

Lidwien Kapteijns, Review of Mohamed Ingiriis, *The Suicidal State* (2016), *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (2016), pp. 457-459.

***The Suicidal State in Somalia: The Rise and Fall of the Siad Barre Regime, 1969–1991.*** By Mohamed Haji Ingiriis. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016. Pp. 363. \$85.00 cloth, \$84.99 e-Book.

One does not commonly begin a review with commenting on its substandard formal characteristics; even less so, when an author is a graduate student who lived in Mogadishu, Somalia, until October 2002, and has therefore had less opportunity to master writing in English. However, the first obstacle a reader must overcome when s/he opens this book is its pervasive grammatical mistakes, which make whole sentences and arguments incomprehensible. Especially challenging is the Introduction and most of Part 1, where the author introduces his book and places Somalia in the wider African colonial context, this complete disregard for grammar remains problematic throughout. Representative examples are sentences such as these: “By communal is referred to a State where every clan and community had their voice and attempted to appropriate the whole national State for themselves” (p. 3), and “Compagnon treats quite less critical to the regime than to armed opposition movements, minimising the State terror unleashed upon civilians and pointing out instead panegyric personalities from other clans to stress that Siad Barre’s rule was not as clannish as it seemed” (p. 5). One wonders whether publishers such as the University

Press of America have stopped caring about the books they publish now our university libraries buy huge electronic bundles of books irrespective of quality of form or content. In any case, the author and readers of this book have been very poorly served.

The time is certainly right for a new study of the period of military dictatorship in Somalia, for, while there have certainly been many edited volumes and book chapters on this subject, the most important monographs were written in the late 1980s. Moreover, the very informative dissertation by Daniel Compagnon, which dates from 1995, is in French and remains unpublished. However, it is regrettable that Ingiriis does not properly situate his new study in the wider historiography about Barre's military regime. He ignores, for example, major studies about the fall-out from land expropriation and the implementation of foreign-funded, large-scale industrial projects implemented in this period, as well as about the regime's increasing use of large-scale clan-based violence against civilians, whether in Mudug or the Northwest. When he refers to certain major texts (such as those of Ahmed and Abdi Samatar), he limits his engagement to brief (even snide) remarks in text or footnotes (e.g., Introduction, notes 19, 40; Chapter 11, note 121). This makes it difficult for the reader to determine what is new in this author's analysis.

What is indeed new in Ingiriis' study is the number and range of sources he brings to the table. This constitutes both an accomplishment and the book's Achilles heel. On the one hand, the author distinguishes himself by unearthing new sources such as transcripts of the conversations between John Kennedy and the then serving Somali premier in 1962 (p. 42), or the Somali court proceedings about the assassination of President Abdirashid Sharmarke in 1969 (p. 54). On the other hand, he mixes his valid references with many invalid and even deceptive ones. For example, the author asserts that Barre was the personal servant of Gerald Hanley, a military man who served in Somalia during World War II (p. 27), and that Barre learned violent armed repression while training in British Kenya during Mau Mau (p. 28). When one checks the footnotes, one finds Hanley's fond description of two personal servants, neither of whom was Barre, and a list of five books on Mau Mau, none of which mention Barre (p. 28). This is misleading. Similar, but more politically charged, is the author's claim that Abdirazak Haji Hussein, the one-but-last prime minister of Somalia's civilian administrations, together with another politician called Zoppo, was "quick in supporting" Barre's coup (p. 60). The footnote here is to a diplomatic cable that can be found on the wikileaks website but does *not* mention Abdirazak at all, speaking only about the other politician (pp. 60–61). In fact, the former prime minister was imprisoned when the coup took place.

Such flawed source references to individuals gain special weight because Ingiriis' study is focused on Somali political personalities and their roles in Somali politics between 1960 and 1992. The book's downfall is that the author brings to this very detailed set of stories *not* a commitment to what LaCapra in *Writing History* calls "the referential dimension of history,"<sup>1</sup> but one to scoring points in a civil war of words fought by the pen. In the context of this review, one illustration of what appears to be bad faith must suffice. It has to do with the Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977–1978, in whose aftermath the Barre regime, to cover up its own political failures, selected for immediate execution, without any due process, circa one hundred soldiers and officers selected on the basis of their clan

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<sup>1</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 239.

identities. Different oral and written accounts circulate about who ordered and implemented these acts of outrage and it would have been acceptable for Ingiriis to argue for a particular version. However, he does not mention alternative versions and uses as his single source a 2014 telephone conversation with the very same General Galaal whose name is firmly associated with selecting for execution at least some of these men (p. 159). That Galaal after Barre's fall went on to become a major perpetrator during the clan cleansing campaign of 1991–1992 makes the un-contextualized use of his testimony even more problematic.

Two brief final chapters (before the Conclusion) deal with the regime's fall and its immediate aftermath, which the author—without engaging the most recent studies of this period, including this reviewer's—simply and in just a few pages characterizes as chaotic clan fighting to which the question of accountability is not relevant (pp. 234–44). Here Ingiriis appears to adopt the untenable assumption that clan identity and sentiment *a priori* constitute the explanation of what needs explaining; this allows him to sidestep the crucial historical question of how, *in the specific context of 1991–1992*, clan as a political tool and popular mindset helped mobilize ordinary people for large-scale communal violence. Suppressing issues of agency and accountability in the priming for, and the organizing and perpetrating of large-scale, clan-based violence against civilians is out of step with the state of scholarship about mass-violence in 2016; in the Somali context, too, this is no longer theoretically, historiographically, or politically viable.

It is a pity that an author of Ingiriis's background, linguistic ability in Somali, love of wide and diverse reading, and capacity for hard work is so blinded by the conflict identities and clan hate-narratives that are part and parcel of Somalia's long civil war. In the end, it is for the continuing currency of those identities and hate-narratives that his book constitutes most powerful evidence.

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***African Teachers on the Colonial Frontier: Tswana Evangelists and Their Communities during the Nineteenth Century.*** By Stephen C. Volz. New York: Peter Lang, 2011. Pp. 293; 12 b/w illustrations, 2 maps, 2 tables. \$76.95 cloth and e-book.

A serious reconsideration is taking place in the historiography of African Christianity. In light of its astonishing twentieth-century growth and dynamism, it has become harder to imagine African Christianity as a simple byproduct of European missions and colonial conquest.

Much of the reconceptualization has centered on southern Africa, particularly in the nineteenth century, when hundreds of missionaries fanned out into regions convulsed by intermittent war among black chiefdoms and white colonial settlements. For a long time it