Politicizing the United Nations Peace Operations through a discursive analysis: the case of Somalia

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of optimism that characterized the end of the Cold War due to the overcoming of the ideological tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United Nations (UN) experienced a change in the nature of its peace operations, which became increasingly committed to the reconstruction of states fragmented by civil wars.

While traditional UN peacekeeping missions during the Cold War involved lightly armed multinational forces responsible for observing and maintaining the ceasefire agreements between combatants, in the context of the post-Cold War these operations began to involve a much wider scope of activities: from humanitarian assistance to judiciary and legislative reform. Moreover, these operations involve a wide range of international actors such as nongovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, development agencies, as well as regional and international organizations (Paris, 1997, 2002). Therefore, the process of peace-building is not only aimed to prevent the former enemies to restart the conflict, but also to deal with the root causes of it, preventing its recurrence by the recreation of the central institutions of the state and society (Call, Cook, 2003). In this sense, the peace that the peace-building operations proposes to introduce is not negative, that is, characterized by the mere physical cessation of hostilities between combatants, but has as its goal the eradication of the so-called new sources of insecurity such as economic, social and environmental instabilities. Thus, these operations are informed by an expanded concept of security no longer tied exclusively to the military dimension and no longer focused on the state since now they are undertaken in the name of humanity.

The UN involvement in the Somali conflict (1992-1995) occurred in the scenario sketched above. According to Boutros-Ghali (1996), it occurred in a turning point in the history of the Organization, when the end of the Cold War (i) gave rise to a renewed optimism about the ability of the Security Council to fulfil the promise of the UN Charter to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and (ii) led to a tremendous expansion of peace-keeping operations. Firstly organized to eradicate the famine that had been devastating the country
since the overthrow of Siad Barre’s dictatorship in January 1991, the UN action in Somalia was comprehensive, involving, according to Boutros-Ghali, peace-making, peace-keeping, peace-enforcement and peace-building. Given such new challenges, the Somali experience provided important lessons for the international community to shape policies and instruments for future conflicts involving failed states (Boutros-Ghali, 1996).

In most part of the literature from the Somali experience on, the new UN peace operations are perceived as a sign of progress and “humanization” of world politics. According to Paris (1997) this occurs to the extent that such practices are presented as more consensual and multilateral than the previous ones, devoid of any exploitative goals, deployed within a determined period of time and even as a “charitable” action undertaken by the international community on behalf of humanity.

Guided by the foucauldian strategy of: “distinguish discontinuity in that which presents itself as continuity and to examine possible continuities in that which presents itself as new, different or unique” (Andersen, 2003:20), this paper will proceed in the following way. On the one hand, the paper aims to deconstruct the discourse that has been producing the people subject to the new UN peace operations as if they were involved in ancestral conflicts related to the continuities of their modes of social organization defined as “backwardness”, uncovering instead the discontinuities and transformations of these societies. On the other hand, the paper tries to deconstruct the discourse describing the process of reconstruction of states led by the UN since the end of the Cold War as a completely innovative practice in relation to the colonial past; uncovering instead the elements of continuity between the contemporary practice of peace-building and the colonial one.

A DISCURSIVE AND GENEALOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE UN PEACE OPERATION IN SOMALIA

In order to deconstruct the dominant discourse which portrays the elements of continuity of the Somali conflict as if it was perpetual and frozen in time, the paper intends to juxtapose the “truth” of the continuity of the Somali conflict
constructed within the dominant discourse against other views that draw attention to the impact of both the colonization and the Cold War upon the Somali society, stressing, therewith, its discontinuity and hybridism. This strategy consists in opposing the dominant representations with other explanations that articulate objects, subjects and their relationships differently (see Campbell, 1992). The goal of this strategy, according to David Campbell, is not to establish a “correct story” but rather to reveal the ambiguity of the dominant discourses thereby demonstrating their inherently political and unstable nature. (see Campbell, 1992). To such an end, the paper is based on the work of Homi Bhabha, which, as will be shown in the last item, emphasizes the hybrid character of postcolonial societies. By pointing to the complicity of the “external” actors in the current violence of postcolonial societies, postcolonial thinkers contaminate the so-called “progress” of the international domain destabilizing the clear boundary discursively constructed between the external actors represented as symbols of progress, rationality and as saviors, and the postcolonial societies often constructed as anarchical, irrational and in need of foreign aid and expertise for their salvation.

In order to destabilize the discourse about the innovation of these new peace operations, we will search for elements of continuity between these operations and the colonial practices as presented by some scholars as well as by the Somalis themselves. This paper shares the argument developed by Beate Jahn (2007) according to which the peace-building operations are informed by the old modernisation theory. In this way, they maintain the same logocentric logic that informed the colonial practices and those of the Trusteeship Council. Hence, Somalia has still been constructed as “traditional” and as incapable of solving its own problems without the help provide by states temporally ahead. Thus, the colonial strategy of establishing boundaries between the self and the “Other”, the modern and the past, the order and the disorder remains in force in the peace-building discourses. It is argued that the discursive construction of the “Other” as marked by “violence” and “backwardness” contributes to the production of the “progress” and the idea of “community” of the international space. Thus, the logocentric discourse contributes to the construction of the “International” as a locus of progress and contributes to overcome its classical image as an arena of
repetition and violence. To this end, it is still necessary to demarcate borders between these two domains (domestic and international) since these states regarded as imperfections needed to be continually restrained and disciplined to prevent that the anarchy inside them extrapolate their borders contaminating the “progress” of the International. As put by the United States permanent representative to the United Nations during the UN operation in Somalia, Madeleine Albright (1993):

“Success is important not only for Somalis -30,000 people died from war and famine before the United Nations approved intervention- but also because anarchy may produce refugees, uncontrolled arms peddling and targets of opportunity for terrorists and their state sponsors”.

In this sense, the production of the discontinuity and innovation of the peace-building operations in relation to the colonial past depends on the construction of the continuity of the postcolonial societies viewed as subject to endogenous conflicts linked to a pre-colonial past, which calls attention to the mutual dependency between the progressive identity of the international domain and the backward identity assigned to some postcolonial regions of the world.

The analytical strategy adopted here, inspired by Foucault and Derrida, takes advantage of discourse analysis to understand the “reality”. “Reality” –subject, object and their relationships- only becomes intelligible through discourse, which means that “reality” can not be understood in the absence of discourse and interpretation (see Malmvig, 2006; Doty, 1993).

For Foucault, the “world” is produced by discursive practices. In this sense, the “world” does not have an ontological foundation, but rather it is a product of power that operates through language. Based on this perspective, power is productive, since, through discourse, it produces subjects and objects, as well as connects them. According to Foucault, there is no possibility of exercising power without a certain economy of discourses of truth, that is, power relations can not be established without a certain production, accumulation and circulations of discourses of truth (Foucault, 2004). Therefore, power can not be understood in
negative terms of interdiction, since, according to Foucault, it produces “reality” and rituals of truth (Foucault, 2006).

Thus, the “world” no longer can be seen as an empirical referent to which knowledge and truth shall meet and refer (Malmvig, 2006). The language is not conceived, as assumed by positivism, as a transparent instrument which serves as a conduit between thoughts/concepts and things (Shapiro, 1989). To the extent that discourses do not refer to an essence or to a stable referent, but only to other discursive practices, any analysis of “reality” can claim the stamp of authenticity (Brown, 1994).

Since the discourse does not derive from an intention of a conscious actor, he does not function, as claimed by realist theorists, as merely a guise to advance interests. Differently, for Foucault, the subject itself is seen as a product of discourse and, therefore, he is not previous to it. In the words of Foucault (2004: 183-4): “The individual (…) is not the vis-à-vis power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation”.

As Malmvig remarks (2006), discursive articulations are not seen as a rhetoric superficial phenomenon behind which we can find a real cause or an extra-discursive foundation, like interest or power.

In this sense, the work proposed here does not intend to identify the possible economic, security or legitimacy intentions of the actors that have been motivating the UN operations since the end of the Cold War. As shown by Doty (1993), the central question for post-structuralist thinkers is not worded as a “why question”, but rather formulated in terms of “how-possible”. According to Doty, the questions formulated in such way have the merit to analyse not only how social identities are constructed, but also how certain policies have become possible. For Doty, such questions illuminate an aspect of power neglected by the “why questions”, namely, the way in which power operates to construct particular modes of subjectivity and interpretative dispositions. This kind of power can not be understood as one that pre-existing social actors possess and use, but it produces a variety of meanings and imaginable behaviours and, as such, it is, in Foucault terms, “productive”. The power inherent in language is productive
in that it produces the “world” and has practical effects, enabling and legitimizing certain actions, while precluding and discrediting others.

This work aims to show that by describing certain states as imperfect representations of the modern state and its people as “backwardness”, “traditional” or “warlike”, the literature in not adopting a mere naive effort to better understand these states and its people, but is producing what should be governed and disciplined, and thereby creating the conditions of possibility for the UN peace operations. Thus, the identity assigned to such states and its people for most of the mainstream literature of International Relations as well as by media and other discourses, produces them as natural candidates to interventions undertaken in the name of human progress.

