

**REBUILDING SOMALI POLITICAL SYSTEMS:
GROWING NEW ROOTS IN INDIGENOUS REALITIES,
OR MERELY RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST?**

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty
of
The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
Tufts University

by
Carolyn J. Logan

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2002

UMI Number: 3188549

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3188549

Copyright 2006 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Carolyn J. Logan
12974 New Lothrop Road
Byron, Michigan 48418

Education

- May 2002 **Ph.D. in International Relations**, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.
- May 1996 **M.A. in Law and Diplomacy (International Relations)**, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.
- May 1987 **M.S. in Environmental and Water Resource Engineering**, minor in Economics, Cornell University.
- December 1983 **B.S. *summa cum laude* in Civil Engineering**, University of Michigan.

Professional Experience

- 2001 – present **Associate Project Director** (MSU), Afrobarometer Project, Michigan State University
- 1997 – 2000 **Democracy Fellow**, World Learning, Washington, D.C., with placement as Regional Advisor for Conflict Prevention, Mitigation and Response, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Regional Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA), Nairobi, Kenya.
- 1997 **Research Consultant**, Conflict Management Group, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 1997 **Freelance Editor**
- 1994 - 1997 **Research Assistant**, Global Development And Environment Institute (G-DAE), Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts
- 1995 (summer) **Water Sector Manager**, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Rwanda
- 1993 **Irrigation/Agriculture Sector Manager**, IRC, Somalia Cross-Border Operation
- 1992
(Nov.-Dec.) **Consultant Irrigation Engineer**, joint appointment with GTZ, Government of Lesotho Ministry of Agriculture (GOL/MOA), and SIDA/Swedforest.

1992 (Sept. – Nov.)	Consultant Irrigation Engineer , Local Initiatives Support Project (LISP) of GOL/MOA and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
1990 – 1991	Project Irrigation Engineer , LISP
1987 – 1990	District Irrigation Engineer , GOL/MOA and U.S. Peace Corps – Lesotho
1987 (summer)	Water Resources Engineer Intern , Ford Foundation, New Delhi, India
1985 (summer)	Consultant Water Resources Engineer , World Bank, Washington, D.C.
1983 – 1984	Assistant Project Engineer , Limno-Tech, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

Publications and Reports

“Overcoming the State-Society Disconnect in the Former Somalia: Putting Somali Political and Economic Resources at the Root of Reconstruction,” report prepared for USAID/REDSO/ESA, September 2000.

“US Public Opinion and the Intervention in Somalia: Lessons for the Future of Military-Humanitarian Interventions,” *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 20, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1996): 155-180.

Gravity Fed Sprinkler Irrigation Systems for Lesotho, published by Lesotho Agricultural Production and Institutional Support Project (LAPIS/USAID), U.S. Peace Corps, and Local Initiatives Support Project, March 1990, revised 1991.

Languages

Sesotho	Advanced speaking, reading and writing.
French	General proficiency in speaking, reading and writing.
Swahili	General proficiency in speaking.

Abstract

Many African states have been plagued by weak and ineffective state structures, at times culminating in complete political collapse. This dissertation considers the validity of two propositions aimed at developing an understanding of the problem of institutional weakness and failure, using the case studies of the Republic of Somalia (in collapse) and the “self-declared” Republic of Somaliland (in rebuilding). The first proposition contends that a critical root cause of Somalia’s implosion can be found in the virtually total lack of correspondence between the foundations and formal institutions of the state and the norms, values, practices and beliefs – the informal institutions – of Somali society. This “disconnect” resulted in the failure of the state and its successive regimes to sustain any form of *vertical legitimacy*; there was no agreement between the state and society on the principles upon which the “right to rule” was based. The second proposition suggests that the vertical legitimacy of the reconstructed state can be strengthened in both intrinsic and instrumental ways via a process of “indigenization” of the political system – i.e., construction of the foundations of the state, as well as the formal institutions of the new regime, based on *both* indigenous Somali political culture and universal democratic principles.

Two key aspects of the “hybrid” political system which Somalilanders are constructing are evaluated: the incorporation of “traditional” elders into formal political structures via a “House of Elders” or *Guurti*, and the reliance on explicit, negotiated clan balance within the state’s legislative bodies. Based on interviews with a broad range of Somalilanders, both the potential and actual implications for legitimacy of these adaptations are evaluated. The findings suggest that indigenization offers potential opportunities to expand political space, strengthening the state-society linkage and hence increasing vertical legitimacy. But the effects of indigenization are fluid and situational, responding to changes in the political context, the efforts of various constituencies to define and control these institutions, and the changing expectations of society. Moreover, indigenization will not prevent elite efforts to co-opt indigenized structures in ways that could undermine their usefulness to the state. But the public’s familiarity with how indigenized institutions are supposed to work may make it more successful in holding them accountable.

To Chuck. All these words, but none adequate to say how much you've added to this project, and to my life.

And to my lovely Mara. Gertrude said "read your dissertation to your daughter to inspire her." You still prefer *Good Night Moon*, but maybe someday...

Acknowledgements

I am grateful first of all to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for funding the fellowship which made my field research possible, and to World Learning, which manages the Democracy Fellows Program. Special thanks are due to Linda Howey and Ned Greeley of USAID's Regional Economic Development Services Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA) in Nairobi, Kenya, and to David Burgess, Jennifer MacCaskill, and Sora Friedman of World Learning in Washington, D.C. for their continuous support. Matt Bryden and Ahmed Yusuf Farah of the War-torn Societies Project (WSP) Somali Programme in Nairobi were especially helpful in getting me started and in being available to exchange ideas all along the way.

In the field, enormous thanks are due to everyone at the Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD) in Hargeisa, who provided invaluable assistance, both intellectually and logistically, to the Somaliland portion of the fieldwork. And none of this would have been possible without the excellent assistance and advice of Saeed Ahmed Mohamoud, who translated, facilitated, and helped me make the best use of my all-too-brief visits to Somaliland. I am also indebted to the Puntland Development Research Centre (PDRC) and its director, Abdirahman Osman Shuke, as well as to Abduljabar Hassan Dini and the Care-Puntland office, for their assistance during my work in Puntland, and to Abdulkadir Sheikh Mohamoud Salah for his services as a translator. Most importantly, I am grateful to all of the respondents in both Somaliland and Puntland, who willingly gave of their time and their thoughts, and made the fieldwork a fascinating and enjoyable, as well as challenging, experience.

Finally, I am especially indebted to my dissertation committee for their continuous support, encouragement and guidance. Both Professor Pearl Robinson, my committee chair, and Professor Bill Moomaw always found time to provide thoughtful comments on these many pages despite the innumerable demands on their time. And Professor Peter Uvin provided invaluable input despite his late arrival into the process; I appreciate his willingness to take this on at short notice. Lastly, I am grateful to Ann Marie Decembrele and Nora Moser at the Fletcher School, whose frequent and willing assistance helped keep this whole project moving despite the long distances, delayed communications, and my own forgetfulness.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Institutional Roots and the Challenge of Legitimacy	1
1.1 Introduction to the Problem	
1.2 Proposition 1: The Roots of Failure	
1.1 Proposition 2: The Way Forward?	
Chapter 2: Literature Review	32
2.1 Institutional Disconnect – A Root Cause of African State Failure?	
2.2 New Interpretations of Legitimacy – Supply Side Failures	
2.3 Demand Side Failures and the Need for Democratic Innovation	
2.4 Overcoming Disconnect – The Construction of Hybrid Institutions	
2.5 Indigenization in Practice	
2.6 The Many Shapes of Indigenization Reforms	
2.7 Critiques of Indigenization	
2.8 Further Research Needs	
Chapter 3: The Evolution of Somali Political Institutions: The Roots of Collapse and the Foundations of Reconstruction	75
3.1 Pre-Colonial Somali Socio-Political Systems	
3.2 Foreign Presence and Political Influence – The First Nine Centuries	
3.3 The Colonial Legacy	
3.4 Preparation for Transition: The Emergence of Nationalism and Political Parties	
3.5 The Colonial Era: Assessing the Socio-Political Impacts	
3.6 Independence Part I: An Experiment with Multiparty Democracy	
3.7 Independence Part II: The Siyad Barre Era	
3.8 The End for Siyad Barre – and the Republic of Somalia	
Chapter 4: Digging Up the Roots of Somalia’s Collapse	150
4.1 An Evident Disconnect	
4.2 The Implications for Legitimacy	
4.3 The Conclusion: The Disconnect is Complete	
4.4 Finding the Way Forward: The Difficult Task of Recreating Political Order	
4.5 Indigenization Somali-Style	
Chapter 5: Rising from the Ashes – The Origins of the New Somaliland State	197
5.1 Burao and a New Start for the Northwest	
5.2 The Grand Guurti at Boroma	
5.3 The SNM and the Isaaq Community	
5.4 New Government Structures – The Experiment Begins	
5.5 Struggling Towards Peace and Prosperity	

Chapter 6: The Role of Traditional Leaders: Can Anyone Else Fill the Gap?	225
6.1 The Elders and Indigenization – The Theory	
6.2 The Reality: Contested Visions	
6.3 The Future of the <i>Guurti</i>	
6.4 Conclusion: The Implications of Elders’ New Role for State and Regime Legitimacy	
Chapter 7: Clan Identity and Representation – A Conflict Between Legitimacy and Effectiveness?	292
7.1 The Clan “Problem”	
7.2 Negotiated Clan Balance: A Lasting Answer?	
7.3 The Down Side	
7.4 From Selection to Election	
7.5 Conclusion: Can Legitimacy and Effectiveness Coexist in the Context of Clan?	
Chapter 8: Conclusion	339
8.1 Avoiding the Mistakes of the Past	
8.2 The State in Africa	
8.3 Indigenization and Legitimacy: The Verdict?	
8.4 More Ways to Indigenize	
8.5 Parallels in Puntland	
8.6 To the South, and Beyond	
8.7 Lessons for the International Community	
Bibliography	381
Appendix A: Map of Somaliland/Somalia	400
Appendix B: Notes on Field Research	401

Chapter 1: Institutional Roots and the Challenge of Legitimacy

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

The former Republic of Somalia has achieved the unfortunate distinction of becoming Africa's quintessential failed state. After tolerating a decade of corrupt and ineffective – though purportedly democratic – rule under its first post-independence government, followed by more than 20 years of increasingly autocratic and totalitarian rule under the dictatorship of Mohamed Siyad Barre, the country finally imploded early in 1991, fracturing along fault lines of regional and clan divisions. Much of the former Republic has, since then, endured extreme hardship as repeated attempts to reconcile warring factions and restore a formal government have met with failure. And although Somalia in the 1990s represented the extremes of failure, many of its neighbors in the Horn of Africa and beyond have not fared particularly well either, suffering ills ranging from slow or even negative growth and declining standards of living, to corruption and poor governance, unrest, and in numerous cases, civil wars of their own. Ethiopia joins the former Somalia as one of the world's poorest countries, and Sudan remains mired in a long-running civil war that extends into northern Uganda, while the states of the Great Lakes Region have been repeatedly torn asunder by civil and international conflict that has escalated into genocide. Relatively speaking, Kenya, which suffers from ongoing low-level conflict in several regions and where the economy has virtually ground to a standstill under the weight of rampant corruption and economic mismanagement, is a “success story.” And the stories of the coups and dictatorships that have long dominated politics on much of the rest of the continent are also well known. Across most of Africa, the first four decades of independence have produced at best disappointing results.

Is it possible to break out of the negative spiral that seems to have engulfed the former Republic of Somalia, and to a lesser extent, its neighbors? The experiences of the breakaway northwestern region of the country, now known as the “self-declared” Republic of Somaliland, may offer some critical insights on this issue. Encompassing the territory of the former British Protectorate of Somaliland, this region announced its secession from the south of the country shortly after the state collapsed in an effort to reclaim the independent status that it gave up to form a union with the south just days after the British departed in 1960. Since 1991, Somalilanders have been deeply engaged in the process of political reconstruction, and they have been relatively successful in achieving not just peace and stability, but a remarkable degree of political and economic rehabilitation as well. Although it has not been recognized by any sovereign state or international body, Somaliland clearly exists as a *de facto* state,¹ drawing attention to Jeffrey Herbst’s (2001) contention that it is time for the West to explore new understandings of sovereignty, borders, and what constitutes a viable “state.”²

But the critical lessons from Somalia and Somaliland for the purposes of this analysis lie in developing an understanding of the root causes of Somalia’s collapse, and in evaluating Somaliland’s particular response to the problem of institutional rebuilding. Somalis themselves recognize that there is no guarantee that the new government or governments they produce will be any more effective, just, or beneficial to the public than those of the past. Constructing a better future requires understanding what went so

¹ Based on this *de facto* status, for the purposes of clarity in the terminology used in this analysis I will refer to Somaliland as a state despite its lack of *de jure* status in the international arena. Given that the ultimate resolution of Somaliland’s status must almost inevitably involve at least a considerable degree of autonomy for the region, if not outright independence, treating the political structures in the region as though they are indeed state structures is not likely to be far off the mark. I will return to this issue in further detail in Chapter 5.

² Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

wrong in the past. Only then can Somalis, and the international community that supports their efforts, begin to plot a way forward that can help to avoid repeating the mistakes and failures of the past. In constructing a unique set of what they describe as “hybrid” institutions, Somalilanders believe they may have found this way. The purpose of this analysis is therefore two-fold: first, to explore the question of what went wrong in Somalia, and secondly, to investigate what can be done differently in a reconstructed Somali state (or states) in order to break free of the destructive cycle in which Somalis currently find themselves so deeply mired. Towards this end, I will explore the following two propositions:

***Proposition 1:** The primary cause of the implosion of the Republic of Somalia can be traced to the virtually total lack of correspondence between the foundations and formal institutions of the state and the norms, values, practices and beliefs – the informal institutions – of Somali society, resulting in a lack of vertical legitimacy.*

***Proposition 2:** Indigenizing Somaliland’s political system – i.e., building the foundations of the state, as well as the specific, formal institutions and structures of the new regime, based on both indigenous Somali political culture and global democratic roots – will strengthen the legitimacy of the new state in both intrinsic and instrumental ways.*

The findings of this analysis in Somaliland will reveal important lessons about institution building that are relevant not just to the rest of the former Republic of Somalia, but to many other political systems in Africa as well.

1.2 Proposition 1: The Roots of Failure

1.2.1 Theoretical Overview

I. William Zartman (1995) explains that state collapse occurs when “the basic functions of the state are no longer be performed. . . . As the decisionmaking center of government, the state is paralyzed and inoperative: laws are not made, order is not preserved, and societal cohesion is not enhanced.” Nor can a collapsed state continue to function as a symbol of identity, as a secure territory, or as an authoritative political institution that can direct public affairs. Then, as Zartman describes it, “no longer functioning, with neither traditional nor charismatic nor institutional sources of legitimacy, it has lost the right to rule.”³

Analysts have proposed a variety of theories to explain the abysmal performance of so-called failed states such as Somalia, as well as their deeply troubled neighbors. They seek to understand the choice of poor policies and the pursuit of corrupt and self-serving practices on the part of governments, and to explain the inability of African publics, even at times in the context of electoral – and therefore technically democratic – politics, to keep their governments in check. Whether operating under autocratic dictatorships, military juntas, reformist socialist regimes, or purportedly democratic systems, African leaders and their bureaucracies have, with a few notable exceptions, consistently failed to devise, select and/or implement effective policies and programs that have advanced their countries’ interests, and their citizens have, more often than not, quietly acquiesced. Increasingly, the focus of these analyses has intensified on the problem of weak, illegitimate and ineffectual institutions – breakdowns in what Douglass C. North (1990)

³ I. William Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse,” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I William Zartman (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 5.

has described as “the rules of the game in a society or . . . the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction.”⁴

North focuses on this question of why societies continue to exhibit poor performance, despite the fact that more effective political and economic models exist. He finds the answer in the nature of institutional change and the correspondence – or lack thereof – between the formal aspects of institutions (their rules and laws) and their underlying informal foundations such as cultural norms and values. He argues that there must be a certain amount of consistency between the formal rules and the informal constraints for a political system to function effectively. North adds that radical changes in the formal rules will not necessarily be matched by corresponding changes in the informal constraints, in part due to the high information and transactions costs that arise. He also argues that the resulting inconsistencies between the formal and informal rules and constraints can lead to tensions in society, which in theory must be resolved through adjustments to either the formal rules, the informal constraints, or both.

North’s analysis is clearly relevant to many African countries, where radical, abrupt changes in the formal rules – the advent of colonization, the arrival of independence, a “democratic opening,” a military takeover, and other liberal or non-liberal transitions – have occurred frequently since the onset of the colonial era, a relatively brief period of time from the perspective of long-term institution building. The result has been fundamental inconsistencies and tensions between social and political structures, producing institutions that are at odds with the norms, values and expectations of society – its informal constraints. This could be a significant source of the instability and failure

⁴ Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

in many African political systems. North also proposes a theory of path dependence, which posits that: 1) rather than major changes, institutional changes will almost always be incremental and occur at the margins; and 2) the direction or nature of possible changes will be limited, especially by the informal constraints of a society.

This framework is particularly relevant not only to the institutions of government generally, but more specifically to the question of the fundamental legitimacy of a regime, or even of the state itself. In his 1996 analysis of the causes of modern civil wars, Kalevi Holsti identifies what he describes as a lack of *vertical legitimacy* as a key source of failure of modern states, particularly those created in the post-1945 era of decolonization. Holsti argues that a state (or regime) has vertical legitimacy if there is agreement between the state (as manifested in its structures and institutions) and society on the principles on which the “right to rule” is based.⁵ According to Holsti, states typically make *claims* of legitimacy or a “right to rule” based on a number of factors, ranging from religion or divine right, heredity, ethnicity, or ideology, to contract and consent, task achievement (for example, successfully leading an independence struggle), leadership attributes, or the use of force.⁶

However, Holsti goes on to note that “claims to authority are only that.”⁷ Actual vertical legitimacy only pertains if these claims are accepted by society. If they are, then a state or regime can likely rely to at least some extent on the loyalty and compliance of its citizens, giving it considerable strength, manifested, for example, in the ability to

⁵ Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 84. Note that Holsti also identifies what he considers a second key aspect of legitimacy, *horizontal legitimacy*, defined as the “intellectual and emotional bases of political community,” or in other words “the definition of the population over whom rule is exercised.” While this source of legitimacy is also highly relevant in many contexts, it is less important to this analysis of Somalia and will not be considered further.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

make and implement decisions and policies and to collect revenues. In this sense, legitimacy can be defined as “the belief in the rightfulness of a state, in its authority to issue commands, so that those commands are obeyed not simply out of fear or self-interest, but because they are believed in some sense to have moral authority.”⁸ If, on the other hand, society rejects the state’s claims, the state will be weak, unable to elicit the trust, support and compliance of citizens or to generate and manage resources, and failing to exhibit accountability or develop relationships of reciprocity with its citizens.

One alternative to establishing legitimacy based on a common view of the *principles* underlying a state’s right to rule, which I will refer to as *intrinsic legitimacy*, is to build *instrumental legitimacy*, that is, legitimacy based on state success in meeting widely perceived needs of citizens, for example by successfully providing social services or security. However, Holsti notes how difficult it is for a state lacking intrinsic legitimacy to improve its status via instrumental means:

The weak state is caught in a vicious circle. It does not have the resources to create legitimacy by providing security and other services. In its attempt to find strength, it adopts predatory and kleptocratic practices or plays upon and exacerbates social tensions between the myriads of communities that make up the society. *Everything it does to become a strong state actually perpetuates its weakness.*⁹ [italics supplied]

Thus, states that lack legitimacy from the beginning often not only fail to improve their position, but in fact they frequently take actions that lead them to descend ever further into alienation and illegitimacy.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 87, citing Rodney Barker, *Political Legitimacy and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

One of the critical outcomes of this lack of legitimacy and the disconnection between the state and society that produces it is excessive *state autonomy*.¹⁰ Particularly when society has little recourse to create a more legitimate state (or regime), and instead acquiesces in the perpetuation of an illegitimate state, the political system may find itself able to act essentially as it chooses, free from accountability to society. But as Marina Ottaway (1987) has explained, despite initial appearances, this is not necessarily a positive outcome for the state:

The weak state . . . : “has a high degree of autonomy from society, but . . . it is also very seriously weakened by its internal divisions. Decision-making is most often in the hands of a few, not of institutions. Administration is in the hands of an inefficient apparatus that the leaders do not always control . . . [I]t is a state that has autonomy (probably too much autonomy), but very little sovereignty.”¹¹ [italics supplied]

Holsti thus concludes with the important point that appearances can be deceiving; neither authoritarian or despotic power, nor state autonomy from society, should be confused with the kind of functional and effective state strength and authority that arise out of vertical legitimacy. He observes that in weak, illegitimate states:

Substantial segments of their population do not accord the state or its rulers loyalty . . . and the rulers, in the name of the state, have little authority in the sense that their decisions, decrees, actions, and policies

¹⁰ In the literature on the state, state “autonomy” is often considered a good thing, a component of state strength that implies that a state has the capacity to act decisively, and to give orders and have them carried out. See for example Eric A. Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), and Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988). However, in this analysis I am concerned with an excess of “autonomy” of the state from society, implying not state strength, but rather a capacity to act independently of – in fact, to openly ignore – societal interests and demands. In other words, I use the term “autonomy” to refer to a state that is unattached, or disconnected, from the population. The question of whether state autonomy is a positive or negative trait hinges in part on the distinction Christopher Clapham makes between conceptions of the state as a provider of welfare, and those that treat the state as source of exploitation. In the case of Somalia, the latter framework is a more appropriate starting point. Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.

¹¹ Holsti, *The State of War*, 116, citing Marina Ottaway, “The Crisis of Socialist States,” in *The African State in Transition*, ed. Zaki Ergas (London: Macmillan, 1987), 173.

elicit habitual compliance. . . . Weak states in fact display a paradox: they are at once strong in the category of despotic power, but weak in infrastructural power. . . . The essential props of vertical legitimacy – authority, reciprocity, trust, and accountability – are largely absent. . . . In many weak states, therefore, central rule is mostly theater. . . . The authoritarianism of most weak states is not to be confused with the capacity to govern effectively.¹²

The fact that the few countries, such as Botswana, that did not ignore their own political and cultural roots in building their post-independence polities are now among Africa's top performers is particularly telling. The rest have been plagued by the predations of governments that are disconnected from and function autonomously of their societies, both institutionally, and financially.

1.2.2 Hypothesis 1

The first proposition to be tested in this analysis, then, arises out of an application of these frameworks of state weakness and institutional failure developed by North and Holsti to the particular case of the Republic of Somalia. Specifically, I will evaluate the hypothesis that while many causal factors contributed to the implosion of the Somali state, the primary roots of the problem can be traced to the failure of the state or its successive regimes to achieve any form of vertical legitimacy. In other words, it resulted from the virtually total lack of correspondence between the foundations and formal institutions of the state and the norms, values, practices and beliefs – the informal institutions – of Somali society.

The Somali state had neither authority, nor the consent and loyalty of the Somali public to the state and its institutions, and the at best sporadic efforts of subsequent regimes to overcome this weakness met with failure. What state institutions did have was

¹² *Ibid.*, 104, citing Ottaway, "Crisis of Socialist States," 174.

an enormous amount of autonomy, a condition which each regime took full advantage of, but which, despite temporary benefits to power holders, ultimately undermined the regime's – and the state's – public standing, eventually to the point of collapse. By the time it fell, the Somali state had so little legitimacy and credibility with the public that it has yet to be rebuilt.

1.2.3 Methodology and Findings

My evaluation of this first proposition is based primarily upon a review of secondary sources that concern the historical record of social and political evolution in Somali society and the Republic of Somalia over the past century and beyond. This historical overview will serve as the basis for an analysis of the sources – or lack thereof – of institutional, state and regime legitimacy during the independence era. I will begin by reviewing the institutions, practices and values comprising traditional (pre-colonial) Somali political culture. I will then evaluate the impacts of both pre-European and European foreign intervention and impact, and consider especially the significant impacts of the British and Italians on the role and functions of these traditional institutions in the two parts of the Somali-inhabited territories that they ruled. Finally, I will consider the two post-independence regimes that ruled the Republic of Somalia prior to the state's collapse. I will give special attention in this part of the analysis both to how they interacted with traditional institutions, and with the extent to which the structures, processes and practices of governance which they employed were or were not consistent with indigenous value systems.

This evolution does in fact reveal a classic example of a growing disconnection between state institutions and society precisely along the lines described by North. Until

late in the 19th century, Somali social and political behavior had evolved relatively independently of external forces into a minimalist system of rule that has been described as “pastoral democracy.” Yet in Somalia, as in much of Africa, the advent of colonialism brought about an abrupt and alien reordering of the political arena. Subsequently, the independence era essentially constituted yet another new disruption in an already discontinuous process of political evolution. The institutions of Western liberal democracy bequeathed to Somalia – and most other African countries – upon independence were nearly as much of a foreign imposition as colonial rule itself had been. They had only the shallowest of roots among the educated elites within independence-era Somali society. In Somalia, as throughout most of Africa, the indigenous political practices, values, institutions, and leadership recognized by the vast majority of citizens – whether relatively accountable and participatory in nature (as in Somalia) or autocratic and limited – were entirely and often deliberately marginalized. Moreover, as we shall see, while indigenous political culture and practices were not static, neither did they change beyond recognition, nor did they lose their relevance to much of Somali society.

It is little wonder, then, that state institutions that denied any role to these societal foundations found it so difficult to establish and sustain legitimacy and effectiveness; the new political systems were anything but organically grounded in their societies. The institutions that resulted were shallowly rooted, illegitimate, ineffective, and weak, and could generate neither positive benefits for Somali society, nor elicit the cooperation and trust of that society. In such a context, the increasing efforts of the state to enforce allegiance and extract resources for its own survival eventually proved untenable. Tensions mounted between the state and Somali society, producing ever widening

rebellion and eventually civil war, until, early in 1991, the breaking point was reached, and the illegitimate Somali state collapsed so completely that it has yet to be fully restored.

It should be apparent that Somalia was by no means alone in struggling with the problems of weak institutions and lack of vertical legitimacy. Zartman reports that one study identified half of the states in Africa as being in “serious or maximum danger of collapse, if not already gone.”¹³ The disconnection between state and society that so undermined the Somali state has been experienced, in varying fashion and to varying degrees, by many African states. But only a handful of these have actually ended in failure. These different outcomes can be explained by the fact that while institutional weakness is a key factor in failure, it is not the only determinant. In the case of Somalia, cultural factors combined with the effects of Cold War politics to push the state over the brink from “mere” weakness to collapse. Institutional disconnect occurred in the context of an intensely independent traditional political culture that was particularly averse to the concept of centralized (mis-)rule. In other words, in some senses the disconnect between the state and society was perhaps even greater in Somalia than elsewhere given the acephalous nature of Somali political tradition. Centralized rule was already a foreign concept to Somalis, and according to Zartman, “In Somalia after 1990, Siyad Barre so concentrated power in the hands of his clan that the whole country rose against him . . . delegitimizing both the idea and the practice of central state government.”¹⁴ At the same time, as a Cold War client state first of the Soviets, and later of the US, the Somali government received enormous infusions of funds that both exacerbated the degree of

¹³ Zartman, *Collapsed States*, 3, citing John Nellier, “States in Danger,” 1993 (mimeo).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

disconnect and autonomy of the state from society, and enhanced the oppressive capabilities of the state. By the time these resources were abruptly withdrawn in the late 1980s, the state had so undermined not only its legitimacy, but its very structures and its ability to function without these resources, that an angry public seized what it then saw as an opportunity to rid itself of a despised regime.¹⁵ This fiercely independent political culture and a now even more deeply ingrained fear of domination by others, in combination with the readings and mis-readings of the lessons of the past by Somali warlords, have prevented reconstruction as well. But while the same sort of institutional weakness has not in all other cases led to outright state failure as it did in Somalia, it has been a major factor in the poor performance of states throughout the continent; the differences are more a matter of degree than of kind.

1.3 Proposition 2: The Way Forward?

1.3.1 Theoretical Overview

If this disconnection and lack of legitimacy is indeed the root source of the failure of the Somali state, the obvious question is how can Somalis avoid repeating the same mistakes and build a more legitimate and effective state (or states) out of the ashes of the Republic of Somalia? Although the collapse of the state has cost Somalis dearly, many recognize that it has also presented them with a unique opportunity. The silver lining to the dark cloud of Somalia's lost decade may be the opportunity it offers to build new political institutions that are much more fully attuned to the society's own political needs and political culture than those of the past that failed them so completely. At the same

¹⁵ Although today many Somalis, particularly in the south, regretfully wonder whether any government, even Siyad Barre's, would be better than the anarchy that has "ruled" the country since.

time, the legacy of the past will remain a powerful force shaping rebuilding processes. Despite all Somalis have been through, there is no assurance that they will not once again be subjected to rule by a centralized and autonomous regime that remains largely disconnected from society.

What approach should Somalis take to reconstruction that can overcome the failures of the past, stemming at least in part from this disconnection between the state and society? As Holsti notes, “today most Western analysts argue that rule based on explicit consent through periodic elections is the only enduring basis of vertical legitimacy.”¹⁶ This Western consensus has been manifested in widespread and wholesale promotion of the Western liberal model of multiparty electoral democracy throughout Africa and in many other transitional regions of the world during the 1990s. In fact, this model is regarded by many as the *only* acceptable political model available today.

However, Holsti himself goes on to add that “it is probably premature to claim that only democracies have strong bases of legitimacy”¹⁷ – a fact that the pre-democratic histories of many Western states would confirm – and if we return to North’s analysis, it should be evident that the “answer” to the political problems not only of Somalia, but of many other states throughout the world, is not likely to be so simple. The formal institutions of Western liberal democracy have evolved, in most cases over long periods of time, in particular social, political and cultural contexts; in fact, it is more accurate to say that they have *co-evolved* with the specific values, practices and beliefs of Western societies, i.e., with their informal institutions. As discussed above, North’s analysis suggests that the assumption that it is possible to simply impose the formal institutions of

¹⁶ Holsti, *State of War*, 87.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

the successful model of Western liberal democracy on societies in which they have not evolved endogenously is a flawed one.

North's thesis finds strong support in the empirical evidence from Somalia, and the continent. The widespread failure of African regimes to function effectively and benefit society is in all cases troubling. But it is particular cause for concern in the case of the so-called democratic regimes that dominated the immediate post-independence era, and that have taken center stage again during the "democratic resurgence" of the 1990s. These systems have been built according to what many believe to be the "correct" institutional model, i.e., the model of multiparty electoral democracy whereby voting for political party candidates is the primary means for the public to interact with the political system. In the immediate post-independence era, most of these electoral democracies either evolved into or were abruptly replaced by military regimes or one-party states in less than a decade, often much sooner, in transitions that were rarely contested by the majority of citizens. In fact, as we shall see, the 1969 coup that overthrew a presumably legitimate, elected, and purportedly democratic government in Somalia was widely welcomed by the populace, and Somalia is by no means the only country that has witnessed such a turnover to the relief or even joy of its citizens. The "new democracies" of the 1990s have perhaps fared somewhat better, but the overall quality of their records of governance, and the continuing – and all too often successful – efforts by their elected leaders to subvert democratic principles (albeit now with a generally higher level of resistance than was witnessed in the 1960s) suggest that they are still at the very best fragile democracies with weak foundations, questionable legitimacy, and continuing difficulty in performing effectively.

That these electoral democracies have failed in almost equal proportion to their less liberal cousins raises particularly pointed questions about what troubles African politics, and more especially about what remedies are available. Clearly, there is more to establishing legitimacy and good governance than the conduct of elections or the simple establishment of a triumvirate of institutions – executive, legislature, and judiciary – that clearly have not been able to produce checks and balances on each other by the *mere fact* of their mutual existence. North's argument that formal institutions cannot function effectively when they do not correspond to – or arise out of – a society's own norms, values and practices – i.e., that no matter how well a particular political model has worked elsewhere, it cannot simply be transferred as is into another context – seems to find abundant support in the empirical evidence from Africa. It goes a long way toward explaining not only why Somalia collapsed, but also why the Basotho remain largely disengaged from their elected government, why President Moi in Kenya can manipulate a multiparty system to his own ends almost as adroitly as he managed the one-party state that preceded it, and why Ghanaians and Nigerians have seen elected civilian regimes overthrown by military coups almost more times than anyone can count.

At the same time, the *democratic principles* upon which the Western liberal democratic model is based – principles of accountability, participation, and representation – should not, and perhaps cannot, be discarded. In today's modern, ever more interconnected global community, adhering to democratic principles may become increasingly necessary for states to gain and retain international credibility, and, as in the case of human rights and some other issues, there is certainly a global movement towards promotion of – even demand for – democratic rights for all people. What is clear, however, is that while an adherence to *democratic principles* may be *necessary*, the shape

and content of the particular forms, structures and institutions in which these democratic principles can take effect also matter. In other words, adopting the formal institutions of Western liberal democracy apparently cannot guarantee a political system that embodies democratic principles as an outcome. It may instead be necessary to look more creatively at democracy and institutional structures in order to construct institutions that can *both* embody these principles *and* remain relevant and functional *in the particular society which they are intended to serve*, rather than continuing to prescribe a fixed set of institutions based on the Western liberal democratic model of multiparty, competitive, winner-takes-all electoral politics.

In fact, many pre-colonial African political systems (though by no means all) possessed highly democratic elements; democracy is by no means a foreign concept on the continent, even if it is often labeled as such. The failure of Western liberal democratic institutions to take root may therefore lie not in a lack of understanding or adherence to the principles of democracy on the part of most Africans, but in the failure of many Africans, especially those of the rural and/or uneducated majority, to identify with the particular constellation of institutions associated with the liberal democratic model, which still seems to be regarded by much of the world as the sole legitimate manifestation of democracy.

Ultimately, then, what North's and Holsti's analyses suggest is the need to creatively build *hybrid* political models and institutions that correspond to the internal, informal roots and structures of a society – its unique political culture and political realities – but that can also fulfill key “universal” principles and goals of democracy. Such a process I will refer to as “indigenization.” The starting point for designing and constructing such indigenized political systems and institutions that are not only

democratic, but effective and legitimate as well, must be *within* the society that they are intended to serve. That is, we must begin by understanding the nature of a society's informal institutions, the political values or practices that are considered most relevant and important to citizens, and the bases of legitimacy that are understood and accepted. By blending these understandings and realities with democratic principles, institutions and structures, it may be possible to create institutions that are not only truly democratic, but enduring as well.

1.3.2 Hypothesis 2

The second proposition to be tested in this analysis therefore concerns the specific efforts at indigenization undertaken in Somaliland. Specifically, my hypothesis is that indigenizing Somaliland's political system – i.e., building the foundations of the state, as well as the specific, formal institutions and structures of the new regime, based on *both* indigenous Somali political culture and global democratic roots – strengthens the legitimacy of the new state in both intrinsic and instrumental ways.

In other words, I am suggesting that indigenization enhances the authority of the state to make and implement decisions, the loyalty of Somalilanders toward the state and its institutions, and the capacity of the state to function effectively, even in an extremely difficult post-conflict environment. In theory, this should contribute to both the continuing viability and longevity of the state and the current regime, and the ability of successive governments to act effectively. This latter proposition cannot, however, be tested here except in a limited way given the relative newness of the regime, although I will consider how effectively and resiliently the state has withstood some of its early challenges.

The somewhat cumbersome term “indigenization” is used here because it is important to recognize that what we are looking at is not necessarily “traditionalization,” although it may include elements based in tradition or customary practice. There are two primary problems with the term tradition. The first is that it tends to imply a “going back to” something that existed previously in an ancient, unchanged form, whether the traditional continues to exist now or not. However, the need is not to connect political systems to what *was* there but to what *is* there now, and that reflects a mixture of influences – “traditional,” “modern,” “Western,” religious, or others – derived from both external and internal sources.

The second problem with using the term “traditional” is closely related, in that tradition itself is rarely static, and defining it can also be a controversial and contested process involving varied definitions and interpretations. Between the mixture of influences and the continuous processes of evolution and change, it would often be hard to arrive at a definitive concept of what actually is traditional since all institutions are constantly in flux. (Note that the same holds true for identifying what is indigenous, a problem that I will return to later in the discussion.) Hence these terms must be used carefully, and I will use the general term “indigenization” to describe the type of changes being discussed here. I will, however, continue to refer to the role of traditional authorities and traditional institutions or structures, but the potential ambiguity of these phrases should be kept in mind.

Of course, in practice creating such indigenized institutions presents as many difficulties and pitfalls as it does opportunities. Indigenization can take many different forms, and not all of them are created equal. Political elites have, for example, used similar arguments to incorporate traditional leaders into governments with the intent

merely of co-opting them, rather than better serving their people. And indigenization efforts may yield unintended consequences – either positive or negative – as well. The actual impact and value of indigenization efforts will therefore depend on a number of factors, including who has instigated the changes and why, what form they take, and what actual outcomes, both anticipated and unanticipated, result.

Post-collapse Somalia offers an unique opportunity to move beyond a theoretical elaboration of indigenization to study how such an approach works in practice. Many Somalis throughout the country have recognized that the failure to build on the society's own strengths and values – political, social and economic – was a leading cause precipitating the collapse. In the northwestern region, now the Republic of Somaliland, this concept has received particular attention, consciously on behalf of some, and implicitly in the approach and perspective many others have taken to building new political institutions. The region's experiences therefore offer a particularly rich opportunity to investigate the potential strengths, as well as the weaknesses, of indigenization as an approach to constructing – or reconstructing – a political system.

1.3.3 Methodology and Findings

Evaluation of this second proposition will be based primarily on data gathered during field interviews with a wide variety of respondents primarily in Somaliland conducted between September 1999 and June 2000; further interviews conducted in Nairobi and the northeastern region now known as the Puntland Republic of Somalia served as an additional source of information. At this point, the administration established in Somaliland in 1993 was preparing to make the transition, after a constitutional referendum to be held in 2001, to a more permanent political regime.

These open-ended interviews were designed to explore respondents' perceptions of the structure and functioning of the new Somaliland government, the processes by which it was established, its willingness and ability to understand and meet their needs, and how it compared to previous regimes in the Republic of Somalia. Although there are important sub-sets of the population which could not be included in the interview sampling, the results can reasonably be taken to be broadly representative of the breadth of views among Somalilanders on these issues with the caveats and limitations presented in the following section. Further detail on the methodology and constraints faced in conducting fieldwork can be found in the sections below and in Appendix B. Some additional data was also collected from primary written sources such as local English-language newspapers and the Somaliland constitution passed in a 2001 referendum, and to a lesser extent from secondary documents, including a variety of news and analytical reports available from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

1.3.3.1 Survey Respondents

The aim in selecting respondents to be interviewed was to capture the perspectives of as wide a cross-section of Somaliland society as possible, given the constraints faced in conducting field research as discussed in Appendix B. The characteristics of respondents interviewed in Somaliland are summarized in Table 1. A number of respondents were also interviewed in Nairobi, Kenya and in the Puntland Republic of Somalia, but these are not included in Table 1 because they primarily concerned political developments in the northeast or elsewhere in the country, and so are of secondary relevance in this analysis. Some key points to note about the respondents include the following:

- Men are significantly over-represented compared to the population at large; 78 percent of respondents were men, and 22 percent women. This arises in part from the fact that women are very under-represented in government, local administration and professional classes, so these groups of respondents were almost exclusively men. The tendency for interviews with rural elders to evolve into fairly large groups of men also affected the final balance.
- I have categorized interviews conducted in the capital city of Hargeisa, as well as the towns of Boroma, Burao, and Gabiley, as urban (71 percent). Those conducted in the much smaller towns and villages of Baki, Bon, Hahi, Odweyn, and Tog Wajaale are classified as rural (29 percent). Most of the rural dwellers could be classified as agro-pastoralists (crops comprising 20 percent or more of their total crop and livestock production¹⁸); the sample included few respondents who primarily practice nomadic livestock production due to the logistics and time constraints of interviewing among these populations. This compares to national figures reported by the Somaliland government of 45 percent “urban and rural dwellers” and 55 percent nomads,¹⁹ while other assessments place the numbers at 25 percent in Hargeisa and other cities and towns, 30 to 35 percent in rural agro-pastoral areas, and 40 to 45 percent in pastoral areas.²⁰

¹⁸ Reginald Herbold Green, “Towards a Macro-Economic Framework for Somaliland’s Post-War Rehabilitation and Reconstruction,” in *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, ed. Adebayo Adedeji (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), 261.

¹⁹ Republic of Somaliland, Ministry of National Planning and Coordination, *Somaliland in Figures*, 2nd ed., Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 1999, 4.

²⁰ Green, “Towards a Macro-Economic Framework,” 261.

Table 1: Characteristics of Interview Respondents

	Men	Women	Total
Individuals	33	6	39
Groups / no. of groups	124 / 25	37 / 8	161
Mixed Groups (3 groups)	11	4	15
TOTAL	168	47	215
Urban	115	38	153
Rural	53	9	62
TOTAL	168	47	215
Central Government	37		37
<i>Guurti</i>	26	--	
<i>Individual interviews</i>	2	--	
<i>Group interviews (3)</i>	24 ¹	--	
<i>MPs</i>	4	--	
<i>Ministers</i>	4	--	
<i>Other</i>	3	--	
Total	37	--	37
Local Government	20	1	21
Local Elders	63	--	63
NGO Staff	22	14	36
Local Women's Groups	--	27	27
Business Community	9	--	9
Other Professionals	9	2	11
Minority Communities	2	1	3
Other	6	2	8
TOTAL	168	47	215

¹Some *Guurti* members attended more than one of the group interviews; this count reflects the sum of attendance at each of the group interviews, not the number of separate participants.

- A total of 75 interviews were conducted in Somaliland, 39 of them with individuals and 36 with groups of respondents. Table 2 provides detail on the participants in group interviews. Rural interviews nearly always involved groups of respondents, which did at times limit the depth to which individual's perspectives could be probed and the extent of the material which could be covered in the time available.

Table 2: Details of Group Interviews

Group	Participants	
	Men	Women
Baki district administration	4	
Baki elders – I	10	
Baki elders – II	3	
Bon village committee	3	
Bon mothers' committee		5
Boroma women's group representatives		4
Boroma Social Committee of Elders representatives	2	
Boroma intellectuals	7	
Boroma minority group representatives	2	
Burao elders	8	
Burao women's group representatives		4
Chamber of Commerce representatives	2	
Hahi village committee members	2	
Gabiley district administration	9	1
Gabiley elders	10	
Gabiley women's group representatives		12
Gabiley intellectuals	5	
<i>Guurti</i> Secretariat	2	
<i>Guurti</i> members – I	9	
<i>Guurti</i> members – II	10	
<i>Guurti</i> members – III	5	
<i>Guurti</i> members – IV	2	
Nagaad women's umbrella organization leaders		4
NGO staff (IRC)	2	1
NGO staff (Candlelight – Burao)	1	2
NGO staff (LPI)	2	
NGO staff (Candlelight-Hargeisa)		2
NGO staff (CCS)		2
NGO staff (SADO – Burao)	3	
Odweyn mayor (with elders)	10	
Odweyn elders	9	
Odweyn “businessmen”	3	
Odweyn women's group representatives		4
Odweyn youth	4	
Tog Wajaale headman and elders	5	
Togdheer regional government	2	

- The list of respondent categories in Table 1 does indicate a bias towards elites, but not all respondents fall into this category (and elite status is itself a relative variable). Although data sufficient to make a final judgment were not collected on each individual, a large share of the rural respondents likely fall into non-elite categories.

For example, while most of the rural women interviewed were members of local women's groups, this only implies some degree of "activist" orientation on the part of these women, but not necessarily elite status. Likewise, as discussed in Chapter 3, the term "elder" when used at the local level can essentially mean any older adult male. Interviews with local elders thus at times included a relatively ad hoc gathering of those men who were present at the time. Thus, those included in the "local elder" category in Table 1 likely cover a broad spectrum in terms of status and wealth. Some might be considered elites within their local communities, though by no means all, and very few of them could be considered part of Somaliland's national elite.

- Data on respondents' ages were not gathered, but the youngest respondents were the "Odweyn youth," who ranged in age from their early 20s to early 30s (the term "youth" is generally used to designate anyone less than 35 years old), and the oldest was the Chairman of Boroma's "Social Committee of Elders," who is in his 90s.
- Respondents were not asked their clan affiliation, as experiments with this question tended to make many uncomfortable. However, based on what is known about the demographics of Somaliland (primarily people of the Gadabursi clan living in Boroma and the western agro-pastoral areas of Awdal region, Isaaq throughout the center of the country, and Dulbahante and Warsengele clans in Sool and Sanag regions in the east), it is clear that the Gadabursi and Isaaq were well sampled, while the Dulbahante and Warsengele were not, due to the security and logistical constraints on travel in the east. Some residents of Sool and Sanaag, where sovereignty is contested between Somaliland and Puntland, were interviewed in Hargeisa (including, for example, some *Guurti* members from these regions and a

government minister), but the greater diversity of views about the Somaliland experience likely to be found in those regions could not be captured.

- In addition to the interviews detailed in Tables 1 and 2, a number of additional interviews were conducted in Nairobi and in the Puntland Republic of Somalia, primarily regarding political development in other parts of the former Somalia. These are listed in the Bibliography. Even greater constraints of time and security in Puntland meant that the sample of 21 interviews took place in the region's two urban centers, Bosaso and Garowe (the Puntland capital), and included only elites – including leading elders, MPs, government officials, newspaper editors (male and female), NGO staff, and activists. Once again, the dominance of males in virtually all of these sectors led to gender imbalance in this phase: just four of the interviews were with women, including one of Puntland's five women MPs, a newspaper editor, and two NGO activists. The surveys conducted in Puntland can therefore be considered only a quite preliminary assessment of perspectives on the region's political development that cannot be considered representative of society as a whole. Just three interviews were conducted in Nairobi, two with leading Puntlanders who, while based in Nairobi, are active in the region's politics, and one with a Somali scholar who has been conducting research on political reconstruction throughout the former Republic.

Thus, while the primary data set is not *proportionally representative* of Somaliland society as a whole, it should be sufficient to successfully capture the *breadth of opinion* on these issues in Somaliland, with the significant exception that neither the nomadic population nor easterners could be adequately sampled due to security and logistical constraints.

1.3.3.2 The Survey Instrument

Interviews were open-ended, and typically lasted from one to three hours, although some were longer. Seven were held in multiple sessions. The interviews were loosely structured around questions relating to: the founding of Somaliland; the selection of the *Guurti* and its roles, strengths and weaknesses; clan identity; the history and future of party politics; the role of women; and local government and decentralization. A list of the questions on which the interviews were based can be found in Appendix B.

The structure of the interviews was quite informal, and the topics discussed and the specific questions asked varied somewhat, depending on the position, knowledge, and willingness of the interviewees. For example, with respondents who had been directly involved with the SNM resistance movement during the 1980s and early 1990s, I might pursue a discussion of how the relationship between the SNM and the elders evolved at some length, asking extensive follow-up questions to those listed in the appendix, while to many other respondents without direct experience of these events the discussion of these issues might be quite brief. Similarly, with women the discussion of women's role was often much more extensive than it was with men, as the respondents shared examples and discussed their experiences in some detail. At other times, respondents simply showed more interest or inclination to discuss certain issues relative to the others. I pursued these evident areas of interest with detailed follow-up questions developed on the spot. While I tried to cover all of these topics with all respondents, at times this was not possible as respondents' time was limited, or they simply tired of participating. It was particularly difficult in group interviews to cover the full range of topics and questions.

While many of the interviews were conducted in English, just under one-half required translation between Somali and English. In most cases translations were

conducted by the same individual, an educated male Somalilander²¹ from the center of the country (an Isaaq). Because interview content varied considerably as discussed above, questions were translated on the spot rather than working from a prepared, translated interview instrument. Question wording may therefore have varied somewhat from one interview to the next. Further details and discussions of the constraints and their implications can be found in Appendix B.

1.3.3.3 Measuring Outcomes

Measuring the extent of intrinsic and instrumental legitimacy enjoyed by the Somaliland state and the transitional regime is not a precise process. As discussed, *intrinsic legitimacy* implies a certain degree of authority on the part of the state (though not implying that the state should have limitless authority), and loyalty or even obedience on behalf of citizens. It is based on the presence of consensus or agreement between the two regarding the principles, practices and processes on which the state is founded, i.e., in Holsti's words, agreement on "the principles on which the 'right to rule' is based."²² It is clearly not a simple task to measure intrinsic legitimacy in any concrete way, as it has as much to do with ideas and intangible values such as loyalty, as with specific, measurable behaviors. However, it is possible to identify and observe some useful indicators. Specifically, using the data and resources mentioned above, I will evaluate the extent of intrinsic legitimacy in Somaliland primarily based on the following:

²¹ Note that while it might have been preferable to have a woman to translate interviews with women, this was logistically impossible for two reasons. Most significantly, the pool of women with adequate language skills was relatively small and had largely been absorbed by the local and international NGOs, which were almost always interested in hiring more skilled women to their staffs; the individuals available for this sort of work were therefore exclusively male. Secondly, the costs and logistics of traveling to rural areas where a translator was usually needed with not one but two translators was prohibitive.

²² Holsti, *State of War*, 84.

1) explicit statements regarding the rightfulness (or the “right to rule”) of the Somaliland state and its structures, or indications of agreement with the principles of rule on which the state is founded and structured; and 2) examples of obedience or loyalty to the Somaliland state, especially in situations where a state decision may be unpopular.

Instrumental legitimacy can also be a difficult entity to define precisely, because it essentially relates to the regime or government’s *effectiveness*, and, as Holsti suggests, efficacy can be both a cause, and an effect, of legitimacy²³ (and, as discussed above, the reverse is also true, i.e., lack of legitimacy can both cause and be caused by lack of effectiveness in meeting the concrete needs of society). In a positive cycle, greater authority and loyalty afforded to the state by its citizens can lead to a greater ability to make and implement decisions and rule effectively (though society may also place limits on the scope and extent of a legitimate state’s authority). Provided that the policies selected are good ones, their successful implementation can in turn enhance the legitimacy of the state still further. I will not attempt to go too far here in separating causes of legitimacy from effects. Rather, given that it is the practice of indigenization and its effects on legitimacy that are at issue here, I will instead focus primarily on those aspects of instrumental legitimacy that can be linked directly to indigenization efforts. That is, I will attempt to identify the extent to which particular structural features of Somaliland’s institutions that arose from the indigenization process contribute directly to the instrumental efficacy of state institutions in meeting their key functions, such as ensuring security, fostering economic activity and growth, and facilitating international linkages. Note that if anything, this approach should underestimate the effects of indigenization on instrumental legitimacy as it only measures the direct effect of

²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

specifically indigenized structures, while not attempting to account for increases in instrumental legitimacy that can be traced more broadly to increases in intrinsic legitimacy that arise from indigenization.

It will become increasingly clear, during the course of my analysis and discussion, that the impacts of indigenization in Somaliland cannot easily be defined or categorized in simple, black and white terms. As we shall see, there have clearly been some highly positive impacts on regime legitimacy and efficacy, at least in the short term, and there is potential to increase these gains still further. At the same time, there have been sometimes successful efforts to manipulate indigenization, and there have been unintended consequences as well, some of them negative. In fact, while incorporating “traditional” institutions into the “modern” political system may have enhanced the legitimacy of the latter, it may have simultaneously *decreased* the intrinsic legitimacy that has historically been accorded to the former. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that indigenization – and the resulting creation of a distinctly Somali form of democratic rule – may indeed offer the most fruitful approach to political reconstruction, although positive results will depend to a large extent on who controls indigenization processes. The many nuances of the actual outcomes of the hybrid institutional structures created in Somaliland, and the lessons for both Somalis and the international community, will be discussed in detail.

In the discussion that follows, I will begin in Chapter 2 with a detailed literature review of the theoretical foundations for understanding the impacts of state-society disconnects, and for promoting indigenization. I will then turn in Chapter 3 to the specific case of Somalia, providing a historical overview of the political evolution of the Somali region from the pre-colonial era to 1991. Chapter 4 then takes up the first

proposition in detail, building the case for recognizing the disconnection between state and society and the failure of the Republic of Somalia to achieve legitimacy as the most significant root cause of the state's collapse. Chapter 5 describes the origins of Somaliland and the processes of reconstruction that produced indigenized political structures in the new state. Chapter 6 and 7 will then take a detailed look at two specific aspects of indigenization: the institutionalized role of "traditional" elders, and of clan identity, respectively. Finally, I will conclude in Chapter 8 with a discussion of the conclusions we can draw based on these findings, their potential applications elsewhere in Africa, and the lessons for the international community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While their theories form the cornerstones on which my hypothesis on indigenization is built, North and Holsti do not stand alone in their efforts to lay out an explanation for the widespread failure of institutions and states based on institutional disconnect and absence of legitimacy. This chapter will lay out the analytical and empirical underpinnings of this analysis in much more detail, highlighting not only the case for institutional disconnect as a key problem for African states, but also the shortcomings of the overly simplistic efforts to promote a narrow interpretation of democratization on the continent as a catch-all solution to its widespread political problems. In addition, I will take a more in-depth look at what other analysts have had to say about building hybrid political systems that can respond to cultural and historical differences, and review some of the critiques of this approach.

2.1 Institutional Disconnect – A Root Cause of African State Failure?

To begin with, we find that North's theory of institutional disconnect and the failure of informal institutions to quickly and automatically adjust to match abrupt changes in formal institutions finds backing from a number of other analysts. Barbara Geddes (1991), for example, points out that modernization theorists had initially expected "the rapid transformation of traditional societies and cultures into modern ones." Instead, they soon found themselves explaining the persistence of traditional norms and values because of "the existence of informal sanctions and rewards that persuaded individuals to

continue to behave in culturally approved ways.”¹ Larry Diamond (1988) further observes that “the lack of articulation between modern democratic systems and ancient cultural traditions may help to explain the general failure of independence constitutions in Africa.”²

Pierre Landell-Mills (1992) makes a similar argument, and ties it to a Holsti-like notion of legitimacy. He identifies the lack of fit between African publics and the institutions bequeathed to them by colonialism as “a fundamental flaw in the prevailing development paradigm,” observing that “it is all too obvious that the underlying cultural premises of these institutions were alien to the vast majority of Africans.”³ Landell-Mills suggests that accountability and legitimacy cannot simply arise out of a written constitution that reflects Western norms, procedures and processes, but must instead emerge from the norms and practices of the society itself:

The lesson to be drawn is that the design and operational practices of public institutions must be at one with the social values of the society in which they are imbedded. If not, *each time the rules are tested, they are likely to give way*. The formal rules cannot alone protect an institution if its members do not behave in a manner consistent with the values that underlie the rules.⁴ [italics supplied]

He proposes a solution akin to the indigenization approach outlined in the previous chapter: “Africa will only emerge from its current difficulties if it can progressively

¹ Barbara Geddes, “Paradigms and Sand Castles in Comparative Politics of Developing Areas,” in *Comparative Politics, Policy, and International Relations*, vol. 2, *Political Science: Looking Toward the Future*, ed. William Crotty (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 46 and 50.

² Larry Diamond, “Introduction: Roots of Failure, Seeds of Hope,” in *Democracy in Developing Countries*, vol. 2, *Africa*, eds. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, and London: Adamantine Press Limited, 1988), 14.

³ Pierre Landell-Mills, “Governance, Cultural Change, and Empowerment,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30 (1992): 543.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 546.

remodel its institutions to be more in tune with the traditions, beliefs, and structures of its component societies.”⁵

Peter P. Ekeh (1976) outlines a distinct but related framework for explaining why adopted foreign models have met with such limited success in Africa. He argues that traditional kingships and chieftaincies were systems of government based in moral terms, while the new civil public political sphere created by the colonizers was amoral, and that the two were thus incompatible. He suggests that the primordial public is imbued with norms derived from tradition, culture and morality, while the civic public is the realm of amoral adopted foreign models of government, and is devoid of the power or oversight provided by moral societal norms.⁶ As long as it remains unbridged, the gap between these two realms stymies institutional effectiveness.

2.2 New Interpretations of Legitimacy – Supply Side Failures

In his analysis of regime legitimacy and its relationship to developmental capacity in Africa, Pierre Englebert (2000) expands Holsti’s model and digs deeper into the connections between lack of legitimacy and consequent state failure. He argues that regardless of whether the institutions of the state are democratic or autocratic, rulers and public institutions will not be able to function effectively (i.e., select and implement appropriate developmental policies) if the state lacks legitimacy. Founding his analysis around the presence or lack of vertical legitimacy as defined by Holsti, Englebert then goes even farther, defining legitimacy specifically in terms of the origins of the state; according to his definition, “a state is *legitimate* when its structures have evolved

⁵ *Ibid.*, 544-545.

⁶ Peter P. Ekeh, “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (1976): 104.

endogenously to its own society and there is some level of historical continuity to its institutions.”⁷ Englebert begins his argument by “highlighting the ‘imported’ origins of many African states,” which he describes as “instruments of colonization abandoned by their creators and often appropriated by new domestic political elites upon independence.” He then goes on to show

how this genesis has tended to create structures that conflict with preexisting political institutions, underlying norms of political behavior, and customary sources of political authority. These new African states are not the endogenous creations of local history. They are not embedded in domestic power relations. They lack legitimacy.⁸

Englebert focuses primarily on the behavior of elites and power relations, and he goes further than most other analysts in sketching out the specific reasons that ungrounded, illegitimate states fail to function effectively. He argues that

Rulers of these states therefore faced a peculiar challenge, arising from the fact that the creation of their states preceded the sedimentation of relations of power in their newly and artificially aggregated societies. Their states brought together groups that until then were following different historical trajectories and building alternative political institutions. . . . Having originated outside domestic social and political relations and having failed to be assimilated within existing political and social relations, these states faced contending sources of political allegiance and did not command the loyalty of their citizens. . . . The crux of the problem is that there were competing institutional claims to sovereignty within the state. . . . The impossibility of establishing even the myth of a social contract, the widespread existence of competing loyalties, and the consequent lack of hegemonic control of the state over society all conspired to undermine the power of the rulers and the effectiveness of their governments. Citizens and politicians alike conceived of the state not so much as a common instrument of collective action but, in the words of Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, as “they,” or in other words, as having “nothing to do with you or me.”⁹

⁷ Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

Englebert argues that this “lack of institutional hegemony”¹⁰ left rulers with one of two choices: “They either tried to legitimate the state by forcing a new national identity upon their societies, or used its resources to create and sustain networks of support for their regime.”¹¹ Englebert suggests that the former approach led to the multitude of “revolutionary,” often purportedly socialist or communist efforts at nation building that were aimed at “imposing the new state on the lives and minds of their citizens.” In most cases, the ideological content of these revolutions was much less important than their real purpose, which was national integration. “All these regimes had in common their desire to quash competing centers of institutional allegiance (ethnic identification and ethnic-based political parties were often banned, as were customary chieftaincies), to force their societies into a new mold . . .”¹²

However, Englebert also observes, just as Geddes and others did, that most of these revolutionary undertakings failed to meet their goals because “the resilience of alternative loyalties remained too high.”¹³ Thus, most regimes have eventually resorted to the second alternative, pursuing efforts to co-opt competing loci of power such as traditional leaders. Englebert argues that this is the true source of the neopatrimonial patterns of rule observed so widely in Africa whereby rulers seek to personalize their power through distribution of patronage and clientelist practices, while maintaining the veneer of rational, bureaucratic rule.¹⁴

These leaders attempted to substitute the instrumental legitimacy of neopatrimonial policies for their lack of moral claim to rule, and they resorted to clientelistic networks to prevent state fragmentation. . . . The

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹² *Ibid.*, 97.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴ See for example, Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 61-96.

point is for the contemporary leadership to establish alliances with other elites, be they regional, ethnic, customary, or otherwise, who control the loyalty of some segments of society. In doing so, these loyalties are co-opted for the national regime, which thereby stabilizes its rule and reaches some level of social foundations.¹⁵

Englebert notes that the problem is not therefore a failure of rationality on the part of Africa's rulers. In fact, neopatrimonial approaches are the "best" (i.e., most rational) selection for their rulers given the weak foundations of their political systems and the poor incentives that they consequently face.

Jeffrey Herbst (2000) also makes note of the enduring legitimacy of traditional leaders and chiefs, particularly in those countries where they still play a significant role in controlling or managing access to land. He argues that they continue to have a relationship, primarily with the rural public, that cannot be matched by modern state structures and their leaders. He suggests that:

The relationships between states and chiefs have been among the most complicated in African politics. . . . To the young men who led the new parties seeking independence, very few of whom were of high status at birth, the traditional authorities were seemingly the very antithesis of the modern revolution that they sought to lead.¹⁶

And he goes on to observe that this relationship remained ambivalent after independence.

And yet,

At the same time, African leaders knew that they simply could not crush traditional leaders. In fact, they coveted the legitimacy that traditional leaders had because, if harnessed by the central state, those sentiments could be an extraordinary means of getting around their own administrative weaknesses and the physical and emotional distance from their populations. . . . As a result, postindependence African states were often schizophrenic in their approach to chiefs.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 174.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

He notes the widely divergent – both in approach and outcome – efforts by various states to capture some of this legitimacy in the decades since independence, ranging from efforts to co-opt these leaders, to attempts to destroy their control over land tenure, and with it the foundations of their importance to their constituents. Herbst observes that this relationship is still evolving, and that the real potential remains uncertain, with some suggesting that the balance of power is shifting back towards traditional leaders as the state wanes, while others counter that “contact with the state inevitably contaminates those whose basis of power is outside the formal political apparatus.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, he concludes by suggesting that:

One of the more interesting developments in nascent African democratic theory is how national institutions can come to some kind of accommodation with chiefs. The agreement between the Ugandan government and the kabaka (where Mutebi II has explicitly agreed to stay out of national politics) is one such example. Others include the so-called “Houses of Chiefs” that some countries are exploring, which could be analogous to the House of Lords. . . . Whether these arrangements allow the central state apparatus to share in the legitimacy accorded traditional leaders remains to be seen.¹⁹

2.3 Demand Side Failures and the Need for Democratic Innovation

Much of Englebert’s analysis focuses on the failure of the “supply side” of political institutions and actions, i.e., on why political leaders seemingly make such poor decisions about what to “offer” to the public. He argues that the same dynamics and incentives tend to prevail regardless of whether states are cosmetically authoritarian or democratic. But it is the failure in the latter case that gives particular cause for concern, suggesting as it does that even under what are presumed to be the best of circumstances, African

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

publics are unwilling or unable to hold their rulers accountable, apparently quiescently accepting the anti-developmental behavior and decisions of their political leadership. The “demand” for democracy and for effective governance from the public is either weak, ineffective, or both.

Englebert does briefly acknowledge the impact of illegitimacy on “demand side” failures as well. He contends firstly that “The lack of legitimacy of the political system as a whole reduces the loyalty of citizens vis-à-vis state institutions perceived as alien and makes them more likely to choose ‘exit’ rather than ‘voice’ options when faced with policies or leadership they disapprove of.”²⁰ He also describes a public divided between “citizens” and “subjects,” citing the particular example of the Congo, but the relevance throughout Africa is clear:

The formation of a modern Congolese elite involved a certain level of dissociation with customary authority. The very few Congolese who had access to education became *évolués* – evolved individuals – a term that emphasized their dissociation from traditional structures and socialized them in looking down on their previous identity and that of their compatriots. As Mahmood Mamdani (1996) has brilliantly argued, the *évolués*, by their very dissociation, became the future citizens of a state defined by colonialism, whereas the rest of the indigenous population remained mere subjects, deprived of historical agency.²¹

In other words, the institutions of the modern state, whether autocratic or democratic in appearance, may be so foreign to the majority of the African public that many people either choose not to engage with those institutions, or they simply do not know how. This is true despite the fact that many (though not all) pre-colonial African political systems incorporated values and practices that fostered accountability and participation or

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 108, citing Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

other principles of democracy – i.e., democratic principles themselves are not foreign on much of the continent.

This suggests that the problem may not necessarily be the lack of adherence to democratic principles on the part of African publics, but the failure of many people, especially those of the rural majority, to identify with the particular constellation of institutions that seems today to be regarded as the sole legitimate manifestation of democracy: the Western liberal democratic model of multiparty electoral politics. Claude Ake (1991) has observed that there has all too often been “A confusion between the principles of democracy and their institutional manifestation.”²² Certainly the approach of the international community to democracy promotion over the last ten years bears this out. Most obvious has been the pressure on governments throughout Africa to hold elections, and the channeling of a relatively high share of development assistance resources targeted at democracy promotion towards the conduct and monitoring of these elections. These programs also tend to give a high degree of attention and resources to political party development, and to civic education programs intended to teach people the “rules of the game” so that they can “participate effectively.” But insufficient attention and resources have been devoted to understanding Africans’ expectations of their governments, or their perceptions of their roles, rights and responsibilities in the political realm.²³ The need to explore alternative approaches and institutional innovation is rarely

²² Claude Ake, “Rethinking African Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Winter 1991): 34.

²³ There is some hope that this trend is changing however. For example the work of the Afrobarometer Project, which has received funding from multiple donors, conducts public opinion research in a number of African countries on attitudes toward democratization and economic reform. See the Afrobarometer Working Paper series at www.afrobarometer.org.

discussed – most foreign assistance programs take the validity and universal applicability of the Western liberal democratic model for granted.²⁴

Yet empirical and analytical findings increasingly suggest that this model may not be as universal and easily replicable as is commonly assumed. In her study of South Asian politics, Ayesha Jalal (1995) distinguishes between so-called democratic political systems that merely grant a formal system of “voters’ rights,” and those in which a more deeply-rooted ethic of “citizens’ rights” has emerged. This distinction is of critical importance in the African context, as demonstrated by the failures of many of the experiments with electoral multiparty democratic systems undertaken to date. All too often we have seen new African governments ride to power on a wave of popular support expressed in multiparty elections, only to see democratic principles abandoned or overthrown shortly thereafter, frequently with little real public protest. The occasional opportunity to vote does not appear to have automatically instilled in a majority of the African electorate a sense of ownership, that is, of having either the right or the responsibility to expect – or in fact to demand – accountability from their governments. In fact, frequently just the opposite seems to be the case. Rather than creating “citizens” who become active participants in the affairs of the state, the adoption of this foreign democratic model may actually alienate many, leading them to chose passive disengagement – a form of “exit” – over active participation – or “voice.”

In their discussion of the concept of governance, Michael Bratton and Donald Rothchild (1992) recognize the importance of the norms and values of the majority of the public. Like North, they argue that to be effective, “governance involves the

²⁴ See for example Frederic C. Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998); and Marina Ottaway, “African Democratization: An Update,” *CSIS Africa Notes*, no. 171 (April 1995): 1-6.

reconciliation of institutions and state practices with domestic public values and aspirations,” adding that “to the extent that these become aligned, the possibilities for responsive government and creative statecraft are greatly enhanced.”²⁵ They go on to reject the specific identification of good governance with a move towards multiparty democracy, claiming that “if the legitimation of the state requires congruence with prevailing social values, then we must expect to find a range of political forms that can express legitimacy.”²⁶ Ake similarly points out that “the principles of democracy include widespread participation, consent of the governed, and public accountability of those in power. These principles may prevail in a wide variety of political arrangements and practices, which naturally vary according to historical conditions.”²⁷

In practice, however, the application of the concept of governance has rarely proved to be as creative and flexible as Ake and Bratton and Rothchild suggest that it needs to be. While many practitioners do acknowledge that elections alone are not enough to launch a country on the path to a consolidated democracy, in practice elections often appear to be treated as the only truly important element for creating a democratic system. In her review of US democratization programs in sub-Saharan Africa, Marina Ottaway (1995) notes that although some other institution-building programs exist, the bulk of US money and effort is devoted to elections, especially transitional elections from one-party systems.²⁸ Ottaway goes on to point out, however, that the commitment to this type of democracy among the general populace in Africa is far from clear, and that focus group discussions led by the National Democratic Institute even reveal much uncertainty among

²⁵ Michael Bratton and Donald Rothchild, “The Institutional Bases of Governance in Africa,” in *Governance and Politics in Africa*, eds. Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 274.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁷ Ake, *African Democracy*, 34.

²⁸ Ottaway, “African Democratization,” 1.

rural Africans about the meaning of the concept. Moreover, the reasons that Africans vote, and the reasons that they vote the way they do, are only very poorly understood in Africa. Tom Young observes, for example, that “our grasp of how electoral processes are perceived and understood in non-Western cultural settings . . . remains relatively slight,”²⁹ and Ottaway notes that turnouts were often high even in one-party elections in many states.³⁰

In his study of Senegalese conceptions of politics, a “game” played at least in part according to the rules of what is known locally as *demokaraasi*, as opposed to a Western conception of democracy, Frederic C. Schaffer (1998) highlights the importance of understanding local intentions, interpretations and explanations of politics and political behavior, i.e., “how local populations understand their own actions.”³¹ Focusing primarily on voting behavior – the aspect of liberal democracy imbued with the greatest purpose and significance by Westerners – Schaffer demonstrates that outside analysts are often mistaken to assume, for example, that there is a direct and inevitable connection between participation in elections and public accountability and transparency. He finds that in fact Senegalese are at least as likely to vote for reasons of preserving community solidarity or for personal gain as to influence public policy or ensure accountability, and that such behavior is *not* seen by most Senegalese voters as immoral, as it would be by many Westerners, but rather as a legitimate, entirely moral, and perhaps even essential means for ensuring community or individual survival. For example, he observes that:

Vulnerable populations that rely heavily on group cohesion for their survival may well perceive the risks of social discord occasioned by elections to be so great that the question of whether one candidate or

²⁹ Tom Young, “Elections and Electoral Politics in Africa,” *Africa* 62, no. 3 (1993): 307.

³⁰ Ottaway, “African Democratization,” 4.

³¹ Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation*, 7.

another would best serve the interests of the community is inconsequential by comparison. As a result, they vote along with the majority, or abstain from voting altogether, to keep their social safety net intact. . . . what may look like ineptitude (for example, not knowing the names of candidates, not being familiar with issues, voting the way others vote) may in fact be a skillful strategy for ensuring basic material needs . . .³²

Schaffer points out, in fact, that the very notion of public accountability must be questioned in Senegalese society, where many people have at best a weak sense of a “national good” that politicians should be expected to pursue, or of themselves as individuals with democratic rights in the national arena (that they are, for example, relinquishing if they sell their vote). There may, however, be a strong sense of *local good* that both politicians and voters are expected to promote and protect.³³

Finally, Schaffer points out the flaws of Western efforts to promote democratization:

This tenuous connection between voting and public accountability may bode ill for the anticipated payoffs of the many democracy-building projects sponsored by the United States and the World Bank. . . . Unfortunately for those who see elections as creators of transparency, there is little reason to believe that a purpose of ballot casting is always, or even usually, a desire to impose public accountability upon leaders.

