

**Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem**

**Bölcsészettudományi Kar**

# **Doktori Disszertáció**

**Marsai Viktor**

**Kelet-Afrika modernkori története és a nemzetközi  
kapcsolatok (The modern history of East Africa and the  
international relations)**

**Erőfeszítések a szomáli állam megteremtésére és  
nemzetközi integrációjára 1960-2012**

**(Efforts to build the Somali state and its international  
integration 1960-2012)**

Történettudományi Doktori Iskola

Az iskola vezetője:

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Új- és jelenkori egyetem történelem Doktori Program

A program vezetője:

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A bizottság tagjai:

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Opponensek: Dr. Búr Gábor egy. doc., Dr. Hettyey András egy. adj.

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Nowadays the name of Somalia is a synonym for terrorism, piracy, extremism, and state collapse. Because of the wide range of security challenges hundreds of researchers and scholars, even politicians focused on the country in the last two decades, and their common point was that most of the problems were rooted in the state collapse in the early 1990s.

Therefore, it is evident that the most important task is a successful state-building on the Horn of Africa. Although significant efforts were made to recover the Somali state, the results are deeply controversial. Furthermore, we must face the fact that most of the scholars and experts who deal with the Somali state building work in the field of international and/or security studies. As we can see in the historiographical review, numerous books and articles were published about the security risks of the country (piracy, terrorism, jihadism) and the circumstances of the state's collapse, as well as the state building efforts. However, only a few works try to understand the problems of Somalia in a *historical* perspective. Furthermore, with the exception of the pioneer book of I. M. Lewis there is no monograph about the modern history of Somalia. We can hardly find essays which show and examine the working Somali state in detail during the Cold War, and analyze which historical factors contributed to the failure of the central government.

The limits of this short-range approach are evident, and it is obvious that the causes of the state collapse go back not only to the last years of Siad Barre, but much earlier. The basic question in connection with Somalia after the independence – similar to other African states – was how the new entity could operate as a modern, centralized state without any tradition of statehood. It is clear that it was a pressure: if Somalia wanted to defend her interests and become a full member of the international system, she had no other alternative than to accept the imported the Western-style, centralized state model. Therefore, since the independence the main question for the Somali elite and the leadership of the country was how they can cement the cohesion of the state that never existed earlier which is necessary for the successful political and economic integration into the international community. The Somali politicians reached significant improvements in this field; nevertheless, their efforts were not enough to avoid the catastrophe in 1991.

What were the reasons behind this? Which factors led to the failure of the Somali state building and integration process, while neighboring countries were more successful in creating stability and sustainability? At first sight the conditions of Somalia (homogenous people, religion) were much better than Kenya's or Ethiopia's. Why could not the Somali leadership reach stability on the Horn of Africa?

The dissertation, which concentrates on the history of Somalia after 1960, tries to answer these questions. It is important that the work applies a *historical* approach. Hence, the intention was to avoid the field of security and international studies – although it was not completely possible. The reason for this was that the main task of latter disciplines is to *make statements* which tend to the future, and the dissertation should confirm them. But in history-writing the most essential element is the *description*. Therefore, besides the support of the main theses, the dissertation lays great emphasis on the description of the Somali history in the last decades. It is essential because in the case of Somalia the only comprehensive historical monograph is Lewis' book, which only deals with the events of the period 1980-2000 shortly, and it does not contain the Somali history of the new century.

The main theses of my PhD dissertation are as follows:

1. **Somalia – contrary to the perceptions – is not a homogenous country, and it significantly contributed to the failure of the centralized state.** The examination of the geographical, climatic, social, cultural, economic, religious conditions of the Horn of Africa proves that the centrifugal factors are at least as strong in the region as the forces of cohesion. The clan-system, the tension between the nomadic and agricultural groups, the differences between the cities and the „bush” deeply divide the society, and contribute to the fragmentation of the country – similarly to „ethnicization” in other Sub-Saharan states.
2. **The second thesis is that although these dividing factors have strong effects on the Horn it does not mean historical determination, and there is place for changes.** The dissertation represents examples which prove that the most stable factors as clan relations, religion, or geographic determinations can be shaped – although, of course, it is not a simple task.
3. The third thesis, namely, that **the Somali state building was not doomed from the beginning**, follows from the first and the second one. While many scholars are skeptical about the possibilities of the creation of a modern state on the Horn of Africa, the dissertation confirms that the failure of the central government was the consequence of the misguided decisions of the Somali elites and the foreign actors.
4. The fourth thesis – that **the Somali and the foreign actors are equally responsible for the catastrophe of the country** – supports the third one. While there is fierce debate among scholars, politicians, and Somalis regarding who is more responsible for the state collapse, the inner or the external actors, this is a fruitless polemic. The dissertation proves that both actors significantly contributed to the collapse with their selfishness, and their economic and

political self-interests were more important than the recovery of the state on the Horn of Africa.

5. The final thesis is that the disruption of the Somali society, **the widening gap between the new Somali elite and the rest of the population significantly contributed to the failure of the centralized state.** At the beginning, between 1940 and 1980 it seemed that the elite, which was small in numbers but powerful in political and economic meaning, would be able to mobilize the majority of the society, and across nationalism, irredentism, and created historical heritage form a coherent Somali nation. But the defeat in Ogaden jeopardized these efforts, and prepared the scene for clan fights and the rise of warlords.

Besides the five main theses the research contains four sub-theses:

a) The examination of the Italian colonization and the transitional period proves that **Rome made significant efforts to create a model-colony in East-Africa, and these improvements both economically and politically provided important basics for the young Somali state.**

b) In spite of the overall negative attitude towards the Barre regime **the General's measures were essential in the Somali state building, and it is necessary to reevaluate his role in the history of the country.** The modernization of the economy, the society, and the state apparatus demonstrated significant steps in the strengthening of statehood on the Horn of Africa. Although in his last years Barre ruled the country as an omnipotent dictator, his achievements in the field of literacy, education, women rights, or foreign relations are undisputed.

c) While many scholars schematize the international dynamics of the Horn of Africa to the struggle of the two super-powers, **the documents of the different archives confirm that the minor actors – China, the states of the Gulf, and the African countries – also played significant, sometimes decisive role in shaping the events.** Furthermore, the contents of these documents query the traditional view that the basis of the struggle was ideological, and support the primal role of geopolitics.

d) Last, but not least, the history of the Horn of Africa puts us on guard in the role of political Islam in Somalia. Although it seems that the new Somalia will be governed by Islamist political groups, **it is a question how long political Islam will determine the internal affairs of Somalia, and whether it will be – similar to earlier attempts – only a short-lived experiment.**

For the theoretic framework of the dissertation Fernand Braudel's three-times approach seemed the most fruitful. In this structure the different elements which at first sight have no

connections to each-other – as the internal affairs and the climate, the urbanization and the refugees, the rise of al-Shabaab and the ethnic division of the big rivers' valleys – gain clear and sensible connections. Therefore, after the introduction the paper is divided into three big parts. The research follows the Braudelian frameworks of historical time, but in some point the dissertation differs from the thematic contents of his masterwork, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. It must be underlined that – comparing with Braudel's 1500-page book – the dissertation is only an experiment, and does not aim to totally follow the French historian's monumental work, which is a fruit of a twenty-five-year long research.