In addition to produce subjects and objects, the discursive practices also relate them, for example, through opposition and identity (Doty, 1993). According to Derrida, the construction of a conceptual opposition is accompanied by a series of other oppositions, for example, underdeveloped/developed, violent/peaceful, traditional/modern, and so on. For Derrida, the meaning is not established by the essence of a thing, but through a series of juxtapositions by which one element is valued over its opposite (Hansen, 2006). Of course, such conceptual oppositions are not neutral, but hierarchical since the first term is positioned in the domain of the problematic and the pathological while the second term is located in the area of the good and healthy, after all, the first term only acquires such a privileged status disallowing the subordinate term and, in this sense, both terms are closed related (see on Devetak, 1995). This relational conception of identity, which is formed by processes of association and differentiation, is what suggests its instability and possibility of destabilization, revealing at the same time its political character.

As put by Hansen (2006), language is a political act, since it is always subjective and questionable. In this sense, according to Hansen, language produces and reproduces particular subjectivities. Therefore, post-structuralists aim to destabilize the knowledge constructed through similarities and differences, going against the intention of positivists as Guerring (2001:157), according to whom: “In order to know one thing, we must know neighboring things, perhaps
even things that are different from what we set out to talk about”. For Derrida, by contrast, one can not unveil the essence of things since the language does not function as a meditation technique used to capture the “real world” which can only be grasped in an interpretative way (see Brown, 1994).

The strategy proposed by Derrida’s deconstruction has the aim, at first, to reverse such binary oppositions mentioned above so that what is treated as a negative version or supplement of the first term becomes its condition of possibility. According to Derrida (1982), to neglect this phase of reversion means to forget the conflict nature of such structure of opposition. For Derrida, however, it is not enough mere to reverse the hierarchy since in this case one remains in the logic of opposition. For such reason, he proposes a second movement in order to displace and subvert the conceptual oppositions. Deconstruction, in turn, must move away from the search for a new concept or a third term that solves the philosophical binary opposition. For Derrida, although the discourses try to build themselves as stable, there will always be lapses and instability termed by Derrida as the “undecidability” present in any text and that can not be resolved (see Hansen, 2006; Derrida, 1982). In this sense, the strategy of deconstruction reveals the contingent nature of the discourse, because it shows how, internally to a text, privileged poles of opposition lack stable foundations as it can be inverted and displaced in order to produce other and new “truths” (Milliken, 1999).

This work also makes use of a diachronic strategy, namely, the genealogical analysis of Foucault, which aims to reveal the contingency of contemporary discursive practices through the historical study of past discursive practices (Milliken, 1999). The genealogy is a rupture with the history written as progress, that is, as a continuous succession of events moving toward a telos (Malmvig, 2006). Thus, in the genealogical study, history is not a metaphysical, supra-historical undertaking, seeking to uncover a secret key or an underlying essence of the events (Andersen, 2003). In this sense, Foucault rejects an overall teleological historical tradition that tends to dissolve the single event into an ideal continuity (Foucault, 2005 b: 272). Genealogy, therefore, is not interpreted as a progression of events leading to the present. According to Foucault:
“Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violence in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination” (Foucault, 2005b, 270).

Thus, through the critical perspectives of Derrida and Foucault, this work aims to deconstruct the dominant discourse on the new UN peace operations. This work, thus, shares the aim announced by Shapiro (1989:13) in relation to critical perspectives, namely:

“A critical political perspective is, accordingly, one that questions that privileged forms of representation whose dominance has led to the unproblematic acceptance of subjects, objects, acts and themes which the political world is constructed”

Hence, the analytical strategy employed here has the merit of politicize what is taken for granted by the UN discourse and, in doing so, to reveal that the limits set by the UN discourses are not necessary or universal, but rather open, contingent and historically produced (see in Malmvig, 2006). Therefore, the work aims, through a genealogy analysis, to emphasize the effects depoliticizing of the dominant discourses about peace operations and, in this sense, to contribute to the future identification of new conditions of possibility for them. In addition, the discursive analysis here proposed has a clear ethical and political significance, since by unveiling the productivity of the discourse, the work aims to denaturalize the current forms of knowledge and in doing so to expose to critical interrogation the practices made possible by such forms of knowledge (see Milliken, 1999).

This work aims to investigate, in a brief way (due to considerations of space), the UN peace operation in Somalia (1992-1995) through a genealogical discursive analysis that goes back to the discursive events produced in the course of the nineteenth century imperialist movement as well as the action taken within the framework of the UN Trusteeship Council after the Second World War. The fact that Somalia experienced these three moments, namely, colonization, trusteeship, peace operation allow us to examine (i) the discursive constructions of Somali identity throughout its history, and (ii) how these constructions have led to different policy interventions since the nineteenth century on.
Due to considerations of space, the aim here is only to introduce the way by which Somalia and Somalis has been discursively produced throughout history. The work argues that the identity discursively assigned to them in the course of history, such as “traditional”, “irrational”, “primitive”, “failed state”, not only produced them but also participated in the construction of the modernity of Italy in the nineteenth centuries as well as of the UN in the post-Cold War. Thus, the vices and pejorative predicates assigned to Somalia ended up extolling the virtues of Italy and the United Nations/international community.

Consistent with the Foucault’s genealogy, the work does not intend to make any comparative analysis or derive any causal relationship between the historical moments described above, but rather seeks to understand such moments from their specificities and complex dynamics (see Charbonneau, 2009). The work aims to, in accordance with the Foucauldian critique, highlight the contingency and arbitrariness of what presents itself as universal and compulsory (see more in Foucault, 2005a).

Thus, the UN practices will not be constructed as an updated version of the European imperialism, although it will be shown how, in fact, different actors established this connection. To this end, it would be necessary to identify a common rationale underlying the various historical moments. For Foucault, however, (i) there is no essence in history behind the events and (ii) discourses do not have any explanation or underlying structure since they are understood in their manifest level. Therefore, the argument assumes that neither the different times analyzed (colonization/trusteeship/peace operation) can be read as phases of a progressive history nor the final step (peace operations) can be read as the result of inevitable trends, given our emphasis on the Foucauldian historical contingencies.
A “FAILED” SOMALIA

As Pat Lauderdale and Pietro Toggia (1999) show us the main reference used for analysing the extension of the Somali crisis is the condition of ‘statelessness’ assessed by the lack of a central political authority, evident in Somalia since the fall of Mohammed Siad Barre’s dictatorship in January 1991. In the absence of such an authority, it is said that Somalia lives under ‘anarchy’ or in a ‘Hobbesian state of nature’; two metaphors widely used to describe Somalia after Barre. Quoting from President Bush’s statement from the Oval Office in 1992. ‘There is no government in Somalia. Law and order have broken down. Anarchy prevails’. In the same year, one can read from Charles Krauthammer’s article in The Washington Post:

Somalia has no government. It is in a Hobbesian state of nature. It desperately needs to be taken over and run by some outside power so that its suffering people can be afforded the minimal human decencies of food, medicine and personal safety (Krauthammer, 1992, emphasis mine)

These metaphors refer to a natural environment not domesticated and in need of being civilised. Thomas Hobbes himself notoriously placed the Amerindians in this condition of state of nature, i.e., an environment that temporally precedes the social contract. Hobbes’ narrative on the social contract, according to R. B. J. Walker (2005), gives legitimacy to the modern state by projecting the man’s problems to another time and place, the state of nature, thought of as the negation of the prototype of the modern liberal man. Hobbes’ narrative asserts, according to Walker, how men can transform themselves into free and mature modern subjects. For such an end, it is only necessary that they comply with the modern structures of authority. In the absence of such structures, what remains is the non-domesticated natural environment that needs to be civilised. Thus, once Somalia is characterised as ‘anarchical’ or as immersed in a ‘Hobbesian state of nature’, Somalis are displaced out of history and as a consequence they are deprived of the
possibility of a political life, since in modernity, according to Walker, the effective and progressive political practice is unthinkable outside of the boundaries of the sovereign state (Walker, 1993). In this regard, the present – the modern state – becomes the norm, while the past or the temporal-space ‘Other’ of the modern state becomes the exception (Walker, 2005).

As well as the condition of ‘statelessness’, ‘anarchy’ or ‘state of nature’, a series of other terms, according to Jonathan Hill have been used for describing the situation of African states since the end of the 1980s, namely, ‘quasi-states’, ‘in collapse’ or, even, ‘failed’ (Hill, 2005). Such descriptions emphasise the supposed weakness and inability of African states when compared to those of Western Europe and North America, which are considered models of successful states (Hill, 2005). When they are used as paradigms of organisation, these central states are placed in a privileged position, functioning as the norm from which the other states will be judged, degraded, denied or punished. Nevertheless, the thesis of an African deviation has been frequently postulated, according to Siba Grovogui, silencing the extent to which this state model fits the very European experience.¹ Instead, this thesis focuses on the inability of these ‘deviating states’ to live up to the requirements of sovereignty (Grovogui, 2002).

