
The Limitation of Segmentary Lineage Theories: Somalia as an Example

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Abstract

For some time now, tribal societies have been analyzed through two theoretical approaches: British functionalism and French structuralism. Although they differ conceptually in their interpretations, both theories emphasize that tribal societies are ranked, socially and politically, according to an ongoing process of lineage segmentation. Therefore, the overall purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze the existing literature on Somali society's segmentary lineage system, and to determine how that data coincides with the more general anthropological approaches to similar segmentary systems. This overall purpose is accomplished through an illustration of the anthropological segmentary lineage theories; an interpretation of the Somali segmentary lineage system; and an examination of whether the Somali segmentary lineage system proves or disproves the existing anthropological theories. In conclusion, the author indicates that the function and structure of the Somali segmentary lineage system reflects a major contradiction with the theoretical assumptions provided by both functionalist and structuralist theories. Therefore, the author argues that a new theoretical interpretation for societies based on segmentary lineage system is importantly needed.

Somalia (Somal in Arabic) is one of the major states in Eastern Africa. It is bounded on the north by the Gulf of Aden, on the east and south by the Indian Ocean, on the southwest by Kenya, on the west by Ethiopia, and on the northwest by Djibouti. Somalia is a member of the Arab League. The state religion is Islam, and the major spoken languages are Somali and Arabic.

Somalia's social and political relations are ultimately based upon and influenced by patrilineal kinship ties. The importance of kinship relations can be seen in the on-going conflict between clans, which led to the collapse of the Somali State in 1991. Tribal alliances between several clans were successful in removing the state president General Mohammad Sayid Barri from power. Since then, clan conflicts and competition to control the state apparatus and power have escalated, and the civil war seems to be endless. This type of political situation is theoretically a fascinating one, though it is socially disastrous. As an anthropologist specializing in tribal societies, I consider the recent Somali situation a sufficient example for examining specific anthropological theories related to the socio-political system in societies based on tribal structure and organization.

Accordingly, this paper deals with two anthropological perspectives: the functionalist and structuralist models, both of which emphasize the process of lineage segmentation as an analytical tool for the study of tribal societies. *Lineage segmentation* refers here to "a model that uses the principles of unilineal descent to explain the homeostatic functioning of acephalous or non-centrally organized societies (Barfield, 419). To examine the validity of the two theoretical perspectives, an intensive analysis of the Somali segmentary lineage system is provided. The main intention of the analysis is to present some theoretically oriented considerations of the subject. To accomplish this goal, the paper is purposefully divided into three sections as follows.

The first section provides an anthropological account of two segmentary lineage models, which have been widely applied by anthropologists dealing with tribal societies. The purpose here is to clarify the notion of "segmentary lineage system" as used by both British and French scholars. The second section concentrates on the Somali society by showing the dynamics of lineage segmentation and unity, especially during a non-traditional time, such as civil war. A thorough discussion and explanation of the Somali segmentary lineage process is provided. The third section seeks to present a comparative analysis between the Somali segmentary lineage system and other segmentary lineage systems found around the world. The major task here is to determine whether or not the Somali segmentary lineage system coincides with more general anthropological models, which have been applied to similar tribal societies.

My point of departure in this paper is general, and is not limited to any specific theoretical conception of "lineage segmentation." What I am trying to present is a practical argument, which emphasizes the need for a new theoretical understanding and explanation of societies based on tribal structure and organization. Methodologically, this paper is based on a survey of existent research work on the Somali society's segmentary lineage system.

