

Study of somalia and globalization history essay



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\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [History](#) \n \t
2. [Population and Consumption](#) \n \t
3. [Hunger and Poverty](#) \n \t
4. [Environment](#) \n \t
5. [Disease and Healthcare](#) \n \t
6. [Indigenous Populations](#) \n \t
7. [Protest](#) \n \t
8. [Conclusion](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Through my research on Somalia it has become clear that attempts to globalize, beginning with colonization during the late 19th century and continuing with the policies of international institutions and foreign nations to the present, have contributed to many of the problems affecting Somalis today. The inability to implement a national government, rampant violence, growth of hunger and poverty and increases in terrorism can in most cases be traced back to the policies of foreign powers and their attempts to control and modernize the Somali nation-state.

History

Somalia, along with much of the African continent in the 19th and 20th centuries, was subject to aggressive colonization by foreign powers. This period marked the growth of European imperialism and in many ways led to

the breaking up of previously cultural boundaries into lands consisting of multiple cultures, peoples and languages.

By the late 19th century, Aden was established as an important port for the British on the northern coast. During this period France also sought to stake its claim along the coast, while in southern Somalia Italy began to assume control over the Banaadir coast. Ethiopia also emerged as a regional power and fought to gain control over Ogaden in southern Somalia. (Metz, 1993)

One result of this rapid colonization was the creation of multiple borders in a region that had historically possessed distinct cultural identities. British Somaliland, French Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, Ethiopian Somaliland and the Northern Frontier District were formed from what had been one land.

In the decades that followed, Italy emerged as the most active in the governing and development of its land in southern Somalia. Italian citizens were encouraged by the government to settle and implemented fruit and sugarcane plantations to develop the region's economy. With the outbreak of World War II Italian troops took over Ethiopian and British Somaliland to bring most of Somalia under the control of one power. This was short lived however and in 1941 Britain defeated Italy and gained control of the majority of Somalia. (Metz, 1993)

The Potsdam Conference of 1945 placed the future of Somalia in the hands of the Allied Council of Foreign Ministers, which called for Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union to decide what course of action to take. Ogaden was returned to Ethiopia despite huge protests and destroyed hope for a greater Somali nation. Ultimately it was decided that Somalia be placed

under Italian rule for a short period, after which it would become an independent nation. According to the UN agreement, the Italians were required to help Somalia prepare for independence and develop its economic and political infrastructure. (Metz, 1993)

To the protest of many Somalis, Britain handed Haud over to Ethiopia; although after the election in 1960, Britain did give its remaining portion of lands to the Somali government. President Usmaan was elected along with Prime Minister Shermaarke to lead the newly independent and unified nation. Contributing to the difficulties in unifying Somalia was the inequality in which the Italian and British territories had been governed, leaving northern Somalis at a disadvantage politically and economically. (Hurgin)

The idea of pan-Somalism dominated the political agenda of the new government and led to demands to get back Northern Frontier District. Kenya's denial to hand the NFD back to Somalia added to regional tensions and armed conflict with Somalis. Growing nationalism and a desire for a Greater Somalia also led to conflict with Ethiopia over Haud and the formation of a defense pact between Kenya and Ethiopia to protect against Somali efforts.

The Soviets provided technological and monetary aid during the 1960s; this along with Britain's cession of Haud and US support for Ethiopia created strong anti-western sentiments in Somalia, which culminated in the overthrow of the government by Siyad Barre, a militant "scientific socialist". Barre gained popularity during the 1970s, establishing Latin script as the national written language and launched a huge campaign to spread its use

across the country. Despite these efforts, the UN estimated that literacy in Somalia was only 24% in 1990. (Metz, 1993)

Under Barre's administration much of the economy was controlled by the state, with nationalized banking, agricultural and insurance agencies. Focus on the war to reclaim Ogaden still remained a main concern of the regime, leading to increasing debt and decreasing industrial production. The rescheduling of debts owed to the US, Soviet Union, China and other European countries, as well as OPEC and OECD in this period resulted in increased foreign control over the Somali economy. Somalia rescheduled its debt again in 1985 with the Paris Club, consisting of 18 western nations, and in return a free market was implemented with restructuring of the government and economy. With aid from the Paris Club and IMF inflation decreased and grain prices leveled, however Somalia still remained dependent largely on foreign imports. (Metz, 1993)

Population and Consumption

Somalia's population is estimated at over 10 million people, however gathering an accurate number has been hindered due to migration and refugee movements over the last several decades. The population growth rate is estimated at 2.8% with an infant mortality rate of 10.7% and an average life expectancy of about 50 years. (CIA, 2010)

As a result of the war with Ogaden under Barre's rule, approximately 400,000 Somalis fled to surrounding countries and with the outbreak of civil war in the 1990s, close to 800,000 sought refuge in the face of increasing violence. Severe flooding in 1997 also caused hundreds of thousands to be

displaced internally or leave the country. Although many have returned following these events, Somalia is cited as having among the world's highest applications for asylum over the last decade. (Griffiths, 2003)

Today Somalia is broken up along political, clan and former colonial borders. The northern region is divided into an independent Somaliland in the west and Puntland, which identifies more strongly with the greater Somalia. Since the collapse of the government under Siyad Barre, Somali society has become increasingly stratified into class, racial and clan divisions contributing to political and social inequality and violent conflict. (Hohne, 2006) Nomadic herders still occupy many rural areas, while others have adopted a more sedentary lifestyle to raise crops and livestock. Mogadishu, Merca, Baraawe, Kismayu and Berbera are some of the larger coastal cities in Somalia, many of which saw substantial damage during the 1990s as a result of civil war. Difficulties in rebuilding areas of the country have been increased due to insufficient infrastructure and transportation, as well as the inability to implement a stable national government. (Hurgin)

