Piracy in Somalia

Piracy in Somalia sheds light on an often misunderstood world that is oversimplified and demonized in the media and largely decontextualized in scholarly and policy works. It examines the root causes of piracy in Somalia as well as piracy's impact on coastal communities, local views about it, and measures taken against it. Drawing on six years' worth of extensive fieldwork, Awet Weldemichael amplifies the voices of local communities who have suffered under the heavy weight of illegal fishing, piracy, and counter-piracy; he makes their struggles comprehensible. He also exposes complex webs of crimes within crimes, of double-dealing pirates, fraudulent negotiators, duplicitous intermediaries, and treacherous foreign illegal fishers and their local partners. *Piracy in Somalia* will help to inform regional and global counter-piracy endeavors, to avoid possible reversals in the gains made so far against piracy, and to identify the gains that still need to be made against its root causes.

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Piracy in Somalia

Violence and Development in the Horn of Africa

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To Miriam, whose love sustains me.

To Farris, who reanimates my transience through the minutia of planetary here and now.

To Eyl, a jewel along the Somali coast, that took me in as one of its own.

Contents

Figures

Preface and Acknowledgments

The capital of knowledge that an individual scholar has to offer is small. Admission (of one's shortcomings) saves from censure. Kindness from colleagues is hoped for. It is God whom I ask to make our deeds acceptable in His sight. He is a good protector.

Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 9.

In 2011, I had the good fortune of holding the Hiob Ludolf Guest Professorship at Hamburg University in Germany, lecturing on piracy, terrorism and insurgency. During that year, a court in Hamburg started to hear the piracy charges against ten Somali men, who attacked the German vessel MS T*aipan* in April 2010.[1] The pirates' capable pro bono lawyers valiantly fought a losing battle, arguing that their clients were fighting for survival and in self-defense against foreign plundering of their marine resources and destruction of their livelihoods. After more than 100 days of hearing the case, in October 2012 the court found all suspects guilty and meted out to them varying prison sentences.[2]

After one of the court's adjournments in July 2011, I went to a series of events that regularly takes place across Germany in the summer in celebration of Klaus Stortebeker, the fourteenth-century Hanseatic League (northern German) pirate. The myth of Stortebeker's feats and the lore surrounding his name is particularly salient in Hamburg, where there is a life-size bronze statue of him and there are restaurants on the shores of the Elbe River, music bands, and songs (including a techno mix) bearing his name, among many others.

[1] Captured by a Dutch warship, the ten were handed over to Germany because the ship belonged to a Hamburg-based company. "Dutch Marines Abseil on to a Hijacked Cargo Vessel to Rescue Its Crew and Arrest 10 Somali Pirates," *Daily Mail*, 7 April 2010: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1263960/Dutch-marines-abseil-deck-ship-MV-Taipan-freeing-crew-Somali-pirates.html.

[2] "Verdict in Somali Hijacking Case: Court Rules in Germany's First Modern-Day Piracy Trial," *Spiegel Online*, 19 October 2012: http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/hamburg-court-hands-down-somali-pirate-sentences-a-862350.html.

As I took my students on an alternative boat tour of the Hamburg inner harbor to discuss the city's past and present with piracy,[3] the idolization of Stortebeker stood in sharp contrast to the confinement of the ten Somalis being tried in the same city. The irony of celebrating a long-dead outlaw was living testimony to a popular pirate quote widely attributed to British philosopher Bernard Williams: "The average man will bristle if you say his father was dishonest, but he will brag a little if he discovers that his great-grandfather was a pirate." Popular movies, pirate-day shows, and the popularity of pirate paraphernalia as Halloween costumes reflect the romanticizing of pirates elsewhere in the West.

Only some pirates were afforded such posthumous celebration in Western popular culture, however. Not only did that tradition exclude the pirates off the coast of North Africa, or "Barbary" Coast, but on the contrary many towns in the United States are named Decatur after the American captain who led the final 1815 onslaught on the North African states that harbored the notorious Barbary pirates. The perpetuity in the discourse of Muslim and African infractions, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, the same past criminality of non-Muslims and non-Africans are celebrated and their contemporary similar crimes are either shrugged off or given no more than lip service, is glaring. The treatment of the short-lived piracy phenomenon off the coast of Somalia has not been free from the same historic double standard and has also been a subject of eerie comparisons with Barbary piracy to the detriment of a proper understanding of – and sustainable solutions to – its root causes.