The broader point is that similar institutional arrangements in different cultural contexts are not necessarily imbued with similar meaning. While Senegal shares with the United States the most significant institutional feature of democracy (regular elections), ideals of *demokaraasi* among Wolof speakers depart in significant ways from American ideals of democracy. . . . many Senegalese voters are playing a different game with different aims and rules.³⁴ [italics supplied]

In other words, intentions matter. And it will take more than simple “civic education” programs to change the situation, or, as many Westerners might see it, to “solve” this problem:

³² *Ibid.*, 98-99.

³³ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

The assumption was that uneducated voters would act as competent democrats if they could only be taught the purposes of democracy and the rules of the game.

This assumption is faulty. Learning the rules and purposes of democracy does not alleviate the existential dilemmas and material insecurities faced by most Senegalese, nor does it lessen the need to make use of electoral institutions – in ways Americans would not consider democratic, to be sure – to guarantee collective well-being. Such voters may be poor democrats, but they are adept players of the game of *demokaraasi*, and civic education alone will do little to persuade them to play a different, more risky game.³⁵

Schaffer thus sounds an interesting variation on North's theme: the introduction of electoral politics in Senegal – a formal institution – did not bring about the immediate restructuring of internal values and practices – informal institutions – to be consistent *with the original intentions* of that practice. However, both formal and informal institutions appear to have been adapted by Senegalese, bringing about a new equilibrium between the two, but at a place different from that Westerners tend to take for granted. Schaffer also notes that both formal and informal institutions may continue to evolve, possibly, though not necessarily, in the direction Western analysts might expect, i.e., to a place where voting and participation yield accountability, but this remains to be seen.³⁶

In his field surveys of local understanding of democracy and politics among rural Baganda, Mikael Karlström (1996) identifies similarly distinct interpretations of what makes for “good governance.” Karlström finds that concepts of democracy among the Baganda are in fact significantly different from the Western liberal conception, though he also observes that there is an ongoing process of “creolization” whereby elements of the liberal democratic model are selectively assimilated into Baganda political conceptions at the same time that they are modified by those conceptions.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

³⁶ See for example Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation*, 128 and 138.

In his survey, Karlström finds that institutions such as elections, political parties, and representative government, though by no means unimportant to Baganda, rarely played a significant role in their conceptions of democracy and good government. Instead, Baganda conceptions of a rightly ordered polity focus on the centrality of bottom-up structures of nested allegiances, and regulated rather than total competition. Justice, communication and civility are all key elements of the Baganda understanding of properly working politics. Karlström found a number of specific manifestations of the differences between Western and Baganda conceptions. For example,

The Ganda concern with freedom of speech thus differs from a general Western liberal conception in that it is rooted, not in a model of politics as competition for power among the plural representatives of various political views, but rather in a model of legitimate *unitary* authority as founded on the willingness of power-holders to hear voices of their subjects.³⁷

Similarly, the Baganda concept of civil liberty is rooted in an idea of freedoms which arise in a rightly ordered polity when proper standards of civility are observed by both rulers and ruled, rather than in the sense of individual rights and freedoms that dominates the Western conception.

Of particular interest in the case of Uganda is how Baganda have responded to the particular set of institutions and practices incorporated in the “modified” democratic system instituted by President Yoweri Museveni when his National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power in 1986. This system includes a pyramidal system of Resistance Councils (RCs) and a no-party “movement” system of government. Karlström found, among other things, that Baganda appreciated the movement system of interest representation as opposed to a multiparty system as it resonated with their

³⁷ Mikael Karlström, “Imagining Democracy: Political Culture and Democratisation in Buganda,” *Africa* 66, no. 4 (1996): 488.

preference for regulated rather than total competition. In addition, because freedom of speech and open communication are more highly valued among Baganda than freedom of association, the NRM's adherence to the first principle but not to the second has been acceptable to many Baganda. Karlström notes that the NRM's system of government is "a democratization programme running with the grain of local political culture rather than against it."³⁸

Also significant is the Bugandan attitude towards elections. Karlström observes that the importance of the election of officials in the Resistance Councils system appears to be somewhat ambiguous:

While the legitimacy of the RC system has not been *conceived of* as founded primarily on their democratic election, such election has nevertheless for the first time been *experienced* as a viable means of achieving the predominant political ideals of justice, communication, and civility. This experience has generated widespread support for democratic elections without, thus far, elevating democratic representation to the status of a core political value in its own right.³⁹

Once again, we see processes of gradual change working from both directions – altering both informal and formal institutions – to reconcile the two in a manner that may ultimately be quite specific to Ugandan society.

Like Schaffer's work, this analysis suggests interesting lessons for Western analysts and diplomats who have voiced concern over Uganda's failure to introduce multipartyism, and focused their democratization efforts on electoral, competitive politics. Whether or not these concerns are well placed is a point that can be fairly argued, but to date the debate has largely failed to take account to any significant extent of these fundamental differences in the values and views of at least some Ugandans.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 499.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 498.

Strengthening our understanding of local conceptions of democracy and good governance, and using this as a base to expand our perceptions of democratic possibilities and options, may, in the end, prove much more fruitful than such strict adherence to the Western liberal democratic formula.

2.4 Overcoming Disconnect – The Construction of Hybrid Institutions

As suggested in the previous chapter, all of this does not mean that efforts to create more responsive, accountable and democratic political systems on the continent should be abandoned. Rather, it is the narrow focus on the Western liberal democratic model of multiparty electoral systems that needs to be reexamined. While elections and the other central institutions of this model might well play an important role in African politics and democratization, they clearly are not sufficient in and of themselves, and it is necessary to look beyond this model for ways to increase the articulation between state and society, particularly the rural, non-Westernized majority of that society for whom traditional structures and symbols may still hold the most value.

Adopting such an approach – which I have defined as “indigenization” – is either an explicit or implicit part of the argument in most of the analyses discussed above. Ekeh, for example suggests that although it will be difficult, integrating the moral world of the primordial public and the amoral sphere of the civic public is essential.⁴⁰ Ake (1996) too, observing that numerous pre-colonial African political institutions and practices “were infused with democratic values,”⁴¹ argues that there is a need to reassess our definitions of democracy, and move away from the liberal democratic model which is

⁴⁰ Ekeh, “Colonialism and the Two Publics,” 103.

⁴¹ Ake, “Rethinking African Democracy,” 34.

a very specific, and in his view poor form of democracy that replaces popular sovereignty with the rule of law. He suggests instead that a democratic system that is more suitable in the African cultural, economic and political context might include relocation of real decision-making power to legislatures and to local level political structures, a shift in focus from abstract political rights to social needs and rights, and an equal emphasis on collective and individual rights, including corporatist representation for mass organizations (women, labor, youth) as well as for different nationalities and ethnic groups. He proposes, for example, the creation of second legislative “chambers of nationalities” and other consociational forms to accommodate ethnic, clan or tribal identity, and argues that political structures must draw on African tradition to appropriately adapt democracy to the cultural and historical experience of the people.⁴²

Such a “hybridizing” approach is also implicit in North’s argument about the limitations that path dependence places on the evolution of political institutions. However, several analysts, including Pearl Robinson (1994) and Walter C. Neale (1993), challenge North’s conservatism, arguing that he focuses too much on the limiting nature of informal constraints (culture, value, beliefs) on political institutions.⁴³ While acknowledging that this is one effect of institutions, Neale points out that “they equally make possible an enormous range of activities that would be impossible – inconceivable – in their absence: that is, they are always and everywhere liberating as well as limiting.”⁴⁴ Similarly, describing an “era of experimental government”⁴⁵ and the mixed

⁴² Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996), 130-134.

⁴³ Pearl T. Robinson, “Democratization: Understanding the Relationship Between Regime Change and the Culture of Politics,” *African Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (1994): 51-52; and Walter C. Neale, review of *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, by Douglass C. North, *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 41 (January 1993): 424.

⁴⁴ Neale, review of *Institutions*, 424.

governments “emerging in Africa as a result of the coexistence of sovereign and traditional authorities,”⁴⁶ Richard Sklar (1999) argues that:

With relatively few exceptions, the citizens of contemporary African states have dual political identities. They recognize two, coexisting sources of legitimate political authority: the legally sovereign states and traditional orders of both colonial and precolonial origin. These colonial and territorial legacies have been reckoned widely as burdens of African history. . . . The evidence adduced in this analysis indicates a growing propensity in African statecraft to use the troubling legacies of multiple sovereignty and dual political identity for constructive purposes.⁴⁷

Dennis Galvan has proposed perhaps the most elaborate framework for defining, understanding and evaluating what he calls “institutional syncretism,” which he defines (in a manner similar to “indigenization”) as “the blending of rules, habits or norms of distinct socio-cultural origin to create innovative new institutional arrangements.” Galvan argues that “syncretism can produce innovative, adapted institutions which meet the demands of rapid change while *seeming* ‘culturally authentic,’ and worthy of personal sacrifice to ordinary actors.” He claims that “The syncretic transformation of what are largely Western democratic institutional forms in non-Western social and cultural contexts can offer non-elites a greater sense of ownership over electoral institutions, a greater willingness to participate, a greater acceptance of loss and sacrifice in the democratic process.”⁴⁸

Like North, Galvan suggests that there needs to be correspondence between formal and informal rules and institutions, but he too notes that this connection has largely been broken in Africa:

⁴⁵ Richard Sklar, “African Politics: The Next Generation,” in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Richard Joseph (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 173.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁸ Dennis Galvan, “Institutional Syncretism and Culturally Generic Democracy in Rural Senegal,” paper prepared for the 1999 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Philadelphia, November 11-14, 1999, 1.

Indeed, the great flaw with modernization schemes . . . involves an assumption . . . that deliberate, planned reformulation of formal organizations and rules to achieve “progressive” or “desirable” goals (from the point of view of the planner) can and will entail a natural and corresponding adjustment of the informal . . . elements of institutional practice. . . . [For example] the sometimes mechanical transfer of democratic electoral regimes to the Benins of the 1960s or Belaruses of the 1990s has not, in spite of extensive elite socialization and reworked incentive structures, resulted in necessary and ubiquitous supportive change in values, habits, and informal rules.⁴⁹

Galvan continues, however, by noting that there are different types and agents of syncretism, which affect the actual impact of such institutional innovation. In other words, all forms of institutional syncretism are not created equal. Syncretic processes may be driven by either elites or non-elites, and they may be either “structurally static” or “structurally innovative.” Structurally static institutional syncretism tends to involve mechanical efforts to “stick together” elements of modern superstructure with pre-modern infrastructure. While this approach can be developmentally beneficial when it is used for regime legitimation, is a technique frequently used by elites, such as Zaire’s Mobutu, to legitimize their hegemonic control through “cultural” justifications for authoritarian pseudo-democracies.⁵⁰ Structurally innovative syncretism, on the other hand,

involves an ongoing, incremental reworking of *all* elements of institutional structure . . . drawing on the full range of “modern” and “pre-modern” institutional elements as raw material for the creation of institutional structures which are new and blended at *all* levels of superstructure and infrastructure.⁵¹

Galvan cites examples from his fieldwork in Senegal of how rural peasants in the Sere region were able to transform an attempt at elite-driven, structurally static

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7 and 31.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

syncretism into a more effective, innovative form. Democratically elected rural councils were introduced by the Senegal government in 1972 in an effort to manage land tenure relations that had become confused and chaotic after a 1964 land reform law. Galvan observes that democratic decentralization does hold an “inherent syncretic promise,” i.e., if done properly, it can be a means to achieving effective, dynamic syncretic institutions and cultural federalism. However, this outcome is not guaranteed, and in fact in Senegal, there was a fatal flaw in the original, elite-driven approach. The true aim of the creation of Rural Councils was to create local bodies to *enforce* the central government’s land law, not to *interpret* that law and implement it in a culturally coherent fashion. This is apparent in the fact that when decisions by locally elected rural councilors were not acceptable to their bureaucratic superiors, their judgments were simply overturned. As a result, before long local peasants came to “understand the Rural Councils instead in a different historical light, as the latest manifestation of alien, arbitrary government.”⁵²

However, in the years since, Galvan finds that despite these constraints, the Serer peasants and their elected councilors have gradually succeeded in introducing structurally innovative institutional syncretism by quietly adapting the way the Rural Council implements the land law, for example by deferring more frequently to elders and notables. At the same time, peasants have begun to adopt some of the language of “inherent rights” to land and livelihood out of the Western liberal framework. This is, then, yet another example of a *two-way* process of institutional reform that is underway.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 11.

2.5 Indigenization in Practice

In addition to these studies by Schaffer, Karlström and Galvan, there are numerous other pieces of empirical evidence supporting the contention that indigenous political actors and practices do matter, and must be taken into account if Africans are to own their political systems and make them more effective. A few are discussed briefly below.

2.5.1 *The Botswana Success Story*

A number of analysts have pointed to the relatively unique political approach of the Botswana leadership, which has taken deliberate steps to link the functioning of the modern political system with traditional political practice, as a key factor in the country's economic and developmental success. Most important may be the continued reliance on the *kgotla*, or communal assembly, as part of the communication and decision-making process, as well as the preservation of the customary court system, and a continued role for the chieftaincy. Englebert cites Botswana as perhaps the best example of a contemporary state that, "although created by colonization, nevertheless [did] little institutional violence to preexisting state structures or relations of political authority," and he argues that this is a primary factor contributing to Botswana's position as one of Africa's – and the world's – most successful polities and economies.⁵³ Englebert concludes that "the quality of leadership and the construction of state capacity in Botswana are directly related to the embeddedness of its postcolonial state into precolonial patterns of political authority."⁵⁴

⁵³ Englebert, *State Legitimacy*, 82.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

Elliot P. Skinner (1993) agrees. He points out that “with Botswana and Swaziland among the major exceptions, the emerging African states opted for the political cultures of their metropolises, rather than develop ‘cultures of politics’ based on local realities.”⁵⁵ He then goes on to argue that “Botswana and Swaziland largely escaped political upheaval because their political leaders used traditional cultural elements to fashion political institutions.”⁵⁶ While there are certainly other factors that have contributed to the country’s relative success and stability, incorporating indigenous institutions rather than abandoning them may well have been one of the most important decisions made in Botswana.

John D. Holm (1988) has described how government officials in Botswana interact closely with the *kgotlas* and seek their consensus before trying to implement new policies.⁵⁷ However, both he and Gloria Somolekae (1989) point out that while the values of the traditional system at times directly support those of modern democracy, at other times the two may be opposed. Even so, as Somolekae points out, “it appears that the liberal democratic system . . . is being built on and continues to find its support and continuity in the foundations of the traditional political system.”⁵⁸ This may be due in part to the fact that Botswana has left political space for both models to act and interact, creating a system of shared legitimacy in which the value accorded to the indigenous

⁵⁵ Elliot P. Skinner, “The Issue of Disemia as African States Move Toward Democracy: The Case of Burkina Faso,” paper presented at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 1993: 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁷ John D. Holm, “Botswana: A Paternalistic Democracy,” in *Democracy in Developing Countries*, vol. 2, *Africa*, eds. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, and London: Adamantine Press Limited, 1988): 195-196.

⁵⁸ Gloria Somolekae, “Do Botswana Think and Act as Democrats?” in *Democracy in Botswana: The Proceedings of a Symposium held in Gabarone, 1-5 August 1988*, eds. John Holm and Patrick Molutsi (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989), 75.

system enhanced that of the modern political structures as well, rather than producing alienation.

2.5.2 Political Attitudes in Zambia

As Richard Sklar nicely put it, denying recognition to traditional authority will not make it disappear: “traditional authorities do not exist as a consequence of their recognition and appointment by the governments of sovereign states. On the contrary, they are recognized and appointed to traditional offices, in accordance to customary laws, because those offices are legitimated by the beliefs of the people, who expect them to exist in practice.”⁵⁹

The findings of Michael Bratton and Beatrice Liatto-Katundu (1994) in Zambia support Sklar’s contention. In their study of political attitudes among a broad cross-section of Zambian citizens, they found that Zambians “find local politics at the community level to be more relevant than elite politics in national arenas.” In particular, they found that 70 percent of the populace identified traditional leaders such as chiefs and headmen as “very important” political actors in their lives, while 45 percent rated local government councilors this way, and Members of Parliament were rated as “very important” by 46 percent.⁶⁰ At the same time, Bratton and Liatto-Katundu found that the respondents were evenly split (49 percent “yes,” 49 percent “no”) on the question: “should chiefs and headmen play a part in governing Zambia today?”⁶¹ This, along with some of their other results, seems to suggest that as Ekeh proposes, many Africans today are neither fully traditional nor fully modernized; instead, using Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s (1963) typology, Bratton and Liatto-Katundu suggest that “Zambia seems

⁵⁹ Englebort, *State Legitimacy*, 189, citing Sklar, “The Next Generation,” 169.

⁶⁰ Michael Bratton and Beatrice Liatto-Katundu, “Political Culture in Zambia: A Pilot Survey,” Michigan State University (MSU) Working Papers on Political Reform in Africa, No. 7, 1994, 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

to display a thoroughly hybrid political culture which mixes ‘subject,’ ‘parochial,’ and ‘participant’ orientations.”⁶²

2.5.3 Land Tenure Reform

Additional evidence of the importance of indigenization and of the particular theory of institutional change suggested by North can be found in the debate on land tenure reform in Africa, especially in work done in East Africa by Jean Ensminger (1997) and Thomas C. Pinckney and Peter K. Kimuyu (1994). Development of freehold land tenure in Africa has long been promoted as an essential component of programs to improve agricultural productivity. This system of individualized property rights in land is supposed to have three main advantages over the customary, supposedly communal property rights systems of most of Africa: increased investment in land due to increased security of tenure, increased access to credit through the use of land as collateral, and increased concentration of land ownership in the hands of the most efficient farmers.

A number of African states have followed this prescription and instituted land tenure reform, and Kenya has lead the way with the most extensive program on the continent; in some regions of the country the land has been fully registered since the 1950s, and by 1993 as much as 90 percent of all land in farming districts may have been officially privatized.⁶³ However, in comparing communities under reformed (freehold) tenure in Kenya and under non-reformed (customary) tenure in Tanzania, Pinckney and Kimuyu found few actual differences with respect to investment, credit access and use, or

⁶² *Ibid.*, 17. See also Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); and Sidney Verba, Norma H. Nie, and Jae-On Kim, *The Modes of Democratic Participation: A Cross-National Comparison* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1971).

⁶³ Jean Ensminger, “Changing Property Rights: Reconciling Formal and Informal Rights to Land in Africa,” in *Frontiers of the New Institutional Economics*, eds. John Nye and John Drobback, (New York: Academic Press, 1997), 176.

the distribution of holdings, and both they and Ensminger cite numerous recent studies that have produced similar results in Kenya and elsewhere.⁶⁴ Even more interesting is the reported tendency in many of the areas where tenure has been reformed to revert back to reliance on indigenous land tenure arrangements, even when they are no longer legally in effect. For example, Ensminger reports the frequent failure in Kenya to renew or transfer registrations upon death of the owner or sale of land, and the unregistered division of land among numerous sons. She also notes survey findings indicating that the vast majority of farmers in some areas report that they cannot sell their land despite being the registered owners, suggesting that customary norms continue to limit this practice.⁶⁵

The underlying causes of these findings may provide some of the best available evidence in support of North's concept of the importance of complementarity between formal and informal institutions. Ensminger points out that there are some economic reasons for the failure of land tenure changes in Kenya, including the relatively high transactions costs of the registration process, and failures in the complementary factor markets, particularly that for credit. However, she goes on to argue that the most important source of failure has been the incompatibility of the changes in the formal rules with the informal norms and constraints of Kenyan society. She cites the primary conflicts as the following:

consolidation was inconsistent with the ecological need for scattered strips and broke up cooperative work units, the restrictions on the minimal allowable "economic unit" and the limit on heirs was inconsistent with indigenous norms of inheritance, household composition was highly fluid over time, asymmetries in information were great and meant that the educated were able to manipulate the system and gain what was perceived by others as illegitimate advantage, and finally the new property rights

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, and Thomas C. Pinckney and Peter K. Kimuyu, "Land Tenure Reform in East Africa: Good, Bad or Unimportant?" *Journal of African Economies* 3 (April 1994): 1-28.

⁶⁵ Ensminger, "Changing Property Rights," 180.

reduced the rights of many over the customary system, while enhancing those of the single titled “household head.”⁶⁶

The prospects of disinheriting all but the first-born son, reducing the rights of female household members over the land, or losing an entire family’s access to land and livelihood through the actions of a single member of the household apparently proved unacceptable to many Kenyans, and the customary tenure system has once again become the *de facto* law in the country.

It is important to note, however, that both of these studies found that while elements of customary tenure systems persisted, these systems were by no means static. There is substantial evidence, for example, that even in the pre-colonial era land rights were shifting toward greater privatization in some areas of higher population pressure and increasingly commercialized agriculture.⁶⁷ Ensminger argues that “the evidence provides strong support for the proposition that social norms and institutions respond in ways economists would predict to exogenous changes in relative prices.”⁶⁸ Herbst concurs, pointing out that “‘Traditional’ practices in many places and at many times were quite dynamic and did provide security in the context of local environments.”⁶⁹ He goes on to conclude that:

There is, in fact, a consensus in the literature that states only will succeed in land tenure reform if they move slowly while recognizing traditional practices. Thus, Bruce, Migot-Adholla, and Atherton note that radical plans that attempt to completely overturn traditional arrangements or that ignore local practices often are worse than doing nothing: “Unsuccessful attempts to substitute state titles for customary entitlements may reduce security by creating normative confusion, of which the powerful may take

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁹ Herbst, *States and Power*, 180.

advantage.” They are therefore more optimistic about incremental plans that seek to work with traditional practices.⁷⁰

Thus, these studies of customary and reformed land tenure provide solid evidence both of the continuing importance of indigenous institutions, and of the capacity of these institutions to adapt to meet the needs and demands of modernizing societies and economies.

2.6 The Many Shapes of Indigenization Reforms

What might indigenization reforms look like in practice? The actual changes in the structures, practices, or symbols utilized by a political system that might be brought about in the process of indigenization can take many forms, and the changes may be either formal or, as in the case of the Rural Councils’ gradually evolving interpretation of land tenure laws noted by Galvan in Senegal, informally. While assigning a formal political role to chiefs, headmen or elders may be the simplest and most common approach to indigenization, James S. Wunsch (1990) points out that:

it must be understood that “traditional authority” meant more than “chiefs” and “councils of elders.” The latter are often seen as the sum and substance of these institutions, ignoring the complex bodies of common law, jurisprudence, and checks and balances, which surrounded and guided their actions. . . . traditional institutions must be understood as the diverse mechanisms by which Africans regulated social and economic affairs, and exercised and controlled political power.⁷¹

Thus, utilizing the full creative power of all that is indigenous requires looking well beyond these basic leadership institutions.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 184, citing John W. Bruce, Shem E. Migot-Adholla, and Joan Atherton, “The Findings and Their Policy Implications: Institutional Adaptation or Replacement?” in *Searching for Land Tenure Security in Africa*, ed. John W. Bruce and Shem E. Migot-Adholla (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1994), 260-261.

⁷¹ James W. Wunsch, “Centralization and Development in Post-Independence Africa,” in *The Failure of the Centralized State: Institutions and Self-Governance in Africa*, eds. James S. Wunsch and Dele Olowu (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), 62-63.

Again, as mentioned above, it is important to note that the traditional institutions that Wunsch refers to have by no means been static; they have both adapted in positive ways to changing circumstances, as we saw in the case of land tenure systems, and they have at times been abruptly and arbitrarily changed by both colonial and post-independence authorities. Therefore what should be considered in the processes of indigenization is not what is in some sense “purely” traditional (which would in any case be difficult to define), but what *currently* exists as local, indigenous practice, values, and symbols. The indigenous, rather than being purely traditional, is likely instead to be a complicated mixture of traditional, colonial, “modern” or “global” and other influences, and it will also reflect the political learning of indigenous communities that has occurred throughout the colonial and post-independence eras. Identifying the norms and understandings of people and/or the political forms that they favor and incorporating these into existing political systems in meaningful ways may therefore be a far more complicated task than identifying a few traditional authorities or institutions and reinvigorating them. Ensminger has aptly observed the “African social norms and informal institutions are currently a rapidly moving target.”⁷² Further, as Galvan has noted, there may be competition over efforts to define what is indigenous, or over what parts of indigenous consciousness matter or how they may be used. I will return to all of these issues in the discussion on indigenization in Somaliland. Before continuing with the specific case study, however, I will briefly review some of the varied forms that indigenization can, or has, taken.

As mentioned, the most common approach in practice is restoration of a role for “traditional” authorities. During their political and economic resurgence in the 1990s, for

⁷² Ensminger, “Changing Property Rights,” 175.

example, both Uganda and Ghana have to some degree restored the role of previously abolished traditional chiefs through constitutional revisions. Although their roles are still more cultural and ceremonial than political, Englebert argues that these states' recognition of traditional sources of authority may have enhanced state legitimacy, and therefore improved their capacity and ability to perform economically.⁷³ Maxwell Owusu (1992) has argued that "in many areas of Africa, the authority of the village, town, or ethnic group – frequently symbolized by institutions of chieftaincy – may well be far more significant and influential than the 'far away' national or regional government with little or no roots in the community."⁷⁴ Devolution of some power to chiefs, headmen or elders can take several forms, including: formalizing consultations with traditional leaders by creating a codified advisory role for them; apportioning these leaders a role, either formally or informally, in adjudicating local disputes (e.g., over land or family matters); appointing chiefs or elders to local councils, assemblies, or government posts; creating "houses of elders" as part of national or regional legislatures; or returning most local government and administrative functions directly to traditional authorities at the local and perhaps regional level.

Enhancing the role of other indigenous (including but not limited to "traditional") institutions such as customary or Islamic courts, land councils, or community fora (such as the *kgotla* in Botswana) can also be important, particularly because these institutions often provided for wider consultation and participation than working with chiefs alone, and they may also serve as part of the system of checks and balances on the power of local leaders. These indigenous institutions may replace parts of the government's

⁷³ Englebert, *State Legitimacy*, 189.

⁷⁴ Maxwell Owusu, "Democracy and Africa – A View from the Village," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30 (September 1992): 377.

bureaucratic structure, or they may operate in parallel, for example when customary courts are allocated responsibility over family law issues or certain civil or criminal cases, while state civil courts maintain their jurisdiction over other matters, as has been the case in Botswana. These indigenous institutions may have long-standing traditional roots, or they may be more recent creations of local communities that have been developed to deal with modern needs and problems, such as the “hometown” associations described by Joel Barkan, *et al.* (1991).⁷⁵ It can be particularly useful to investigate how such indigenous organizations structure themselves, transfer leadership, and maintain accountability, which can provide lessons that might be applicable in other parts of the government structure.

Galvan refers to the “inherent syncretic promise of democratic decentralization.”⁷⁶ In this, he is referring to the fact that truly devolving power to local institutions allows a great deal of opportunity for integrating local priorities, understandings and needs into the implementation of laws and policies, as was eventually the case in the rural Senegalese communities that he studied. However, as Galvan also noted, the all-too-common forms of decentralization that merely decentralize responsibility for implementing central government policies according to non-local interpretations may be of much less value in producing effective indigenization. Indigenization via decentralization may be manifested formally – i.e., in locally-made changes in rules, practices, participation, etc. – or it may occur informally, as was the case in Senegal, where the simple fact that local Rural Councils eventually were given real control over

⁷⁵ Joel D. Barkan, Michael L. McNulty, and M.A.O. Ayeni, “Hometown Voluntary Associations, Local Development, and the Emergence of Civil Society in Western Nigeria,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29 (1991): 457-480.

⁷⁶ Galvan, “Institutional Syncretism,” 10.

policy implementation allowed them to informally pursue practices such as consulting or deferring to the decisions of local leaders on certain issues, or restoring traditional principles of land allocation in appropriate situations. A potentially related approach could involve modifying decision-making processes, whether at local, regional or national levels of government. For example, many pre-colonial African political systems relied to at least some extent on consensus-based decision making, and this approach is still widely practiced on the few issues over which communities still exert local control. Extending such decision-making practices to a broader sphere of issues may enhance perceptions of fair play and legitimacy.

These examples of approaches to indigenization may, however, only scratch the surface of the possibilities. Other avenues that should be explored include using the traditional social contracts that existed in some societies as models for laying the foundations of modern states and building constitutions, and investigating traditional methods of conflict resolution for practices or symbols that can be useful. Omari H. Kokole and Ali A. Mazrui (1988) describe the unusual system of selecting members of parliament that was developed by Milton Obote in Uganda based on the practice of polygamy. “Electoral polygamy” was a system whereby a candidate would register his or her candidacy in one constituency, but would also have to win support in three other constituencies in different regions of the country. This polygamous political marriage would serve to tie several regions together through the bonds of loyalty and obligation to the candidate in the same way that polygamy in human marriage could serve to bind several families or clans in mutually supportive relationships. Kokole and Mazrui point out that “life in Africa often makes matters of marriage and kinship touch issues of

politics and social organization,”⁷⁷ with the implication that there might be numerous useful forms for political systems that can be found in traditional social systems as well.

2.7 Critiques of Indigenization

The above discussion makes clear some of the potential benefits of indigenization approaches. It has also pointed to several of the concerns relating to this approach.

Which critiques are relevant in any given situation will depend a great deal on the form the adaptations actually take, and especially on the agents of change and their goals.

The problem of identifying who or what is “traditional” or “indigenous” has already been raised. In practice, many approaches to indigenization involve incorporation of traditional authorities or institutions into the political system, so Merle L. Bowen’s (1994) point that identifying “what is traditional” is a difficult if not impossible task bears careful consideration.⁷⁸ Colonial rule and the effects of modernization and interaction with the international community have often had profound impacts on pre-colonial structures and institutions. Colonial administrations, for example, sometimes greatly increased the power and autocratic control of chiefs or elders, essentially building up this traditional institution at the expense of others which had previously provided the checks and balances on it. On the other hand, in some instances the effect of colonization was to severely weaken chiefs, either through removing their powers, or by destroying their legitimacy when they were viewed as co-opted puppets of the colonial regime.

⁷⁷ Omari H. Kokole and Ali A. Mazrui, “Uganda: The Dual Polity and the Plural Society,” in *Democracy in Developing Countries*, vol. 2, *Africa*, eds. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), 290.

⁷⁸ Merle L. Bowen, Political Science Department, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, interview by author (telephone), April 17, 1994.

Moreover, as mentioned, indigenous institutions are not static, further complicating the task of pinpointing what they are at any given time.

Galvan also notes that it is essentially inevitable that the non-elite, innovative institutional syncretism that he proposes will, in the end, wind up

privileging *one* local interpretation of culture, idealized historical memory and valued local institutional arrangements over many others which may be in circulation even in a small rural community. That single interpretation of culture, memory and legitimate local institutional legacies will probably be held by some dominant socio-economic group in a community (older men, the literate, those with cash incomes, etc.) and will contradict other, subaltern interpretations of culture, traditional and institutional legacies. Non-elite syncretism, by privileging one reading of “the local” and “the traditional” in the process of making institutional blends, almost of necessity excludes other versions of what is local and traditional. Thus the process itself, it is important to note, is in some ways potentially illiberal and exclusionary with regard to local cultural diversity.⁷⁹

Thus, it is not merely indigenization itself, but the *processes* by which it is brought about, that matter. Issues such as who instigates such changes and why, who participates in institution-building processes, and who is responsible for implementation can play a major role in determining the quality of the indigenization process and the institutions that result.

Indigenization in multiethnic societies also presents particular challenges. When it involves primarily decentralization and privileging of indigenous practice at the local level, it may be an effective means for accommodating differences and recognizing diversity in a positive way. However, in such a context it may still be extremely difficult to build the legitimacy of the state at the national level unless indigenous practices can be effectively blended there as well. But the borders of many countries encompass ethnic groups with radically different historical traditions. For example, in his work among the

⁷⁹ Galvan, “Institutional Syncretism,” 33.

Baganda, Karlstrom noted that the system of rural councils, which was implemented nationwide, was highly consistent with Baganda traditional practice of politics. But it is entirely possible that the same response and consequent respect for this system would not have been found among northern Ugandan communities, many of which had much less hierarchical, and in some cases acephalous, political traditions. Such problems did in fact occur in Niger, when the military regime created a national youth movement called the “Samariya,” modeled on the Hausa age-grade system. The regime was able to mobilize Hausa and Djerma youth from sedentary farming communities, but they never managed to recruit many youth among the Fulani and Touareg nomadic or semi-nomadic herding communities. Local political leaders of the latter two groups complained that the *Samariya* was alien to their culture, so they were unable to attract their young ethnic kin to participate.⁸⁰

Another particularly important concern is the potentially socially regressive nature of traditional norms and structures. As Bowen points out, many traditional structures were male-dominated gerontocracies, involving varying degrees of social stratification and hierarchy, and control by chiefs over the land, lives and labor of the poor. Returning to these norms and institutions might therefore be seen as socially regressive, potentially reversing progressive achievements with respect to women’s rights and influence, the distribution of wealth, and the access of various groups to the means of production, especially land.⁸¹ For example, in northern Nigeria, as long as traditional authorities maintained their power after independence, women were not granted the same rights of

⁸⁰ Pearl T. Robinson, personal communication, 2001.

⁸¹ Merle Bowen, “Peace, Politics, and Peasants: The Rural Challenge in Mozambique,” paper presented at the Workshop on Political Transitions in Africa, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, March 11-12, 1994, 7.

participation, particularly the right to vote, as they had in other parts of Nigeria. It was not until a “modernizing” military central government gained control that these rights for women were extended to the northern region as well.

However, traditional authorities and institutions are not always regressive; the land tenure studies in Kenya actually suggest that women had more rights and control over land under customary tenure systems than under the freehold system that replaced it. Alternatively, in Botswana traditional institutions were maintained while their socially regressive aspects were reformed, so there is nothing inevitable about the potentially regressive nature of tradition. The *kgotla* system was historically a forum only for older men to discuss community affairs, but chiefs and the central government have successfully promoted opening this forum to participation by women and youth⁸² – an excellent example of Galvan’s *two-way* adaptation that characterizes truly innovative institutional syncretism.

But Galvan also notes that there is no guarantee that syncretism will lead to an embrace of the liberal values that many Westerners hold so dear, such as the sacredness of individual rights and autonomy. He observes that “Syncretism is deliciously and frustratingly unpredictable: it may result in institutional arrangements that make use of these ontological and sociological building blocks of liberal democracy, or it may not.” Based on his findings in Senegal, he suggests that “syncretism invests democratic institutions with a sensitivity toward social hierarchy and deference, with an emphasis on group interests at the expense of individual well being.”⁸³

⁸² Chief Linchwe II, “The Role a Chief Can Play in Botswana’s Democracy,” in *Democracy in Botswana: The Proceedings of a Symposium held in Gabarone, 1-5 August 1988*, eds. John Holm and Patrick Molutsi (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989), 100.

⁸³ Galvan, “Institutional Syncretism,” 33.

Another concern centers upon the potential lack of efficacy of traditional authorities and institutions, stemming from several factors. The first is a loss of authority. In addition to the influence and legitimacy many such leaders lost under colonial authorities, the role of tradition has been challenged by both economic and educational changes. Bowen points out, for example, the impact of incomes from migrant labor on the distribution of power and influence within rural communities in southern Mozambique, which has decreased the role of chiefs.⁸⁴ And Somolekae has gathered evidence that education has decreased the influence of chiefs in Botswana,⁸⁵ as have urbanization and other forms of “modernization.” Generational change may play a profound role as well, as a new cadre of “traditional” authority figures are selected, many of whom, Herbst notes, have themselves pursued modern businesses and advanced degrees.⁸⁶ Others contend that the scale and complexity of government policy in the modern, global community may be beyond the skills of traditional authorities or the capacities of traditional political systems, for example those dependent on consensus-based decision-making practices, which it is simply not feasible to apply on a large scale. In addition, skills, resources, and infrastructure are, as always, limited, particularly in rural areas, which may inhibit efforts to indigenize through decentralization. Devolving power to traditional authorities and institutions will be meaningless if they do not also have access to and control over the resources necessary to fulfill their new mandates.

A related issue is the frequent opposition to indigenization on the part of modernized elites. They often argue that including traditional authorities, for example, is backward, and thus useless, or even embarrassing, citing some of the constraints on these

⁸⁴ Bowen, telephone conversation.

⁸⁵ Somolekae, “Do Batswana,” 80-81.

⁸⁶ Herbst, *States and Power*, 179.

leaders described above, especially lack of skills and “worldliness.” They also recognize, of course, that as the members of society who tend to be most familiar with the Western political models that have dominated their countries, they stand to lose the privileged position and access they gain through this special understanding. In fact, since indigenization is typically part of an effort to increase the integration of the non-modernized rural majority into the political system, it may directly contribute to rural-urban or elite-non-elite tensions and competition for access, power and resources. Ekeh notes, however, that these conflicts are not simply between things African and things Western, but have become differences within African norms themselves, and even within the norms of a single individual. Both the primordial and the civic publics may express themselves in a single individual, especially among educated Africans,⁸⁷ resulting in often complex and even contradictory attitudes towards traditional systems and authorities, as we shall see among Somalis in the discussions to follow.

Finally, as discussed above, it is possible that certain approaches to indigenization, particularly those driven by elites, may only be – or become – new means by which elites manipulate others for their own gain, as a means to co-opt influential community leaders through salaries or window-dressed decision-making roles for rural leaders for example. Numerous African leaders have cited the common African tradition of consensus-based decision making as justification for creating (often autocratic) one-party states. Schaffer also cites the ambiguous example of the ruling party’s successful 1977 effort in Senegal to abolish secret voting in favor of public voting. The party argued that “since traditional political practices involved public exhibition, expressing one’s political opinion in full view of others had long been an integral part of Senegalese culture and should be legally

⁸⁷ Ekeh, “Colonialism and the Two Publics,” 108.

sanctioned.”⁸⁸ Schaffer notes, however, that while there was some legitimate justification for this argument, many Senegalese voters in fact rejected this approach, in part because it threatened their ability to maintain community solidarity, while the opposition saw it as merely an effort to preserve the ruling party’s position through intimidation and manipulation of voters. Interestingly, as Schaffer notes, “The debate over private versus public voting, then, not only opposed European to traditional African practices but also pitted competing indigenous moral codes against each other.”⁸⁹ The practice of secret voting has since been restored.

Finally, there are those who simply dismiss the issue of disconnect – and hence the need for indigenization – as unimportant in explaining state failure. Zartman, for example, argues

Did the state fall apart because it was the wrong institution? Taking Africa as the example, was it because the state was not appropriately African? Various ways of answering the question turn up negative. . . . no common theme or characteristic runs through the cases of collapse that would indicate that collapse was the result either of the same “Western-style” malfunction in the state or of particularly badly adapted Western institutions.⁹⁰

However, when he instead finds his explanation for state failure in “paradoxically, the effectiveness of the state before collapse, through repression and neglect, in destroying the regulative and regenerative capacities of society,” he offers no explanation for how these states came to replace their electorally-democratic predecessors, or for why the states were able to behave in such a destructive and autonomous fashion without effective public censure.

⁸⁸ Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation*, 101.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹⁰ I. William Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse,” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I William Zartman (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 6.

Nevertheless, all of these concerns represent serious challenges to the proposal that indigenized or syncretized political systems will be stronger, more rooted in their societies, and hence more effective. Two things should consequently be clear. First, it is not enough to simply “mix the old and the new systems.” Rather, we are likely to find that there are appropriate and effective means to positive indigenization processes, but we are also likely to find many examples of “pseudo-indigenization” that are ineffective or even destructive. How and why the systems are hybridized, and with what structural outcomes, will go a long way toward determining the actual effectiveness and validity of the process. Second, outcomes may not always be clear-cut, and evaluating them will require balancing costs and benefits in ways that may be difficult and controversial. Such evaluations – weighing, for example, trade-offs between adaptations that have apparently negative impacts on women, but otherwise positive impacts on community integration into decision making and state legitimacy – can, at least for now, only be conducted on a case by case basis. It is important, however, to keep in mind the following from Galvan:

A serious effort to understand (let alone promote) local participation in politics, local ownership of the process of decision making, and local agency in the allocation of resources, requires that we recognize (and accept) that institutional design can and does take place “from the bottom up.” If democratization is about empowerment, then it is about . . . the abandonment of institutional design principles (liberal individualism, for example) elements *cherished* in one setting but merely *required* in others. . . . But electoral rule by the people itself will get thrown out with the bathwater if we short circuit the process by which communities, especially in the developing world, make sense and build ownership. The unstated worldwide hegemony of liberalism, with its implicit hostility to the uncertain, heterogeneous results of democratic institutional syncretism, is itself a serious threat to the globalization of democracy.⁹¹

⁹¹ Galvan, “Institutional Syncretism,” 34.

And Sklar makes a similar argument in his discussion of mixed governments, which he finds often involve elements of oligarchy:

Like the forms of government themselves, auxiliary structures, designed to fortify a constitutional order, combine democratic and oligarchic elements of power. Constitutional purists may regret the construction of rude ramparts that deviate from the contours of either democratic or liberal forms of government: for example, an arrangement that would compromise civilian control of the military, or one that might enhance the authority of traditional rulers or provide for the formulation of public policies by the assembled elites of interest groups.

. . . The constitutional integrity of a liberal-democratic political landscape almost certainly will be marred by the erection of protective barriers against disruptive assaults. However, experimental governments cannot be expected to survive without them.⁹²

He goes on to add that:

The conception of a mixed polity, with its oligarchic features, could prove to be an antidote to cultural conceit in the form of one-dimensional images of successful political systems that are frequently recommended for export to countries with unstable governments.⁹³

This does not suggest that all principles must be thrown to the wind in pursuit of legitimacy. Instead, Ake, Galvan and others propose that a focus on universal democratic principles such as accountability, broad-based participation and openness to multiple ideas, non-arbitrariness of rule, and protection of minority rights be the focus and desired endpoint, rather than one particularistic model of how these principles can be achieved.

2.8 Further Research Needs

Clearly indigenization is a complex, and potentially controversial approach. While there is strong theoretical evidence for the importance of developing a broad-based sense of ownership and better integrating societies into their political systems in Africa, the

⁹² Sklar, "The Next Generation," 175.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 176.

empirical evidence is still relatively limited, although a few important studies in this area have been discussed above. Further studies to better define the need and the opportunities, as well as to identify successful – and unsuccessful – approaches to indigenization, would do much to fill this gap. More specifically, the needs can be divided into several categories.

First, further studies such as Schaffer's and Karlstrom's that focus on better comprehending the nature and significance of local understandings of democracy, fairness, equity, participation, and "good politics," and that assess the relevance of these findings for the adoption of Western liberal democratic models, would be extremely productive. We still understand far too little about what rural and non-elite Africans think about politics, about elections, about how and why they vote, about who they respect as leaders and why, and about what they expect – or hope for – from their governments.

The second main category of need is for case studies of particular attempts at indigenization. There is still a lack of sufficient empirical evidence to adequately test the potential benefits, as well as the costs, of indigenization, and to conceptualize how the process can be carried out in practice. For example, among other questions, it is necessary to address whether indigenous institutions are truly adaptable enough to meet current demands in environments that are often facing severe stress and degradation. This is where the current analysis fits in. Along with some of the potentially indigenizing actions undertaken in Ghana, Uganda, and elsewhere in the last decade, the political rebuilding processes in Somaliland represent very specific efforts to indigenize, and they have come about through processes considerably different from those that have driven the changes in Uganda and Ghana. Each case, including Somaliland, may be very particular

in its circumstances – countries will vary with respect to many factors, including the nature and variety of pre-colonial institutions, the impacts of colonialism and various experiences of post-colonial government from the democratic to the totalitarian, and in the events that have precipitated indigenizing adaptations. Nevertheless, by evaluating each particular case in the context of the issues, determining factors, and critiques discussed above, we can learn a great deal about the potential of indigenization to enhance legitimacy and hence improve governance both in the case study country and elsewhere on the continent.

Chapter 3: The Evolution of Somali Political Institutions: The Roots of Collapse and the Foundations of Reconstruction

I will now turn my attention to a discussion of the specific political experiences of the former Republic of Somalia in order to set the stage for the analysis in Chapter 4 of my first proposition, i.e., that a severe “disconnect” did in fact develop between the structures and functions of the state and the values, practices, traditions and daily lives of much of Somali society, emerging especially during the colonial era, but deepening after independence. I will do this by tracing the history both of the evolution of indigenous Somali political institutions and practices through the pre-colonial, colonial, and independence periods, including their role (or lack thereof) in governance of society during these periods, as well as outlining the structures and practices of the various governing regimes put in place during each of these eras. I will go into Somalia’s political history in some detail, because finding a successful route to rebuilding will only be possible if we thoroughly understand how the country and the people got to where they are today. Exploring the complex territory of state-society relations, institutional legitimacy, and the degree of connection or disconnection to the public and its beliefs and values requires an in-depth look at many aspects of both state/regime behavior, and public response.

3.1 Pre-Colonial Somali Socio-Political Systems

The British anthropologist Ioan M. Lewis’s (1961) book *A Pastoral Democracy* provides the best known and most detailed description of “traditional” Somali socio-

political systems.¹ Although he did not conduct his field work until the mid-1950s in what was then the British Protectorate of Somaliland (later northwest Somalia), Lewis's depiction constitutes what is widely regarded as the "classic" version of traditional political culture among northern Somali pastoral nomads as it existed in its "purest" form, i.e., before the influences of colonization, commercialization, modernization, and globalization.² Some analysts have charged that Lewis's description is too monolithic, failing to acknowledge that a significant degree of variation did in fact exist among different sub-sections of Somali society, including, for example, clans more dependent upon settled agricultural or agropastoral livelihoods, as well as religious and minority communities,³ although Lewis himself has frequently pointed out these differences.⁴ Nevertheless, Lewis's description is widely accepted as the starting point, even if it is generally acknowledged that this is a somewhat idealized version of Somali culture that was in fact practiced by only certain sections – albeit the most dominant sections – of

¹ I.M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa* (New York, NY: Africana Publishing Company for the International African Institute, 1961, 1982).

² In fact, some analysts accuse Lewis precisely on these grounds. For example, the noted Somali scholar Abdi Ismail Samatar observes that "Lewis's description of the pastoralism and associated democratic culture could well have been written a century earlier," arguing that Lewis has essentially ignored the impacts of colonialism and commercialization, treating Somali social, political and economic structure as static. Abdi I. Samatar, "Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Convention," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (December 1992): 626-627. Lewis himself, however, begins the preface to the 1982 edition of his book by claiming that "Above all, I wanted to emphasize how the institutions I described were not static and self-contained. Somali society was, on the contrary, involved in a process of change that could only be understood by taking into account many external factors, including the overarching political framework created by colonial administration." Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 1982 xi. Lewis's many references in his text to various impacts of the colonial system would indeed seem to suggest that Samatar overstates the static nature of Lewis's analysis. I will return to this issue later in this chapter and in the next. For now, it is enough to conclude that Lewis's description, while noting modern changes, provides the closest available approximation of an understanding or pre-colonial political and social practice. I will use it as the starting point for my own analysis, which will in fact devote considerable attention to evaluating how this political culture has changed and evolved over the last century, and what it consists of today.

³ See for example Catherine Besteman, *Unraveling Somalia: Race, Violence, and the Legacy of Slavery* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

⁴ The problem is perhaps more in how others have used Lewis's descriptions, treating them as though they are in fact a "universal" description of Somali culture, than in how Lewis himself described them or intended them to be used.

Somali society. For now, I will begin with a review of Lewis's description of indigenous political practices, before turning to a discussion of how they have in fact varied and evolved across space and across time, and what form they take today.

3.1.1 Kinship at the Core

To understand traditional Somali political and social interactions, it is necessary to begin with an understanding of what Lewis identifies as a key operating principle of Somali political culture, kinship relationships, including how they are structured (or not structured) and how they shape many aspects of Somali political practice. The social and political identity of most male Somalis is first and foremost determined genealogically, by tracing the patrilineal line of descent. Political and social communities are formed at various levels of aggregation with others who share a common male ancestor in the genealogical tree. Beyond the immediate family, Somalis trace their identity to a common ancestor at the level of the *diya*-paying group (*diya*, or *dia*, is the payment of blood money or compensation for deaths, injuries or insults), and then onward to a shared primary lineage, sub-clan identity, clan identity, and finally to the clan-family. Thus, an individual might identify himself as a member of the Sa'ad Musse sub-clan of the Habar Awal clan of the Isaaq clan family, each level representing a larger cohort and higher level of aggregation.

Although religious affiliations and in some cases territorially-based groupings also had relevance, kinship and clan have long been the most salient source of identity for the vast majority of Somalis. According to Lewis, "By reference to his ancestors, a man's relations with others are defined, and his position in Somali society as a whole is

determined.”⁵ Somali society thus exhibited the classic characteristics of a segmentary lineage system in which, according to Hamza Alavi, “all ‘roles,’ including political and economic roles, appeared in the form of kinship roles.”⁶

This genealogically-based system of layered identity is by no means fixed or static. In practice, Somali political and social identification is a fluid system of shifting alliances and cleavages between groups at different levels and in different branches of the genealogical tree, and at times even between members of different genealogies. The particular identity that an individual focuses on and aligns himself with at any given time will depend on the context – on what issues are currently at stake and what individuals or groups are involved – giving rise to a pattern of shifting, situational affiliations in a process of “constant decomposition and recomposition”⁷ of identity. Thus, when conflict arises over, say, a local murder, a man might find himself aligning with his own *diya*-paying group against another *diya*-paying group of the same lineage, while at another time these two *diya*-paying groups might unite as a lineage group to contest with another lineage in their same sub-clan over access to a watering point. At still other times, an entire sub-clan or clan may come together to wage territorial battles with another clan for control of grazing lands. Genealogically-based political units are thus constantly aligning and realigning themselves with others in an effort to successfully compete and survive in an extremely harsh environment. “In fact,” observe David Laitin and Said Samatar

⁵ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 2.

⁶ Hamza Alavi, “Peasant Classes and Primordial Loyalties,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1, no. 1 (1973): 33; cited by Ahmed I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality* (London, UK and New Jersey: Zed Books, Ltd., 1988), 38.

⁷ Virginia Luling, “Come Back Somalia? Questioning a Collapsed State,” *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1997): 292.

(1987), “the essence of great politics in the Somali context is the clever reconstruction of one’s clan identity.”⁸

In the most basic unit of this layered kinship system, the *diya*-paying group, each individual member shared collective responsibility for all other members and their actions and needs. Kinship networks, at all levels, constituted a system of mutual support, providing a mechanism of insurance and survival during difficult times through a framework of reciprocal obligations to assist those in need. It was therefore in conjunction with his kin that an individual’s interests could be protected and his survival, as well as that of his family and his livestock, ensured. Outside of the structure of kinship he had no security, no strength or power against others, and little hope of survival. Historically, most contested issues were local, and the most stable and common locus of identity was therefore at the level of the *diya*-paying group. But even the composition of these groups was not fixed. When disagreements arose within a *diya*-paying group, for example over the settlement of a *diya* debt, or when it simply became too large, the group could split into different sub-branches.⁹ Action as a lineage or as a sub-clan was not uncommon, but it was rare, in the pre-colonial era, that Somalis would align and act with common purpose at the level of the clan, and they almost never acted in unison as clan-families.

While the kinship system of relationships did encompass most male Somalis, however, others stood outside of this system or had a different relationship to it. Most numerous of these were of course women. Raised like their brothers as members of their father’s lineage, upon marriage their “identity” became more complex, as they

⁸ David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, and London, UK: Gower, 1987), 31.

⁹ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 168 and 175-176.

maintained their close linkages to their father's kin, while also building ties, particularly through their sons, to their husband's lineage. This put women in a unique position, allowing them through their marriages and the resulting "dual kinship" to build bonds between lineage groups, and at times to play the role of behind-the-scenes communicators or mediators between groups in conflict. Moreover, to a limited extent this role also carried over to her husband and especially to her sons, who frequently also had a special bond with matrilineal kin, although patrilineal kinship was always the primary determinant of their allegiance. A common component of agreements to resolve conflicts also included exchange of young girls for marriage to build inter-clan bonds.

In addition, while Somali society is commonly presented as being comprised of a relatively homogeneous people, each descending from one of the six main clan-families – the Dir, Isaaq, Darood, Hawiye, Digil/Mirifle, and Rahanweyn – there are minority groups in various parts of the region who are part of Somali society, but whose origins are not in these traditional Somali lineages. These include communities of people of Arab or occasionally Asian descent living primarily in coastal towns, as well as groups known as the Midgaans, Tumaals, and Yibirs (collectively called *sab*), who practiced skilled – but despised – trades such as blacksmithing, leatherworking, and shoemaking. Historically, the *sab* were essentially seen as people of "lower caste" by the majority of Somalis, as were the people of Bantu descent such as the Gosha living as agriculturalists in the river valleys of the south. In most cases, these groups suffered as second class citizens of Somali society; they were not treated as equals in an otherwise highly egalitarian community, nor were they given voice in political proceedings. With relatively small numbers and a standing outside of the all-important kinship structure, they had little strength in contest with other Somalis.

However, these small communities were not always completely abandoned outside of the predominant system of inter-clan politics. In many cases minorities became aligned to a particular lineage group with which they were closely associated through proximity or economic interaction, and were then essentially “adopted” by this lineage group and treated as part of it for most purposes. Such a relationship was usually quite beneficial to minorities, although it was not always possible. Nevertheless, the various degrees of “adoption” practiced in different communities indicates that the genealogical system of identity was somewhat more fluid and flexible than a strict interpretation of genealogy would dictate.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the variations in this system of identity and alliance produced by more settled agricultural, and occasionally religious, communities. In large part the focus of Somali nomads on genealogical identity as the core of social and political interaction arose of necessity out of their harsh environment and the exigencies of surviving in it, which required movement, rather than settlement, as a predominant way of life, thus precluding territorially-based political units as an alternative. According to Lewis, “The barren terrain in which nomadic pastoralism is the prevailing economy does little to foster, and indeed actively militates against the formation of stable territorial groups.”¹⁰ In addition, it is in large part the necessarily fierce competition for access to resources and therefore survival that generated the fluidity of shifting conflicts and allegiances within this system. Thus, despite shared language, religion, and culture, there have been major environmental impediments to the development of widespread political unity and commonality of purpose among the pastoral Somali. To varying degrees, this diffuse, uncentralized system of political

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

interaction is common to many pastoralist groups both in Africa and Asia, such as the Nuer and Dinka communities in Sudan, the Touareg in West Africa, and others; it clearly contrasts sharply with the nation-state system that was evolving in more productive and densely populated agricultural regions.

However, there are some regions of the Somali-inhabited territories, principally the valleys of the Juba and Shebelle Rivers in the south, and some parts of the northwest, that are at least somewhat suited to settled agricultural production. The Digil/Mirifle and Rahanweyn peoples which inhabited the southern riverine areas thus became the more settled and agriculturally inclined of the six main clan-families (and hence have long been looked down upon by their nomadic cousins in the other four groups). In addition, these settled communities often included other minorities, especially farmers of Bantu origin (e.g., the Gosha, mentioned above), and occasionally religious-cum-agricultural communities formed that drew inhabitants from across the clan and non-clan spectrum. In these areas, there was naturally a much stronger tendency for political units to develop on a territorial basis rather than on a strictly genealogical basis. It should therefore be apparent that there are in fact numerous exceptions to the “idealized” portrayal of a kinship-based society developed by Lewis.

3.1.2 Somali Politics in Practice – An Egalitarian Ethos

Lewis’s observation about the political practices of Somalis emphasizes just how radically different their traditional approach to social and political governance was from that of much of the rest of the non-pastoralist world, and the West in particular:

Few societies can so conspicuously lack those judicial, administrative, and political procedures which lie at the heart of the western conception of government. The traditional northern Somali political system has no

chiefs to run it and no formal judiciary to control it. Men are divided amongst political units without any administrative hierarchy of officials and with no instituted positions of leadership to direct their affairs. Yet, although they thus lack to a remarkable degree all the machinery of centralized government, they are not without government or political institutions.¹¹

Nor, as the title of his book suggests, did Lewis find that the Somalis lacked democracy. In fact, they practiced it in what was perhaps one of its purest forms.

Lewis argues that Somalis traditionally managed political, social and economic decision making, including decisions to create laws and contracts, manage critical resources, or to make peace or pursue war with other clans, through a diffuse and decentralized – and broadly participatory – system of rule. The fundamental institution of government were community decision-making fora, informal meetings known as *shir*. *Shir* were called on an *ad hoc* basis as the need arose, and could range in size and scope from a small, local meeting to a large regional gathering involving thousands of participants, depending on the issues at hand. Decisions were reached by majority opinion as consensus was approached through often lengthy discussions in which all adult men were free to participate, at least in principle. Depending on the importance and complexity of the issue at hand, *shir* might last anywhere from a few hours to days, weeks, or even months when necessary.

Perhaps the most unique feature of traditional Somali practice was the extent to which, both in *shir* and throughout the conduct of daily affairs, Somalis did not appoint or recognize official leaders or leadership positions. Rather, as Lewis observes, in a *shir* council, “All men are councilors, and all men politicians.”¹² In principle, all adult men were considered *odayasha*, or elders, and were free to take part in the proceedings on an

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

equal basis, to speak and voice their views. Women, however, were completely excluded from these public fora, as were the men of the *sab* minority groups.

In practice, however, it was not uncommon that certain of the *odayasha* were in fact held in higher regard than their colleagues; their opinions might be given greater heed, or they might even be seen as the unofficial leaders of their group – “That is to say,” as Ismail Ahmed puts it, “all old men are not elders nor are all elders aged.”¹³ But such a special, if unofficial, status was normally accorded to groups of several individuals, rarely to a single individual. Attaining this informal status depended on a number of factors, including knowledge of traditions and laws, political acumen and skills of compromise and mediation, oratory prowess and poetic ability, lineage and inherited prestige, wealth, age, religious knowledge and piety, and reputation for wisdom, reason and fairness. However, while these individuals might to some extent act as informal leaders of their communities, it is important to recognize that this was a position of respect and prestige, but little real power. Such “rank” did not empower them to make independent decisions or dictate to their communities, but only to lead largely by building and constantly maintaining a considerable degree of consensus among community members. In addition, in very large *shir* where it was not practicable for all those attending to actively participate, these informal leaders were likely to be selected to represent their particular clan or lineage group at the center of the circle, while others observed and provided input to their representatives outside of formal discussions.

¹³ Ismail Ahmed, “Understanding Conflict in Somalia and Somaliland,” in *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, ed. Adebayo Adedeji (London, UK and New York, NY: Zed Books, and Nigeria: African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies (ADCESS), 1999), 247.

This very loosely structured system of informal leadership applied at all levels of aggregation, from the *diya*-paying group to the clan level. The only exception was observed at the clan level, where most clans did support a “titled elder,” commonly known as the sultan or *suldan*, from the Arabic, or by the equivalent Somali titles of *ugaas*, *boqor*, or *garaad*. However, while this position was much more formalized than those of the informal clan leaders discussed above, the real powers of the position were little different. It was a position of considerable prestige, but the *suldan* was by no means empowered to make independent decisions on behalf of his community, or in any sense to rule arbitrarily, or even, for that matter, to rule at all. He was primarily a figurehead, representing the clan before other clans, and embodying the clan’s sense of its own power and prestige, but making decisions only in consultation with other close councilors, who themselves were informal representatives of various sub-clans or lineages. *Suldans* could collect some tribute from their clan members, but the intake of these relatively limited resources were accompanied by a substantial responsibility to support those in need within the clan. These positions were also unique within the Somali system in that they were typically hereditary. Although rules of transfer differed among clans, in most cases the position was passed to the *suldan*’s first-born son unless he was unacceptable to the community for some reason.

According to Virginia Luling, then, “The clan and the minor groups which make it up used to be self-governing direct democracies; the clan elders and the local sultans and ‘kings’ were simply its leading members.”¹⁴ What this all added up to, according to Lewis, was a participatory, decentralized – or even uncentralized – egalitarian, non-hierarchical and highly democratic system of governing and social control. It was a

¹⁴ Luling, “Come Back Somalia?,” 294.

classic example of an acephalous or “stateless” society. The locus of power shifted according to the issue at hand and who was involved; there was no permanent decision-making body. As Lewis describes it, “before colonization there was no Somali state. Sentiments of cultural identity . . . were not expressed politically in this form.”¹⁵ And as the Somali scholar Hussein M. Adam elaborates, “historically, Somalis have lived in societies with rules but without rulers . . .”¹⁶

3.1.3 Contract and (Limited) Cohesion

This brings us finally to the concept of contract, which Lewis describes as another fundamental principle of Somali political practice that complements and interacts with kinship to build political solidarity and create some degree (albeit limited) of social order.¹⁷ Customary Somali law derived from two primary sources: Islamic *sharia*, and agreements negotiated within or between kin groups in *shir*, known as *heer* (also written as *xeer*). *Heer* essentially constitute a (usually unwritten) contract among the parties to the agreement, who might be members of a single *diya*-paying group, members of multiple genealogically related groups (e.g., several lineages linked in a single sub-clan), or even members of genealogically unrelated groups (e.g., members of neighboring sub-clans from two different clans). Although they do not incorporate all of the same features, they are the closest Somali equivalent to Western constitutions or the egalitarian

¹⁵ Ioan M. Lewis, “Introduction: The Uncentralised Somali Legacy,” in *A Study of Decentralised Political Structures for Somalia: A Menu of Options*, report prepared for the European Union EC Somalia unit and the United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS), August 1995, 4.

¹⁶ Hussein M. Adam, “Somalia: A Terrible Beauty Being Born?” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I. William Zartman (Boulder, CO and London, UK: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 87.

¹⁷ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 161.

social contracts of the political philosophers¹⁸ in that they establish the fundamental principles and rules by which Somali communities lived. However, they differ fundamentally from Western constitutions in that they are not essentially an agreement between a people and their government, but among self-governing peoples.

According to Lewis, “*heer* then, denotes a body of explicitly formulated obligations, rights and duties. It binds people of the same treaty (*heer*) together in relation to internal delicts and defines their collective responsibility in external relations with other groups.”¹⁹ A given *heer* might serve essentially as a contract among members of a given *diya*-paying group, laying out the specifics of how members of the group must share responsibility for payment of compensation to others or distribute compensation paid to the group, and specifying how injuries inflicted within the group by one member upon another will be compensated differently from injuries inflicted by outsiders. Alternatively, in some cases, a *heer* serves the purpose of a treaty between two groups that have been in conflict, outlining how they will relate in future, and again specifying the compensation that will be paid in the case of past and/or future damages inflicted by members of one group upon the other.

Heer and kinship interacted in critical ways in the Somali political universe. The principles of kinship as practiced in a stateless, segmentary lineage system such as that of the Somalis can appear to be highly fragmentary, setting group against group without a central authority to enforce restraint of any sort. While Lewis tends to emphasize the inherently conflictual nature of Somali society given its roots in segmentary lineage structures, several other analysts stress the essential complementary role that *heer* plays

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

in relation to kinship, building bonds that overcome the potentially centrifugal forces of the latter. According to Anna Simons:

Xeer is the pastoralists' counterbalance to segmentation. More specifically, it is a set of norms and laws (in short, a contract) formally agreed to by adult males who may or may not be closely related, designed to ensure peace and prevent bloodshed within the group they self-define. It is purposely intended to override lineage differences and is critical to preserving order among those who mutually seek it . . .²⁰

Abdi I. Samatar aggressively counters Lewis's position, emphasizing the critical balancing role of *heer*:

The *Xeer* was a social contract democratically constructed (all adult males took part in this) to check the occasional conflicts between individuals and among communities. What gave the *Xeer* staying power in the absence of centralized coercive machinery was the voluntarism associated with the absolute necessity of relying and living on one's labour/livestock rather than exploiting others. Such an ethic – in conjunction with Islam – prevented and restrained centrifugal tendencies in the lineage system . . .²¹

He also points out that:

The *Heer* and the teachings of Islam superseded the *potential* divisiveness of genealogy (*tol*). Furthermore, the web of relationships created by intermarriage reinforced the community-wide spirit of the *Heer* and Islam and blunted the genealogical basis of difference. . . . [this] did not prevent conflict . . . but certainly precluded prolonged hostilities driven by genealogical differences.²²

Samatar argues that it was *heer* that historically prevented Somali society from being decimated or destroyed by ill-intentioned individuals.

Heer also countered the “might makes right” principle that could otherwise dominate inter-clan relations in its absence. For example, according to Islamic *sharia*, compensation must be paid for causing the death of an individual. In Somali society, the

²⁰ Anna Simons, *Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 43.

²¹ Samatar, “Destruction of State and Society,” 630-631.

²² Abdi Ismail Samatar, “Leadership and Ethnicity in the Making of African State Models: Botswana versus Somalia,” *Third World Quarterly* 4, no. 18 (1997): 694.

traditional rate was 100 camels for an adult male, and 50 for a woman, or the equivalent. However, in practice, a clan that was weaker in numbers or physical strength often could not actually extract *diya* from a stronger lineage, and had no recourse. In other words, without a *heer* contract, weaker lineage groupings were essentially left to the mercy of the stronger. Under *heer*, however, there was a much greater sanction against, and disincentive for, causing harm to one's contractual partners.

Heer contracts aimed at resolving conflicts – probably the most common motivation for forming them – were negotiated between the elders of the genealogical groups involved either at the instigation of peacemakers within their own ranks, or through the mediation efforts of neutral clans. And like kinship relationships, *heer* are a fluid rather than a static institution. As occasion demands – for example, fragmentation of a *diya*-paying group, or political realignments among genealogically-based political units – *heer* contracts may be modified or even rescinded, and new ones instituted. This is in keeping with the pattern of shifting alliances among kinship groups discussed above. Essentially the contracts were good for as long as both sides respected them – Somalis claim that some *heer* agreements have lasted for generations, passed down orally from one generation to the next, and continuously observed,²³ although they can also be very short lived.

3.1.4 The Ecological and Economic Roots of Pastoral Democracy

Kinship, complemented by *heer*, thus constituted the key organizing principles in the system of “pastoral democracy,” a socio-political system that emerged at least in part

²³ Robleh Michael Mariano, lawyer, former Somaliland MP, and founding member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 27, 2000.

out of the harsh economic and social realities faced by Somalis. The land they occupied on the Horn of Africa presented Somalis with an environment in which the means of production were widely dispersed, risk and uncertainty were high, mobility was essential, and cooperation and conflict had to be carefully balanced to ensure survival. Abdi I. Samatar observes that “The political structure of pre-colonial Somali society reflected the decentralized nature of the production base,” fostering a system in which the “economic and social logic of the unit of production was oriented towards minimizing risk in order to ensure family reproduction.”²⁴ It was a society in which “all members had access to the means of production (land and livestock) despite some unequal distribution among households,”²⁵ and in which “everyone was a member of a production unit and consequently, no tribute or surplus was extracted.”²⁶ These conditions produced a society in which, “in the absence of institutionalised state structures, and given the wide distribution of the means of livelihood, no household or lineage group could muster enough resources (material and organizational) to dominate and exploit others. It is in this sense that pre-colonial Somalia was an equalitarian society.”²⁷ This produced the fluid, relatively non-hierarchical structure that characterized much – though not all – of pre-colonial Somali society. We will now explore how external forces affected the evolution of these internally-generated political systems.

²⁴ Abdi I. Samatar, “The State, Agrarian Change, and Crisis of Hegemony in Somalia,” *Review of African Political Economy* 43 (1988): 29.

²⁵ Samatar, “Crisis of Hegemony,” 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁷ Samatar, “Destruction of State and Society,” 630.

3.2 Foreign Presence and Political Influence – The First Nine Centuries

As mentioned, the description of traditional Somali society and politics presented above essentially constitutes an idealized version of the pre-colonial reality. In fact, there was some variation in actual practice across different regions of the Somali-inhabited territories, with differences particularly apparent between the predominantly nomadic regions that comprised most of this zone and the riverine agricultural zone between the Juba and Shebelle Rivers. Actual governance practices also varied over time as the influence of both internal factors – population migrations, droughts, and local conflicts – and external factors such as foreign traders, invaders, and rulers, waxed and waned. The interaction of Somalis with outsiders dates back at least ten centuries, and includes local episodes of centralized rule by foreigners that long pre-date the advent of European colonization. I will not try to present an exhaustive or comprehensive portrayal of this pre-colonial Somali history here. Rather, my main goal in this section is to briefly evaluate the extent to which the above portrayal of Somali socio-political practice continued to hold true over the course of pre-colonial history, and the nature and extent of outside influences on this indigenous model. Was Somali political reality truly as democratic, decentralized and non-hierarchical as Lewis's portrayal suggests? Did the external rulers who came and went from various regions across the centuries, and who usually attempted to create more centralized, hierarchical and dominating systems of rule, have a lasting impact on Somali political culture?

Spreading south and west from the Horn, Somalis gradually occupied the extensive regions of the Horn of Africa which they now inhabit over a period of nearly nine centuries, continuing their expansion until well into the 19th century or even the early

20th.²⁸ Describing these migrations, Lewis notes that “in considering the character of the Somali expansion, it should be remembered that this was not a concerted operation under a single direction: it was a disjointed series of clan and lineage movements in which there were many cross-currents of migration as group jostled group in the search for new pastures.”²⁹ Their steady move into new regions was driven both by internal pressures such as population growth and increasing competition for resources in an extremely sparse environment, as well as external factors such as the occasional pressure put on their northern territories by Abyssinian and Arabian expansionism. Their gradual advance to the south and west brought them into contact – and often conflict – with several of the ethnic groups that remain their neighbors today, including the Abyssinians to the west, the Borana and Galla to the south and southwest, and Bantu peoples in the south.

In these interactions, Somalis did occasionally adopt social, economic or political practices from the neighbors with whom they competed and fought. For example, the Hawiye, Darood, Digil and Rahanweyn Somalis, who occupied lands between the Juba and Shebelle Rivers and to the southwest of the Juba River, all adopted military age-grade systems from the Galla, for example. Although this practice was later abandoned, this interchange did have a lasting impact, as these southern Somalis now recognize a more heterogeneous and open lineage structure that readily allows for the incorporation of foreigners and clients, in contrast to the more closed systems of northern Somalis.³⁰ The Digil and Rahanweyn clan-families also adopted the practice of cultivation from the

²⁸ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 24.

²⁹ I.M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (London, UK and New York, NY: Longman Group Limited, 1965, 1980), 32.

³⁰ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 8-9.

Bantu. The settled, more territorially-based allegiances which resulted, along with a more hierarchical, chief-based political structure, still distinguish them from the other Somali clan-families. However, there is little evidence of other significant changes in political practice, either temporary or long term, brought about by Somalis' contact with their southern and western neighbors.