Hill argues that, like the European colonisers, the analysts of ‘failed states’ describe the African identities in relation to Western societies, attributing negative characteristics to the Africans as opposed to the positive characteristics of the West (Hill, 2005). As we have seen, these conceptual oppositions, according to Derrida, are not neutral, but hierarchical, since the term privileged only gets such status by discrediting the subordinate term and, in this regard, these terms are intrinsically related. To Derrida, the apparent opposition between these two terms is not clear, since it is always accompanied by a veiled difference inside each term, since none of them is pure and, as such, all conceptual totality is unstable and subjected to deconstruction.

¹ Rosa Brooks, for instance, argues that the weak states, in a process of failing or failed are not exceptions, but the rule. The author reminds that there is no reason for conceiving the state as a particularly successful or benign social organization, since even in Europe the birth and the history of the modern state were characterized by repression and war. As the European states expanded, they knocked down other weaker social systems and once they have decided to create unified national cultures, they cannibalized their own citizens. See Rosa Brooks, ‘Failed States, or the State as Failure?’, The University of Chicago Law Review, 72/4 (2005).
Informed by Derrida, Hill argues that the representations of the non-Europeans found in colonialist literature not only perform a crucial role of creating the image of the outsider, but also construct the very colonialist self, since such identities (colonisers/colonised) are mutually constituted (Hill, 2005). Thus, the vices and pejorative characteristics attributed to those non-Europeans, such as “barbarians”, “backwards”, “inferior”, “abnormal” or “undeveloped” praise the virtues of the coloniser, understood as a “rational”, “developed” and a “superior” being. From such a rationale, therefore, underlying each of the descriptions of a ‘failed state’ there are predetermined definitions of what constitutes a successful state (Hill, 2005).

According to Michael Ignatieff (2003), although the ‘failed states’ face singular crises, all of them share a common characteristic, which is that they no longer possess the monopoly of the legitimate means of violence and, therefore, they no longer fit the classical definition of the state as described by Max Weber. This loss of control over the coercive means is presented, in turn, as the main reason for violence and instability for the populations in these states. The corollary of this discourse is the supposition that citizens depend on centralised states to feel secure. In fact, this allegation is expressed explicitly by Robert Rotberg (2002:87) when he says: ‘Citizens depend on states and central governments to secure their persons and free them from fear’. The centralised state, holder of the monopoly of the legitimate use of force becomes, according to this mainstream literature, a compulsory condition for providing what is considered the best political benefit, namely, security. ‘Failed states’, on the other hand, are defined as those ‘in which public authorities are either unable or unwilling to carry out their end of what Hobbes long ago called the social contract’ (Gros, 1996:456). This discourse, therefore, deters us from imagining any serious alternative political organisation to the state since it conditions us to think that in the absence of the state, we will have only Hobbes’s anarchy. As put by Keith Richburg (1992): ‘Without some form of governmental authority, Somalia is likely to be a perpetual ward of the international community, living off relief and relegated to anarchy’.

From the dominant literature a decisive criterion for the conceptualisation of a state as ‘successful’ is what Robert Jackson defines as ‘positive sovereignty’, meaning the capacity to provide security and well-being to their populations
The ‘negative sovereignty’ \(^2\), conversely, refers to a juridical status granted to post-colonial states after the Second World War. On formally incorporating Europe’s rules and institutions, these post-colonial states acquire a juridical sovereignty that in practice did not give them conditions to efficiently perform the functions expected from a ‘real state’ (Jackson, 1990; Jackson; Rosberg, 1982). In line with this notion of negative sovereignty, João P. Nogueira says about Somalia:

> If we look at states like Somalia ... and others where a common identity is hard to find, sovereignty seems to be only a mechanism for simulating a political community and enabling its participation as a member of the international system (Nogueira, 1997:13, translation mine).

However, during the Cold War, the fragility of these new independent states was in part hidden due to the support they received from the superpowers, who were rivals in search of strategic allies, no matter how oppressive or anti-democratic they were. In Somalia, for instance, during 22 years of Barre’s rule the country receive military and economic support, until 1977 from the Soviet Union and, thereafter, from the United States.

All these depreciative labels such as ‘failed state’ attributed to Somalia show us in a clear way that the sovereign state is the regulatory ideal from which this country has been evaluated historically. The process of political disintegration of Somalia was researched through the rhetoric that reduced Somalia to a ‘failed state’ negatively described in terms of what does not exist (state presence) rather than based on what exists (variety of fragmented authorities); which, according to Tobias Hagmann, shows the ideological power that concepts focused on the state still have. (Hagmann, 2005). To overcome this limitation underlying the dominant discourse, Volker Boege; Anne Brown; Kevin Clements and Anna Nollan (2009) propose a re-conceptualisation of the so-called ‘failed states’ as ‘hybrid political orders’. For them, this movement:

\(^2\) Hill (2005) makes clear that not all negatively sovereign state is regarded as ‘failed’.
allows for a more neutral and nuanced understanding of the complex domains of power and authority in these societies, by widening the frame of reference from the functions and capacities of state institutions to also include the operation of customary and other non-state institutions in providing sources of social peace, justice, political representation, and participation. (Boege, Brown, Clements, Nollan, 2009).

DISCONTINUITIES OF A HISTORICALLY SPECIFIC CONFLICT

At the end of the 1990s, images of Somalis amidst carnage and starvation were causing discomfort in wealthy Western audiences when they were publicised by international media. At that time, Somali rebels were fighting to overthrow Siad Barre’s government, which had begun in 1969. When this aim was finally accomplished, in January 1991, the civil war among political factions based in different clans intensified, leading to a United Nations humanitarian operation in July of the following year in order to eradicate the famine that was devastating the country.

From examination of President Clinton’s rhetoric in relation to the Somali conflict, John Butler shows us that such rhetoric transmitted an image of Somalis as ‘primitives’. According to Butler, this image re-articulates the historical image of the primitive savage presented by the imperialist discourse of the United States at the end of the XIX century and expressed, for instance, in support for the annexation of the Philippines. At this time, America proclaimed itself as the nation chosen by God with the duty of civilising the primitive savage. In the case of Somalia, two crucial strategies present at the time of the Philippines annexation are evident: (i) the development of the image of a primitive savage society incapable of assessing its own problems and that rejects, due to its own ignorance, the benevolent intentions of those who want to help; and (ii) the identification of a solution that wants to offer civilisation to a disturbed culture (Butler, 2002). Thus, when in contact with difference in both occasions (Philippines and Somalia), the United States behaviour assumed the

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3 See Doty (1993) for an interesting analysis of the American discourse during the occupation of Philippines.
double movement described by Tzvetan Todorov by means of which the difference is understood as inferiority for, only subsequently, being assimilated or extirpated in favour of uniformity (Inayatullah; Blaney, 2004). In this way, the United States’ discourse in Somalia reproduces the imperial discourse of the United States at the end of the XIX century and creates the conditions to allow an action aimed at civilising a culture represented as primitive, ruined by a meaningless conflict caused by the Somalis themselves, mainly because they resist accepting the chances of peace fomented by American leadership (Butler, 2002).

According to David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah (2004) one of the ways used by Europeans for dealing with difference was by means of its temporalisation, i.e., the difference was thrown to a distant past and viewed as a backward version of the European/Western self. In addition to the temporal strategy of portraying Somali people as ‘primitive’, the dominant discourse at the time of the Somali conflict has also disseminated the idea that the conflict among the clans in Somalia derived from the pre-colonial era, as if it had ancestral origins. Catherine Besteman shows us that immediately after Barre’s fall, journalists, politicians and scholars tried to understand the Somali scenery of violence and famine. The common explanation resulting from such approaches was that of a country incapable of getting rid of ancestral animosities among the different clans; social units based on kinship bonds (Besteman, 1996). As such, the war was discursively constructed as a ‘clannish war’ and the guilt for it was attributed to the Somali social organisation, i.e., to the system of mutually antagonistic clans, as reported by Cable News Network (CNN) in 1992: ‘the crisis in Somalia has been caused by intense clan rivalries, a problem common in Africa, but here carried out with such violence that, there is nothing left of civil society but anarchy and the rule of the gun’ (quoted in Besteman, 1996).

The characterisation of the Somali social organisation as ‘tribal’ created the conditions allowing intervention, since, according to Besteman, it refers to familiar evolutionary typologies. That is, to imagine a Somalia exclusively based in the clan system reinforces the traditional anthropological understanding of state formation and clearly indicates the direction in which it should move, namely, from the kinship relationships to the social contract (Besteman, 1996).
The presentation in the media of a Somalia based in the classic anthropological typology of tribe that evolves towards the state asserts the idea that these forms of political organisation are distinct and irreconcilable (Besteman, 1996) and, furthermore, they cannot coexist in time, since they are temporally dissociated. Thus the evolutionary trend underlying the dominant discourses places such categories (tribes, states) as distinct steps of an evolutionary trajectory of society. According to such evolutionary vision, the Somali system of clans has in its core the sovereign potentiality whose updating requires help from the vanguard countries. Reflecting such an evolutionary view Abdalla O. Mansur (1995:115-6) states:

The most serious problem in Somalia today is that our cultural traditions are not compatible with the constructs of a modern state. We Somalis are prisoners of a culture that we created in the past and which we refuse to re-examine. What is needed is to educate our people and exhort them to free themselves from the dependency of clanism, charity, and family parasitism. Only after creating this new culture will it be possible for us to reinvent ourselves and in the process to launch the construction of a new, viable state.