In a simplistic sketch of the eighteenth–nineteenth century piracy off the coast of North Africa, *The New York Times's* Africa correspondent Jeffrey Gettleman drew specious parallels with the piracy off the coast of Somalia and called for similar solutions.[4] Just as US military bombed the Barbary Coast and pounded the bravado out of "a bunch of knife-sucking thugs in blousy pants,"[5] Gettleman had no scruples about a similar remedy in Somalia: "[P]ound the bravado out of the pirates by taking the battle to them where it hurts most – on shore."[6]

Although Gettleman's wide readership makes his shallow, warlike point of view disconcerting, his is by no means unique or first. Renowned French historian of the Mediterranean World, Fernand

[3] A small group of social and environmental justice activists in Hamburg organized the tour.
[4] Jeffrey Gettleman, "Lessons from the Barbary Pirate Wars," *The New York Times*, 12 April 2009.
[5] Thomas Jefferson is widely believed to have similarly characterized pirates off the coast of North Africa thus: "When they sprang to the deck of an enemy's ship, every sailor held a dagger in each hand and a third in his mouth, which usually struck such terror in the foe that they cried out for quarter at once."
[6] Gettleman, "Lessons from the Barbary Pirate Wars."

Braudel, had noted how the West traditionally "encouraged us to see only the pirates of Islam, in particular Barbary corsairs"[7] when in fact maritime predation (conveniently dubbed privateering when perpetrated by one's side and piracy when done by rivals or enemies) had dominated the relations between both sides of the Mediterranean. European fortune hunters and renegades particularly crowded Mediterranean privateering/piracy with – and without – the protection of the North African states of the time.

As Tunisian scholar Lotfi Ben Rejeb had deduced, the exclusive association of the once useful and widespread practice with North African states, and the separate dehumanization of the Muslim practitioners of the trade reflected the changing power relations not only between the powers to the north and south of the Mediterranean but also among powers farther afield.[8] Much as the twenty-first century maritime predation off the coast of Somalia is real, mainstream journalist accounts, scholarly narratives and policy discussions around it are similarly emblematic of far-off hegemonic power relations.

This book takes to task the prevalent linear narratives that have smothered meaningful debate about – and helped preclude lasting solutions to – piracy in Somalia. Based on extensive field research in piracy-affected areas in that country, it sheds light on an oft-misunderstood world, oversimplified and demonized in the media and largely decontextualized or inadequately contextualized in scholarly discourse and policy. For the root causes of piracy off the coast of Somalia, its impact on local Somali communities, and the latter's views about and measures against it are by and large missing in the current one-way conversation. The book amplifies the voices of local communities against illegal fishing, piracy and counter-piracy; it makes their legitimate responses comprehensible on their own terms; and it documents their misconceived remedial measures all the while exposing the rationalized criminality around them.

I am hopeful that examining the root causes of piracy, exposing its inner workings, and documenting its consequences and the struggles of its victims will help avoid the risks of possible reversals in the gains so far made against that scourge. I am equally hopeful that this book will bring into sharper focus the parallel gains that await to be made against illegal exploitation of maritime resources in present-day Somalia as a microcosm of the broader imbalances that the Global South suffers. The stories thus documented do help in identifying potential allies to the quest for lasting

[7] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. Vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 754–755.
[8] Lotfi Ben Rejeb, "Barbary's 'Character' in European Letters, 1514–1830: An Ideological Prelude to Colonization," *Dialectical Anthropology*. vol. 6, no. 4 (June 1982), 345–355.

solutions (at sea and on land) to the ongoing crimes, solutions that are homegrown, locally driven and internationally supported.

While, in the spirit of Ibn Khaldun's words,[9] I concede the limitations of my work and accept sole responsibility for the shortcomings that readers will undoubtedly find in this book, I acknowledge the invaluable support I received from its inception to its completion. When this project was no more than an idea on paper, Hamburg University granted me an exploratory fund that enabled me to travel to Kenya and Somalia (Puntland) in the summer of 2011 to test the waters. Research on the project picked up momentum during my Fernand Braudel Fellowship at the University of Paris Diderot (Paris VII), when I was simultaneously wrapping up a previous project.

The Gerda Henkel Stiftung, a Dusseldorf-based not-for-profit research funding organization, awarded me the most generous and crucial funding that enabled me to travel to the field twice. On learning of that award, the University of Kentucky (UK), whose job offer I had accepted, gave me a semester-long leave of absence to enable me to take advantage of the grant and advance my research. The UK College of Arts and Science also awarded me summer research support in 2013.