Moving from the interior to the extensive Somali coastline, the story changes considerably. Beginning with Arab and Persian traders who probably first arrived on the coast in the 10th century, Somalis began to experience the effects of external commercial and political interests, which continued throughout the following centuries, although varying considerably over time in their intensity and impact. A complete chronology of the various Muslim sultanates and petty states that came and went, primarily from various northern and southern coastal towns, is not necessary, but the following sampling can give some sense of the various powers and interests involved.

One of the most significant of these sultanates in the north, the Sultanate of Awdal, which was ruled by Arab Muslims in some cooperation with local Somalis, was initially based in the port of Zeila – the “northern hub of Muslim and Arab influence”³¹ – in what is now Somaliland. Through the port at Zeila, trade in slaves, ivory, and other commodities passed between Arabia and Abyssinia for centuries. Unlike many of the other states and sultanates, Awdal extended its influence into the interior to a considerable degree. In fact, in one of the most distinct and unusual periods of Somali history, Somali and Muslim armies gathered from several of these petty Muslim states under the ruler of Awdal, Imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghaazi ‘Gran’ (‘the left-handed’) (who had by then moved Awdal’s capital inland to Harar), and conquered Abyssinia

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

briefly between 1527 and 1543. While this victory was short-lived, it is a remarkable and rare example during this entire period of Somalis uniting on a wide scale to successfully pursue a common purpose. Although David Laitin and Said Samatar argue that in this case “these clans went to war not so much as Somalis but as Muslims,”³² Somalis nevertheless take considerable pride in this moment in their history. The ability to pull off such a feat is in large part a testament to Ahmad Gran’s exceptional leadership skills, which is particularly notable given that historic accounts of this period otherwise “[depict] Somali clan politics in the sixteenth century as of essentially the same character as they are now,”³³ i.e., decentralized, localized, and generally fragmented along various lines of kinship. As the Abyssinians reasserted themselves, however, Awdal declined rapidly, and the ports of Zeila and Berbera to the east soon fell under the loose rule of the Shariifs of Mukha and the Ottoman empire from the 17th to 19th centuries. Ismail Ahmed notes that “the subsequent evaporation of the newly expanded state and its highland conquests, which reached within 50 miles of present-day Addis Ababa, foreshadowed the implausibility of a strong state enduring within the realities of Somali national identity.”³⁴

Mogadishu, which filled a similar role to that of Zeila on the south coast, serving as the gateway for trade from the interior in livestock, ivory and other valuables, was founded by Arab and Persian traders as early as the 10th century, and by the 14th and 15th had become a significant commercial center. Like Zeila, it changed hands numerous times, falling at various times under the rule of sultanates of local dynasties (the Fakhr ad-Din from the 13th to 16th centuries, and the Muzzaffar from the 16th to early 17th), and later under the Sultan of Oman from late in the 17th century, and then the Sultan of

³² Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 12.

³³ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 16.

³⁴ Ahmed, “Understanding Conflict,” 236.

Zanzibar from early in the 19th century. The actual degree of control that each of these sultanates exerted over its possessions varied considerably, and depended in large part on the perceived benefits of controlling (or taxing) trade and protecting access to both interior and coastal trade routes; it appears that in general, these benefits were great enough only to justify the exertion of fairly limited effort on the part of foreign powers. The Sultan of Zanzibar, for example, had only a handful of representatives in Mogadishu during much of his suzerainty over the city. Nevertheless, Zeila and Mogadishu, along with lesser ports at Berbera, Mait, Brava, Merca, and a handful of other locations, were the main centers which according to Lewis experienced “some degree of centralized government and some, though irregular, tradition of authority more formalized than the egalitarian structure of Somali pastoral politics.”³⁵

But not only was the rule over these cities itself erratic, it rarely extended past the immediate vicinity of the coast (the Sultanate of Awdal in the north being an early exception³⁶), and sometimes not even past the city walls. Lewis, for example, describes the explorer Richard Burton’s experience in the mid-19th century upon departing from Zeila for Harar: “Burton soon found that this orderly town life at Zeila did not extend far beyond the gates of the city. The nomadic clans through whose pastures Burton and his companions passed on their way towards Harar, recognized no political dependence upon Zeila. Indeed raids and skirmishes occurred under the very wall of the city.” Moreover, he also notes that while “in 1855 Zeila thus continued the coastal tradition of instituted authority under a Somali governor . . . its political influence was a mere shadow of what it had once been,” whereas at Berbera, Burton found that “the process of nomadic

³⁵ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 18.

³⁶ Lewis also notes a number of ruined Muslim towns scattered around Somaliland, about which little is known, but the coastal sultanates seem likely to have been the more important centers. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

encroachment had gone much further and the town was in fact no longer politically distinct from its nomadic hinterland.”³⁷

Not all of the centralizing influences arose from external sources, however. Several of the sultanates mentioned above – the Fakhr ad-Din and Muzzaffar in Mogadishu, for example – had indigenous Somali roots, rather than Arab or Persian ones. This is also true of the Geledi and Ajuuran Sultanates, both of which exerted some degree of rule over sizeable regions of the interior in the southern zones around the Juba and Shebelle Rivers, and at times even extended at least some degree of influence, if not direct control, over Mogadishu. It should not be surprising that most of these internally-built power centers were located in the southern regions where greater agricultural potential provided more impetus for a shift from nomadic lineage-based systems of power and politics to the territorially-based systems more typical of settled agricultural communities. It must also be noted that the real extent of the power of these dynasties is unknown, but does not appear to have been anywhere near as great, for example, as the power of the foreign sultanates (such as those under the Sultans of Oman and Zanzibar, and the Ottoman Empire) which occasionally ruled. To the extent that they did occasionally dominate over these external powers, their position was largely based on advantages of position rather than the ability to muster superior force.

There is, however, a notable exception to the rule that these power centers, limited as they were, emerged primarily in agricultural zones: the Mijertejn Sultanates of Hobyo and Alula in the northeast (in what is now the northeastern region of Puntland). While neither appears to have exhibited strongly centralized rule or an extensive degree of control, the sultans in each were able to collect some tribute, primarily in the form of

³⁷ Lewis, *Modern History*, 33.

livestock and local products such as frankincense, and maintain their independence from various foreign interests until well into the 19th century.

The key question in the context of this analysis is what, if any, lasting impacts did these experiences of limited centralized rule prior to the advent of European colonialism have? Whether arising from external or internal influences, did they in any way significantly alter the decentralized, non-hierarchical political traditions of the majority of Somali as described by Lewis. Lewis's own answer to this question is clearly a resounding "no." He summarizes the impact of these interventions in Somaliland, for example, by arguing that:

the slender and often broken thread of instituted government which foreign intervention established in a few urban centers . . . has always been tenuous in the extreme, existing precariously on the fringes of the wider and more pervasive field of lineage rivalries over which, until the advent of European administration at the end of the nineteenth century, no firm central authority ever held continuous jurisdiction.³⁸

He further notes that "the irregular transmission of the principles of centralized authority . . . only touched the majority of the Somali peripherally."³⁹

Not everyone agrees with Lewis, however. Ahmed I. Samatar makes the case that Lewis has overstated the resilience of traditional Somali society, arguing that in fact Somalis' exposure to Arab traders and patterns of rule began to gradually undermine both the economic and political foundations of the non-hierarchical, subsistence-based nomadic culture. Somalis of the interior first experienced commercial exchange at the hands of Middle Eastern traders, and Samatar argues that from the beginning these relations were typically exploitative on the part of the traders, and based on unequal exchange. This set the stage for political antagonisms which later grew between the

³⁸ Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy*, 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

majority of Somalis, who remained pastoralists in the interior, and the emerging commercial interests of the coasts. Traditional political practices began to be undermined as well, as “the development of economic conceptions of power and politics” began to spread within Somali society.⁴⁰ Thus, while Lewis argues that during the pre-colonial era Somali political practices were only occasionally, and temporarily, displaced, Samatar contends that in fact a *transformation* of these institutions had begun well before the Europeans arrived. I will return to this debate in much greater depth after discussing the impact of the European colonial era.

3.3 The Colonial Legacy

The shift to the European brand of colonialism brought about much more radical changes in the social and political life of Somalis, although often even these profound impacts were felt only gradually. Sharp regional differences were also introduced by the different colonial powers. Here I will begin to narrow my focus to what became the British Somaliland Protectorate, and the Italian colony of Somalia, the two regions that later united to become the Republic of Somalia. The role of the French, British and Ethiopians in other parts of the Somali-inhabited territories are beyond the scope of this analysis.

The radical contrasts in approach that characterized the British and Italian presence arose to a large extent out of their very different interests in the two territories, which in turn came about in part due to the substantial ecological variations between the two. In the north, the British began developing an interest in Somaliland from early in the 19th century as a consequence of their need to provision their key strategic base at Aden,

⁴⁰ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 13-15.

across the Red Sea from Somaliland. Somaliland had the potential to provide a steady supply of meat for the troops stationed at Aden, and the British became intent on preserving this critical source. In the early part of the 19th century they began to treat with leaders of several of the coastal trading cities still operating in the region, including Zeila and Berbera to the west, and paid subsidies to the Mijertejn Sultanates in exchange for access to Bosaso and other eastern ports. By the latter part of the century, however, the Egyptians, with reluctant British acquiescence, had established themselves in several of the northern port cities, although as with many of their predecessors, their authority over the nomads of the interior was much more limited. Although the period of Egyptian rule was quite brief, from 1870 to 1884, through the use of *corvée* labor they made significant improvements in infrastructure such as ports and mosques. They also introduced the system of ruling through appointed and paid lineage-group representatives known by the Arabic title *akil* (also sometimes called “chiefs”), which both the British and Italians were later to adopt. However, when Egypt began to face serious challenges in the Sudan and at home, they withdrew from their holdings on the Somali coast in 1874.

By this time, Europe was gearing up to make its “scramble for Africa.” Britain could not find another ally willing to take on Somaliland, and grew concerned that it could lose its access to the valuable ports and meat supplies to other powers – their arch rivals the French were of particular concern – if it did not take a more aggressive stance. In 1884 the British therefore began to pursue treaties with each of the major clans and sub-clans in the area, establishing authority for themselves over what was to become the Somaliland Protectorate. The Somalis were apparently fairly willing to take this step with the British, given their concerns at the time about Abyssinia’s expansionist aims. However, Lewis notes that they may not have had the same relationship in mind that the

British did: “The preamble to each clan treaty explained that its purpose was, from the Somali side: ‘for the maintenance of our independence, the preservation of order, and other good and sufficient reasons.’”⁴¹ He posits that the Somalis saw these treaties with the British as akin to their internal *heer* contracts, making certain agreements about rights, duties, and mutual obligations, but not explicitly ceding land or sovereignty to the British. And perhaps initially the carefully self-circumscribed role of the British did not raise any cause for concern. Their sole interest was securing the supply of provisions for Aden. The governors sent out to the Protectorate were given explicit instructions that this was to be done with the minimum of investment, intervention and effort; keeping the peace was the sole requirement. The Protectorate was also to be self-supporting based on revenues collected from the ports; no drain on British coffers would be accepted.

Initially the British succeeded in meeting their minimalist goals in Somaliland, confining their presence primarily to the coastal ports, and keeping demands on the Protectorate’s limited revenues to a minimum. But many Somalis were not happy to see British infidels usurping even this relatively modest degree of control and bringing about profound changes in Somali society, and they particularly disliked Christian mission activities. By 1900, resistance began to coalesce under the leadership of a charismatic Somali sheikh, Sayyid Mohammed ‘Abdille Hassan (known to the British as the “Mad Mullah”). As their policy of even limited engagement began to face a serious challenge, the British were gradually drawn into a deeper and much more involved relationship with the Protectorate over the next 20 years, as they battled Sayyid and the sizeable forces that he was able to gather, known as the “Dervishes.” Religious brotherhoods had long been one of the few institutions in Somali society that could cut across clan cleavages, and it

⁴¹ Lewis, *Modern History*, 46.

was largely as a religious leader that the Sayyid was able to “create a highly fluid and loosely organized national movement,”⁴² that was able to present a sustained challenge to the British presence. The Sayyid attempted to create the foundations of an independent Somali polity, building an alternative bureaucratic structure based in part on indigenous sources of authority such as the *Khusuusi*, or Council of Elders, but at the same time his personally autocratic style of rule became well known.

Lewis notes that this was the most unified action taken by Somalis since their conquests in Abyssinia under Ahmad Gran’s leadership in the 16th century, and once again the motivation for uniting was for the purpose of taking on a foreign power. But Somalis were by no means completely united under the Sayyid. In fact, according to Lewis:

although his task was to create a national movement transcending clan divisions, to accomplish his object he had of necessity to adapt his tactics to the realities of Somali life. Hence with consummate skill, he employed all the traditional devices of Somali politics; utilizing, when it seemed profitable, his ties with his paternal clansmen, while on another occasion appealing to his maternal relatives, and also taking full advantage of those direct links which he forged by his many political marriages.⁴³

Meanwhile, several clans to which his connections remained more distant, and who benefited most from the British presence, largely remained aloof from his cause, and in some cases fought for the British. Nevertheless, it is a testament to the Sayyid’s exceptional personality and leadership, and to the difficulty at the time of overcoming clan divisions and uniting many Somalis for common action, both that the movement was able to survive for 20 years, and that it collapsed upon his death in 1920.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Although the British ultimately prevailed, the cost to them was quite dear. Lewis again:

The long-drawn out, costly, and unrewarding operations against the Dervishes, which were not by-products of any attempt to carry the British flag inland, caused the British government to assume greater responsibilities in Somaliland than had ever been foreseen and which were out of all proportion of Britain's very secondary interest in this area.⁴⁴

By 1920, the Protectorate was far from self-sufficient, putting a significant strain on the British treasury. Nevertheless, Lewis argues that their initially very limited interests had in fact “bred a tradition of parsimony and neglect which dominated British action in her Somali Protectorate throughout most of its life.”⁴⁵

Meanwhile, in the south the story with the Italians was much different. In 1888, the Italians began to gain a foothold in southern Somalia by treating first with the Mijerteyn Sultan of Obbyo, and then with his rival, the Mijerteyn Sultan of Alula. By these treaties, the Sultans placed their people and land under the “protection and government” of Italy in return for a small annual allowance. Further to the south, in an effort to gain control over the more valuable trading centers of the coast, and the inter-riverine agricultural lands, Italy signed lease agreements in 1892 with Sultan Barghash b. Sa'idd, who had usurped control over some of the ports from the Sultan of Zanzibar, and with the Sultan of Zanzibar himself. Italy then purchased permanent rights to these lands from Zanzibar in 1905, and annexed the two northern protectorates – not without considerable resistance – to make them part of the colony in the 1920s.

From the start, the Italians' objectives stood in stark contrast to those of the British. Italy intended to build a full-fledged colony in Somalia that could both provide raw

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40-41.

materials and goods to Italian markets, especially the produce of plantation agriculture from the Juba and Shebelle River valleys, and that could absorb some of the country's excess population. They were initially held back by the effects of the Dervish movement, which extended into the south, as well as other external constraints, but by 1920 they had established firm control over the territory. They followed this with aggressive efforts to penetrate the interior through construction of roads and by developing trading routes through the territory to Ethiopia, and set about to extend their authority as thoroughly and as extensively as they could. As Ahmed I. Samatar describes it:

The fascist colonial state now aimed to turn clan leaders into creatures of colonialism; to expropriate land and distribute it among colonials – in the process forcing Somali peasants to become cheap labour; and to deface and devalue Somali culture so as to undermine the self-confidence of the people. With regard to the first of these aims, Hess explains how the clan leaders were stripped of any sense of autonomy and dignity: “The most effective method of dealing with the dissident chief, other than military force, was the suspension of his stipend. New colonial officials, in fact, were reminded of the scale of punishment they were entitled to use to coerce the chiefs: verbal reproof in public, suspension of the chief's authority, and ultimately, removal of the uncooperative chief.” With the traditional source of local leadership and guidance destroyed, the twin tactics of land dispossession and labour enforcement could be employed.⁴⁶

Despite these efforts, however, the Italians never really succeeded in fulfilling their goals for Somalia. In the midst of continuing economic crises both within the colony and abroad, the resistance encountered to forced labor, and other impediments, the hoped for economic benefits never fully materialized. But the changes wrought by the Italians on Somali society and economy were nevertheless far-reaching.

These stark differences in the interests of the two administrations, as well as the substantial disparity in the level of resources available to each, became readily apparent

⁴⁶ Ahmed I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 49, citing Robert L. Hess, *Italian Colonialism in Somalia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 160.

in the sharply contrasting nature of the administrations each established and the extent of their penetration into Somali society. In the south, a fascist-style, bureaucratic and highly centralized administration was built, extending its reach throughout society via a system of direct rule – the practice of largely replacing indigenous political structures with colonial ones, rather than trying to work through or with them as in a system of indirect rule. Of greatest significance were first, the sizeable contingent of both Italian and Somali (or occasionally local Arab) cadres brought into or trained into this civil administration – 350 and 1700 respectively by the late 1920s and early 1930s – and second, the extent to which the traditional Somali political system was marginalized. Initially a significant number of Somali elders and notables were identified as “chiefs” or *akils* using the system first introduced by the Egyptians, and they were paid salaries to “advise” the administration and serve as a liaison with their clans. However, in practice their intended function was to serve the needs of the administration much more than those of their clan members, and uncooperative *akils* were quickly replaced. As the size of the civil service administration grew, even the numbers of these co-opted local leaders were significantly scaled back, and only those most loyal to the administration were kept on the payroll. Islamic judges, or *Kadis*, appointed by the administration, also took over many of the responsibilities previously fulfilled by clan elders, including the interpretation of customary law. By the onset of World War II, the traditional political system and its informal leaders had been marginalized to a considerable extent in the Italian colony.

In the Somaliland Protectorate, the approach was significantly different, though in general the differences were more in the degree than in the nature of the changes introduced. Most noticeably, the British did not begin to match the Italians’ efforts to

penetrate and control society, appointing only a handful of British civil servant administrators with a similarly small contingent of Indian and Arab clerks. In principle, they also attempted to build a system of indirect rule similar to their other colonies. However, in reality, because Somali society did not possess a network of at least semi-permanent, “officially” sanctioned and readily identifiable community leaders to work with, it was essentially impossible to put a system of true indirect rule in place. In fact, by building on the practice initiated by the Egyptians of identifying individual clan elders to officially designate as salaried *akils* or “chiefs,” they in effect created a system of direct rule that actually brought about fundamental changes in the traditional socio-political systems. Eventually, nearly every *diya*-paying group in the Protectorate was allotted one paid *akil* position. But while group members were in many cases allowed to choose their own representative for this position, the British, like the Italians, were not averse to identifying their own replacement when locally-identified leaders proved uncooperative, although they often met with stiff resistance when they attempted such tactics. Such replacements occasionally occurred even at the highest level of clan leadership, with the British at times attempting to replace *suldans* or other titled elders, although they did not always succeed. Nevertheless, because the British interest remained focused almost exclusively on preserving law and order, rather than introducing sweeping social changes (they did not, for example, push the issue when they encountered widespread resistance to the provision of Western-style education for Somali children), their scope, and hence their impact, was much more limited than that of the Italians.

The British interest in preserving order took shape in several different ways. The key responsibility of *akils* was to serve as a conduit between their clan members and the

British authorities, usually the District Commissioner, but this could be a difficult role to fulfill. For example, *akils* were expected to assist the British in identifying troublemakers and criminals. In cases of murder, the *akil* of the perpetrator's clan would be held responsible for seeing that the murderer was identified and turned over to authorities. However, this method of dealing with crime conflicted sharply with Somali traditional methods revolving around *heer* and often extensive negotiations between clans about compensation, approaches which carefully protected individual clan members from retribution or punishment by outsiders. Clan solidarity in the face of such incidents was generally held as a paramount value, so clans were frequently reluctant to turn over wayward members to external authorities. This put *akils* in a difficult position, forced to maneuver between their clan and the British authorities. Some managed to successfully balance these competing demands and expectations placed upon them; those who did not earned either the disrespect and approbation of their clans, or replacement by the British as a result. *Akils* were also given limited judicial authority over a rudimentary system of courts, although here too their powers remained relatively limited, as both British District Commissioners and British-appointed Muslim *Kadis* played leading roles in adjudicating disputes.

The British also brought about noticeable changes in traditional clan politics through their determination to minimize and manage inter-clan conflicts. Over the course of their presence they became increasingly involved as mediators and to some extent as guarantors of inter-clan agreements. Although *heer* negotiated within or between genealogical groups had traditionally existed purely as oral agreements (and even in this form often lasted for generations), a practice of committing these agreements to paper and placing them on file with the British authorities developed. This represents a

potentially fundamental alteration in the traditional *heer* system. Historically the *heer* system had been self-contained and self-limiting, relying upon the necessary interdependence of Somalis for its enforcement and relevance. As the British began to occupy a position as a higher, external authority that could be appealed to in order to enforce the *heer* or to otherwise intervene, traditional bonds of interdependence were consequently reshaped and weakened.⁴⁷ It is also likely that these changing practices made the *heer* system more rigid, and the contracts less open to re-negotiation.

The post-World War II era saw some significant changes in the rule of both territories. In the north, changing global attitudes towards colonial possessions began to have an impact. Lewis notes that by the late-1940s, “the old care and maintenance policy of the past [had] been at last decisively abandoned in favour of more progressive policies.”⁴⁸ The early Somali resistance to taxation and particularly to the introduction of Western-style education in the Protectorate, to which the British had readily acquiesced in the early colonial period, dissipated, and more active efforts were undertaken to promote education, agriculture, and infrastructure development. Meanwhile, after initially losing Somaliland to Italian control early in World War II, the British eventually gained control of the entire Horn. With the blessing of the United Nations, they continued to administer the former Italian colony in the south throughout the 1940s, where their liberalizing (or “liberating”) policies in the political and economic arenas were generally welcomed by Somalis. However, in 1950, the UN handed control of the south back to Italy, although this time Italy was tightly bound by a Trusteeship agreement that required that they prepare Somalia for independence in ten years time.

⁴⁷ For specific examples of this see Simons, *Networks of Dissolution*, 43 for a discussion of Marlowe’s findings among the Barsana.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *Modern History*, 131-132.

3.4 Preparation for Transition: The Emergence of Nationalism and Political Parties

Under British rule, the political arena in the south was liberalized during the late 1940s and Somali participation in governance was advanced. Prior to this, the Italians had maintained strict control. Somalis had had little decision-making power in government structures, and virtually no opportunity for political organization or action outside of traditional clan politics, for example, at the national or cross-clan level. The nascent reaction against Italian colonial rule that had started to develop, particularly among the handful of educated and employed, could only be channeled through secret gatherings. The British, however, rebuilt the administrative structure, particularly at the local government level, creating “tribal assemblies” with elected Somali leaders to liaise with the administration, and advisory councils which tackled a wide range of social and economic problems at the district and regional levels, one of the first experiences of southern Somalis with formal electoral politics. The British also promoted training and advancement of Somali cadres in the civil service and police forces, laying the groundwork for increasing Somali dominance of these institutions.

However, the most significant manifestation of the new British policy was the new-found freedom to organize politically. Somalis quickly took advantage of the opportunity, forming numerous clubs and associations, the most important of which was the Somali Youth Club founded in 1943. Changing its name to the Somali Youth League (SYL) in 1947, this party rapidly spread throughout the country, and was to dominate Somali national politics for the next two decades. Particularly in its earliest years, the SYL represented a broad, cross-clan coalition. As in the past, Somalis were able to achieve some degree of unity primarily amidst growing opposition to rule by foreign powers. Nevertheless, not everyone was satisfied with the SYL’s ability to represent

their interests, and a number of more narrowly clan-based organizations also formed to compete with the SYL, most notably the Hizbia Digil-Mirifle Somali (HDMS), formed in 1947 primarily to represent the interests of the more agriculturally-based Digil and Rahanweyn clans and the southern Bantu and Arab populations that lived alongside them.

The SYL's agenda included promoting the interests and education of Somalis generally, and promoting a written script for the Somali language, as well as uniting "all Somalis generally, and the youth especially with the consequent repudiation of all harmful old prejudices (such as, for example, tribal and clan distinctions)."⁴⁹ The SYL's founding members represented a broad cross-section of Somali lineages – their bias was not one of clan. However, it could not be said that the SYL's founders represented a true cross-section of Somali society as a whole, representing, as they did, only a narrow spectrum of it – the educated and employed (as clerks, civil servants, etc.), who were increasingly to become Somalia's elites and the dominant actors in the political arena. As Ahmed I. Samatar observes, the traders, merchants, and literate, including a few educated religious leaders, made up the bulk of not only the SYL but most of the leading political parties. In fact,

the relationship between the centers of the independence parties and the rest of Somali society was hardly close-knit. Almost all the parties, and especially the dominant three or four, were primarily urban-bound, with a negligible female membership. These two deficiencies alone go a long way to demonstrate their exclusivity. The majority of Somalis were in the remote hinterland – though attached to the market economy through trade – busily eking out a living. In these areas, old patriarchal, kinship, and clanist relations were deeply rooted, and most aspects of "modernism" which spread from the cities barely touched the surface of people's lives. . . . Yet, despite their weaknesses, the parties of independence . . . did make significant contributions. They attempted to counter – not always successfully – traditional centrifugal tendencies . . .⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

⁵⁰ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 57.

The individuals described by Samatar were those who had begun to form relationships and allegiances outside of the traditionally dominant boundaries of genealogy, and had begun to think in terms of national or pan-Somali interests, seeing a unified national approach as the only hope for throwing off the yoke of colonial rule. At the same time, they tended to reject traditional Somali practices – to which they had tenuous bonds, and by which their own ascendancy was challenged – and equated all of traditional politics with *fragmentary* clanism. In these attitudes, they reflected the trend among nationalist movements throughout the continent.⁵¹ Of particular concern to the nationalists was abolishing collective responsibility for payment of blood compensation (*diya*), as this system of group protection of the individual was considered one of the main pillars upon which continued allegiance to lineage – and thus, in their view, fragmentation – rested. To progress, they believed, would require a “modern” political system with “modern” political leaders – i.e., Somalis like themselves.

Under the UN Trusteeship in the 1950s, the Italians advanced Somali political participation still further, taking explicit steps toward self rule through increasing Somalization of the civil service and police, and creation in 1950 of an “embryonic legislature.”⁵² This national Territorial Council, comprised of representatives of both clan interests and the new political parties and associations, had among its responsibilities the review of government decrees and ordinances. In 1956 this body evolved into a full-fledged legislative body with 70 seats, 10 of them reserved for representatives of ethnic

⁵¹ See for example Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 99-117.

⁵² Lewis, *Modern History*, 144.

minorities. Although still subordinate to the Italian governor, this legislature had full statutory powers subject only to his veto.

At the local level, power was gradually devolved to rural District Councils and Municipal Councils in the towns. Disrupted by clan rivalries and local political struggles, District Councils progressed slowly and remained limited to a consultative role. The Municipal Councils, on the other hand, “were not so directly affected by the exigencies of the nomadic life,” and thus, according to Lewis, proved much more effective than their rural counterparts. By 1956, the 48 Municipal Councils had considerable financial and political autonomy.⁵³ Municipal Council seats were open to elections in 1954, and those of District Councils in 1955.

According to Lewis, Somalis took to the electoral process with considerable zeal,⁵⁴ but early on there were signs of some of the complexities and complications of introducing multiparty politics into Somalis’ clan-based socio-political culture. One of these was the tendency toward political party fragmentation and factionalism, often along clan lines. In the first municipal elections in 1954, a surprising 16 parties contested at the polls. Although these had consolidated to six by the 1956 national elections, this might nevertheless have been taken as a warning sign in a society vaunted for its ethnic and cultural homogeneity. At the same time, the seemingly contradictory tendency toward one-party domination of the political arena was also apparent early on, as the SYL consistently won more than half of the seats contested in each election. Analysts note, however, that this apparent contradiction between fragmentation into many parties while one party remained large and continued to dominate can be explained by the fact that the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵⁴ I have not, however, been able to find any figures on turnout for any of the elections mentioned.

SYL, while remaining successful at presenting a united national front, was itself suffering from deep internal fractures.

One unusual feature of these early elections was the radically different “voting” procedures employed in the urban and rural areas. In municipal areas, a typical Western-style approach was used with registered voter lists and secret ballots. However, because this proved too difficult and costly for the Italians in the rural areas, clan or sub-clan members instead met in *shir* and put together block lists of votes for each candidate. Votes were not secret, and hence voters (there was only male suffrage at this stage) were subject to pressure, and vote counts were open to manipulation. Lewis notes that it was not unusual for the total number of votes submitted to exceed (admittedly uncertain) population estimates.⁵⁵

Although, as mentioned above, the British also began taking a more progressive attitude in the north, they opened the political arena to Somalilanders much more slowly. While the Italians were to be forced to grant independence to the south in 1960 by the UN, the British anticipated that this step was still a long way off in the north. Education and development efforts were increased substantially, although Lewis notes that the region nonetheless was still “very lightly administered.”⁵⁶ In addition, township councils were formed in the major towns to participate in local administration, and a Protectorate Advisory Council was formed in 1946. The Advisory Council was comprised of representatives of both “old” (e.g., clan) and “new” (e.g., traders, parties) interests, but it met only twice per year and did not have the same powers and responsibilities as the Territorial Council in the south. It was not until 1957, as it became increasingly clear that

⁵⁵ Lewis, *Modern History*, 145.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

mounting nationalist sentiments were also propelling British Somaliland toward independence, that a council with legislative responsibilities was formed, while the former Advisory Council was renamed the House of Elders and continued to serve an advisory role as the equivalent of an upper house. The British thus, in effect, introduced an early form of indigenization into Somaliland. Seats on the new legislative council were not opened to electoral competition until 1959. The governor's appointments in 1957 were based on clan rather than party affiliation, as the British argued – correctly according to Lewis, but regressively according to Samatar – that this was still the most salient means of representing competing interests in the Protectorate. Lewis argues with some justification (as discussed above) that at this point parties still failed to represent the majority of the people, but Samatar counters that the British fomented the continuation of clanist cleavages for their own purposes by ignoring the burgeoning political parties.⁵⁷ In 1957, as in the south, voting was by secret ballot in municipalities, but by acclamation in the rural areas; here too, suffrage was limited to men.

In the rural areas, however, rather than attempting to create representative councils, the British “localized” the administration by appointing selected *akils* as local authorities. Lewis notes several important outcomes of this process. First, since the new positions in theory granted the *akil* expanded powers beyond those of traditional lineage leaders, the plan was initially met with resistance. But once it was recognized that these additional powers existed in principle more than in practice, there was growing competition, among and within lineages, to garner these positions. From the perspective of the lineage as a whole, having a clan member holding a position as a “local authority” granted status. Within lineages, individuals competed for access to the salary and related perks. This

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153, and Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 46-48.

initiated a pattern of fragmentation that still continues, as successively smaller genealogical sub-units rejected the leadership at higher levels of aggregation, and sought the prestige and resources attached to obtaining a position for an officially designated clan representative.⁵⁸ Thus, as Lewis notes, “In practice there was hardly any appreciable change in the pattern of authority, except in the titles which clan headmen now bore. Yet the modest salary of not more than £15 monthly which went with the title attracted many rival applicants, and the position of Local Authority soon came to be regarded as synonymous with group independence.”⁵⁹

“Modern” nationalist political sentiments also began to coalesce in the northwest during this period much as they had in the south, culminating in the introduction of the SYL to the Protectorate in 1947, as well as the formation of the Somali National League (SNL) in the same year. The SNL’s agenda closely mirrored that of the SYL; the organization owed its separate existence in part to northern concerns, particularly among the dominant Isaaq clan, that the SYL was too “Darood-dominated.”⁶⁰ Another major player, the National United Front (NUF), formed in the mid-1950s amidst Somali anger over British handover of critical grazing lands in a region known as the Haud to Ethiopian control and the mounting nationalist pressure which resulted. In both the north and the south, however, Lewis notes the increasing, albeit loose, clan affiliations of even the largest and most cross-cutting of these nationalist parties. He indicates, for example, that by the late 1950s just prior to independence, most Isaaq in the northwest (the largest clan) supported the SNL, although one sub-clan, the Habr Tol Ja’alo, dominated the

⁵⁸ For example, a given sub-clan, made up of three lineages, *a*, *b*, and *c*, might initially have one *akil* from lineage *a* appointed as a local authority. But before long, individuals from lineages *b* and *c* might claim rights to this post, leading to fragmentation and demands from lineages *b* and *c* that the *akils* of their own lineages must be advanced to the title of local authority.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Modern History*, 149.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

NUF, while the smaller Dir and Darood populations in the Protectorate tended to support the SYL.⁶¹

Meanwhile in the south, the HDMS continued to represent the interests of the agrarian Digil and Rahanweyn communities, although new laws forbidding parties from bearing clan names had forced the party to change its name (although they managed to preserve their acronym). The SYL, meanwhile, was increasingly torn between Hawiye and Darood factions. Generally the parties all shared the common goals of independence and unification of all Somali-inhabited territories, although they differed in details such as the pace, and perhaps most significantly, in their beliefs about the nature of the state that should be created. The HDMS, in particular, reflected its members' particularistic interests and their concern about domination by the pastoral interests of the other four clan families. It therefore advocated that rather than the unitary, centralized system of rule advocated by the SYL, the new state should be federal with regional autonomy for the riverine zones inhabited by its constituent clans. Lewis concludes that these divisions and shifting allegiances reflected what, "put in its simplest terms, was partly a matter of conflicting policies, partly a struggle for power between individuals, and at the same time also a question of competing clan interests."⁶² This dynamic continued to operate after independence, with critical, and eventually devastating, impacts, as we shall see in the following sections. First, I will step aside to make an overall assessment of the impacts of the European colonial era on indigenous Somali political and social institutions.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

3.5 The Colonial Era: Assessing the Socio-Political Impacts

Lewis observes that “In general, the Somalis, with their well-deserved reputation for sturdy independence, were ruled with a light hand,”⁶³ suggesting that the overall impacts of the colonial era were relatively minor, particularly in the British Protectorate, though less so in the Italian-run south. However, there is much evidence, even in Lewis’s own works, to suggest that in fact the impacts were quite profound and far reaching, particularly with respect to the Somali conduct of politics. It may be true that when colonial interventions in the Somali territories are compared to those in other countries, the relative depth of penetration and degree of external control appears to be much less. And in the northwest, there was very little of the European-settler phenomenon to deal with. However, when the nature of the colonial states in the north and south are instead compared to the pre-colonial situation, the differences are much more stark. Some of these, as discussed below, are changes that were felt throughout colonial Africa, while others – perhaps the most important impacts – were so significant for Somalis precisely because their pre-colonial “pastoral democracy” political traditions were so unique.

The most significant of these changes was the imposition by Britain and Italy on a much wider and more penetrating scale than that achieved by the earlier petty sultanates, not just of centralized government, but of government itself, i.e., “government” as an entity distinct from “the governed,” or government as an independently structured body in which institutions – and individuals – could wield great power over the rest of society. In other words, they introduced a distinctly un-Somali means of managing politics. Somalis had had some experience of centralized political systems in the pre-European period. But these had, for the most part, been limited to the confines of towns and trading

⁶³ Lewis, “Uncentralised Somali Legacy,” 4.

centers, and the real extent of their powers was often quite narrow. They had certainly touched the majority of rural Somalis, particularly in the primarily pastoral areas, only peripherally. It was only during the European colonial era that this system of government was introduced to the entire society on a much more permanent, powerful, and pervasive basis than had been true in the past. It is critical to recognize that the colonial administrations did not therefore represent simply a different government from those Somalis had experienced in the past. They were a completely new kind of entity within Somali society, an outside “presence” or “force,” an “other,” a “them,” in contrast to Somalis conception of “us,” a perception that the non-Muslim identity of these new rulers would strongly reinforce.

Perhaps Lewis did not comment significantly on this aspect of colonial impact because he saw it as both a positive and an inevitable development. In his discussion of the impacts of Italian colonial rule in the south, Lewis suggests that despite the political repression Somalis experienced under the Italians in the early years of their rule, there were benefits to society as well:

In public buildings and roads, and in the plantation industry, the foundations of a modern colony had been created, the benefit of which, despite the many injustices committed against them, Somalis were to reap in the future. At the same time, in the less intractable conditions of their colony, a wider respect for law and order and *a more modern attitude towards centralized government* had been inculcated which was to prove of great importance in the future.⁶⁴ [italics supplied]

I will return to the discussion of whether imposing centralized government on Somali society was in fact a beneficial endeavor later in the discussion. For now, it is sufficient simply to observe that this was indeed a system that was inconsistent – and perhaps

⁶⁴ Lewis, *Modern History*, 112-113.

fundamentally incompatible – with Somalis’ traditional practices, and as such was a major disruption in the political life of Somali society.

Some of the other most significant impacts of colonialism have already been discussed, and these are not unique to Somalis. First, through a mixture of payment and co-optation, replacement and displacement of traditional leadership to accomplish their goals, both the British and the Italians had a profound impact on the role of – and respect for – traditional leadership. Under the colonial systems, some individuals gained titles, salaries, and at times powers that would never have accrued to one person under the traditional system of highly dispersed and informal sharing of power.

Secondly, of course, by creating a class – albeit a small one – of urbanized, Western educated and/or employed individuals at least as familiar with and interested in “modern” Western political systems as traditional Somali ones, they produced a radical shift in the balance of power within Somali society. By virtue of their newly-gained “insider’s knowledge” of these “modern” political systems, it was these individuals who stood to gain the most from their introduction to – or imposition on – Somali society, at the expense of the traditional political systems with which they had much more tenuous connections, and which certainly offered them fewer personal advantages. Thus, from a traditional society in which every individual had a voice and an equal opportunity to become a leading member, Somalis began the shift to a “modern” system in which a privileged few had the necessary knowledge of and skills for pivotal positions of power and control. These too represent extremely profound impacts on Somali political culture and practice, which Lewis seems to have underestimated.

While Lewis perhaps makes too light of the changes wrought by colonialism, Abdi I. Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar take the opposite position, arguing that Somali political

culture was virtually completely remade by the colonial intervention, and that by the time of independence very little remained of the traditional political practices and systems described by Lewis. They contend that the economic and political changes that had begun in the pre-colonial era under the pressure of external influences, which had already begun to corrode the traditional decision-making processes and to alter the balance of economic relations against pastoralist producers, were rapidly accelerated under colonial rule. Citing the commoditization of livestock production (usually on terms more favorable to livestock traders and merchants than to the pastoralist producers), the imposition of a colonial state, and the development of “non-traditional nodes of power” during the colonial era (i.e., the emerging elite class of merchants, traders, civil servants and other literati), Abdi I. Samatar charges that rather than the minor changes suggested by Lewis, “the significance of traditional relations has been changed almost out of recognition by the evolving interactions that have taken place between human beings.”⁶⁵ He argues that kinship relations and the way they are understood, used and manipulated, as well as the fundamental nature of institutions such as the *shir* and the informal leadership by *odayasha*, had shifted from the egalitarian ideal of pastoral democracy to the mere tools of emerging class-based conflict, manipulated by the new elites (the *petit-bourgeoisie*) for their own benefit. He pointedly accuses Lewis and other “traditionalists” of naiveté:

The imposition of colonial rule on stateless societies, the new dynamics of social relations, and the transformation of the pastoral economy are all deemed to be mere quantitative alterations in Somali society rather than fundamental modifications of pre-colonial tradition. By evading the qualitative nature of the changes experienced, the traditionalists are able to

⁶⁵ Samatar, “Destruction of State and Society,” 626.

avoid systematic analysis of any mutations of the social structures and the governing ethos that might have taken place in the last century.⁶⁶

Thus, these traditionalists, according to Samatar, still describe modern Somalis as egalitarian pastoral democrats, but without any recent evidence to support this – a “static reading of social history.”⁶⁷

But while Lewis underestimates the degree of damage to traditional practices and institutions, the poisoned view that the Samatars’ take of modern Somali political culture perhaps overestimates the degree of change and destruction. The colonial era did indeed deeply scar the democratic practices and institutions of nomadic Somalis, and these changes cannot be ignored. But at the same time, I will show in the coming chapters that while these institutions are by no means unchanged, neither are they destroyed, nor have they become purely tools of class warfare as the Samatars contend. Traditional practices of selecting leaders, or managing resources and conflicts, and of understanding one’s place in the community and society, still draw strongly on the historic roots described by Lewis. I will return to this issue at length later in the discussion.

3.6 Independence Part I: An Experiment with Multiparty Democracy

The conditions of Italy’s UN Trusteeship agreement stipulated that independence would be granted to the south in 1960. The British initially anticipated that the time line for independence in the north would proceed much more slowly. However, as nationalist sentiments grew within both territories during the 1940s and especially the 1950s, spurred on by both the emerging global trend toward decolonization, as well as such internal factors as Somalilanders’ intense anger over the British decision to release the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 627.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 628.

precious Haud grazing lands to Ethiopian control, the British soon came to realize that their days were also numbered, and they began making accelerated preparations for departure. Among the majority of Somalis, the desire grew not just to achieve independence from the Italians in the south and the British in the north, but to liberate all five of the Somali territories, including also the Northwest Frontier District or NFD under British rule as part of the colony of Kenya, French Somaliland (later Djibouti), and the Ogaden region under Ethiopian control, and to unite them into a nation and state of “Greater Somalia.” This dream of unity for all Somalis was a powerful force driving politics in both British Somaliland and Italian Somalia throughout the 1950s, and it motivated much of the foreign policy of the Republic of Somalia even through the 1970s. It stands in sharp contrast to both the historic patterns of fragmentary and shifting clan allegiances, and to the present trend of rebuilding based on smaller territories often associated primarily with a single clan or group of clans. While pan-Somali sentiment was high throughout the territories, and perhaps particularly so in the British Somaliland Protectorate, not surprisingly this desire for unity was advocated most strongly by nationalist politicians, those who saw their own future in national, rather than clan, politics.

Acceding to both the desire for independence and the desire for pan-Somali unity among the citizens of its Protectorate, the British granted Somaliland independence on June 26, 1960, just days before Italy released its hold on the south on July 1st. In preparation, during the first few months of 1960 hasty – and ultimately incomplete – arrangements were made between the two territories to unite on July 1st. Despite the fact that these arrangements were not technically completed, however, the union did in fact occur, and the Republic of Somalia was born. Borrowing especially from the Italian

model, the Somalis established a multiparty system with members of parliament chosen by direct election every four years, a president selected by parliament for a six year term, and a prime minister nominated by the president for parliamentary approval.

Significantly, as was the case throughout Africa during this period, the process of uniting the two territories and building a government structure was by and large controlled by the “modern” class of nationalists and politicians, and apparently little, if any, consideration was given to anything other than Western political models when the new structures were designed. In fact, throughout the 1960s, indigenous systems of politics remained at least as marginalized as they had been under colonial rule, and perhaps even more so. The new independence government continued to pay some *akils* and use them to communicate – usually from the top down – with “the people,” but they remained co-opted leaders with little real influence, and even the role of local advisory committees was marginal. Constitutionally, the country’s eight regions and 36 districts were to be run by individuals appointed by the Ministry of the Interior, while municipalities would have locally-elected mayors. But in reality, in the countryside it was the “traditional” system (changed though it was by years of colonial and other external influences) that continued to be the dominant political arena, and the role of local elders in managing local problems remained essential.

The new independence government immediately confronted a number of critical challenges. One of these was the need to reconcile the British and Italian administrative and judicial systems that had been established in each territory. This was initially a daunting task, but within several years, under the guidance of a special commission created to manage this effort, a considerable degree of success had been achieved.

A second, much more difficult task, was pursuing the pan-Somali goal of Greater Somalia. One significant part of this struggle was waged in the international arena, as the new government pursued an aggressive – but ultimately failed – diplomatic effort to gain control over the other Somali-inhabited territories. But perhaps the more important struggle – also apparently failed – was the one fought at home, the effort to win the allegiance of the Somali masses to nationalist ambitions rather than clans. While it was apparent in urban areas that clan allegiances were no longer the only source of identity that mattered, and that party, professional, neighborhood and religious ties could all compete with the claims of clan for loyalty, in the rural areas this was not the case.

According to Lewis:

With the increasing spread of western education, the growth of modern towns, and the gradual but quite unmistakable formation of new social classes, clan loyalties now fell into place as one component in a complex of diverse political attachments. Yet within this cluster of allegiances, for the majority of the population those bonds based on clanship – now extended much more widely than in traditional Somali politics – remained the most pervasive, the most commanding, and above all the most insidious. No other single line of communication and common interest connected so directly and incontrovertibly the pastoral nomad in the interior with his kinsmen in the civil service, in the National Assembly, or in the cabinet itself. No other bond of mutual interest had so many far-reaching ramifications in all aspects of private and public life.⁶⁸

Nationalist politicians had been debating the so-called “problem of tribalism” since before independence. From their perspective,

While acknowledging the associated values of generosity and assistance, and the highly democratic traditional political process where policy-making is not the monopoly of a small privileged class but the natural right of every adult man, the other divisive aspects of their political heritage were fiercely condemned.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Lewis, *Modern History*, 166-167.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

But the solution, from the perspective of the nationalists, was not to be found in accommodating clanism or building a system that could explicitly function in the context of this powerful social and political force. Rather, their efforts focused on seeking to legislate clan sentiment out of existence when possible, and to wish it out of existence when legislation did not suffice. Yet in one of the great contradictions in Somali politics, Lewis ironically observes that even those who feared or despised clanism the most remained beholden to it: “However unwillingly, all politicians and parties had, perforce, to utilize these bonds of kinship in attaining their political aims.”⁷⁰ Even as they viewed continuing clan allegiances as a permanent threat to the stability of the new Republic, they nevertheless rarely hesitated to use these ties to secure their positions.

The continuing centrality of clan affiliation played out in several ways on the national political stage. Most noticeably, the public – or rather, each clan – tended to keep careful tabs on the distribution of key government positions. It was always considered critical, for example, that the cabinet contain a reasonable balance of representatives from all the major clans, as well as maintaining an acceptable north-south balance. Nationalist politicians might have lamented the fact that selections could be made based at least as much on clan identity as on merit, but again, they themselves frequently played by these rules for the sake of their own political survival. One source of growing competition and resentment among clans arose out of the perceived Darood hegemony within the SYL, which was the ruling party, and hence their tendency to dominate the highest posts of government. In contrast, many Isaaq became disaffected with the union government because of their loss of status after independence, as they shifted from being the clearly dominant clan within the British Protectorate, to a second-

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

rank clan within the much larger Republic. However, at times they also aligned themselves with the Dir and Hawiye to counter Darood dominance.

The focus on clan and kinship was also apparent within the political party arena. While in the early years after independence, explicitly clan-based parties were still the exception (although several did exist), it was widely recognized that even the national parties often represented particular multi-clan alliances, and that there were competing, clan-affiliated factions within some of the largest parties such as the SYL.

The other enormous challenge faced by Somalia's government after independence was overcoming the country's extremely weak revenue base. While the British established their Protectorate intending that it should be financially self-sufficient, this had long ceased to be the case. Both the British and the Italian governments had eventually invested large quantities in their holdings, both to maintain day-to-day operations, and to undertake development and infrastructure projects. There was thought to be little hope that the newly independent country could stand on its own, and consequently virtually no effort invested in achieving such a feat, either through expanding the productive base of the economy, or improving revenue collection. Even less thought appears to have been given to developing a more circumscribed state apparatus based on realistic expectations of what could be expected or accomplished with limited resources. In fact, the Republic of Somalia, throughout its existence, was to remain exceptionally dependent on external sources – first the former colonial powers, and later a succession of superpower suitors motivated by Cold War politics – for its financial survival. This fact had major, eventually devastating, consequences for the state, which I will touch on briefly here, and discuss in more detail in later sections.

As noted, prior to independence Britain had steadily allocated increasing resources to the Protectorate, in part in an unsuccessful effort to defuse mounting nationalist agitation, but also because they had little choice given the ailing state of the economy. By the 1958-59 budget cycle just before independence, Britain was providing annual budgetary subsidies to Somaliland that amounted to more than 50 percent of the total, highlighting the underdevelopment of domestic sources of revenue.⁷¹ The situation was no better in the Italian colony, where:

On the eve of independence, the emerging post-colonial state in Somalia was marked, *inter alia*, by . . . (2) economic foundations afflicted with a large and neglected subsistence sector, yet articulated to international and regional markets; (3) peasant productivity hobbled by usurious credit practices of middle traders; and (4) exceedingly poor infrastructures, chronic balance-of-payments deficits, and acute dependence on foreign beneficence to assuage annual deficits.⁷²

In itself, independence could, of course, change nothing. The lack of an adequate revenue base forced the government to depend on external donors even to balance the ordinary budget; there was no internal capacity to go beyond this, and donors underwrote 100 percent of the cost of the nation's first development plan for 1963-67.⁷³ By 1969, the per capita aid inflow was among the highest on the continent.⁷⁴

But worse than this initial state of dependence was the acceptance of the situation by Somali politicians, and their lack of effort to do anything to improve it. They did make some efforts to increase tax revenues through the usual sources – placing new stock and poll taxes on the heads of the nomads – but they met with fierce resistance and made

⁷¹ Abdi Samatar and A.I. Samatar, "The Material Roots of the Suspended African State: Arguments from Somalia," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (December 1987): 677.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 677, citing Mark Karp, *The Economics of Trusteeship in Somalia* (Boston, 1960), especially chapter 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 680.

⁷⁴ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 122.

little real progress.⁷⁵ In fact, rather than trying to take steps to resurrect the economy, stimulate production and expand the revenue base, they simply became predators upon the existing revenue stream that consisted primarily of donor resources. Abdi I. and Ahmed I. Samatar observe that “The absence of a dynamic and expanding productive base made access to state resources, and their distribution, the central object of competition and envy,”⁷⁶ and so “the new rulers focused their attention on fierce competition over the distribution of the potentially lucrative vacancies to be filled.”⁷⁷

The outcome in the “democratic” political arena was ultimately devastating both to the system, and to the economy and the country’s very future: “In the end, the contest over parliamentary seats in the First Republic (1960-4) was not about the future developmental orientation of Somalia; rather, it was a race to see who would control the central organs of the state and, consequently, its resources.”⁷⁸ Politics became not a dialogue between the state and the productive sectors of society aimed at building the economy – in fact, the central government “made no tangible efforts to establish dialogue with the majority of Somali citizens, the rural population.”⁷⁹ – but rather a steadily intensifying competition among the members of the elite for access to the spoils of power.

This discouraging trend in Somali politics became increasingly apparent in successive elections held in the decade after independence. The actual conduct of polls in Somalia was in fact relatively open and fair, with opposition parties allowed to freely contest against the ruling SYL. In fact, especially during the early 1960s, Somalia was

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁶ Samatar and Samatar, “Material Roots,” 681.

⁷⁷ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 63.

⁷⁸ Samatar and Samatar, “Material Roots,” 681-682.

⁷⁹ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 65.

often commended as a model of democracy in Africa.⁸⁰ But beneath this veneer of apparently functional and effective democracy, the multiparty system was beginning a slow disintegration. Impending trouble was already apparent as early as the 1964 general elections. While the polling itself went relatively smoothly, a rather unwieldy total of 18 parties participated, only three of which were truly national parties; the rest were small, often clan-based organizations. The SYL won more than half the seats in parliament, while the remainder were distributed among other major and minor parties. Noting that 21 of the 53 “opposition” MPs crossed the floor and joined the SYL immediately after the elections, Samatar observes that

The obvious if unpalatable explanation for this sudden shift was office-seeking to recover the expenses of campaigning. From then on, the mushrooming of esoteric parties before elections and the strengthening of the ruling party after elections became hallmarks of Somali “democracy.”⁸¹

Although steps were eventually taken to try to prevent this proliferation of parties, multiparty politics grew even more chaotic by the time of the next general elections in 1969. In response to the increasing reliance on fellow clan members to secure spoils in the political system, “the most abiding interest of each major local voting block [was] to place a kinsman in a ‘chair’ (as they expressively put it) in the national assembly.”⁸² Some 62 parties put up more than 1000 candidates for just 123 parliamentary seats – Somalia had more political parties per capita than any other democratic country except

⁸⁰ Lewis, *Modern History*, 201, and Abdulahi Yusuf Farah, “Political Actors in Somalia’s Emerging *de facto* Entities: Civil-Military Relations in Somaliland and Northeast Somalia,” unpublished draft manuscript, January 2000, 7.

⁸¹ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 67.

⁸² Ioan M. Lewis, “Nationalism and Particularism in Somalia,” in *Tradition and Transition in East Africa: Studies of the Tribal Element in the Modern Era*, ed. P.H. Gulliver (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 353, cited by Simons, *Networks of Dissolution*, 44.

Israel.⁸³ Lewis notes that “Despite electoral regulations designed to discourage one-man lineage or clan parties . . . most of those who sought election . . . campaigned on a clan basis.”⁸⁴ This time, all but one MP, the former prime minister, ‘Abdirizaaq Haaji Hussein, crossed the floor and joined the SYL; Lewis quotes figures as high as £15,000 per seat being spent in the quest for votes, and it did not pay to remain a member of the opposition.⁸⁵

This fluidity of party identity further suggests that ultimately clan identity had become a much more critical component of a candidate’s identity and a politician’s role than party affiliation. The result of this interaction between clan identity and multiparty politics thus evolved into a strange mixed system in which proliferating parties coexisted with one-party rule. Lewis observes that “Somalia had succumbed to one party rule in a political context where, in the absence of acute external pressures, internal divisions along clan lines were highlighted, as each major clan sought to gain at least one seat in order to secure part of the spoils of power.” Yet even as each clan sought to position its own representative, Lewis observes how corrupted and unrepresentative the system had become: “The National Assembly was no longer the symbol of free speech and fair play for all citizens. It was now widely regarded cynically as a sordid market-place where, with little concern for the interests of those who had voted for them, deputies traded their votes for personal gain.”⁸⁶

Given Somalia’s purported status as a democracy, an obvious and critical question is how the public reacted to this steady deterioration in political practice that so

⁸³ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 69.

⁸⁴ Lewis, “Uncentralised Somali Legacy,” 7.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *Modern History*, 204.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

thoroughly violated Somali political tradition. The answer is: relatively passively. . . . Ahmed I. Samatar notes that despite the failing economy and some public anger over the conduct of the 1969 elections, the countryside was calm. He attributes this to the nature of a still largely rural and pastoralist society, where social classes and a sense of a common interest are relatively unformed, and to the lack of significant popular consciousness: “These two factors . . . go a long way towards explaining why pressures from below were not visible in the Somali political terrain of late 1969.”⁸⁷ He goes on to add that:

The political machinations and bargaining taking place in Moqdishu and other urban centers may also have convinced the pastoralists that traditional democratic practices had either fallen by the wayside or, where they survived, been grotesquely distorted. The ‘commercialization’ of debate and discussion (*shir*) may well have been an affront to rural sensibilities and a source of profound disenchantment.⁸⁸

A combination of disenchantment and lack of organized or consolidated class consciousness may have contributed, then, to the complete disengagement of most Somalis from the political process. A severe disconnect had emerged between a people steeped in their own particular set of democratic political traditions, and a so-called democratic system that was not only based on a significantly different – and unfamiliar – political model, but that had also become grossly corrupted and divorced from Somali economic and social realities. In the traditional system, all Somalis were in effect politicians, and knowledge and understanding of the system and ability to work within it to achieve desired outcomes was widespread. But the “modern” multiparty democratic system was a different world, requiring special knowledge, knowledge controlled by a small class of increasingly privileged politicians. Even though both were called

⁸⁷ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 73-75.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

“democratic” systems, it is unlikely that rural Somalis saw any connection between their own indigenous way of doing things, and what they saw elite, educated, urbanized politicians doing in distant Mogadishu. Their sense of rights in or ability to take control over such a political system was negligible, and the elites, absolutely aware of this, took full advantage of the situation.

There is one way, however, in which rural Somalis did make use of the political system, relying again on the all-important kinship system. Lewis observes that “cabinet ministers and wealthy urban merchants were still strongly bound to their rural cousins, who looked to them for employment and preferment.”⁸⁹ Laitin and Samatar add that “the big men provide jobs, lucrative construction permits, outright *cash* payments, and other forms of patronage to certain influential clan members and their families in return for the latter’s ability to deliver the clan’s support.”⁹⁰ This is in fact one way in which the relatively egalitarian tradition, linked with the power of kinship ties, has extended into modern Somali politics. In the 1960s – and still today – it is possible for virtually any Somali to call on any relative of his own clan for assistance, hospitality, or requests for favors, and Somalis have and continue to make use of this extremely open system of access even up to the highest levels of power. This helps to explain why despite so many other failures of the system, many Somalis did still see advantage in trying to ensure that “one of their own” – i.e., a fellow clansman – attained high position. In exchange, “the merchants and ministers in turn benefited from this rural support in situations – such as elections – where they needed it.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ahmed I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 74, citing Ioan M. Lewis, “The Nation, State, and Politics in Somalia,” in *The Search for National Integration in Africa*, eds. R. Smock and Kwamena Bensti-Enchill (New York: Free Press, 1976), 290.

⁹⁰ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 46.

⁹¹ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 74, citing Lewis, “Nation, State, and Politics,” 290.

But for the vast majority of Somalis, this superficially democratic system was unable to produce any significant benefits, and in fact most politicians appeared indifferent to the plight of the increasingly impoverished population. By the late 1960s, public disenchantment with the turn that the political system had taken was palpable as the government increasingly failed to produce results. According to Lewis:

In the opinion of the more disillusioned critics, democracy had lapsed into commercialized anarchy and strong rule of a new type was urgently required if the country was to be rescued from the morass of poverty, insecurity and inefficiency into which it had sunk.⁹²

But public action in response to this disenchantment was nowhere evident. Change was instead instigated by a competing section of the elite class, the military leadership. A police guard assassinate the President of the Republic, Abdurashid Ali Sharmarke, in early October 1969,⁹³ paralyzing the government as politicians jockeyed for position yet again. In the ensuing vacuum, the military, under the leadership of Mohamed Siyad Barre, staged a coup later in the month, bringing about the “easy and unmourned demise of democracy.”⁹⁴

3.7 Independence Part II: The Siyad Barre Era

Many commentators have noted with irony “the ease, indeed the enthusiasm, with which the traditionally democratic Somalis accepted General Mahammad Siyaad Barre’s bloodless coup” in October 1969. Laitin and Samatar go on to add that “Although few Somalis knew at the time what the future held, their ready acquiescence to the wholesale suspension of their civil liberties by the new military regime was an eloquent indication

⁹² Lewis, *Modern History*, 206.

⁹³ Although Lewis indicates that rumors of an impending military intervention were rampant at the time (Lewis, *Modern History*, 206), the assassination was entirely unexpected and there does not seem to be any evidence that the military or other political rivals were behind it.

⁹⁴ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 75.

of the extent of the public's disenchantment with democratic politics.”⁹⁵ Aside from unification – and even that was only partially successful – independence had brought nothing to most Somalis. Moreover, in the view of many, the military represented the most professional, un-clan-biased institution of the state,⁹⁶ so there was great hope that under military leadership Somalis could again hope to progress and achieve all they felt they were capable of.

Promising to fight against corruption and tribalism, the new regime immediately abolished the constitution, the National Assembly, and the Supreme Court, outlawed all political activities, including political parties, and put in their place the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), which was to lead Somalis out of the morass that had overtaken the country's politics. Openings on the SRC were typically filled by young, often unknown civil servants and technocrats, raising hopes that merit rather than clan would be the basis for appointments in the future. However, analysts disagree about the extent to which the necessity of maintaining clan balance did in fact continue to shape the government. Laitin and Samatar suggest that in these early years of “The Revolution” Somalia did indeed become a meritocracy and that appointments were no longer carefully scrutinized by the public to assess the current standing of each clan,⁹⁷ but other evidence contradicts this assertion, and suggests that Siyad Barre, too, had to play by this rule of modern Somali politics. The SRC also acted rapidly to centralize control in Mogadishu even more than had been the case in the previous government, for example by appointing military governors and district chairmen throughout the country.

⁹⁵ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 154.

⁹⁶ Farah, “Political Actors,” 8.

⁹⁷ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 79.

It was roughly a year later, after Siyad Barre had secured his position as head of the new regime, that he introduced “Scientific Socialism” as the guiding policy framework for the Republic. Under this broad rubric were gathered an array of policies aimed at “modernizing” Somali society, from promoting community participation – albeit often through mandatory provision of labor from every family – in local development projects, to literacy campaigns, advancement of women’s rights, and perhaps most significantly, to a declaration of war on “tribalism.” Proclaiming that “Socialism unites, tribalism divides,” Siyad Barre set out upon a public course to eradicate all vestiges of the genealogically-based roots of Somali society and politics, both figuratively and literally. In public ceremonies, effigies of tribalism were symbolically buried or burned, and any mention of clan, one’s own or another’s, was banned, punishable by fines and imprisonment. Ahmed I. Samatar reports that “the issue weighed so heavily on the minds of the new leadership that no speech of President Barre or his associates failed to underline the evils of ‘tribalism’ and the punishment that would befall those who still cling to it.”⁹⁸ Identifying *diya* payments as one of the key traditional practices that forced Somalis to continue to associate with their kin, these payments were outlawed and the death penalty was introduced in their stead. In many respects Siyad Barre’s message repeated what Somalis had been hearing from nationalists since before independence – that divisive clan loyalties must be abandoned and pan-Somali unity pursued in order for the country to progress and succeed. But Barre’s regime certainly implemented this policy with a force and vigor new to Somalis, and which many initially welcomed.

The efforts to replace traditional society and allegiances with “modern” nationalist ones also significantly affected the role of traditional elders. Until this time, many had

⁹⁸ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 107.

continued to receive government stipends as *akils* or as titled elders, but Siyad Barre abolished all of these positions, renaming the elders *nabadoon*, or peace makers. Ahmed Yusuf Farah (2000) describes the aims and outcomes this way:

The extent of social engineering sought by the military rulers was evident in their attempt to change even the traditional role of the clan heads – an important element of the junta’s struggle against the stated triple threat to Somali society of ‘tribalism, ignorance and hunger.’ These traditional offices were officially abolished, given a new function defined as ‘peace-seekers,’ and officially became government employees who could theoretically be transferred to any clan territory in the country.⁹⁹

The government undertook aggressive efforts to eliminate all intra- and inter-clan conflict in the countryside, with some assistance from the *nabadoon*, but otherwise, traditional leadership played even less of a role in governance and political life than they had under the previous civilian government.

Siyad Barre’s efforts to improve the position of women constituted another drastic attempt at social engineering, and he gained much support among Somali women for his efforts. He promoted education for women and girls, and, amid much controversy, promulgated new laws giving women equal rights with men in inheritance and divorce, going so far as to execute ten sheikhs who publicly spoke out against this move. His efforts were less noticeable, however, in the composition of the government and among the ranks of other professionals; women still appeared only very occasionally in the upper echelons of the economic and political power structures.

Siyad Barre’s motivations for pursuing his “Scientific Socialist” agenda so aggressively are debatable. Some argue that Barre at least in part truly believed that modernization could result only if Somalis would throw off the outdated and backward practices and values of traditional, “pre-modern” society. In this, he would have shared a

⁹⁹ Farah, “Political Actors,” 11.

great deal with the nationalists of the independence movement, although many of these had lost sight of their goals during the civilian era.

But the rapid escalation in his autocratic tendencies, and his failure to truly promote the proclaimed goal of democracy and participation, suggests that Siyad Barre also had other goals in mind. Like the nationalists, Barre had recognized the difficulty of building a viable national state while the old allegiances to kin-groups remained strong, but when it was apparent that persuasion would not be effective in eliminating the latter, he was not above wiping out these alternative centers of loyalty by fiat and by force if necessary. In fact, Siyad Barre's actions appear to present a classic example of the response described by Englebert when competing sources of political loyalty interfered with the ability of Africa's post-independence rulers to establish the hegemony of the state (and themselves). He argued that these leaders had two choices: "they either tried to legitimate the state by forcing a new national identity upon their societies, or used its resources to create and sustain networks of support for their regime."¹⁰⁰ In the early years of his rule, Barre appears to have chosen the former, although as discussed below, as these efforts failed to achieve the intended goals he increasingly shifted towards the latter, neopatrimonial approach.

But how successful was Barre's attempt to recast his society in a new mold, or, for that matter, to eliminate alternative nodes of political loyalty and secure his position? The answer can only be: marginally, at best. And even then, successes were only noticeable in the early stages of his rule, primarily between 1969 and 1974. In these first few years of the revolution, progress in some areas was in fact substantial. The most noted success was in selecting a script for the Somali language – an issue that had

¹⁰⁰ Englebert, *State Legitimacy*, 97.

produced contentious debate and consequently remained unresolved throughout the era of civilian government. Once Somali could be written, for the first time, in a consistent fashion, it was possible to launch a massive literacy campaign throughout the country in the early 1970s which produced significant results. The self-help ethos promoted by the regime also yielded some important outputs in local development as communities were mobilized to participate in construction and other projects. Laitin and Samatar comment on the early success in instilling more of a self-reliant “can-do” attitude in the public, sparking both individual and group initiative, something which both the colonial and the civilian administrations had completely failed to do.¹⁰¹ And with government support and newly constructed accommodations, access to schools and clinics was much improved in many parts of the country (with the support of government salaries for teachers, nurses, and others).

However, in the economic, political and cultural realms, his success was much more limited. Despite gains in certain sectors, the national economy showed little sign of improvement, and the agriculture sector in particular continued to suffer neglect.¹⁰² Politically, too, Barre failed to live up to his promise to Somali society to build the foundations for a truly democratic and participatory polity. Even as his public statements lauded the “democratic nature of socialism,” Samatar observes that “The divide between such statements and the palpable authoritarianism of Somali politics was becoming difficult to conceal.”¹⁰³ In fact the political arena had narrowed substantially, for the most part leaving room only for Siyad Barre and some of his closest advisors. Lewis notes that “While the President regularly exhorted his local representatives to act as

¹⁰¹ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 114-116.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁰³ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 111.

channels of communication faithfully relaying the ideas and aspirations of his subjects to him, this pervasive apparatus of state control was hardly conducive to an effective dialogue between rulers and ruled.”¹⁰⁴ As in the past, the public soon concluded that it had little role to play in governance, and it withdrew to the sidelines, recognizing that “reticence was clearly the safest policy.”¹⁰⁵

Possibly with the encouragement of his Soviet sponsors, in 1976 Siyad Barre did take steps ostensibly aimed at opening the system to the public, including abolishing the SRC, introducing the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) in its place, and officially making the transition from a military to a civilian regime. But in practice, little changed, and the party did not achieve widespread popularity or participation. As local delegates and councilors continued to be appointed by the central government even at the level of village councils, Samatar points out that “during these charades local autonomy – ostensibly the main objective – was almost absent, as the sole criterion for successful nomination and election was the delegate’s ‘reliability’ as a regime supporter.”¹⁰⁶

Despite these failings, the regime did maintain a considerable degree of popular support through its first few years. But as Barre’s failures to live up to his proclaimed agenda were mounting, the gradual weakening of support was rapidly exacerbated by two crises the government confronted and failed to address satisfactorily. The first was a severe drought that struck the region in 1974-75, which devastated the already struggling economy and population. The second was the disastrous Ogaden war instigated by Somalia in 1977 in an effort to lay claim to the Somali-inhabited region of Ethiopia – an undertaking that can be understood as an effort to boost the regime’s sagging status

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, *Modern History*, 213-214.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁰⁶ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 111.

through resurrection of a popular cause and identification of an external enemy. The war began with great successes for the Somalis, and the revived dream of Greater Somalia rallied tremendous public support. But the Soviet decision to abandon its relationship with Somalia in favor of building ties with the Marxist regime in Ethiopia dealt a severe blow to the Somali war effort, and the initial victories were soon turned into an embarrassing rout.

This is seen by many as a critical transition point, as the tide of public sentiment turned against the regime, sparking speculation about a change in government. A coup attempt in 1978, led largely (though not exclusively) by disaffected Mijertejn military officers, decisively ended the more benevolent era of Barre's rule. As his attention turned inward, increasingly focused merely on self preservation and the survival of his regime, both the rhetoric of Scientific Socialism and the dream of Greater Somalia, not to mention the ideals of democracy and participation, were abandoned. According to Abdi I. Samatar, "Siyad and his cohorts . . . decided to fight this challenge with all means at their disposal and without any regard for the interest of the nation."¹⁰⁷

One such means became the selective use of clan. Some analysts contend that even in the earliest years of the junta, when merit was thought by many to have replaced clan as the necessary qualification for high government positions, maintaining clan balance remained a core principle of government to which Barre strictly adhered. Although Lewis acknowledges that many of the initial appointments to the SRC were qualified technocrats chosen for their skills rather than their clan, within just a few years, he argues, "Somali tribalism is plainly a perversely persistent force. Although it was an indictable offence to say so publicly, it was still in terms of the principle of clan

¹⁰⁷ Abdi I. Samatar, "Leadership and Ethnicity," 703.

representativeness that the SRC was regarded prior to its formal dissolution in 1975 by the majority of Somalis.”¹⁰⁸ Samatar pointedly disagrees with Lewis, arguing that a regime that predicated its right to rule in large part on the elimination of clanism would have been committing suicide if it were to “flaunt the same tribalist propensities.”¹⁰⁹ He insists that these early years of Barre’s rule should instead be seen as something of a heyday for pan-Somalism. However, while we may not be able to conclusively demonstrate whether or not Siyad Barre was intentionally balancing clans – while perhaps also seeking qualified individuals – the reality that the public continued to interpret the government’s actions and appointments in terms of clan balance is telling.

After the war and the coup attempt, the resurgence of clanism within the government as well as without became much more overt, although public mention of clans continued to be outlawed. Outside of the government, this is most apparent in the emergence of clan-based rebel movements, beginning with the formation of the predominantly Mijerteyn Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). The Mijerteyn had been among the most dominant clans in the civilian government and so felt some lingering resentment towards, or at least impatience with, the Barre regime.¹¹⁰ After the coup attempt and the subsequent execution of a number of Mijerteyn officers, their anger mounted. Lewis notes that the fact that “the Mijerteen sought support in Ethiopia, Somalia’s traditional enemy, was both a sign of their desperation and a measure of the degree of disintegration of Somali national solidarity.” Then in 1981, reflecting years of disaffection with the union of north and south and a mounting sense of persecution at the hands of the government, the predominantly Isaaq Somali National Movement (SNM)

¹⁰⁸ Lewis, *Modern History*, 220-221.

¹⁰⁹ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 107.

¹¹⁰ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 90-91.

was formed in the north. While both of these organizations, and others like them that emerged later, presented themselves publicly as representatives of multi-clan coalitions (and they often did include at least some members from other clans), in general they were perceived by others – and in fact were in practice – largely clan-based organizations.

