



13 June 91

Dear Pietro,

First of all, let me thank you for your letter and for what it tells me : above all, that Mohamed Aden is safe and sound, splendid news (we'd heard almost nothing of his whereabouts) - and so, to him, my wife's and my warmest greetings and good wishes, please. Also to you : and as for our little dissension with Repubblica, don't give it a thought (I knew in any case that none of that could have been your fault). I am delighted to be in touch with you again.

I have been reading the "Conversation" (and have no difficulty in reading Italian although a good deal of difficulty in writing it - hence my response in English). It seems to me that each of you has done an admirable and important work. You have evoked from Mohamed a "document" of unexampled value so far as the recent history of Somalia is concerned but over and beyond that a record of very great moral value in bodying forth Mohamed's sterling honesty and courage under conditions of persecution much worse, I have to say, than I had imagined (or, I think, anyone here has imagined). I can think of no words sufficient to the "case". It does honour to his friends - even distant friends such as I - simply to have known him. We should like to congratulate him except that it would sound like a pretention. Try and find some words Pietro, in which to explain to him that we deeply and thoroughly respect and admire him.

For myself, the full revelation of Siad's baseness brings me a sense of shame : not that I should or even could have known its depths, but that it reveals a personal collapse, a misery, a scene of horror, that spreads like a fog of revulsion over everything connected with him. Baseness, yes, but also, surely, an incredible stupidity under a mask of cunning ? Well, you will have felt all this still more sharply.

It is excellent that Ed Associate will publish the "Conversation" ; I don't know them, but I do know Poscia's remarkable book - a member of the Eritrean cc gave it to me when I was in Eritrea in 1988 just before and during the Afabet victory, imperial Ethiopia's Dien Bien Phu as I called that victory at the time and as it has since proved to have been. If there is anything I can do to ensure the success of the book, please tell me.

An edition in English ? Yes, I would think there are definite possibilities, and these would become a certainty if we could arrange for a really competent translation. My question then is : have I you and Mohamed's permission to discuss the book with persons here who might be helpful ? There is a small but competent British school of Somali specialists ; among these, does Mohamed have any objection to, for instance, Prof Ioan Lewis (London School of Economics) ? There would be need for a few additions and deletions, I would think : e.g., some extensions to the last (and excellent) chapter - notably, of the thoughts briefly expressed by M on pp 213-4 about the possible future direction of politics and society in Somalia ; and, again, some words about Mohamed's friends and comrades (Marion and I especially want to know about Yussuf Weyrah, whom we warmly remember). Most of the Italian chapter could be lost, in an English edition, but not the parts on "tribalism", which I find particularly interesting. And so on.

Some deletions of detail here and there, and, as I would suggest, some editorial

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notes along the way in order to explain persons and situations at various points in the conversation. (For example - pp 33 - nobody here any longer remembers Présence Africaine).

Some enlargement, for sure, of the achievements which M very briefly recalls on p 195 : because these achievements were real, were much written about at the time, and yet were then engulfed in the miseries of what followed. (I wrote about them with admiration, as you did, only to be much reproached in the aftermath...) "You told us they were doing well, making progress, building something new... and look at what's happened..." ETC etc.

In short, there is probably a need (perhaps in an introduction - and I would venture to think this would also apply to the Italian edition) for a very short "potted" history or overview of those years - really, from the British occupation through AFIS to the 1960s/- because, however deplorably, little or nothing is known except to the specialists. Now they are telling us that Africa must have multi-party constitutions as though these would be sufficient to ensure Democracy and Progress -and I remind them that Somalia achieved no fewer than 62 "parties" in the 1960s... which is another reason why Mohamed should extend his thoughts ^{as} now set forth on page 214.

But all this may be a little premature. In any case, the Italian edition will in itself be a great contribution to understanding just what's happened in Somalia, and why.

Please let me hear from you, and a few words from Mohamed himself would be very welcome here! Meanwhile, all good wishes to him and to you :

Baird