Besteman argues that, by means of the dominant discourse, Somalia had only pretended to be a state while in fact it remained tribal. Thus, adds the author, one imagines Somalia returning from a pseudo-state to a social organisation based on kinship bonds. So, the dominant narrative portrays the Somali conflict as derived from ancestral rivalries that exploded again with their pre-colonial vigour (Besteman, 1996). In agreement with this vision, the news about the Somali conflict emphasises the idea that after Barre’s fall what happened was merely the reappearance of the old clannish rivalries. In the wake of Barre being overthrown, Scott Petterson (2000:15), a journalist of London’s Daily Telegraph newspaper, reported that ‘The power vacuum was readily filled by the ferocious ghosts of Somali warriors past’. This vision is corroborated by Ioan M. Lewis (2002:263) one of the best known scholars in the Somali field, when he describes the Somali situation after Barre as follows:

The general situation now vividly recalls the descriptions of Burton and other nineteenth-century European explorers: a land of clan
When the evolutionary language is used, the image that comes out is that of a backward, non-civilised and rigid society, based on the Darwinian survival practices, which hides other hierarchies that would give a bigger complexity to the Somali society than it is usually suggested (Besteman, 1996). Thus, the representation of Somalia as a society divided into clans, some allied, others in perpetual conflict, suggests the idea of a society of relatively equal units pursuing relatively similar objectives and living in similar cultural worlds (Besteman, 1996). After all, such an image suggests the idea of a system based on a single temporality. Thus, any signals of greater complexity or of competitive personal identities tend to be denied.

Drawing upon this segmented lineage structure model, American journalists and some academics presented Somalia’s destruction as having been almost inevitable (Besteman, 1999). According to Besteman, the discourse about the Somali conflict portrayed Somalis as ‘continuing to act out Stone Age ancestral clan rivalries, but with Star Wars military technology’ (Besteman, 1999:4). Petterson (2000:6-7), for instance, says:

I wanted to understand ‘these people’ – these ancient nomadic warriors and peacemakers – who were thrown by default into a new era in which the measured calculus of killing with a spear had been displaced by weapons of much greater efficiency. This dangerous cocktail was, curiously, both ancient and modern and it mixed medieval demands for vengeance with today’s disturbing ability to thoughtlessly kill vast numbers of people. This disease is not limited to Somalia. Several African states (…) have been similarly driven to battle for ethnic or tribal differences. In Africa it has always been so, but has proved all the more potent when destructive firepower is easier to find than food and when government disappears or is complicit.

Thus, according to such an account, the militarisation of the country during the Cold War is not a problem in itself but what explains the conflict is the
encounter of such modern arms with ancestral animosities or as put by Petterson (2000:3) with ‘childish fingers’ even as he refers to an adult individual. Charles Krauthammer expresses a similar vision when he states: ‘The United States and the Soviet Union shipped M-16s and AK-47s to every corner of the Earth. Yet only in Somalia have the guns been used for cruelty beyond barbarism: stealing food from the mouths of starving children’ (Krauthammer, 1992). John Burgess (1993), in his turn, says: ‘ancient clan enmity, pursued with modern weapons that are so abundant in Somalia, is at the root of the country’s conflict’.

It is argued here that the conventional literature of peace-building uses several concepts and metaphors to refer to the states subjected to peace-building practices, such as ‘failed states’ immersed in a ‘Hobbesian state of nature’ that represent the difference as ‘backwardness’ or as an ‘early version of European self’. Thus, this literature is informed by a liberal philosophy of history that distances temporally the peace-building agents from their targets, as occurred at the time of the first contacts between Europeans and non-Europeans as well as during the action of the Trusteeship Council.

In Somalia, as shown by Lauderdale and Toggia (1991), the colonialism was justified from the construction of an artificial hierarchy among the ‘civilised citizens’ and the ‘primitive natives’, which assumed the image of the ‘Other’, unstable, uncontrolled, irresponsible, and associated with nature vis-à-vis the Europeans, represented as disciplined, constant, responsible and cultured.

Neelam Srivastavā shows us that when, during the Second World War, Britain occupied Italian Somaliland, the Communist Party and other Left Parties of Italy presented a document to the United Nations requesting the trusteeship over Somalia on the grounds that they would be better tutors than Ethiopia because ‘we believe that many years must pass before it can acquire the role of nation that is a teacher of civilisation [maestra di civilità] (Collection 513, Archive of Communist Political Party of Italy, 1921-43, quoted in Srivastava, 2006, emphasis mine). So, even those who had fought against the colonial practices of fascist Italy, were then requesting the trusteeship over Somalia based on an hierarchical thought that assumed Somalis as backwards vis-à-vis an Italian described as ‘maestra di civilità’. 
When Somalia finally became independent in 1960 and was admitted as a member of the United Nations, the Somali people were regarded mature enough to exercise their independence as expressed during the 871st Meeting of the Security Council. The following metaphor used by the Italian delegate in the United Nations, Mr. Ortona (1960), during this Meeting, shows clearly the idea of progress inlaid in the modernisation theory during the 1960's:

There is in the Sistine Chapel a fresco by Michelangelo showing the Son slowly detaching himself from the Father. There is still only a tenuous link between them. It is barely visible, because it pertains more to the spirit than to the body. I think that this could well describe what Italy hopes to have achieved in discharging the task entrusted to it by our Organisation vis-à-vis the Somali people: the injection into their minds of great spiritual motivations of our Charter, such as respect for human dignity, social progress, peace and security.

Assuming that in fact Somalia achieved maturity by inheriting a successful state through the colonial legacy, Richburg states: ‘Somalis at independence inherited a country hailed as a model of African stability… but instead of being known for unity and stability, Somalia has become synonymous with chaos, anarchy, famine and despair’ (Richburg, 1992).

So, even discourse that advances the idea that Somalis had at some point of their lives a functional government through the colonial/trusteeship legacy suggest that Somalia proved unable to overcome its traditional rivalries.

As the above quotations show, the Somali conflict was interpreted by the media mostly as derived from the clannish organisation of the Somali society and, as such, was tied to its traditional nature. Walter Rodney criticises this common misunderstanding about the African social organisation in the following passage:

… tribalism is understood by Europeans to mean each tribe still retains a fundamental hostility towards its neighbouring tribes (...) their accounts suggest that Europeans tried to make a nation out of the tribes, but they failed, because the various tribes had their age-long hatreds; and, as soon as the colonial power went, the nations returned to killing each other. To this phenomenon, Europeans often
attach the word ‘atavism’, to carry the notion that Africans were returning to this primitive savagery. Even a cursory survey of the African past shows that such assertions are the exact opposite of the truth (quoted in Lauderdale; Toggia, 1999: 157).

Sceptical about the above mentioned ‘atavistic’ vision, Besteman asks (i) if it would be possible that in fact the impact of the main events of XIX and XX centuries, such as the colonialism, the expansion of global economy and the Cold War could have left Somali culture intact; and (ii) if in fact it is true that pre-colonial Somalis were involved in self-destructive spirals of violence among the clans (Besteman, 1996).

Besteman (1996), Nogueira (1997), Lauderdale and Toggia (1999), Abdi I. Samatar (1992), and Virginia Luling (1997) help us to undo the idea that the Somali identity remained unaltered in spite of the colonization and that the conflict among clans is derived from its internal dynamics.

As argued by Lauderdale and Toggia, Somalis saw themselves as incapable of returning to their traditional institutions for peacefully solving their conflicts and managing their lives in a self-sufficient way since such traditional associations were emasculated. These authors show that since colonisation the alternative social organisation of the Somalis was read as dysfunctional and backwards, creating in this way, the conditions to allow for the process that, in spite of being euphemistically called a ‘civilising mission’, included, in practice, the forced occupation of the region as well as the subjugation of Somali people through violence.

To Nogueira the events leading to the disintegration of the Somali state should be analysed regarding its articulation with the international system since the old communal forms of identity were transformed as the colony’s economy was gradually integrated to capitalism.

In fact, if before the arrival of the colonisers the Western idea of exclusive sovereignty did not exist, after, there was a radical change in the property regimen in line with the Western capitalist model. Hence, culturally determined notions of space were imposed on the Somalis at the same time that the legality of their traditional system of communal property was denied by the colonisers. Land dispossession of pastoral people was justified by colonial discourse as the
liberation of the land for its productive use since this asset would be wasted in the hands of ‘lethargic primitives’ (Lauderdale, Toggia, 1999). Robert Hess, for instance, shows that during the XIX century, an Italian commandant warned the colonial government about the obstacles in promoting the development of the colony on the grounds that Somalis are seen as ‘untameable and lazy...preferring to live by war and rapine’ (Hess, 1996:47). Therefore, oriented according to a supposedly more efficient and temporally advanced model of production organisation, the colonial administration began to control the fertile land for agriculture along the Juba and Shebelle rivers. While on the one hand the cattle exportation began to generate revenues for the colony, on the other hand the formerly self-sufficient shepherds were placed into a relationship of economic dependence on internal and international markets (Lauderdale, Toggia, 1999).