Meanwhile, within the confines of the government, Siyad Barre vigorously maintained the ban on clan politics, even as he turned to clan as his defense and support mechanism, relying on clans to which he was connected by either birth or marriage, the infamous “MOD” – for Marehan, Ogaden and Dulbahante – alliance. Lewis puts it bluntly:

He [Siyad] well knew . . . how to adapt the ancient divide and rule formula to these particular clan conditions. He befriended groups which enabled him to attack his clan enemies. In this pattern of what Daniel Compagnon aptly calls (clan) clientalism, Siyad distributed arms and money to his friends, encouraging them to attack their common clan enemies who, of course, were *accused of divisive “tribalism” by the master tribalist.*¹¹¹ [italics supplied]

Thus, Barre had conclusively shifted from using enforced nationalism – the first option Englebert identifies for cornered, illegitimate rulers – to the second option, clientalist or neopatrimonial rule. Becoming increasingly manipulative and paranoid, Barre occasionally purged upper chambers of government, regularly imprisoning his former allies and perceived enemies, particularly among the Isaaq and Mijerteyn.

Samatar again disputes the clan-based interpretation of these actions, arguing that it is not consistent with the facts.¹¹² And he is correct in arguing that even as many Isaaq and Mijerteyn were purged from the government, others remained or replaced those who were ousted; the government was never built solely from the MOD clans. In fact,

¹¹¹ Joan M. Lewis, *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1994), 231.

¹¹² Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 138.

Marehan ministers and others of the “favored” clans were at times included in the purges. However, rather than concluding from this that Siyad was not actually manipulating clanism, the more convincing conclusion, as outlined by Laitin and Samatar, is that he was indeed a master of his art:

In actuality, Siyaad Barre’s clan-based politics is far more subtle than that. Within the army and in high political office there are numerous Isaaqs and Majeerteens, but they are almost always from primary lineages with little direct involvement in Isaaq and Majeerteen politics. Siyaad cleverly appoints people who are unknown within their clan-families and are delighted to get positions of power within the national government.¹¹³

And at least as important as the actual intent and outcome of Siyad’s actions is the public interpretation of his motivations and actions, which was unquestionably a clan-based interpretation. Laitin and Samatar remark that “In the wake of the coup attempt in 1978 and the subsequent foundings of the SSDF and the SNM, virtually every political action in the Somali Republic today is analyzed with a view to the tribal affiliations of the relevant actors.”¹¹⁴ Lewis then goes on to conclude that:

The legacy of his rule . . . contributed materially to the present situation in which the Somali nation is more deeply divided along its traditional kinship lines than perhaps at any other time this century. Here we might say that if the segmentary system had not already existed, Siyad would have invented it to cling to power at the vortex of clan chaos.¹¹⁵

Far from burying “divisive tribalism,” then, Barre, in his later years, succeeded in placing genealogy and clan identity – often in its most negative and divisive forms – at the center of the lives of even rural Somalis. As their economy and society disintegrated around them, Somalis of all walks of life found themselves turning to the one enduring source of survival and security that they knew they could count on – their kin.

¹¹³ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 156.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

¹¹⁵ Lewis, *Blood and Bone*, 231.

Adding to the deterioration of governance, the rise of tribalism, and the decline of the state, was the continued faltering of the economy. The situation had not noticeably improved since the civilian era, or the colonial period for that matter. After weak economic growth in the early 1970s during the regime's early days, the shocks of drought and war set the country back considerably. The internal revenue base failed to expand, and the dependence on foreign aid not only continued unabated, but worsened considerably. The Soviets provided the bulk of support until they abandoned Somalia during the Ogaden war. In 1980, the Cold War switch was complete, and Somalia became a client of the United States, which then provided a significant share of the external resources the country received throughout the 1980s. Cold War politics produced an enormous military assistance dividend for the country, given its strategic position with relation to major shipping lanes and the Gulf states, and development assistance also remained high. The Ministry of Planning estimated the foreign contributions to the country's development plans for 1974-1978 and 1982-1986 at 68 and 80 per cent, respectively,¹¹⁶ and some other estimates are even higher.¹¹⁷ By the 1980s, estimates of the combined total of foreign development and refugee aid range from 25 to more than 50 percent of GNP.¹¹⁸

But like the civilian government before it, Siyad Barre's regime became more of a predator upon than a manager of state resources. Particularly after the Ogaden war, when competition for power among elites again escalated, resources were siphoned from the state coffers at an unprecedented rate.¹¹⁹ Amidst the politics of the Cold War, the US and

¹¹⁶ Samatar and Samatar, "Material Roots," 685, fn. 1.

¹¹⁷ Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 90-91.

¹¹⁸ See for example, Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: Political Order in a Stateless Society," *Current History* (May 1998): 220 and Ahmed Ismael, "Understanding Conflict," 239.

¹¹⁹ Samatar and Samatar, "Material Roots," 683-684.

other major donors largely tolerated massive abuse of the refugee assistance system as well as development assistance programs,¹²⁰ and Somalia became known as the ultimate “aid graveyard.” Yet the funds continued to flow in, and Siyad and his cronies continued to enrich themselves, while impoverishing their country both economically and socially. Abdi I. Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar emphasize the extent to which the state had become divorced from society and its productive forces, in large part because of this reliance on seemingly limitless flows of foreign resources rather than the indigenous economy for its survival, a disconnection which dated back to the colonial period.¹²¹ Finally, Lewis notes that this feeding frenzy on the country’s resources in turn fed the increase in divisive tribalism: “By destroying his country’s economy, Siyad also directly promoted those conditions of general lack of resources and insecurity on which clan loyalty thrives, since clan solidarity offers the only hope of survival.”¹²² Between the pillaging of the economy and the demolishing of all pan-Somali nationalist sentiment, Barre’s regime during the 1980s diligently paved the way for the catastrophe that was to come in 1991.

3.8 The End for Siyad Barre – and the Republic of Somalia

Throughout the 1980s, resistance to Siyad Barre’s escalating authoritarianism and use of oppression and terror tactics mounted, with the SNM leading the way in the north. After intermittently harassing the government throughout the mid-1980s from its bases in Ethiopia, the SNM was forced into more aggressive tactics in 1988 after Siyad reached a

¹²⁰ See for example Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1997).

¹²¹ Samatar and Samatar, “Material Roots,” 674.

¹²² Lewis, *Blood and Bone*, 231.

new accommodation with the Ethiopian government that forced the Movement to shift its bases back into Somalia. Their resulting 1988 attack on government garrisons at Hargeisa ultimately signaled the beginning of the end for Siyad Barre. This was true in part because of the relative military success of the endeavor, which reflected the true strength and seriousness of the opposition movement. But it is also true because of the government's extreme response to this provocation. The regime's shocking and excessive use of force in retaliation – much of Hargeisa was flattened and tens of thousands killed in the ensuing bombing campaign – finally caught the attention not only of the rest of the country, but of the international community. No longer able to ignore the corrupt and abusive behavior of Barre and his government, much of the international assistance on which he had become so dependent for survival was put on hold or canceled.

With the nearly simultaneous wind-down of the Cold War which had driven much of this support, Barre's fate was sealed. As public restlessness with his excesses mounted and coalesced into the formation of other opposition movements throughout the country – almost all of them clan based¹²³ – the regime's ability to respond collapsed. As the government was cut afloat, not only did patronage resources dwindle, but eventually Siyad could not even pay his own security forces, and militias began to take control of various regions of the country, and even to challenge Barre in the streets of Mogadishu. Last minute efforts to secure an orderly transition failed, most notably the attempt by the “Manifesto Group,” a coalition of more than 100 eminent Somali politicians, civic and business leaders who attempted to convince Barre to hand over power. Finally, in

¹²³ These included the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) representing Ogadeni interests, the United Somali Congress (USC) comprised largely of members of the Hawiye clan-family, and the Rahanweyn-dominated Somali Democratic Movement (SDM), to name just a few of the key players.

January 1991, government and non-government militias clashed in Mogadishu, and within a matter of hours the regime had collapsed as Siyad Barre fled the city.

But while the vast majority of Somalis cheered Barre's departure, in fact their trials were far from over. Having succeeded in sowing a considerable degree of distrust between the major clans, Barre's main legacy seems to have been to the virtual elimination of pan-Somali sentiment and any accompanying willingness to cooperate and share power that a unified state requires. The elites – particularly the faction leaders – of each clan were determined to secure power for themselves and their clans, and more often than not, they received the support of their fellow clansmen in pursuing this goal, particularly in the early days after the collapse. While a variety of clan-based factions controlled separate regions of the country after Siyad Barre's fall (including the Somali National Front (SNF), led by Siyad's son-in-law General Mohamed Hersi Morgan, which continued to support the deposed president), the Hawiye-based United Somali Congress (USC) dominated the scene in Mogadishu, and quickly attempted to lay claim to power by appointing businessman and USC political leader Ali Mahdi as the new interim president. This unilateral Hawiye grab for power raised the hackles of competing factions, so that by the time that Ali Mahdi called for a national conference to discuss the country's future, most were so angry that they refused to attend. This move also led to Somaliland's declaration of independence from the former Republic in May 1991, as discussed in Chapter 5. Moreover, not only did other factions reject Mahdi's appointment, but within the USC itself there were divisions over this move. The other key claimant to power, the USC's military leader General Mohamed Farah Aideed, led a breakaway faction that soon opposed Ali Mahdi (notably, a division that occurred largely along sub-clan lines, with the Abgal sub-clan of the Hawiye backing Ali Mahdi, and

Aideed's own Habr Gedir sub-clan backing his claims). Over the next two years, parts of the countryside (particularly the fertile riverine valleys in the south and southwest), and especially Mogadishu, descended into chaos as the various factions fought – without success – to gain the upper hand, and with it control of the capital and the hoped for future government.

The relevance of two aspects of the chaos that followed Siyad's collapse cannot be overemphasized. The first is Somalis' complete inability at this stage to form stable, broad, cross-clan coalitions, i.e., to resurrect any of the former sense of pan-Somali unity that had motivated elites in the past. Levels of distrust among many clan communities were extremely high, but this was not the sole source of the problem. Somalis, both elites and the community at large, had come to experience government as nothing more than a feeding trough, but one without enough room for everyone to partake. In addition to the sense of persecution that at least some clans felt, and of jealousy that almost all felt particularly towards the Marehan (Siyad's clan), but also toward the others clans of the MOD alliance, there was the simple sense that if the sole purpose of a government was "to eat," and there was not going to be enough for everyone, then there was no alternative but to insist that one's own clan must be in control of the future feeding frenzy. The combination of a sense of betrayal at the hands of other clans and of a sense of scarcity akin to what their pastoral brothers felt during hard times in conflict over land and water resources – i.e., that there is not enough for all of us here, so controlling the resource was a matter of survival, and it is therefore "him or me" – left many Somalis feeling that the only acceptable future scenario was to have "one of their own" controlling the reigns of power and access to the resources of the state. Note that this is not to say that there was *no* cooperation among clans. Various clans or sub-clans did in fact form alliances, at

times durable ones, at times more fleeting. The point is that no truly broad-based multi-clan coalitions that could, for example, claim to represent a majority of Somalis have been able to form.

The second issue is in many respects closely related to the first, and is equally indicative of the pathology of the collapsed Somali state, and that is the focus on Mogadishu as the “golden egg” over which much of the fighting focused. It has been a frequent complaint of Somalis, particularly northwesterners who saw their former capital at Hargeisa marginalized, but also of other rural Somalis from throughout the country, that politicians, elected or otherwise, all fled the countryside to Mogadishu and were never heard from again. Throughout the independence era, Mogadishu was the seat of *everything*. Education, jobs, government documents of any kind – most of these things could *only* be found in the capital, and the entire rest of the country became a mere footnote. It was also, of course, the channel through which all national resources – whether from internal or external sources – flowed and were controlled. He who controlled Mogadishu, controlled the country, and most importantly, controlled access to its resources. This had been the case throughout the independence era, and the clear assumption of faction leaders with ambitions to national power is that this will one day be the case again. Despite evidence in many other countries of the changes wrought by the end of the Cold War, many Somalis have long assumed that once a national government can be restored in Mogadishu, the milk of the international cash cow will begin flowing again into their country, and each faction leader has been determined that he, and only he can be in a position to control that cash flow. Thus, for years, the conflict has focused on Mogadishu and on the ability to re-establish an all-controlling *national* government based there. This is not to say, however, that control of Mogadishu has been the only source of

contention. Kismayu, the south's second city and an important port in its own right, also continues to be the scene of a continuing struggle for control. To a lesser extent, the fertile valleys of the Juba and Shebelle Rivers, particularly the zones conducive to profitable irrigated plantation agriculture, have also seen considerable fighting, and several other regions of the country have not been spared mostly-local battles for control. But it is nonetheless clear that the true prize in the eyes of most Somali factions has been Mogadishu. Why this goal should be deeply flawed is discussed at length in the final chapter.

Chapter 4: Digging Up the Roots of Somalia's Collapse

The past decade has produced a plethora of analyses of “what went wrong” in Somalia, citing a wide variety of factors that have contributed to the state’s catastrophic collapse. The persistence and/or manipulation of clan identity as opposed to the evolution of a sense of national, cross-clan identity and pride has perhaps received the most attention, although other analyses also identify gross economic mismanagement, corruption, oppression, increasing internal inequalities, cold war politics, a disadvantaged position in the global economy, and natural disasters (primarily drought) as well, each of which is evident in the historical overview presented in the last chapter. Certainly all of these factors did play a role, often in a complex, inter-connected fashion. But the search for adequate “solutions” for Somalia can only begin when the root causes of the previous state’s failures can be identified; we must distinguish these from factors which were, for the most part, merely symptoms of the state’s decline if we are to avoid creating such an analytical muddle that it will be impossible to identify a way forward. And the first point that should be clear from the discussion of the previous chapter is that although external and environmental factors contributed – at times significantly – to the calamity, ultimately the crux of the problem must still be located within the weaknesses of the Somali political system itself. The historical record presented in Chapter 3 clearly reveals that in terms of serving the needs of the Somali people and fostering development, the independent Somali state failed from the beginning.

I will therefore turn, at this point, to an evaluation of the first proposition presented in Chapter 1, that is, the hypothesis that a key root cause of the Somali state’s failure can be found in the disconnect that emerged between the formal institutions of the state and

the informal norms, values, beliefs and practices of Somali society. I proposed that, as Holsti suggested, this translated into a lack of *vertical legitimacy* for the Republic of Somalia that critically interfered with the reciprocal relationships of service and loyalty, accountability and obedience that must exist between state and society if political regimes are to prosper and endure. Strong evidence of this disconnect and lack of legitimacy should already be apparent from the general discussion in Chapter 3, but I will further elaborate and clarify the case for drawing this conclusion here. In part because it so effectively illustrates some of the complexities of these issues, and also because it is one of the most often-cited “causes” of the collapse, I will focus particular attention on the highly contested issue of “clanism,” its current role and relevance in Somali social and political life, and the implications of this for understanding state failure and the road to reconstruction. I will also take a close look at the sources of legitimacy, weak as they were, that did, for a time, underpin the Somali state and the successive regimes that ruled it. I will conclude the chapter by re-opening the discussion of the proposed solution – indigenization – this time focusing specifically on the Somali context and the particular constraints to adopting such an approach in a complex, post-conflict environment. The following chapters will then evaluate Somalis’ actual indigenization efforts in detail.

Note that in evaluating the roots of collapse, it is critical that we avoid a common mistake of a number of the analyses that have come before, which have focused their attention almost exclusively on the failings of the Siyad Barre regime. Obviously it was the escalating excesses of the Barre regime that ultimately precipitated the collapse. But again, if we focus on separating root causes from symptoms, it is clear we must go beyond this. Yes, Siyad Barre’s regime became a hallmark of oppressive, authoritarian rule, but how and why did this come about. Even more importantly, in many respects the

era of civilian government that preceded Barre's rule laid the groundwork for what was to come. In fact, the failures and abuses of the military regime were for the most part simply exaggerated or exacerbated versions of those witnessed during the "democratic" era of the 1960s (although the civilian regime did not resort to the oppression and terror tactics that eventually came to characterize Barre's regime). And as previously emphasized, it should be of even greater concern to us that such failures were manifested under a purportedly democratic regime, than that they were perpetuated by an unabashed dictator.

4.1 An Evident Disconnect

As discussed in Chapter 1, North argues that institutional disconnect arises when radical changes in the formal rules – i.e., the structures and institutions of the state – are not, or cannot, be matched by corresponding adaptations in the informal institutions such as societal norms and values. It is readily apparent that such radical changes in formal institutions occurred in Somalia, several times in fact, between the colonial era and the eventual demise of the state. Even the very first step undertaken by the Italians and the British, the introduction of a permanent, centralized ruling authority with control over considerable "public" resources, constituted a foreign concept of administration to Somalis (although one to which they had had some prior exposure in the pre-colonial era). And the gap between traditional practices and structures and the formal structures of rule that Somalis were expected to live under only widened both as the scope and extent of colonial administration broadened, and even more so as the country entered into the independence era. Capital cities, formal legislatures, political parties, elections, and perhaps more importantly, the very concept of power existing separately from the *daily*

expressed consent of the people granted according to long-standing principles about the accepted and expected qualities of leadership, were all new, and as such, potential sources of disconnect. At the same time, it is readily apparent from the historical record that *no* efforts were made to incorporate traditional practices or institutions into the formal structures and institutions of the state. Clearly, then, we have the makings of a potentially severe disconnect between the evolving state and the underlying norms and values of Somali society.

But what was happening to the informal institutions of Somali society during these transitions? If we assume that they remained static or unchanging, then the case for the existence of a severe disconnect would essentially be complete. But this assumption is weak; as discussed in Chapter 2, “traditional” institutions – both formal and informal – also evolve and adapt to changing situations and incentives. Recall for example Ensminger’s contention that land tenure institutions in Africa were responding to changing market structures long before the Western model of privatized ownership in commercial agricultural settings was introduced. This is not, however, to say that these institutions will automatically evolve into exactly the same sorts of market-based relationships that had developed in the West or elsewhere. Have Somali institutions, both formal and informal, evolved as well? If so, then we must look more carefully to determine whether there is still, despite adaptations in these institutions, evidence that there was a mismatch, i.e., that they had not evolved in such a way as to correspond or articulate adequately with these newer formal institutions of the state. In fact, the discussion that follows on kinship and clanism will demonstrate that determining the current status and form of “traditional” institutions is by no means a simple task. The debates surrounding the current nature of this bedrock social and political concept

exemplify the complexity of pinpointing the role and relevance of the current, indigenous version of traditional Somali political life.

4.1.1 The Persistence of Clanism

Clan is everything here. You need clan to marry, to get credit, to get a bank account, to get property, to belong. Without clan, you are a nobody in society.¹

Because of the strong belief of almost the entire population in clanism as a necessary and inevitable political regime, no political organisation with an open-door non-clan-based membership has yet appeared in the political landscape. Any member of the Somali society who aims for an active political participation is required to present himself as a clan member who plans to foster his clan interest. The notion of politics outside clan affiliations has no roots in our minds.²

The meanings and role of kinship and clanism in contemporary Somali society are highly contested; over the past decade, Somali analysts have been facing off in an intensely polarized debate. Some see it as a feature of Somali socio-political life that remains essentially unchanged from an earlier era, while others contend that clan identity today bears little resemblance to its past manifestations. And in analyses of Somalia's failure, some credit it as the most significant *causal* factor in the collapse and ensuing chaos, while others argue that the breakdown of society along clan lines is a mere *symptom* of the manipulation and failure of the modern political system. Likewise, when looking toward the future, some see clan allegiance as a (or *the*) key weakness of Somali society, something that must be overcome and eradicated, while others see it as a fundamental and enduring component of Somali social and political identity. But

¹ Comments of an unnamed Somali social worker at the Hargeisa orphanage, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs IRIN Humanitarian Information Unit, "Somalia: Looking After the Unwanted," 15 June 2001.

² Abdi A. Mohamed ('Baffo'), "Some Reflections on Current Somali Politics and Its Future Directions," paper presented at the Nairobi Peace Forum, Nairobi, Kenya, 1995, 8, cited by Virginia Luling, "Come Back Somalia? Questioning a Collapsed State," *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1997): 289-290.

regardless of whether it is seen as static or unrecognizably changed, cause or effect, strength or weakness, the extreme salience of clan identity during the decade of collapse, and the importance of shifting clan alliances in the battle for control, are undeniable. In fact, Doornbos and Markakis observe that “The importance of kinship . . . is the element highlighted in all attempts to explain Somali political behavior.”³ Plotting a way forward for Somali political reconstruction thus demands that we attempt to come to an understanding of the true role and relevance of clanism.

Not surprisingly, one key “school of thought” builds around Lewis’s classical anthropological analyses, and the other around the Marxist-oriented work of Abdi I. Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar. As mentioned, Lewis’s anthropological studies are widely accepted as *the* description of traditional Somali culture, but his interpretations of modern Somali society, rooted in this same analytical framework, are much more controversial. Doornbos and Markakis observe that Lewis and others of a similar analytical bent take the position that “the segmented clan system remains the bedrock foundation of pastoral Somali society, and ‘clannishness’” – defined by Doornbos and Markakis as “the pursuit of kinship interests without restraint and at the expense of everything else”⁴ – “is its *natural* divisive reflection on the political level.”⁵ Some equate this approach with the grossly oversimplified attitude that conflict between clans or ethnic groups is essentially an inherent, inevitable aspect of existence in Africa, i.e., that the presence and persistence of different identities in effect *causes* conflict.

³ Martin Doornbos and John Markakis, “Society and State in Crisis: What went wrong in Somalia?” *Review of African Political Economy* 59 (1994): 82.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

Yet there is much more to Lewis's analysis than this. As described in the previous chapter, Lewis has elaborated on how and why the segmentary system made logical sense for Somalis in the harsh, resource-constrained environment in which they have struggled to survive for centuries. He contends that in such an environment, conflict during times of privation was in fact inevitable, and that the misrule of Siyad Barre essentially created a modern version of just such a period of privation. Faced with this, Lewis argues, Somalis responded in their characteristic – i.e., traditional – way, by retreating into clan identity and clan allegiances and alliances. After the collapse, he observes that:

The same tendencies of reversion to clan relativist loyalties, with the alliance and disassociation of segmentary kin-groups according to the political context, characterised the general scene throughout the Somali region in 1992. Siyad's much publicised official campaigns against clan allegiance had manifestly had absolutely no lasting effect, which was perhaps not surprising since they were essentially rhetorical.⁶

Moreover, Lewis argues that the fundamental sociological nature of “clanship” has remained largely unchanged between the 1890s and the 1990s. He concludes by observing that in the end, “the collapse of the colonially created state represents technically a triumph for the segmentary lineage system and the political power of kinship.”⁷ In other words, the fragmentation inherent in the segmentary system overpowered the centralizing, unifying efforts that began with the colonial powers, and were erratically, and quite unsuccessfully, carried on by Somali “nationalists.” Unlike Lewis, Laitin and Samatar see signs of this trend well before the darkest days of the Siyad Barre era. They describe how clannishness pervaded the political system in “democratic” Somalia to the extent that after the 1969 elections, “The resultant chaos

⁶ Ioan M. Lewis, *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1994), 231.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

made a mockery of the democratic process. . . . In subsequent months the elected government reigned but could not rule. Maintaining [clan] balance rather than solving Somalia's deep problems became the leitmotif of Somalia's democracy."⁸ But whether focusing only on the Siyad Barre regime, or on the entire independence era, this analytical perspective generally regards the persistence of clanism as an essentially natural, but *harmful*, phenomenon that played a key causal role in the collapse of the state.

Abdi I. Samatar, however, labels Lewis and his cohort as "traditionalists" who completely misunderstand the role of clan in modern Somali life.⁹ Together and separately, he and Ahmed I. Samatar argue that the cultural traditions and behaviors of Somalis, which were rooted in a subsistence-based pastoral economic system, have been distorted virtually beyond recognition by commercialization of the nomadic culture and society. In particular, Abdi I. Samatar argues that modern manifestations of "clanism" bear little relation to the traditional role of "kinship." This is true in part, he argues, because the unifying and moderating role of *heer* has been lost as a counterbalance to the fragmentation of kinship,¹⁰ a change rooted in shifting modes of production, including especially the commercialization of livestock production. The Samatars argue that a shift occurred from pre-capitalist communalist modes of production to a system based on mercantilist and capitalist modes of production in which "the consumption of objects beyond one's productive capabilities, and the accumulation of wealth in the urban centers

⁸ David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder: Westview Press, and London, UK: Gower, 1987), 76.

⁹ Abdi I. Samatar, "Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Convention," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (December 1992): 626-641.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 630.

were paramount.” They add that “the ethos and the reproductive requirements of this commercial order began to erode the effectiveness of the rules of kinship.”¹¹

Under this new economy and ethos, the state and its resources became the object of struggle, and the means of access to state resources was political position. Abdi I. Samatar argues that this led directly to the proliferation of parties during the multiparty era, as “in the absence of any philosophical differences among the elite, they collectively used clanship as a means of distinguishing one candidate from another.”¹² According to this line of argument, it was this competition for resources and the consequent *manipulation* of clan identity by elites – i.e., *politicized* clanship – that led first to the collapse of the “democratic” regime, and eventually to the collapse of the state itself; it was not, from this perspective, anything inherent in the *traditional* nature of kinship or segmentary clan identity. Samatar concludes that “The most important lesson to be learned from the present tragedy is the recognition that Somali society has been torn apart because blood-ties without the *Xeer* have been manipulated by the elite in order to gain or retain access to unearned resources.”¹³ In other words, as Doornbos and Markakis observe, “In this perspective, clannishness as currently manifested is not a reflection of the survival of traditional kinship relationships, but of their transformation and decay.”¹⁴ Clanism is thus not a cause, but a symptom of failure; the Samatars ultimately locate the causes of the collapse in the unchecked greed and corruption of the elites created by modernization and capitalism.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 632-633.

¹² *Ibid.*, 634-635.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 640.

¹⁴ Doornbos and Markakis, “Society and State in Crisis,” 83.

That both of these interpretations of clanism and its role suffer serious weaknesses should be clear from the preceding chapter, and it will become more so in the discussion of rebuilding processes that follows. Although Lewis at times acknowledges that changes have occurred in Somali society in the past century, and observes, for example, that new elites have in fact actively manipulated clan identity for their personal ends, he does not make sufficient allowance for this evolution within his analysis. Arguing that Somali clan relations are *essentially* unchanged neglects the clear reality and impact of these new elites – politicians, merchants and traders, and other educated “intellectuals” – as well as those of other “modern” influences from both within and outside of the country. It takes no account of how traditional social bonds have been weakened or changed, and most importantly, it ignores the vast influence these new players have had on how individual, clan, and society-wide relationships are expressed. It also denies the desire of many Somalis to participate in the modern global economy, and to have a government that can secure the status necessary for them to do so.

The analyses of both of the Samatars, on the other hand, exhibit largely the opposite failing: while they rightly point out the momentous changes brought about by myriad influences over the course of the last century, they fail to recognize that there is also continuity in Somali social and political systems. They acknowledge *only* new influences and new actors, while denying the fact that many Somalis still retain close ties to their social and cultural roots, and that kinship relations continue to fulfill many of their traditional roles, as well as having taken on modern meanings and relevance – both positive and negative. As the Samatars argue (and as Lewis occasionally acknowledges) politicians have indeed actively sought to manipulate clan. But as Doornbos and Markakis point out, “No allowance is made for the constraints imposed on politicians by

the structure of Somali society. If the clan structure is indeed so important, it is difficult to see how politicians can operate outside it.”¹⁵ Laitin and Samatar observed, for example, that during Siyad Barre’s reign, “Although the modern Somali state . . . manages to exercise . . . a measure of centralized authority, most Somalis continue to give greater political and emotional loyalty to their lineages.”¹⁶ Luling agrees, arguing that “It is true that clan ties are manipulated as a tool by politicians, but they would not be able to do this if those ties were not a reality in peoples minds and lives.”¹⁷

This enduring attachment to traditional bonds of clan, as well as to other elements of traditional political culture, has been clear in the difficulty that Siyad Barre encountered in trying to radically overthrow or supplant many of these traditions, from clan identity to the role of women and Islam. It has been even more apparent in the decade after the collapse, as Somalis almost universally returned to their clan homes for protection and insurance, in fact for their very *survival* – much as they did in the past. Moreover, that traditional politics still plays a critical role in Somali society, despite years of marginalization at the hands of *central* powers, has been perhaps one of the clearest lessons learned following Somalia’s collapse. Traditional leaders, traditional survival tactics, and traditional patterns of social relations, much as they have changed, are still intact enough – and still have enough positive value – that they have helped Somalis survive surprisingly well in vast regions of the country where there has been no government, but also very little fighting.¹⁸ The Samatars overlook the reality that

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁶ Laitin and Samatar, *Nation in Search*, 30.

¹⁷ Luling, “Come Back Somalia,” 289-290.

¹⁸ Most of the fighting during Somalia’s long civil war has been concentrated in and around Mogadishu, Kismayo, and the southern inter-riverine zone; much of the rest of the country has remained largely ungoverned in any formal sense, but mostly peaceful as well, although occasional outbreaks of fighting have occurred elsewhere. Some regions suffer primarily from banditry, as opposed to armed warfare.

Somalis express frequently these days, i.e., that while clanism may be their curse, it is also their blessing. It may be what gets them into trouble, but it is also what enables them to survive through difficult times. As such, it is not only very much alive, but it still fulfills many of its traditional roles in Somali socio-political life.

Recognizing this “intermediate” (or “indeterminate”) nature and role of clan, it also becomes difficult to specify whether “clanism” is cause or effect in the overall scheme of the Somali conflict. But in the end, the most important aspect of understanding clan and its current role in society does not lie in debating the details regarding how “traditional” versus how “distorted” clan relations are – they are in fact some of both – or in arguing about cause versus effect. Rather, it is to recognize that clan identity continues to be a fundamental reality of Somali socio-political identity, and that past efforts to at best ignore it and at worst actively abolish it have been misguided. In fact, as the analyses of North and others suggest, it appears that it was precisely these conscious efforts to build structures that deliberately excluded any role or reality for clan identity (as well as other aspects of indigenous Somali political culture) that most directly resulted in the failure of those structures.

For example, during the “multiparty democracy” of the 1960s, ignoring the role of clan identity culminated in fragmentation of political parties along clan lines, contributing significantly to the failure of the political system to function, and ultimately to its overthrow. Trying to ignore clan not only did not make it go away, but it meant that the political system was unprepared for – or unable to effectively channel and manage – the role of clan in Somali political relations. The result was, in effect, ad hoc indigenization, whereby indigenous values (clan identity) mixed with, and ultimately overran, the foreign political party model. But because this inadvertent indigenization essentially brought out

the worst in both systems rather than building on the strengths of each, it produced *negative* outcomes rather than positive ones. Similarly, although maintaining clan balance within the institutions and offices of government was expressly disavowed under the Siyad Barre regime, few would argue today that perceptions of growing *imbalance* and *favoritism* among clans did not contribute significantly to the mounting disaffection and distrust of Barre's regime. Attempting to ignore a reality that simply could not be ignored created problems rather than resolving them.

This is not to say, however, that acknowledging clan identity and finding means to successfully incorporate it into the political system in ways that are not themselves destructive is an easy task, or that it will not be a fiercely contested one, given the interests of different players involved. But I will deal with these issues at length in Chapter 7. The point here is that while it is not only unnecessary, but also unwise, to deal with an "idealized" or "historic" notion of clan, it is nevertheless essential that Somalis (and, to the extent they support or condemn new political structures, the international community) accept the salience of clan identity *in its current indigenous form* as a reality. In other words, the problem in the past was not clan identity, or even manipulated clanism; *it was a political system and political structures that could not function effectively in the context of clanism*. Thus, this is clearly a case in which the formal and informal institutions were not well matched, and the political system could not function effectively as a result.

4.1.2 Other Elements of an Evolving Indigenous Political Culture

The continuing importance of kinship and clan in politics is perhaps the most evident example of the persistence – albeit in a modified form – of traditional Somali

political culture. But there are numerous other examples of elements of this tradition, as described by Lewis, that have survived as well. Some of these are at least partially apparent in the historical overview of the last chapter, for example, the continuing although contested, role of religious leaders (recall, for example, Siyad Barre's execution of ten sheikhs who publicly spoke out against some of his social modernization efforts). The enduring importance of these indigenous institutions and elements of indigenous political culture will become even more evident in the discussion in the following chapters about how Somali society has survived and begun to rebuild since the collapse. When examining how Somali society has functioned in the absence of central government institutions, it becomes quite apparent that many indigenous institutions and practices still have strong roots, despite the often aggressive efforts, particularly on the part of Siyad Barre, to undermine or eradicate them, and despite many changes in their actual forms and functions over the course of the last century.

One example of this is the critical role played by elders in preserving and/or negotiating the restoration of peace in several regions of the country since the collapse, most notably in the northwest and northeast (although their ability to fulfill the community's desire for peace has been much more mixed across the south). In some cases, customary systems of law and punishment have also been brought back into play, while in other areas Islamic courts have been created or restored in an effort to maintain peace and security. Traditional systems of decision making – i.e., extended and participatory consultative sessions focused on consensus building – have also been resurrected in many areas to deal with issues as small as local resource management problems, and as large as regional and national reconciliation conferences. Many Somalis have also expressed insistent demands for a more decentralized system of rule in

future that retains most resources and decision-making power in local hands, rather than reverting to the highly centralized system of past regimes in which a few individuals – and hence, in the minds of many Somalis, a few clans – claim excessive power. In addition, on a more negative note, we will see that the traditionally marginalized role of women in Somali political discourse has also persisted in many respects, again despite at least rhetorical efforts on Siyad Barre’s part to change this trend.

While the details of the forms in which these institutions and practices have persisted, as well as the ways in which they have changed, will become more evident in the following chapters, the key point here is that they have, in some form or another, remained highly relevant in Somali society despite years of efforts by both the civilian and military regimes to marginalize or even eradicate them, and despite generations of “modern” and “global” influences on society. Yet these political institutions, actors and practices were virtually completely ignored in the construction of independence political institutions. The result, as North suggested, has been a disconnect between the formal institutions and structures of the state and the informal values, norms, practices and beliefs of Somali society, a disconnect that fatally weakened the state-society relationship. It is perhaps hardly surprising, then, that the majority of Somalis remained largely disengaged from state politics. It was a system of politics that bore little resemblance, whether in substance or in appearance, to the political practices that they understood and valued, and as such, it contracted the political space in Somali society, leaving room only for a handful of elites who knew how to function in and make use of this system.

4.2 The Implications for Legitimacy

It should also be apparent from the above discussion and the historical review of the last chapter that this disconnect affected not just the *structures* of the independence governments, but the very foundations and legitimacy of the state. Recalling Holsti's definition of *vertical legitimacy* as agreement between the state and society about the principles on which the state's right to rule is based, it is apparent that here, too, there may have been a serious gap. As described in the previous chapter, the modern Somali state and its independence era government were largely a creation of two coalitions of actors: the representatives of the colonial powers, and the class of educated Somali elites who became the country's first politicians, and who stood to inherit it. The contours of this new state were the outcome of negotiations between these two groups (as well as of negotiations between the representatives of the north and south within each of these groups). The rest of Somali society, although highly supportive of this process, was not party to these negotiations.

As discussed, Holsti suggests that regimes will make *claims* to legitimacy based on factors as diverse as divine right or heredity, ideology, contract, task achievement, or the use of force.¹⁹ At independence, the Republic of Somalia's new leadership had essentially three pillars on which to base their claims. The first was their successful effort to achieve independence for the country, what Holsti broadly describes as a "task achievement" justification. The second was the common goal of unifying Somalis within one state – the dream of "Greater Somalia" that had already led to the ready acquiescence of the north to union with the south, with the hopes that the other three points of the

¹⁹ Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 85.

“five-pointed star” could soon be incorporated as well – a justification that is perhaps best classified as a Somali “ideology.” And the third was the superficially democratic nature of the structures of the new regime, based on the Western, liberal democratic model of multiparty electoral politics, which constitutes a justification of legitimacy based on what Holsti labels “contract and consent.”

But Holsti goes on to note that claiming legitimacy and actually having it are not the same things. How did the Somali public, then, view these claims to legitimacy of the new state, and perhaps more importantly, of the new regime and the politicians who inhabited this emerging political arena? Were these claims to legitimacy sufficient? Were they durable? To fully understand the validity, durability and adequacy of these claims to legitimacy from the perspective of society, it is necessary to go a step beyond Holsti’s analysis and think in terms of both *state legitimacy* and the related but distinct concept of *regime legitimacy* (or, in some cases, *government legitimacy*, or even the legitimacy of the individual politicians who man the government apparatus). While these levels of legitimacy are often inter-related, they cannot necessarily be equated, and this has important implications for states and for particular regimes and governments. State and regime legitimacy may be mutually reinforcing; for example, if the foundations and principles on which the existence and rule of the state is justified are highly legitimate, this is also likely to be reflected in enhanced legitimacy for particular regimes or governments, at least initially. Similarly, they can be mutually undermining; a regime, or succession of regimes, that perform extremely poorly, may eventually undermine the legitimacy of the state itself. But it is also possible to have a legitimate state – e.g., one in which the national borders encompass a territory that the majority believes should constitute a single, sovereign political unit – and an illegitimate regime or government

ruling it at a particular point in time. While both states and regimes or governments can have both intrinsic and instrumental sources of legitimacy, we might expect that states will tend to be more dependent on the former, while regimes and governments must rely more on the latter. Finally, as Holsti suggests, in states where one regime – or one ruler – holds power for an extended period, the state and the regime – and the legitimacy accorded by society to each – may in fact become increasingly indistinguishable, both in the minds of the ruler, and in the view of society at large. In light of these considerations, let us evaluate first the legitimacy of the Somali state, and secondly the legitimacy of the various regimes that ruled it.

4.2.1 State Legitimacy

Of the three sources of legitimacy identified above for the new Republic of Somalia, the first two can be linked particularly to state-level legitimacy. That a Somali state governed by Somalis was a preferable alternative to foreign domination of Somali-inhabited protectorates and colonies was a virtually uncontested proposition, at least within the Somali territories (British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland) that joined to form the Republic. As elsewhere, the desire to throw off the colonial yoke was deeply felt among Somalis, and the religious divide between rulers and ruled added considerably to this sentiment in the Somali context. There were, however, debates about the appropriate nature and structures of the state. For example, as discussed, the agriculturally-based Digil/Mirifle and Rahanweyn clans, in particular, were more inclined towards creating a federal rather than a unitary state, given their concerns about domination by pastoral Somali clans. But there was little doubt in most Somali minds that Somalis should run their own political systems, whatever the structure, and this

consensus translated into an important – and relatively lasting – source of legitimacy for the new Somali state.

Although perhaps not as universally shared as the desire for independence from colonial rule, the ideological goal of unifying all Somalis under one flag and forming Greater Somalia was sufficiently widespread that it served as a similarly powerful symbol of unity among Somalis, and pursuit of this objective also constituted an important source of legitimacy for the new state, particularly during the independence era. This was perhaps a less lasting source of legitimacy, however, as the new Republic suffered politically both within Africa and in the international arena for their expressed desire to pursue these irredentist goals, and also as the state failed to make further progress toward achieving pan-Somali unity. Waning support for the union was particularly noticeable among northerners, who had eagerly given up their sovereignty in pursuit of this goal at independence, but who began to question their decision as the sense of southern domination grew, and as it became clear that the state's borders would not be extended further.

Thus, at the outset, the Somali *state* benefited from these two important sources of state legitimacy. But were these sufficient? Were there other sources of legitimacy that were lacking? We can begin such an evaluation by considering traditionally accepted principles within Somali political culture that granted a state the right to exist, and/or a regime the right to rule. Of course, in the Somali context, this appears to immediately get us into difficulties, since as we have seen, Somalis did not traditionally have a state-based or regime-based system of politics. But this does not necessarily imply that there are no possible sources of legitimacy for a state or regime that would be valid from an indigenous perspective. Many Somalis have in fact recognized that if they are to prosper,

they must interact with the global economy and community, and that their traditional modes of stateless political organization may not be suited to the present. By no means would they rule out the possibility of any kind of state functioning in their society simply because “it wasn’t done that way traditionally.” A more appropriate approach to tackling this question is not to consider traditional modes of legitimizing a state or regime, per se, but traditional modes of exercising power and accepted principles regarding the right to rule, or rather, to lead. These can provide us with some indicators of what Somalis might expect from a modern state in order to consider it legitimate.

Recalling Lewis’s description of traditional political culture, we can identify a number of key principles that underlie Somali conceptions of “good politics.” These include: direct and widespread participation in the processes of decision making, peace building or other negotiations, and selecting representatives; consensus-based decision-making processes; fair balance of power and rejection of excessive dominance of one clan over others; dispersal, rather than concentration, of resources and power; and granting the right to lead by consensus of the community on the basis of leadership qualities that include knowledge of Somali custom and law, reputation for fairness and wisdom, and oratorical ability. Note first that some of these principles – particularly those related to selecting leaders and day-to-day decision making – may in general be more relevant to the issue of regime or government legitimacy rather than state legitimacy, and I will return to these below.

Upon reviewing the other items on this list and the principles that are particularly relevant to establishing state legitimacy, it rapidly becomes apparent that from the indigenous perspective, the Somali state may in fact have had some legitimation problems. We have, for example, already noted that, as elsewhere in Africa, the

negotiations that established the new state and its structures were limited to a small cadre of educated, elite Somalis; the majority of those involved in negotiating the foundation of the state participated by virtue of their role as politicians and members of political parties. However, in contrast to those African states that had a history of more hierarchical and/or centralized systems of rule, in Somalia this approach stood in sharp contrast to the traditional principle of extensive, open participation by all men, or at least by their selected representatives, in such processes. While each individual involved in the negotiations would still be seen, to some extent, as a representative of his clan as well, they were neither selected by their clans according to usual practices, nor was representing their clan interests primary on their agenda. In fact, many of them would have been advocates of the pan-Somali movement that sought to build cross-clan allegiances. While these individuals did validly represent some sectors of society, they could not adequately represent all interests, and rural and non-elite interests in particular were left out of the discussions almost entirely.

The principle of dispersal of power and multiple nodes of power was also clearly violated. The state that was created was in principle unitary and centralized, and in practice became exceptionally concentrated within the narrow confines of the capital, Mogadishu. In fact, one of the most common complaints heard today about previous governments and politicians was the extent to which Mogadishu became the center of Somali political life, to the almost total exclusion of the rest of the country. The educated all moved there, politicians disappeared there rarely to be seen again, and obtaining many basic government services, permits and documents required a trip there. Even more unacceptable was the extent to which control over state resources was limited to a

privileged few, in stark contrast to traditional practices, and to the way life was still lived and local resources controlled in the rest of the country.

Finally, with respect to state legitimacy, let us consider the principle of *fair* balance of power among clans. This principle does *not* suggest that all clans expect to have an *equal* position, e.g., equal power or equal representation. Clans have always recognized that their different size and strength could not be ignored. In fact, at times this did indeed lead to the practice of “might makes right” politics – for example, a small clan might not actually be able to collect a *diya* payment that had been negotiated with a much larger clan if the latter was unwilling to pay. But in general, Somalis have negotiated agreements that, while recognizing the varying strengths of different clans, also ensured that all had at least some representation, and, in a context of largely consensus-based decision making, prevented any single clan or coalition of clans from overwhelmingly dominating others. Significantly, in the creation of the new Somali state there was no *explicit* means incorporated for ensuring that any sort of balance among clans was established or maintained, or that there were any protections for smaller, less powerful clans against domination by larger ones. In fact, there was no explicit recognition of clan differences at all. But it is equally important to recognize that while the state and its structures did not preserve balance directly, individual regimes and governments often did take careful heed of this principle, at least with respect to the larger clans. For example, under the civilian regime parliamentarians were extremely conscious of the need to maintain balance as they elected the president – always from a major clan – who in turn selected a prime minister – always from another major clan – who in turn named a cabinet – always with careful attention to preserving clan balance and ensuring the representation at least of all major clans and sub-clans. Thus, it was regime actions that

preserved this element of legitimacy, rather than the constitution of the state itself. But regardless of how or why it was achieved, it was an essential (though not sufficient) component of building legitimacy for the state and for the regime.

Thus we can conclude that the Somali state had some sources of legitimacy – most importantly its status as an anti-colonial symbol, and to a lesser extent the ideological goal of creating Greater Somalia that was linked to it. Its legitimacy could also be enhanced by efforts of individual regimes to preserve the principle of clan balance, although the fact that this principle was not explicitly built into the structures of the state allowed Siyad Barre, in his later years, to stray quite far from this goal. However, with regard to other indigenous principles of legitimate rule that might have been important to Somalis, the new state was quite weak, particularly due to the nature of and limited participation in the founding negotiations, and because of the concentration of power in a unitary state. We will now turn to the question of the relative legitimacy of the individual regimes, both civilian and military, that ruled the state during the independence era.

4.2.2 Legitimacy of the Civilian Regime

Some sources of legitimacy can benefit both the state, and individual regimes that govern it. Throughout Africa one such source of shared legitimacy was the success in achieving independence, since the first post-independence regimes were typically led by the same individuals who had pressed the independence struggle. In Somalia, the same held true with regard to the ideological principle of achieving a Greater Somalia. The state itself gained legitimacy from this goal, and the post-independence leadership, by making the pursuit of this ideology a key goal, gained legitimacy for their regime as well.

However, while these served as relatively lasting sources of legitimacy for the state, as sources of regime legitimacy both were to fade over time. The regime's past success in achieving independence was soon overshadowed by the many hopes and expectations the public had of its fledgling government. And the regime's claim to legitimacy based on pursuit of the Greater Somalia objective was soon undermined by its failure to make any progress. Initially aggressive unification efforts on the part of the civilian regime were replaced, by the time Mohamed Ibrahim Egal took up the prime ministerial post in 1967, by a quiet acknowledgement that further progress was unlikely. Internally, this outcome resonated particularly negatively with northerners, who had perhaps given up the most for the sake of Greater Somalia in their union with the south, as they began to feel that they may have sacrificed too much in pursuit of a goal that would not, after all, be achieved. The regime's credibility, and legitimacy, suffered as a result.

The other main claim to legitimacy of the independence regime was, of course, what Holsti refers to as "contract and consent," i.e., the apparently democratic nature of the new political structures. Yet as was noted in the above discussion of institutional disconnect, the structures and practices of the Western liberal model were considerably different from Somalis' own traditional democratic practices. Thus, rather than enhancing legitimacy, they actually introduced a disconnect between these structures and society and so contributed to regime illegitimacy. For example, the most fundamental feature of this new system, voting, was still very unfamiliar to Somalis, and as Schaffer noted in the case of Senegal, even if Somalis adapted to and learned to utilize this new system, they might not do so in the ways expected, or in ways that ensured "democratic" outcomes. As a result, the outcomes of voting in the end reflected neither Somali traditional political practices, nor the outcomes of accountability and a sense of

ownership and participation that Western proponents of the model would predict. In contrast to the often direct involvement of many (male) Somalis in local-level decision making, voting offered a mere one-off opportunity to “participate” in selecting a leader who, likely as not, disappeared immediately to Mogadishu; there was no remnant of the *daily* accountability to and interaction with constituents that leading traditional elders experienced. The practice of voting in fact offered a much more contracted political space than traditional participatory practices.

Similarly, political parties, to the extent that they attempted to operate independently of the clan system, were anathema to the majority of Somalis, who had not experienced representation on anything other than a clan basis (with the exception of the anti-colonial struggle when they were united in response to an external enemy). In addition, the qualities generally necessary to “win” a leadership role in the liberal democratic system – access to resources, education, and in particular a knowledge of the new system and how to use it to advantage – stood in stark contrast to the characteristics that counted critically in the traditional system of leadership. Elected “leaders” were thus unrecognizable as such to many Somalis, and their representative functions were only fulfilled in the most cursory manner.

We can therefore see that not only was there an institutional disconnect – i.e., that the new formal institutions of the democratic system failed to function effectively in and of themselves because they had no roots in Somali indigenous political culture – but that this would have translated into a “legitimacy disconnect” as well. Principles about such factors as the nature of the individual’s relationship to politics and the political system, the characteristics that (loosely) established the “right to lead,” and the nature of interest representation – all critical to the (uncodified) definition of “good politics” within the

Somali indigenous political system – were all violated by the first post-independence regime. “Contract and consent” as a basis for legitimacy did not sufficiently apply in the Somali case.

One final, potential source of legitimacy for a government or regime that might have been available to this post-independence Somali government was legitimacy based on *instrumental* accomplishments. Had the government succeeded in promoting economic growth or producing other recognized benefits to society, it would certainly have gained legitimacy via these day-to-day achievements. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, this was far from the case. In fact, the leadership seemed to exert little effort on such a task – they perhaps took their right to rule, and more importantly, the public’s acquiescence regarding their right to rule, for granted.

Why did the civilian regime take such a cavalier attitude toward legitimacy, making little effort to consolidate and strengthen what was initially, all things considered, a relatively weak position? I cannot give a definitive answer to this question, but suggest two contrasting responses. The first is that, as elites trained by former colonial rulers, they may in fact have believed, as many Westerners did, that the model of democracy that they had chosen for – or imposed on – their country was in fact an inherently self-legitimizing system of rule. Elections often were – and continue to be – idealized as a fail-safe system of ensuring that the public can express its views.

The other, less idealistic perspective is that these leaders recognized that, at least when it came to the *public’s* perceptions, legitimacy was virtually unnecessary to them. In fact, the state, the regime, and the institutions of each were so divorced in structure and content from the average Somali that the regime essentially became *autonomous* of Somali society. We see little evidence during the decade of efforts by Somali society to

check an increasingly out-of-control regime, or to enforce accountability in any way. Somalis in effect, seemed to stand back from a government that was perceived as a remote “they” running a state that seemed increasingly distant and predatory. Somalis did not perceive it as “their” state that could be expected to serve their interests. Rather, it was in effect little more than one more imposed, “foreign” system of rule. Even if they started the post-independence era with nobler intentions, most Somali elites must eventually have recognized their relative freedom from public control, leading, as we have seen, to their increasing focus on personal self-interest, and to obtaining enough resources to win re-election. The thought of managing the state apparatus for the benefit of society at large appears to have grown increasingly irrelevant.

It is important to note that this was by no means a phenomenon exclusive to Somalia. This disconnect, and the illegitimacy that it implied or exacerbated, appeared to varying degrees in countries throughout the continent. The exact nature and extent of the disconnect in each state would have depended on such factors as the nature of traditional political systems, the experiences and effects of colonial rule, and the actions and intentions of independence era leadership. But the failure of the liberal democratic model to provide regimes with the promised legitimacy that was thought to be inherent in this system of rule was almost universal among first generation post-independence regimes. I will return to this issue in the concluding chapter when considering the implications of the lessons about rebuilding among Somalis for other African states.

In the end, Somali society found no way to put a stop to the regime’s increasing predation. It was left to the military – another part of the state apparatus – to make the change, much to the relief of an already weary and disillusioned public. Clearly, the civilian regime, having started with weak legitimacy, had almost none remaining by the

time of the coup (although the state was still solidly legitimate at this stage). But Somali society was so functionally disenfranchised that it was unable to rectify this situation on its own.

4.2.3 Siyad Barre's Struggle for Legitimacy

Perhaps Siyad Barre learned something from observing the civilian regime, because in contrast to the decision of the first generation of leaders to willfully ignore public needs and demands, as well as the issue of their own legitimacy, Barre, during the early years of his tenure, appeared to put considerable effort into establishing a solid foundation for his regime's "right to rule." However, he based his initial claims to legitimacy neither on the pseudo-democracy of his predecessors nor on the principles of indigenous Somali political culture, but rather on "revolutionary" ideology. His famed "Scientific Socialism" – aimed to forge – or enforce – a new Somali *national* consciousness. Recall that Englebert identified such "revolutionary" tactics as one of the two options available to African leaders confronted with the problem of weak, or non-existent, legitimacy. With the twin goals of wiping out Somali customary practices and political values – including those related to the acceptable basis of legitimacy – while building a modern, prosperous Somali state, Siyad Barre set about to establish the credibility of his own regime. However, as we have seen, despite having started out with a relatively large reservoir of good will, and despite the *state's* continuing legitimacy, Barre's revolution soon floundered, and thus failed to promote his own regime's legitimacy as he had hoped. Despite his decrees and threats, indigenous political culture did not disappear. Neither, despite some early benefits from his campaigns (especially with respect to literacy), did economic revolution sweep the country and thus confirm the

rightness of the Scientific Socialist ideology and win instrumental legitimacy for the regime.

As Barre recognized that his efforts to win support via revolutionary zeal were collapsing, he shifted tactics. As outlined in Chapter 2, Englebert suggests that the second alternative open to a leader challenged by illegitimacy is the neopatrimonial approach – i.e., co-opting alternative nodes of loyalty and legitimacy through the extensive distribution of patronage resources. Barre, too, followed this pattern, and increasingly shifted his attention towards this tactic. In addition, he attempted to capitalize on another frequently successful technique for inciting loyalty: the identification of a foreign enemy – Ethiopia – and the launching of a “righteous” war for territory justified by resurrecting the Greater Somalia dream. However, the war effort quickly turned sour, and Siyad Barre was left with neopatrimonialism as his sole means of survival. By the late 1970s, he seems to have thoroughly given up on the idea of winning the people over and establishing legitimacy in some form, and narrowed his aims purely to the preservation of his power.

Having abandoned both traditional principles that might have helped establish *regime* legitimacy, as well as democratic practices for doing the same, and having failed in its attempt to introduce new alternatives or to build instrumental legitimacy, the Barre regime was left with extremely weak foundations. In fact, in principle the regime had little remaining justification by which to project its right to rule other than the use of force, and this became increasingly evident in practice, as use of oppression and terror tactics escalated in an effort to control the increasingly disaffected population. It was as any sense of regime legitimacy dwindled outside of the inner circle of those who

benefited directly, that rebel movements began to form, and the country embarked on its long downward spiral into collapse.

Strikingly, this time it was not only Siyad Barre's *regime* that suffered from this loss of legitimacy, it was the Somali *state* itself. As we noted, the state did have some independent bases of legitimacy in the eyes of the Somali public. However, its legitimacy was limited and incomplete, and the foundations of the state were therefore weak from the start. Eventually, the extreme failures of the ruling regimes, especially Siyad Barre's, began to erode the legitimacy of the state as well. This erosion occurred in part simply because of the continuing failure of the state and its successive governments to benefit society. But it was exacerbated greatly by the increasing, and deliberate efforts of Barre to retain his claim to power. As he increasingly shifted toward violating some of the few principles on which the legitimacy of the state had rested in its earlier days, particularly that of maintaining clan balance, the already weak foundations of state legitimacy were undermined as well. Thus, while none of the rebel movements that emerged during the 1980s and early 90s explicitly challenged the existence of the Somali state itself, this has in fact been a key outcome of the state's collapse. As a result, since the collapse some of the only Somalis who believe the state should be resurrected in its old form are those who expect to rule it themselves, i.e., primarily the warlords and their supporters. Many average Somalis, on the other hand, believe that the very nature, shape, scope and extent of the Somali state – or states – must be fundamentally reconsidered.

4.3 The Conclusion: The Disconnect is Complete

Thus, what we see throughout the independence era in Somalia is a state, and more importantly, regimes of rule, with at best weak bases of legitimacy, and a great divide

imposed between the state and the society by the unfamiliar structures and institutions that were built. The result was not a legitimate and effective state that could count on loyalty and a fair level of cooperation and obedience from citizens, while itself remaining accountable to them. Rather, it was a largely *autonomous* state in which the Somali people were really subjects, more than citizens, and in which the state, regimes, and individual politicians were largely free to do as they wished. Sadly, as we have seen, this seems to have released most Somali politicians from any sense of responsibility to the public, as they recognized that their ability to control and manipulate resources would be the surest means for staying in power, rather than efforts to build or preserve the legitimacy, capability and effectiveness of their regime and state institutions.

It is worth noting at least briefly here that this political and institutional disconnect was greatly exacerbated by the *financial autonomy* of the Somali state. The extent to which every government in Somalia from the colonial period onward relied heavily upon outside resources to function and survive was noted in Chapter 3. The availability of resources did not depend to a significant extent upon the Somali state achieving economic growth, or on good economic management, i.e., the state had financial autonomy from society to go along with its political and institutional autonomy. As a result, the personal interests of Somali political elites and the developmental interests of society were even more widely divorced than they might otherwise have been, and there were even fewer incentives for regimes to seek public benefit than would otherwise have been the case. For example, Abdi I. and Ahmed I. Samatar (1987), in a prescient, pre-collapse analysis of the flawed “material roots” of African states, observe that:

The post-colonial state is a Janus-faced social institution; it is both dependent and autonomous. Reliance on foreign assistance as a main source of accumulation ties the state to outside patrons while, at the same

time, it brings relative freedom from the domestic economy – postponing the time of reckoning with the civil society.²⁰

The relationship between financial autonomy and political and institutional disconnect is a critical one, deserving of further study.²¹ It must suffice here, however, to note the extent to which the state's financial autonomy from society seriously exacerbated the problem of state-society disconnect and state autonomy. While I will not have the opportunity to pursue this issue at any great length in this analysis, it is a critical one as the international community considers its role in supporting reconstruction in Somalia, and I will return to it briefly in Chapter 8.

The disconnect between Somali state and society was therefore virtually complete. State elites and the institutions they created did not need to rely on society to function and survive, or in fact to thrive. They were not only financially, but culturally and ideationally independent of that society. And society was likewise disconnected from the institutions of the state. It had not created them, did not understand or own them, and did not have the means, or perhaps even the *expectation*, of keeping them in check. Somalia was thus a classic example of the kind of society described by North in which the formal institutions of society and government and the informal norms and values that *should* underpin them were in fact mismatched, leading to inconsistencies and tensions, and ultimately to the failure of the state. As such, the Republic of Somalia – both the state, and individual regimes that ruled it – lacked the vertical legitimacy necessary to build an effective and enduring political system.

²⁰ Abdi Ismail Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar, "The Material Roots of the Suspended African State: Arguments from Somalia," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (December 1987): 674.

²¹ Some analyses have already been conducted. See for example Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

Both North and Holsti suggest that these problems of disconnect and illegitimacy are widespread in Africa, and elsewhere in the world, and the evidence certainly supports them. In Somalia the problem is particularly surprising in several regards, particularly given the *relative* homogeneity of the society, and the democratic nature of traditional political culture. This is, in fact, one part of the explanation for the extreme outcome in Somalia. As discussed, many African states and their ruling regimes share the problem of weak and eroding legitimacy that plagued Somalia, and Siyad Barre is by no means the only leader to respond to these weak foundations with an autocratic and oppressive dictatorship. And yet the collapse in Somalia has been worse than anywhere else on the continent (although there are numerous close contenders for the runners-up spot, including Sudan, the entire Great Lakes region, Sierra Leone and Liberia, among others). I propose two primary explanations for this. First, given that Somali's traditional political culture was both highly democratic – on its own terms – and extremely decentralized, the disconnect between the traditional system and a highly centralized state with very undemocratic (in effect, if not in name) political practices was even greater than the disconnect that might be experienced in a society with a more hierarchical and less democratic tradition. Secondly, as mentioned, this institutional and cultural disconnect was exacerbated in Somalia by the extreme financial disconnect. While this was also true in many countries, as a key client state of Cold War powers, the effects in Somalia were again extreme. Benefiting from the largess of its patrons, Siyad Barre's regime didn't need the Somali economy for its survival. In fact, the state received the economic and military resources necessary to allow it to survive long after the last vestiges of legitimacy and the ability to survive on its own were long gone, and the gap between the state and society grew into an abyss. The effect of these resources could be

compared to a pressure cooker: tensions between the state and society grew steadily throughout the 1980s, but it was not until the resources were withdrawn that the pressure could be released. By the time the collapse came, social values and structures of trust and cooperation were so undermined that rebuilding the state has been impossible. It is notable that many comparisons could be drawn with Congo (formerly Zaire), and a number of other states; in each case, while the fundamental flaws are in the internal structure and functioning of the state, external resources and influences have the power to greatly affect how these issues are played out in a society.

This disconnect in Somalia, its historical roots, and the need to overcome it, has been increasingly recognized by Somali scholars and Somalis themselves. Martin Doornbos and John Markakis (1994), for example, observe that:

The pattern that Siad Barre perfected was laid down before he arrived on the political scene. This pattern was introduced under colonial rule, and was accepted uncritically by the Somali nationalist movement in the 1950s. It was then that a number of complex, interrelated, but alien concepts were adopted to govern Somali political life. Among them was the imperative of the 'nation state,' the unitary and highly centralized system of rule, the western model of representative government, the bureaucratic mode of administration, a western code of law and justice. Most crucial of all was the assumption that a minuscule western educated class would rule Somalia; naturally, it seemed, since only they could administer a modern state. . . . Somali traditional institutions and customary authority were discarded, and the degrading of traditional values and norms began.²²

They then go on to conclude that:

Following this line of thought, one can say there was a mismatch between a society whose traditional mode of political practice was, according to Lewis (1980), "democratic to the point of anarchy," and the highly centralized, authoritarian, militarized and violent post-colonial state ruled by a tiny, westernized elite class. This mismatch is the essence of the Somali problem . . .²³

²² Doornbos and Markakis, "Society and State in Crisis," 84.

²³ *Ibid.*, 86.

In her analysis of the causes of collapse, Virginia Luling (1997) reaches similar conclusions:

The state which has disappeared was, as in most of Africa, an essentially artificial one, 'suspended above' a society which would never have produced it and did not demand it. This 'mis-match' between state and society is the essence of the problem.²⁴

This is how a society known for fierce individualism, open, participatory processes, consensus-based decision making and lack of centralized control virtually to the point of anarchy, and exhibiting extremely non-hierarchical social and political values, came to experience one of the most highly centralized, concentrated and hierarchical governments, with one of the most poorly served populaces, either on the continent, or in the world. While in a literal sense Somalis were enfranchised in their new independence, in a practical, functional sense they were largely disenfranchised. They were bequeathed political models that bore little relation to those they knew and understood, and as such, experienced government, as Chinua Achebe put it, as "they," as "having nothing to do with you or me."²⁵ Traditional checks and balances on abuse of individual power, traditional means of decision making, and traditional patterns of interaction were all essentially meaningless in the national political sphere, while the patterns and practices necessary to function effectively in the new state were at best unfamiliar, at worst entirely unknown. The few who understood the system could and did use their knowledge of how to manipulate it to the fullest, while much of the rest of society stood back and watched – from as great a distance as they could manage – the machinations of this foreign creation

²⁴ Luling, "Come Back Somalia," 288-289. Note that the concept of the state "suspended above" society comes from Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective* (London: Heineman, 1983).

²⁵ Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 92.

in their midst, with little expectation that they should, much less could, try to control it. The result has been tragic for the Somali people. Does the future present a more hopeful outlook?

4.4 Finding the Way Forward: The Difficult Task of Recreating Political Order

If the above analysis of the problem is correct, then the nature of the solution at least appears to be relatively straightforward: build new political systems that take account not only of global or “universal” democratic values, but also of the indigenous values, political practices, structures, norms, actors or symbols of society, blending the two together to create systems that are well-rooted in the societies they are meant to serve, or, as I defined it in Chapter 2, “indigenization,” the subject of my second proposition. Doornbos and Markakis concur, suggesting that as they rebuild their political systems, in order to avoid another mismatch between society and the state, “the Somali must look for inspiration into their own culture and political tradition for the solution to their problems. . . . Somalia’s special features require unorthodox and original thinking about what might be appropriate institutional solutions in a largely pastoral context.”²⁶

The growing recognition of this disconnect or mismatch between state and society has led an increasing number of analysts to assert that new models are needed for state building in Somalia. But as we shall also see, the task of building a *connected* state will not be an easy one, for several reasons. Not least of these is that fact that the very nature and validity of the values, beliefs and practices of society at large are hotly contested

²⁶ Doornbos and Markakis, “Society and State in Crisis,” 87.

among Somalis themselves, as well as by analysts. Current debates over kinship and clanism in modern Somali society amply demonstrate this.

Nevertheless, while the solutions are not simple, it should become clear that the struggle to identify more complex solutions is well worth the effort. There is already solid evidence in Somalia of how effective approaches that rely more on indigenous or traditional practice can be. For example, Ken Menkhaus (1995) describes the relative success and failure of various negotiation processes that went on as part of efforts to resolve the crisis in Somalia during the period of the UN's intervention in the early 1990s. He finds that in general, those negotiations that were pursued along traditional patterns – i.e., via long periods of negotiation (days, weeks, or even months), and situated within the communities concerned so that elders regularly consulted with community members – tended to produce much more effective and lasting results than those organized by outsiders. Numerous local agreements negotiated without United Nations assistance or international attention in some cases still hold today (and even those that do not often held for several years before succumbing to shifting allegiances or being supplanted by new accords).²⁷ The UN-sponsored 1993 Addis Ababa negotiations, on the other hand, were negotiated over a period of a few days, they were conducted outside of the country, and participants – primarily warlords, with few representatives of other sectors of society – appeared to be responding more to the considerable international pressure to reach an agreement rather than to a Somali agenda. And this pattern has been typical of most of the externally negotiated “settlements” negotiated under the influence of various foreign powers and international actors. It is hardly surprising that the

²⁷ See for example Ken Menkhaus, “International Peacebuilding and the Dynamics of Local and National Reconciliation in Somalia,” in *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, eds. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), 42-63.

agreements they have produced have never been implemented. Menkhaus and John Prendergast (1995) therefore conclude that negotiations, both for peace and reconciliation as well as for the reconstruction of legitimate authority, must happen “on a Somali timetable and in Somali ways, and must not be driven by whatever preference the international community may have.”²⁸

Nevertheless, putting this solution into practice on a large scale is a daunting task. In the aftermath of state collapse, the Somali people have found themselves at a historic crossroads. There is, on the one hand, the rare opportunity to build new political institutions that are much more fully attuned to their own political needs and political culture – to create a uniquely Somali form of democracy, in the eyes of some Somalis. On the other hand, the legacy of the past remains strong, both among unreformed politicians of the old regime, and in the perspectives and understandings of many “average” Somalis. And the international community, in its efforts to support rebuilding efforts and interact with re-emerging state entities can also find itself mired in old habits and patterns of relating to African states that can also inhibit innovation. The final sections in this chapter will therefore outline some of the key impediments that could undermine efforts to build innovative institutions, while the following chapters will discuss specific efforts at innovation and the extent to which they have succeeded in overcoming these constraints.

²⁸ Ken Menkhaus and John Prendergast, “Governance and Economic Survival in Post-Intervention Somalia,” *CSIS Africa Notes*, no. 172 (May 1995): 9.

4.4.1 Internal Impediments

Although there are signs of hope that a new “Somali model of democracy” could emerge that builds on both Somali and universal values and practices to promote a new norm of accountability to broader public interests, and that puts accessible mechanisms in place to facilitate and perpetuate such values, there is also ample evidence of the struggle that still lies ahead. Authoritarian attitudes, corruption, power struggles, manipulation of interests, and other tools of the former regime are also still very much in evidence in Somaliland and elsewhere in the region. So there is no guarantee of success in producing a more viable political system. While Somalis’ past experience of government does encourage greater vigilance and diligent efforts to avoid making the same mistakes again – many aver that they will never again tolerate abuse at the hands of the state as they did under Siyad Barre – other factors will instead tend to foster the re-creation of hierarchical, disengaged political structures. The most important of these are discussed below.

Foremost among them are the role and interests of the political “old guard.” An admirable aspect of Somalis’ willingness to reconcile has been the extent to which members of the former regime have been “forgiven” and “reintegrated” into their communities, rather than having their past allegiances and associations held against them. Former political prisoners and rebels work and live alongside their former jailers and government ministers, apparently without complaint. Officials of the former government are among the most educated and skilled – and the most politically savvy – members of society. As a result, their presence is notable in the Somaliland administration. While not all former civil servants can be condemned for their links with the past government, there is nevertheless a greater danger that these individuals, by choice or merely by habit,

will revert to old habits of centralized rule, autonomous decision making, and self-interested politics that focus on controlling the resources of a centralized state.

Just as former government officials may have bad governance habits, so too might the public. Although indigenous Somali political systems emphasize participation, independent thinking, and individual voice in local governance, the experience of state government, as we have seen, has been entirely different, with few opportunities for meaningful participation, and no decision-making power for the public at large. Somalis have, to some extent, learned to be placid “takers” of government policy rather than creators of it. It thus appears that how Somalis view their relationship to their local communities and fellow clansmen, and how they see their relationship with the state, can be fundamentally different: government is still seen by many as something separate from and not subject to the control of society. In addition, Somalis share a contradictory mixture of low expectations of what a government can accomplish, but high expectations of what it is responsible for – a particular legacy of Siyad Barre’s socialist policies. Many Somalis thus express the belief that the best government is the one that leaves them alone, so they may be slow to recognize and act on new opportunities to participate or to hold government accountable.

Another constraint arises from the fact that while many Somalis recognize the challenges that they face in building a more functional, cohesive political system that can reconcile an ability to meet their modern, global needs with the nature and needs of indigenous society, they are also very aware of the fact that there is no “blueprint,” no existing model that can simply be adopted or adapted into the Somali situation. The solutions will not be simple, and identifying them will require debate and compromise, struggle, experimentation, creative thinking, and risk taking. In the complex Somali

political environment, carving out the opportunity and sufficient political space to debate and decide on how to experiment can be enormously difficult. So can ensuring the opportunity for – and the reality of – broad-based participation in these debates and institution-building processes. The danger that the whole rebuilding process can be “hijacked” by savvy politicians to serve their own objectives is particularly acute.

A final, critical internal impediment to fostering truly creative processes is the fear, felt by many Somalis, of renewed conflict. As often as Somalis are heard to say that they will “never again” tolerate a predatory state like the Siyad Barre regime, they are also heard to say “any government is better than no government,” reflecting the high costs that conflict and statelessness have inflicted on society. In areas where peace already prevails, it is highly treasured, and the outpouring of public support in the south for the Djibouti peace process in 2000 indicates how strongly felt the desire for peace is there as well. The danger inherent in this strong desire for peace, however, is that in the short term the public may be reluctant to challenge predatory interests seeking to take control of the state, or even simply to complain about poor government performance, for fear that any challenge may spark renewed conflict. There may therefore be a trade-off, whether real or perceived, between short-term preservation of peace and stability, and long-term efforts to build effective political institutions.