Segmentary Lineage System: An Anthropological Account

Segmentary lineage theory emerged for the first time with the works of Evans-Pritchard among the Sudanese Nuer tribe in 1940, and Fortes among the Nigerian Tallensi tribe in 1945. The major principle of this theory is based on the concept of descent, which has been defined anthropologically as the cultural principle by which the membership of a group, both its rights and obligations, "... is determined by relationship to a specific ancestor, putative or real" (Winthrop, 75). In this sense, *descent* establishes the essential mechanism and political order in kin-based societies. This kind of mechanism depends strictly on unilineal descent (either patri or matrilineal) in which "... all members regard one another as in some specific sense kinsfolk" (Radcliffe Brown, 48). According to Radcliffe-Brown, a group, as an association, is composed of rights and duties. Through the *descent*, which is the principal element of a group, these rights and duties will be divided differentially to generate borders and permit continuity for that group (Verdon, 130).

The idea of unilineal descent, which is explained by Radcliffe-Brown, plays a major role in the writing of the British anthropologists of the 1940s and 1950s, who emphasized the importance of these concepts as a cornerstone of segmentary lineage theory as well as a crucial element of membership. In other words, the concept of descent was used and seen as evidence for the functionalist theory. This led to the development of descent notion which was centered on the principle of membership where ...

An individual is affiliated with others through a common ancestor. On this basis, a person becomes a member of a group, receives rights, particularly rights in real and personal property, and incurs obligations, such as the ritual requirements of ancestor worship. This genealogical connection is commonly reckoned through ancestors of a single sex (Unilineal descent). If the connection runs through females this is termed matrilineal descent; if through males, patrilineal descent; and if through both sexes, bilateral descent. The unilineal descent principle yields unambiguous membership status and nonoverlapping groups, features that permit a group to exert social control in a range of contexts, as in the ownership of property (Winthrop, 75).

Based on the principle of unilineal descent, Evans-Pritchard and Fortes were able to develop a segmentary lineage theory for societies lacking

central governments. The nature of this theory, according to Evans-Pritchard, can be illustrated by examining how the functioning of tribal structure produces the political basis of those societies lacking state institutions. Evans-Pritchard goes on to illustrate this point by showing that the Nuer tribes, who cover very large areas and have a high population, are based on a complex segmentary structure. In the absence of tribal chiefs or other forms of tribal government, the organizing principle within the segmentary structure provides the Nuer with conceptual consistency as well as a strong measure of stable cohesion. This lineage system provides these societies a unique social structure and a distinct political collectivity, which in turn enhance the association of lineage value. Therefore, Evans-Pritchard states that "in the absence of a chief or king, who might symbolize a tribe, [the] unity [of people] is expressed in the idiom of lineage and clans affiliation" (Evans-Pritchard, 236). However, the dynamic of a segmentary political system is identified through the process of "fission and fusion," which is based on the system of blood feud. According to Kuper (80), the system of blood feud can be illustrated as follows:

The largest unit territorial and political community was the tribe, the unit within which homicide should be compensated for by blood-wealth rather than vengeance. The tribal territory was divided into segments, and at each successive level of segmentation the local groups were smaller and more cohesive. These segments had no absolute existence, but emerged in specific situation, called into being in opposition to like units. If a man in one village killed a man in another, the two entire villages would be forced into confrontation. If a man in either of these villages killed a man in another district, then all the villages in his district would unite against all the villages in the other district.

On the other hand, Fortes' study of the Tallensi shows that lineage solidarity is ultimately a function of both the cooperation and cohesion of its major segments. In public or private, common or specific, lineage members always cooperate as representatives of its major segments. According to Fortes (31), the segmentary lineage system of the Tallensi works in this way:

The lesser segments constituting each segment receive explicit recognition only in relation to the major segment. They emerge, then, as major segment of a major segment, and their segments, again, emerge only in relation to them; and so on down to minimal segments. In these affairs of common concern, rights and duties, privileges and obligations are distributed equally amongst the major segments of a lineage".

According to this kind of fission, Fortes states that the regulation of the relationship between discrete groups is based on what he called the "political-jural bond" as a function of the segmentary lineage system (Verdon, 132).

Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, then, observe the segmentary lineage system as a type of political system in which various descent lineages (either matri or patrilineal) build at different levels of segmentation and promote political functions. The complex arrangement of lineage groups within this system, as Scupin explains, is based on “complementary opposition” which forms alliances and resolves conflicts (Scupin 136). Complementary opposition process could be understood in the following way: lets imagine that we have two tribes Z and Y, and each of them have two clans, say, Z1, Z2, Y1 and Y2. If a member from Z1 killed a member from Z2, a feud may take place, but it will be solved within the tribe Z. On the other hand, if a member of Y1 killed a member, say, from Z2, a different process will occur. All members of Z1 and Z2 will come together and unite against the members of Y1 seeking a feud. In this sense, the members of Y1 will be joined and supported by the members of Y2. Therefore, political conflicts between different tribal lineages will politically unite the segmented groups of a tribe.

In brief, the political organization of segmentary lineage societies, according to both anthropologists, is based on three assumptions: (1) the political relationship must be conceived according to a tree of lineal descent; (2) each group of a new order of segmentation must be balanced by another group of equal power and strength; and (3) a segmentary lineage system provides all the individuals with equal rights and obligations¹. Although Evans-Pritchard and Fortes agree on these points, they disagree about the nature of the second assumption. While Evans-Pritchard insists that lineages of the same order of segmentation are balanced on equal strength and power, Fortes shows that this kind of balance is based on the distribution of equal status among lineages or the segments of a major lineage. That is, the equality among these groups is of status and not of power or strength inside the tribe, clan, or lineage. The maintenance of the status equality is based on “... the function of the ancestral ideology that links lineage with one another” (Fortes, 36).

Evans-Pritchard’s and Fortes’ segmentary lineage theories dominated the field of anthropology in the 1940s and 1950s. However, another alternative to their viewpoints was introduced in the 1960s by Levi-Strauss and his followers who developed a new theory: “alliance theory.” The major principle of this theory is that “[it has] identified relationships based on marriage rather than on an ideology of common descent as the critical factor linking localized clans or lineages within tribal societies” (Winthrop, 178). In other words, this model of alliance theory recognizes that the existence of segmentary organization of unilineal descent groups is a political one.

However, the articulation of the system is only seen in the marriage exchanges between the lineages. Thus, Levi-Strauss and, later, Edmund Leach, emphasize that descent has no crucial role in regulating the segmentary lineage system. Instead, it is the role of marriage exchanges through exogamy which make up the alliance between segmented lineages as well as providing them with cohesive alliances.

Accordingly, Levi-Strauss states that marriage among the Cushion tribes of aboriginal Australia is responsible for creating the kin relationships. In this respect, he demonstrates that the form of polygyny, the acquirement of more than wife, is important, especially for chiefs, for two reasons: (1) it produces more male heirs who will carry on the local descent group, and (2) it provides a husband with a political advantage which will advance and maintain his relationships through the marriage alliances with several groups (Leach, 84). Therefore, Levi-Strauss (310) writes that "kinship ... is a way of classifying people and defining their rights and duties in accordance with past marriage and in provision of future ones".

Leach also provides another example which supports Levi-Strauss's argument. In his study of three patrilineal societies in North Burma (Ordinary Jinghpaw, Gouti Kachins and Kakher), Leach states that marriage, not descent, is the basis element of creating the social relationships and ties. In this respect, Leach (114-123) suggests that these societies differ significantly in the nature of the marriage institution rather than in the system of descent.

Regardless of their disagreement, both descent and alliance theories agree that societies lacking government institutions, like those found in Africa and other places, are based on a political order of segmentation called "segmentary lineage theory." This system, according to both theories, is best suitable to regulate the social relationships and to maintain group cohesion.

Within anthropology, the difference between these two theories, however, has survived. This difference has also served to divide anthropologists into two groups: those who continue to view descent as a principle key of the segmentary lineage system (e.g., the British), and those who look at this system as a result of marriage exchanges (e.g., the French). American anthropologists, on the other hand, seem to have a tendency towards alliance theory rather than the descent theory, with the exception of Marshall Sahlins who emphasizes the importance of descent as a major aspect of segmentary lineage systems.