Besteman argues that what was known since the beginning of the 1990s as ‘tribalism’ has created a distorted vision of the Somali society since it did not correspond in any way to the pre-colonial social organisation of Somalia. The so-called ‘warlords’ that, in fact, stole food and incited violence, were not part of the old rivalries of Somalia as was assumed by the dominant discourse. These new actors derived, according to Besteman, from the new urban elite that during Barre’s administration fought for personal enrichment through the access to state power and that, to achieve said aim, employed a clannish rhetoric.

The above mentioned political mobilisation of identity is identified by Mary Kaldor in the so-called ‘new wars’. To her, the policy of identities is a means through which political elites reproduce their power. The term ‘policy of identity’ used by Kaldor designates the movements that mobilised around the ethnic, racial or religious identity with the aim of claiming the control of the state. The force that connects the networks that make the new war is generally an extreme political ideology based on an exclusive claim of the state power based on the identity. These identities, although based in pre-existing fissures of tribe, nation and religion, usually use memories and experiences of past injustices with the aim of political mobilisation (Kaldor, 1999). In this way, although it is true that the majority of the fights among ‘warlords’ in Somalia after Barre have happened among united groups with a clannish base, such clan’s attachment was not something natural, but rather mobilised by several national militias in
their search for control of the state. According to Besteman the assaults that affected the Somalis did not result, as presented by the dominant discourse, from deep-rooted and profound clannish hostilities, but they were the result of particular patterns of fights for the control of the state resources established during the 1980s. They are, therefore, a historically specific conflict.

Also, adopting an argument that emphasises the transformations of the Somali society through history, for Samatar, the nature of the competition between clans changed with the introduction of the colonial state. According to Samatar, ‘the leadership in the old tradition had no public resources that they could compete for and loot, and as such the nature of the allocations made under that regime was qualitatively at variance with the modern order’ (Samatar, 1992:634). Luling (1997:290) agrees with Samatar saying that:

Clans always had to compete for resources such as land, grazing and water, but now that control of all these resources and much more was vested in the state, competition between clans, which before had been only one aspect of their existence, became its permanent condition.

As put forward by Samatar the dominant discourse does not offer an answer for the following question. ‘Since the lineage system has been part of the Somali social organisation for centuries, why has this society not engaged in nihilist fratricide war before?’ (Samatar, 1992:269). According to the author, the conflict among clans generalised all through Somalia in the 1990s, had no precedent in the history of the Somali people.

While in this item, the dominant narrative that illuminates the continuities of the Somali conflict was deconstructed with the help of alternative readings of the conflict that emphasise the transformations and, thus, the discontinuities of the conflict, in the next item the aim is to deconstruct the discourse that portrays the new UN peace operation as an innovative practice vis-à-vis the past imperialist practices and, thus, to emphasise the continuities between both practices.
CONTINUITIES BETWEEN UN/USA OPERATION AND IMPERIALISM

The United Nations peace-building operations are discursively presented as something new, completely different from the preceding colonialist and trusteeship’s practices. They are usually seen as a signal of progress of contemporary world politics. Such progress expresses itself through the characterisation of the new peace operations as a consensual and multilateral undertaking, deprived of any exploitative objectives, deployed for limited periods with the approval of international organisations and even as a ‘charitable’ act’ (Paris, 2002:653) performed by the international community on behalf of mankind (Paris, 2002). Since it is presented as a more and more distinct and ‘civilised’ process vis-à-vis the previous colonialist practices, the discourse that permeates these operations stands out from the original elements of the present action in comparison to a past of domination from which it tries to be disconnected.

In spite of this emphasis on the originality of such operations, some scholars, as well as the very Somalis during the UN operation in Somalia, identify some similarities between the UN and the colonialist practices.

Even recognising the evident differences among the new UN peace operations and colonialism, Roland Paris argues that the contemporary practice of peace-building can be understood as a modern version of the ‘civilising mission’ through which the European imperial powers assume the duty of civilising overseas possessions or as a new chapter in the history of the relationship between the developed and the developing world. Although these current operations have abandoned the language that referred to ‘civilised’ versus ‘non-civilised’ or ‘barbarian’ people, they seem, according to Paris, to act from the belief that a certain model of domestic governance, namely, the liberal democracy, is superior. Thus, they keep transferring rules of ‘acceptable’

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4 Paris (2002) shows that while European colonialism was undertaken for the benefit of the imperial states themselves, the motivation behind the peace-building operations is less mercenary. Besides, the old colonialism was based on theories of racial superiority that have been abandoned.
behaviour – seen in the past as ‘civilised’ – to the domestic arena of the less developed states.⁵

Edward Keene (2002) argues that the promotion of civilisation, which in the past was presented as an obligation of the colonial powers, began to be increasingly a concern of the International Organisations after the Second World War. Keene develops his argument explaining that at the end of the XIX century international jurists considered perfectly reasonable the existence of two distinct types of political and legal orders, one to the ‘family of civilised nations’ and another to the ‘non-civilised world’. Nowadays, conversely, there is only one global pattern of political and legal order that came out from the abandonment of the discriminatory way by which the concept of civilisation was used in the XIX century, when European states, being considered racially superior, had the special responsibility of civilising those people seen as racially inferior. During the first half of the XX century, this position became unsustainable since the concept of civilisation began to be seen in ideological rather than racial terms.⁶ Although no longer defined along racial lines, the idea of civilisation maintained other elements to be fundamental objectives of the new order, such as economic and technological progress, the presence of a good government and the respect of individual rights as evidenced in the UN Charter (Keene, 2002).

These objectives, associated by Keene with the previous logic of civilisation, appear clear when Paolo Tripodi examines the documents of the AFIS

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⁵ Although Paris conceives the peace-building operations as an updated version of the European civilization mission since both aim to export norms and values from the centre of the system to the periphery, he does not problematise the model that has been exported. To Paris, the liberal institutions are understood as the best and only way to achieve international peace and stability.

⁶ Keene (2002) locates the climax of this intellectual transformation in the fight on behalf of civilization performed against Nazism, since on that occasion the concept of civilization was explicitly used against scientific theories of race, when, for the first time, other Europeans experienced the uncomfortable sensation of being themselves the target of racial discrimination by Germany. In this new context, as Keene says, it would be inconsistent to assert the supremacy of white race on African races while simultaneously deny the validity of Nazi efforts of proving the Arian supremacy. In this way, according to this author, on projecting civilization against Nazism, its followers were inevitably questioning the old thoughts on the racial borders of the civilized world. Thus, the United Nations system, emerging in the post-Second World War scenario, adopted a much more inclusive and less discriminatory attitude in relation to non-Europeans. Keene, however, argues that the traditional aim of promoting civilization was not rejected; after all, allies were fighting against Nazism in the name of ‘civilization’. 
(Amministrazione Fiduciária Italiana- from 1950 to 1960). From this examination, Tripodi infers that the Italians regarded the Somali society as archaic, associating the clan system with the negative aspects of the past and claiming that the adoption of a political system based on a Western liberal democracy would be synonymous with modernity (Tripodi, 1999). This commitment to modernising Somalia is clear, for example, in the words of the Italian foreign minister in 1959, Carlos Sforza:

Many countries agree with us that Italy still has many important tasks in Somalia. Somalia's economic and social development still needs a hard Italian commitment. This commitment cannot be interrupted or changed without some dangerous consequence in the process of Somali civilisation (Quoted in Tripodi, 1999).

In this way, Italians assume the task of modernising Somali society according to Western values and to this end they seek to overcome the clan system tied to the past and, therefore, to a traditional and pastoral Somalia. According to Lewis, there were many attempts at different times to devalue and even extirpate these internal divisions, which always threatened national solidarity. Such attempts assumed many forms, ranging from denial to political suppression (Lewis, 2002). Such aims reflect the old civilisation logic subtracting only its racial component. Thus, for Keene since the end of the Second World War, as well as for Paris since the end of the Cold War, the UN has been dedicated to promoting something which, at other times, had been called ‘civilisation’. So, although the UN discourse proclaims nowadays a ‘new world order’ dissociated from the old imperialist logic prior to its creation, it keeps being informed, according to both authors, by the idea of a ‘civilising mission’ that discursively had oriented the imperialist movement during the XIX century.

This link between the UN and the imperialist practices was also mobilised by the Somalis themselves.

In a letter dated from November 1992 from the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to the President of the Security Council informing the Council of a series of disturbing developments in Somalia, Ghali puts:
Another disturbing trend, which has evolved in recent weeks, apparently at the instigation of local faction leaders, is the widespread perception among Somalis that the United Nations has decided to abandon its policy of cooperation and is planning to ‘invade’ the country (Boutros-Ghali, 1996:207).