4.4.2 External Impediments

It is clear then that Somalis have their work cut out for them if they are to succeed in creating a state (or states) that is both peaceful and effective. Moreover, while it is clearly Somalis themselves who must struggle through the process of political rebuilding with all its opportunities and pitfalls, and they who will ultimately determine the success

or failure of these efforts, they do not and will not be operating in a vacuum. Just as it did in the past, the international community will continue to play an influential role on the course of events both in the short and the long term in Somalia, and just as there is no guarantee that the best goals of Somalis will be reached, there is no assurance that the role of the international community will be positive, however good the intentions might be, without a thorough understanding of the causes of past failures, and of the current strengths and opportunities, and the interests, issues and actors involved in the rebuilding process. Just as former Somali government officials and Somali society as a whole have some old, bad habits that must be overcome in order to render real change and improvement in the nature of the political system, the same is true of the actions of the international community. If we simply continue relying on traditional assumptions and old routines (e.g., about the proper nature of the state and state institutions, the best models of government and how to achieve them, etc.), we are likely to facilitate precisely what many Somalis most fear: the re-creation of the centralized and predatory state according to the old, failed models. As Jeffrey Herbst (2000) suggests, the international community may need to join Somalis in thinking creatively about the nature of the state, its structures, and its relationships with the “outside world.”²⁹

But this is not easy, and it is certainly not the habit of the international community to think creatively on these issues. As Krishna Kumar (1997) notes, civil wars suggest political failure: “The causes of civil war are mostly political; civil wars signify failed political systems that could not perform essential governance functions, thereby generating political insurgencies. *The need, therefore, is not to go back to pre-crisis*

²⁹ Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 269-272.

conditions but to move in a different direction."³⁰ [italics supplied] However, while Kumar points to the primacy of political rebuilding in the post-conflict reconstruction process, arguing that it is ultimately the most critical aspect of rebuilding, he also observes that it is the most problematic aspect for the international community as well. This is due in part to a lack of knowledge, understanding and successful experience concerning how to effectively support these tasks. But it results as well from a lack of political will to put the necessary resources and effort into developing and implementing a coherent strategy for rebuilding political institutions. Rather, Kumar notes, the focus of post-war reconstruction efforts on the part of the international community is typically on the "easier" sector of economic rehabilitation, as well as limited aspects of political rebuilding such as elections preparation, and demobilization and reintegration. The fundamental task of institution building is all too often overlooked or ignored.

Some would argue, in contrast to Kumar, that economic rebuilding should take precedence over what is regarded perhaps as more abstract, less immediate efforts to rebuild political institutions. But in fact the two cannot be separated. Kumar is not concerned with remote or abstract politics; he is concerned with the "essential governance functions" that political institutions will fulfill that have immediate, daily impact on society and individuals. Along with providing security and stability, perhaps the most critical of these governance functions are the management of public resources for the public good, and regulating and facilitating the growth of the economy. A key factor in the collapse of the Siyad Barre regime was its almost complete failure to fulfill these latter economic governance functions. New governments may be weak, and it is

³⁰ Krishna Kumar, "The Nature and Focus of International Assistance for Rebuilding War-Torn Societies," in *Rebuilding Societies After Civil War: Critical Roles for International Assistance*, ed. in Krishna Kumar (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 2.

tempting to believe that they will stay this way, allowing the economy to take its own course. But these governments will inevitably strengthen, establish policies, and gain influence, so it is imperative to ensure that past mistakes are not repeated as new policies are established and new roles carved out. The early stages of rebuilding, when new governments are weak and regulatory environments are still unformed, offer a unique window of opportunity to positively influence these processes in ways that could have critical long-term impacts on the economy and society. It is these long-term implications of the formation of governance institutions that makes political reconstruction such a key priority.

Cynthia Hewitt de Alcantra (1998) goes on to note that not only do we tend to avoid politics and stick to the “easier” economic tasks, but when we do address politics we also tend to stick to familiar political models:

In such situations, it is particularly easy to see the contradictions inherent in many approaches to governance within the international development community. The extreme openness of the concept of “governance” – its general reference to problems of consensus-building, participation and management, outside the necessary confines of the state – should serve the useful purpose of reminding outsiders involved in reconstruction that different societies have different approaches to problems of political order. Yet in the desperate race to re-establish a functioning government, there is little time to consider such subtleties. Standard models of political institution building are proposed and supported – models that may prove workable over the longer term, but often do not.³¹

She further laments the potentially dangerous impacts of careless use of international resources, observing that:

channeling resources from donors to certain groups – a highly political act in any society – is particularly charged with implications for the future balance of power in a situation of economic and political collapse. An enormous effort to understand and involve local people is required, when

³¹ Cynthia Hewitt de Alcantra, “Uses and Abuses of the Concept of Governance,” *International Social Science Journal*, no. 155 (March 1998): 110.

operating within these political minefields, to avoid imposing inadequate models of institutional reform on prostrate countries. The international community rarely has the capacity to make this effort.³²

Rebuilding political institutions in Somalia will without doubt be just such a “political minefield” of competing interests and agendas, both among Somalis and within the international community. Perceived short-term needs may be at odds with long-term interests, the old guard will compete with young reformers, power struggles will be intense, and old, bad habits will die hard. There is no assurance that the international community will not once again prop-up a pseudo “democracy” that fulfills certain procedural rules while meeting none of the more important criteria, such as instilling a sense of ownership and building truly participatory structures on the part of the Somali people, or being accountable to them, rather than only to outsiders, or to themselves. But doing so would likely mean continuing the cycle of failure and violence, rather than decisively breaking out of it and producing a new, more effective, durable, and peaceful political system. The challenge for the international community to discover how to play a truly constructive role in such a context is immense.

4.4.3 The Ultimate Hurdle: Defining the “Indigenous”

A particular impediment to the task of rebuilding via *indigenization*, already raised in the discussion in Chapter 2, is the contested process of identifying what in fact constitutes *indigenous* political culture and systems, and agreeing on what components of this culture and practice can and should be integrated in appropriate and effective ways into an organically reconstructed system. Although many Somalis (though by no means all) agree that this time they need to do things differently, building a distinctively Somali

³² *Ibid.*, 110.

political system that draws on their own roots, there is much less consensus about *how* this can best be done. Some focus on designing rebuilding *processes* that reflect traditional values of participation as the means to instill legitimacy and Somali ownership, but others would go well beyond this, believing that the final substance – the structure and content – of political institutions must *directly* reflect a Somali heritage. But “political culture” is always a difficult beast to pin down, and this is especially true when trying to understand the *present* nature of institutions and practices with deep historical roots. The preceding discussion about interpretations of modern “clanism” amply demonstrates this difficulty. This, and related questions (e.g., about the power struggles that can envelope the attempt to indigenize) will be returned to frequently in the chapters that follow on actual attempts at indigenization in Somaliland and elsewhere.

4.5 Indigenization Somali-Style

The next three chapters focus in on the particular efforts at peace building and political reconstruction undertaken in northwest Somalia, known today as Somaliland. In part, the discussion will serve to highlight the extent to which “modern” versions of traditional institutions are still strong, influential forces in Somali society. But we will go on from there to an in-depth look at the ways in which Somalis, at times consciously, and at other times unconsciously, are seeking to construct political systems that build on the foundations of these institutions, rather than ignoring them as in the past. It is a complex process, involving at times intense contestation to define both the nature and role of these “old” institutions, as well as the shape of the new. And the outcomes, as we shall see, are complex as well. Ideally Somalis would undertake this task in an environment that fosters widespread participation and offers ample opportunities for creativity,

experimentation, innovation, and risk taking. Not surprisingly, these conditions cannot often be met. There is nevertheless much that we can learn from the developments that are evident thus far.

Chapter 5: Rising from the Ashes – The Origins of the New Somaliland State

While Siyad Barre's fall and the collapse of the state signaled the beginning of the real troubles for much of the south, the situation was just the opposite in the northwest. Although progress was fitful and interrupted by episodes of severe internal conflict in the first few years, the collapse of the unified Republic of Somalia launched the northwestern territories of the former British Somaliland on the road towards reconstruction and recovery. While the region was largely being ignored by the rest of the world, increasingly successful, internally-driven peace efforts were laying the foundations for a new, and possibly unique, political experiment, and the region was soon reintroduced to the world as the ("self-declared") Republic of Somaliland. The project of political reconstruction in Somaliland proceeded down a radically different path from prior state- and institution-building processes in the region. Building the state was not, this time, a task reserved for Somali elites and foreign intermediaries that excluded the Somali majority. Instead, a broad cross-section of northwestern Somali society, including especially traditional elders, but also poets, elites and intellectuals, businesspeople and many others (although women were largely excluded from direct participation), joined together to build the new state. And it was not only the processes that were different, but the outcomes as well. Somaliland's new institutional structures include some unique features that in many respects reflect an explicit effort to meld Somali political traditions and modern state structures into a more organic, and perhaps more functional, political system.

This chapter and the two that follow will explore in some detail how this new political experiment came to pass, the shape that it has taken, and most importantly,

whether these unique processes and institutional outcomes have or will succeed in conferring enhanced legitimacy and capacity on the new state and its regimes and governments. Specifically, I will be exploring the second proposition presented in Chapter 1, whereby I argued that building the foundations of the state, as well as its institutions, by drawing upon both universal democratic principles and Somalis' own indigenous political culture – a process of “indigenization” – could create a political system with increased legitimacy, and thus enhanced authority and effectiveness. I will therefore review here the unique, indigenously-rooted aspects of the events and processes that have taken place in Somaliland, as well as their outcomes, and, based on extensive interviews with a broad cross-section of Somalilanders, evaluate the impacts on both instrumental and intrinsic sources of legitimacy for the state, as well as for the governing regime. Here I will focus on the process of how this unique political experiment came to pass – an important component in evaluating the likely and actual outcomes of the process.

5.1 Burao and a New Start for the Northwest

While the SNM had been fighting for over a decade to bring down Siyad Barre and his despotic regime, they had not sought the destruction of the state itself, at least not explicitly. The initial response in the northwest, therefore, to the fall of the regime in Mogadishu was to begin almost immediately taking steps aimed at rebuilding relationships and institutions. The SNM secretariat met in the coastal town of Berbera to declare a ceasefire in February 1991, and called a conference, or grand *shir*, of the *guurti* (elders' assembly) from each of the clans in the northwest to be held in Burao, the northwest's “second city,” shortly thereafter. The inclusiveness of the Isaaq-dominated

SNM's initiative reflects one of the most critical decisions made by the organization. Despite their numerical dominance, and their victory in the struggle against the Barre regime, and contrary to the fears among other clans of Isaaq retaliation, the Isaaq and the SNM made a deliberate decision to reconcile and work together with their neighbors. These included the Dulbahante and Warsengele in the east, who had, for the most part, fought with the government against the Isaaq, and the Isse and Gadabursi in the west. The task of reconciling all of the clans of the northwest was to be left in the hands of these elders. Thus, in April and May of 1991, leading elders of all the clans of the northwest came together in Burao, accompanied by a host of poets, businesspeople, intellectuals, members of the Somali diaspora, and others, to plot the region's future.

In the midst of this gathering, news arrived from the south of Ali Mahdi's self-declared appointment as the new president of the Republic. Mahdi was the political leader of the SNC, the faction which had the most direct hand in ousting Siyad Barre from Mogadishu. This move met with resistance even from within the SNC; Mohamed Farah Aideed, the faction's military leader, soon split with Ali Mahdi and sought to claim the presidency for himself. But in the north, this development generated particular animosity. Believing that they had suffered the most at the hands not just of Siyad Barre, but of the entire south, for years, and that they had played a leading role in the fight to free the country of Barre's despotism, northwesterners were particularly insulted by this abrupt move, made without consultations, by yet another southerner to usurp control of the country. Seceding from the Republic of Somalia had never been part of the SNM's stated objectives during their long struggle, and the SNM leadership continued to resist this move during the Burao conference. But popular sentiment among both the rank and file of the SNM, as well as among the gathered elders (who were in constant consultation

with their fellow clansmen), increasingly favored a decisive split with the south, and the conference eventually decided in favor of recommending this step to the SNM leadership. The SNM was eventually forced by the strength of public opinion to accept.¹ On May 18, 1991, Somaliland unilaterally abrogated the union formed so rashly (as northwesterners now saw it) in 1960, and declared the independence of the Republic of Somaliland.² The elders gathered at Burao further decided to entrust the governance of the country to the SNM for a transitional period of two years, so the SNM leader at the time, Abdirahman Ahmed Ali “Tuur,” took over as interim president.

The first goal of the assembly at Burao had been to reconcile the region’s clans, and it met with notable success, at least initially. But the inter-clan peace that was established there did not resolve all of the region’s internal disputes, and after a few tranquil months these spilled over into open conflict, and the next two years were troubled ones.

According to analysts at the Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), “Although the agreement reached at Burco [Burao] remains the cornerstone of the peace that prevails in Somaliland today, it by no means settled all grievances, nor resolved all differences: it simply terminated active hostilities and created a common political framework.”³ In fact, while the conference succeeded admirably in settling inter-clan conflicts, and representatives of non-Isaaq clans played a role in establishing the new government, the reduction in hostilities with non-Isaaqs allowed long-simmering intra-Isaaq tensions to rise to the surface. By early in 1992, fighting among major Isaaq clans

¹ Mohamed Barood Ali, Director, Somali Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SORRA), chemist and member of the “Hargeisa Group” of political prisoners under Siyad Barre, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 22, 2000.

² Although many Somalilanders argue that the union was never valid in the first place. See for example Republic of Somaliland, “Submission on Statehood and Recognition of Republic of Somaliland,” June 1996 (mimeo).

³ Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD) and War-torn Societies Project, *Rebuilding from the Ruins: A Self-Portrait of Somaliland*, Hargeisa, Somaliland, October 1999, 19.

had broken out in Burao and Berbera, and the Isaaq *guurti*, or council of elders, which had so successfully fostered the resolution of the region's inter-clan problems at Burao, was soon embarrassed by its inability to resolve the conflicts within its own ranks. There had, in fact, long been tensions within the SNM between the military and political wings, which flared as the new government, dominated by a group of Isaaq sub-clans known collectively as the Garhajis, sought to centralize power and take control of the region's critical resources, most notably the port at Berbera, a town dominated by a rival sub-clan. Ultimately it was left to the regions' non-Isaaq clans, particularly the Gadabursi, to mediate among the Isaaq, and peace was again established at another conference at the town of Sheikh in October and November 1992.

This conference did not, however, produce a final resolution to all of the disharmony among Somaliland's clans. Despite the progress achieved at Burao, non-Isaaq clans still felt marginalized by the SNM government. And even many Isaaq were disenchanted as they watched the administration squander resources while competition for power and control escalated.⁴ Abdirahman "Tuur" also played upon a power struggle that was emerging between the SNM, which had essentially become the ruling party, and his government. Because the SNM had policies, documents and plans, while the government had none, he increasingly preferred his position as president with its greater flexibility to his role as party chairman, antagonizing some within the party ranks.⁵ As a result of these disputes, failures and weaknesses, when the elders met at Sheikh to resolve

⁴ Ahmed Yusuf Farah and Ioan M. Lewis, "Making Peace in Somaliland," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 146 no. XXXVII-2 (1997): 362.

⁵ Abdulrahman Youssef "Bobe," Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), former Secretary of the SNM, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Somaliland Government, and former editor of *Jamhurriya*, Somaliland's leading independent daily, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 17, 1999.

the intra-Isaaq conflicts, they also called for a broader reconciliation and rebuilding conference to be held at the western town of Boroma the following year.

5.2 The Grand Guurti at Boroma

In response to this call, some 150 leading elders from all of Somaliland's clans, joined by hundreds of observers and advisors representing many sectors of Somaliland society, gathered at Boroma in January 1993. In classic Somali style, the deliberations lasted for more than four months, concluding in May 1993 with the adoption of a Peace Charter and a National Charter, the transfer of power to a new transitional government, and the virtual banishment of the SNM to the sidelines of Somaliland politics. The charters were to serve as the basis for peace- and state-building efforts for a two-year transition period, during which time the new government was instructed to draw up a constitution for the Republic and lay the groundwork for a more permanent regime.

The Grand Boroma Conference was a unique and momentous event in modern Somali political history. It was here that the locus of power within Somaliland shifted decisively and virtually completely into the hands of the elders for the first time since the advent of the colonial era. These traditional leaders, who represented the *guurti*, or elders' assemblies, of each of the region's clans, formed into a Grand *Guurti* which then became one of the core institutions of the new regime. The SNM, a rebel movement which only two years earlier had found itself victorious after a decade of leading Somaliland's (or the Isaaq community's) struggle against the Siyad Barre regime, was relegated to the position of a mere opposition party, while the elders with whom the SNM had previously shared influence over the Somaliland community took control of the process of plotting the new state's future. The presence of the international community

was also minimal, confined to a handful of journalists and representatives of aid organizations. In sharp contrast to the many UN-sponsored peace negotiations described earlier, the Grand *Shir* at Boroma was locally organized and mostly locally supported (although some international support for logistics was provided). It was “attended” by not only the 150 “official” delegates – elders selected to formally represent their clans – but also by some 700 or more observers, advisors, and supporters. And perhaps most importantly, the negotiations were undertaken on a “Somali timetable” rather than an international one; the delegates stayed as long as it took to resolve the issues that they had taken on.

This shift of power almost completely into the hands of the elders at Boroma did not come without a struggle. Abdirahman “Tuur,” the SNM leader and interim president, lobbied aggressively to retain his position, and expected to be re-elected as president of the fledgling state.⁶ The SNM, however, had become deeply divided over the issue of his leadership, causing something of a power vacuum. Abdirahman’s challengers were also winning support within the SNM, but the party remained roughly evenly divided between support for “Tuur” and support for his leading challenger, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, Somaliland’s most prominent, and one of its longest-serving, politicians (and the prime minister at the time of Siyad Barre’s coup in 1969), and a civilian who had not been directly involved with the SNM. According to Abdulrahman Youssef, the *Guurti* was talking to all sides – each of which thought the *Guurti* would support it – and became aware of the power vacuum. The elders therefore stepped in to fill the gap, and much to Tuur’s surprise, elected Egal. In so doing, they demonstrated that they now held the

⁶ *Ibid.*

reigns of power in the country.⁷ As one respondent, Mohammed Barood, suggested, their victory in this power struggle may have gained support from an interesting quarter. Barood, a former political prisoner under Barre, argues that it was not so much an emerging power vacuum within the SNM that allowed the *Guurti* to elevate itself to the position of primary authority, but the maneuvering of the many northerners who were returning home after years of working (or, as some saw it, “collaborating”) with the government in Mogadishu. According to Barood, “their only hope was in the clan system, because if the SNM was stronger, they would have to account for their actions.” He argues that these individuals therefore threw their support behind their clan elders in their struggle with the SNM.⁸ However, even with the backing of these individuals it is unlikely that the elders could have gained such a clearly dominant position in the absence of a real power vacuum within the SNM and a high degree of community support for their leadership.

Tuur was initially unwilling to accept defeat and perform the public handover of power that had become an SNM tradition. But emissaries dispatched to convince him to concede for the sake of Somaliland’s future eventually succeeded. Tuur then left Somaliland to become politically active in the south (eventually becoming a proponent of federalism for all of the former Republic of Somalia, rather than of independence for Somaliland), while the rump-SNM reorganized and began operating as Somaliland’s leading opposition forum.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Mohamed Barood Ali, interview.

5.3 The SNM and the Isaaq Community

In the history of African rebel movements, this represents a relatively unique turn of events, and it is worth exploring further the ideals and structures of the SNM and the evolution of its relationship with Somali community elders to understand how this came to pass. Because in general African rebel movements have tended to be just as prone as many African states to succumbing to strongman leadership. It is, to say the least, rare, if not entirely unprecedented, that just two years after a movement's victory, its leader would willingly, if reluctantly, accept his removal from control of the territories which he had, in effect, successfully "liberated."

The SNM had been founded in 1981 by a disparate collection of intellectuals, businessmen, religious leaders, and members of the Somali (primarily, but not entirely, from the Isaaq clan) diaspora working in London and the Gulf states. In contrast to other rebel movements in Somalia, and on the continent, not only its stated goals, but its actual operations, were relatively democratic from the beginning. Ahmed I. Samatar reports on a policy document released by the organization as follows:

Politically, the SNM's position, while rather hazy, conveyed a desire to resuscitate some Somali traditions of social organization and mesh these with enacted laws. The document stated: "We propose a new political system built on Somali cultural values of co-operation rather than coercion; a system which elevates the Somali concept of *Xeer* or inter-family social contract in which no man exercised political power over another except according to established law and custom, to the national level." More specifically, the guidelines listed the following principles as central to the SNM's conception of future policy: 1) The structure of the central and regional governments will be as simple as possible. They will be designed to reduce hierarchy and bureaucracy to a minimum and enable the average man and woman to understand and relate to regional and national governments; 2) It will integrate effectively traditional Somali egalitarianism and the requirements of good central government; 3) It will

maximize the effectiveness of the representative and democratic process at all levels . . .⁹

Thus, in effect, from its beginning the SNM had a policy of pursuing political reconstruction based on a program akin to indigenization. The list continues to include a number of additional principles promising democracy and constitutional rule, collective leadership, accountability of politicians and bureaucrats, freedom of access for all citizens to information about all aspects of government, political neutrality of police and other government institutions, freedom of the press, and a system of government that “will ensure stability without stifling innovation.” Unlike many of its counterparts, the SNM published its policies and directives, and produced a monthly publication, *Somali Uncensored*, to promote discussion and debate.¹⁰

However, unusual as this might have been, the really critical differences between the SNM and other rebel movements can be seen in the actual practice of democracy within the organization. The SNM membership elected its leaders every two years, and in the decade between its founding and Siyad Barre’s collapse, leadership changed hands numerous times. The organization had thus built a legacy of established and functioning institutionalized practices. This does not mean the movement did not face internal conflict and power struggles. As Ahmed I. Samatar again describes it:

The Somali National Movement, too, experienced domestic discord. On 10 November 1983, in a crucial Central Committee meeting held in Jigjiga, the entire civilian component of the leadership was ousted – leaving the military in sole charge. The reasons offered to justify this “coup” were many and mixed: organizational weakness; leadership mostly from the Habar Awal clan, while the guerrillas were mostly from the Habar Yunis clan; civilian leadership resistant to unification with the SSDF; and too close a relationship with Saudi Arabia and the US.

⁹ Ahmed I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, Ltd., 1988), 142.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

However, the dominance of the military faction did not endure and, without any great acrimony or bloodshed, SNM again changed its leadership. A new civilian group was installed at the 1984 Congress, under Chairman Axmed Moxammad ‘Silanyo’, a senior minister in the Barre government until his defection in 1982.¹¹

And the leadership changed hands several more times during the course of the 1980s, each time via a public pledge from the loser to support and cooperate with the winner, an SNM tradition intended to ensure the public that the transition had been peaceful.¹² On the basis of this information alone, the SNM would have to be rated one of the most democratic entities of any kind on the African continent during the troubled decade of the 1980s.

There are several different, but related, “stories” about how this relationship came to pass. Abdulrahman Youssef “Bobe,” a former secretary of the SNM, credits this non-autocratic approach – and in fact the SNM’s very survival – to the movement’s strong linkages with the people via Isaaq community elders. As indicated above, the SNM interest in building a political system based on Somali cultural values was expressed early on. On a less ideological, more instrumental note, the SNM found that by working with the elders their ability to attract new recruits to their militias improved dramatically – the movement needed local support to survive and thrive. “Bobe” argues that in the early years, while the SNM was in the bush, they began to ask themselves how the people would govern themselves if the SNM succeeded. The answer they arrived at was not to restore something modeled on the colonial system, but to innovate, involving a wide range of social organizations such as women’s and youth groups, and also to rely on the elders who had age, experience, and knowledge of Somali culture. The SNM wanted to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹² Abdulrahman Youssef “Bobe,” interview, Gabiley, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

build a new model of governance that would “introduce the population into the government,” and they saw working with elders – who have a “permanent connection” to the people unlike elected representatives – as the best means to achieve this.¹³

Several other respondents tell similar stories. For example, Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, director of the Institute for Policy Research, describes it this way:

The elders’ role was a part of the way the SNM was created. It was more of a populist organization than a party, so it relied on clans from the very beginning. In London and Ethiopia, they realized the people of Somaliland are their base, and they’re in clans, therefore they must appeal to the clans, which means appealing to the elders.¹⁴

He goes on to explain that, in his view, the real difference between the north and south of the former Republic of Somalia

is the process the SNM went through. First, they had a long struggle, so they matured. And they needed a power base. At the beginning they had no intention of going to the clans, since it means sharing power, but then they realized they had to have them. Secondly, the people in the SNM were dedicated to a cause more than to power itself. . . . It had basically democratic internal processes. There were five elections and each time the leader was changed peacefully.¹⁵

Said Shukri, a founding member of the SNM and now chairman of Soyaal, the Somaliland veterans association, describes the beginnings of the relationship with the elders and the community:

The SNM was a very vulnerable organization because it was not getting outside support. To some extent we were afraid of external ideologies. . . . In the 80s, we were thinking of several factors. We were overthrowing an immense regime, Siyad Barre was a very powerful player in the Horn. . . . We knew we couldn’t overthrow him unless we organize . . . so we needed the people’s support. . . . We had intellectual conversations with the

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, Director, Institute for Policy Research (IPR), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 24, 2000.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

nomads to win sympathy and support, and they gave the SNM arms, food, even their sons and daughters.¹⁶

He goes on to describe the origins of the concept of working with elders and forming a *guurti*:

The inherited style of government was not fitting to the true African way of governance. The colonials were OK, they used their own set-up, but when they left they didn't prepare for an African set-up, instead they left their own system, with Africans in the seats. So countries didn't go through the political chemistry of forming their own governments. . . . The SNM found it essential to have some kind of chemistry in the decision-making processes that combines traditional and modern. This is why we have the *Guurti*.¹⁷

Describing the origins of the idea in conversations that he and others had with nomads as they traveled in the bush, he points out that the concept did originally meet with some resistance:

When we came back with this story, at first there was lots of resistance, other members of the SNM say we need policies, and education, but these elders only think of their own clan. We say look, we're 60 percent nomads and we've mobilized lots of people for the struggle from there, we can't just have elitists talking, we need practical policy. . . . There were strong debates, but eventually we convinced the others, and we could also show the practical aspects such as the role of elders in mobilizing support.¹⁸

In sum, according to Somaliland's Minister of Planning and two-time chairman of the SNM, Ahmed Mohamed "Silanyo," "Only the SNM lasted longer than all others because it was actually democratic. What very few understand is that right now Somaliland is what it is because the SNM was very democratic. . . . Few understand that the blend of

¹⁶ Said Shukri, Chairman, SOYAAL (Somaliland veterans association), and founding member and former central committee member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 25, 2000.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

traditional and modern was not created by Somaliland, it was created by the SNM. The *Guurti* was created by the SNM as a council of elders.”¹⁹

Not surprisingly, several respondents focused more on what Said Shukri treated as almost an afterthought: the instrumental benefits of working with the elders. John Drysdale, a leading analyst of Somali affairs, for example, argues that recruitment had much more to do with the growing relationship between the SNM and the elders than political ideals. He suggests that the SNM was having a hard time getting enough new recruits, so “they decided they needed to call on Sheikh Ibrahim [chairman of the *Guurti*] and the elders to whip up support to increase the number of militia, and it worked.”²⁰

There is likely a considerable amount of truth in Drysdale’s more cynical assessment of the SNM’s motives, particularly given that, as many observers noted, a sharp increase in the elders’ role came when the SNM was struggling for survival after a *détente* emerged between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1988. The SNM’s position became much more precarious as Ethiopia, its base of operations and key financier, withdrew its support. While the elders’ involvement had started with a meeting of a *guurti* in the primarily Isaaq areas sympathetic to the SNM in 1984, it was not until the movement was being expelled from Ethiopia and their resulting offensive inside Somaliland was being strongly countered by Siyad Barre’s troops, that they began to play a critical role, one that was increasingly recognized by the SNM leadership. According to Ahmed Yusuf and I.M. Lewis (1997), for example:

the authority of the clan elders started to gain increasing significance during the civil war. In 1988, the repulsed massive offensive, launched by

¹⁹ Axmed Mohamed “Silanyo,” Minister of Planning, Government of Somaliland, and two-time former chairman of the Somali National Movement (SNM), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 28, 2000.

²⁰ John Drysdale, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

the SNM against the government forces in Burco and Hargeysa, effectively undermined the capacity of the SNM as a military organization. This led to the formation of an Isaaq *Guurti* of fifty-three members that took the responsibility of providing clan militias and logistical support to the impaired war effort. Held at Adarosh, near the Ethiopian border, this important conference was organized by elders. Because of the vital collaboration between the elders, who had influence on Isaaq groups, and military leaders, the Isaaq *Guurti* was given recognition in the constitution of the SNM.²¹

And another founder of the SNM gives this first hand account:

In Adarosh, Ethiopia, in 1988, was the first meeting where the SNM had a collective meeting with the elders. The SNM leadership had been very affected by the agreement of Siyad Barre and Ethiopia. They were near collapse. Logistics were suspended. There was a breakdown of law and order within the SNM. So they needed some sort of combined leadership. At Adarosh they formed a council of elders, and made peace within the SNM. . . . They needed the elders to make peace among the people, to fill the gap in logistics caused by Siyad Barre's agreement with Ethiopia, and as a council to advise the SNM.²²

The movement's survival was now completely dependent on community support, and the undisputed key to community support was the backing of the elders. While up to this time the elders had long been excluded from any vestige of political power in the state system, they were still very much the leaders of their own communities. The *guurti* was reinvigorated and another conference held. Even at this time, however, the institution's role was still primarily focused on settling disputes and procuring logistical support; it was seen as a "social organization" separate from the SNM, and did not play a key role in political decision making. However, at the sixth SNM Congress held in 1990, the *guurti's* profile was elevated further, as it gained recognition in the SNM constitution.

The fourth article stated essentially that "the *guurti* is an official institution that exists,"²³

²¹ Yusuf and Lewis, "Making Peace," 359.

²² Mohamed Hashi, businessman, former mayor of Hargeisa, former Somaliland presidential candidate, and founding member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 31, 2000.

²³ This is a paraphrase of the actual text provided by Abdulrahman Yusuf "Bobe," a leading figure in the SNM during the 1980s. Abdulrahman Yusuf "Bobe," interview, September 19, 1999.

thus enhancing the status and importance of the group. So by the time the state collapsed in January 1991, the SNM had become quite accustomed to working with the local traditional leadership, and the elders were likewise becoming increasingly accustomed to – and assertive in – their revived role. As we have seen, over the course of the next few years, as their institution was vested with ever greater authority, the balance of political power continued to shift further toward these traditional leaders, until by the time of the Boroma Conference they became the main locus of power within the region.

5.4 New Government Structures – The Experiment Begins

The elders at Boroma did much more than simply replace Tuur with Egal as president of Somaliland. The National Charter which they negotiated among themselves established the structures and functions of the transitional administration, which in turn had considerable influence on the constitution adopted in a 2001 referendum. In many respects neither the National Charter nor the Constitution are particularly unique, but a few critical decisions reached during the negotiations at Boroma are highly relevant to this study. These features were not necessarily new to Somaliland politics by this time – several of them had also been incorporated into the first transitional administration under “Tuur” – but they were codified for the first time in the National Charter produced at Boroma.

The fundamental structure of the new government included an executive presidency supported by a council of ministers, as well as independent legislative and judicial branches. But there was one feature that stands out as a sharp departure from the political past of the Republic of Somalia. The new legislative branch was bicameral, and the *Guurti* which had led the Boroma conference became the upper house, sometimes known

as the “House of Elders.” The newly rediscovered political power of Somaliland’s elders was to be institutionalized, rather than limited to the duration of the Boroma conference itself, or relegated to the margins of Somali society, polity and economy as previous regimes had sought to do. Instead, the *Guurti* was granted nearly an equal role to that of the lower house of parliament in reviewing legislation produced by the executive branch. All legislation except for budgets was to be considered first in the lower house, and then pass to the *Guurti*, which could pass it, or return it with comments or proposed revisions. The *Guurti*’s lack of oversight of budgets is a significant limitation, but it is justified on the grounds that budgets are too “technocratic” for the elders, and it is a limitation which they *imposed on themselves* at Boroma. Members of the *Guurti* were also expected to have a critical and continuing role in maintaining the fragile peace in Somaliland – in fact, in the eyes of many this was seen as their primary mandate. How this unprecedented role for the traditional elders is affecting modern Somaliland politics will be explored in some detail in the next chapter.

In another radical departure from other post-independence regimes, the conference at Boroma and the government established by it did not attempt to sweep clan under the carpet. In fact, both the attendance and much of the negotiations at Boroma were explicitly based on clan. Initially there was perhaps no other choice; in the absence of some overarching controlling force, clan was the only legitimate basis on which Somalis could come together and negotiate. They may have had more choice, however, when it came to laying out the principles for constructing the new government that they were creating, but whether by necessity or by choice, clan identity remained very much a factor in building the new administration. This was manifested primarily within the legislative branch, where seats, at least during the transitional period, were allotted to

each clan according to its presumed numerical strength. The conference determined that the combined houses should have 150 seats, 75 in the *Guurti* and 75 in the lower house, and rather than renegotiating the distribution based on current contentions and claims about population size and clan strength, the elders of all clans eventually agreed to rely on the distribution established by the British in the Advisory Council of the protectorate, which had had 33 seats, 21 of them Isaaq, and 12 for other clans, with the exception that the seats for the Gadabursi clan were increased somewhat. This conferred a majority upon the Isaaq clan, but while the clan garnered more than 50 percent of the total seats, at a total of 87, it had less than a fully controlling two-thirds majority. The remaining seats were allotted to the Dulbahante (21 seats), the Warsengele (12), the Gadabursi (21), and the Isse (9), a distribution which probably reflects actual population shares relatively accurately, and which seems to have met with general acceptance, despite occasional grumbling. It was up to each clan to internally negotiate the distribution of seats among sub-clans, and each sub-clan likewise negotiated internally among its sub-sub-clans. Individuals were then selected for each seat by members of the lineage group to which it had been assigned. I will discuss some of the strengths, weaknesses, critiques, and implications of this system in some detail later Chapters 7.

The National Charter agreed to at Boroma contained one other element of particular interest in this analysis: a promise of decentralization. As already argued, many saw the centralization of previous regimes and the concentration of the power and resources of the entire state in Mogadishu as key contributing factors to the breakdown of the post-independence regimes and the eventual collapse of the country, in part because centralization is so contrary to traditional Somali approaches to politics, and was increasingly seen as a way for one clan or group of clans to dominate others. As they set

out to rebuild a political system for the northwest, therefore, Somaliland's elders made the construction of decentralized political structures and processes a cornerstone of the new system. This meant not just that power would be, *de facto*, decentralized from Mogadishu to the new capital at Hargeisa, but that within Somaliland itself, decision-making prerogative, as well as resources, should be made available to regional, town and local/village administrations and people. However, while many Somalilanders considered decentralization a critical feature of their new political system, a variety of factors have impeded progress in making it a reality. By the time this study was undertaken, while there was some evidence of a more decentralized approach, there was considerable concern about the tendency toward centralization that was once again being observed. I will explore decentralization and its implications briefly in the concluding chapter.

All of these *structural* changes in the Somali political system are noteworthy. Each reflects efforts, in some cases conscious and in others perhaps less deliberate, to reunite Somalis' traditional political culture with a modern political system and structure. But one other difference with the past which has potentially even deeper implications for the future of Somaliland should also be explored: the homegrown foundations of the (albeit unrecognized) state itself. No longer a creation merely of foreigners and a handful of Somali elites, some argue that the inclusive, participatory Boroma conference (as well as the other *shir* that both preceded and followed it) gave all Somalilanders a real voice in the creation of their new state, a real stake in – and claim on – its future, and a much more functional sense of ownership. And of course, the hope is that these organic foundations will have an enduring impact on Somalilanders' perceptions of and allegiance to the state that has grown out of them, safeguarding the state itself from the

machinations of those who would commandeer it to serve their own ends. While clearly not everyone, and not every group, participated in this process, the political space in Somaliland has expanded far beyond anything Somalis have experienced since the onset of the colonial era. It drew into the active political process a much larger cross-section of Somaliland society, perhaps laying the foundations for the emergence of a broad political class that has a real stake in the survival and effective functioning of the political system, rather than only in cornering its resources for their own ends.

The central question of this study, then, is whether these efforts to build a hybrid – or “indigenized” – political system, whether undertaken consciously or unconsciously, mean anything. Do they reflect a fundamental change in the structures and institutions of the state? Can they provide any assurance that the new regime in Somaliland will not simply be a recreation or resurrection of the failed efforts of the past? Do they in fact imbue Somalilanders at large with a greater sense of rights, ownership, and control over their government? Or is the only thing that has changed the personalities holding power, and in fact, in many cases not even these (recall that Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, the current president, was prime minister at the time of Siyad Barre’s widely welcomed coup)? As outlined in Chapter 2, the focus of our analysis of these changes will be on how they affect the legitimacy of the new state, as well as that of the transitional regime. Based on interviews with a wide cross-section of Somalilanders – ranging from local elders and women’s group representatives to government ministers, and from former SNM founders and fighters to ex-officials of the Siyad Barre regime, and including members of the parliament and the *Guurti* – we’ll explore the extent to which these changes have contributed to enhanced legitimacy in both intrinsic and instrumental ways. Before moving on to the analysis of these effects, I will begin with a brief review of

developments in Somaliland since the 1993 Boroma conference to set the scene for the environment in which these interviews were conducted in 1999-2000.

5.5 Struggling Towards Peace and Prosperity

Although many of the internal tensions within Somaliland had been resolved by the end of the Boroma conference, some still remained. After a year and a half of rebuilding efforts under Egal's new administration, intra-Isaaq tensions again erupted into full-blown conflict in the central region of the country in November 1994. Despite numerous and varied attempts by different players to negotiate a peace, the conflict persisted for two years until another peace conference was called at Hargeisa, beginning in October 1996. Finally, in yet another endurance session of negotiations, this one lasting just over four months, Somalilanders were able to negotiate a lasting peace.

The official delegates at the Hargeisa Conference included the 150 members of the existing parliament and *Guurti*, as well as another 165 delegates selected from the regions in equal proportions (i.e., each clan effectively doubled its representation), plus a handful of seats allotted to minority tribes. But as always, a large contingent of unofficial delegates, including women, intellectuals, business leaders, representatives of the Somali diaspora, and a host of other interested parties, also attended. In addition to negotiating a settlement to the latest round of fighting, the conference also played a key role in constitutional development. The previous charter had required that a draft constitution be developed and presented by the executive branch to the public for a referendum. However, Egal and the lower house of parliament had each set about preparing their own drafts, and tensions were mounting between them. The elders at Hargeisa were therefore also called upon to reconcile the president and the lower house by combining the two

drafts into a single document that would be acceptable to both. The unified draft constitution that they produced became the new law of the land, which was scheduled to be in effect for a further three year transition period, by which time the executive branch was to have conducted a referendum and completed the transition. Ultimately, there were still further extensions of the transition period, and additional changes in the constitution were negotiated between Egal and the parliament, before a final version was put to the test in a public referendum in May 2001. This constitution met with overwhelming approval (97 percent), although the referendum was probably seen as a vote not so much on the constitution itself, but on independence from the south.²⁴

The final task of the elders gathered in Hargeisa was to address the grievances of opposition groups, particularly minorities, who had not had any political representation in the government up to that time. This situation was rectified by the addition of 14 seats to the legislative branch, seven in the *Guurti* and seven in the lower house, allocated to minority groups and some under-represented Isaaq clans. Women, however, were still not able to win any seats, as discussed in some detail in Chapter 7.

While it was the Boroma conference that succeeded in firmly establishing a government in Somaliland, it was the Hargeisa conference that really consolidated peace in the country, and several years of relative tranquility and, to some extent, mounting prosperity, have followed. The region has been, and continues to be, relatively ignored by the international community, particularly in comparison to the headline-grabbing south, where the struggle for control of Mogadishu continues. This, combined with the

²⁴ At the time of the referendum, the Transitional National Government (TNG) established at the Arta Peace Conference in Djibouti less than a year earlier, was still struggling to establish control over all of Mogadishu, not to mention the rest of the south of Somalia. Nevertheless, both the peace conference at Arta and the survival of this fledgling administration in the south had brought the issue of Somaliland's declared independence – and consequent refusal to participate in the conference or negotiate any form of participation in the TNG – into the limelight.

lack of official recognition of Somaliland's status as an independent state by any other country, which precludes access to the international financial institutions as well as other international financial networks, has forced the new government to subsist on a shoestring budget, limited largely to resources that can be generated internally, primarily through taxes on imports, exports (especially livestock) and internal trade and transport of goods. As a result, the government's capacity has remained extremely low, and up to 2000, it was reported that as much as 70 percent of the annual budget still went to ensuring the fledgling state's security.²⁵ While the public has to some extent been tolerant of the administration's inability to provide much in the way of services or development assistance, or even guidance, frustration has also been mounting, particularly amidst growing suspicion of corruption and clan-based nepotism.

At the same time, the government's relative inability in these early years to assert itself has allowed the economy to flourish in an extremely *laissez faire*, free market environment. Trade has steadily expanded, including trans-shipment of goods through the port at Berbera to parts of Ethiopia and southern Somalia, and reconstruction of the shattered capital proceeds at a rapid pace. Nevertheless, the country remains impoverished, and many Somalilanders remained highly dependent on remittances from family and friends in the diaspora. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, which

²⁵ Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, President of Somaliland, and formerly Prime Minister of the Republic of Somalia 1967-69, comments during a meeting with a delegation from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), including author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 14, 1999. While the elders had negotiated a peace that was widely accepted by the vast majority of Somalilanders, it was generally believed that it would take more than this to convince the large number of militia members, who owned their own guns and had come to rely on them as a source of sustenance and survival, to lay down their arms. Many were recruited into the newly-formed national army and police force, and the remainder were successfully demobilized in other programs, but the costs of salaries and other incentives required to bring about this transition drained the government's limited resources. However, it was frequently argued that this was a small price to pay for the peace that had finally been achieved. Further, according to the Minister of Finance, the government was making steady progress in increasing its revenues, and security was, by 2001, declining as a share of the total budget. Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," Minister of Finance, Government of Somaliland, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 28, 2000.

serve as the primary outlets for Somali livestock production, have occasionally banned these imports, purportedly due to disease problems, and this has set the economy, as well as the government's trade-dependent budget, back considerably.

The political arena has also remained relatively *laissez faire*, particularly compared to the past experiences of Somalilanders during the Siyad Barre era. An atmosphere of open debate has predominated, despite occasional lapses that include arrests – usually short-lived – of journalists or others who cross the government. Many Somalilanders, particularly those living overseas, have become quite vigilant, and do not hesitate to voice their criticisms and concerns over what they consider to be government missteps. According to a former editor of the leading daily newspaper, President Egal cannot keep his fax number a secret, and when he does act undemocratically, for example by arresting journalists who criticize him or his administration, he receives angry faxes from Somali grandmothers in New Zealand and others around the globe, and he soon relents.²⁶ This is indicative of the highly level of interest of Somalilanders in the diaspora, and the important role that many of them continue to play in the region.

However, it cannot be assumed that the government will remain indefinitely in this extremely weak state, with little capability to make and implement policies, or to control society or the economy. President Egal's transitional administration had to rebuild the country's institutions, including both the buildings and the people, practically from scratch over the first decade of its existence, and, as mentioned, it has had to do so in a context of extremely limited internal resources and with little assistance from the international community. But while progress has been slow, the government has unquestionably strengthened over time, and it is likely to continue to do so. This is

²⁶ Abdulrahman Youssef "Bobe," interview.

demonstrated most clearly by a steady increase in annual revenue collections, as taxation laws are passed and implemented and the customs authority gains capacity. Collections have increased to the point where the 2000-2001 budget included government-funded development activities for the first time,²⁷ although the ban on imports of Somali livestock in the Gulf states, implemented during this budget cycle, decreased government revenues and forced cancellation of this plan.

Government “strength” is a very relative concept, and it is true that as long as access to international financial institutions is blocked, the government’s resource base, and hence its ability to implement policies, is likely to be quite limited. Nevertheless, compared to where it started in 1993 after the Boroma Conference, it’s capacity has increased steadily, and this trend is likely to continue. Given the past experiences of what was, at least in some respects, an excessively strong state, the growing capacity of the government can be seen as something of a mixed blessing, and the challenge for Somalilanders will be finding the resources to make their government “strong enough” to meet their needs, but limited enough to allow public control and preserve accountability. Of course, the question of which needs the government should be meeting is also on the table in Somaliland. At a minimum, Somalilanders recognize the need for a government that can provide them both with security, and with an identity and support in interacting with the international community. Beyond this, the consensus evaporates. While some desire a “strong state,” which they associate with security and order, and many would like to see government once again promising to take care of all of their social service needs, others are extremely wary of giving the government responsibilities or resources beyond those required to meet its most basic responsibilities. Many factors, both internal and

²⁷ Mohamed Said Mohamed “Gees,” interview, May 28, 2000.

external, will play into the determination of just how strong the Somaliland government does in fact become, an issue I will return to in the concluding chapter.

Of course, Somaliland's lack of status in the international community, and the lack of access to international financial institutions as well as other commerce, trade and postal networks, have been a critical concern for both the government and the public since the inception of the new republic. Somalilanders argue that the northwest's lasting peace, which stands in such sharp contrast to the continuing battles and power struggles in the south, should be rewarded with international recognition, but to no avail, and officially their status remains ambiguous. However, after devoting most of their peacemaking efforts in Somalia during the early 1990s to the concept of reconstructing a unitary Somali state, the international community has begun to pay more attention to Somaliland's efforts, as well as those of several other regions in the former Somalia, and attention has increasingly turned toward what has come to be known as the "building blocks approach."²⁸ The building block approach is an emerging vision of a future state structure that arises out of the efforts of other regions to emulate Somaliland's success. In 1998, after a constitutional conference held in the town of Garowe, the predominantly Mijerteyn northeastern region declared itself to be the Puntland Region of Somalia, declaring regional autonomy, rather than secession, as its expected relationship to a future Somali state. More recently, the southern regions of Bai and Bakool, home primarily to the Digil-Mirifle and Rahanweyn clans, established a nascent administration, and talk of creating a "Jubaland," also in the south, and other regional states, has continued. As the difficulties of recreating a unitary state continued to reassert themselves time after time,

²⁸ See for example Matt Bryden, "New Hope for Somalia? The Building Block Approach," *Review of African Political Economy* 26, no. 74 (March 1999): 134-140.

the possibility that these decentralized regional entities might instead form the basis for recreating, from the bottom up, some sort of federated or confederated Somali state has gained acceptance. Somaliland, however, has continued to assert that secession and independence are the only acceptable option, although at the same time, President Egal and others agree that they will be willing to talk, but only when the south has established a legitimate administration. However, from the perspective of the building blocks approach, whether Somaliland is part of Somalia or independent might not make an enormous difference on the ground, since a great deal of regional autonomy would be anticipated in such a federated state.

However, the emergence of a new peace process in 2000, known as the Arta Peace Conference for the town in Djibouti where it was held, threw the future of the building blocks approach into some question. Initiated by President Ismael Omar Gueleh of Djibouti, this gathering brought together a much wider array of Somalis from throughout the country than any of the previous meetings sponsored by the United Nations or neighboring states. Somalis from all regions of the south attended, and considerable pressure was put on Somaliland by both southerners and the international community to participate as well. However, Somaliland continued to insist that it was independent and peaceful, and therefore saw no reason to join the peace talks as a party to a conflict that was not theirs – although they did offer their services as mediators. The Somaliland parliament passed a law banning participation of its citizens in the conference, although a few individuals did attend anyway (several of whom were jailed, albeit briefly, upon their return). The peace conference was also highly controversial in Puntland, where the administration felt threatened while the public strongly supported the process. In the

south, large demonstrations in Mogadishu in support of the process made it clear that the public was ready for peace even if the warlords were not.

The conference to some extent threatened the building block approach, as no safeguards to the continuing existence of the existing or emerging regional entities were offered, and the intentions of the conference organizers and participants in terms of the expected structure of the future state they were trying to reconstruct were unclear. However, while the conference was far more successful than any previous efforts had been, and it did produce a Transitional National Assembly (TNA) which elected a Transitional National Government (TNG), the “threat” that it is the harbinger of a reconstructed centralized state has waned as the new TNG, in its first year and a half, struggled even to gain control over all of Mogadishu. While it has been recognized by many international bodies – many of which would find it much easier to interact with a unitary state than a federated or confederated one – the TNG’s slow progress is yet another indicator of how difficult reconstructing political space in the south will be, and suggests also that the building blocks approach may still be the best hope for peace and reconstruction over the long term.

This, then, is the context in which the indigenization efforts discussed below have evolved, and in which interviewees lived at the time the fieldwork was conducted. The “state” of Somaliland remains unrecognized, but it is very much a *de facto* reality. More importantly from the perspective of this research, regardless of its final status as either an independent political entity or a part of a restructured Somalia, it is difficult to imagine a scenario whereby its autonomy and political structures would be significantly altered or abandoned anytime in the near future. I will therefore now turn to the detailed discussion of the indigenized Somaliland political system.

Chapter 6: The Role of Traditional Leaders: Can Anyone Else Fill the Gap?

Like the regime that prevailed in the Republic of Somalia during the 1960s, Somaliland's new political system includes a parliament, but as discussed, this is now a bi-cameral institution, with the addition of the a second, upper chamber, the *Guurti*, or House of Elders to complement the lower House of Representatives. This chapter will draw extensively from interviews with a wide range of Somalilanders to evaluate what the *Guurti*, comprised of elders, as opposed to MPs, adds to the system, what is expected of it, how is it different, how better, how worse? And how, if at all, does the addition of this institution to the structure of the government, affect public perceptions of the legitimacy – the “right to rule” – of the Somaliland state and the governing regime?

6.1 The Elders and Indigenization – The Theory

We will start by considering how an elder is actually expected to be different from an MP, both in character and qualifications, and in roles and responsibilities. According to the new constitution that Somalilanders approved in a 2001 referendum,¹ there are two key differences in qualifications for the posts: MPs must be at least 35 years old and have a secondary school education, while the minimum age for members of the *Guurti* is 45, and “He must be a person who has a good knowledge of the religion or an elder who is versed in the traditions.”² These requirements reflect the widespread impression among Somalilanders that these two posts should be filled by fundamentally different kinds of

¹ This and all other discussions of the Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland, which was approved in a May 2001 referendum, are based on Republic of Somaliland, “The Revised Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland,” unofficial English translation prepared by Ibrahim Hashi Jama, LL.B., LL.M (accessed July 2, 2001); available from <http://www.somalilandforum.com>.

² The requirements for each post included in the National Charter produced at the Boroma Conference were similar, except that the age limits were five years lower.

people. The “typical” MP is expected to be a younger, urban and more educated person, a “modernized” individual, and perhaps most significantly, a “politician,” a loaded – and not necessarily flattering – title in the Somali context, where many contend that it was politicians intent on personal power and skilled in manipulating clan identity that brought about the demise of the state. The ideal member of the *Guurti*, on the other hand, is described as someone, typically older, who may be less educated in the Western sense, but is thoroughly educated in the culture, religion and traditions of the Somali people, an orator and skilled mediator, tightly connected to the rural and mostly nomadic majority of Somalis. Such a man is believed to understand, represent and promote the interests of his clansmen first and foremost, something a politician cannot be counted on to do.

According to a retired teacher involved in drafting the constitution, it was intended that MPs would essentially represent the modern interests of urban elites, the “educated and enlightened,” while *Guurti* members would be the representatives of tribal, rural society, at last giving the rural majority a voice in government.³ A Hargeisa-based lawyer described it this way:

. . . the house of *Guurti* should be elders, representatives who know Somali customary law, how to deal with other clans, men who know that every problem can be resolved by consensus. This doesn’t need formal education, but he must be well versed in Somali *heer*. And the true *Guurti* understands that external relations, administration, and relations with foreigners require an educated man. . . . So members of parliament will be better educated persons.⁴

Thus, there was a relatively clear intent, in the creation of the bicameral house, to expand both the representativeness, and the capabilities, of the parliament.

³ Axmed Sheikh Jama “Axmed Maalin,” resident of Sool region in eastern Somaliland, and a former regional governor and assistant minister in the Siyad Barre government, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 23, 2000.

⁴ Robleh Michael Mariano, lawyer, former Somaliland MP, and founding member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 29, 2000.

In considering the intended role of the *Guurti* in more detail, it is useful to begin with the duties outlined in the National Charter produced at Boroma.⁵ The Charter first notes that “The Council of Elders shall function as a link between the government and the people and assume a leadership role in cultural and religious affairs.” It then lists the specific duties and functions of the council, beginning with the duty “To encourage and safeguard peace amongst the clans of Somaliland and to resolve existing or future conflicts that may cause confrontations amongst the clans.” The *Guurti* was also expected to be active in “Creating new or enforcing existing Code[s] of Conduct among the clans in accordance with our traditions and along the principles of Islam,” and “to advise and assist the government in matters relating to peace, national defense, economy and social affairs,” “to mediate and resolve any political conflicts that may arise,” and to “call a General Meeting of the clans and try to find solutions to the problem” in the event that either the executive council (the cabinet) or the “elected council” (also identified as the “Constituent Assembly,” now the House of Representatives) were “compromised as a result of unusual circumstances.” Finally, the Charter stipulates that “Any bill passed by the Constituent Assembly and pertaining to issues such as peace, religion, customs and traditions shall be reviewed by the Council of Elders before it is passed as law.” It is clear from this that the foremost responsibility of the elders at this time was to maintain peace both within the government and within the country as a whole. It is also notable that in this document the elders gathered at Boroma essentially claimed for themselves the primary position among Somaliland’s new political institutions through the power to

⁵ All discussion of the National Charter is based on Republic of Somaliland, “Republic of Somaliland, General Meeting of the Elders of Somaliland, The National Charter,” prepared 1991, adopted 1993; an unofficial translation of which was obtained from the United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS) Documentation Unit.

call another “General Meeting of the clans” – i.e., another Grand *Shir* of elders similar to the Boroma Conference – in the event that the other branches of government were failing.

By the time the new constitution was approved in the 2001 referendum there had clearly been some evolution in the role and power of Somaliland’s elders.⁶ Here the powers and duties listed for the House of Elders, while similar, are considerably less expansive than those included in the Charter, and the *Guurti* no longer finds itself in a clearly primary position relative to the other branches and institutions of the government. Specifically, the constitution stipulates that the powers and duties of the House of Elders include reviewing all legislation approved by the House of Representatives with the exception of budgets and financial bills, “the passing of legislation relating to religion, traditions (culture) and security,” as well as “assistance to the government in matters relating to religion, security, defense, traditions (culture), economy and society whilst consulting the traditional heads of the communities.” Ten years after the country’s declaration of its independence, and just over four years after the last bout of open, violent conflict was concluded, the critical role of conflict management is much less prominent and explicit, although still evident in the elders’ designated responsibility for dealing with matters of security. Moreover, there is no longer any provision for the elders to, in effect, dissolve the government and retake control of the state if they deem it necessary as there had been in the National Charter. In fact, the House of Representatives now clearly has greater powers than the *Guurti* in promulgating legislation; while the *Guurti* can always comment and propose amendments (with the

⁶ In fact, the constitution adopted in 2001 was quite similar to a draft prepared more than four years earlier at the Hargeisa Conference, so the evolution of the *Guurti*’s role had actually occurred even earlier.

exception of bills relating to financial matters), a two-thirds majority of *Guurti* members is required to prevent the House of Representatives from passing a bill into law.

In these documents, and in the public's perceptions, we can thus trace three primary responsibilities for the *Guurti* and its members. The first is, as the Charter said, to serve as a linkage between government and society, particularly the rural, often nomadic majority of that society which had been marginalized for decades by previous governments and the colonial administration. Elders are presumed to be familiar with the needs and problems of these people, whose lives and production serve as the backbone of the society and economy, and they are expected to represent the interests of their clansmen within the government so that these needs might be better met. Likewise, they are expected to bring to the government a greater understanding of – and presumably, increased sympathy and respect for – the culture, traditions and religion of the people to serve as a guide to, or a check on, government actions. Many also anticipate that the integration of the elders into the government will improve government-society linkages in two other ways. First, if the elders of the *Guurti* are selected according to traditional processes, this suggests that they are held in high regard by their fellow clansmen. As these individuals become members of the government, then their individual legitimacy might also produce increased respect for the government, which has often been abysmally low among rural people during previous regimes. Finally, if every man has an elder from his own clan in the government, then there is a presumption that every man has *access* to the government – a ready channel for communication of his needs, concerns, and ideas. This guaranteed access was also clearly been absent in the past.

Second, the elders were accorded critical responsibility for protecting, preserving, building and consolidating Somaliland's precious peace. The ability of elders to mediate,

compromise, and achieve consensus had clearly been critical to the establishment of Somaliland as a functioning polity, and it was widely recognized that this role would remain essential for some time to come. Somalilanders understood that many issues and sources of tension remained unresolved, and it was up to the country's elders to meet this ongoing need if unity was to be preserved and the state was to survive.

Finally, in sharp contrast to Siyad Barre's burial of clanism, each elder was to publicly serve as a the voice for his clansmen within government in a head-on effort to tackle each clan's concerns about being marginalized, forgotten, or dominated by others. In principle, this should reduce tensions among the clans and check any tendency to resort to violence if a clan feels that it is not getting its share of national resources. The rest of this chapter will explore how effective the elders have or have not been in fulfilling the first two of these roles – linking the state to society, and protecting the peace – and what the implications have been for the legitimacy of the Somaliland state, and for the transitional administration of President Egal. Their role as clan representatives, as well as the effectiveness, practicality, and legitimacy of using clan as a key basis for representation, will be considered in detail in Chapter 7.

6.2 The Reality: Contested Visions

Not surprisingly, the actual effects of bringing Somali traditional elders into the government and recognizing clan identity have been more mixed than suggested by these ideal outcomes. Even less surprising is the fact that in most respects Somalilanders are far from unified in their view of the role the elders have played in the past decade, and the value of having them involved in the government. Moreover, we will find that there

are at times (apparent) contradictions in the way these outcomes are interpreted among Somalis.

6.2.1 Respect versus Ridicule, Innovation versus Ignorance

As discussed in Chapter 4, previous regimes in Somalia had been largely divorced from rural Somalis, paying no heed to the high regard in which traditional practices and leaders were still held. Many rural Somalis, in turn, held the government in very low esteem (a phenomenon that was not unique to Somalis). For evidence of this, Somalilanders point to, among other things, the fact that destruction during the wars carried out by local inhabitants focused on government properties, while private property was left largely untouched.⁷ Can bringing elders, who are presumed to be respected leaders in the rural areas, into the state enhance the legitimacy of that state? As discussed in Chapter 1, *vertical legitimacy* concerns the extent to which a state (or a ruling government) is willingly granted authority, loyalty, or even obedience by its citizens. It is based on consensus or agreement between the two regarding the principles, practices and processes on which the state is founded, or as Holsti put it, agreement on “the principles on which the ‘right to rule’ is based.”⁸

Some Somalilanders among both elite and rural respondents do in fact see it is this way. They describe the respect that Somalilanders hold for the traditional leadership:

[a regional vice-governor] I was present in ‘91 at the Sheikh conference, [and] the Boroma conference [in 1993]. All the time the elders were

⁷ Mohamed Barood Ali, Director, Somali Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SORRA), chemist and member of the “Hargeisa Group” of political prisoners under Siyad Barre, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 22, 2000.

⁸ Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 84.

leading us and politicians were backing the elders. Our tradition allows us to respect elders. . . . Even the president gives heed to elders.⁹

[elders in the town of Gabiley] The *Guurti* they go to first, because the people feel that they own them, they can address their problems, they're closer than government officials. People have more respect for them, as they depend on their culture and tradition. They know what people think.¹⁰

[a Hargeisa-based NGO worker] The House of *Guurti* is similar to the House of Lords. Many of the elders are very respected, though not all.¹¹

One respondent, an intellectual and NGO researcher, said simply: "The only thing noble about us is these elders,"¹² a view which seems to sum up the perception that it is the inclusion, finally, of Somalilands' traditional leadership within the government that makes the government unique, and sets it apart both from the regimes of the past, and from the governments of all other states.

But Somalis are by no means unanimous in this view. There are certainly those, primarily among urban elites, who believe that elders represent a backward side of Somali society, almost an embarrassment to Somaliland in the world community. One of them describes the elders' involvement this way:

[a former teacher] Without parties, power is in the hands of ignorant traditional elders. They're not ignorant about Somali society, but they're ignorant according to modern education. . . . They are against all development, education, women, and new ideas because it will reduce their own position.¹³

[a businessman, SNM founder and former mayor of Hargeisa] Elders were effective up to that point [forming the government], but now they have

⁹ Mohamed Hassan Ahmed, Vice-Governor, Awdal Region, interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

¹⁰ Ali Ahmed Olhaye, Gabiley elder, during interview with Mohamoud Sheikh Nur, elder and former mayor of Gabiley, and other Gabiley elders, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

¹¹ Hasan Axmed "Hasan Embassy," Area Manager, African Educational Trust (AET), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 24, 2000.

¹² Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 20, 1999.

¹³ Axmed Sheikh Jama "Axmed Maalin," interview.

been made part of parliament. This is the negative part, because they know very little about government and democratic institutions. It's hard for them to debate because they're uneducated. . . . Egal gets better support from the elders, he can fool them more easily. . . . Ignorance is the main problem, plus manipulation also. . . . They're dealing with something they don't know.¹⁴

[a Hargeisa-based NGO director] The other problem is the lack of knowledge in modern governance, so they are also easily manipulated for this reason. They are genius people, some of them, in traditional ways, but not in the modern system with constitutions, mandates, etc. . . . I'm not saying they're not effective now, but they were more effective before. They have abandoned their traditional role but they haven't yet reached the role of a House of Elders.¹⁵

These views suggest that elders will not improve the government's – or the state's – intrinsic legitimacy either because they themselves are backward and ignorant, or because they don't have the skills and savvy necessary to serve as an adequate protection against abuses by other branches of government, and thus can do nothing to improve the typically low levels of trust Somalis have for national political systems. However, this perception was by no means universal among elites – some of Hargeisa's "intellectuals" were among the most vocal and articulate proponents of the elders' value, as demonstrated by some of the comments noted above.

Some respondents are particularly concerned about how the presence of the elders in the government will affect Somaliland's ability to function in the global arena. They believe that the elders don't have the knowledge and skills needed to help run a government in the modern world, and Somalilanders very much want to be part of the modern world. Urban Somalis in particular clearly desire a government "modern" enough to speak for them in – and get them access to – the global community, and they

¹⁴ Mohamed Hashi, businessman, former mayor of Hargeisa, former Somaliland presidential candidate, and founding member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 31, 2000.

are concerned that elders cannot sufficiently grasp these complex issues, and will thus hold the country back. Others raise concerns about international perceptions: in a global community that they believe demands the Western liberal model of multiparty democracy as the only acceptable political model, they fear that the blending of traditional elements into the political system will work against acceptance of Somaliland as an equal partner in the international community, a issue of particular significance considering that Somaliland already faces an uphill struggle for recognition even without this additional concern on the table.

Other critics focus their attention instead on what they see as the very limited capacity of elders to take on the technocratic, day-to-day affairs of running a government. They don't deny an important role to the elders, but they would only grant them carefully circumscribed responsibilities. For example, one respondent suggested that:

[a Hargeisa-based NGO director] We need to go through them to review and confirm political decisions, for example, on how to form a representational government, which is essential to keep the clans happy, or anything else where there's room for conflict. But not day-to-day legislation that's technocratic. The problem is when you get into technocratic issues like legislation, which is complicated, or a role in selecting professional staff.¹⁵

But this perspective does, once again, emphasize the importance elders can have in establishing the foundations of the political system, and, in so doing shoring up its intrinsic legitimacy.

In fact, it is in their perceived role as the founders of the Republic of Somaliland that the benefits of the elders' involvement for intrinsic legitimacy is most pronounced.

¹⁵ Dr. Aden Abokar, Director, International Cooperation for Development (ICD), former director of Hargeisa Hospital and member of the "Hargeisa Group" of political prisoners under Siyad Barre, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 23, 2000.

¹⁶ Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, Director, Institute for Policy Research (IPR), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 24, 2000.

The sense of pride that the vast majority of Somalilanders interviewed for this study feel in the successful endeavor to establish peace and rebuild political and economic structures is palpable. Of particular interest is the fact that while it was ultimately the elders who negotiated and approved agreements during the peace conferences, many Somalilanders see these processes as a collective achievement of the community, over which they feel some ownership. The sense that this is something special that “we” achieved is expressed frequently and in myriad ways. The elders’ public efforts are, to some extent, simply seen as the culmination of an enormous behind-the-scenes effort of Somalilanders from all parts of society. One Hargeisa woman said, for example, that “lots of things contributed to peace, including women, men, the government, politicians. Everybody wherever they are is working on it.”¹⁷ This sense that the elders’ achievements are society’s achievements reflects the considerable extent to which the elders do still have a special relationship to society that cannot be matched by politicians or other elites. And the frequent expressions of pride in this achievement – particularly in contrast to the nearly equally frequent mention of the failure of Somalis in the south to match this success – is a strongly positive indicator for the legitimacy of the state that has resulted, the Republic of Somaliland, and for the transitional administration that was established as well. In fact, it is easy to imagine the Boroma Conference becoming a part of Somaliland history and its “national myth” in the same way that the conventions at Philadelphia occupy this space in the American psyche.

Finally, in considering the impacts of the elders’ role in founding the Somaliland state on state legitimacy, it is also important to consider what respondents *did not say* in

¹⁷ Amran Ali Mahmoud, wife of former mayor, presidential candidate and founding member of the SNM Mohamed Hashi, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 29, 2000.

the interviews, particularly considering how open and straightforward the majority of those interviewed were about their views, even when these were critical of the government. Few hesitated, for example, to criticize where they saw fit, especially when it came to issues such as mismanagement in the executive branch or corruption and manipulation of legislators. And while there were numerous criticisms of the way the political game was being played in Somaliland – accusations, for example, that corruption and influence peddling were rampant – criticism of Somaliland itself, or of the foundational processes, was extremely rare. We must of course bear in mind that it was not possible to conduct interviews in the two regions where such criticisms might be most likely – the eastern regions of Sool and Sanaag where sovereignty is contested between Somaliland and the neighboring Puntland Republic of Somalia. But certainly in the central and western regions of the country the legitimacy of the state was largely unquestioned.

However, the elders themselves, and Somalilanders in general, would do well to keep in mind that the strong sense of intrinsic legitimacy that can be enjoyed by a state in its early days after such beginnings, while important, or perhaps even necessary, may be neither lasting nor sufficient. We saw this in Chapter 3 as we considered the history of the former Republic of Somalia. The strong sense of intrinsic legitimacy that derived from the success of the anti-colonial struggle did not last, and the legitimacy of the first post-independence regime was negligible after just a decade of misrule, to the point where Siyad Barre's coup was welcomed. And even the state itself eventually lost legitimacy. Strong and legitimate foundations may be necessary for the success of the state, but they clearly are not sufficient. In fact, one respondent, when asked whether the

formation of the government by the elders at Boroma would have long-term implications argued that:

[a Hargeisa-based NGO director] It doesn't have much impact now. At the time it was very good, it was important that people believed in it at the conference. But once the government is in place it starts to feel alien again as governments always have in the past. . . . There's no participation in government, so there's alienation.¹⁸

Thus, the overall implications for intrinsic legitimacy of the elders' participation first in founding the Republic of Somaliland, and then in the structures of the state, are quite positive for many Somalilanders. This is particularly true in the case of the founding peace conference at Boroma. However, this intrinsic source of legitimacy is clearly limited. First, it is not shared by all Somalilanders, the most notable exceptions being some among the intellectual class and politicians, although there are also many within these groups who are strongly supportive of the elders' role. In addition, the level of support in the contested eastern regions is largely unknown.¹⁹ The second limitation is that there is no guarantee that this will be an *enduring* source of legitimacy. Nor is it likely that this source of legitimacy alone will be enough to sustain the state. We will therefore turn to other aspects of the elders' role, and their impact on the instrumental legitimacy of the state and the regime.

6.2.2 The Voice of the People?

The elders of the *Guurti* are described by some as the "true" voice of the Somali people, but how accurate is such a description? Do "the people" select them to fill this

¹⁸ Dr. Aden Abokar, interview.

¹⁹ Several individuals from the eastern regions were interviewed in Hargeisa, but the very fact that they were in Hargeisa suggests that they prefer Somaliland's claims to sovereignty over those of Puntland, so their views cannot be considered representative of the region as a whole.

role? And how well do they represent the needs and concerns and opinions of their fellow clansmen and constituents to the government? What, in fact, do their clansmen expect of their government, and their representatives in it? This section will address each of these issues in turn.

6.2.2.1 Selection Processes

As discussed in Chapter 2, the traditional means for selecting a leading elder was much less cut-and-dried than a western-style election, but it was nevertheless widely understood by Somalis. At the most local level, all adult men would meet together in a *shir* and select, by consensus, their (nominal) leaders based on characteristics such as knowledge of custom and religion, oratorical and mediating skills, and family reputation, among others. At higher levels of aggregation where attendance of all adult males at a *shir* was not practicable, representatives selected at the local *shir* could gather and legitimately make the selection on behalf of their fellow clansmen. Thus, although the selection might not directly take the views of all “constituents” into account in selecting a leader as a direct election would, the process can provide a *locally acceptable* means for selecting a legitimate leader. In addition, according to traditional practice, leaders were generally selected without any fixed “term of office” (and in fact titled elders typically held their titles for life unless they raised the ire of the clan and were deposed).

There is no question, really, that the actual selection processes during the transition period were not up to the standard that Somalilanders expect over the long term. MPs were appointed by their clans rather than elected via multiparty processes, as expected under the new constitution. Likewise, the initial selection processes for members of the *Guurti* have in many cases not been conducted entirely according to

traditional norms. These weaknesses in the selection processes arose at least in part because of compromises made at a time when the national situation and the government's capacity were not yet up to managing more complex selection or election processes, nor were the necessary legal frameworks in place. Somalilanders were also willing to make considerable compromises on issues of representation during the transition period in the interest of preserving what many saw as a fragile peace. The key questions in the case of *Guurti* members are first, to what extent these early selections were nevertheless perceived as legitimate, and second, to the extent that they were not acceptable, how feasible – and how likely – will future modifications to improve these processes be?