The Somali economy, driven largely by agriculture and livestock production, was set back severely by the outbreak of civil war and drought in the 1990s. Today fisheries, farms for sustenance and export and industries related to the processing of these goods form a majority of the Somali economy. Foreign grain is also provided to fight hunger and decreases in production from the onset of war, disease and drought. (Metz, 1993)

Hunger and Poverty

Poverty has become a widespread problem throughout Somalia after the collapse of the national government and today it is estimated that over 40% of Somalis live in poverty, especially in rural areas where it is closer to half the population. Displacement from land due to war, drought and flooding has decreased agricultural and livestock production, with the Saudi Arabian ban on Somali livestock adding to the financial problems of many farmers. (IFAD)

Marginalization of groups within Somalia, along with a large refugee population has exacerbated the hunger and poverty issues facing the country. Although international aid has been provided, the onset of civil war has halted many of these groups culminating in the recent UN suspension of relief efforts due to increasing threats of violence and terrorism.

The northern portion of the country has experienced more economic stability and considerably less violence than the south, where civil war has continued for about 15 years. The rise of al Shabaab and their anti western stance has also inhibited efforts to fight hunger and poverty in the south where it is most severe. (IFAD)

Environment

Somalia is primarily an agricultural society, relying on the land and surrounding waters for sustenance and profit; it occupies 640, 000 square kilometers, an area about the size of Texas, on the horn of Africa. Arid plains that spread across much of the country provide a relatively harsh environment for farmers and herders, with limited rainfall and arable land. Because of this, Somalis have adapted to this difficult environment by

adopting a nomadic lifestyle, practiced by about half the population. (Metz, 1993)

In the southern portion of Somalia, lands are considerably more suited for farming with the presence of the Jubba and Shabeelle rivers. The Italians recognized this during their control over the region and implemented sugarcane and banana plantations run by settlers, resources that still contribute to Somali exports today. These plantations utilized primarily Bantu laborers, a clan comprised mainly of the descendants of slaves brought to the country in the 18th and 19th centuries. With the end of colonial rule, the plantations became a source of economic and political inequality, primarily for the Bantu who have become increasingly marginalized. (Besteman, 1996)

Overall Somalia is not in possession of many valuable natural resources. The World Bank and UN cited potential for drillable oil in Somalia's region, however with the political and economic turmoil of the last several decades, no progress has been made in extracting any of these resources. Today Somalia remains dependant on foreign oil, with a small amount of energy also being supplied by wind turbines throughout the country. (Metz, 1993)

Disease and Healthcare

Somalis today are affected by a number of diseases readily treatable in other parts of the world, such as malaria, tuberculosis, tetanus and venereal disease; the absence of a health care system since the fall of Siyad Barre has added the severity of these problems. In addition, the huge number of

refugees and nomads moving throughout the country pose difficulties in treatment and controlling the spread of disease.

Contaminated water supplies, refugee camps, malnutrition and malaria carrying mosquitoes are some of the major health issues facing the country today. Although foreign aid has been provided to treat disease in Somalia, efforts have been focused on mainly the refugee population and proved to be only marginally successful. To make matters worse, the UN has recently suspended health and hunger operations in the face of militant threats and opposition by al-Shabaab. (Howden, 2010)

Indigenous Populations

Somalia is composed of several clans that form the basic structure of society and regional identities. The Isaaq, Darood, Dir, Hawiye, Digil and Rahanweyn are six major clan families, which are further divided into clans, subclans, sub-subclans and partilineages. Within these groups there are further distinctions based upon lineage and intra-clan relations that add to the complexity of Somali clan systems. Positions of nobility or commoner are often determined through descent in clan and familial lines, however mobility is evident within and between clans. (Besteman, 1996)

The Somali government has contributed to the stratification of society and degradation of clan relations through unequal access to resources and political support for dominant groups. Marginalization of clans, such as the Bantu, as a result of political policy has added to social problems often resulting in internal violence and displacement. Also the decision to implement a written national language and modernize the nation-state under

Siyad Barre was unsuccessful in large part due to the use of traditional dialects by different clans in rural areas of Somalia. (Besteman, 1996)

Media coverage has portrayed the civil war in terms of deep-rooted clan warfare, showing these groups as primitive organizations with access to modern weapons. Unfortunately, little attention has been given to the connection between globalization and the problems facing Somalia today. It is also evident that the aims of the Western world and the attempts to modernize Somalia conflict with its clan traditions, contributing to the negative connotations that have developed. (Besteman, 1996)

Protest

The most significant form Somali protest to globalization and the Western world has been through the growth of al Shabaab, an Islamic fundamentalist group whose influence has spread throughout Somalia. In recent years the militant group, which opposes globalization and Western interference, has gained control over most of southern Somalia and driven out Ethiopian forces in support of the Transitional Federal Government. (Country reports on terrorism, 2009)

Al Shabaab was listed as a terrorist organization by the US government in 2008, citing connections with al Qaeda and numerous attacks and bombings within Somalia. Even with support from the international community the TFG struggles to maintain control over the nation and in the face of al Shabaab's growing influence. Today most of the news coverage on Somali terrorism has been focused on the organization's piracy against foreign vessels and suicide bombings. (Holzer, 2008)

Conclusion

The influence of foreign powers and their attempts to globalize Somalia have had long term consequences on its social, economic and political condition. Today the government struggles to control Somali territory against the rise of terrorism directly opposing the goals of globalization. People throughout the country are faced with violence, displacement and poverty in a country with little means to provide assistance, in an atmosphere so threatening that international institutions are unable or unwilling to undertake substantial relief efforts.