One month later, in an article to the Washington Post, the Somali scholar, Said Samatar (1992) warned that one path to be avoided by the United States should be:

… to give the impression that the United States was about to re-colonise their country. Ridiculous as this may sound, Somalis, with their bitter experience of colonial occupation, are born xenophobic paranoids. The United States must impress upon the Somalis that it has no hidden agenda, but only a humanitarian interest.

In fact, especially from the moment in which the UN operation began to have, as its objective, the capture of the clannish leader Mohammed Aidid, the intervening forces rapidly began to be associated with the old colonisers (Lang, 2003). On describing how Aidid’s radio station questioned the UN presence in Somalia, the official report revealed that Aidid was capable of articulating resistance to the intervention in terms that could resonate in any African country (Lang, 2003). Such appeals to resistance against the UN presence combined with the narrative of Somalia’s history of opposition to previous attempts at foreign imposition were, as one could expect them to be, well received by Mogadishu at this time, being full of foreign military troops (Lang, 2003). According to the ‘Report of the Commission of Inquiry established pursuant to resolution 885 (1993) to investigate armed attacks on UNOSOM II’

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8 The Security Council adopted the resolution 751 (1992) authorizing the establishment of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) in order to monitor the cease-fire in Mogadishu and to deploy a security force to protect humanitarian relief activities. In its resolution 794 (1992), the Council established the UNITAF (United Task Force) cod-named ‘Operation Restore Hope’ through which the United States lead a peace-enforcement operation to provide a secure environment for humanitarian relief. The Security Council resolution 814 established UNOSOM II to assist in the process of national reconciliation, in the rehabilitation of
the hostility of the Radio Mogadishu broadcasts to UNOSOM II is reflected in its transcripts between 1 May and 4 June on the eve of the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers. During this period, the Report observes:

…the broadcasts had a xenophobic tone, especially starting on 11 May, when they accuse UNOSOM II and the United States of being aggressors trying to colonise Somalia and to establish a trusteeship. They speak highly of Somalia’s history of resistance to foreign domination and imposition. UNOSOM II was very concerned about this propaganda which could give a negative perception of the United Nations could stir up hostile sentiments towards UNOSOM II personnel from the Somali public (Boutros-Ghali, 1996:374).

Anthony Lang shows that Aidid was capable of presenting his propaganda through the radio as the voice of the Somalia’s political aspirations. On treating Aidid as a criminal, the UN only contributed to his transformation into a martyr, making him and his faction fit perfectly in the role of victims in opposition to the UN and the United States, represented as villains (Lang, 2003). As put forward by Peter Woodward (2003:78, emphasis mine):

With forty-seven UN forces and an estimated 300 Somalis killed, it was soon being suggested that the UN was becoming the biggest warlord of all and the greatest threat to the people of Mogadishu.

As the UN abandoned its position of impartiality and became explicitly committed against one of the conflict factions, the relationship between the Organisation and Imperialism was easily established by the Somalis.

According to Lang, it was Aidid’s attempt at declaring Mogadishu’s radio station as the ‘official voice’ of Somalia that most displeased the UN. After all, the UN believed that only an entity like itself, representing the international community, could decide who the sovereign of a ‘failed state’ like Somalia was. Thus, Aidid’s attempt at using the mantle of Somali sovereignty threatened the UN capacity to determine the status of Somalia. Through a normative discourse, the UN arrogates for itself the exclusivity of action in Somalia, Somalia’s institutions and economy, and in the re-establishment of the nation’s police forces. See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, (1996).
depriving, therefore, any other legitimate actions and, thus, preventing local actors who could have participated in the solution to their own problems. In excluding them from the political debate through a discourse that characterises them as ‘warlords’ or by transforming Somalia in a ‘failed state’, the UN finally helped to generate the hostility that led to the failure of the intervention guided by humanitarian motivations. For this reason, Lang attributes to the UN discourse the partial responsibility for the Organisation’s failure in Somalia (Lang, 2003).

This discourse is consistent with those exposed heretofore that regard the Somalis as ‘backwards’ and, therefore, as incapable of acting by themselves. Thus, for Lang the UN narrative reveals that the Organisation considers itself the only agent with moral capacity to intervene and save the Somali people.

Not only can the elements of continuity be found in the alternative discourses of scholars and Somalis but also in the very discourse that have been informing the peace building operations since the end of the Cold War. This is so inasmuch as this discourse is informed by the same modernisation discourse evident during the colonisation and the trusteeship actions, which represent the Somalis in particular and the ‘Other’ African countries in general, as a backward version of the European self. Thus, this discourse keeps the same logocentric quality visible in the previous ones, that is, it remains operating through binary oppositions that divide the world between certain modern areas and the traditional ‘Others’.

DOMESTIC ANARCHY VERSUS INTERNATIONAL PROGRESS

The justifications presented in the conventional literature in favour of intervention into ‘failed states’ assume in general that such practices constitute the only possible way for their regeneration. Once the people of such a state are construed as incapable of solving their own problems, it is up to the external powers to conduct them to modernity. In fact, as Hill (2005) shows, these external actors are presented in the analysis as restoring and benevolent powers.

This paper argues that the ‘failed state’ discourse not only defines the people of such states as ‘backwards’ and incapable of altering their futures, but also
contributes to defining the progress of the ‘International’, traditionally conceived as an anarchical domain and, therefore, as a space of recurring conflicts. To develop this argument, it will be shown, firstly, how the conventional Anglo-American literature has conceived the international relations, in order to, subsequently, show how the ‘failed state discourse’ is inverting such logic, even though it continues to operate from the same modern clear demarcation of boundaries between the domestic and the international domains.

In the article “Why is there no International Theory?” (1996), Martin Wight established an opposition between, on the one hand, political theory, understood as the theory of the possible good life within the state, and on the other hand, the theory of international relations, distinguished, by the rejection of the illuminist vision of universal progress (Inayatullah; Blaney: 2004:45; Walker, 1993:33). Thus, Wight’s article suggests that international relations have always been an antithesis of something more authentic and political, i.e. life inside the states. Relations among states operate, therefore, in a depoliticised space that forbids the existence of history as a progressive teleology (Walker, 1993).

According to such a vision, while the international time is frozen in a primitive time, not allowing the development of the system of states, the inside time unfolds in a specific way in each state, but always in a teleological way towards a modern liberal society (Inayatullah; Blaney, 2004). According to Walker it is the positive claim of the community and justice within the state boundaries that make the negative claim of the international space possible as marked by difference, relativism and violence (Walker, 1993).

Indeed, the claim that states exist in a state of nature constitutes, according to Jahn (1999), the raison d’être of international relations theory, which means that relations among states are in a pre-social and pre-cultural stage, i.e., that society (existing in the domestic plan) would not still have reached international relations. This claim, according to Jahn (1999) is the basis for the distinction between national politics as the domain of authority and international politics as the domain of power.

Although the discourse of the ‘state of nature’ – used by realist as well as by idealist theorists for defining international relations – is live in the representation
made of ‘failed states’, more and more the international domain is discursively produced as an arena of progress, consequence of the increasing overflow of society to the international as argued by Blaney and Inayatullah. According to these authors, since the end of Cold War new theories of modernisation came out as important theories of international relations such as the liberal peace theory. These theories differ from the traditional vision of the international system as a perpetual state of nature, forever primitive, in that they recognise the possibility of domestication of the international anarchy (Inayatullah; Blaney, 2004).

In this way, inverting the logic presented by the mainstream international relations theory, it is argued here that the discursive construction of several African states as a space marked by relativism and violence, contributes to the progress and the idea of community in the international space. Furthermore, assigning depreciative labels to several entities has excluded them from the ‘community of states’ which, in turn, allows this community to be constructed as a coherent space formed only by the ‘real states’ of the developed world (see more in Doty, 1996). So, the ‘failed state’ discourse helps to construct the ‘International’ as a space of progress and coherence and, therefore, to overcome its classic image as an arena of repetition and violence.

One of the strategies to construct the above mentioned distinction – between domestic anarchy versus international progress – consists in exclusively imputing domestic factors as the reason, and thus, attributing to the ‘failed states’ the guilt for their own failure, as if the contemporary problems faced by them did not have any relation to the ‘external’ factors that historically have affected them. Reflecting on this assumption, Richburg (1992) expressed the following view about the Somali conflict: ‘Ultimately … Somalis themselves are responsible. It may have been the superpowers that supplied the guns, but it was Somalis – driven by clan hatreds, swayed by misguided leaders – who pulled the triggers’.

Thus, the impact of colonial powers, as well as superpowers during the Cold War, the condition of ‘underdevelopment’ and the rivalries that nowadays destroy many of these states is increasingly being neglected in the conventional
As Phillip Darby (2004) argues, although frequently neglected through selective histories, the presence of the ‘global’ in the ‘local’ is a corollary of the external/colonial involvement in the reconfiguration of the local identities that several times was responsible for the stimulation of such identities. As an example of such stimulation of identities, Besteman argues that the colonial intrusion into the South of Somalia and the following imposition of classifying labels based on Eurocentric racial categories amplified and refined the local constructions of identity in this part of Somalia (Besteman, 1999).