It is instructive to begin by noting who is *not* in the *Guurti*. With a few exceptions, it is not traditional, titled clan (or sub-clan, or sub-sub-clan) leaders such as the *suldans* or *garads* that occupy these seats, nor for the most part, is it the (sometimes paid) *akils* or “chiefs.” According to the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, the clans like to keep these leaders “closer to home,” and the members of the *Guurti* are essentially their selected emissaries.²⁰ A Hargeisa lawyer observed that:

The *Guurti* is not mostly made up of titled leaders. If a sultan or chieftain is a true sultan or chieftain, and then comes to Hargeisa and sets up house, he'll be divorced by the people. He can't spend more than about one month per year in Hargeisa. Often they will send a proxy and instruct him about what line he should follow.²¹

Titled elders are for the most part expected to stay close to home, and send representatives to do their business in the capital, rather than the reverse. Thus, rather than titled elders, it is most often other leading men of the clan who occupy these posts. In fact, during the transition both MPs and *Guurti* members were selected in the same

²⁰ Abdulkadir Jirde, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 25, 2000.

way, and the members of each house are not always as distinct from each other in their background and skills as the characterizations discussed above might suggest. Once the seats were divided among the clan families and the clans at Boroma, it was up to the leadership of each clan to negotiate a division among its sub-clans, and up to each sub-clan to negotiate a further distribution of seats among its sub-sub-clans. It was then up to each lineage grouping allotted a seat to name their MP or *Guurti* member. It is at this point that the process becomes much more fluid.

There are several different views about the nature of the selection processes that put *Guurti* members and MPs in place during the 1990s. A number of respondents suggest that at least some clans followed traditional, locally-based selection processes, at least in selecting delegates for the Boroma Conference in 1993 and/or in choosing *Guurti* members or MPs immediately afterwards. But most respondents who knew anything about the selection process report that selection was done “in the towns,” in many cases by a handful of influential clan members. However, they differ in their views of whether or not this was a valid and reasonable approach, at least considering the circumstances of the country at the time, or whether these limitations rendered the process largely invalid. Some examples of descriptions of this process:

[Town headman in Bon, a small town in Awdal Region where Boroma is the regional capital.] They [the *Guurti* and MPs] were selected in the towns, not in Bon. Those who were fairly educated, who went to Boroma, they selected them. . . . There the decision makers of the clan gathered. At the selection in Boroma we were represented. We and Boroma are connected. Some of us who represent the clan were there. The clan has *akils*, *suldans*, sheikhs, and many of these are in the regional capital [Boroma]. They represent us and make decisions, and our representatives are good.²²

²¹ Robleh Michael Mariano, interview.

²² Raghe Osman Wabire, headman, Bon, with Abib Aw Aden Jama, committee member, and Abib Robleh Hosh, interview by author, Bon, Somaliland, March 17, 2000.

[Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives] Seats are divided first at the clan level, then each clan itself divides them within the clan. . . . I am an Arap, one of the eight sub-clans within the Isaaq. The Arap were given a number of seats, and tried to haggle for more, but we were turned down, our *Suldan* said accept it. We then broke them into 5 parts for the sub-sub-clans, including the Arap. I was chosen by my sub-sub-clan. They had several candidates. I never wanted to go but the elders convinced me I should go for it.²³

[Town official in Baki, also in Awdal region.] The *Guurti* and the MPs, they were handpicked. For example, I would go to three or four of my clan elders, and they would give me a paper saying I am nominated for clan x, and I go become an MP or *Guurti*. . . . These nominations are not out of clan gatherings, they're just done through a few friends.²⁴

[Minister of Finance] Usually 20 to 50 elders get together and select them. . . . The clans don't meet all together, and they usually meet in an urban area. There are lots of disputes, but they're usually resolved within the clan.²⁵

[President, Amoud University in Boroma] By consensus the sub-clan should agree on the person, but this is normally done in towns by the spokesman for the clans, the powerful people in town, the king makers. There are sometimes disputes, for example, if one is pushed through without sufficient consensus. But in other cases the selection is good.²⁶

Clearly the selection processes as practiced during the 1990s were quite informal, and this applied to both MPs and members of the House of Elders.

It is also evident that while some Somalis readily accepted the decisions of the handful of clan leaders and urban elites who were the usual participants, others find this system problematic. Some view existing clan leaders – those most involved in the initial selection processes – as legitimate; they are long-standing representatives selected without a “term of office” and empowered to make decisions on behalf of their clan. But

²³ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 30, 2000.

²⁴ Mohamed Said Kahlief “Farahan,” Finance Manager, Baki, interview with with Osman Sheikh Umar, et al., interview by author Baki, Somaliland, March 19, 2000.

²⁵ Mohamed Said Mohamed “Gees,” Minister of Finance, Government of Somaliland, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 18, 1999.

²⁶ Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, President, Amoud University, interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 15, 2000.

others saw this system as anathema, raising the concern that the process was too often controlled by small cliques of urbanized elites, precisely the problem that creating the *Guurti* was supposed to help solve. Numerous respondents also described ways in which the process could be influenced – some would say manipulated – by the wealthy. For example:

[Deputy speaker of the House of Representatives] There is some manipulation also; cultivating of the most influential people. The use of money isn't done, it's not our way, but we use lots of khat.²⁷ For example, if you want to influence the clan, you establish something like a social club where all can come and chew. Or when the clan goes to visit the tomb of a clan ancestor once per year, providing a feast is another chance for influence, for increasing your status with the clan. It's not usually candidates who do it themselves, but others do it on their behalf. It's better this way in Somali culture, the same as in the *shir* when you get someone to speak on your behalf if you're accused.²⁸

But there is also considerable concern that less innocuous forms of influence have been used as well, particularly by the government, or the president himself, as the administration has gained strength and expanded its access to resources. While many expressed the belief that the initial selections for conference representatives and/or *Guurti* members and MPs up to the time of the Boroma Conference in 1993 were legitimate, the belief that these processes were much more tainted during and after the Hargeisa Conference in 1996-97 by government “influence” was relatively widespread, particularly among urban intellectuals. As one respondent, the director of a Hargeisa-based NGO, described it:

The president uses them [traditional elders] to reach his own means. He has used them in many ways, for example in '96 at his re-election. At Boroma they were still genuine, they were really the salvation of this nation. Again in '97, when

²⁷ Also “qat,” a mildly narcotic leaf chewed by many Somali men, and a few women. Much of men's discussion of politics and life in the country (and a number of these interviews) is conducted during afternoon “khat sessions” that often last well into the night.

²⁸ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 30, 2000.

Egal's term was finished and people came together for a national conference . . . the president was manipulating the whole conference through them. When the House and the *Guurti* formed, the selection of members was manipulated by him. Now people see that the *Guurti* is no longer impartial. . . . The people selected by the clans and sub-clans to attend the conference were later changed. This is one of the things that made the *garads* [equivalent of *suldan*] from the Dulbahante very angry, because the list they wrote was changed by the government. . . . Some individuals who the government saw as opposing them the government didn't allow to participate, not the government directly, but through the *akils* and *suldans* who prepare the list.²⁹

And another respondent agrees:

[chairman of the government's war crimes committee] At the conference in Hargeisa in 1997 of all clans, those representatives weren't chosen by the clans, they were chosen by the president, the leadership of the former council of elders, and some other elders. The representatives were not selected in the traditional way from the grassroots, they were just selected by a council from each tribe.³⁰

Some clearly expressed their disappointment with this process:

[a Boroma elder] In the last selection for *Guurti* members they were being chosen by *suldans* and clan leaders. This selection by *suldans* and others was agreed to in the national conference at Hargeisa, but we're not satisfied with this system. We need a better system that's more representative. Many people aren't satisfied with this selection method only by a certain few people. But it was agreed at the national conference that this should be the way.³¹

Although participation in selection of representatives had been relatively narrow, however, most of those interviewed even in rural areas and small towns were able to name at least some of the MPs and/or *Guurti* members who represent them. This is quite a significant finding, suggesting that the representatives selected were already well known among their fellow clansmen.³² Moreover, respondents could frequently tell

²⁹ Dr. Aden Abokar, interview.

³⁰ Rashid Sheikh Cabdilaahi Axmed "Garweyn," chairman, Somaliland War Crimes Investigation Commission, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 23, 2000.

³¹ Mohamed Rabile, with Mohamed Isman, members of Boroma's "Social Committee of Elders," interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

³² This finding, although far from statistically significant, is particularly interesting given the comparison to data from other countries. For example, surveys conducted in ten African countries found that a mean of just one in three individuals could correctly name their member of parliament. Afrobarometer Network,

stories of their own or other clans' efforts to change their representatives if they were not satisfied with their work. The committee members in the small town of Bon, for example, claimed that "We can change them. If they're ineffective we can change them. We judge their performance, the problems he creates. If he's bad, then we can change him."³³

But while disputes over representatives selected in this way may often be resolved within the clan, at times making changes has not been so easy, and cases may reach the courts, or remain unresolved. The Deputy Speaker of Parliament again:

Within my clan there was a dispute. At the Boroma Conference the clan felt that those who represented them didn't do well, but they got three seats, and the representatives at the conference immediately nominated three people, one for MP and two for the *Guurti*. Things got so bad my sub-clan got a lawyer to challenge the MP, and the MP, who had already taken his seat, also got a lawyer. The MP lost in the supreme court. The evidence was that the charter says established clan elders should have the final say at least in certification. . . . They argued it is the *suldan* and *akils* who have the right to present the decision to the state, though they just supervise the process, they don't decide themselves. They argued that the people who nominated the other MP were the clan representatives at Boroma, but not the *suldan* or *akils*. The *suldan* testified, and said I wasn't there at Boroma, I didn't approve this nomination.³⁴

And another respondent details the following dispute:

[a Hargeisa lawyer and one of the founders of the SNM] For example, Sultan Abdirahman of the Jibril Abokor [a clan in Gabiley] became basically an instrument of the president, he was not showing the slightest interest in his people. So last year in March his clan had a meeting in Gabiley and deposed him and elected a new sultan. They wrote a letter to the president and told him of the change, saying Sultan Abdirahman is no longer a sultan and no longer represents the clan, and they gave the name of his successor, who had a better claim to the title. Egal sent back a letter saying that so long as he's president, he recognizes Sultan Abdirahman. . .

"Afrobarometer Round 1: Compendium of Comparative Data from a Twelve-Nation Survey," Michigan State University Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 11, 2002.

³³ Raghe Osman Wabire, interview.

³⁴ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 30, 2000.

. This is where it stands now, Sultan Abdirahman remains in the *Guurti* and the new guy remains in Gabiley.³⁵

“Traditional” selection processes may also be distorted by the fact that, unlike the past, a seat in the *Guurti* today yields considerable direct benefits. Most noticeable of these is the government salary, which at 1.2 million Somaliland shillings per month (about \$430 at the time of these interviews) represented quite an attractive sum and made these among the best-paid positions available in the country. However, like clan leaders in the past, *Guurti* members also have extra obligations, and are expected to be generous with their hospitality, their food, and khat. But it is also true that the official salary may not be the only benefit to the position – a topic I will discuss in a later section – and the perks and potential gains associated with membership in the *Guurti* have generated a type of competition for at least some of these seats that may not have been often seen in the past, competition of a nature more typically observed during the struggle for parliamentary seats in the multiparty era of the 1960s.

It seems clear, then, that during the transition period there were aspects of the selection processes for elders who represented their clans in the *Guurti* that troubled many Somalilanders, potentially threatening the perceived legitimacy of these men. However, at the same time many expressed the belief that compromises in the selection process had been necessary in these early stages to preserve the peace, and that as the peace consolidated, both the political and legal details of processes of selection for members of the *Guurti* (as well as elections for MPs) could be (or must be) resolved. As one respondent put it, “The selection process needs work, but with a good, clean selection

³⁵ Robleh Michael Mariano, interview, January 27, 2000.

process they could be a good balancing force.”³⁶ There is disagreement, however, about the best selection process for an institution such as the *Guurti*. Some argue that elders should also be directly elected like MPs. Others suggest that a more multi-layered process that preserves the traditional character of the institution and avoids the fierce, open competition for power of electoral politics, but that is also more regulated than the present one, is necessary. The constitution left the details of the selection process to be established by law.

6.2.2.2 *Speaking for the Rural Majority?*

There is considerable debate about how close the elders, particularly those in the *Guurti*, really are to the people, and about the extent to which they truly can, or do, represent the interests of Somaliland’s rural majority, and whether they can do this better than the typical MP. *Guurti* members themselves describe their connection as very close, arguing that “If anything happens anywhere we will know, people will come and inform us.” They go on to illustrate their relationship using a Somali proverb about a small straw that is used to drink water from holes in trees: “Dhuun baa moqor iyo afba og. [The funnel is aware of the mouth and the hole.] It’s the link, this is us.”³⁷

Some other respondents were also unequivocal in their view that these clan representatives are the people’s true voice:

[an NGO researcher] The elders are very entrenched in tradition, the collective experience, they know society in a way that politicians don’t. . . . The *Guurti* are the representatives. They have been very much manipulated in the last regime, but still the people know it’s their person,

³⁶ Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, interview.

³⁷ Sheikh Ibrahim Sheikh Yusuf Sheikh Madar, Chairman, Somaliland *Guurti*, with *Guurti* members Sheikh Ahmed Sheikh Nur, Aidiid Abdi Mohamed, Hasan Ahmed Farah, Omar Farah Boduye, Mohamed Gahanub Jama, Ahmed Musa Absiye, Suldan Abdirahman Sheikh Mohamed, and Abdirahman Qawden Mohamed, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 30, 2000.

they still feel a connection to them as they wouldn't to a politician. People still feel they have claims on this elder. He could be changed, so an elder in the *Guurti* can't escape, whereas even a Minister or MP from their own clan doesn't have the same responsibility to the clan. And even if a chief is corrupted he'll still look out for the interests of his clan.³⁸

[a Burao elder from the mobile land court] Actually this is a very good way, the *Guurti* becoming part of the government, because solely if the government has power, there's a fear of a clash between the government and the people, so the *Guurti* has a role to play. The *Guurti* safeguards the interests of the people at large. It has a consultative and supportive role for the government, it is the link between the people and the government. It is like a *hoogan*, the rope between a camel and a person. . . . That's the shield, they speak in the voice of the people. And anything the government proposes, they are the ones to transmit it to the people.³⁹

And some argue that the rural people strongly prefer elders to politicians, even if elites are reluctant:

[Minister of Finance] Most elites believe there should be no role for elders, they want a modern, Western government. . . . But the rural areas would rather recognize elders than politicians. . . . Elders are the only system of government that the majority of rural people know. . . . Rural people hate everyone who wears trousers.⁴⁰

[elders in the small town of Bon] The *Guurti* people guard us from unscrupulous politicians, because they base their decision on traditions and religious values. . . . The *Guurti* always keeps in mind about us. It's politicians that forget us more.⁴¹

Moreover, at least some rural respondents report going to their *Guurti* representatives first and foremost when they are in need of assistance:

[elders in the town of Boroma] In case of need, we call the *Guurti* and consult them, we consult them informally. And they come here if they have an agenda or a problem.⁴²

³⁸ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, interview.

³⁹ Suleiman A. Duale, member of Burao mobile court, interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

⁴⁰ Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," interview, September 18, 1999.

⁴¹ Raghe Osman Wabire, interview.

⁴² Mohamed Rabile, with Mohamed Isman, interview.

And elders themselves also report that the people can, at least at times, voice their opinions very effectively through them:

[elder in Gabiley] I was a member of the *guurti*.⁴³ We were feeling pressure from the people locally, people wanted us to find solutions, they were even threatening us, they were very tired of instability and war. Every one of us felt the pressure.⁴⁴

Thus, there is some relatively widespread feeling that *Guurti* members are indeed a better voice for rural people, their needs and interests.

However, the perception that the *Guurti* could effectively fill the role of representing rural interests in concrete and necessary ways was by no means universal. A number of respondents raised the concern that once they become members of an urban-based institution complete with salaries and other perks, there is great danger that members of the *Guurti* will themselves become urbanites and lose their connection to the people. One Hargeisa woman reflected on their ambivalent role by observing that “Elders are the mouthpiece and ears of the community, they know how to solve problems, but some elders have strong community connections, and some don’t.”⁴⁵ Another Hargeisa NGO director laments that “Even if a member of the *Guurti* comes from a very rural area, which is very few of them, they soon get overwhelmed by urban politics.”⁴⁶ Similarly, government officers in the remote town of Baki complained that “When a community elder goes from here to Hargeisa he just sits in a villa or hotel, he doesn’t know the problems and can’t do anything about them. But when he’s at the local

⁴³ This respondent is probably referring to a clan-level *guurti* that may have participated in the peace conferences, but not to the national *Guurti*.

⁴⁴ Musa Warsame Dubed, interview with Mohamoud Sheikh Nur and Gabiley elders, interview.

⁴⁵ Nurine Michael Mariano, Director, CCS (Somaliland women’s NGO), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

⁴⁶ Dr. Aden Abokar, interview.

level he can solve problems like deforestation. They should work at local areas, in native villages.”⁴⁷ An engineer in the town of Burao is also concerned:

Yes, it’s a real danger. They used to be in the communities and get people’s aspirations and fears, and go back and forth town-to-country. If they stay in Hargeisa they lose touch with their constituents. And if their constituents don’t see them, they lose touch and get disenchanting. . . . The danger is down the road, but we’ve already seen more and more chiefs coming to town, losing touch. It’s not only with *Guurti* members – we see it in Burao. The effectiveness of an elder is being conversant with the desires and needs of his constituents.⁴⁸

Other respondents, as suggested in the above discussion of selection processes, argued that the nature of the selection processes guaranteed that the individuals chosen were *already* members of the urban elite, disconnected from the rural base that was supposed to be their constituency. For example, according to one, when asked if the *Guurti* helps to represent rural interests:

[Chairman of the War Crimes Commission] I don’t think so. The majority of elders are from urban areas, the issues they’re involved in are government issues, issues that the government submits to them, and they just accept it. They don’t have information on what people need.⁴⁹

And several others concurred:

[president of Amoud University] There’s no improvement in rural representation, because the elders are from the urban or semi-urban areas. . . . *Guurti* members represent clan interests, both urban and rural, not rural interests particularly. Elders from the towns dominate the *Guurti*, and sometimes they only leave town when they want to influence people. The real community leaders who represent rural areas are still in the rural areas. It is an issue of the selection processes. . . . It’s a continuation of the earlier system with urban domination . . . uneven development . . . and an urban focus.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Mohamed Said Kahlief “Farahan,” interview (with Osman Sheikh Umar).

⁴⁸ Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf “Kulumbe,” contractor/businessman and owner of National Rehabilitation and Development Co. (NAREDCO), interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

⁴⁹ Rashid Sheikh Cabdilaahi Axmed “Garweyn,” interview.

⁵⁰ Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, et al., interview.

[the former mayor of Hargeisa] Elders aren't any closer to the rural people than MPs. They've always been urban people, all of them.⁵¹

[women staff of a Hargeisa-based NGO] The elders in the *Guurti* are not connected with their own people. They're just here to collect money. . . . *Guurti* members haven't been selected from the grassroots. . . . The elders on the ground, at the grassroots, are speaking for the people, not the *Guurti*.⁵²

A number of respondents further elaborated on this view that the "real" elders are still in the rural areas:

[an NGO director in Boroma] Local elders are totally different from *Guurti* elders. They don't get paid, but they're doing what the *Guurti* is supposed to do.⁵³

[head of the national women's umbrella organization] We don't need elders for representation [in the *Guurti*] because in rural areas the people have elders to work with, elders that come from rural areas, and each area has its own elders. They don't use the elders in the government, they use their own people.⁵⁴

[a Hargeisa lawyer] The relationship between the true *Guurti* and the nomad is much, much closer than your elected representative, because the true *Guurti* has the confidence of his people. If he loses it, he's dropped immediately. The true *Guurti* doesn't come to Hargeisa or town, he's in the bush as pastoralist or farmer. He'll have a representative he sends to Hargeisa with instructions to pass his views, this is his mouthpiece.⁵⁵

So there is clearly no consensus on the issue of how well the elders in the *Guurti* are fulfilling their responsibility to represent rural interests.

And the debate does not end here. Maybe it is true, some argue, that elders are urbanized, but maybe this doesn't matter. According to one respondent, for example,

⁵¹ Mohamed Hashi, interview.

⁵² Sarah Aden, Project Officer, Candlelight for Health and Education (a Somaliland NGO), interview with Kinzi Hussein.

⁵³ Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, Executive Director, Awdal Relief and Development Association (ARDA), and Chairman, Awdal Association of Indigenous NGOs (AAIN), interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 16, 2000.

⁵⁴ Run Yusuf Ayoon, member of Nagaad (an umbrella group for Somaliland women's organizations), interview with Anab Omer Ileeeye, Chairperson, et al., interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 26, 2000.

“All Somalis have roots in rural areas, elders and everyone, so even an ‘urban elder’ may understand rural needs.”⁵⁶ Another suggests that this is unimportant because “There is communication. Always cars go, there’s radio communication, people know each other, they know what’s going on. Someone who leaves from Burao today will be in Hargeisa. So even if they stay in Hargeisa, they know.”⁵⁷

But if this is true, then would it not also be true of the “typical” urban, educated, elite MP? Several respondents argued that this is indeed the case.

[local government officials in the rural district center of Baki] Somalis have no classes. Even an MP, young and educated, is on the same footing, he’s connected by family to rural people. If people go to Hargeisa they’ll go to the house of a *Guurti* member or the house of an MP. We’re connected on clan lines. There are no barriers if a guy is from your clan.⁵⁸

[a Hargeisa-based NGO director] MPs are also clan based. . . . The technocrats in parliament may have education, but still their constituency is rooted in clans.⁵⁹

The comments from a group of intellectuals in the town of Gabiley as they debated the issue of whether MPs or *Guurti* members are more closely connected to the people, captures this diversity of viewpoints. One observed that “It depends on many things, for example, how well is the MP benefiting the community? If he is, they see him also as a great man.” Another argued that “It’s more personal, it depends on the individuals, there are not generalized differences,” while a third suggested that “Preference depends on a personal assessment of who is better for you. . . . Preference is based on individual pockets, it depends on how they affect your pocket.”⁶⁰ These views stand in sharp

⁵⁵ Robleh Michael Mariano, interview.

⁵⁶ Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, interview.

⁵⁷ Suleiman A. Duale, interview.

⁵⁸ Mohamed Said Kahlief “Farahan,” interview (with Osman Sheikh Umar).

⁵⁹ Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, interview.

⁶⁰ Abdulahi Yusuf Warsame, teacher, interview with Gabiley intellectuals, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

contrast to those who claim that MPs, whether in the previous multiparty regime of the 1960s or in the Somaliland of the present, are just “politicians” after money and securing their personal interests.

The above discussion reveals the range of views Somalilanders hold regarding how well the elders understand the needs of rural constituents. But what do people expect them to actually do with this information? What do they expect of their representatives, and of their government? Hanna Pitkin (1967) argues that the real test of representation is in documentable outcomes.⁶¹ What interests do Somalis have, and what outcomes do they expect?

Clearly the cornerstone of public expectations is peace. The frequently heard mantra that “any government is better than no government” reflects the desire for the stability that only a government is able to provide, regardless of how well or poorly that government might otherwise perform. This statement suggests that peace really is the only important interest to Somalis, and so as long as there is peace, the job of their representatives can be considered done.

But is this the entire story? Somaliland often seems a land of contradictions, and this is particularly evident with regard to Somalilanders’ expectations of their government. Because just as frequently, the mantra “never again” is voiced; the public has no intention of again suffering the predation and abuses of a disconnected and out of control state. So does this mean they do have other interests, other expectations of the state?

⁶¹ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967).

Well, yes and no. In a manner that again appears contradictory, Somalis express a mixture of seemingly very high, and very low expectations of the state, often in the same conversation. On the one hand, an individual might insist that providing their community with teachers, health care workers and tractors should be the government's responsibility, and they are waiting for the government to fulfill it. Perhaps this is a legacy of the socialism of the Siyad Barre era. On the other, the same individual may lament that they can never hope for anything good to come from government, reflecting both the negative experiences with governments of the past, and the weakness and lack of resources of government during the 1990s. What this leaves us with is a community that tends to express not only many needs, but also many expectations of the government, at the same time that it shows a considerable degree of tolerance, or at least passivity, when these needs are not in fact met. How this plays out in community expectations of and interactions with their representatives will emerge in the following discussion.

Let's begin with the range of needs that Somalis express, and how (to whom) they are voiced. When asked whether they had made contact with any of their representatives in the government, whether a *Guurti* member, an MP, a minister (from one's own clan) or another influential clan member, a considerable number of respondents indicated that they had, or knew of people who had. It is an interesting reflection on the state of politics, and the lack of resources, in Somaliland that a significant proportion of the contacts were made in pursuit of individual needs and interests. The most commonly cited reason was the search for employment, and both *Guurti* members and ministers who were interviewed confirmed that their constituents (i.e., fellow clansmen) were constantly visiting them in hopes of finding work. Other kinds of individual issues might also be brought to the attention of an influential clansman for assistance as well. For example,

the director of one woman's NGO describes how she approached the MP from her clan for assistance with a conflict that had arisen in one of the communities where she worked over the use of NGO funds. She went to her MP and asked him to intervene on her behalf, and he did so by writing a letter to the community, after which they met and the problem was resolved. When asked why she decided to go to her MP for assistance, she replied that "I went to my MP because he was more educated, so he was better able to solve this problem. There are some problems that *Guurti* members would be more effective in resolving, but I've never had to go to them."⁶²

But while meeting individual needs was the primary goal of many respondents, others do report going to their representatives on behalf of community needs, most often in the hope of capturing some development resources, or at least having their case brought to the attention of the government and the international NGOs. The desire for assistance with water supplies, schools, clinics and salaries for teachers and nurses, and agricultural implements is virtually universal, given the impoverished state of the countryside. One of the most commonly reported scenarios in pursuit of community interests was the practice of visiting one's *Guurti* representative, who could then accompany a local delegation to the offices of the international NGOs in the hopes of finding an organization willing to assist the community. Contacts were also made about other types of community concerns. For example, Odweyn elders visited their representatives to discuss attempted land annexations by a neighboring district. Thus, it is clear that a considerable amount of contacting goes on regarding a wide variety of issues.

⁶² Shukri H. Ismail "Shukri Bandari," Coordinator, Candlelight for Health and Education (a Somaliland NGO), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 30, 2000.

No matter how accessible a government representative is, however, access is of little use if that representative can do nothing to help. And in a resource-poor country with a nascent and even more resource-poor government, many respondents, particularly rural respondents, cite this as the crux of the matter. For example, when asked to compare interaction with local MPs in the past compared to their present representatives, a woman in the small town of Bon responded that “What’s important is what they bring, not the concept, and earlier [in the 1960s] they could bring more.”⁶³ Elders could assist community members in pleading their case before international NGOs or occasionally government ministries, but it was true that little direct assistance could be obtained from this. As elders in the small town of Baki put it, “Both our *Guurti* [representative] and MP have come to see our situation, and people go there to Hargeisa to see them as well. But the ability to assist is limited now, but if they have something they can share it.”⁶⁴

Another in the group commented further on the contrasts between past and present:

Now the elders are so powerful compared to the former government. Before the government had lots of resources, but now the government has almost nothing, so the elders take over responsibility. Before the government was consulting them, there were community-based committees to communicate between the government and the people. Now it’s the same, but the resources are missing.⁶⁵

This comment highlights some of the contrasts between life for rural people under the present Somaliland government and the former regimes. While in the past there may have been means to consult the elders at least superficially, they did not have real decision-making power compared to the present. Today they have more power, but they have few resources at their disposal to really help their communities. (Another

⁶³ Hasna Haji Saeed, Bon “mother’s committee,” with Barkhado Ali Geleh, Ibaado Elmi Lodon, Sofia Aw Barka, and Ardo Abdullahi, interview by author, Bon, Somaliland, March 17, 2000.

⁶⁴ Baki elders, interview by author, Baki, Somaliland, March 19, 2000.

interesting point about this particular comment is the distinction that rural people often made between the elders and the government. There is still less of a sense of elders as a part of the government than of elders as an institution functioning alongside of government, with more or less power depending on the conditions faced by the regime in power.)

Does this lack of resources make the issue of representation and access moot? Not necessarily. First of all, there may be at least some low cost ways in which elders can represent their constituents' interests. One way in which the *Guurti*'s representational role is supposed to play out is in better rural input into the policy-making process of the state, and this can be an inexpensive way in which to have real impact on constituents lives. Abdulkadir Jirde, the Deputy Speaker of the lower House of Representatives, discussed the importance of having this voice in the legislature. He argues that people who raise livestock, the backbone of the Somaliland economy, have long been underserved or ignored by successive political regimes. Jirde describes how the *Guurti* did indeed, from his perspective, serve as a voice for the rural section in dealing with the serious national problem of "enclosures." This occurs when individuals, usually urbanites, fence off sections of the range land needed so desperately by the nomads for their personal use and/or for harvesting the fodder produced for sale.

[There was a problem with] creeping enclosures, fencing an area and selling the grass. City-based people do this. It leads to environmental degradation and pastures decline. . . . The Minister for Environment drafted a bill to address this, and the House of Representatives debated it, then we sent it to the *Guurti*, who changed it and made excellent contributions. They put the House of Representatives to shame on this. They sent it back to the House of Representatives and they passed it. The House of Representatives were so ashamed when they saw how much the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Guurti had done better. . . . If there is no house of *Guurti*, these laws would never be made. Rural interests are critical here.⁶⁶

Guurti members report that the key changes they made in the bill involved reducing the allowable size for various types of individual holdings.⁶⁷ The mayor of Boroma reports that the elders – both local ones and those from the *Guurti* – will also play a critical role in implementation of this new policy. According to him, “We could do it ourselves, but the elders are closer to the people than us, so it goes more smoothly. Without them it would be difficult. When a nomad sees this old man, he’ll respect them.”⁶⁸

Thus, this reflects one way in which a government policy that did not require significant resources could be implemented to meet rural interests with the assistance of *Guurti* representatives. Another example of the possible benefits of representation was explained by elders from Ethiopian border town of Tog Wajaale, where transshipment of goods from Berbera port to Ethiopia is a key economic activity. They report going to their representatives (in this case, their MPs) to complain about the problem of taxation of goods at the multiple checkpoints throughout the country, which made the costs prohibitively high by the time they reached Tog Wajaale, thus leading to a decline in trade. They believe their complaint contributed to the government’s decision to change this policy,⁶⁹ a real case of effective representation. (The Minister of Finance reports that many traders throughout the country had been complaining about the problem.) While rural constituents in particular often think of hoped for or expected benefits from

⁶⁶ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

⁶⁷ Hussein Madar Hosh, Deputy Chairman of the Somaliland *Guurti*, with *Guurti* members Mohamoud Hared Robleh, Abdirahman Ahmed Arayeh, Dini Abdulahi Handa, and Aden Shire Farah, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 21, 2000.

⁶⁸ Ibrahim Magan Nur, Mayor, Boroma, interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

⁶⁹ Omar Mumin Nur, headman, Tog Wajaale, with elders Abdi Kahin Raghe, Mohamud Hussein Tukale, Musa Hassan Shirdon, and Sahardid Daud Ibrahim, interview by author, Tog Wajaale, Somaliland, June 5, 2000.

government in much more concrete and immediate terms – a road, a water supply, a salary – *Guurti* representatives may be able to provide them some very important, if less immediately tangible, benefits via their input into policy as well.

Finally, one *Guurti* member explained how he sees his responsibilities to his constituents changing over time as peace consolidates and he can shift his attention to other issues:

Now we're in a transitional period. We want to consolidate peace. We haven't actually reached the stage where you particularly address the needs of a constituency, but I'm confident I will be able to do things for them. . . . You couldn't come here otherwise [if we were not focused on peace now]. . . . The time is coming nearer, we're starting development projects, we're moving to the development stage.⁷⁰

So while some might see the benefits of having *Guurti* members represent them in the government as limited now because the government has so little in the way of development resources to make use of, the influence of *Guurti* members, and hence the perceptions of their importance, could change considerably if the state consolidates and financial resources increase.

In summary, we once again see that there is not consensus among Somalilanders, this time on the issue of the elders' ability to provide better quality representation for rural clan constituents than MPs, whether elected or "selected." While the survey did not involve a representative sample of the population – in fact, rural Somalis are considerably under-represented – we can nevertheless note some interesting and important trends in the ways that different sectors of society responded on this issue. First, and most significantly, we can observe here, as in the discussion of election processes, that the variations in perspective between those who rate the elders' ability to fulfill this

representation role positively and those who disagree, cannot be attributed to a generalized “elite” versus “rural” or “non-elite” status. Some elites, such as the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, are strong and vocal believers in the need for the elders’ participation in government – recall, for example, his description of their critical role in representing and promoting rural interests on the enclosures legislation. But other elites are among the strongest critics of what they essentially regard as urbanized imposters. Among rural respondents, on the other hand, the issue much more often comes down to a more concrete and instrumental assessment of what *anyone* can do for them and their communities. Given the still financially precarious status of the government and the limited resources of their representatives as well, both in the *Guurti* and in the lower house, they seem to accept, for now, that no one can do much to help them meet their most pressing needs for employment, clean water, or better roads and markets for their produce and livestock. But they also clearly express their hope, and expectation, that this situation will change in the future.

The implications of this for state and regime legitimacy, particularly in the rural communities that the elders’ are supposed to be especially good at representing, and where state and regime legitimacy have historically been very low, are important, but still undetermined. While rural communities seem to be at least somewhat tolerant of the limited capacity of the government and their representatives for the time being, this acceptance is waning. As in so much of Africa, then, it is lack of resources, rather than lack of responsiveness, that perhaps poses the most immediate threat of undermining the regime’s legitimacy (although this is unlikely to have a major impact on state legitimacy

⁷⁰ Ali “Dhere” Omar Ahmed, member of the Somaliland *Guurti* representing the Dulbahante clan in eastern Somaliland, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, June 9, 2000.

given that the reuniting with the south, the only credible alternative, clearly would not improve the state's circumstances). The true test of the elders' value and their implications for legitimacy in the eyes of rural Somalis may not come until resources are more plentiful.⁷¹ It is only then that this aspect of the new political system can truly be put to the test. Constituents will be able to see then whether elders are more responsive to their needs, or if not, whether they can be pressured more effectively or removed from office more easily than MPs. Thus far, however, respondents do not report significant differences in the ease or quality of access to *Guurti* members versus MPs, although given the awareness of the government's limited resources, efforts to make use of representatives has still been relatively limited.

6.2.2.3 *A Co-opted Agenda?*

The above discussion addresses the question of whether or not elders in the *Guurti* can speak for their people, especially the rural majority, better than MPs or other representatives. But even if they can, do they? Some of the comments recorded above have already alluded to what is unquestionably the most serious challenge to the value and legitimacy of participation by elders directly in the affairs of government: co-optation, manipulation, or, in the worst case, outright corruption of elders by the government, or sometimes more specifically, by the president. Co-optation is of course not a new problem. As discussed, during the colonial era some *akils* managed better than others to balance the competing demands of their fellow clansmen and the British

⁷¹ The 2000 budget for the Republic of Somaliland included allocations for development projects for the first time, although these were initially to be targeted only to the eastern regions of the country where sovereignty is contested with Puntland. However, a series of bans on livestock imports from the Horn of Africa imposed by the Gulf States during parts of 2000 and 2001 led to substantial decreases in Somaliland

administration that paid their salaries, while others came to be seen as mere puppets or tools of the British, leading in some cases to efforts to depose or replace them. And neither the vote-seeking politicians of the multiparty era in the 1960s nor Siyad Barre were reluctant about attempting to “influence” leading elders in the hopes that they would then produce the votes, or acquiescence, of their people, although they too met with varying degrees of success. But constituting the *Guurti* as an institution of the government itself, rather than just using elders as an informal link between the government and the people, changes, and perhaps compromises, their role still further.

This problem, if that is what it is, perhaps begins with changing expectations among the elders elevated to the *Guurti* about both their role in society, and their lifestyles. The chairman of SOYAAL, the Somaliland Veterans Association, and one of the founders of the SNM, put it this way:

The *Guurti* themselves are getting more modernized, insatiable economic needs are emerging, they’re developing wishful thinking about land and big houses . . . As individuals they are seeing themselves as government employees. . . . They’re driving big cars, wearing safari suits. Their social status is uplifted.

But he also adds:

But this doesn’t change their behavior much. . . . They’re the true leaders of the country. . . . They’re still playing their role, they’re not changing much. And young *guurti*, young, elders are coming up to challenge them too.⁷²

And the Deputy Speaker of Parliament (the lower house) likewise observes:

The elders themselves are heavy consumers of khat, which is not a good sign. It makes them needy, susceptible to bribery, for example by an

government revenues, which may have forced these development initiatives to be delayed still further. Mohamed Said Mohamed “Gees,” interview, May 28, 2000.

⁷² Said Shukri, Chairman, SOYAAL (Somaliland veterans association), and founding member and former central committee member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 25, 2000.

aspiring minister. It increases their vulnerability. I'm seeing problems like this, and it's increasing.⁷³

And some Somalis contend that along with a taste for greater material comforts, many leading elders have developed an unseemly – “un-Somali” – taste for political power. One Hargeisa NGO director argues that “They’ve realized they have power they didn’t have before and they’re asserting it, which isn’t quite right.”⁷⁴ Another respondent adds: “This *Guurti* is different from the traditional *guurti*, they’ve had a taste of power. The traditional was above power, but now they’re highly politicized, urbanized, intriguing.”⁷⁵ In the view of many Somalilanders, these new interests decrease the respect for the elders and the public trust that they are impartial and loyal representatives of their clan and of society, rather than “politicians” pursuing personal interests.⁷⁶

Moreover, the perception that at least some members of the *Guurti* have actually become corrupt as they pursue these new interests is widespread, particularly among urbanites, although it is also expressed outside of the major towns. Somaliland society has taken careful note of the acquisition of land cruisers, land and new houses by leading elders, largess that is presumed to be distributed by the executive branch in the interest of obtaining *Guurti* members’ enduring support. Observations about this problem were mentioned with startling frequency. The disappointment of the public in the behavior of many *Guurti* members was palpable. For example, according to one NGO director in Boroma:

⁷³ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

⁷⁴ Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, interview.

⁷⁵ Mohamed Sheikh Abdullahi, Executive Director, ARDA, interview with Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, et al., interview.

⁷⁶ Note that the term *guurti* is often used to refer to any informal council of elders; it does not necessarily indicate an institutionalized, permanent or semi-permanent grouping. Many clans, and/or their titled elders, had such informal *guurti* that advised them. They exercised a certain amount of power as advisors, but the

They're very susceptible in politics to being manipulated. . . . This wasn't the *Guurti* I expected, with land cruisers and body guards. But self interest comes in, and they are after all human.⁷⁷

This has clearly been detrimental to their standing in the eyes of many. Some examples:

[A Hargeisa lawyer] Originally any member of the *Guurti*, whatever his clan, was seen as a respectable elder that could move from one end of Somaliland to the other and be received and respected. It is because they've gotten onto other agendas that there's been an opportunity to corrupt them.⁷⁸

[staff of a women's NGO in Hargeisa] They [the elders] built the government, but now it's benefiting certain people, politicians. It's corrupting clan elders. Before they didn't get things like a salary. Now they're being manipulated, nobody respects them now.⁷⁹

[woman lawyer in Hargeisa] The *Guurti* have been manipulating things, they're becoming politicians themselves. People are less and less interested in the role of the *Guurti* because they've become politicians.⁸⁰

[A British observer of Somaliland society] Sheikh Ibrahim [chairman of the *Guurti*] and the elders could see power, political power, being given that they'd never had before. Their only role had been peace. . . . But traditional elders who start dipping their toes in the waters of modern political institutions have to be careful that they don't run counter to traditional values. Two months ago Sheikh Ibrahim and others were making a public speech in Hargeisa, and they were shouted down. . . . The top 12 are regarded by the public as totally corrupt, and they are. They've received houses, land cruisers. . . .⁸¹

[Director of a Hargeisa NGO] The *Guurti* elders get salaries . . . they are paid with government funds, but the executive can stop payments. . . . Many elders are very respected in their own societies, but since they came to the *Guurti* they've been corrupted, not just financially, but morally also. . . . The elders are also facing this dilemma. They were very respected, but now they're doing the president's bidding, and they're no longer in control. . . . The government has given them plots of land, cars, behind the

real extent of their traditional authority was limited by their ability to preserve consensus within their community.

⁷⁷ Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, interview.

⁷⁸ Robleh Michael Mariano, interview.

⁷⁹ Kinzi Hussein, interview.

⁸⁰ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), lawyer, and Secretary General, Nagaad (an umbrella group for Somaliland's women's organizations), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, November 4, 1999.

⁸¹ John Drysdale, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

scenes money . . . so they find it very difficult to tell Egal what he doesn't want to hear.⁸²

[a woman in Hargeisa] The young used to respect the elders, but now the elders have wealth, a good life, they're marrying many wives, they have land cruisers, while young people have nothing and no one cares.⁸³

It is clear that the widespread perceptions of corruption among at least some of the members of the *Guurti* – particularly the leadership – pose a serious threat to the respect for and legitimacy of both the individuals, and the institution.

However, widespread as the concerns about corruption were, many still believed that the value of the *Guurti* as a unique institution that could meet Somali needs outweighed this. For example, just as some had argued that even if *Guurti* elders were urbanized, they could still represent their rural clansmen, one respondent suggested that “Even if a chief is corrupted he'll still look out for the interests of his clan.”⁸⁴ Another believed that despite these problems, the special skills of the elders were nonetheless needed:

[Minister of Finance] This is a danger, that by being in the *Guurti* they may be cut off, become elites themselves, and this is already happening some. They are being corrupted, they're becoming integrated into the government and political life, they're getting perks. This corrupts. They have land cruisers and houses in town. They're becoming urban elders. There has been no discussion of what to do about this yet, we're still waiting. . . . But even if some are urban, they still have traditional tools, and elites can never replace them.⁸⁵

It is particularly interesting to note here that the Minister does not automatically see *Guurti* members as being among the nation's elites, but rather treats it as a new phenomenon, an aberration. This is a striking perception with regard to a group of this

⁸² Mohamed Barood Ali, interview.

⁸³ Amran Ali Mahmoud, interview.

⁸⁴ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, interview.

⁸⁵ Mohamed Said Mohamed “Gees,” interview, September 18, 1999.

stature, and salary level, and it was typical of how many respondents spoke about the *Guurti*.

Still others contend that while this problem or corruption is serious, it is not insurmountable. Many associate it specifically with the current administration of President Egal. Described by one man as a “genius of manipulation,”⁸⁶ and with some notoriety from the fact that Barre’s 1969 coup was welcomed in part because the government he headed had become so corrupt, Egal is widely regarded as a master at wielding “influence.” But some respondents argue that elections and challenges from the next generation of politicians will soon lead to a new and cleaner era in Somali politics when these problems can be corrected. And according to some, the elders themselves may be recognizing that the stature and respect on which their present positions depend are being threatened.

[A Hargeisa NGO director] Urbanization and co-optation, yes, this is happening, but this is short-term problem, this government has done this. The elders will realize that this is not the way to go. This is already coming up. There is lots of unease in the public about the way the *Guurti* has been co-opted. It’s true, it’s clear – they’re driving land cruisers and they only go to their clans when something happens. They’re more and more involved in government day to day. But this isn’t a problem of the structure. It’s a good institution. It’s not being used properly at the moment, but this can be corrected. The *Guurti* is an institution that fits this context very well.⁸⁷

The view that it is not the concept of the *Guurti* or the institution itself that is flawed, but only its current embodiment, was expressed by a number of respondents, leading even some of those who were most critical of the present system to express optimism about its future potential.

⁸⁶ Dr. Aden Abokar, interview.

⁸⁷ Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, interview.

Overall then, the record of the *Guurti* in fulfilling its role as a “voice for the people,” especially rural constituents, is quite mixed, as are the implications for state and regime legitimacy. Clearly some individuals value their *Guurti* member as a special kind of representative for their needs and interests, and see them as filling a gap that only they can fill. There are some, albeit perhaps still relatively minor, indicators of their ability to bring a broader, rural perspective to government activity at large, evident for example in legislation such as the enclosures bill, but their record may yet be too limited to be conclusive.

But others just as clearly feel that they have failed in this role, or at the least, that they are no better than other representatives, particularly MPs. There is clearly widespread concern that it is precisely those characteristics that can, *in theory*, make the elders uniquely effective as representatives of their primarily rural clansmen which are altered or distorted when they actually join the government. These include their knowledge of rural life and needs, their objectivity and lack of bias, and their placement of clan interests before personal ones. Certainly these concerns appear to be more prevalent among urbanites and intellectuals than among rural respondents, and it is the views of the latter that perhaps matter the most in this case, since it is the legitimacy of the state and the government in the eyes of previously marginalized rural Somalis that is primarily at stake. However, the results presented here can only be taken as indicative of trends; a larger sample of primarily rural respondents would be necessary to get a fully accurate understanding of the extent to which these concerns affect rural perceptions, or alternatively, the extent to which the presence of the elders does in fact make a positive difference in their perspectives on the state and the government.

6.2.3 *The Nation's Peacemakers*

There is widespread agreement among Somalilanders that the most important role the elders in general, and the *Guurti* as an institution, can play in Somaliland society is the preservation of what many see as their precious but fragile peace. Elders may be called on to resolve conflicts arising from local tensions arising after a murder, which might pit neighboring sub-clans against one another, as Somalis are always cognizant of the danger that such tensions, if left unchecked, are prone to escalate. And they also get involved in major inter-clan conflicts over traditional issues like control of pasture or more “modern” national resources such as the distribution of seats in the cabinet or positions in the police or military. In addition, they are expected to help manage intra-governmental conflict, particularly between the executive branch and the lower house of parliament, which have frequently found themselves at odds with each other. While many believe that Somaliland would not exist without their efforts, and there is general agreement that elders are effectively fulfilling this critical peacemaking role, there are also dissenters who make important critiques of the institutionalization of the *Guurti* and the negative effects of this step on their abilities to manage conflict.

The belief that the elders in the *Guurti* – in fact, “elders” in general – do indeed possess exceptional abilities to manage conflict seems virtually universal. They were described variously as “peace guardians” who are “like an anesthetic”⁸⁸; “a torch which we beam to shed light to darkness”⁸⁹; and “the first sensitive detectors to seismic tensions [in the pastoral communities].”⁹⁰ One NGO director described the response of local

⁸⁸ Musa Jama Mohammed, interview by author (with Abdulahi Ibrahim Habaneh “Abdulahi Dhere,” Secretary of the Somaliland *Guurti*, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

⁸⁹ Mohamoud Sheikh Nur, et al., interview.

⁹⁰ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, Januray 25, 2000.

elders to problems this way: “These elders come on their own, they get involved . . . they resolve problems. . . . You can’t imagine how sensitive they are. They respond immediately without hesitation.”⁹¹ Many would agree that, as one local elder said of the *Guurti*: “Their greatest role is to intervene to put out fires.”⁹² A man in the regional center of Burao likewise explained that “The *Guurti*’s role is to nip tribal issues. If they’re there, they can be effective to prevent crisis, but without them it can explode.”⁹³

Among Somalis, fires may start small and escalate rapidly if not controlled, or they may ignite on a large scale right from the start. Elders in the national *Guurti* may have a role in either case. Local conflicts appear to arise most frequently over land use or access issues, at least in the western part of Somaliland, where the practice of crop-based agriculture is relatively common. These cases may initially seem relatively insignificant, but they can spread rapidly to the protagonists’ sub-clans and beyond, particularly in an environment where the government’s ability to respond via police and court action is quite limited. Given the widespread perception that Somaliland’s peace is fragile and must therefore be carefully guarded, the need for intervention by local and, if necessary, national-level mediators to prevent small conflicts from getting out of hand is widely felt. When such conflicts do arise, it is normally up to local government authorities to respond first, although local elders may also respond immediately, or get involved at the request of local authorities. This approach is not new, although over the course of the colonial period and the post-independence regimes the extent to which local authorities relied on local elders in such cases has varied considerably. If, however, local elders are unable to resolve such conflicts on their own, they may call upon the national government,

⁹¹ Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, interview.

⁹² Mohamed Rabile, with Mohamed Isman, interview.

including, but not limited to, the *Guurti*, to help reduce tensions and resolve the problems. Government representatives may then be sent to the area to assist in mediation efforts.

The exact nature of the government response can vary considerably. At times, the response is left almost entirely to the *Guurti*. In such cases, the Standing Committee of the *Guurti* will select appropriate members – typically including both representatives from each of the clans in conflict, as well as numerous representatives of clans that are not involved in the conflict and therefore in a good position to mediate – and send them to the area to manage negotiations. They will typically remain there until the problem is fully resolved, a process which can take anywhere from a few days to weeks or months. *Guurti* members may be joined by one or more government ministers or MPs, and occasionally ministers or other government representatives may be sent on their own, without *Guurti* members. There is no fixed pattern of response; rather, the composition of the negotiating team or teams will depend on which clans are involved, what issues are at stake, how “political” the issue is (e.g., is the dispute among relatively unimportant sub-clans, or is it a conflict emerging among clans that straddle some of the more serious fault lines in Somaliland society), and the skills and clan identity of the particular mediators selected.

It may be helpful to describe a few of these mediation efforts in greater detail.

According to one government official in the town of Gabiley:

There was insecurity in the region which they helped with. Last year there was a conflict in Qadow over agricultural land within the Jibril Abokor clan. The *Guurti* came, a member of the council of ministers came. For four to five days there was discussion and peace was concluded. Also at El Bardaale, there was conflict between the Reer Nur sub-clan of the

⁹³ Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf “Kulumbe,” interview.

Gadabursi and the Jibril Abokor [an Isaaq sub-clan], again over agricultural land. The *Guurti* was there for 25 days, both MPs and *Guurti* members and ministers were there, and they finished it. We tried to solve both locally first, but we didn't succeed, so we called others. Elders are specialized in problem solving, and by law it is their role. The others supplement them. Elders, MPs and ministers assist and complement each other.⁹⁴

And *Guurti* members themselves describe some of their efforts:

There was one conflict between the Ayub [an Isaaq sub-clan] and the Rad Samatar [a sub-clan of Sa'ad Musa of Isaaq] in Faroweyn about 21 days ago. There was a killing in [Medaweyn] on the Ethiopian border. The Minister of Interior and the former Minister of Interior and a military general, all from the Rad Samatar, went there, but they were unsuccessful. People were arming themselves, tension was high. So a group headed by Suldan Abdirahman Mohamed, with 15 *Guurti* members composed from all clans, went to Faroweyn near the border and called both groups. The problem was the victim's clan had conditions, they wanted the killer killed or else, and they had resorted to violence and killed others. We were successful without crossing the border in giving blood compensations [*diya* payments] between the groups. . . . There are similar incidents all the time.

Guurti members went on to discuss their own views of their unique ability to respond in such cases. One claimed that "When things like that happen, when the executive or state goes people are a bit suspicious, but when the *Guurti* goes they welcome them." Another added that this is "Because people like tradition, they understand it."⁹⁵

Many respondents commented positively on the unique skills and effectiveness of the elders in the *Guurti* when it came to managing conflict. For example:

[an elder in the small town of Baki] The *Guurti* does make it better, the *Guurti* is there as peacekeepers. There was war in Hargeisa in '94, and

⁹⁴ Abdirisak Sheikh Aden, Vice-Mayor, Gabiley, with town and district officers Mohamed Abas, Ahmed Mohamed, Mohamoud Elmi, Asha Abdi Ali, Abdi Ahmed, Ismael Ali Abdulahi, Hasan Filfil, and Ahmed Ismael Farah, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

⁹⁵ Hussein Madar Hosh, et al., interview by author.

those who succeeded in bringing them together were the *Guurti*. Always the *Guurti* is there to resolve conflict and keep peace. If there is peace, it was initiated by the elders, and if the government becomes strong, the elders will be revered.⁹⁶

[a Boroma intellectual] There was general consensus on the value of this [the *Guurti*] at Boroma, because there were lots of conflict issues still to be resolved, so the *Guurti's* role was very important in the near future. The peace process had started, but it was not completed, and we needed a national *Guurti*. Somaliland was still in an embryonic stage politically, don't exaggerate its strength, it was still fragile. We needed the *Guurti* to be on the watch for problems. . . . They've gone to Burao on several occasions, and other areas with disputes about grazing land or farms.⁹⁷

[a Hargeisa women's NGO leader] If some men try to organize war, the elders can do something quickly. . . . The elders' involvement makes the government stronger, they are good for peace. The only thing they've been successful in here is the peace. In '93 they saved the country. . . . Elders are still needed for peace, they are the fathers of peace. They know the culture, and everybody and where they came from.⁹⁸

[the deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament] Politicians used to incite clans, whereas traditional elders keep them calm. This is why the politicians don't like the elders. Our traditional resources are grass and water, but politicians want political resources to be additional resources that clans fight over. But this is for their own interests, not clan interests at heart. Now we've installed elders above politicians. The *Guurti* immediately diffuses tribal tensions now. I myself am deputy speaker, but I'm subordinate to my own sultan. If I'm thrown out, I can't get the clan fighting over it. It can still cause tension among the clans, for example, when a minister is thrown out, but we have access to the elders now to control this.⁹⁹

[Minister of Finance] The good thing about the traditional system is there's always compromise and consensus. The problem is elites don't compromise. Elites were part of the civil wars. The elders are very practical, they solve problems.¹⁰⁰

[Hargeisa NGO staff member] They [the *Guurti*] have the skill of intervening peacefully, of mediating. In most cases they're useful to appease the clans, and sometimes to advise the government and parliament. In 1992 and 1993, we had internal problems, fighting. It was

⁹⁶ Baki elders, interview.

⁹⁷ Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, interview.

⁹⁸ Amiina Ali Omer, with Anab Omer Ileeeye, et al., interview.

⁹⁹ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," interview, September 18, 1999.

the *Guurti* who tried eventually to bring the sides together. At that time there was anarchy in the whole country, and they went out to all sides to talk and organize the Boroma conference. Without them there's trouble because no one else can bring all sides together.¹⁰¹

Thus, the view that the elders of the *Guurti* have made, and continue to make, an essential contribution to the preservation of peace and stability within the country is deeply held by many Somalilanders.

The *Guurti* has also on occasion taken on the role of mediating within the government, trying to resolve tensions between the executive branch and the lower house of parliament, which have at times found themselves sharply at odds. The most notable example of this was in the process of drafting the Somaliland constitution. Both the president and the lower house drafted their own versions, and there was considerable tension over which version would be used. At the Hargeisa Conference in 1996-97, the *Guurti* resolved this issue by taking the two drafts and combining them into one document in a way that both the president and the lower house were able to accept. On a more day-to-day basis, as well, the *Guurti* tries to moderate the tensions that arise between the president and the increasingly vocal and confrontational house.

As a result of these efforts both within the government and throughout society, many Somalilanders credit the elders and members of the *Guurti* with a key role in both creating and sustaining their fledgling state, arguing frequently that Somaliland would not exist without their efforts: "We are still with the clan system, so they're the best to solve that problem, they're better than MPs or ministers. The system would have collapsed without them."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Hasan Axmed "Hasan Embassy," interview.

¹⁰² Mohamed Rabile, with Mohamed Isman, interview.

However, while many Somalilanders laud the elders' skills and successes, a considerable minority of those interviewed argued that while the elders might possess these skills, for a variety of reasons they are in fact failing to put them to good use, and letting down their country and people. Several different types of problems with the elders' role are cited. The mildest of these is that the elders are, by their nature, conservative and non-confrontational, and that this, rather than their vaunted neutrality, tends to influence their role and response in conflicts. For example, several respondents suggest that the elders are inclined toward supporting the government in its conflicts with the (presumably) younger and more change-oriented parliament. According to one respondent, "The elders are very deferential to authorities, they're not confrontational,"¹⁰³ and another contended that "The *Guurti* is naturally non-confrontational, they are peacemakers, but they're not trying to really change Egal's actions."¹⁰⁴ Another individual comments that "The *Guurti* is very conservative, the government deals with them in a separate way from parliament. The *Guurti* usually supports the government in conflicts, for example, with parliament."¹⁰⁵

But again, there is no universal consensus. Elders in the small rural town of Odweyn (President Egal's birthplace) commented that "The *Guurti* is actually concerned with the interests of the people at large, while parliament is more connected to the government."¹⁰⁶ Other respondents counter that while the *Guurti* may appear conservative from the perspective of those expecting or accustomed to the more openly

¹⁰³ Mohamed Sheikh Abdullahi, Executive Director, ARDA, interview with Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, et al., interview.

¹⁰⁴ Mohamed Barood Ali, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Abdirahman Abdulahi Jimaale, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, November 4, 1999.

confrontational style of the Western liberal system, that this is precisely a reflection of their traditional, *non-Western* ways of resolving conflicts. For example, while the Minister of Planning accedes that they are highly conservative, he suggests that this arises at least in part from their skills as conflict managers:

Elders, once they're institutionalized, always tend to be conservative, they're always pro-government, always for the status quo. Some are very open about it. They don't question even dictatorship unless it gets really bad. They always tend to mediate.

He also makes it clear that – whether despite their conservatism or because of it – their skills are critically important:

Yes, they're conservative. Whether this is good or bad is a value judgment. But they can mobilize, that's why the SNM included them. And they can always come in when there are divisions in the government and mediate. . . . They're supposed to instill common sense, to mediate, not to do day-to-day administration, but to have a moderating effect in a crisis. And the fighting is not always between the government and the opposition. When there are two clans fighting they go there. They use the local language, talk in terms of clans, and the people believe in the elders.¹⁰⁷

Likewise, according to another Hargeisa intellectual:

The *Guurti* sees the government and parliament as their children, they want to appease them, not accuse one or the other. They don't want to say the government is wrong; they'll say the government has done x, y, and z that's positive, then they'll criticize it a bit.¹⁰⁸

Another adds that:

¹⁰⁶ Odweyn elders, including Ali Ibrahim Dirie, Ali Mohamed Hasan, Nur Ahmed Jieer, Mohamud Musa Afeeye, Mahamed Ibrahim Ismail, Mohamud Mohamed Guleed, Yusuf Jama Fidhen, Mohamud Ibrahim Mohamed, and Ahmed Ali Abdi, interview by author, June 4, 2000.

¹⁰⁷ Axmed Mohamed "Silanyo," Minister of Planning, Government of Somaliland, and two-time former chairman of the Somali National Movement (SNM), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 28, 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Abdulrahman Youssef "Bobe," Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), former Secretary of the SNM, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Somaliland Government, and former editor of Jamhurriya, Somaliland's leading independent daily, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 17, 1999.

Many people associate the *Guurti* with the government and think they don't tell the truth to the government. . . . Some say the *Guurti* is wiser than parliament, while others say they're blind, they're just supporting the government without giving concrete reasons. I think they ignore minor mistakes of the government, but they may not ignore grave problems.¹⁰⁹

Another, after acknowledging that it is true that elders can also incite conflicts, said:

Yes, but they work in different ways. . . . Politicians are confrontational, while the *Guurti*, even when they debate they have decorum. In parliament there's shouting, even fists fly. *Guurti* members could never do this.¹¹⁰

Still another suggests that their role as mediators makes it difficult for the *Guurti* to please all sides, and thus opens them up to accusations of bias: "Parliament is often against the government, but the *Guurti* compromises, so the *Guurti* is said by parliament to be a rubber stamp for government."¹¹¹ Finally, *Guurti* members themselves contend that "There is also always conflict between the government and the House of Representatives. Many times the House of Representatives is saying the president broke the law or the constitution. We intervene on behalf of the president and calm the situation. This is for conflict resolution, on behalf of peace, not on behalf of supporting the president."¹¹² And another *Guurti* member claimed that:

What people disagree about is so much at this stage. When the youth become restive we tell them to stay calm, and we go quietly to the president to discuss it so there will be no disagreement. Some of our youth members [of parliament] read how the American parliament works, so they're quicker in pace, they're more radical. But we haven't reached that stage. Then when we say "let's calm down," they'll say we're supportive of the government. But the challenge is behind the scenes. . . .

¹⁰⁹ Hasan Axmed "Hasan Embassy," interview.

¹¹⁰ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

¹¹¹ Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," interview, September 18, 1999.

¹¹² Sheikh Ibrahim Sheikh Yusuf Sheikh Madar, Chairman, Somaliland *Guurti*, with *Guurti* members Sheikh Axmed Sheikh. Nur, Sheikh Haji Abdi Hussein Yusuf, Sultan Abdirahman Sheikh Mohamud, Omar Sheikh Abdi Fure, Sheikh Musa Godad, Mohamed Duelle, Abdulkadir Mohamed Hasan, Farhan Isa Ubahale, and Abdulahi Sheikh Hasan, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 30, 2000.

We refuse many things [to the president]. If we didn't, we wouldn't have a function."¹¹³

Thus, whether their apparent conservatism is a weakness, or a part of their effective problem-solving technique, or simply a necessity to preserve security, remains a matter of debate.

A second, much more serious criticism of the *Guurti*'s role in peace preservation is the suggestion that by virtue of their new position as *part of the government*, the *Guurti*'s critical neutrality is compromised in many conflicts, particularly anytime when the government – or the clans seen to be most closely aligned with it – is a player in the controversy. The issue of neutrality can in fact be a complex one. Elders are expected to represent their clan interests, i.e., not to be neutral. But at the same time, they are expected to work for the good of all of society, demonstrating a willingness to compromise on clan demands in the interest of peace, for example. In this sense, then, “neutrality” becomes a virtue that elders are sometimes acclaimed for. Moreover, it is when they are working in a group, as “The *Guurti*” rather than as individual *Guurti* members, that their neutrality becomes particularly important. It is because of this perception of neutrality that a team of *Guurti* members can, at least in theory, be sent out to resolve any conflict that arises in the country. Of course, that team usually includes representatives of the clans in conflict – who are not really expected to be fully neutral, but also not fully partisan either – but it is comprised primarily of members who do not have an interest in the conflict, and therefore can serve as neutral arbiters.

It is in this sense, however, that the perception of their neutrality may be threatened by their institutionalization within the government. Several individuals noted with either

¹¹³ Haji Abdi Hussein Yusuf “Abdi Warabe,” Deputy Chair of the Somaliland *Guurti* and head of the

anger or considerable concern that since the *Guurti* is now seen as part of the government, it can no longer play a role in resolving the most serious conflicts that face Somaliland. It is now suspected of representing the interests of the executive, or more particularly, of President Egal. One woman described the *Guurti* as “yes men” for the government,¹¹⁴ while another respondent, a Hargeisa NGO director, observed that:

In the past, elders who were influential were ad hoc, they didn't seek incentives to go to a trouble spot. Now it is the government that sends the elders. . . . In 1994 there were problems, a conflict, but the elders stayed put because the government didn't want them to go out, because Egal was benefiting from the conflict.¹¹⁵

Some contend that the impacts of this compromised neutrality were most serious in the conflict that emerged between the government and the clans that backed the SNM and the previous president, Abdirahman “Tuur,” between 1994 and 1996. Because the government was a key protagonist, they argue, the elders of the *Guurti*, as members of the government, could not, would not, and did not act effectively to resolve the problems. They argue that it was, instead, elders from outside of the *Guurti*, as well as other concerned Somalilanders, who were finally able to resolve the problems. One respondent, the director of a Hargeisa NGO, described his concerns this way:

The mix of traditional and modern is very interesting. But frankly speaking, we're really confused. I personally find that something is not really proper. Before the formation of Somaliland, the *guurti* was functioning as a traditional *guurti* and it was effective in terms of conflict resolution and awareness raising. The confusion started when they became institutionalized. They lost the traditional way of working, their voluntarism. Now they're paid. Before they were somehow fair and impartial. Now it looks like they bias towards the central government. If they try to mediate between the government and a clan, they're biased toward the government. . . . For example, in 1994 there was fighting

security committee, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, June 9, 2000.

¹¹⁴ Asli Abdi Hasan, Chairperson of Nasrulah (a Somaliland NGO), interview by author (with Anab Mohamed Nur), Boroma, Somaliland, March 16, 2000.

¹¹⁵ Mohamed Barood Ali, interview.

between a clan and the government in Hargeisa, and the *Guurti* were helpless, they couldn't intervene, they were not still seen as impartial, they had lost the trust of the people. They couldn't go to the Garhajis [the group of clans in conflict with the government] because they were seen as pro-government. Since they became institutionalized, they lost the trust of the clans. . . . The *Guurti*'s major mandate is peace and reconciliation, but they can't handle it as they did before, so it's confusing whether you can mix the systems.¹¹⁶

While this respondent agreed that the *Guurti* had, as many people noted, been very effective in helping communities to manage many of the conflicts that had arisen, he suggested that this was not an adequate indicator of their effectiveness:

There are many people who really praise the *Guurti*'s role, but they can't really show their effectiveness since they were institutionalized. . . . When small-scale conflicts are popping up, it's true that they're responding, but these are among sub-clans, the *Guurti* goes and solves them. But these problems in comparison are quite minor, they're among kinsmen in the same area. But some of the conflicts now are like the previous ones, like the SNM opposing the government, or people who are anti-Somaliland and pro-union [with the south]. They're quite serious, and damaging to the country, but they [the *Guurti*] can't do anything about them. They are completely seen as part of the government.¹¹⁷

Again, we see the suggestion that it is precisely those skills that make the elders most useful as a component of the government that are compromised – or even destroyed – by their very institutionalization within the government.

Finally, there are those who argue that as peacemakers, the *Guurti* are compromised most not simply because they are conservative by nature, or even because they are seen as members of the government, but because of the perception that they have been *bought* by the government (i.e., the president). One respondent contended, for example, that “*Guurti* members don't do a good job of representing the people because they're too pro-government. The president gives them money from time to time so they support the

¹¹⁶ Dr. Aden Abokar, interview.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

government in all issues. They're very pro-government, so they are useless for society.”¹¹⁸ And as we saw above, the perception that at least some members have become somewhat corrupt is relatively widespread, a factor that could have serious implications for their effectiveness as peacemakers and mediators. This view was captured by one Hargeisa woman NGO staffer when she said: “The *Guurti* has failed completely really. If there's peace in Somaliland, it's because of the people. The elders are corrupted.”¹¹⁹

Somaliland's gradually consolidating peace is unquestionably a – if not *the* – key source of instrumental legitimacy for the transitional administration, and for the state itself, and the elders' of the *Guurti* are widely credited with have played a pivotal role in protecting and preserving this peace. In this respect, then, their role within the government as the guardians of the country's security appears to have contributed considerably to the legitimacy of the state and the transitional administration. There are several caveats however. First, as is apparent from the comments recorded above, the elders' credibility as peacemakers is not unassailable; perceptions of bias or corruption could increasingly undermine both their effectiveness and their status with the public, and the benefits of their participation for legitimacy would be lost as well. Secondly, the importance of this role will certainly decline as peace consolidates. Although there will always be a need for some form of effective conflict management in Somali society, public attention is likely to increasingly shift to the elders' representational role. Thus, as a source of legitimacy their success as peacemakers may be significant, but it is probably somewhat temporary.

¹¹⁸ Axmed Sheikh Jama “Axmed Maalin,” interview.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Aden (with Kinzi Hussein), interview.

6.3 The Future of the *Guurti*

Thus far, the discussion has dealt primarily with respondents' perceptions about the role of the *Guurti* during Somaliland's transition phase under the regime put in place at the Boroma conference in 1993. But how do they see the future of this institution as Somaliland consolidates peace and builds what it hopes will be more permanent political structures? Were the elders effective primarily for crisis management, and should they now once again take a back seat and let educated intellectuals, technocrats and politicians lead the way? Or can their presence add value to the state over the long term? What is the extent of, and limitations on, their capabilities and the skills they have to offer?

As discussed, Somaliland's new constitution was approved in a 2001 referendum, and multiparty elections are scheduled for 2002. The most basic question – whether or not the *Guurti* will continue to exist as an institution of the Somaliland government – was answered affirmatively by the passage of the constitution. However, many other issues, including the breadth of their role relative to the past, and relative to the other institutions of the government, as well as selection processes and the precise representational role which they will fill over the long term, remain to be determined according to laws that are being promulgated by the government. As we have seen, many Somalilanders argue that the elders were the true founders – and the true power holders – during the early 1990s when peace was negotiated and the government established, and they have continued to earn considerable credit for their efforts to preserve that peace. But it is also clear that the balance of power has steadily shifted since the government was established, particularly as the executive branch has gained control over greater economic resources as the economy expands and taxation and financial management systems consolidate, and as relationships are built with external financiers. Will the power balance continue to

shift, and if so, how will this affect the legitimacy of the *Guurti* elders, and of the state structures of which they are a part? And if, as Somalilanders so desperately hope, the peace continues to consolidate and strengthen, at the same time that government security and policing institutions also strengthen, will the role of elders as peacemakers wane? Will there be a role for the elders in the Somaliland of 2005, 2025, 2050?

There is, of course, a wide range of opinion on these questions. Naturally, those who were already arguing that the elders and the *Guurti* are backwards and/or manipulated and corrupted, and therefore rendered ineffective as instruments of the state, do not see a need for the institution, as indicated in the above discussion. But even among those who believe the *Guurti* has played an effective, or even critical, role during the transition, consensus has not been reached about the future role for elders in a more consolidated and stable state. Among those who see the primary role of the elders as conflict management, some do see their role as a stop-gap measure, preserving peace and security only until the state is stronger,¹²⁰ and courts and police forces are well established, at which point the services of the elders will no longer be needed. Some see these functions as ultimately the job of “the state,” something which the elders are temporarily assisting with (suggesting that even in the *Guurti* the elders are not seen by these individuals as fully a part of the state) but which should be handled by the state when it is capable. Others, as the above discussion has already suggested, do not believe

¹²⁰ An interesting issue which is, however, beyond the scope of this analysis is the question of how Somalis now perceive the pros and cons of a “strong state.” It was clear that many still negatively associate such a concept with the Siyad Barre regime and its abusiveness. However, after a decade of chaos in the south, and some conflict and weak government in the north, there are also many who positively associate strength with the ability to maintain control and preserve peace, as well as the ability to assist them and provide services, build infrastructure, etc. Debates on these issues – and their outcomes – will be key determinants of the political futures of all Somalis.

the elders can be an effective part of a modern state structure, so that their role must therefore be “phased out”:

[former mayor of Hargeisa and SNM founder] They [the *Guurti*] should be modernized, and gradually dropped. We have to move from a tribal system to a national government, so their role will be minimized, the need will not be there eventually. Maybe within four years this could happen. People need justice. They don't need a *suldan* if there's a good court.¹²¹

[local government administrator in the rural town of Baki] The *Guurti* is not needed now. They were very ideal at the time of making peace, but now they're not so effective. We need the young and the educated now. . . . They can't handle policy or long-term planning. . . . Now that there is peace and the skeleton of a government is formed, we should tell them thank you very much, you've done your work.¹²²

[elder in Boroma] With a strong government structure and secure peace, then there's no need for them. Their greatest role is to intervene to put out fires. If this is solved permanently, there are no other roles. . . . What else could they do? They can't prepare a budget. If the government becomes powerful, then we won't need them.¹²³

The Minister of Fisheries, after pointing out that he had been sent out from the rural areas at an early age and “so I have no knowledge of this system – I'm urban,” observed that:

They [the *Guurti*] are very powerful now. It has got its advantages and disadvantages. . . . They're very clever in handling the clan system, but they don't know how to handle a modern system of government. In conclusion, we're very lucky because with that traditional system we saved ourselves, but now with this mixed system, we can't move forward. . . . We're at a critical stage, we must move forward or stay this way forever.¹²⁴

From this perspective, the elders may have been critical players in a chaotic, stateless environment, but in the presence of functioning state institutions, they have little role to play.