However, though the French anthropologists carry on Levi-Strauss's agenda in studying lineage societies, the British seem to be more flexible in

modifying Evans-Pritchard's and Fortes' assumption of segmentary lineage systems. For example, Peters' study of the Bedouins of Cyrenaica (261-81), illustrates that the order of segmentation does not take place in balanced opposition between one segment and another. Each segment group may differ in its strength and power from the others. Unlike Evans-Pritchard, he also indicates that the functioning of the segmentary lineage system can be achieved along with the existence of leaders, such as chiefs and kings. Moreover, Peters shows that a segmentary lineage system does not assume equality between its members. People, according to him, have been found to hold a different power and status which gives them, in turn, a greater access to resources over others. Finally, Peters indicates that both Evans-Pritchard and Fortes were mistaken in ignoring the importance of kinship ties created through women.

The Somali Segmentary Lineage System

Somali society provides us with a concrete example of a segmentary lineage system. In other words, the on-going conflict between clans provides more insights of that system. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to (1) discuss the nature of this system; (2) explain how it functions; and (3) indicate the basic principles of that system.

Somalia is a patrilineal clan-based society, divided into six major clan-families, four of which are predominantly pastoral: Daarood, Isaaq, Hawiye and Dir (together representing 70% of the population); and two are agricultural: Rahawiin and Digil (Metz, xxi). However, despite these and other differences, the six major clan-families share a common and traditional culture. In addition to sharing one language (Somali) and one religion (Islam), they are all segmented into different lineages based on patrilineal descent. In this respect, each of the clan-family claims and originates itself with a single male ancestor (Samatar, *Society* 57). However, this point is ambiguous does author mean member as an individual or each group as a unit. Although some data show that all clan-families share one founder (Somali), Lewis emphasizes that each clan-family differs from the other in its historical root in *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society*.

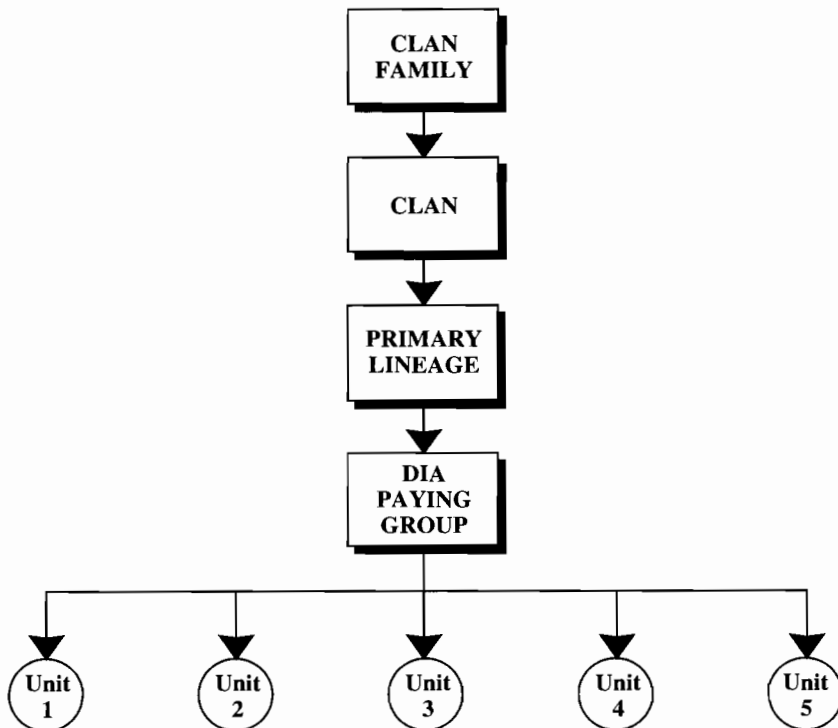
According to Lewis the Somali clan-families reside in specific geographic locations. In Northern Somalia are: (1) the Dir in the west, (2) the Isaaq in the center and (3) the Daarood in the east. In Southern somalia are: (1) the Hawiye in the center and (2) the Digil and Rahawiin in the south. Although the territories of the clan-families are recognized by Somali tribesmen, a specific geographic location is not limited to a specific group. Different lineages from different clan-families can use one another's land for



