third segment of the same clan, stood on raised ground between the two forces and recited a "geeraar" poem of his own composition, parts of which are quoted below:

That day when [the descendants of] Omar Daahir;
Had killed one another over a trifle; and
He who had witnessed the battle of "The White Entrails"; and
Was filled in on [the horrors of the battle at] *Meygaag-Iidan*;
Knows well the destructive effects of war;
And has had enough lessons;
So, kinsmen, please stop the hostilities!

He who has supped [well] for some nights;
Has a wispy cloud that casts no shadow;
Presented to him through a mist;
[So that] for him to peacefully enjoy his health;
Would seem to be an unreasonable proposition;
So, kinsmen, please stop the hostilities!

The meaning of these words of mine;
He who has been fated to die;
And the ignorant will fail to comprehend;
But when young men die;
And a significant number of men had been decimated;
Then, recriminations will be traded;
So, kinsmen, please stop the hostilities!

The two groups of you;
Who are displaying signs of aggressiveness towards each other;
You and I are next of kin;
Yet there is a grudge between us;
And we both know what you did at *Anla*;
So if you now start to prey on each other;

I will not just stand by and watch;
But I will ally myself with one of you;
And descend in attack on the other;
Therefore, O kinsmen! please stop the hostilities!"

Soon after the poet had finished his address, the two forces which had faced each other were dispersed and sent home, their leaders having been convinced by his argument.

10.3. Men of Religion

While the men of religion belonged generally to the category of respected community leaders, they enjoyed additional esteem and deference because of their knowledge of the Islamic religion and the laws of the Sharia. It followed from that fact that Somali priests took an active and prominent role in the prevention and quelling of wars. Whenever there was a flare-up of hostilities, the priests in the community raised copies of the Holy Koran as well as pieces of white cloth with holy writing on them and stood between the two hostile groups, calling on them to stop the fighting, and threatening to call down a curse on the party that refused. Due to the great respect they commanded, the men of religion were often successful in their missions.

10.4. Women

During hostilities, women often were the only ones who had the freedom of movement between the camps of the two adversary groups. At times like this, they provided the only source of information to each camp on the plans and intentions of the other and on the degree of its readiness for a cessation of the war. They were also used as go-betweens, conveying messages of reconciliation from one side to the other and back. It has also been reported that in the north western corner of the Somali territory, women especially those past the age of fertility, were used as peace delegates.

In addition to the above, when peace had been concluded between any two previously warring lineages, and their mutual claims for compensation had been satisfactorily settled, they exchanged virginal maidens in a gesture aimed at reinforcing the reconciliation just achieved. This practice also signified, symbolically, that each clan's young women who were given in marriage to the other would bear their husbands sons who would compensate the lineage for those men it had lost in the war. Moreover, the measure was designed to establish relations of affinity between the two communities, that would prevent a recurrence of hostilities in the future. A Somali proverb related to this practice says:

Where blood has been spilled, birth fluids should also be spilled [in order to erase it].

Thus women took an important part, both in the process leading up to reconciliation and in the peace act itself.

10.5. Blacksmiths

The role of this group is confined (as far as we know), to the agricultural communities inhabiting the area between the two rivers. It has been reported that if an individual, or a group, belonging to that Somali caste that monopolised the profession of metal-working intervened between two groups who had been engaged in fighting, or were about to do so, and called on them to bring the hostilities to an end, such a call would immediately be accepted. This is explained by the monopoly which members of this group had over the manufacture of weapons, making those who reject their mediation fear the imposition of a ban on weapons sales to them, a measure that would ensure their defeat in the war.

10.6. The Reconciliation Process and Compensation

Among the pastoral nomads, when finally the elders of two formerly warring groups were brought together under the tree of reconciliation, the men who had been killed on either side during the war would be counted. Then, the group that had sustained more deaths would be compensated for its extra men killed in action. Also, if there had been mutual looting of livestock during the war, each party would be given back its missing stock. That would be followed by the exchange of maiden brides, and the administration of oaths to the leaders of both sides, committing them to observe the peace. The process would be sealed with prayers and holy readings from the Koran.