¹²¹ Mohamed Hashi, interview.

¹²² Osman Sheikh Umar, et al., interview.

¹²³ Mohamed Rabile, with Mohamed Isman, interview.

¹²⁴ Ahmed Hussein Omani, Minister of Fisheries, Government of Somaliland, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 29, 2000.

Many respondents argue, however, that “A strong government doesn’t eliminate the need for the *Guurti*,”¹²⁵ and see a continuing role for the elders and the *Guurti* as a state institution, although there is considerable debate over what the breadth of their role should be. Some, focusing on their role in conflict management, suggest that their skills in this arena will continue to be needed by the state indefinitely. For example, one Boroma elder argues that regardless of the strength of the state, no one can solve clan conflicts as effectively as the elders:

In my opinion, they are always needed, there should always be a role for them. For example, if two major clans clash, the elders are better suited than MPs for solving it. Somalis are clan based. Everyone runs to the elders when there’s a clash.¹²⁶

Others suggest that they should have a continuing *advisory* role:

[an NGO director in Boroma] There is a role for them, but they should be advisory, have a statesmen’s role. . . . These are their traditional roles, not day to day management. . . . It is better if they’re more advisory rather than having an equal billing with parliament. They should not be active lawmakers.¹²⁷

Moreover, although there was not consensus on the extent of their powers, it was not uncommon, even in rural areas, to hear the *Guurti* equated with the U.S. Senate or the House of Lords in the United Kingdom, suggesting that they would continue to be seen as having a more senior or higher status position relative to the lower house of parliament.

The strongest supporters of the *Guurti* believe that it should continue to hold the lead position among Somaliland’s political institutions, giving the elders a status similar to that they held at the Boroma conference. One Hargeisa intellectual explained it this way:

¹²⁵ Baki elders, interview.

¹²⁶ Haji Jama Mohamed Ugas Elmi, Chairman, Boroma’s “Social Committee of Elders,” interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

Those elites who say there is no role for elders are mostly trying to protect their space, preserve power for themselves. . . . Those who want to reduce the role of the *Guurti* say they should have no role, or a role only on certain “traditional” matters, but I see them as more important. The only thing noble about us is this *Guurti* and their role. They should review almost all political issues, and have an active role, not just a behind the scenes advisory role. Parliament has a four year term, the president five, and the *Guurti* six. This is a very important fallback – the *Guurti* is there the longest to safeguard the system.¹²⁸

But even members of the *Guurti* agree that their role will change as the state strengthens.

According to one member, “When there is an absence of government, the *Guurti* can be utilized, but if the state becomes strong, the state usurps some of the duties. But the *Guurti* is doing many things, it will still be needed. The state just takes some parts.”¹²⁹

At the same time, not surprisingly, elders in general, and particularly those in the *Guurti*, are among those most interested in preserving their position within government. While they acknowledge that there may be change, members of the *Guurti* also describe the institution as “absolutely vital for our survival.”¹³⁰ Some observers point out that these elders are very conscious of the stark difference between their present and past positions and will work hard to preserve their current role. As one intellectual in the town of Gabiley pointed out: “It is also said that the role of the *Guurti* has almost disappeared during the Siyad Barre government. That’s recognized by some elders, so they’ll be very careful that they don’t lose again.”¹³¹

In fact, some Somalis believe that what really distinguishes the present system from the past regimes in the Republic of Somalia is that “The difference from before is the openness of politicians’ to listening to elders. The politicians go to the elders when

¹²⁷ Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, interview.

¹²⁸ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, interview.

¹²⁹ Hussein Madar Hosh, et al., interview.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Ahmed Ismael, District Agriculture Officer, with Gabiley intellectuals, interview.

they need them, and they need the people to succeed now.”¹³² Still others argue that it is precisely because of this willingness on the part of the government to listen to elders that they do not need to have an institutionalized role, which merely corrupts them. They ask: “As long as the government is receptive to elders’ voices – which it wasn’t under Siyad Barre – why formalize the relationship?”¹³³

Obviously, there is still much to be debated and decided within Somaliland about what the future role of elders and status of the *Guurti* should be. It is worth noting that most of those who offered an opinion on this issue took a fairly instrumental view of their participation, that is, they based their opinion on whether or not they believe the state can function better with the elders than without them. This suggests, not surprisingly, that instrumental sources of legitimacy may be rated more highly than intrinsic ones. In fact, few respondents expressed the view that the elders’ participation in state institutions could have continuing symbolic – or intrinsic – value for the state or the regime.

6.4 Conclusion: The Implications of Elders’ New Role for State and Regime

Legitimacy

Renewing a role for Somaliland’s traditional elders as key players in the political system is one way in which Somalilanders have blended elements of indigenous political structures and practices with those of Western liberal democracy – a step toward indigenization. In so doing, they have created a system that, at least in principle, honors both “universal” democratic principles and local understandings of political behavior and practice. What conclusions can we draw about whether this approach to construction of

¹³² Abdulrahman Youssef “Bobe,” interview, September 17, 1999.

¹³³ John Drysdale, interview.

hybrid institutions and political practices can strengthen the political system, either in comparison to a system in which the elders have an active, but informal, non-institutionalized role, or in which they are sidelined as they were under both of Somalia's regimes? Is the Somaliland state, and/or the transitional regime and administration more legitimate – and hence more accountable, capable and effective – because of the role that the elders of the Guurti have played in the in founding the new state, or the institutionalized power that they will continue to exercise in the future? Has their role in creating and preserving this new state and political administration enhanced the intrinsic legitimacy of the political system? Can we hear in Somali's words, or see in their actions, a greater belief in the right to rule of the state, an agreement on the rules of the game, as a result of these changes? And how, if at all, have the elders and the Guurti contributed to the instrumental legitimacy of the state? Can we identify ways in which the Somaliland administration functions more effectively in promoting the interests of its citizens because of the role they play?

We can first of all see that the series of peace conferences, conducted under the leadership of these elders, which led to the foundation of the Republic of Somaliland and the establishment of its transitional regime, does indeed occupy a special place within the political consciousness of Somalilanders. Their descriptions of these founding events were consistently told with evident pride in what they themselves had achieved, using distinctly Somali ways of doing things and under the leadership of (or in cooperation with) their elders. They repeatedly point to the sharp contrast between this success and the continuing failures of the south. These stories in fact appear to be coalescing into a shared “national myth” of Somaliland's origins, with important implications for the intrinsic legitimacy of the state, and to some extent for the transitional regime which

arose directly from these processes. There is a clear sense that, at least at its beginnings, there was a national agreement on “the rules of the game” which the vast majority of those interviewed certainly felt that they were a part of and had a stake in.

However, as potent as the real and symbolic power of these foundations are, it is also clear that this is not enough: Somaliland cannot survive solely on the basis of the people’s strong identification with the way the state was formed, and the alternative to conflict that it offered, in the same way that the Republic of Somalia before it could not survive solely on the basis of the success in overcoming colonialism that the state embodied. Just as the specter of colonialism receded in Somalis’ memories through the course of the troubled decades that followed, the fear of conflict which has so strongly motivated Somalilanders will also recede in importance as the state consolidates its position (although the ongoing conflict in the south may continue to serve as a useful reminder for some time to come). Other successes and new or renewed sources of legitimacy – instrumental legitimacy – will be necessary to reinforce this initial success if the state and its regimes are to have enduring strength and retain the allegiance of Somaliland citizens.

As members of the *Guurti*, Somaliland’s elders can contribute to the state’s instrumental legitimacy in two primary ways: by helping to preserve peace and stability, and by serving as a voice for the interests of their constituents, particularly the rural majority of their constituents who have typically been under-represented by elected parliamentarians or other appointed representatives in the past. It is clear that their success in keeping the peace – which unquestionably remains the priority issue for Somalilanders – has indeed contributed greatly to the instrumental legitimacy of the state (not to mention its continued existence). For perhaps understandable reasons, they have

not had similar impact as representatives for the grassroots majority. Somalilanders have been willing to accept the failure of the elders – and the entire government – to provide other benefits, especially economic ones, as long as the peace is still seen as precarious, and recognition remains an elusive goal. But as peace consolidates, priorities and expectations will shift, and the demands of preserving and enhancing legitimacy will shift as well. If the elders are going to continue contributing to state and regime legitimacy over the long term, they may have to extend their perceived effectiveness beyond the realm of security in a way they have not successfully done during the transition period, when they have held relatively tightly to the most traditional of their roles, that as peacemakers.

As we have seen, there are many potential impediments to their ability to fulfill this role, from selection processes that lack transparency, and, at times, clarity, to their susceptibility to “influence,” or outright corruption. They in fact face a difficult conundrum: while making the elders a part of the government may enhance the respect for and legitimacy of the government, it simultaneously undermines that of the elders themselves. Abdulkadir Jirde, the Deputy Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament, captures the difficulty that the elders, and all Somalilanders, face:

We must choose between two devils. If we don't institutionalize the *Guurti*, then urban interests will dominate the country when the backbone of the economy is the rural livestock sector. But if we institutionalize them, then we risk divorcing them from their constituency. We must choose, and the lesser of the two is the second. Otherwise, you lose contact with the rural sector.¹³⁴

These obstacles are not insurmountable, but it may require conscious, collective effort on the part of the elders if the integrity of and respect for the institution of the *Guurti* is to be

¹³⁴ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

preserved and continue to serve as an anchor for the government, and there are no guarantees that such effort will be forthcoming.

One might ask whether it would not be sufficient to simply continue to listen to the elders, without actually institutionalizing their role and the potential for problems. As noted above, for example, John Drysdale argues that now that the executive branch of the government is willing to listen to the elders in a way that the previous regimes in the Republic of Somalia were not, there is no need to formalize their role. The weakness of this position, however, is evident. To begin with, a non-codified, advisory role might seem sufficient in the early years while the government is still weak and so desperately needs the assistance of the elders to ensure its very survival. But the government will likely continue to strengthen, albeit slowly, and while we might hope that it would be enlightened enough to continue to share power with informal advisors, it would seem foolhardy to assume it will do so. In fact, we are already seeing that is among political elites that the greatest resistance to the role of the *Guurti* can be found, although they are by no means unanimous in this view. Thus, if the premise that the elders' input and involvement strengthens the system is correct, then such participation needs to be ensured through an institutionalized role. Furthermore, political influence and the potential for corruption go hand in hand. The only way to safely eliminate the possible negative outcomes of indigenization, such as urbanization, corruption or manipulation of the elders, is to distance the elders from any power or influence, and this, as Jirde argues above, is too high a price to pay.

Finally, I will conclude by noting how much is still unknown about this issue, and particularly about rural perceptions, which were under-sampled in this study. Whether Somaliland's true nomads believe that the present political system holds any more

promise for them than those of the past remains to be seen. Certainly among those rural inhabitants that were interviewed, what was not said – for example, the general absence of criticism of the elders’ – may be as important as what was said. The majority of concerns were raised not by the elders’ intended rural constituents, but by Somali “intellectuals” both in Hargeisa and elsewhere, and these educated community leaders did not, by any means, speak with one voice. Their views range from ready acceptance to outright condemnation of the *Guurti* and the role its members have played, with a number agreeing that it is a flawed but absolutely necessary institution in the Somali context. Further exploration of rural perspectives could shed further, critical light on this subject.

On balance, then, we might conclude that the elders’ participation and institutionalization has been beneficial for state and regime legitimacy, though not unequivocally so, while at the same time it may actually have been detrimental to the elders’ own standing. But neither the positive (for the state and regime) nor the negative (for the elders and their perceived neutrality) outcomes can, or need to be, taken as given. While challenges to the elders’ credibility will perhaps be inevitable if they are part of the government, the individual and collective decisions and behavior on the part of these individuals can either exacerbate or mitigate the criticisms laid against them. If they are careless with their positions, their status is sure to decline, and with it the positive value, both for intrinsic and instrumental legitimacy, that they bring to the government. Their ultimate failure will be realized if the public at large – rather than just a handful of individuals as is presently the case – comes to perceive them as “politicians” rather than as representatives of the still highly credible indigenous (“traditional”) Somali system of politics.

Similarly, the extent to which they actually strengthen the long-term credibility and status of the state, the regime and/or individual governments is, to a considerable extent, in the hands of Somali political leaders. If these leaders seek to manipulate the *Guurti* and its role for short-term political gains, as the current president is accused of doing, then the boost to legitimacy that the institution can provide is not likely to persist. On the other hand, there is certainly the potential, by capitalizing on the strengths of the *Guurti*'s representative capabilities, to continue to strengthen both the intrinsic and instrumental legitimacy of the government, particularly through increasing rural perceptions that the government is aware of and responsive to rural needs and interests. But whether or not Somaliland will be able to realize the full benefits of this new and uniquely Somali institution remains an open question.

Chapter 7: Clan Identity and Representation – A Conflict Between Legitimacy and Effectiveness?

For the members of Somaliland's *Guurti*, just as significant as their role as peacemakers is the symbolic and practical importance of their presence within the government as clan representatives. We saw in Chapter 4 that clan identity, although modified by numerous factors, retains great salience in Somali society and politics. Yet the failure to deal effectively with this reality proved to be the bane of both of Somalia's post-independence regimes. While neither regime formally recognized clan balance as a requirement of government, and Siyad Barre went so far as to "outlaw" clan, implicitly clan balance – within the Council of Ministers, the security forces, the civil service, and throughout the government – had to be carefully maintained under a watchful public eye. Siyad Barre's abandonment of balance in the later years of his regime became a major source of public disenchantment with his regime, and it was only through escalating use of oppression and terror tactics that he could keep a lid on the mounting opposition to his rule.

During its transition period, Somaliland made a fundamentally different choice: negotiated clan balance was made explicit in the distribution of seats among Somaliland's clans within the two houses of parliament. However, the debate about whether such explicit recognition of clan in the structures of government should continue past the transition period remains unresolved. And even in the context of the explicit balance embodied in the parliament, each appointment and hiring by the transitional administration has continued to be subjected to considerable public scrutiny, just as they were in the past. Thus, while they recognize that denying their "Somaliness" was a fundamental failure of past political regimes, Somalilanders continue to struggle with one

of the most fundamental challenges that any Somali political structure must face: how do you build a state with clan in it that can function, a state that is both legitimate, and effective? This chapter will explore how Somalilanders view the benefits and costs of both explicit and implicit approaches to preserving clan balance, and the implications for regime legitimacy and the means for managing clanism and clan identity within the political system.

7.1 The Clan “Problem”

As we saw in the discussion of the continuing salience of kinship relations in Chapter 4, the vast majority of Somalis are still deeply attached to their clan identity, or in fact, as we have seen, to a multi-layered set of clan *identities*. As one respondent put it, “The mentality of tribalism is still strong. No two Somalis can meet without first identifying their tribal background.”¹ Many Somalilanders argue that, for better or for worse, clan identity and clan relationships are still *the* factor shaping their political and social relations. Abdulkadir Jirde, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, suggests that among Somalis “clan antagonism takes the place of class antagonism. . . . So instead of issue-based politics it is clan-based.” He goes on to point out, as I have argued, that “You ignore clanism in such a society at your own risk.”²

As in many multiethnic societies, Somalis are acutely sensitive to the balance of power between their own group and others, whether it be at the level of their clan, their sub-clan, their lineage, or some other layer of their identity, depending on the particular context of power. At the national level, they keep careful tabs on the clan identity of

¹ Mohamed Salah, intellectual from Burao, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 30, 2000.

² Abdulkadir Jirde, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 25, 2000.

each of the most powerful individuals in government, and often hold strong impressions about the general degree of balance within the security forces and the civil service. One respondent describes how past governments have been labeled – and perceived – according to the clan of their leading figures:

Somalis were introduced to [the Western democratic system] in the 60s, but we didn't know what it was all about, and tribal manifestations appeared immediately in the names of the governments. The first president, Abdulahi Issa, was from the Habar Gedir, and it was dubbed "The Saad Government," which means no-one outside the Saad [Abdulahi Issa's sub-clan] believed the government was theirs, and Saad see it as their government. The second and third presidents were both Mijerten, and the name is "The Mahamoud Saleiban [another sub-clan] Government."³

The highly decentralized, or even acephalous, nature of power in Somali tradition makes resistance to domination by others a particularly powerful force in Somali society. John Drysdale argues that this fear of domination, in combination with the fact that Somali society is divided vertically rather than laterally, makes solving the "problem" of political structure particularly difficult:

The problem is where you have a vertically oriented society, and the forefathers said never, ever give power to one man because he can't be trusted. So there is no leadership at the top above a vertical society. You can't have a leader from every clan, and no clan wants to be subordinated to another. . . . This is why it is so difficult to produce a centralized government for Somaliland.

Drysdale goes on to wryly observe that "This problem is not entirely rational – if it was, maybe it would be easier to solve."⁴ Somalilanders thus continue to grapple with the question of how to produce a functional and effective government in the context of their clan identity and kinship relationships; a government that can both allay their fears of

³ Mohamed Salah, interview.

⁴ John Drysdale, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

domination, and that can function effectively both internally, and internationally. “The question,” as one woman put it, “is how can we build a nation on the basis of clan?”⁵

7.2 Negotiated Clan Balance: A Lasting Answer?

While past political regimes in the Republic of Somalia often relied on *implicit* clan balance to try to maintain their legitimacy with the public, in Somaliland these relationships have been made explicit in the negotiated clan balance on which seats in the houses of parliament were distributed during the transition. Rather than hiding, denying or manipulating the role of clan identity and clan balance, Somaliland’s transitional structures openly embrace the issue of balance. In so doing, some argue, Somaliland has taken a step that will help it to build on the positive aspects of clan, rather than be destroyed by it. Numerous respondents observed, as Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, a Hargeisa intellectual, did, that clan can be both curse and blessing, the source of damnation, but also of salvation, for Somalis. The key problem, according to Artan, has been that “In the past, clan was only addressed when political elites needed it in their power struggles.” But now, he explains, the approach has changed: “Clans and culture are important, they save us. This is recognized now, the earlier omission is recognized. We need to keep these positive aspects and integrate them into the political system.”⁶

During the transition, seats in both houses have been distributed based on negotiated clan allocations, but it is the *Guurti* that is intended to embody a clan-balancing role over the long term. As Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud “Silanyo,”

⁵ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), lawyer, and Secretary General, Nagaad (an umbrella group for Somaliland’s women’s organizations), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, November 4, 1999.

⁶ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 20, 1999.

Somaliland's Minister of Planning until 2001 and the two-time former chairman of the SNM, explains it:

The *Guurti* was established and maintained for two reasons, and the first of these is to represent clans. In a very direct sense that is the basic social fabric of the country. The government doesn't speak in the name of clans, the *Guurti* does. They watch for the interests of their clan.⁷

Many Somalilanders perceive the presence of representatives of all clans in the Somaliland government as a means not just of making sure that their own clan has a voice in the government, but of safeguarding the entire system from clan fears and complaints. A former professor in the town of Burao explains that "the thing I like about this system is there's some kind of representation for all clans in Somaliland, and it stops the bigger clans from taking the political chances of smaller groups."⁸ Artan agrees, observing that "there is transparency with each clan represented. This way, there can be no clan dictatorship."⁹ As Minister "Silanyo" describes it, "Combining modern administration with clan, that mix, that sort of thing will be needed. Something elected or nominated purely on a clan basis . . . it's very existence is reassuring because no clan is out of it."¹⁰

Clan-based representation may have practical and instrumental benefits as well, particularly through the expanded access which it makes possible. In the last chapter we addressed the *Guurti*'s ability to represent rural interests, and touched on the issue of access and how often and on what types of issues an individual or group might contact a *Guurti* member or other government official. It was apparent that Somalilanders do make

⁷ Axmed Mohamed Mohamoud "Silanyo," Minister of Planning, Government of Somaliland, and two-time former chairman of the Somali National Movement (SNM), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 28, 2000.

⁸ Professor Abdi Timir, interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

⁹ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, interview.

¹⁰ Axmed Mohamed Mohamoud "Silanyo," interview, May 30, 2000.

at least some use of their access to government officials, not only their *Guurti* members, but also at times their MPs, cabinet ministers, or other highly placed individuals. And they may make these contacts as they seek help to meet personal needs – solving a family problem or finding employment – or on behalf of a community need such as assistance with repair of a community’s tractor or rehabilitation of a water supply system.

There is in fact a relatively wide variety of contacting going on. But the one factor that appears to be quite constant is that when Somalilanders do report making contact with their government, it appears that they virtually always do so through their fellow clansmen. At least in principle, even quite a powerful and highly placed individual always has an open door to members of his or her clan. A woman in the small rural town of Bon confirms this point, saying that “We go to our own representatives, the ones who we know, for example about development projects we want. . . . They do help, they have pretty much an open door.”¹¹ And a *Guurti* member confirms his own accessibility to his fellow clansmen, observing that he has many visitors and that “Anyone from the clan can come. I do what I can for them. The least I can do is give them a lunch.” He also adds, however, that in practice there may be differences in the accessibility of some individuals, or in the extent to which access is used, noting that “If you’re not welcoming or not capable, less will come, but if you’re helpful, more come.”¹²

Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that clan is an essential feature affecting perceptions of access, and that having a fellow clansmen seated somewhere in the government is the most effective means to ensure that each Somalilander believes he has a means to access the government. Moreover, while clan members outside of the *Guurti*

¹¹ Hasna Haji Saeed, Bon “mother’s committee,” interview by author, Bon, Somaliland, March 17, 2000.

¹² Ali “Dhere” Omar Ahmed, member of the Somaliland *Guurti* representing the Dulbahante clan in eastern Somaliland, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, June 9, 2000.

are certainly used as points of access, it would appear that the *Guurti* can play a special role in this regard through the combined effects of their greater connections to the people (to the extent that these do actually exist, as discussed in the last chapter) and through the fact that each clan is in principle “guaranteed” some representation in the *Guurti*, even if they have not won a place in the council of ministers or elsewhere in the offices of government (although we will discuss potential changes in selection processes that could alter this “guarantee” later in the chapter).

In sum, then, we can identify two primary benefits to legitimacy of a structure like the *Guurti* that explicitly guarantees representation to every clan in a society such as that in Somaliland where clan and lineage could still be considered the *predominant* (though by no means the only) locus of identity formation. The first of these is the inherent sense of fairness that Somalis feel when they know that they, via their clan representative, have a voice in the government. This helps to dispel the deeply-ingrained fear of clan domination that arises out of both Somali culture and the region’s recent political history. This is at its root a benefit to the intrinsic legitimacy of the state and the regime, although it can become instrumental in specific instances when clan representation is actually perceived as protecting or promoting clan interests. The second is the very real access that clan representatives can extend to their constituents, which is again, both an intrinsic and, when access is actually used, instrumental boon for the government.

Note that it is this role perhaps more than any of the other duties anticipated for *Guurti* members such as peacekeeping or representing rural interests that explains why it may have been necessary to make the *Guurti* a part of the government itself, rather than to settle for the alternative of having the elders occupy an unofficial, informal position outside of but alongside the government. While the elders might still have been able to

fulfill many of their other duties from such a position, the government may need this symbol of clan balance *as part of its own structure* in order to benefit from the legitimacy that it can potentially imbue.

7.3 The Down Side

Of course, it will hardly be surprising to find that there are many qualifications to these benefits, as well as a considerable number of Somalilanders who believe that clanism in general, and the specific recognition of it implied in an institution such as the *Guurti* in particular, constitute the greatest dangers to the new state and its fledgling regime. Citing problems that they see as inherent to the nature of clanism – its divisiveness, its backwardness, its proneness to manipulation – as well as practical ways in which it is detrimental to the functioning of the political system, a considerable number of respondents express discomfort with this aspect of the new political universe in Somaliland.

7.3.1 An Approach that has Served Its Purpose?

Among clanism's critics, the most moderate uncertainly recognize that clan balance may have been necessary and that clan relations have, in at least some respects, played a positive role in Somaliland's peace processes, but they are nevertheless concerned about the limitations of clan-based representation. For example, Abdirahman Artan (himself a *Guurti* supporter) observes that:

Many are not sure how much room the clan system will allow for the development of a state system that can function in the modern world. Many doubt whether the clan system will cope with this. They feel that up to a certain stage clan is useful, but after that... Many feel they've reached the ceiling already, and need to look for alternatives. It's good up

to now, for peace building, building a state from the grassroots. But now in the institution building of modern institutions, the clan system has no answers . . . They do have some answers regarding political issues, but not on administration . . .¹³

One woman who held these views lamented that “if we do away with clan representation then things will be better. . . . This country disintegrated, and there was no other way to bring it back. It was good at that time, but we’re stuck there.”¹⁴

The ambivalent role of clan in modern Somaliland politics was highlighted by Minister “Silanyo”:

We had no choice when we started but basically the clan system . . . It’s the only thing that has existed over hundreds, thousands of years, the only thing Somalis know. But how do we combine this with a modern, democratic state? Tribalism, clanism is somewhat anarchic, it’s anti-administration. . . . [It] does not cater for dictatorships, it is more for anarchy than dictatorship. But the problem, for example, in Yemen is that clans are very strong and they’ve never been able to form a strong government. It’s an ancient country but its had no strong government until now, and still this is an issue. Our clan structure, if you accede to it, it kills the possibility of establishing any sensible and effective administration. But still for some time until we move to elections we have to retain an element of that because it prevents dictatorship.¹⁵

Thus, although he describes it as a “primitive” system and observes that the decentralized nature of Somali clanism essentially competes with the need of a state for allegiance and at least some degree of centralization, Minister “Silanyo” also concedes that clan must play a role in the government, at least for now. He reasons that “Whether it works perfectly or not is not the question, it doesn’t,” but clearly finds that in the near term the benefits outweigh the costs.

¹³ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, interview.

¹⁴ Asli Abdi Hasan, Chairperson of Nasrulah (a Somaliland NGO), interview with Anab Mohamed Nur, et al., interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 16, 2000.

¹⁵ Axmed Mohamed Mohamoud “Silanyo,” interview, May 30, 2000. Somalis and Yemenis have close cultural, political and social ties, so many Somalis would consider Yemen’s political problems to be particularly relevant to Somaliland.

Others are far less equivocal in their view that any manifestation of clanism is detrimental to the political system and should be eradicated. A Burao intellectual argued that “The tribal system is parochial and divisive. It doesn’t put the general good in the forefront, just the interests of the tribe. So the tribal system and the democratic system can’t coexist.”¹⁶ Some intellectuals in Gabiley would agree. One offered as an example of this problem the concern that “If you’re the mayor here, your sub-clan will say what are you doing for us, not caring what you’ve done for the community as a whole.” Another added, in reference to two members of the group who were former employees of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), that “when they came back, their community, their sub-clan, everyone was asking what were you doing for us, where’s our school.” Members of the group went on to observe that “The clan is expecting a lot, everyone taking any responsibility is subject to lots of pressure and demands . . . So a person who is good for working for the public may not be able to face all of this.”¹⁷ Thus, from this perspective what is seen as the inherent divisiveness of clanism leads to the conclusion that all aspects and manifestations of it – including both explicit and implicit attempts at establishing clan balance – need to be eradicated.

7.3.2 Merit versus Balance

Some of the other complaints against clanism emphasize more specific practical weaknesses that a focus on clan identity introduces into the political system. The most frequent complaints are registered about the bloat and ineffectiveness that demands for balance cause within the Council of Ministers and government ministries, since

¹⁶ Mohamed Salah, interview.

¹⁷ Ahmed Ismael, District Agriculture Officer, with Gabiley intellectuals, interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

individuals are frequently appointed or hired to appease clans rather than based on their skills. Among the numerous complaints about this issue were the following:

[the Minister of Fisheries] Sometimes they [the elders] exceed the limit, for example, to impose on the president or myself to hire someone. . . . For example, if I dismiss someone because he's not playing his role and the elders come to me and say this is the only one from our sub-clan here, we are disadvantaged, etc., I have to respect them. . . . This clan balance is why the ministers are now up to 40, although at Boroma we agreed on 12. Elders say we are sub-clan X, we are very important, how can we not be represented, and then Y says we must have it too."¹⁸

[the Minister of Finance] Every time a minister is thrown out they go back to their clan and stir clan rivalry.¹⁹

[a former teacher] The tribal system doesn't know justice. If someone in the tribe . . . makes a mistake, the tribe supports him no matter what. The government can't take action because his tribe backs him . . . The cabinet is based on tribal balance, but this undermines the need to use the right people for the right places . . . And Director Generals and others . . . they're also selected based on clan, not quality. This goes deeper and deeper. You get the best man only by chance. Tribal balance is always there.²⁰

[a Boroma NGO director] There are no avenues to respond to problems like poor performance because everything is determined by clan. If you attack the mayor, his sub-clan will defend him. Instead of responding to interests, people respond to clan allegiance, though the mayor may give them nothing but khat.²¹

[a women's leader in Boroma] Having the *Guurti* increases clanism because a man first and foremost represents his clan even if it makes mistakes. He's afraid his existence is threatened if he doesn't back his clan.²²

¹⁸ Ahmed Hussein Omani, Minister of Fisheries, Government of Somaliland, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 29, 2000.

¹⁹ Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," Minister of Finance, Government of Somaliland, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 18, 1999.

²⁰ Axmed Sheikh Jama "Axmed Maalin," resident of Sool region in eastern Somaliland, and a former regional governor and assistant minister in the Siyad Barre government, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 23, 2000.

²¹ Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, Executive Director, Awdal Relief and Development Association (ARDA), and Chairman, Awdal Association of Indigenous NGOs (AAIN), interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 16, 2000.

²² Saado Nur Gedde "Adamio," women's support organizer for the Boroma Conference, interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

[a Boroma intellectual] We're trying to balance between clans for stability. All top posts are essentially by clan, not for merit, and it's difficult to remove someone because of sub-clan protests. It's peace at any price. . . . When balance begins it never ends. The cabinet size has increased from 12 to 24.²³

[women's group leaders in Boroma] Anab: The optimum solution, rather than clan balance, is to see the merit and ability of a person, but the government is not doing it this way. Asli: Many governments went through this history. Still we haven't reached maturity in how to run a government. There are some educated people, but they're kept behind by the clan thing, and the uneducated are also stuck in the clan thing.²⁴

[a civil servant in Baki] Clan balance is just appeasing people to keep calm, and we can't do this indefinitely. If this country has any chance, then the clan system must be punished and all positions based on merit.²⁵

Clearly, the concerns about this problem are widespread and serious. It is at this point that the demands of *intrinsic* legitimacy – the need for a shared sense of fairness and balance within the system – conflict with the dictates of effective administration and the *instrumental* legitimacy that it can produce. One respondent, however, took a notably pragmatic view of the issue, acknowledging the problem, but also the necessity of living with it:

The ministers, everyone in government, has two roles, their front role as a minister in the international system, but also a clan role. The government sends them out to make peace when there are problems between their tribes in the interior. It's true they can't pick the best man for the job, but... For example, the Minister of Education spends more time on managing tribal problems than on education, 90 percent of his time. It is the Director General and others who do the long-term work of education. . . . The Minister of Education has been in five or six ministries in the last few years. He's not good in any ministry, but the president needs him for solving tribal issues because his tribe is very strong in Hargeisa and there is acute enmity between the president and his tiny clan. This minister was key in getting his tribe to make peace with the president. . . . So tribal

²³ Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, with Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, et al., interview by author, Boroma, Somaliland, March 15, 2000.

²⁴ Anab Mohamed Nur with Asli Abdi Hasan, interview.

²⁵ Osman Sheikh Umar, Vice-Mayor, Baki, with Mohamed Said Kahlief "Farahan," Finance Manager, Suleyman Mahamoud Emrahe, Administrative Officer, and Barre Jama Yusuf, Baki elder, interview by author, Baki, Somaliland, March 19, 2000.

balance most of the time plays a negative role in the government, negative but necessary.²⁶

Neither the Somaliland government, nor society at large, have worked out how to resolve this conflict. Some, such as Mohamed Hashi, a former mayor of Hargeisa, argue that those who suggest that preserving clan balance is essential for legitimacy are simply wrong. Claiming that he successfully reduced the city's payroll from 350 to 56 employees during his tenure as mayor using a merit-based exam, he complained vehemently that "Tribal balance is an excuse for the inefficiency of corrupted people."²⁷ And the Minister of Finance, Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," has initiated efforts to tackle this problem head on, starting in his own ministry. In 2000, he offered all ministers the opportunity to budget increased salaries for their staff (in the hopes that paying a living wage would reduce incentives for corruption) on the condition that they reduce the number of staff significantly, using a merit-based exam as the sole criteria for retaining or releasing employees. He successfully initiated this program in the ministry of finance, and argued that "the exam helps get past the clan system. If you fail, you fail." He argues that clans will accept the outcome, even if their own members appear to lose more jobs: "no one is trying to claim the need for affirmative action. No one will demean himself by saying we're less equal. They will never admit this because of the nomadic culture."²⁸ A businessman from Buraao agrees with this approach:

The thing is there are a lot of complaints from tribes about the imbalance of jobs. They've gone to the *Guurti* and the government. The *Guurti* is most effective on these kinds of things. . . . They haven't been able to resolve this issue satisfactorily, but they're working on it. The

²⁶ Axmed Sheikh Jama "Axmed Maalin," interview.

²⁷ Mohamed Hashi, businessman, former mayor of Hargeisa, former Somaliland presidential candidate, and founding member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 31, 2000.

²⁸ Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," interview, September 18, 1999.

government promised the *Guurti* that they'd do things on a merit basis. . . . They will select especially senior staff on merit and no one will quarrel.

But he suggests that some clans will indeed feel disadvantaged by the results because of unequal opportunities:

Yes, during the war some people settled and had education, but some, like Burao, Toghder, and the east were disrupted for a long time, so it's unfair to put them on the same level. The merit system won't completely solve the problem, but it is the right goal, and we can build up education in the less successful areas.²⁹

It is possible that the *Guurti* offers at least a partial solution to this problem of balancing the need for clans to feel they have fair representation, and the need to create a functioning and effective administration. Rather than eliminating clan balance from the government entirely, it offers a location where balance can be contained in a single institution, thus freeing the government to rely on merit elsewhere. Clearly, this institution alone will not solve the problem of demands for clan balance; jobs are the key benefit that the government has to distribute, particularly when resources are scarce. But if hiring processes are transparent and there are not major differences in skills and education among the different clans, it may at least offer a starting point for resolving this problem and building a political system that can be both legitimate, and effective.

7.3.3 To Each His Own Clan?

Another problem prodding concerns among Somalilanders arises from the combination of clan-based representation and the fluidity and layeredness of Somali clan identity, leading to proliferating demands for representation and fractionation of the clan structure. As discussed, the distribution of seats in the *Guurti* and parliament during the

²⁹ Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf "Kulumbe," contractor/businessman and owner of National Rehabilitation and Development Co. (NAREDCO), interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

transition among Somaliland's major clans was negotiated largely based on distributions established by the British during the 1950s. Each clan then negotiated a division of the seats among its sub-clans, and so on, until each seat had its own lineage-based constituency responsible for selecting an individual to fill it. However, any constituency can always be sub-divided into smaller sub-constituencies, and any given individual selected to represent that constituency will be more closely linked genetically with one of these sub-constituencies than with the others. As the benefits to an identity group of having a seat at the table have increased, those to whom the selected leader has weaker linkages may begin to feel they could do better with a representative from their own sub-constituency.

The classic way to go about establishing a clan group's "right" to representation or other benefits is to have a titled elder, which is why this phenomenon is commonly referred to as the "proliferation of titles." While titled elders often do not take seats in the *Guurti* themselves, establishing a titled elder at the head of one's lineage group may be intended to *imply* that the group is significant enough to warrant a representative. Thus, Abdulkadir Jirde, deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament, observes that:

The onset of selecting seats by clans has increased divisions and sub-divisions because of the increased power of a *suldan* within the political system. . . . This was to be expected, but not on such a scale. . . . Some clans are disintegrating because of it. The Dulbahante have completely disintegrated as far as *suldans* are concerned. There are nine now, and there were two in 1960, and they're still making new ones because of the Somaliland-Puntland dispute. The Warsengele clan has one *suldan* now who has been there for 26 generations, but now he's being challenged for the first time in history because of the Puntland-Somaliland factor. There are two challenges, one from his family and one other who are both pro-Puntland.³⁰

³⁰ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 30, 2000.

Jirde's comments raise two important points about the proliferation of titles. First, it is not an entirely new problem. The introduction of borders that have divided clans between different states and regions, incentives paid by colonial administrations to *akils*, and a variety of other factors have been having this effect for years. But numerous respondents commented that the problem has escalated considerably during the 1990s with the advent of explicit, clan-based representation in the *Guurti*.

Secondly, Jirde's comments reveal that divisions do not occur purely among different lineage groups in essentially apolitical efforts to gain power, prestige or access to resources for a particular clan grouping. Fractionation can also occur due to real political differences, in this case, between groups among the Dulbahante and Warsengele clans in the contested regions of eastern Somaliland that would prefer to align with Somaliland, and those that advocate joining Puntland. Similarly, in another example Jirde cited divisions that occurred among sub-clans of the Habar Yunis clan within Somaliland early in the 1990s between factions that were "hardline" and those that were pro-peace. He notes that this case was unusual in that, because the challenge was political rather than simply for the purposes of clan recognition, the challenge to the existing *suldan* actually came from a cousin within his own sub-clan. We will return to the issue of such cross-cutting cleavages – political and social – that might, at least at times, override traditional clan relations later in the chapter.

A Hargeisa lawyer highlighted another source of proliferation of titles: the efforts of the president to manipulate and dominate the *Guurti* by placing his own people there. We already discussed some of the views and perceptions about the efforts of the executive branch to manage the *Guurti* through various means. Robleh Michael Mariano

contends that he also does this by promoting fractionation among clan groups, generating competition for clan seats:

The proliferation of titles started after peace was made in 1991. At that time, titles were not even very popular. The one man who, for his own purposes, encouraged the proliferation of these titles, is the incumbent president. He's creating for his own use titles that have no substance. They're men of straw who will support him at every turn. . . . My clan had one sultan, and Egal went out of his way to create six. He will find a minor ambitious chieftain and say "I recognize you as sultan of your sub-sub-clan." Normally to establish an *akil* or sultan the whole clan meets. A man's pedigree is examined, his personal qualifications and achievements are examined, and if he's of the right standard, the clan will nominate and recognize him. . . . But Egal dumps lots of cash on a character and says "get your sub-clan to approve you without the clan's approval."³¹

But while there is relatively widespread acknowledgement that this fractionation of clan coalitions and allegiances for the purposes of identity group recognition is becoming increasingly common, there is less consensus among Somalilanders about how serious this problem really is for the political system. Minister "Silanyo" demonstrates considerable concern, bemoaning the fact that, as he sees it, "The clan thing is terrible, it never stops anywhere, because you have sub-sub-sub-sub-clans. . . . The clan system is bottomless. It eventually gets down to individual brother against brother."³² But a Hargeisa NGO director rather nonchalantly describes the issue in much more moderate tones, saying that "The selection process hasn't been entirely healthy, but it's not bad. Each clan has an elder or sultan. Yes, there is proliferation of titles, this is common. If you don't like how one sultan is behaving, you create another, and there's no resolution of the conflicts over these. It is a problem."³³ In fact, his comments suggest the possibility that this proliferation is actually quite consistent with the traditional mode of

³¹ Robleh Michael Mariano, lawyer, former Somaliland MP, and founding member of the SNM, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 27, 2000.

³² Axmed Mohamed Mohamoud "Silanyo," interview, May 28, 2000.

³³ Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, Director, Institute for Policy Research (IPR), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 24, 2000.

politics whereby leadership is fluid, depending on who can generate consensus around the issues of the day, rather than static and hierarchical.

Thus far proliferation of titles has not caused a proliferation of seats, but rather a proliferation of competition for those that exist. But it could pose threats to the legitimacy of the political system, because if the number of seats cannot be expanded, then fractionation might threaten the widespread sense of fairness and access discussed above which clan-based representation can potentially offer. This highlights once again the need to clarify selection processes for existing seats, a subject which I will return to below.

7.3.4 Women on the Margins

Perhaps the most glaring omission of Somaliland's transitional administration is the virtually total absence of women from positions of power and decision making in the institutions of the state. This includes the *Guurti* and the parliament, but extends also to the Council of Ministers (although one woman served briefly as a minister in the early 1990s) and to the upper levels of the civil service, where not a single Director General is a woman. Obviously this is a complex issue within Somali society, involving elements of culture and tradition, religion, and modern socio-economics, and which extends well beyond the scope of this analysis. I will focus the discussion here on the specific exclusion of women that arises from – or is justified by – the reliance on clan as the basis of representation during Somaliland's traditional administration. Recall that one of the key critiques of indigenization raised by Merle Bowen and others discussed in Chapter 2 was the potentially socially regressive nature of the traditional institutions with regard to historically marginalized groups, including women. Has the turn toward tradition in

Somaliland produced these regressive results? What are the implications of the exclusion of women for the legitimacy of the Somaliland state and its regimes? And finally, are there opportunities to expand women's participation within the present framework, or only through radical restructuring of the political system?

Women's exclusion from Somaliland's political world stands in sharp contrast to their burgeoning role in the economic arena since the civil war. Both women and men cited the increasing responsibility which has fallen on women to provide for their families, especially as a result of the loss of male breadwinners to civil war, or more recently, to khat. Women have been taking to petty trade – especially in khat – and other primarily informal and small-scale business ventures in growing numbers. But their growing economic strength has not been matched in the political arena.

It is important to recognize that political marginalization of women is by no means an entirely new phenomenon in Somali society. Edna Aden, a leading Somalilander and the first woman to enter the ranks of Somalia's senior civil service during the 1960s, describes the problem:

There's a big vacuum in issues of gender regarding women. There's always been this disadvantage. We've never been treated with fairness or equality. We've never had our rightful place in Somali society. This comes out of several things. First, ignorance. Many hide behind a veil of ignorance and have brainwashed some women to agree. Second, the veil of religion. Third, fear of women, fear of being shown up by women. Fourth, women themselves, they're brainwashed, dependent, they own nothing, they have no steady income.

Edna went on to draw a graph describing the trajectory of women's status in Somalia and Somaliland over the four decades since independence. According to Edna, Somali women's status was very low throughout the 1960s. It was during these years when, having returned from abroad with strong educational credentials, she struggled to attain a

position in the professional civil service (her eventual induction into the senior civil service was startling enough to warrant a discussion in the parliament of the day).

On Edna's graph, the advent of Siyad Barre's regime and his policy of Scientific Socialism produced a sharp rise in the status of women during the early years of his rule as he promoted education for girls and equal rights for women, peaking around 1977 at the opening of the Ogaden War with Ethiopia. But she describes the changes under Siyad Barre this way:

The 70s were the years of Siyad Barre's love affair with communism, but it wasn't really progressive, he was just meeting the needs, for example, in times of war. The politics of the Siyad Barre war period worked for the advantage of women, because the war led to the need for votes and a labor force, but women were weeded out again after the war.

Since that time, Edna argues, women's position steadily declined to a very low level in 1990 just before Somalia's collapse. By 1999, she argues, their status in Somaliland was lower still, "almost back to zero." She attributes this to the fact that "Somalis are basically nomads, and the nomadic mentality plus the Islamic mentality plus ignorance plus poverty leads to a poor position for women."³⁴ Another male respondent gives greater credit to Siyad Barre for the improvements in women's position under his rule, but concurs with Edna's assessment of how bad women's present political status is in Somaliland:

There's been a setback in women's position from Siyad Barre's time. Siyad Barre was in favor of women, but now we are getting set back. In Somaliland the mentality has gone back to the former times before the British, too far, 150, 200 years. It is very difficult for women to have a political role now.³⁵

³⁴ Edna Aden, Director, Edna Aden Women's Hospital, and first woman to enter Somalia's the senior civil service in the 1960s, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 20, 2000.

³⁵ Axmed Sheikh Jama "Axmed Maalin," interview.

The common notion of Somali women's traditional role is not that they should have no part in politics, but that they should play their role "behind the scenes," listening from the edge of the *shir* assembly, and voicing their opinions to their husbands in the home. Some respondents, including both men and women, see this as a very useful, if not in fact adequate, role for women. For example, a prominent and active Hargeisa woman says:

Women have two roles. They can discuss things with their husbands when they have bad ideas. But some women don't understand their role . . . and some husbands are not willing to listen to women, they think women are less. But there are thousands of women like me who can do a lot without leaving the house.³⁶

While one man describes it this way:

There are some very influential women, and their husbands talk to them. They're in every tribe and the tribe knows them. They're respected in their houses, men come and consult them, but they never participate in the meetings.³⁷

But another leading woman, a Hargeisa NGO director, argues that while this may have been the way things worked in the past, times have changed in Somaliland:

In the Somali context, when elders meet, women listen at the back, then they say wait two days for a decision. This is the time to talk to the wife and family. Today a problem is that decisions are made quicker, they don't leave time to consult women. Also khat and fighting have broken down the family, and these also decrease consultation with women.³⁸

Others question whether even this somewhat limited form of participation ever had any value. The Deputy Speaker of Parliament, for example, explains that:

In *shir*, women's voice is via nagging only at home, and she suffers slaps that she takes silently to avoid losing face. Male chauvinists call this "participation." The brave persist, but many really suffer to be heard.

³⁶ Amran Ali Mahmoud, wife of former mayor, presidential candidate and founding member of the SNM Mohamed Hashi, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 29, 2000.

³⁷ Axmed Sheikh Jama "Axmed Maalin," interview.

³⁸ Nurine Michael Mariano, Director, CCS (a Somaliland women's NGO), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

Women are becoming more vocal also, but I still don't see a change in their participation.³⁹

And Suad Ibrahim Abdi, a lawyer and Secretary General of Nagaad, a women's umbrella group focused on improving the status and participation of women in decision making, has this to add:

Some men say women are involved indirectly, but I don't know what they mean. I think they're anti-women. I don't think they even discuss things with their wives. Maybe some men do discuss with their wives, but it depends on the women also, and many are not trying to have influence, they're leaving it to men. Most women are not aware of their rights, most believe they are owned by men. Awareness is the first issue.⁴⁰

There is in fact a small core group of women within Somaliland that have both participated in some of the peace conferences of the past decade, and been active in lobbying for greater participation for women on a permanent basis. They, along with some of the men who support their cause, describe their continuing efforts to convince leading men that as more than half of the population, they deserved more – more and better civil service jobs, as well as seats in Parliament and the Council of Ministers, and even seats in the *Guurti*. They have employed a variety of tactics in their struggle, including lobbying both leading men and their wives, writing letters, speaking publicly at conferences during those few moments when they are given the opportunity, and even holding workshops for MPs and others to raise their awareness, all, thus far, to no avail. Zeinab Mohamed Hasan, the Women's Coordinator for a Hargeisa-based NGO, described some of their efforts, and the lengths they had to go to simply to get a hearing:

At the Sheikh Conference there were no women. But then at Boroma, women decided to go. We submitted a letter to the elders saying we want to participate. There was no response. The conference started, and we submitted another letter. Again there was no response. We sent a third

³⁹ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

⁴⁰ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

letter, and they said we'll consider it. Five women from SOWDA and SLWA [two women's NGOs] went.⁴¹

The women leaders of Nagaad, the women's umbrella organization, related similar stories about the Hargeisa conference several years later:

First, we wrote a letter to the government's preparatory committee asking for 40 percent of the seats for women, but there was no reply. So then Run and Fatuma Mohamed [two leading women, members of Nagaad] were sent to Sheikh Ibrahim [the chairman of the *Guurti*]. They went first to his wives . . . to say Sheikh Ibrahim is against women, and [his wives] pressured him. Then we all met together for whole days and convinced Sheikh Ibrahim, who said go to the Secretary General of the preparatory committee, and the preparatory committee gave us cards to attend for ten women as observers only, not as voting members . . . but we hardly got a presentation chance.⁴²

All of these efforts were required merely to gain the right to attend, or perhaps occasionally participate in, Somaliland's peace conferences. Efforts to include more women in government positions present still higher hurdles. Nurine Michael Mariano of CCS, a local NGO, describes a session at a United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS) training course for parliamentarians conducted by herself and her colleague, Amina Yusuf Arr, aimed at raising awareness among men about the need for women's participation:

There are no women in the higher levels of government, and only two women heads of departments, both in accounts. I said I wanted a seat in the *Guurti*, and Amina in Parliament. They were aghast, especially about the *Guurti*, which is only for elders, for men. But I could be the mother of some members of the *Guurti*. What do they know about culture?⁴³

It may seem surprising that even these leading women, some of them quite well educated, and all part of the Somali elite, felt so dependent upon receiving the permission

⁴¹ Zeinab Mohamed Hasan, Women's Coordinator, Life and Peace Institute (LPI), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 23, 2000.

⁴² Anab Omer Ileeeye, Chairperson, Nagaad (an umbrella group for Somaliland women's organizations), with members Run Yusuf Ayoon, Amina Ali Omer and Shukri Harir Ismael, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 26, 2000.

⁴³ Nurine Michael Mariano, interview.

of men even to attend and perhaps speak at the peace conferences, not to mention actually participating or voting, or joining the administrations that were formed. But a number of women also pointed out just how desperate women are for peace, and how reluctant they have therefore been to do anything that might rock the boat and impede the peace processes undertaken by the men. For example, one member of Candlelight NGO reported that “The it [the peace process] didn’t include women. The elders, religious leaders, and others made peace, and we agreed because we want peace,”⁴⁴ and another added that “The problem lies with women too. We are not pushing hard. All is fragile, the government and peace, and we don’t want problems.”⁴⁵ In fact, many may be satisfied with peace alone, as Saado Nur Gedde “Adamio,” who coordinated women’s logistical support for the hundreds of men in attendance at the Boroma conference, seems to say:

I was responsible for running the food, everything at Boroma. It was a huge task because all Somaliland was here. You can’t imagine how many frying pans were needed. All that work we did because of our interest for peace. We were convinced that in peace women had a very good role to play. As women our paramount importance is to contribute to peace. Instead of power we like peace. If we have peace, we have everything. Peace is for us like a post, like the presidency, but some people are complaining because we don’t have a role in the government. . . . We were pushing men hard telling them to stop arguing and make peace.

But “Adamio” goes on to add that:

Women should get their amount of employment. Educated women should stand for parliament and directors of ministries, and the uneducated should get employment as cleaners and office workers. Men at the Hargeisa conference refused women participation in parliament. Ten women were there, we talked, made speeches, gave them written documents, but they refused.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Kinzi Hussein, Field Officer, Candlelight for Health and Education (a Somaliland NGO), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 27, 2000.

⁴⁵ Shukri H. Ismail “Shukri Bandari,” Coordinator, Candlelight for Health and Education (a Somaliland NGO), interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 30, 2000.

⁴⁶ Saado Nur Gedde “Adamio,” interview.

Clearly, it would be wrong to assume that even older, uneducated women – such as “Adamio” – are only interested in peace, with no ambitions for themselves or their fellow women.

What issues and attitudes continue to drive this marginalization of women in politics even as their role in the economic sphere continues to expand? Several factors come into play. A number of women reacted to what they considered to be, at least in part, religiously-motivated objections to their political participation. “Adamio” says that “Some of [the men] argued that for religious reasons they can’t accept us, but we argued that plenty of women work hard on the streets in the sun, while men hardly work and waste the money. It’s a double standard.” And Shukri Bandari of Candlelight NGO, suggested that “In Islamic culture we have a lot of freedom . . . It is how you interpret it,”⁴⁷ a point raised by a number of women with respect to how Islam affects their role. Zeinab also points out that some men fear the threat that advancing women might present to their own authority. During another training course for parliamentarians, she says, one MP observed that “When a woman is empowered she can compete with me. You’ll destroy my family if you tell her we’re equal, that she can make decisions.”⁴⁸

But today in Somaliland, by far the most commonly cited explanation – or justification – for women’s exclusion, particularly from the key decision-making bodies of the *Guurti* and the parliament, is the current clan-based foundation of representation and the uncertain – from men’s perspective – allegiance of women. A number of respondents describe the “problem”:

⁴⁷ Shukri H. Ismail “Shukri Bandari,” interview.

⁴⁸ Zeinab Mohamed Hasan, interview, March 23, 2000.

Because a woman has dual clans, it leads to confusion. There's confusion about the loyalty of a woman, to her husband or to her birth. If the clan problem goes away, then women's problem is better, it is solved.⁴⁹

Women were not invited to the last reconciliation meeting in Hargeisa, they got there by force. They appealed to the *Guurti* for a role, but were told no, they're between two clans, and they can't trust a woman.⁵⁰

For now we're selected by clan, and no clan will accept to be represented by women . . . When a woman is killed, who takes compensation? Her husband and children. If a woman kills, who pays? Her birth family. Therefore women have no clan.⁵¹

Men are divided in clans, but not women. Women are divided on two sides, the husband and the father. The father's side can't give women a position, and neither can the husband's side. All clan kings and elders refuse women's role.⁵²

They're organized in clans and sub-clans, but this only involves men. It's a shame for clans to appoint women. Women don't count in clans.⁵³

The question of clan will always be there as well. Some women go to their marriage clan and some to their birth clan, depending on where their relations and support are strongest, but it is impossible, or at least very difficult, for women to get support from both sides.⁵⁴

And another adds "Parliament is clan based and men say women can't represent the clan, which clan does she represent?" When this woman was asked whether there should be women in the *Guurti*, she reveals the pervasiveness of male dominance in Somali society, responding "They're not allowed. Who will allow it?"⁵⁵

In principle, male leaders have not necessarily slammed the door on women's participation completely. Instead, time and time again, women report being told that of

⁴⁹ Saado Nur Gedde "Adamio," interview.

⁵⁰ Kinzi Hussein, interview.

⁵¹ Zeinab Mohamed Hasan, interview, March 23, 2000.

⁵² Anab Omer Ileye, et al., interview.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

⁵⁵ Anab Mohamed Nur, interview.

course they can have a seat, as long as their clan selects them. The women at Nagaad described their experiences:

We had proposed to the elders for women to get six seats in parliament, and the discussion was good, only a few were against it. Some said give them more seats. But then after the discussion had only gone one day, they stopped and said “come from your clans,” and that was the end of it. No single woman has come from her clan since 1960. Run [a leading woman in Nagaad] went to her clan leader and asked to participate, and he laughed and said if other clans send women, we will too. He asked who is her husband, but he’s the same clan. They worry if the husband is from a different clan then she’ll give the seat to his clan.⁵⁶

And Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, a Hargeisa intellectual, tells a similar story:

Women were a strong presence at the Hargeisa conference. They wrote a formal letter to the chairs saying “We’re half of society and the future of society is being determined and we want a voice.” . . . The elders gave a polite negative answer, saying participants in the conference are delegations from clans, so clans decide if they want a woman delegate, so go back to your clan. Of course, no clan will send a woman. They did allow some women to have observation status but non-voting status, and some did speak.

Artan concludes that “Our pastoral democracy was a male democracy, but it’s not against women, although it doesn’t accommodate them...”⁵⁷

Suad Ibrahim Abdi, Secretary General of Nagaad, tells a similar story:

At Hargeisa in 1997 women requested seats in parliament. Parliament says this is ok if the clans accept you. Each woman went back to her own clan, but the clans said no, as parliament knew they would.

and adds this specific example:

In one case a powerful and wealthy woman went to her clan and demanded her rights. She got her clan to approve sending her to the Hargeisa conference. Her birth and marriage clans are the same, which helps. They said ok, if other clans send women also. They acknowledged her right and gave her a seat. But it was the only seat for that clan, and when they found out no other clan had a woman representative, they said no, it’s impossible for us to give you the seat, it will be shameful and we

⁵⁶ Anab Omer Ileeye, et al., interview.

⁵⁷ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, interview.

will lose. They felt a woman couldn't bring anything from a meeting where men are sharing resources.

And she adds an example of the frustrating circular reasoning that women have frequently encountered in this debate when they asked that some seats be added and specifically assigned to women, such as those that the "minority clans" were granted at the Hargeisa conference:

Women argue that we're not from clans since we're born in one, married in another . . . so give us assigned seats like the minorities. But they [the elders/men] say "you're not a minority, you're the majority, you're the breadwinners . . . how can we treat you as a minority?"⁵⁸

Similarly, women parliamentarians in the neighboring region of Puntland, where one woman representative was selected from each of the five regions, report that while *prior* to their selection men claimed that a woman cannot represent a clan, *after* they were selected, their seat was indeed charged against the allocation to their clan.

Of course, not all Somali men support women's exclusion from politics. As some of the responses recorded above have indicated, women often found at least some men who supported their requests, whether among elders, conference organizers, MPs addressed in training courses, or elsewhere. There was a general consensus among respondents, however, that elders are generally more reluctant to see women participate equally than men who are younger and/or more educated. For example, "Adamio" states simply that "Younger men are better. All the old men are very reluctant, while the younger are more accommodating."⁵⁹ Likewise, Nurine Michael Mariano, noting that MPs are generally younger and better educated than elders in the *Guurti*, observes that when it comes to issues like her own request for a seat in the *Guurti*, "It will be easier to

⁵⁸ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

⁵⁹ Saado Nur Gedde "Adamio," interview.

convince parliament regarding women's participation, the *Guurti* will be harder.”⁶⁰

Some elite men themselves agree. According to one,

The decisive elements in our system are not the educated people but elders because the system is based on tribe, and they're against women having a role in politics. But all of the educated people are for women's rights, so they must organize through NGOs . . . But this won't be enough to make the elders change.⁶¹

Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa of the Institute for Policy Research, a Hargeisa-based NGO, generally supports the *Guurti* concept, but nonetheless sees a serious weakness in the elders' attitude towards women's role:

Traditional elders are totally not inclined to hear about this [a role for women]. If you look at the traditional council function and how they choose representatives, there's no way to have women involved – and rightly so in their milieu. But there are other forums where women should participate and the elders are reluctant about this too. In peace making they talk about clan base, clan share, and there is no room for women.⁶²

This sense that the current transition regime is dominated by elders and clan, and that there is little hope for changing the views of these power brokers in the near future, has led many women to focus their hopes for improving their status on the promised multiparty political system:

When we have political parties it will be better. More women will be represented, especially if a woman has money. If a woman buys a man khat, then he'll vote for her.⁶³

Women will benefit from a multiparty system, but they will never benefit from the *Guurti* system.⁶⁴

And some men agree:

In politics, clans elect representatives, so they say women are from another clan. But women have the vote, so it is only when we shift from

⁶⁰ Nurine Michael Mariano, interview.

⁶¹ Axmed Sheikh Jama “Axmed Maalin,” interview.

⁶² Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, interview.

⁶³ Asli Abdi Hasan, interview (with Anab Mohamed Nur).

⁶⁴ Sarah Aden, interview (with Kinzi Hussein).

clans to a political party base that women can have a voice. But nowadays there is no possibility.⁶⁵

And even the elders suggested to the women petitioning for representation that multipartyism is the answer for them. As Suad Ibrahim Abdi explains, after the elders had rejected every plea of the women for seats during the Hargeisa conference,

Finally they said “We’re in a transition period until 2002, when there will be elections, one man one vote, and women will vote also, and that will be your chance.” So now women are focusing on the 2002 elections.⁶⁶

But men in general, or elders more specifically, may not be the only ones who are content with an extremely limited role for women in politics. As activist women readily acknowledged, their first target if they are to garner support or win votes may need to be not men, but their fellow women:

But who will be giving us our rights – the men? No. We do have some problems with our own culture with respect to women. Nomadic women will tell you they’re not missing anything. They don’t know their rights, only their role in the traditional system. It’s difficult to tell women, not to mention men, that they need to change. They will tell you they’re happy the way they are. So it is Somali culture, not Islamic religion, that holds women back. Both need to be integrated into the constitution.⁶⁷

They need the support of women, but at the grassroots women are used to rule by men, and women accept it. Without this support from women it will be difficult for women to have a chance in the election.⁶⁸

Most women are illiterate, they don’t know if they’re a part of this country or not. They’re not really competent. Many women say “men are running the government, why do you interrupt that?”⁶⁹

We also need to convert women. Women have been brainwashed in the last 30 years.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Mohamed Barood Ali, Director, Somali Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SORRA), chemist and member of the “Hargeisa Group” of political prisoners under Siyad Barre, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 22, 2000.

⁶⁶ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

⁶⁷ Shukri H. Ismail “Shukri Bandari,” interview.

⁶⁸ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

⁶⁹ Anab Omer Ileeye, et al., interview.

⁷⁰ Nurine Michael Mariano, interview.

It depends upon us. . . . In government we haven't asked for shares. Many women here work, they haven't been denied the chance to work. We're not denied a higher position. We can't lie, we haven't asked for it.⁷¹

But they often express great confidence in the strength and potential of these women:

Women in the rural areas are very strong, but the idea of women leaders is new. We have to go to people, talk to them.⁷²

Change won't come from men. Women must come together, cooperate, and start change in their households first. Women vary in their own views. Some have a lack of awareness, some close or cover their faces for religious reasons, some agree with me. Women are for their rights and they're awaiting their chance, they want to vote. Women are more assertive than men. If they get mobilized men will give in fast.⁷³

However, it was left to Abdulkadir Jirde, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, to raise a more sensitive issue among activists that may also limit their support from other women, namely their own internal divisions and elite focus:

Their voice is weak now, they're divided. It is very few educated women who get together and they forget their sisters, the urban poor and rural women. They're always talking about ministerial posts, MPs, DGs [Director General], not issues that are important for poor women. Until they overcome this hurdle and make contact with the rest of the community . . .⁷⁴

What then, are the implications of the effects of a clan-based system of representation on the role of women for the legitimacy of the Somaliland state? At first glance it might appear that this issue could seriously undermine the state and the regime's legitimacy in the eyes of women. Yet there are a number of mitigating factors that must be considered. First, as several women indicated, in the eyes of many (though not all)

⁷¹ Gabiley women's group representatives, including Mariam Jama (HAWO), Rhoda Abdi Dahir (TUSMO), Nimo Sheikh Mohamed, Urub Mohamed, Asha Hasan, Sarah Abdi Samatar, (MARWO), Waris Abshir Diriye (DDC), Asha Abdi Aden (DDC), Sarah Dahir Isman (WVVO), Amina Mohamed (KULMIYE), Sara Abdi Buni (AWO), and Medina Abdulahi Deqsi (TOWFIQ), interview by author, Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

⁷² Sarah Aden, interview (with Kinzi Hussein).

⁷³ Saado Nur Gedde "Adamio," interview.

⁷⁴ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

women, in comparison to the stability and security produced by the peace conferences and preserved by the transitional regime, the issue of women's participation clearly takes a back seat, and will have relatively small negative impacts on legitimacy relative to the strong positive effects of achieving and preserving peace. Secondly, it is apparent that at least in the short term, a considerable number (perhaps a sizeable majority) of women are as content as men with their limited role in politics.

But perhaps most significant is the recognition that the marginalization of women is by no means exclusively a by-product of the indigenized Somaliland regime with its clan-based system of representation. Women have always struggled to find a place in the Somali political arena, as Edna's "graph" illustrated – they are struggling against long historical patterns of imbalance that no regime has successfully tackled. Indigenization in the form of clan-based representation has not created this situation, it has simply, in effect, offered men a "convenient excuse" for continuing to exclude women. Ironically, the fact that they need an excuse at all is evidence of progress. While still low, the levels of awareness and expectations among women are higher now than ever before, and men are increasingly being forced to at least respond to their demands, if not, so far, to give in to them. In fact, adapting the indigenized system to accommodate women as well as minorities would appear to be entirely feasible. The obstacle is not clanism or clan-based representation itself, but the deep-seated attitudes and fears of Somalis, both men and women, regarding women's political activity. Suad Ibrahim Abdi argues vehemently that "the traditional system is not doing good work for women, they don't want women to participate. Women are totally against them." But she then goes on to note that the problem does go beyond this, adding "The problems for women aren't just with the

traditional system, but the clan system does specifically exclude them.”⁷⁵ Finally, the women in Nagaad summed up women’s somewhat ambivalent feelings toward the present system this way:

In some ways [the system with elders] is positive . . . this built the government. But on women’s side it is negative. Women are not included except in giving taxes. The situation in the 60s was the international model but with no elders. Now the situation is still the same for women.⁷⁶

7.4 From Selection to Election

As discussed, during the transition period seats in both the lower house of parliament and the *Guurti* have been allocated to clans based on the distribution negotiated at Boroma and Hargeisa. Individual members in both houses have then been selected by their clans through a process which was, in these early stages, largely unregulated, and in many cases involved only a relatively small group of clan leaders. However, whether or not they saw this selection process as acceptable, Somalilanders have almost universally expected that the adoption of a constitution and the completion of the transition phase would culminate in the introduction of a multiparty electoral system, an eventuality greeted with emotions ranging from eager anticipation to worry, trepidation, or even fear. Adding to this uncertainty is the fact that during the transition stage, many of the specific parameters of the future multiparty system remained undefined. Would both MPs and *Guurti* members be elected, or would the *Guurti* remain a selected or appointed body? What would be the basis of representation or the basis for

⁷⁵ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

⁷⁶ Anab Omer Ilceye, et al., interview.

defining constituencies? Would there be any limits on political parties? And how could Somalilanders avoid repeating the mistakes of multipartyism experienced in the past?

Some Somalilanders eagerly await elections as a symbol of progress and/or a chance to select better leaders themselves. For example, the Minister of Fisheries, Ahmed Hussein Omani, explains:

We're at a critical stage, we must move forward or stay this way [stuck on clan balance] forever. That's why we're starting the party system, so we can judge people on their education, their achievements . . . It's not an easy job, but if we want to be part of the world we must do it. There will be hiccups, but we are committed. I foresee many, many problems, but if your system is transparent there will be no problem.⁷⁷

However, others recall the chaos of the late 1960s, when the Republic of Somalia's multiparty system spiraled out of control as clan-based parties proliferated, and the question of whether and how Somaliland can avoid a repeat of that experience troubles many. Axmed Mohamed "Silanyo," Minister of Planning until 2001, expresses this uncertainty, saying:

We need to be on guard, we don't want to continue on these primitive lines [of the clan-based system], we need to move forward, create parties. But we keep asking ourselves "Are we ready for these parties yet?" Some say yes, some say no...⁷⁸

And Suad Ibrahim Abdi seconds these concerns:

Political parties would have been the best for society, but there are questions, for example, what basis would they form on? Would it be clan? People are suspicious about parties. The question within the community is are we mature enough to have political parties, or will they just be clan based?⁷⁹

Her comments capture the crux of "the multiparty problem" in Somali society: will the multiparty system operate solely according to the dictates of clanism, and hence be

⁷⁷ Ahmed Hussein Omani, interview.

⁷⁸ Axmed Mohamed Mohamoud "Silanyo," interview, May 30, 2000.

⁷⁹ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

doomed once again to catastrophic failure as in the 1960s, or can multi-clanism and multi-partyism co-exist without the former destroying the latter?

According to a Burao businessman, “it was at the last elections in ‘69 when the rot started to set in. Every man wanted a party of his own, and he did so with the support of his clan.”⁸⁰ Forming political parties and/or voting exclusively based on clan identity is widely seen as the basis of the failure particularly of the 1969 elections, and many Somalilanders can find no reason why the same will not occur again:

[the Deputy Speaker of Parliament] Clan members can only vote for their own clansman, and they wouldn’t understand if he treated other clans equally.⁸¹

[a former teacher] If there are multiple candidates, the tribe always goes with its own clan no matter what the quality of the individuals.⁸²

[a Hargeisa-based NGO director] In the 60s, rural people voted as their clan leaders told them to. People will still vote for their clansmen no matter what. It will take time to get people to vote for someone who will represent them.⁸³

[the Minister of Finance] Clans are still the only foundation for parties. There are no unions, NGOs are small. We need other aspects of civil society to grow to balance against clan. But for now clan is it. Cross-cutting mechanisms are part of the modern system.⁸⁴

In addition, we’ve discussed the fear of clan domination, and how important perceptions of fair and balanced representation are to clans, making the *Guurti* potentially a very valuable institution. But multipartyism could present a direct threat to the perceived fairness of the negotiated balance in the transitional administration. As Suad Ibrahim Abdi puts it:

⁸⁰ Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf “Kulumbe,” interview.

⁸¹ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 25, 2000.

⁸² Axmed Sheikh Jama “Axmed Maalin,” interview.

⁸³ Mohamed Barood Ali, interview.

⁸⁴ Mohamed Said Mohamed “Gees,” interview, September 18, 1999.

Even with the 2002 elections this question [of clan balance] is still there. If there is, for example, a parliamentary election, each clan will say “How many seats do I get?” It’s not based on regions. It’s very difficult.⁸⁵

And if voting is strictly clan-based, the results might be far more lopsided than the balance that has prevailed during the transition:

[a former teacher from eastern Somaliland] Elections are completely based on tribe, so the largest clan wins, even if other clans have very good candidates. . . . If there are multiple candidates, the tribe always goes with its own clan no matter what the quality of the individuals.⁸⁶

Some therefore voice the fear that multiparty politics could threaten Somaliland’s hard-earned peace:

[a Boroma NGO director] Multiparty politics equals multiclan politics. We can’t see parties outside of clans.⁸⁷

[the President of Amoud University] Parties will make the situation worse, they’ll threaten the security situation we’ve achieved.⁸⁸

[a former professor in Burao] When political parties come in . . . the bigger ones always gain. . . . We will put in the old system, from before 1969. . . . [when] the bigger tribes had more power, there was absolutely no representation among smaller tribes. . . . Universal suffrage is causing . . . may, not will, but may, cause inter-clan fighting because small clans won’t like it.⁸⁹

This leads some Somalilanders to conclude that “We need a slow political evolution, not a rush to elections.”⁹⁰

But many others eagerly await multiparty elections, and suggest that concerns about repeating the mistakes of the past may be overblown for any of a number of reasons. First, some argued that it is not true that Somalilanders will only vote based on clan identity. For example, former Hargeisa mayor Mohamed Hashi says “No, people

⁸⁵ Suad Ibrahim Abdi, interview.

⁸⁶ Axmed Sheikh Jama “Axmed Maalin,” interview.

⁸⁷ Mohamed Shiekh Abdillahi, interview (with Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid).

⁸⁸ Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, et al., interview.