grazing, because land is considered a gift from God for every human being. This is true except in the time of war where territories become more important. However, in the time of peace, pasture is allowed to be used at all seasons of the year by different groups from different clan-families. Hence, as Lewis puts it, "within the clan, at subsidiary levels of lineage division, attachment to territory is less well-defined and grazing movements present a less regular pattern".

Each clan-family, according to Lewis, presents a structure of a segmented grouping. In this sense, the segmentation of a clan-family can be seen in the following direction: first, a clan-family segments into two or more clans in which each consists of 200,000 to 130,000 members; second, a clan of the clan-family divides into more than one primary lineage; and, finally, each of the primary lineages distributes to various "dia-paying groups" (a group collective payment of blood-compensation) which consists of the smallest segmented units. The segmentation is illustrated in the following diagram:

The Process of Sgementation:



This type of segmentation is found only among the four pastoral clan-families: Daarood, Isaaq, hawiye and Dir. (The other two agricultural clan-families. Digil and Rahawiin, developed heterogeneous communities based mostly on territoriality as a framework for social, political and economic organization. These groups are considered inferior groups by the pastoral clan-families (Samatar, *Society* 57). The four pastoral clans are segmented as follows: Daarood is divided into seven clans: Ogaden, Majeerteen, Mareehaan, Dulbahonte, Warsangali, Yousuf and Kabilah. Isaaq is made up of five clans: Habar Yoonis, Habar Awal, Habar Tol Jaalo, Habar Jaalo and lidagale. Hawiye is segmented into six clans: Habar Gidir, Abgaal, Biyamaal, Hawaadle, Murursade and Ujuuraan. And Dir is made up of two clans: Gadabursi and lise.

Consequently, each clan-family creates a system of highly segmented patrilineal descent groups. In other words, the process of segmentation is based on the expanding of lineages. Within each lineage, an individual has an exact place in the society. This is because the Somali patrilineal descent system, as Samatar in the chapter *Historical Setting* in the book *Somalia a Country Study* shows, has a major influence on all activities, especially the political ones. That is, identity as well as the social relationships are heavily concentrated and embodied in the genealogy. Thus, within the whole society, clan membership is determined by descent in the male line which, in turn, shapes the allocation of individual rights and obligations:

The basis of political allegiance is blood kinship, or genealogy. Children learn their ancestor's name by heart back to 20 generations and more. A Somali does not ask another where he is from but whom he is from. Strangers who meet, recite their genealogies until they reach a mutual ancestor; the more closely they are related the more readily they unite transiently, against others (Lewis, *Living Dead*, 2).

However, within a clan-family, the segmentary lineage system does not produce clans or lineages of equal strength size. Rather it guides the growth of an unequally balanced array of descent groups, in which lineages do not develop at the same span (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 99-100).

It is clear from the previous discussion that even though the Somali segmentary lineage system is based on patrilineal descent, the order of segmentation does not develop with an "equally balanced array" between descent groups. Therefore, the question that should be asked is, how do different clans, lineages or "dia-paying groups" of a clan-family, structure their alliances with one another to formulate a political unity? To answer this question, the concepts of marriage and descent are analyzed to determine

the nature of lineage alliances within this particular segmentary lineage system.

First of all, Somali lineages from different clan-families reflect a great degree of inter-marriage relationships between clans. The pattern of Somali exogamous marriage shows that while marriage between the primary groups of a clan and different clans of clan-families is permitted, marriages between the segments of a primary lineage is forbidden. However, the nature of marriage relationships is not the same as the agnatic relationships.