As funding sources appeared to dry up before the end of my research, I moved to Queen's University in 2014–2015 where I was offered a Research Initiation Grant (RIG) that could not have come at a better time. Another advantage of being at Queen's was the fact that its University Research Grants (URG) scheme enables faculty members to borrow against their future salaries. To the utter amazement of my family and research partners, and to subsequent personal financial hardship, I took two large URGs in 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 to complete the research. As this book goes to press, I continue to pay back that debt. Finally, the Faculty of Arts and Science at Queen's awarded me a discretionary grant to see the project through. To all my funders, I register my utmost gratitude as I do to my family that tolerated me and made do with shrunken family finances.

Beyond funding, this project could not have been possible without the support of a network of institutional and personal backing at every corner. The support of my departments at the University of Kentucky and at Queen's University has been solid. I am especially thankful for the course releases I was afforded at Queen's. The former and current chairs, Jamey Carson and Rebecca Manley, respectively, have been extremely understanding, actively supportive and always caring. The intellectually

[9] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Franz Rosenthal (trans.) (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1969), 9.

vibrant, socially healthy and collegial environment that they led went a long way to making my joining of the Queen's community stimulating and all-around meaningful, for which I also thank my colleagues.

In Nairobi, a network of friends helped facilitated a mutually beneficial arrangement with the regional office of Interpeace, the International Alliance for Peace. I am especially thankful to my cousins Bereket Goitom and Titi Asefaw, my friends Berkti Hagos, Johan Svensson, Asia Abdulkadir and Ulf Terlinden for their friendship and guidance in navigating not only the Nairobi NGO scene but also the Somali political and research environment. The Interpeace regional director, the late Abdurahman Raghe, took especial interest in me as a person hailing from that region choosing to partake in such a project, knowing full well the challenges. I hope, more than anything else, he is looking down at this project with satisfaction in the risk he took with me. Johan, Ulf and Jean Paul Mugiraneza, who succeeded Raghe as Interpeace regional or Somali program directors, were similarly unfailing in their support; I am especially thankful to Asia, Ulf and Johan for that critical and subtle holding of the hand that even seasoned researchers need when venturing into new fields. It is thanks to these friends and mentors and Interpeace's decisive support throughout the project that my research gained traction and reached the level that it did.

On the ground in Somalia, Interpeace's network of regional partners proved equally decisive both at the personal and institutional levels. The attention and support that Abdulrahman Osman "Shuke" gave me (and my project) in Garowe matched that of Raghe's in Nairobi. The stature of these two elders restrained and calmed nerves, opened doors, and paved ways with the hostile, hesitant and/or unenthusiastic government officials, individual Somalis and communities that I dealt with throughout my fieldwork. I was affiliated with the Garowe-based Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC, latterly renamed Peace and Development Research Center), an independent think tank-type research institution. In its main office, I had access to its extensive research and audiovisual resources with which Muctar Hersi, Ahmed Adam, and Amina Abdulkadir were extremely generous.

I traveled extensively across Puntland with the fearless researchers and peace activists of PDRC's Mobile Audiovisual Unit (MAVU): Abdinasir Yusuf (MAVU leader); cameramen and researchers Abdirisak Abdulkadir, Abdiladif Abdirahman and the late Ismail Hajji Harash; drivers Mohamed Abyan, Abdirizak, Abdulkarim, Awad "Nairobi" and the late Jibril Yare; and the many armed guards who had to accompany me/us wherever we went. In all my travels, I received the invaluable help of local interlocutors and language assistants, who themselves are capable researchers and

analysts, among them Sakaria Abdulrahman and Ahmed Mohamed. Among all these unassuming but formidable and brave young men, I was no more than an average student, not only regularly schooled on the local do's and don'ts but also engaged in vigorous methodological and substantive debates – and, in a few instances, even quarrels – which carried hefty consequences to our safety and to my project. All along, the always-alert PDRC deputy director Ali Farah's watchful attention to regional developments proved a useful thermometer to my research travels. I equally benefited from his long experience (at a senior level), gained in the Somali government's fisheries authorities before the civil war, which gave him unique perspective to the topic of my own research.

In Somaliland, Interpeace's and PDRC's counterpart, the Hargeisa-based Academy for Peace and Development was forthcoming with its resources and contacts. I am especially thankful to its director, Mohamed Farah, and staff, who welcomed me with open arms and were unfailingly encouraging. My thanks also go to Mohamed Osman Ahmed, the executive director of Somaliland Counter Piracy Coordination, for his candor and support.