Thus, the economic, social and political problems faced by many African states are presented to us as internal factors by the conventional literature, which usually deletes the information about the international historical factors that might have contributed to the failure of these states. According to Pinar Bilgin and Adam Morton (2004), these explanations do not reflect the colonial background and/or the peripheral position in the political-economic structures that, if taken into account, would lead to the adoption of alternative courses of action.

The historical amnesia puts the guilt unfairly on the victims, making it seem that African problems, for instance, have a merely African origin, so that, there is no possibility that they can be solved by the Africans (Crawford, 1996). Against the conventional literature, Pierre Englebert (1997) calls attention to the fact that the contemporary state in Sub-Saharan Africa is not African because it descends from arbitrary colonial units. Englebert follows by saying that although there are no doubts that such states were transformed and adapted, their origin is exogenous, namely, European. According to the author, it is exactly this exogenous character of the state that explains the several examples of state failure in Africa, driven by the lack of rooting of the state, which generates a deficit of legitimacy and a series of related problems, like patterns of depredation, patrimonial relations and administrative decay. On this same line, Beoge, Brown, Clements and Nolan (2010) remark that the formal state structures in the South were neither rooted in their own culture nor in their grass-roots patterns of legitimacy and authority. What happened in Africa,
according to these authors, was that the formal imported state was usurped and transformed by the informal social forces. At the same time, the states reframed or deconstructed the local governance mechanisms by incorporating them into the central processes of the state. According to them, some governments deliberately incorporated traditional authorities in order to enhance their legitimacy and capacity. In this regard Besteman argues that due to the large input of funds and military technology provided by the alliance forged with the United States in the aftermath of the Ogaden debacle in 1978, Barre got to postpone his overthrow by precisely enhancing the capacity of some clans by means of the distribution of rewards and punishment on a clan basis, even though he had banished the use of any terminology referring to clans within the Somali government (Besteman, 1996). As a result of this rivalry, the leadership of the clans, traditionally assumed by older villagers, was deformed and it was conducted by the new military and bureaucratic elites of the state (Lauderdale; Toggia, 1999).

Following the ideas postulated by the above authors, therefore, we shouldn’t believe the civil war that followed the fall of Barre was a mere reprise of pre-colonial clannish conflicts, simply because the old clannish structure did not exist anymore as it had been altered by colonial and post-colonial practices. For Samatar, for instance, the pre-colonial Somali tradition cannot be equated, as it usually is, to blood-ties without any constraints, since in the past, there had been a justice system that was broken with the imposition of the colonial government (Samatar, 1992). According to him: ‘The arbitrary extraction of blood-ties from the rich and complex social web of which it was only a small part, simply panders to elite opportunism and European racism’ (Samatar, 1992:639).

Thus, in line with the argument advanced in this paper, the conditions that led to the civil war in Somalia cannot be fully understood without noticing that the collapsed state was in part the result of externally driven state building projects in Somalia. And such a result is not a positive one according to Luling: ‘Artificial state and clan-based society, unable to work together healthily, instead set up a poisonous interaction which produced corruption in the state and distortion of the clan-tie’ (Luling, 1997:290).
Even when conventional authors recognise the impact of adverse historical factors, they usually argue that they do not constitute the main cause of state failure, since such adversities were aggravated by internal causes such as: corruption, bad administration and lack of economic planning (see, for instance, Ignatieff, 2003). The problem of such approaches, however, is that they assume the plausibility of separating and isolating these dimensions (historical/external and internal) instead of understanding them in a mutually constituted way as Englebert does.

This discourse – that highlights the domestic dimensions of state failure and produces external agents as ‘saviours’ – silences the possibility of peace-building agents stimulating, instead of reverting, the process of failure of the states. Woodward (2003:86), for instance, notices that when the UN became the target of armed groups in the South of Somalia: ‘It seemed a re-run of the situation before the UN’s intervention when the foreign intervention had inadvertently become a cause of, rather than a solution to, suffering’. François Debrix (1999:128), in his turn, concludes that instead of ideologically enhancing the New World Order, the West, fronted by the UN, left Somalia ‘with images of a New World Disorder’.

Besides that, when imputing incompetence and irresponsibility to such people, this discourse makes it impossible to think of these states as capable of developing alternative governance mechanisms more effective than those imposed by external agents. As this paper will show briefly in the next item, the case of Somaliland is a well-known example of a region that developed bottom-up governance structures with great popular legitimacy, even if this region has, so far, not been recognised by the United Nations, who keeps insisting on a single Somalia.

By producing a well defined frontier between the domestic plan of anarchy and the international plan of order and progress, the conventional ‘failed state’ discourse precludes the contamination of the ‘International’ by the domestic anarchy, which could happen in the event that we regard the ‘external’ factors as a transmitter of anarchy to these regions. On the other hand, such dominant rhetoric strategies authorise the use of violent means in order to avoid the domestic anarchy spilling over to the international domain, compromising its
image of civility. According to this rationale, the domestic anarchy created by the ‘failed states’ themselves, has to be domesticated through the assimilation of these states to modern structures of authority or, if this is not possible, has to be confined to the national borders to preserve the stability of the international space. To this end, it is still necessary to demarcate borders between these two domains (domestic and international) since those states regarded as imperfections need to be continually restrained and disciplined to prevent the domestic anarchy rupturing their borders and contaminating the ‘progress’ of the International.

SOMALILAND: CHALLENGING THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE

Since 1991, when the dictator Barre was deposed and the civil war started in Somalia, the country has been without an effective government, which, according to Kenneth Menkhaus (2006/7), makes it ‘the longest-running instance of complete state collapse in postcolonial history’. Although numerous peace conferences have been undertaken to revive the Somali state, all have failed. For Menkhaus (2006/7): ‘This track record has earned Somalia the dubious distinction of being the world’s foremost graveyard of externally sponsored state-building initiatives’.

This paper suggests that the discourse that informed the attempts to reconstruct the centralised state in Somalia guided by external agents is complicit in this failure. As we have seen, this discourse operates through binary oppositions (i.e. modern/non-modern) and in doing so it offers an essentialist and endogenous explanation for the Somali conflict which is often read as a ‘national suicide’ (see, for instance, Editorial Desk, ‘Help Needed for Forsaken Somalia’, The New York Times, 9 February, 1992). Such reading about the conflict does not recognise the co-participation of external actors in the conditions that led to the conflict in the first place and in the systematic failures of trying to remedy it through top-down initiatives. Furthermore, this discourse neglects the agencies that, as put by Oliver Richmond (2010:669): ‘contaminate, transgress and modify both the international and the local’.
To Menkhaus (2006/7), Somaliland functions as a reminder that external state-building endeavours may not be a sine qua non condition for the reconstruction of successful governance mechanisms, as international organisations often presume. In Somaliland, the main agents of the state-building are not external but as mention by Tobias Hagmann and Markus Hoehne (2007:23):

This state-building process occurred through cooperation between traditional authorities such as elders and sheikhs, politicians, former guerrillas, intellectuals and ordinary people who decided to put their guns aside and solve problems peacefully, and with only marginal external support from international organisations.

Through this peaceful process, Somaliland, an ex-British colony, located in the north-west of Somalia, proclaimed its unilateral independence in 1991 and after a couple of years was regarded as an ‘island of tranquillity within the Horn of Africa as a whole’ (2002:96). The Somaliland example is often cited as a functional hybrid political order constructed from bottom-up initiatives⁹. Despite not being recognised as a state by the so-called ‘international community’, Somaliland has achieved a high degree of public security, economic recuperation and domestic legitimacy (Menkhaus, 2006/7). These achievements occurred even in the absence of one of the criteria regarded as decisive for imposing security on any state for its citizens, namely, the Weberian central monopoly of violence. As shown by Hagmann and Hoehne (2007:24), the Somaliland government do not possess such a public monopoly on violence inasmuch as the majority of its inhabitants guarantee their own security by means of private access to arms. According to these authors: ‘Security in Somaliland is dealt with in a decentralised manner and is largely guaranteed by local politicians and elders’. In this innovative schema, the

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central government only intervenes directly in exceptional cases when the integrity of Somaliland is at stake (Hagmann; Hoehne, 2007).

Such a relatively stable environment, has in turn, allowed a huge investment in the country by the Somali Diaspora. This investment has been contributing to Somaliland’s survival and economic recuperation since 1991 in the absence of other sources of resources that could exist if this region was recognised internationally as a sovereign state (Menkhaus, 2006/7; Hagmann; Hoehne, 2007; Englebert, 2009).

Thus, although deprived of the traditional sources of coercive and economic state power, Somaliland is not, as anticipated by mainstream discourses, a chaotic space governed by the laws of nature but rather a peaceful region inside Somalia. This hybrid experiment is frequently seen in positive terms in contrast to the hybrid state that prevailed during Barre’s era as shown by the following passage:

Somaliland thus established a loose political structure which its supporters say offers a form of synthesis between national government on the one hand and local leadership on the other, rather than the schizophrenic relations between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ of the former parliamentary and socialist periods (Woodward, 2003:81).