According to Lewis, the affinal relationship indicates common cooperation between one lineage and another. However, these relationships are characterized by formality and respect. That is, affinal relationships are treated differently from agnatic relationships, which are less formal and more important in binding ties between agnatic kin. The differentiation between affinal and agnatic relationships results from the nature of their existence: affinal relationships exist by virtue of marriage, and agnatic relationships by virtue of birth. Hence, with the constancy of divorce, affinal and agnatic relationships provide Somalis with different meaningful values. Consequently, as Lewis points out:

Where the two ties come into conflict, it is inevitably the affinal relationship which – temporarily at least – is forgotten and the agnatic loyalty asserted. *Agnatic allegiance underlies the structure of political units and can be upheld by direct coercive action. Affinal do not unite politically except when they are also agnates.* Consequently while the affinal relationship has a strong moral force it cannot be directly maintained by punitive sanctions.

Within the blood-bath of inter-clan fighting, which led to the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, exogamous marriage became less and less practiced. This type of marriage has become the exception rather than, as formerly, the rule:

.... In the devastated capital, Mogadishu, women who had married outside their own clan found themselves at a serious disadvantage, they and their children being disowned and left unprotected by both sets of kin. Insecurity required maximum clan solidarity, including now, clan endogamy rather than exogamy (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 47-51).

The weakness of affinal ties in creating strong alliances leads us to the conclusion that in Somali society descent is the basis of political unity and loyalty. In this respect, the Somali political unity of group formation, in which alliances are defined, is always modified by the principle of *heer*, a formal contract (Samatar, *Society* 73). *Heer* is made when two or more lineages of a clan-family combine together and define the nature of their collective unity by a specific agreement (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 22). This kind of political

unity is different from the lineage solidarity of the “dia-paying group.” In other words, while lineages of a clan-family might come together to formulate a union for political or military purposes, segments of a lineage (the dia-paying group) are always associated with one another to pay or receive blood-money in case of homicide, injury and other offenses, which always are determined by the elders (Samatar, *Society* 73). The differentiation between the unity of “dia-paying group” and the contractual alliances of different lineages is reflected by the terms *tol* and *reer*; the first refers to those who are closely related, such as the sons of fathers’ brothers; and the second refers to all members of the clan-family (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 2).

Hence, alliances are based on two different types of contracts: the first is based on contractual alliances between different lineages of a clan-family, and the second on alliances within the “dia-paying group.” While alliances at the level of the “dia-paying group” are stable, the other contracts are in no sense permanent. This is due to the fact that treaties occur only to achieve specific objectives in specific situations. According to Lewis, once those objectives are achieved and new circumstances arise, alliances can be amended or broken. Therefore, within the instability of contractual alliances, genealogies of each “dia-paying group” remain unchanged, opening the door for future treaties:

When two Somali kinship groups combine together against aggressors as a new political entity they do not normally adjust their genealogies. The new political relationship is not validated genealogically. Instead, political alliance is achieved by a formal contract entered into by the lineages concerned, in which the terms of the new union are expressed in detail (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 83-98).

One good example of this kind of contractual alliance, which reflects the nature of the political unity in Somalia, can be seen in the revolution of 1969. The revolution was achieved by General Mohammed Siyad Barre and his people of the Daarood clan-family. Barre’s success in leading and controlling Somalia for two decades was based on an alliance among three clans from the Daarood clan-family: Mareehaam (Barre’s clan), Ogaden, and Dulbehante. The importance of this alliance was clearly illustrated when Barre appointed 10 cabinet ministers from those clans. Further, the code-name for the military regime was the acronym “MOD,” based on the first letters of those three clans to reflect the alliance (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 165-6).

A second example is the contractual alliance among the six clans of the Hawiye clan-family. They formed a powerful militia in Mogadishu and swept Barre from power in January 1991 (Lewis, *Living Dead* 2). However, the



Hawiye alliance did not last. After achieving their victory, clans of Hawiye broke their alliance and replaced it by two new contractual alliances: the first is of Habar Gidir clan, which was formed by Mohammed Aidid; and the second is of Abgaal clan, which has been guided by Ali Mahdi (Shoumatoff, 443). The new alliances led to the continuation of the civil war in Somalia and to the blood shed between the clans of the Hawiye clan-family: the Habar Gidir and Abgaal. Hence, once again the alliances shifted.

