Markus V. Hoehne and Virginia Luling, eds.


_Milk and Peace, Drought and War: Somali Culture, Society and Politics_, as a collection of essays, is a _Festschrift_ for Ioan Myridian Lewis, considered doyen of English-speaking Somali Studies. The co-editors – Markus V. Hoehne and Virginia Luling – knew the honoree very well because one of them had Lewis to supervise her doctoral work from late 1960s until early 1970s. They describe him as “the founder and father” of the field. However, such an accolade rests with Sheikh Aweys Mohamed Al-Muhyyiddiin Al-Baraawe (1846-1909), the subaltern Somali Sheikh, who first wrote an Arabic religious treatise and research studies in the late nineteenth century.

The _Festschrift_ seeks to press for the structural-functionalist preoccupation with the Somali clan system by surveying the copious works of Lewis, who has dominated the field more than anyone else for over half a century. For all his academic life, Lewis as an out-and-out Somalist, has been a jack-of-all-trades and master of many. His influence is marked not only in anthropological and historical studies on Somalia, but also in northeast literature on Islam. Interestingly, while the erstwhile Somali dictator (Mohamed Siad Barre) had been dictating in the façades of the Somali state power for over two decades, Lewis was also commanding the Somali Studies. One of their common tendencies was the absence of accommodating a discretely dissenting voice, or, simply put, a contrary view. In particular, Lewis has avoided engaging with his opponents in scholarly debate.

A (British) social anthropologist by training, he had the influence of Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, the founder of the structural-functionalist theoretical perspective in anthropology. In contrast with Bronislaw Malinowski’s functionalism, Lewis embarked on his research in British Somaliland in late 1950s, conceptualizing and defining Somali society in terms of what suited the British colonial authorities through a Eurocentric worldview. Here, he does not tell us how the Somalis whom he studies had conceptualised and defined clanship, but propagates _ad infinitum_ conclusions he reached after 24 months of fieldwork in late 1950s.

The Radcliffe-Brownian structural-functionalism has disappeared in other parts of Africa, but not in Somalia, where its static model is still in full swing. It is quite surprising that a _fin-de-siecle_ Lewisian anthropology on Somalia is still dominant in Somali Studies. Here, Lewis seems much less of Radcliffe-Brownian and more of Pritchardian than any other protégées of theirs. Drawing upon my contemporary academic training of anthropology and history, this
reviewer can safely contend that Lewis has studied Somali clans, but he has not studied in Somali clans.

Lewis’s classic pioneering work, *A Pastoral Democracy* (1961), on the Isaaq and Daarood clan-groups of British Somaliland, was seemingly inspired by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard’s study on the South Sudan in 1940. It is thought to be the first anthropological study on Somalia (save for earlier excellent ethnographic works by Enrico Cerulli and Massimo Colucci). It has to be noted that Evans-Pritchard was recruited to study the political institutions of the cattle-pastoralist Nuer so that they could be more effectively brought under British rule, later publishing his seminal work, *The Nuer* (1940). Lewis, however, has invented Somalia that does not exist.

Lewis has over the years been a proponent of the concept of kinship in Somali society. He promoted and gave voice (often in subtle ways) to what he calls “the segmentary lineage system” – a notion derived from Pritchard to whom Lewis does not refer. For him, Somali clanship is self-explanatory and self-evident; his argument is that it is there for all to see its effect on socio-political (in)stability, because of the war-of-all-to-all prevalent in nomadic clan culture. True that clanship is a social reality one cannot deny, yet the concept of clanship, as used in Somali Studies by different analysts with different agendas, has proved to be a necessary ingredient to understand the society. In the Somali cosmology, nothing can crosscut clan consciousness, even radical Islam, whilst Somaliness is often a binary form of false consciousness.

Indeed, Lewis holds that the concept of kinship is not a matrix of instrumental force responsive to change and to develop. This is not the case, and it has been proved that is not static but flexible. Scholars who disagree with Lewis (including this reviewer) see clanship as being flexible and responsive to change, in contrast to his assumption of historical and social rigidity. He has discussed at some length Somali patrilineal kinship – a social system based upon an extended descent family – as the permanent food for clanship. He once argued that his Somali subjects valued the concept of clanship as a religion.

However, for some major Somali clans, such as the southern Hawiye, Rahanweyn (Digil/Mirifle) and southern Dir, clan has no real McCoy meaning, but is only used as a temporary instrument to resist any northern pastoralists’ attempts to invade their territories in search of better pasture, yet the practical form of invasion is land expansionism, as the pastoralist Somali, guided by the camel, ‘the mother of the desert’, is always on the move and the invasion to other clan’s territories is deemed necessary. But whenever the latter clans feel threatened by northern Hawiye and Daarood pastoralists, they brusquely draw on the concept of kinship to promote solidarity among kinsmen aimed at