CONCLUSION: POLITICISING PEACE-BUILDING OPERATIONS BY MEANS OF POSTColonIAL INSIGHTS

As shown, this paper shares the hypothesis suggested by Jahn (2007), who says that the new UN peace operations have been guided by the modernisation theory and as such have been based on the assumption that humanity moves through stages from tradition to modernity.

Although associated with the group of theories and methods that dominated the American social science after the Second World War and although its main proponents, including scholars like Parsons and Rostow, denied any link between their theories and the racist evolutionary schemas of the previous century, in fact, modernisation theory tried to rehabilitate, according to Nehal Butha, one basic element present during the nineteenth century, namely: ‘the
attempt at a systematic comparison of other political environments along axes defined by the characteristics of the political development of the West’ (Bhuta, 2008:530). This theory, as shown by Sankaran Krishna (2009), eternalises the dominant features of the current Western developed states, which have to be emulated by the others if they wish to progress. Therefore, the main impetus underlying this theory becomes the globalisation of the modernisation process that, as a result, would put an end to the space and temporal differences of world politics (Inayatullah; Blaney, 2004). According to Inayatullah and Blaney, modernisation theory projects a sequence of natural and universal development through which all cultures or societies have to pass, but whose speed may be accelerated by means of assistance or even of imposition by those located in more advanced steps of this process. The authors say: ‘Those to whom difference is attributed must be taught, and, if unwilling, they must be forced to recognise that assimilating to the ‘sameness’ of European is good for them’ (Inayatullah; Blaney, 2004:102). The suspicion of the difference becomes, as quoted above, an alibi for violence as a means of suppressing spaces that are not yet modernised.

According to Jahn, this model of development had its origins in the European theorisation of the newly discovered societies in America and provided justification of European policies for centuries. (Jahn, 2007). Jahn shows that ‘the view of Amerindians as living in a state of nature led to a redefinition of history along a linear scale providing a secular telos as the basis of the historical process’ (Jahn, 1999: 47). The idea of the state of nature as a universal condition from which humankind started its historical development, adopted by the European authors, introduced, according to Jahn, a linear time scale into the history of humanity. These explanations, in turn, justified and naturalised the particular European path of development (Jahn, 1999).

Post-colonialists, argues Krishna (2009), aim to politicise and to question the naturalness of the dominant logic of the liberal order, understood not as the final stage of human evolution, but as an arbitrary logic that reduces the ethical and political choices of humanity. With this in mind, this paper suggests that postcolonial insights derived from the work of Homi Bhabha can help us find new possibilities for less ethnocentric and depoliticising peace operations.
Bhabha pertains to the so-called third phase of post-colonialism characterised by the cultural and linguistic turn experienced in the late 1970’s. In this phase, post-colonialism departs from its intellectual Marxist foundations, approaching the post-structuralism inspired by Foucault and Derrida (Krishna, 2009). Among the commonalities between these two theories (post-colonialism and post-structuralism), there is the criticism made by both to the binary oppositions and hence the suspicion of essentialism as well as scepticism about the grand narratives of emancipation (Manzo, 1999).

As we have seen, peace-building discourses are structured from a series of binary oppositions such as modern vis-à-vis traditional, liberal vis-à-vis non-liberal or developed vis-à-vis underdeveloped. Understanding the status of these societies as ‘traditional’, ‘indigenous’, ‘clannish’ has practical consequences, one of them being to create the conditions allowing claims in favour of temporary transfer of governance from these societies to international agencies. The assumption underlying these claims is that these people are not capable of governing themselves since, as argued by Jahn (2007), they are regarded by the dominant discourse as traditional, non-modern and non-liberal and as such as incapable of rational political judgment. This practice of trusteeship, symptomatic of the colonial legacy, is often regarded as more desirable than the resumption of civil war (Lidén, 2009). Reflecting on Somali failed experiences, for instance, Rotberg (1997: 253) proposes: ‘As anachronistic as it may seem, we need to consider finding ways to recommit countries (like Somalia) to the good offices of the UN Trusteeship Council’. Writing earlier, more precisely during the civil war in Somalia, Krauthamer (1992) suggests a similar position:

Somalia needs to be occupied. It needs an outside force to suppress the bandits, feed its people and provide medical care. The best way to do this is the old mandate system of the League of Nations, under which a great power under international supervision is given quasi-colonial power over another people. A formal mandate would give the outside power the dignity and legitimacy to justify its otherwise thankless task of pacification.
In criticising the naturalisation of the governance model that is being carried out by UN peace operations and in adopting a critical perspective, this paper does not intend to support a strategy in favour of non-interference, but instead to open new possibilities for alternative peace operations in order to broaden the political choices for humanity (Lidén, 2009).

To such an end, it is not enough, as emphasised by Kate Manzo (1999) in agreement with Derrida, to simply reverse the conventional binary opposition in favour of the up-to-now deprecated category. Thus, the logocentrism cannot be challenged by regarding the categories of a conceptual opposition as autonomous or searching for the original source of goodness and truth, but its contestation depends on a second movement in order to displace and subvert the conceptual oppositions

Therefore, this work does not share the idea of a native peace building, namely, to support traditional forms of conflict resolution in accordance with native indigenous practices (Lidén, 2009). Informed by Derrida, Bhabha warns us against this kind of initiative because, for him, the return to a ‘pure’ native identity or the search for an ‘autochthonous’, ‘true’ history leads to an ethnocentrism in the form of reverse racism since it reproduces the very binary structure of signification (Kapoor, 2003). In the words of Bhabha:

The hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure, ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity can only be achieved through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweaving of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood (1994:5).

Through the above quotation, Bhabha exposes not only the perils but also the inability to access a pure or original identity. The paper, following the anti-essentialist argument developed by Bhabha, suggests that the postcolonial condition is not native, traditional or pre-modern, but hybrid, which contradicts the national conceptions of history and community (Manzo, 1999; Bhabha, 1994). As shown by Beoge, Brown, Clements and Nolan (2010), contemporary traditional institutions cannot be defined as pre-colonial or pre-contract since
traditional societies in all parts of the world had contact with outside influences and, thus, in practice, there are no clear boundaries between the exogenous ‘modern’ domain and the endogenous ‘traditional’. In fact, these postcolonial societies have experienced a history of colonial presence and modernisation that gave rise to a new cultural formation that cannot be defined as modern or as pre-modern, but only as hybrid. To these four authors, the assumption that postcolonial societies are hybrid opens new avenues of peace-building practices not directed to the complete adoption of Western state models but in accordance with more flexible and richer models of governance (Beoge; Brown; Clements; Nolan, 2010:101).

According to Bhabha any attempt at domination or colonisation always carries the possibility of the original being subverted, resulting in hybridity. The possibility of conversion of the colonised is continually being undermined because he is not in a tabula rasa but in a site previously occupied, which makes all attempts of change carry the dangerous possibility of not being recognised (Bhabha, 1994). Reflecting on the Somaliland governance mechanisms established after the demise of Barre’s rule, Hohne argues that the new identities shaped are not new in the sense that ‘they are invented from scratch’, but rather ‘they combine existing identity markers in a way that is particularly meaningful in the current political context’ (Hohne, 2006:398).

During the Cold War, Siad Barre evoked a local version of Scientific Socialism proclaiming the trinity: ‘Comrade Marx, Comrade Lenin and Comrade Syiad’ (quoted in Lewis; Mayall, 2007) and, thus, subverted the imported socialist idea. This corruption of the original message explains why, for Bhabha, hybridism is not defined from the mere combination of two or more entities (modernity and non-modernity or global and local, for example) partly reflecting its attributes, but rather as a third space (Krishna, 2009). Such third space is ‘in-between’ space created in the interstices of imperialism that cannot be understood as a synthesis (Kapoor, 2003).

So, if, on the one hand, the paper criticises the contemporary trends of the literature on peace-building that associates the ‘local’ with ‘tradition’ and, by extension, with regression, disorder and clannish violence, on the other hand, it is also aware of the inverse risk, namely, to romanticise and glorify the ‘local’
The work discards, therefore, the usual association between the ‘global’ and domination as well as between the ‘local’ and resistance, since, as shown by Darby, the ‘global’ resides within the ‘local’ framework (Darby, 2004).

The recognition of the ‘global’ in the ‘local’ precludes us from drawing a clear line between the domestic and the international. The international, in the form of the peace building agents, becomes accomplice to the recent outbreak of violence in post-colonial societies, contradicting the dominant discourse that emphasises its mere endogenous nature. Such complicity, in turn, contaminates the so-called progress of the international arena.

Post-colonial theory, therefore, can help us to problematise the boundaries produced and reproduced through peace-building practices which by stigmatising the ‘Other’ as ‘failed’, ‘pre-modern’ or ‘traditional’ vis-à-vis a ‘modern’ or ‘progressive’ International domain compel us to regard these domains as homogeneous and radically distinct and not as hybrid identities with several overlaps and ambiguities.

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