In summary, we find that the Somali segmentary lineage system is based on patrilineal descent. Within this system allegiances are bound to the clan-family and alliances are determined through two different ways. The first is the contractual alliance, the *heer*, between different lineages of a clan-family, which is unstable, shifting and temporary. The second, however, the "dia-paying group's" alliance which is almost always permanent and stable.

The Needs of a New Theory: A Critical Discussion

A theory is a method of generalization which leads one to discover new facts and open new lines of research. It also classifies the regularities of a phenomenon and tells why such regularities hold. In anthropology, this kind of theoretical generation has been practiced widely to provide universal laws of human behavior and society. One of the more important examples is the segmentary lineage theory. The nature of the segmentary lineage system has been explained by two theories: alliance and descent theories. Both offer a universal explanation of the nature of the segmentary lineage system. On the one hand, alliance theory states that the role of exogamous marriage makes up the alliance between segmented lineages as well as providing them with cohesive political unity. On the other hand, descent theory stresses that unilineal descent (either patri or matrilineal) is the primary element of a segmentary lineage system. Furthermore, descent theory insists that each group of a new order of segmentation is balanced by another group of equal power, strength and span.

But neither theory provides a sufficient and complete explanation of the nature of the Somali segmentary lineage system as we have demonstrated in previous pages. In other words, although the Somali system shares some aspects with what has been indicated by alliance and descent theories, it seems to have its own cultural aspects and characteristics. This kind of distinctiveness somehow disproves some of the theoretical generalizations of alliance and descent theories on the one hand, and indicates the need for a new theory on the other. To show how alliance and descent theories are insufficient, the following examples are given.

First of all, both alliance and descent theories emphasize the need for a geographic territory as a primary function of segmentary lineage system. That is, the segmentary lineage system cannot function without a strongly defined territory. In Somalia, however, tribal territories are "... less well-defined and grazing environments present a less regular pattern" (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 23). This is true except during war when military territories can be made up; Mogadishu, for example, currently indicates the territorial divisions between the clan militias at present time. Hence, the Somali segmentary lineage system shows a relative lack of importance of geographic territories in the time of peace among clans or clan-families.

While the alliance and descent theories stress the point that segmentary lineage systems are characterized by the absence of leadership, the Somali system is based on leadership by a specific group: the elders. Hence, as Lewis indicates in *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society* page 23, Somali clans maintain a traditional political office in which policies and strategies (either social, political or economic) are always made by the elders. For example, McKinley (16) points out:

After the general [Aidid] died of gunshot wounds he had received in the battle .. his clan elders, meeting behind closed doors, selected the ... 33 year-old son, Hussein, to become the president of Aidid's self-proclaimed republic.

Consequently, leadership is a primary element of Somali clan system. This kind of leadership almost always makes the social, political and economic decisions. For example, the elders are those who decide the contractual alliances as well as supporting some leaders and not others.

Moreover, the Somali system disproves strongly the generalization made by the alliance theory, which states that exogamous marriages are the only crucial aspect which creates and regulates the segmentary lineage system. In contrast, the Somali system shows that "affinal ties are not the basis of political cohesion ... while the affinal relationship has a strong moral force it cannot be directly maintained by punitive sanctions". Instead, the Somali system is based on the agnatic allegiance which underlies the structure of political unity between clans of a clan-family. That is, patrilineal descent is the cornerstone of the Somali system and not only determines the patterns of day-to-day life, but also the nature of politics on a village and national level (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 47).