During one of the court hearings in Hamburg in summer 2011, I met the American-German writer Michael Scott Moore and discussed over lunch our respective plans to travel to piracy-affected parts of Somalia for research. Because our travels (his first leg and my second leg) were going to overlap in early 2012, we tentatively agreed to meet either in Nairobi or in Somalia and exchange notes. On asking mutual contacts in Nairobi about Michael's whereabouts in mid-January, I learned that he was in Galkayo, Somalia, and was expected back in Kenya at any time. A few days later, I arrived in Garowe, Somalia, to the news that Michael had just been kidnapped. That news had the worst chilling effect on me as I was about to embark on my first extensive data-gathering travels. During his two-and-half years of captivity, [10] I actively tried to track his whereabouts; his ordeal, which I could only imagine, remained one more reminder of my grim research environment.

Nevertheless, thanks to the staunch support, reassuring friendship and warm hospitality in my Somali network, the specter of my being harmed remained a distant possibility. For a number of reasons, I cannot mention by name many of the Somali men and women who looked after me and actively supported my work, including my interviewees, to all of whom I am grateful. But I cannot pass without acknowledging with thanks the

[10] Michael has since written an account of his captivity in fascinating detail, which came out too late for me to use in my current book. See Michael Scott Moore, *The Desert and the Sea: 977 Days Captive on the Somali Pirate Coast* (New York: Harper Wave, 2018).

support, hospitality and friendship of Ahmed Abbas Ahmed, Fatuma Mohamed, Buraale, Sharmarke Ali, Mohamud Abdulkadir "John," the late Abdisalam Hassan, Abdirizak Mohamed Dirir, Abdirizak Ismail Hassan, Abdi Farah Saeed "Juha," Isahak Ahmed, Burhan I. Hassan, Mohamud Hamid Hamid and Professor Mohamed Samantar. Along with my above-mentioned research partners in the field, these friends and many others formed what proved to be an impenetrable safety shield around me wherever I went. After initial doubt, the community in Eyl took me in as one of their own and the officials, elders and activists there always made me feel at home.

Although they did not quite know it and their assistance may seem brief, I received invaluable encouragement, and important maritime scientific pointers and advice from my Eritrean former colleagues at the University of Asmara who went on to become globetrotting, top-notch marine scientists and experts in sustainable Blue Economies: To Dr. Marco Pedulli, Dr. Dawit Tesfamichael, Dr. Mebrahtu Ateweberhan, Dr. Zekeria Abdulkerim, Dr. Iyob Tsehaye and Dr. Essam Emnay Yassin, thank you.

It is interesting to note that Ethiopian intelligence agents trailed me wherever I went in Somali towns. Where they could not physically watch me in far-off villages, I could not help but notice that they kept indirect tabs on my movements. My Somali colleagues and I chose not to acknowledge their presence by design and they did not visibly interfere with our work, which one would imagine to be of little to no danger to their political, economic and/or security interests in the Somali region (the northeast and northwest). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), like many similar international and regional organizations, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) that were involved in the topic of my research, practically kept me at arm's length or completely shut their doors on me. My repeated attempts to meet UNODC personnel and to consult their resources went unanswered except in one instance when a newly arrived junior official (who, interestingly, attended Queen's University School of Law) came to meet me outside their regional headquarters in Nairobi with their publicly available, expensive-looking brochures – glossy, colorful and in high resolution. Only after he left UNODC was I able to meet and exchange notes with retired British soldier and former military attaché, Col. John Steed, for which I am appreciative.

Upon its completion, my mentor Ned Alpers, and senior colleagues Marc Epprecht, Colin Duncan, Ghirmai Negash, Sandra den Otter, Anthony Lee, Bettina Ng'weno, and Patricia Schneider, and my graduate student Samuel Tsegai read the manuscript in part or in full and offered invaluable feedback for which I thank them heartily. My other graduate

student, Daniel Asante Boamah, helped assemble statistical data on piracy, which he, my sister Natsinet and my better half Miriam assisted in aggregating and analyzing along with other relevant quantitative material I was able to gather. I am grateful to all of them. Studying public international law greatly facilitated my understanding of the legal aspects of the story. That also benefited from constructive consultations with my friend, colleague and supervisor Joshua Karton and classmates Ekaterina Antsygina, who is an expert in maritime (continental shelf) law, and Gary Lutton, a seasoned diplomat and expert in treaty laws.

My thanks also go to Cambridge University Press's impressive editorial team (Maria Marsh, Abigail Walkington and Cassi Roberts) and their efficient production partners at Integra (Karthik Orukaimani and Faye Roberts). I would especially like to thank Maria for taking active interest in my book and seeing it through the most critical phase; to Cassi for ably shepherding it through production; and to Faye Roberts for the meticulous copyediting. I am extremely grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers of my manuscript who gave me valuable feedback.