In the inter-riverine area, the two groups party to the conflict were mediated by the learned men of religion and members of the Ashraaf clan (which claims descent from the prophet, Mohammed, through his daughter, Fatima). When the two groups had agreed to be reconciled, a ritual ewe (or a camel) was taken from each of them to the other's camp where it was ceremonially slaughtered.

After this symbolic act, the mediating committee started to sort out the differences of the two groups, and the party found to be in the wrong made to pay a fine. Only after that, were each side's war losses counted. Among the Digil confederation of clans, the compensation for an extra dead man, in the case of internal conflicts, consisted merely of a ritual ewe and payment of the costs incurred in performing the man's burial rites; but within the Mirifle family of clans, payment of the complete standard blood price was required.

The representatives of the two clans involved then shook each other's hands, or placed their hands on a copy of the Holy Koran and swore that they were sincere about the peace. The proceedings were concluded with each side dedicating the *Faatixa* (the opening sura of the Koran) to the other and with the blessings of the clergymen and the Ashraaf.

11. Conclusion

We have demonstrated in the course of this study that, although conflicts did take place among the various Somali clans, acts of excessive violence occurred rarely. War always had its regulating conventions and well-defined bounds which served to limit its effects, and which also set forth clearly the kind of actions that were permitted and those that were prohibited. This was supplemented by the strict customary laws that were invoked to deal with any violation of the established rules.

In the course of researching this subject, there was common consensus among those interviewed on the fact that acts of violence and abuse against the weak and vulnerable members of society, which ran counter to the Somali code on wartime conduct, were seldom committed and were carried out, even in those rare cases, in moderation. There is also general agreement among all clans, and in all regions, on the need to protect those categories of persons covered by the traditional concept of "immunity from violence," as well as the groups of people who qualified for being members of that class.

As already mentioned, traditional Somalis, wherever they happened to be, adhered uniformly to the same set of codes for warfare. Any differences that might be found were of a minor nature, and resulted from special circumstances, as in the case of the Issa who have common boundaries with many peoples of non-Somali ethnicity, and the community of cultivators, which because of their different way of life, evolved certain special laws.

It was, thus, this body of Somali customary laws, based on considerations of honour and moral rectitude, that made sure hostilities were not taken to extremes, making difficult the restoration of peace later. This was based on the realisation that the proliferation in any war of immoral acts and violations of human dignity contributed to the intensification of animosities and the prolongation of hostilities resulting in intolerably excessive damage to both life and property. This was a calamity against which people prayed by saying:

May we not be afflicted by any of the following:

- [Violent] anger that does not subside;
- Poverty that is not relieved by wealth;
- A disease from which there is no recovery;
- A war that does not give way to peace;
- Knowledge that is not positively utilised.

The worst of all the above mentioned afflictions was the war that would not give way to peace since all the others are limited in their effect to individuals or a limited number of people - while the effects of war are more general and far-reaching. The dire conditions of war are brought about by failure to observe its rules as well as the traditional principle of immunity; and by failure to conform to the typical instructions of the traditional commander who urged:

Do not depart from the traditional customs of the Somali people;
Do not cause our lineage to be disgraced; fight with honour and moral restraint.

To someone who had discarded considerations of honour and moral reserve, the suffering and destruction resulting from war did not matter, as rightly stated in the line of poetry:

Lo! An immoral person cares not about [the devastation of] war.

The following two lines from a contemporary poet, Abshir Ba'adle, also demonstrate the consequences of the excessive acts of violence committed during a war by the likes of such an immoral and irresponsible personality:

If two clans fight and one of them is weakened;
Those whose weak family members were slain do not accept reconciliation.

In order to facilitate reconciliation, actions that generate strong and lasting bitterness should be avoided in the first place, always bearing in mind that war will eventually come to an end and that former enemies will be able to come together again. When that day arrives, he who had acted, during the war in a manner that was contrary to all religious principles and cultural conventions, will end up being a social pariah who is despised and shunned by everybody, in accordance with the saying that:

Everyone reaps the fruits of the tree he has planted.

The answer to the question of why the codes discussed in this study do not operate in Somalia's current civil hostilities as they did in the past is one that is open to everyone.



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