The role of descent in shaping and regulating the Somali system evidently supports the descent theory's claim: a segmentary lineage system

is a political system in which more than one agnatic group forms at different levels, and serves political functions. One would also have to give credit for the descent theory in defining relationships between different lineages through the process of complementary opposition. This kind of process has been found in the Somali system. At the level of lineages of a clan-family, complementary opposition is exemplified by the recent war between the Habar Gidir and Abgaal clans of the Hawiye clan-family. At the level of clan-families, a good example is seen in the alliance of the Hawiye's clan to take over the power from Barre, who was supported by his Daarood clan.

Although the Somali system supports descent theory, it, however, has its own character which differs from that of descent theory. In this respect, the Somali segmentary lineage system shows a particular structure and ideology which relates agnatic groups and defines the nature of their alliances. The particularity of the Somali segmentary lineage system is explained in the following pages to show the weakness of the theoretical generalization made by descent theory.

One of the basic concepts of descent theory is that the segmentary lineage system operates only in those societies with no governmental institutions. In other words, in the absence of a centralized political state, the segmentary lineage system functions in order to link agnatic groups and determine their rights and obligations. In Somalia, the opposite is true. For more than two decades (1969-1991), when Somalia formulated a modern state, the Somali segmentary lineage system survived and played an essential role in shaping the political behavior of the people.

For instance, when General Mohammed Siyad Barre established the Somali Democratic Republic in 1969 by way of military revolution, he adopted "scientific socialism" (Marxist-Leninism) as an ideology in governing the state and the people. Barre, furthermore, went against tribalism where he claimed that "... if all Somalis are to go to Hell, tribalism will be their vehicle to reach there" (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 151). However, Barre contradicted himself when he established his own military regime (MOD) in 1974 whose members were chosen only from his clan-family, Daarood. In 1975, he also nominated 10 members from his clan-family to be cabinet ministers in his government.

What led Barre to act in this way is that he realized that the ideology of scientific socialism could not replace or, at least, modify the clan-based system in Somalia. In other words, Barre was aware that his rivals' political parties continued to base their alliances on the principle of descent,

especially the alliance of Isaaq's clan (Somali National Movement) and the alliance of the Hawiye clan, both of which later swept him from power. Therefore, the Somali system proves the functioning of the segmentary lineage system with the existence of a political state. This characteristic disproves the descent theory's claim that a segmentary lineage system can only function in societies with no centralized government.

Second, in his descent theory, Evans-Pritchard proposed that each group of a new order of segmentation must be balanced by another group of equal power and strength. This proposition is found to be invalid for the Somali system. According to (Lewis, *Blood and Bone* 99) the Somali system indicates that:

... natural increase over the generations does not produce regularly and leads to the development of an unequally balanced array of descent groups, for all lineages do not expand at the same span.

This leads us to agree with Fortes' statement that the equality among different lineages of a clan-family is based on social status and not on equal power or strength. Hence, people may hold equal social status but not equal power. A useful example is found in Shoumatoff's (449) interview with Aidid, who "... hardly mentioned his present rival [Ali Mahdi], giving the impression that they were not serious opponents ... but he called Barre the most brutal dictator". Interestingly, Aidid and Ali Mahdi are from the same Hawiye clan-family, while Barre is from the Daarood clan. Hence, Aidid's silence towards Mahdi reflects his recognition of their equal status, which neither man can invalidate.

Conclusion

The Somali segmentary system is not completely and sufficiently explained by the theoretical generalizations of either alliance or descent theory. Clearly, then, a new segmentary lineage theory should be formulated to explain fully the nature of the Somali segmentary lineage system. In other words, anthropologists should pay more attention to developing theories that will explain all segmentary lineage systems, and how they (1) normally function and (2) function during abnormal times. The recent situation in Somalia, in this respect, presents a unique example of what happens to its traditional system, the segmentary system, during the non-traditional time, civil war. Therefore, the Somali Segmentary system should be taken seriously by anthropologists who seem to neglect the influences of descent in shaping tribal people's behavior in recent time.





NOTES

1. see Eickman, Dale. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall 1981.

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