In ways emblematic of the structurally rigged system of knowledge production, doing this research as a black African and moving around on an Eritrean passport made my research travels unnecessarily complicated and taxing (physically, emotionally, financially and time-wise). The indignity of being especially quizzed and of having one's documents closely examined many times over (by the all-powerful airline employees and immigration/customs officers) at various international departure/entry points are a fraction of the hefty, invisible prices of doing independent research of which only a few researchers even know, much less endure. The withdrawal, by the Dean of the Gujarat National Law University in Ahmadabad in India, of a fellowship offer upon receiving my passport page for visa purposes (hence seeing my face) best epitomizes who, even in the Global South, is considered a credible producer of legitimate knowledge about a topic of scientific research.

As if that, and the physical strain and security risks involved in the research were not enough, perhaps most humiliating, physically exhausting, and draining (financially and in terms of time) was the fact that I was rendered stateless toward the end of my research. Early prospects to acquire an African passport fizzled when the need to bribe officials at key positions became apparent and morally indistinguishable from the uniquely Eritrean circumstances that had, in the first place, left me stateless. Appeals to Canadian authorities have not yielded an outcome in spite of the fact that I have lived, worked, and paid taxes in Canada for

four years and counting – and I hold an enviable position at a prestigious national institution.

This book is written despite all the hardships and because of the support of many Somali and non-Somali personal friends, colleagues, siblings and family far and near.

Awet T. Weldemichael

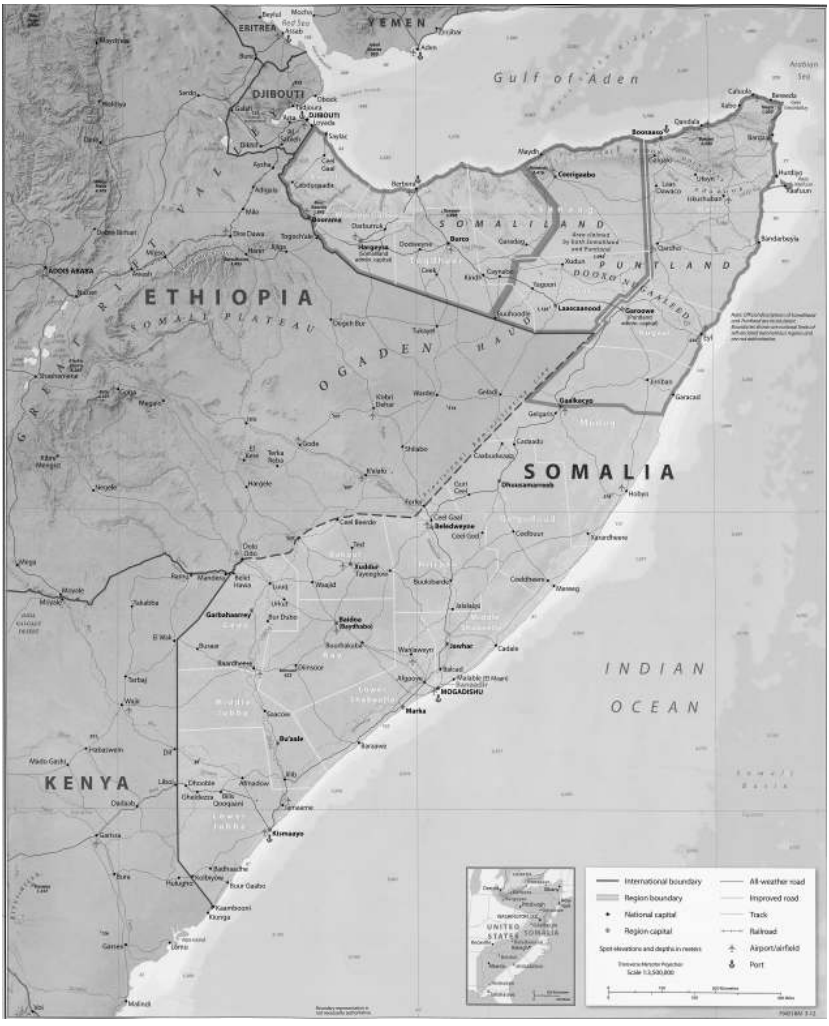

Figure P.1. A 2012 Somalia country profile map available at the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection. (Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.)