⁸⁹ Professor Abdi Timir, interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

⁹⁰ Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, interview.

don't just vote for clan. . . . People will support what is best.”⁹¹ However, virtually every respondent who made this claim cited the same, single example from the past, the election of an Ogadeni – a clan with very few members in the northwest at that time – as governor in Hargeisa in the early 1960s. Thus, while there have been exceptions in the past, they apparently were relatively rare. Deputy Speaker of Parliament Abdulkadir Jirde does give a more recent example of a case in which an aspiring representative was turned away by his fellow clansmen:

Sometimes people can vote on issues. For example, at the Hargeisa conference, there were many candidates for president, including one member of my clan. This candidate says “I want to meet the conference delegates from my clan,” and he brings speakers on his behalf. He says “Since I’m your clan, your brother, you have no right to vote for anyone else.” But he had had a local NGO, and he got money to build a school, but he took it all for himself. So we said “You’ve done nothing for the clan, you failed us once, you’ve eaten us out of a school. How can you be our leader?” So clan allegiances alone are not enough.⁹²

Nevertheless, this is clearly a case in which a potential candidate had taken actions in the past that directly harmed his own clan. Whether clan members would apply this merit-based rather than clan-based decision making in other situations where candidates from their own clan compete with others is, of course, less clear.

One particular strain of this argument suggests that while Somalis may have played politics strictly according to clan allegiance in the past, they have by now “seen the worst of the tribal system and where it can lead,”⁹³ and will therefore not make the same mistakes when multipartyism returns. One rural elder, when asked if the way people think about voting on clan lines has changed, responded:

⁹¹ Mohamed Hashi, interview.

⁹² Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 30, 2000.

⁹³ Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf “Kulumbe,” interview.

Yes, I think they've changed. At that time [the 1960s] we were only pushing people up, elevating men to power only. There was no discussion about who could actually do something. Today people understand who can help them. . . . Actually, people understand that the previous elections were just elevating people, and now they need to select good ones. . . . It's people as a whole who understand this, not just me.⁹⁴

And a doctor in Burao similarly argued that "I think a multiparty system is the best.

Somali people are very experienced now, they're fed up with problems. So tribalism will disappear, that's why we need a multiparty system."⁹⁵

Interestingly, this same doctor went on to suggest that "All the doctors and elites will go into a party," which raises another contention of those who support multipartyism: the argument that cross-cutting allegiances are forming, or will soon begin to do so. Some suggest that new alliances will form based on issues, while others like this doctor focus on class as the catalyst. There is in fact concrete evidence of the emergence of issue-based politics that occasionally overrides clan-based action. We already saw above, in the discussion of the proliferation of titles, that the competition for allegiance in the eastern regions between Somaliland and neighboring Puntland has generated issue-based action, and Abdulkadir Jirde also pointed out that during periods of negotiation and conflict in the early- and mid-1990s in Somaliland, contests for power emerged between pro-peace elements in some clans and so-called hardliners. Jirde offers another example from the 1996 presidential elections:

Mohamed Hashi was also a candidate from the Sa'ad Muse sub-clan of the Habar Awal, while President Egal is a Habar Awal Issa Muse [i.e., the Issa Muse sub-clan of the Habar Awal]. The Habar Awal had 36 delegates, 18 each for Sa'ad Muse and Isse Muse, but Mohamed Hashi got only one from his, while Egal gets the other 35. And Suleiman Mohamed Aden . . .

⁹⁴ Osman "Dhere" Sheikh Omar Mohamoud, elder of Baki area, interview by author, Baki, Somaliland, June 8, 2000.

⁹⁵ Dr. Ali Salah, Program Officer, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, May 31, 2000.

was the other main candidate, and he got only one-third of his clan members. [The reason is that] people feel we're coming out of war, and Mohamed Hashi was seen as a hardliner in his attitude, his hostility to other clans, and Suleiman was a major player in the Burao conflict.⁹⁶

And some members of the Gadabursi clan in Boroma made the following observation about the behavior of their parliamentarians:

Mohamed: There is an emergence of coalitions across normal clan lines, for example, in standing up to the president. Jimaale: MP selection is based on clan, but their actions are not necessarily all on clan lines. For example, the Gadabursi don't organize themselves as Gadabursi in parliament.

However, a third member of the group, Hasan, then goes on to say "But when the fight is tough, they do go back to clan lines."⁹⁷ This suggests, then, that while clan allegiances are still strong, and perhaps at root the *most important* form of allegiance, they are not, in fact, the only basis for action.

Still others suggest that it is likely to be economics, rather than politics, that generates an alternative foundation for political behavior. For example, one Hargeisa woman claimed that "Tribalism is very strong here, but the economic situation is even stronger. If you have money, they don't care what tribe you are."⁹⁸ Such a view leads one man to conclude that economic alliances may *eventually* play a significant role, though it may still be too soon:

At this stage if someone has the impetus to vote it's because he wants his clan to have lots of seats in parliament. But in the future, if we have a strong middle class, political parties whose members cross tribes, and programs focused on national issues not tribal ones, then people can change too.

⁹⁶ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 30, 2000.

⁹⁷ Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, et al., interview.

⁹⁸ Amran Ali Mahmoud, interview.

“But,” he adds, “we need leadership”⁹⁹ in order to get there. Finally, Abdulkadir Jirde observes that changes in economic and commercial relations are already precipitating new forms of interest aggregation:

Clan interests are not clear cut now. A camel herder and an exporter are from the same clan, but they have different interests now vis-à-vis the state. So in the long run, clan influence may weaken, especially as the state takes over functions clans do now. When market relations dominate, families and clans will disappear. In towns, kinship ties are lessening, and people are making more associations that are cross-clan.¹⁰⁰

“But,” Jirde goes on to observe “clans are still the long-term insurance.” Thus, like others, he appears to conclude that while other allegiances may increasingly begin to *supplement* clan affiliations in meeting individual and communal needs, it appears that for most Somalilanders clan allegiance remains the most defining source of identity for the present time.

It may be for this reason that so many Somalilanders focus their hopes of avoiding the political party chaos of the past not on the hope that voters will be smarter now, or that they will form new, non-clan attachments, but rather on regulation of the political party system. For example, former Minister of Planning “Silanyo” suggests that:

We need some controls on parties. Before, anyone could form one, it meant nothing. We could say anyone who comes in a party must stay in that party for the duration of parliament or a by-election will be held. We could have membership and subscriptions, or require distributed support, for example from 6 of 8 districts. Or for example, we could have the parties compete in local elections, and the top three are then in national elections. We need to think of something new, a system can be devised.¹⁰¹

In fact, many Somalilanders have been discussing just how such limits should be placed:

⁹⁹ Rashid Sheikh Cabdilaahi Axmed “Garweyn,” Chairman, Somaliland War Crimes Investigation Commission, with Hasan Aw Barakali, finance officer, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 23, 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Abdulkadir Jirde, interview, January 30, 2000.

¹⁰¹ Axmed Mohamed Mohamoud “Silanyo,” interview, May 30, 2000.

I don't know what they'll do. I've heard only three parties will be allowed. The answer is the formation of genuine parties, but how do you get parties that are not tribally based? One way is to require reasonable representation and participation in at least four regions. . . . But it's a very hard job because the mentality of tribalism is still strong.¹⁰²

The only chance for change is if political parties are formed. True, there were too many in the sixties, but the Somaliland constitution will limit them to three, and they cannot be based on religion, tribal or regional basis. If we limit them then we can't have '69. Every party must have supporters in all regions.¹⁰³

The second respondent actually captures both of the major options that have been considered for limiting the number of political parties: a constitutional mandate limiting the number of parties to three, to be registered by the government – the president's preferred approach – or a requirement for some level of multi-region support. The discussion of the latter approach focuses on the Nigerian model, with which many politically active Somalilanders are now familiar (“I have a copy of it at my house,” said one minister¹⁰⁴). Amidst much debate about the best way to limit parties, Somaliland's new constitution, passed during the 2001 referendum, stipulates that there will be a maximum of three political parties, and that it is unlawful for any party to be based on regionalism or clanism.¹⁰⁵ The details of how these three parties are to be identified will be established in a special law, but most people expect that, as in Nigeria, there will be some requirement that a party achieve a minimum level of support in several regions. There is also some concern, however, that by specifying the number of parties allowable, rather than simply designating criteria that a party must meet to field candidates for

¹⁰² Mohamed Salah, interview.

¹⁰³ Axmed Sheikh Jama “Axmed Maalin,” interview.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmed Hussein Omani, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Republic of Somaliland, “The Revised Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland,” unofficial English translation prepared by Ibrahim Hashi Jama, LL.B., LL.M., Article 9 (accessed July 2, 2001); available from <http://www.somalilandforum.com>.

national office, the government will be able to manipulate the system to its own advantage,¹⁰⁶ but this remains to be seen.

Finally, and perhaps surprisingly, not everyone actually agrees that clan imbalance is a problem. For example, elders in the town of Odweyn, which, it must be noted, is predominantly Isaaq – Somaliland’s largest clan – and the president’s hometown, suggest that:

This question about balance, it can change with elections. Now, small clans have disproportionate seats in parliament. If there’s an election, bigger clans will get more. They’ll be content with that. . . . Now we are actually satisfied with less seats, while some of our minor ones [i.e., smaller clans] less than us in number have more seats, and we’re satisfied. When elections come and it reverses they should also be satisfied.¹⁰⁷

When asked if minority clans would suffer if they got fewer seats, either by negotiation or election, one rural Gadabursi elder had the following to add:

That will not happen, there will be no problem. . . . If he’s more than me, even two people, we’ll agree to share. He will get more than the share [i.e., more than half], that’s our traditional culture, and I’ll give him more of the work. He gets the majority [of seats], and he gets the work. . . . It’s all right, everyone gets his share of what comes out of the ballot.

When questioned further about how people from his small sub-clan would react if the larger sub-clan in the region were to win nine out of ten seats in an election, this elder reiterated his view that this would be accepted, saying “People will say that’s the voice of the people.”¹⁰⁸ But again, whether smaller clans would truly be as sanguine about losing

¹⁰⁶ Robleh Michael Mariano, interview.

¹⁰⁷ Odweyn elders, including Ali Ibrahim Dirie, Ali Mohamed Hasan, Nur Ahmed Jier, Mohamud Musa Afeeye, Mahamed Ibrahim Ismail, Mohamud Mohamed Guleed, Yusuf Jama Fidhen, Mohamud Ibrahim Mohamed, and Ahmed Ali Abdi, interview by author, June 4, 2000. Note that these comments were made in a largely Isaaq community – President Egal’s hometown in fact – and the Isaaq, as the largest clan in Somaliland, would expect to benefit from reducing the number of seats presently occupied by smaller clans based on negotiated balance.

¹⁰⁸ Osman “Dhere” Sheikh Omar Mohamoud, interview.

much of their representation in the legislative bodies of the government as these respondents suggest remains to be seen.

Of course, all of this relates to the viability and impact of multiparty elections. But while the new constitution specifies that members of the House of Representatives “shall be directly elected by secret ballot in a free general election,” the manner of selecting or electing members of the *Guurti* remains to be “determined by law.”¹⁰⁹ For many of the reasons discussed above, there has been considerable debate in Somaliland about whether the *Guurti* should also become an elected body, or whether they should continue to be appointed by clan leadership or via other more “traditional” means. We’ve discussed the problems with the selection processes, the proliferation of claims to representation, and other weaknesses of the present system. Nevertheless, there are those that believe that preserving the present system of clan nomination of *Guurti* members is perhaps the least problematic alternative because it is seen as the best way to preserve the critical balance among the clans. One *Guurti* member described his own views this way:

There’s confusion, disagreement. Some are thinking that if we directly elect the *Guurti*, then politicians might be many, and they’ll be closer to their party than to their clan, to tradition. They’ll lose their impartiality and become politically partisan. Some say the *akils* should continue to nominate them so they stay impartial and rooted in tradition. So I believe in the latter. . . . The reason we support nomination by the *akils* is because in the *Guurti* minorities are represented. If there are elections, they may lose this.¹¹⁰

Thus, both to preserve clan balance and prevent politicians – in the pejorative sense in which many Somalis use this term – from taking over the places of traditional elders in the *Guurti*, he suggests that elections for these posts should be avoided. And a Burao businessman concurs, suggesting that “The *Guurti* functions on a tribal basis and it is

¹⁰⁹ Republic of Somaliland, “Revised Constitution,” Articles 40 and 58.

¹¹⁰ Ali “Dhere” Omar Ahmed, interview.

selected that way . . . If parliament is elected on a [party] basis, then we should keep the *Guurti* to balance tribal feelings.”¹¹¹ Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan agrees, contending that those who suggest that the *Guurti* should face multiparty elections have their own agenda:

It is politicians who don't want elders that are advocating political parties and a purely Western system. But winner takes all doesn't work here. Clans are very careful now about being subjugated. They have seen clans too power hungry, [they will not accept] clan dictatorship.¹¹²

The combination of these concerns – i.e., the problems with legitimacy inherent in non-electoral selection processes, together with the need to preserve representation for all clans – has prompted some to consider an alternative approach: clan-based elections. For example, Professor Abdi Timir, who expressed concern about the potential for universal suffrage to lead to conflict, suggests that:

Personally I think smaller clans should have some representation, even if it is token. We need to keep this house of elders elected by clan rather than by universal suffrage. . . . That's what I'm suggesting . . . a kind of election, but among individual tribes or clans. They should have regular review of *Guurti* selections within the clan, the same as regular election of MPs.¹¹³

This possibility was raised by a handful of respondents, but has not been widely discussed in Somaliland. The Minister of Finance, noting that even among the elites not everyone is comfortable with moving to multipartyism, proposes a variation on this approach based on “the American model”:

Some MPs are uneasy about going head on into a multiparty system. Some want something in between. Of course, there are always some personal interests involved, some may lose their seats. . . . Some clans think they're getting less than their share, some small clans may lose, some may get lots. But with the American model, with an elders house we could

¹¹¹ Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf “Kulumbe,” interview.

¹¹² Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, interview.

¹¹³ Professor Abdi Timir, interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

maybe have equal representation for clans, and have MPs elected according to a vote.¹¹⁴

It is not possible, then, to draw any final conclusions about the impacts of introducing multiparty elections on legitimacy before the final parameters of the multiparty system have been determined (which positions will be elected, what will be the basis of constituencies for each type of seat, how will political party formulation be regulated, etc.). The simple fact of introducing elections (in whatever form) is likely to improve legitimacy in the minds of many respondents *in the short run*, as they see it as a way to be modern, to gain international credibility (and thus contribute to the quest for recognition), or just to have a say in who represents them. But the test of the system will be in how well it performs over time, especially in how well it can balance these needs and expectations with the other requirements of legitimacy such as being transparent and effective and, most importantly, preserving a sense of fair distribution of power among Somaliland's clans.

7.5 Conclusion: Can Legitimacy and Effectiveness Coexist in the Context of Clan?

The strongly polarized feelings about clan can make it difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of recognizing clan balance and of making the transition to multiparty elections on the legitimacy of the political system. Is there middle ground between those who believe that clanism and preserving clan balance are the greatest threats to the political system, and those who argue just the opposite, that ignoring identity and abandoning balance will lead to trouble. This lack of consensus raises particular concerns

¹¹⁴ Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," interview, May 28, 2000.

given that many worry that Somaliland's peace remains fragile, but the Minister of Finance offers some reassurance:

There's no threat to stability in this debate now. We're now past that time. Everybody has an interest in peace now, everyone has rehabilitated their houses. . . . Now we discuss it over khat.

And he also goes on to demonstrate that many individuals are divided in their own thinking on the issue:

Personally, I'm very cautious about the multiparty system, we witnessed what happened in the 1960s. But if we take the Nigeria model, we may have multi-clan parties. On the whole though, it is the best way. We don't want a new dictator.¹¹⁵

But another respondent instead expresses simple frustration with the cautiousness of Somaliland society in dealing with clan, saying "I reach a stage where I say we can't accept to be hostages to security and longer. For nine years there's been little progress. When does it end?"¹¹⁶

Managing the role of clan in government does present particular challenges to the Somaliland regime because it pits the need for intrinsic legitimacy against the need for effectiveness and the instrumental legitimacy that it can produce, and ultimately the state and the regime need both kinds of legitimacy to survive and succeed. The beginnings of a solution to this problem might be found in suggestions to "compartmentalize balance" by creating a specific institution, such as the *Guurti*, in which balance is made explicit and all clans are represented. By ensuring that all clans have access and representation in this institution, it may then be possible to begin working to eliminate it from other institutions of the government.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Yasin Kalinle, interview with Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, et al.

But as analyst John Drysdale argues, clan identity is still very much the reality in Somali society, and it cannot yet be replaced as a fundamental organizing principle in society, or politics:

The *diya* and clan systems still function, with a few amendments. When you take the totality of the clan system and the *tol* [lineage] system, it can't be replaced yet, there's no way known to do it. Diaspora Somalis may absorb foreign culture and condemn the clan system, say it retards political and economic progress, and this may be generally correct, in theory. But in practice. . . the constraints on pastoralist society are not accounted for. Many don't understand the safety net aspect of clan which means we would be hard put to find a replacement system.¹¹⁷

As Drysdale suggests, clanism and clan identity are realities that must be accommodated, not ignored, in any reconstructed political system if that system is going to achieve both legitimacy and effectiveness. A key mistake of the multiparty system of the 1960s was not how it dealt with clan identity, but rather, the fact that it did not and could not deal with it. It was developed in a non-clan context and had no way to accommodate clanism when it was transplanted into a clan-based society. This does not mean that the system necessarily needs to be abandoned, but it must at least be adapted. The above discussion suggests that there are still multiple options for how the Somaliland political system could ultimately be designed and operated to meet these multiple demands, but decision-making processes in Somaliland will ultimately determine whether and how clan is handled as the country's transition is brought to a close.

¹¹⁷ John Drysdale, interview.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Avoiding the Mistakes of the Past

African and global experience suggests that the failure of states to make good developmental choices, the problem of weak and ineffective institutions, and in some cases, the eventual collapse of the state, may be rooted in a number of causes, and that a multitude of factors may ultimately contribute to the failure of any given state. This analysis of Somalia's collapse focuses on one such cause which has been consistently under-explored in the literature and in analyses of the crises in the Horn of Africa: the disconnect that emerged between the state and Somali society, in part as a result of the adoption of institutions that marginalized indigenous political culture and values. This factor certainly cannot stand alone in explaining the Somali political experience. The weakness and underdevelopment of the national economy and global Cold War politics, for example, stand out as key exacerbating factors. But it does play a critical role in explaining why Somali society was unable to check the mounting failures and excesses of the state (which in turn had much to do with explaining the poor and declining state of the national economy). These other factors have not been explored at length here because they have been extensively analyzed elsewhere, but they too must shape the "solutions" to the "Somali problem." Overcoming state-society disconnect will be but one part – albeit a critical one – of building new Somali political structures that are more functional and effective than those of the past.

At its birth in 1960, the Republic of Somalia, a state with perhaps one of the world's most democratic indigenous political traditions, abandoned its own political and cultural past and turned to the West for guidance in developing its formal political

structures. We have seen where this ultimately led. By the time Mohamed Siyad Barre's government collapsed in 1991, Somalis were living under one of the least effective, least democratic, and most oppressive political regimes in the world. And the independence era, electorally-democratic regime that had preceded it, while considerably milder in its tactics and impacts, was certainly no more effective. I have argued that these two facts – the reliance on foreign political models, and the ineffectiveness, and in the end the complete collapse, of each of Somalia's political regimes – are directly, causally linked. Somali elites, having chosen at independence to abandon their own grassroots-based political institutions, familiar and accessible as they were to the entire community, opted instead to construct a political system that became their own, exclusive political domain, where few of their rural or less educated compatriots dared to tread. With little knowledge or experience of the workings and ways of the liberal democratic multiparty political system, the vast majority of Somalis got the vote, but were effectively disenfranchised. They were not even privy to the rules of the game, much less to the means for responding when these rules were broken, as they were with ever greater frequency with the passing years. A gaping divide thus opened up between the Somali state and the society it was meant to serve, and the public was never again able to bridge this divide and recapture its proper role as the guardian of the political system. Unchecked in their excesses by either their own people or their Cold War patrons, the Somali leadership spun out of control, and eventually brought down the entire political house. As I have demonstrated, this severe disconnection between the state and society in the Republic of Somalia was one critical root cause of the state's collapse in 1991.

Although propelled to extremes by the extent of the disconnect and the destructive generosity of the international community (producing a state that was not only politically

autonomous, but also financially autonomous, of society), Somalia's story is in fact a disturbingly common one on the African continent, and beyond. Country after country has ignored the potential strengths of the institutions its own society has to offer, choosing instead the models of the metropolises. And while the outcomes have only occasionally been as severe as those in Somalia, the legacy of failed institutions, if not failed states, is readily apparent across the continent, as many African states continue to experience a crisis of effectiveness, and of legitimacy. As the liberal democratic multiparty model has been reintroduced to many states during the 1990s, it is imperative that we come to terms with the reasons this model almost universally failed in its first manifestations, and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

8.2 The State in Africa

Before concluding, it is important to situate this analysis of the collapse of the Somali state, which posits a state-society disconnect arising *in part* out of a mismatched institutional structures, within the extensive and diverse body of theory that aims to deconstruct the relationship between state and society (if such a conceptual distinction can in fact be made), and identify the causes of the weakness, ineffectiveness, and occasional failure of African states.

The reference point for all analyses of the state is Max Weber's (1950) definition of a political entity that holds sovereignty over a defined territory and population, including a monopoly over the use of force within this arena.¹ A state might derive its legitimacy from traditional, charismatic, or legal/rational sources, but in Weber's view, only those

built on the latter could be considered “modern states,” and these were found only in the West. However, Weber was writing before the era of African independence, at which time bureaucratic legal/rational institutions became the *formal* foundation for the new African states as well. Nonetheless, Weber’s categories of analysis and an assessment of the reasons why most African states have failed, in practice, to achieve the rationally-founded authority of a “modern state” serve as the starting point for much of the debate.

Several key analyses look to the legacy of colonialism for their explanations. One of the most notable among these is Crawford Young’s (1994, 1988) interpretation of the institutional inheritance of the post-colonial state. Young develops an analytical framework based on the attributes of a state and its behavioral imperatives, including hegemony, autonomy, security, legitimacy and revenue. Young notes that colonial administrative structures responded primarily to the imperatives of autonomy and hegemony, and that despite some efforts at independence to establish legitimacy on the basis of participatory, constitutional rule, the “hegemonical habits of the state legacy” soon reasserted themselves (the security imperative had, on the other hand, been relatively weak for the colonial powers, with implications that we will return to in the discussion below). The failure for Young then is not so much a mismatch of institutions as suggested in this analysis, but their *continuity*, preventing the decisive institutional break with the past that will ultimately be necessary.²

¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1950). See also Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York and London: The Free Press, 1947), 324-362.

² Crawford Young, “The African Colonial State and Its Political Legacy,” in *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, ed. Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988), 59. See also Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

Mahmood Mamdani (1996) also focuses his attention on the colonial legacy, but in contrast to Young, he directs his attention toward the internal tensions between the civil-society based politics of urban Africans and the tribalist politics of rural society, an artifact of colonial practices of direct rule in the cities and indirect rule in the countryside. Mamdani argues that this gap must be bridged if democratization and development are to proceed, but highlights the difficulties faced by both “conservative” and “radical” African states in attempting to do so:

If the decentralized conservative variant of despotism tended to bridge the urban-rural divide through a clientelism whose effect was to exacerbate ethnic divisions, its centralized radical variant tended to do the opposite: de-emphasizing the customary and ethnic difference between rural areas while deepening the chasm between town and country in the pursuit of an administratively driven development.³

Thus, Mamdani sees overcoming the rural-urban divide as the key to the political and developmental dilemmas of the African state, suggesting again a problem of institutional continuity. But there is an element of institutional mismatch in his analytical framework as well that bears some relation to the thesis presented here, in that linking rural constituents still subject to “tribalist” rule (although Mamdani, like Ahmed I. and Abdi I. Samatar, argues that this system of rule may bear little relation to its pre-colonial antecedents) with essentially modernized urbanites forms the crux of his problem.

Robert H. Jackson (1987, 1990) takes a different approach to interpreting the legacy of colonialism and the anti-colonial movement in his theoretical construct of the “juridical” (or “quasi-”) state. Prior to World War II, states based their claims to sovereignty on a capacity for effective authority and defense against attack, often demonstrated by military success as in the European state-building processes described

by Charles Tilly (1990). Ending colonialism required the international community to abandon the notion of the empirical state in favor of statehood granted as a legal right by the international community, a form of negative sovereignty, in order to achieve the new international norm that “for any given territory or group of people there must necessarily be a corresponding state.”⁴ Interestingly, Jackson attributes the *need* for juridical statehood to the *pre-colonial* legacy of African states, since there were very few “organized indigenous governments which were recognizable as modern states and even fewer which were demonstrably as capable,” resulting in a lack of “useful and relevant political tradition at the level of international society.”⁵ Jackson suggests that while on the one hand the invention of juridical statehood can be interpreted as a cynical step taken solely to meet international community needs, it can also be seen as part of an idealistic effort to launch the new states of Africa on the road toward full, empirical statehood. However, in retrospect juridical statehood has been almost universally interpreted as a critical source of the weakness and failure of African states, in part because they depend for their sustenance and survival more upon the approval of the international community – which served its own interests in fostering their survival – than upon their own societies. This theoretical framework has important connections to the current analysis and the situation in Somalia, where, I have argued, a key contributing factor in the collapse was the external focus and financial dependency of the state.

³ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 26.

⁴ Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 274.

⁵ Robert H. Jackson, “Quasi-States, Dual Regimes, and Neoclassical Theory: International Jurisprudence and the Third World” *International Organization* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 1987):537. See also, Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

The threads of Jackson's framework can be seen running through many other analyses of the weaknesses and failures of African states, including the various models of the state that is "artificial" either with respect to its borders, as in Jeffrey Herbst's (2000) analysis, or its institutions, as argued by Pierre Englebert (2000). The interpretation of the failure of the state as an inability to achieve the transition from juridical to empirical sovereignty also shapes Barry Buzan's (1983) discussion of state legitimacy based on the absence of an "idea of the state," i.e., the suggestion that "states . . . must be constructed in the minds of at least some of those who form them, including minimally those who run them."⁶ Buzan argues that:

Very weak states possess neither a widely accepted and coherent idea of the state among their populations, nor a governing power strong enough to impose unity in the absence of political consensus. The fact that they exist as states at all is largely a result of other states recognizing them as such and/or not disputing their existence.⁷

Note that Buzan links the concept of the idea of the state to "the nation" and/or its organizing ideologies, thus in effect reducing the problem again to the artificiality of Africa's borders.

The efforts of rulers to survive in the absence of empirical sovereignty (and often, though not always, a functioning "idea of the state") is also the focus of Christopher Clapham's (1996) analysis. Arguing that the reality of states can be considerably different from "common assumptions about the nature of statehood and the international system which may be seriously misleading,"⁸ Clapham describes the response of rulers:

Confronted by weak administrative structures, fragile economies, and in some cases dangerous sources of domestic opposition, political leaders

⁶ Clapham, *Africa and the International System*, 9.

⁷ Barry Buzan, *People States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), 101.

⁸ Clapham, *African and the International System*, 15.

sought to entrench themselves in power by using the machinery of the state to suppress or co-opt any rival organization – be it an opposition political party, a trades union, or even a major corporation. Rather than acknowledging the weakness of their position, and accepting the limitations on their power which this imposed, they chose to up the stakes and go for broke.

The result was the formation of “monopoly states” and the “imposition of control from the top, rather than the mobilization of support from below,”⁹ producing a widening gap between juridical and empirical sovereignty culminating in some cases in outright collapse. Clapham closes with a resounding condemnation of juridical statehood that is closely related to the argument I make regarding the autonomous state in Somalia¹⁰:

Quasi-statehood – the recognition and support by the international system of states that are unable to sustain themselves internally – provides no bridge across which African or other states can pass in reasonable confidence from their post-colonial origins to the “empirical statehood” that rests on national integration and a set of viable political and economic institutions. At best, it has provided only a temporary respite from external pressures, during which some steps towards viability could be made; at worst, it has badly damaged the prospects for any such viability, by sustaining rulers whose external support allowed them to escape accountability to their domestic populations, and to destroy such institutions as previously existed. African states, certainly, have continued in most cases to survive, and some of them have shown a remarkable capacity to reconstitute themselves from a condition of apparently terminal decay. If they are to sustain themselves, and to gain the capacity to carry out the functions for which no effective substitute for statehood has yet been devised, they will, however, have to do so on the basis of their relations with their own citizens, rather than the support of international convention.¹¹

Joel Migdal’s (1988) analysis takes a slightly different but related tack. Migdal likewise questions the assumption of the autonomy and strength or capability of the state, but attributes this to the state’s inability to capture competing loci of power within society

⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁰ On the distinction between my use of the term “autonomous” to describe the Somali state in negative terms and the positive connotations of “autonomy” often cited in the literature on the state, see Chapter 1, note 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 271-272.

in the absence of a massive social dislocation. Positing that a strong and capable state can only emerge with a “tremendous concentration of social control,”¹² and that colonial powers instead tended to entrench fragmented social systems, Migdal finds that weak states will prove to be difficult to transform. But instead of Clapham’s focus on the accommodations that states must make with the international community at the expense of their societies, Migdal, similar to Engleburt, focuses on the internal accommodations that rulers in weak states must make with their societies. The experiences of Somalia, however, would appear to be better described by Clapham’s framework, perhaps a reflection of the fact that given its location, Somalia had the opportunity to capitalize on Cold War politics in a manner that might not have been an option for less strategically positioned polities.

This question of whether states are disconnected from and autonomous of their societies, barely interacting with them, or whether they deeply, if ineffectively, penetrate them is in fact one of the key points contested among a number of these theoretical frameworks. Clapham, for example, paints a picture of deep disconnect. Migdal, on the other hand, argues that the state does in fact penetrate society, but not in ways that allow it to function effectively. He suggests that:

This dual nature of states is at the heart of any possible understanding of the Third World today. States have become a formidable presence in their societies, but many have experienced faltering efforts to get their populations to do what state policy makers want them to do. States are like big rocks thrown into small ponds: they make waves from end to end, but they rarely catch any fish. The duality of states – their unmistakable strengths in penetrating societies and their surprising weaknesses in effecting goal-oriented social changes – is my central concern . . .¹³

¹² Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 261.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Jean-François Bayart (1993), however, goes a considerable step further, challenging the very dichotomy constructed by Migdal and followed by so many others between the state and society. Bayart argues that these social science categories are false and misleading, contending that the roots of the state are deeply intertwined with society, paralleling similar arguments made by Mamdani, as well as by Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (1988). Bayart also expressly denies the thesis of disconnect and the claim that artificial or imported institutions have undermined the African state, arguing instead that Africans have successfully captured these institutions and made them their own: “the State in Africa rests upon autochthonous foundations and a process of reappropriation of institutions of colonial origin which give it its own historicity; it can no longer be taken as a purely exogenous structure.”¹⁴ He goes on to add that:

The majority of phenomena – such as ‘tribalism’ or ‘instability’ – seen as indicative of the exogeneous nature of the postcolonial State, are indicative, on the contrary, of the reappropriation of institutions of foreign origin by indigenous societies. Far from betraying a lack of historicity or cultural alienation, they attest to the vitality of the colonial graft and the political action which it unleashed. They reveal the density of the social foundations of power rather than their absence. Such observations are not, of course, enough to dignify postcolonial systems with Weberian hallmarks. They do, however, at least allow us legitimately to talk about such structures in terms of the concept of the State, and to a certain extent grant them the benefit of the doubt.¹⁵

Bayart is correct to argue that these distinctions are much more blurred than the language of the “state versus society” debate typically suggests. He is also correct in suggesting that, in effect, the state is constantly being indigenized (as I have defined it here) by those who are part of the national political game. As I argued in Chapter 5, for example, clan identity and clan balance were a constant, if often unspoken or even illegal,

¹⁴ Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), 260.

element of the way that politics was played in Somalia. However, Bayart's contention that the state is deeply intertwined with the whole of society cannot be supported by the evidence in Somalia, where politics remained fundamentally an elite game. Certainly all elites have links to society, but it would not be appropriate to exaggerate the extent to which such linkages effectively integrated a rural nomad or farmer in northwestern Somalia into the political system. Politics remained a game played primarily within a tightly constricted political space involving a loosely, but relatively narrowly defined set of players. These players may even have "indigenized" the play of politics in ways that further suited their own interests, but they did not indigenize it in ways that rooted the state and its structures more deeply within the whole of society, or that increased real, widespread participation in decision making and expanded the effective political space.

This analysis does, however, share, at least to some extent, Bayart's understanding of politics *as it has, in the past, been played in Somalia*, as a "politics of the belly," or, as Englebert characterizes it, as "the propensity to understand power and politics as acquisition instead of as instruments for social transformation."¹⁶ Clapham observes that different theoretical constructs of the state can be separated by the balance they strike between conceptions of "the state as provider of welfare, and the state as source of exploitation."¹⁷ Implicit (or occasionally explicit) in a number of the analyses discussed above is the assumption that the goal of the state and the elites that control it is in fact the public good, but that the state and the actors controlling it are prevented from successfully pursuing this goal by the various pathologies of weak states and institutions

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁶ Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 105.

¹⁷ Clapham, *African and the International System*, 9.

or other sources of failure. There are certainly cases in Africa where the pursuit of such public-focused goals can be demonstrated, but my analysis of Somalia's past is clearly drawn toward the conclusion that once independence was achieved, the political intent of Somali elites had little to do with an effort at social transformation. Siyad Barre's brief flirtation with "Scientific Socialism" may have been an exception to this general trend, but as a rule politicians focused their attention inward, towards capturing resources for personal gain, rather than outwards toward society. However, I would again differ with Bayart in that rather than assuming that the state's focus on the belly is essentially an inevitable and inherent characteristic of politics in Africa, it is instead an outcome of the failure to create political institutions that achieve broad legitimacy and widespread participation in a form that can produce some accountability of the state to society. Hence my hypothesis that indigenization (of a different sort from the narrow, elite-based "indigenization" elaborated by Bayart) may produce a more accountable and effective institutional structure.

Finally, although he likewise assumes a rational administrative agenda on the part of states, and limits his analysis specifically to some of the great – but usually failed – efforts at social engineering undertaken by African states since independence, James C. Scott (1998) highlights the disconnect between the formal rules encoded in government programs and the informal, unwritten local knowledge and practice that shape real outcomes. "Seeing like a state," according to Scott, involves an effort to make society "legible," and therefore more easily manageable or manipulable, so that the state's capacity can be enhanced and it can more effectively fulfill functions such as taxation or conscription. But Scott argues that the social engineering schemes that arose from these efforts failed because:

Designed or planned social order is necessarily schematic; it always ignores essential features of any real, functioning social order. . . . The formal scheme was parasitic on informal processes that, alone, it could not create or maintain. To the degree that the formal scheme made no allowance for these processes or actually suppressed them, it failed both its intended beneficiaries and ultimately its designers as well.¹⁸

Although he does not apply his analysis to one of the most common social engineering efforts currently underway in Africa, the democratization project, it is easy to see the relevance of Scott's analysis to such a process, and the consistency with my argument, following North's thesis, that the disconnect between the formal rules of political institutions and informal societal norms has been a root cause of institutional weakness and failure.

In sum, then, my own analysis is also situated primarily within the framework of the weak juridical state as developed by Jackson, a state drawing its sustenance from external rather than internal sources. In the presence of essentially exploitative rather than developmentally-minded elites, such a state did little to benefit society at large, and so experienced a steady and self-reinforcing decline in legitimacy. The fact that the state's political institutions were inaccessible to the public not only reduced legitimacy still further, but also prevented Somalis from checking the external and exploitative focus of Somali elites. While I acknowledge Bayart's contention that the state may be more tightly integrated with society than this model of the free floating state suggests, and that Somali elites did, in their own ways, indigenize the practice of politics within the narrow and exclusive realm where it was played, I would argue that in Somalia the conception of the state as a detached entity or an "other" captures reality more accurately than Bayart would allow. I would not, however, argue that this framework applies equally to all

¹⁸ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*

African states, where different historical circumstance, different choices by national elites, different strategic positions and a variety of other factors have affected state strength and the state-society relationship in different and profound ways. Peter Uvin (1998), for example, correctly argues that the pre-genocide Rwandan state was anything but weak and disconnected from society.¹⁹ But he also observes the extent to which it drew its strength from external as well as internal sources, and the autonomy of the state from Rwandese society is likewise evident in both the pre- and post-1994 eras. Thus, while some key details differ markedly, some of the fundamental arguments of this analysis may still be relevant. I will return to the issue of the general applicability of these findings at the end of the chapter.

8.3 Indigenization and Legitimacy: The Verdict?

The rebuilding experiences of the Republic of Somaliland demonstrate that there are alternative approaches available that offer much greater promise via indigenization of political systems. After studying two aspects of Somaliland's approach to indigenization, what can we conclude?

Herbst quite correctly noted that "popular legitimacy is a notoriously difficult concept to operationalize."²⁰ Studying indigenization in Somaliland and its impacts on legitimacy is no exception. Perspectives on the approaches to indigenization analyzed here have varied across individuals, *within* the thoughts of single individuals, and over time. Tracing the multiple factors that affect perceptions and interpretations of state and

(New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), .

¹⁹ Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1998), 22.

²⁰ Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 180.

regime legitimacy is a complex undertaking. Before we try to generalize about the effects of indigenization, let's look first at what we can conclude about the legitimacy of the Somaliland state more broadly, and then address the question of the specific lessons of the indigenization efforts studied here in achieving the hypothesized outcomes of improved state-society linkages, and enhanced legitimacy and effectiveness of the state and its ruling regimes.

The most significant indicator of the level of legitimacy that the Somaliland state and its governing institutions enjoys has been its ability to withstand several challenges that might have caused a regime with less solid foundations to founder. Among the most serious of these have been the decision in 1999, and again in 2000, by most Gulf states to impose a ban on imports of Somali livestock, one of the primary sources of revenue for both the population at large, and the fledgling Somaliland government. Despite widespread concern both in Somaliland and elsewhere about the potentially destabilizing effect the loss of revenue could have on the Somaliland government, the state has weathered these difficult episodes without serious public challenge; the public has been relatively tolerant of the government's financial weakness and consequent inability to significantly improve public services.

Perhaps even more telling was the public response to a controversial new policy on collection of customs revenue, which shifted collection from numerous district roadblocks to a single point at the Berbera port (although revenues were still to be redistributed to the districts). According to Minister of Finance Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," there was something of an uproar in the districts when the checkpoints were initially removed; *Jamahuriya*, the independent daily paper, castigated the government, and a steady flow of MPs and elders streamed through his office voicing

their complaints. Yet Gees argues that once the policy and its goal of protecting Somaliland's trade, especially with Ethiopia, were explained, the policy has generally been accepted.²¹ And while some respondents in Burao voiced complaints about the change during interviews conducted shortly after the policy had been implemented, the public has generally accepted the new policy and the government's right to enact it. This incident provides a strong indicator of the public's belief in the government's "right to rule," and of the acceptance of the public political arena, rather than the battlefield, as the appropriate place to address policy and political differences.

A number of other indicators are also evident: the strongly pro-Somaliland outcome of the 2001 constitutional referendum,²² the conduct of political debate openly and without violence; and the rapid pace of rehabilitation of homes and businesses in once-devastated Hargeisa. All in all, these indicators suggest that the Somaliland state and the transitional regime enjoy a considerable degree of legitimacy with the public. Of course, there is the possibility that what we are seeing, for example in the acceptance of the new policy on customs revenue collection, is simply passive acquiescence to government actions rather than active acceptance of the government's right to rule, or that the fear of sparking renewed conflict keeps an unhappy population quiet. However, the evidence suggests that this is not the case. The vibrant political atmosphere of the country is readily evident. Independent newspapers challenge the government daily on a wide range of issues, people are not afraid to speak their minds in casual conversation, and the

²¹ Mohamed Said Mohamed "Gees," Minister of Finance, Government of Somaliland, interview by author, Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 28, 2000.

²² As discussed earlier, this referendum is largely interpreted by analysts as a reflection of the public's support for Somaliland independence. While the overwhelming "yes" vote (97 percent) is certainly flawed by irregular collective voting practices in rural areas and an opposition boycott, some analysts suggest that the vote nonetheless generally reflected the will of the majority of Somalilanders, even if the absolute level of support is substantially inflated. Matt Bryden, personal communication, June 2001.

Minister of Fisheries, pointing to his cell phone, says “people express their opinions now . . . I can’t swallow this thing.” Nevertheless, not enough is known at this point about actions and reactions among rural Somalilanders to be sure that they, too, are remaining engaged in the political debate in their country, and not abandoning the political arena to the educated intellectuals and elites of Somali urban society. This suggests an area for further research.

Of course, indigenized political institutions have not been the only source of legitimacy for the Somaliland state or the transition regime. A number of other factors have also been at play, most notably the continuing failure of the south to eliminate conflict and successfully establish some form of lasting and effective administration. As long as Somaliland remains peaceful while the alternative is so starkly evident just across the border, the credibility of the Somaliland government will remain elevated. In fact, this contrast with the south is probably the largest single contributor to Somaliland’s legitimacy in the eyes of many Somalilanders. Closely linked to this source of legitimacy for the Somaliland state and regime are the effects of the ongoing quest for international recognition. There is considerable support for the government’s efforts, and at the same time, some sympathy for the government’s cash-strapped position since access to the international financial institutions and banking systems has been denied. As a result, the government’s relative inability to provide services or other direct benefits (other than security) to the public is tolerated more than it might otherwise be.

While these other sources of legitimacy are clearly quite significant, the views of the respondents interviewed for this study do suggest that the indigenization efforts described here have also contributed. There is a clearly emerging “national story” in Somaliland about the roots of the country that builds in significant part on the pride

Somalilanders feel not only in having achieved peace, but in having done so via a “Somali ways of doing things.” Respondents repeatedly referred to the unique hybrid political system that they are creating, demonstrating an awareness of and pride in this effort to build a uniquely Somali form of democracy. More than one respondent encouraged my research, emphasizing that Somaliland had things it could teach the south, as well as other countries.

What conclusions can we draw, then, about the second hypothesis presented here, which contends that indigenization can help build linkages between the state and society, thereby enhancing both intrinsic and instrumental legitimacy, and improving institutional effectiveness and accountability? And what specific lessons have we learned about approaches to indigenization that may be relevant both to Somaliland’s continuing reconstruction efforts, as well as the rest of the former Somalia, and beyond?

Overall, it is apparent, albeit with a number of caveats, that the two approaches to indigenization studied here – institutionalizing the role of Somaliland’s “traditional” elders, and taking an explicit approach to managing clan balance – have had a positive impact on Somaliland’s legitimacy. The clearest positive impact is evident in the elders’ role in the foundational processes of the new “state,”²³ events viewed highly positively by virtually every respondent interviewed in Somaliland. The role of Somaliland’s elders in achieving peace and establishing a new political order for the region-cum-state has conferred a deep sense of pride and ownership, and is evolving into what could become a

²³ Recall that the Republic of Somaliland is not a *de jure* state according to international standards; it has not been recognized by any other state or international body. It is, however, very much a *de facto* state, capable of meeting all of the standard criteria at least as well as many other African *de jure* states. Moreover, given that consensus is building that the most likely future political structure for the former Republic of Somalia will involve as a minimum a considerable degree of regional autonomy, the political structures of the northwest are likely to persist even if the region does not ultimately achieve recognized independence but instead remains politically connected, albeit loosely so, to the south.

lasting “myth” or “national story” of the state’s foundations, which can be a powerful source of enduring legitimacy. The elders’ contribution since then to preserving peace has also won widespread (though not universal) acclaim both for the elders themselves, and for the transitional regime of which they have been a part. And the clan balance built into the *Guurti* during this era has contributed to the public’s sense of confidence that in Somaliland it will not face political domination at the hands of any one clan again.

Not surprisingly, we have seen that the implications for legitimacy of these various steps have had different effects, positive or negative, depending on individual perspectives and interpretations. The legitimacy benefits of indigenization approaches are perhaps most subject to challenge because of the exclusion of women, although it is not clear that the situation would be substantially different in Somaliland in the absence of indigenized structures. Further research is clearly needed on the perspectives of women (who were undersampled in this study) and the impacts of indigenization on their political, social and economic prospects. It appears, however, that with sufficient political will, the government in general, and indigenized structures in particular, could be adapted to accommodate women’s participation. More surprisingly, however, we have seen that these differences in perspective on the value of indigenization do not correspond to the elite-non-elite or elite-rural divide. While it appears that it is more common for elites to negatively rate indigenous institutions and efforts to integrate them into the political system, there are also many Somali elites who join the majority of their rural counterparts in seeing a great deal of value in this approach. Some elites in fact take pride in the idea of finding a uniquely Somali answer to the problem of political institutions. And of course, the purpose of indigenization is to expand national political

space to include more non-elites, so the less positive reviews among at least some elites are to be expected.

One of the most important lessons of Somaliland's experience is that both the effects of indigenization and their implications for legitimacy are fluid and situational, rather than static, responding to changes in the political context, to efforts of various constituencies, including elites, to define and control the institutions, and to the changing expectations of society. We can see this in several ways. For example, in evaluating the history of the Republic of Somalia, we saw that intrinsic, "foundational" sources of legitimacy such as the success in winning the struggle for independence, while more enduring than many other sources of state legitimacy, were not permanent, and not enough to keep otherwise failing regimes afloat over the long term. In the same way, the Republic of Somaliland has strongly legitimate roots thanks, in large part, to the role of the elders, and this intrinsic, foundational legitimacy is probably a *necessary* component of overall state legitimacy. But we have also seen that the strength of public feeling on this arises in part from the stark contrast between peaceful Somaliland and the conflict-ridden south. Should the south ultimately resolve its problems and end the conflict there as well, the significance of Somaliland's peace will suddenly be much less notable.

Similar parallels might be drawn between the Republic of Somalia's quest to unite "Greater Somalia" and Somaliland's quest for international recognition; while the government's pursuit of this goal wins it considerable credibility and legitimacy now, if these efforts continue to fail, the benefit for legitimacy may turn to a detriment. We might also anticipate shifts in the instrumental sources of legitimacy that indigenization has provided. For example, as noted, the elders' contributions to preserving Somaliland's peace are widely appreciated, and contribute directly to state and regime legitimacy. But

as peace increasingly consolidates, the importance of this role is likely to diminish as well. It thus becomes apparent that legitimacy – and its institutional roots – must be constantly nurtured and regenerated by the state and its regimes.

It also becomes apparent that by integrating indigenous institutions into formal political structures, we may not only change the state or government and perceptions of their legitimacy and effectiveness, we may also change the indigenous institutions themselves. While it appears that on balance institutionalizing the *Guurti* enhances the government's legitimacy, this may simultaneously undermine the status and legitimacy of the *Guurti* and its individual members. This arises in part from the fact that by extending a real role and decision-making power to new individuals and institutions, we simultaneously extend the desire and incentive to control, co-opt or corrupt those institutions on the part of at least some of the other players within the political structure. For example, a number of respondents indicated that the *Guurti* functioned well – we might say “purely” – during the 1993 Boroma conference and selection of a new president (President Egal) at that time, but that by the time of the 1996 Hargeisa conference when President Egal was re-elected, the institution had been significantly corrupted and manipulated. Thus, while some might argue that indigenous institutions must be kept separate from the government because they will be undermined or destroyed, this is essentially an argument for keeping these institutions “pure” by keeping them powerless. Indigenization does indeed represent a shift in the allocation of power – it is intended to do so – and institutions will change and be changed, adapt and be adapted, as a result. There is nothing inherently wrong about this, and trade-offs are to be expected.

However, this finding does lead to an important modification of the theoretical framework regarding indigenization laid out in Chapter 2. I proposed there that the key factors in determining whether or not indigenization efforts would produce positive outcomes for legitimacy or not would depend on how and why the process of indigenization occurred, and what structural outcomes resulted. We have in fact seen that both of these factors do indeed matter. The relatively bottom-up processes by which the elders became, for a time, the leading figures in Somaliland politics, and by which the principles and institutions – including the indigenized structures – of the new state and regime were laid out, were important factors in shaping the overall outcomes. Indigenized institutions were not, in this case, introduced by elites in an effort to co-opt grassroots leadership, but arose instead out of a broad-based community initiative, and reflected (as “positive” efforts at indigenization should) community values, practices and beliefs.

But as discussed, we can observe in Somaliland that despite this propitious starting point, the indigenized institutions have been undermined over time by the actions of elites – both “traditional” and “modern” – to co-opt and control it. Contrast this with the Galvan’s findings in Senegal, where rural councils were in fact introduced by elites with the real intention of enforcing government land policies rather than interpreting them – an apparently inauspicious beginning – but where local residents *eventually* succeeded in adapting these councils to function in ways that are responsive to their own values and local practices. Thus, the origins of indigenization efforts may be an important, but not determining factor.

Institutions clearly do matter as well. It is often the structural changes in institutions brought about by indigenization that actually open up the opportunities to

build linkages between the state and society, to bring the grassroots into the government and expand political space. But whether or not the state or a political regime ultimately capitalizes on these opportunities and expands the political space to include non-elites may depend not so much on the origins of the initiative, but on how political actors – elite or otherwise – make use of these structures. In other words, origins matter and structures matter, but the intentions of users – from both above and below – may matter even more. Thus, while some “slippage” is to be expected as noted above, this must be kept within limits. If it is not, then even a soundly constructed indigenized institution such as the *Guurti* in Somaliland can be catastrophically undermined by the efforts of elites to gain control over its actions. In Somaliland we have seen some loss of status for the elders of the *Guurti*; the shifts are not yet serious enough to outweigh the positive benefits the public attributes to this institution. But if, for example, the political efforts to control the institution go unchecked, either by the public, or by elites themselves (including *Guurti* members) the standing of the *Guurti* could be reduced to the point where it does no longer contribute to legitimacy. Interestingly, this suggests that elites must make some calculations about whether the benefits they realized from the improved legitimacy of their regime are worth the trade-off of actually sharing power, or whether they will again, as so often has been the story in the past, sacrifice legitimacy to ensure a tighter – and yet ultimately more precarious – hold on power.

Does this mean then that the ultimate success or failure of indigenization is still essentially in the hands of elites and their decisions about whether to pursue public good or private gain? If so, how would such institutions be different from those of the past in the Republic of Somalia, which were manipulated and ultimately destroyed by elites? In fact, this is not actually the case, as we are brought full circle, back to the very purpose

for which indigenization was proposed in the first place. Because the difference between elite efforts to manipulate adopted institutions versus indigenized institutions is that in the latter case, the public knows intimately *how they are supposed to work*, and knows when they are being misused or manipulated. This is apparent throughout the comments of respondents in Somaliland. They know how leading elders are supposed to be selected, they know how they are supposed to represent clan interests and assist individuals, they know how they are supposed to live, and what benefits they may reasonably accrue from their positions, and which are excessive. The same could certainly not be said, for example, with respect to political parties, which are still a completely foreign institution to all but a handful of individuals. Somalilanders may therefore be empowered by this knowledge to respond in ways that are different from the non-response that has typically greeted the misuse or manipulation of liberal democratic, but unfamiliar, institutions. In other words, indigenization may not dissuade elites from their efforts to co-opt the institutions of the state to serve their own purposes, but public knowledge and familiarity with the institutions makes society a player in the struggle for power and control in a way it has not been in the past, expanding political space so that it encompasses more than just the relative handful of individuals who know, understand and control the institutions of multiparty democracy or other “foreign” political regimes.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly review some of the other ways in which indigenization can or might occur in Somaliland. I will then begin to look outward, considering briefly comparisons with and lessons for political reconstruction elsewhere in the former of Republic of Somalia, and beyond. Finally, I will consider how the findings of this study should inform the role and actions of the international community in Somaliland during this difficult process of political reconstruction.

8.4 More Ways to Indigenize

The approaches to indigenization of Somaliland's re-emergent political system that have been studied here – the inclusion of “traditional” elders within the formal political system, and the closely linked approach of explicitly recognizing clan balance – are just two of the most obvious ways in which these new national political institutions and structures may be more closely connected to indigenous roots than those of the past. These linkages have been built into the system in several other ways as well, whether deliberately as part of the open effort to build a “hybrid” political system, or inadvertently, as a more general means of overcoming the failures of the past.

One area rich with opportunities for indigenization is in the administration of justice, where balance between customary, religious and “modern” secular systems of law is still being sought. Of necessity, the customary system whereby elders mediate disputes and negotiate *diya* or “blood compensation” payments for injuries was the most active and effective in the early years of Somaliland's existence, as government courts and police forces struggled to re-establish themselves. Customary law has continued to “rule” under the transitional regime to the extent that the government has at times made *diya* payments itself, or even executed defendants at the demands of clan elders, in order to resolve disputes and prevent them from escalating. But as government systems strengthen, this balance will likely shift. The long-term role of elders – either formal or informal – in administering justice and preserving the rule of law remains to be seen, but will be an important indicator of the degree to which indigenous practices and beliefs will truly continue to play a role in Somaliland. Notably, no mention of customary law is made in the 2001 constitution. The jurisdiction of religious courts relative to both the formal, state-run judicial system and the “informal” implementation of customary law is

also being debated and negotiated.²⁴ Another related but largely unexplored aspect of potential indigenization is the connection which Somalis might draw between their traditional *xeer* system of constitution-like agreements among clans, and Somaliland's national constitution. While this possible linkage is not mentioned frequently by Somalilanders when they discuss their hybrid political system, several did point out the similarities between the two.

The other most obvious example of indigenization, though, is the intention to construct a much more decentralized system of governance than under past regimes, when the capital of the former Republic, Mogadishu, became virtually the sole locus of political and administrative activity in the country (although Hargeisa, Kismayu and Bosaso served as regional hubs of economic activity). Somaliland's first National Charter, produced at the Boroma Conference in 1993, establishes decentralization of the administration as a core principle of the new Republic.²⁵ Somalilanders do not often make an explicit link between their intentions to decentralize and their traditional, highly decentralized political practices; rather, it is treated simply as part of a broader and more generalized effort to enhance participation and democratic foundations by bringing government closer to the people, much as it is elsewhere on the African continent. However, it is readily evident that a decentralized system would indeed be more consistent with traditional political practice as well – something that is not necessarily true in many of the other countries where it is being implemented.

²⁴ The 2001 constitution does establish an *Ulema* Council to make declarations concerning religious disagreements and any on any matters which might be contrary to Sharia law. Republic of Somaliland, "The Revised Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland," unofficial English translation prepared by Ibrahim Hashi Jama, LL.B., LL.M (accessed July 2, 2001); available from <http://www.somalilandforum.com>.

In practice, however, the future of decentralization in Somaliland remains somewhat uncertain. As the central government has gained strength and capacity, it is showing typical (of decentralizing central powers) reluctance to support the strengthening of regional and district administrations. Claiming the usual impediments of lack of human and financial resources, while also blaming local-level clan disagreements that have, according to some observers both within and outside of the government, interfered with the ability of localities to take the initiative in forming their own administrations, decentralization has progressed very slowly, and local leaders have, with few exceptions, been appointed by the central government, rather than selected by communities themselves. Not surprisingly, as the central government increasingly consolidates its own position, it has proved to be at best a half-hearted promoter of power dispersal, and it remains to be seen how far the program of decentralization will progress. One respondent actually complained that “Hargeisa is becoming another Mogadishu.”²⁶

At the same time, there are some positive indicators of progress as well. Most importantly, there is evidence of real improvements in control over resources for local governments. *Local taxes are being raised and used by local governments, and local authorities report considerably greater power to make their own decisions about priorities without central government approval than they experienced in the past.* Moreover, while under a new and controversial customs policy implemented in 2000 the government banned collection of trade taxes at the numerous local checkpoints that had dotted trade routes throughout the country in favor of centralized revenue collection at the ports, it

²⁵ Republic of Somaliland, “Republic of Somaliland, General Meeting of the Elders of Somaliland, The National Charter,” no date (prepared 1991, adopted 1993). Available from United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS) Documentation Unit.

²⁶ Amina Haid Dirie, coordinator of KULMIS women’s group umbrella organization and member of TAWAKAL, interview by author, Burao, Somaliland, June 1, 2000.

does in fact redistribute a sizeable share of these revenues to local governments. And there certainly are vocal proponents of decentralization both within and outside of government; many see it as the most important step Somaliland could take to prevent a repetition of past mistakes.

However, there are different degrees of decentralization, and regardless of the degree of *internal* decentralization that Somaliland achieves, the mere existence of the “state” of Somaliland represents a considerably more dispersed system of power relative to the past under the former Republic of Somalia. Many both within and outside of Somaliland see this as an *essential* feature of any future political entity or entities in the region. Centralized power in Somalia proved disastrous for myriad reasons, but not least of these was the fact that it is profoundly inconsistent with indigenous norms of acceptable use of power. One of the key reasons that resolving the problems of Mogadishu and restoring some unified system of governance even just for that city, not to mention the region or the country as a whole, is the continuing belief among the warlords of the south that Mogadishu will one day once again claim its former position as the seat of power for the entire state of Somalia. As such, they continue to believe that controlling Mogadishu will again mean controlling the vast majority of the resource flows into and out of the country. However, throughout the rest of the former state, Somalis vow that Mogadishu will never again dominate and control society the way it once did.

As some regions succeed in rebuilding peace from the ground up at a local level and form nascent regional administrations – from the relatively well established Puntland in the northeast, to the semi-emergent Jubaland, Bai and Bakool, and others in the southwest – they insist that while they want to remain part of a *united* Somalia, they will

not tolerate a *unitary* Somali state, but will instead demand a considerable degree of regional autonomy. For its part, Somaliland insists, at least for the present, that it wants to go a step beyond decentralization to secession. But regardless of whether Somaliland ultimately succeeds in going it alone, or reunites with the south, it is likely to be at most a limited reunion to a state with a tightly circumscribed jurisdiction. Somalilanders, and all Somalis, are keenly interested in being able to engage with the international community and the world, and to the extent that a single central state administration can do this better than a multitude of regional (or independent) authorities, they may tolerate it. But they are, as we have seen, also distressingly familiar with where the excesses of an overly centralized state structure can lead them, and are likely to vigorously protect their autonomy. Thus, in effect, at least one “layer” of decentralization has occurred and will likely persist in some form.

8.5 Parallels in Puntland

Before considering how these lessons from Somaliland might be applied in the south and elsewhere, it is worth taking a brief look at Somaliland’s neighbor to the east, the Puntland Republic of Somalia, where similar, but distinct processes of political reconstruction have been underway. Puntland too, in the eyes of many of its inhabitants, has been “saved by the elders” from the worst excesses of anarchy and lawlessness that have plagued their brothers and sisters to the south. Yet the region has made some fundamentally different decisions about political restructuring.

Puntland emerged as a political entity only in 1998 as the outcome of a regional political conference similar in many respects to the Boroma Conference in Somaliland. Prior to this, the region, which is the most harsh and sparsely populated region of

Somalia inhabited primarily by the Mijerteyn (a clan of the Harti Darood clan family, along with the Dulbahante and Warsengeli clans that inhabit the eastern regions of Somaliland which are also claimed by Puntland), had been largely peaceful relative to the rest of the country. But several previous attempts to establish regional administrations had met with failure. However, at Garowe in 1998 a large *shir* took place that included elders, as well as representatives of the region's rebel movement, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), under its long-time leader Colonel Abdulahi Yusuf, and a host of other representatives of various sectors of northeastern society. This gathering succeeded in laying the foundations for establishing a transitional administration under Yusuf's leadership.

There are several direct parallels with Somaliland, and several sharp contrasts. First, like the SNM, the SSDF was the clearly dominant military force in the region, and it played a major role in bringing about the conference and the creation of the state. However, the SSDF's political history is much more typical of African rebel movements generally than was the SNM's with its democratic roots. Yusuf has long been known as an ambitious, autocratic, and some say ruthless leader.

Secondly, like the traditional clan-level *guurti* that existed within each of Somaliland's clans, the Mijerteyn *Ishimo* continues to hold considerable sway among the region's inhabitants. Many credit the *Ishimo* with preserving a considerable degree of peace and order in the northeast even in the absence of any formal administration until 1998. They too played a central role at Garowe alongside the SSDF, but they did not have the clearly dominant role that the elders at Boroma did. Furthermore, the administration that was created at Garowe did not incorporate any formal role for the

Ishimo or other elders; they were to remain an informal, but as we shall see, still potent force in Puntland society.

And it is this informal yet influential role of the elders that makes for particularly interesting comparisons with Somaliland. Because while the appearance has been that the elders of Puntland have captured considerably less power than their brothers to the west, events in 2000 and 2001 suggest that they in fact wield considerable clout, and their power may actually be on the rise. Two key events bring this to light. The first was the conflict that arose between the Puntland administration and society at large during the Arta Peace Conference held in Djibouti in 2000. Although Puntland's stated aim was to remain an autonomous part of a unified Somalia, the administration also, like Somaliland, rejected the Arta peace process and refused to participate, arguing that the proceedings did not guarantee to protect regional autonomy. However, public demonstrations in response to this position suggested that the majority of the public backed participation. While there was much political maneuvering which I will not detail here, this set the stage for a marked confrontation between the administration, which forbade any Puntlanders from attending the conference, and many of the region's elders, who went anyway, with enormous public backing. As the Transitional National Government established by the Arta conference eventually proved incapable even of controlling Mogadishu, much less the rest of the country, the tension over this issue dissipated, but the competition for power and allegiance between the elders and Yusuf's administration had become clear.

A much sharper conflict arose in 2001, as the initial three-year transitional period allotted to Yusuf's administration came to a close. Yusuf announced that the Puntland parliament had extended his term by a year. But Puntland's Chief Justice contested this,

arguing that Puntland's Charter did not permit such an extension, and claiming that power would instead revert to him until a new community conference could be called. This conference was indeed held in September and October 2001, and it closed by naming a new transitional administration, replacing Yusuf's increasingly unpopular one. Yusuf left Garowe, the capital, but militia's supporting him soon returned, taking control of the capital by force, but leaving the rest of the region, including the all-important port at Bosaso, under the control of the new administration.

This stand-off is complex, and still unresolved at the time of this writing, but it highlights several points about indigenization and indigenous institutions. Most obviously, they remain quite strong in Puntland, as in Somaliland, having re-emerged from the shadows of previous regimes to fill the gap left by the collapse of formal government structures, a role they have filled relatively effectively. And they have regained enough strength in the decade since Somalia's collapse to become major players in the political arena, even to the point of risking armed confrontation, and possibly withstanding it. This is a particularly profound statement on the extent of their influence over society. Secondly, a formal, institutionalized role for indigenous political systems is clearly not a requirement for them to become and remain important players in the political system. None of the respondents in Puntland mentioned a deliberate effort to create hybrid institutions as Somalilanders often did; indigenization may be occurring through more behind-the-scenes means. In the context of a much more autocratic leader, the bottom-up forces of indigenization are finding other ways in which to play a constructive role in keeping government institutions accountable.

8.6 To the South, and Beyond

Finally, What are lessons of Somalia and Somaliland's experience for the rest of Somalia, and for the world? One answer is clear: politics and political institutions must be rooted first and foremost in the societies of which they are a part. This is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition if they are to earn legitimacy, function effectively, and facilitate ownership, participation and accountability. A more specific lesson in the current era of democratization is that the practice of democracy and good governance can no longer be linked solely to the adoption of a particular set of institutions – most commonly those of the Western liberal democratic model of multiparty electoral politics. Functioning, effective, legitimate and democratic government can only emerge when political institutions are engaged with, and accountable to, their publics. Moreover, the public has a right to have a say in what constitute the most important components of good government, and good governance – this is a principle at the heart of democracy. Linking institutions to indigenous values and practices can expand opportunities to participate, as well as enhance the public capacity to monitor and oversee these institutions. It can also contribute to a sense of ownership and a common agreement between the state and society about the state's right to rule, enhancing state legitimacy. And legitimacy, once introduced, can be a self-reinforcing mechanism when used effectively. Greater legitimacy can enhance the state's capacity and its ability to develop and implement effective policies, which in turn can enhance legitimacy still further.

These lessons of state collapse and indigenization can be applied throughout much of Africa and beyond in a variety of ways. Particularly in societies that have been experimenting again with democratization and where indigenous political structures and

practices remain influential, it is time to consider local needs and understandings of politics and how they do or do not correspond to the political models being (re-)introduced. It is time to expand the experiment to include institutional adaptations that draw on indigenous strengths, and meet indigenous political needs.

There can certainly be no fixed formula for how to do this; by its nature, approaches to indigenization must be very context-dependent. Moreover, the viability of indigenizing will not be the same in all countries or contexts. It will depend to some degree on the strength and status of indigenous institutions, which, as we have seen, were perhaps unusually strong among Somalis, particularly after the collapse. On the other hand, in a state such as Rwanda, where society has been deeply penetrated by the state, and where traditional political practices and institutions play a relatively much more marginal role in society, the environment for indigenization is much different – and the need for it likely differs as well. However, the possibility that Rwanda will rely on a traditional system of community-based adjudication known as *gacaca* courts to handle the enormous caseload of accused genocide perpetrators suggests that the concept and practice of indigenization may be highly relevant even in such a society. It will also be more difficult to develop national indigenous models in multiethnic societies, which are more the rule than the exception in Africa. For example, the restoration of kingships in Uganda has profoundly different implications for the former Buganda kingdom in the south than for relatively acephalous societies in the north and east of the country. Further study of the impacts and opportunities for indigenization in such contexts – for example, an analysis of the impacts on regional balance and national politics of Uganda’s restoration – would be a valuable further contribution to this field

In some respects, then, studying and implementing indigenization in a Somali context is perhaps the best case scenario. The continuing strength, commonality (albeit with some variation), and relatively democratic nature of indigenous institutions provide some of the easiest conditions in which to tackle the problem of institutional disconnect. But a creative and open-minded approach to institution building may even be able to overcome the greater difficulties of more heterogeneous, less democratically-grounded (e.g., more hierarchical) societies, or at least to introduce localized adaptations.

Indigenization also has applications outside of state political structures. In particular, resource management regimes are perhaps one of the most obvious examples of a situation where local norms and practices have evolved to meet local needs and the constraints of both the local environment and the communities that use it. Particularly given that managing local natural resources was one of the most critical responsibilities of traditional political institutions in Africa, resource management remains one of the most fruitful fields for re-evaluating the conventional wisdom about appropriate models and the need for enforced change from above. Again, this does not mean that indigenous norms and practices should not change – in fact, they have, and will continue to do so. But as numerous analysts have found,²⁷ local practices must serve as the starting point for effective resource management efforts.

Community-level development is also a fruitful arena for the exploration and practice of indigenization. Many aspects of community development planning, from processes for setting local priorities, to generating local resources and implementing local

²⁷ See for example Jean Ensminger, “Changing Property Rights: Reconciling Formal and Informal Rights to Land in Africa,” in *Frontiers of the New Institutional Economics*, eds. John Nye and John Drobback (New York: Academic Press, 1997), 165-196; Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Jon D. Unruh, “The

projects, can benefit from this approach as well. In many respects, it is at this level where the need for indigenization has already been most widely recognized and internalized within the international development community, as “community ownership” of development activities has become the new catch phrase for development planning. Achieving this goal, however, often remains elusive, as abandoning old models and habits proves to be easier said than done.

Finally, as Somaliland’s own experience so clearly demonstrates, one of the most important arenas for focusing on the importance of indigenous values and methods is in the realm of conflict resolution and political reconstruction. As discussed, Somalia’s neighbors, along with the United Nations, sponsored innumerable peace processes during the early 1990s in a desperate effort to end the conflict that was killing thousands through violence and famine. But just as a highly centralized regime controlled by a small handful of individuals was completely contrary to the traditional practice of Somali politics, so too were these peace processes. Held in foreign capitals with a handful of participants under intense external pressure to produce peace agreements on a tight schedule, these processes were the antithesis of the Somali approach to peacebuilding as exemplified in the Boroma Conference. And yet both in Somalia and globally, we continue to see a reliance on Western models of peacebuilding even in the most un-Western of contexts.

The most notable current example is in Afghanistan. Contrary to every lesson learned in Somalia and Somaliland, the international community undertook facilitation of the political rebuilding process after the fall of the Taliban regime. In November and

Relationship Between Indigenous Pastoralist Resource Tenure and State Tenure in Somalia,” *GeoJournal* 36, no. 1 (May 1995): 19-26.

December 2001, this culminated in a peace “conference” in Bonn, Germany that almost exactly mirrored the repeated, and failed, efforts of the international community in southern Somalia. A mere handful of delegates representing only four factions – three of them exile groups – gathered at a luxury hotel far from the realities and voices of their fellow countrymen and women, who had no representation of their own. In a tight time frame and under intense international pressure, an interim administration for the war-ravaged country was established. This has been followed by the commitment of enormous sums of international assistance. However, the legitimacy of the interim administration would, in a classic repetition of the past in Somalia and elsewhere in Africa (recall Jackson’s quasi-states), appear to be much greater externally among the members of the international community, than it is internally among the Afghan people. But forcing a dubious “solution” onto the country while inundating it with international aid is a recipe for repeated disaster. The planned conduct of a *loya jirga* in mid-2002, a traditional form of community assembly quite similar to the Somali *shir* which will form a new interim administration, offers some cause for hope of a more broadly legitimate outcome in Afghanistan. But one critical, and possibly decisive, difference with the Somaliland process will remain: Afghanistan’s *loya jirga* will be conducted under a still intense international spotlight, and in the context of the continuing flows of aid resources. This will inevitably distort the process, potentially in ways that will make a truly Afghan solution that meets Afghan needs and conforms to local norms and constraints almost impossible to achieve.

8.7 Lessons for the International Community

This brings us to the closing concern of this analysis: the lessons of the Somali experience for the international community, both as it continues to assist Somalis, and in its efforts elsewhere in Africa and the world. I will briefly highlight six key lessons that arise from this study and from the broader analysis of Somali collapse and rebuilding.

First, before it can effectively assist political or developmental processes, the international community needs a thorough understanding of the complex political environments in which it works, of what resources local actors have to bring to the rebuilding process, and of the factors and interests that threaten their maximal use. This may seem self evident, but particularly in complex conflict or post-conflict environments it is a lesson that is often forgotten in the haste to establish peace and rebuild shattered lives. However, *lasting* peace and reconstruction depends on breaking the destructive patterns of the past, and this often takes time and care, rather than haste, to achieve.

The second lesson is that local resources – political, institutional, economic, and social – must provide the foundation for processes of rebuilding governance institutions and for economic revitalization. There is a clear need to create states that meet the needs of their own indigenous environments and populations, rather than those of the international community. Only then will Somalia, and other states teetering on the edge of failure or struggling to recover, be able to find an enduring way forward.

Thirdly, the long-run impact of political and economic assistance on relationships among different actors and on building governance institutions may be much more important than its short-term impact on immediate material well-being. As Peter Uvin observed in his study of the impact of development assistance in Rwanda in the build-up to the genocide, “One of the foremost conclusions of this book is that all development aid

constitutes a form of political intervention.”²⁸ As we have seen, this has been true in the case of Somalia’s downfall as well. Yet again, it is a lesson frequently forgotten during the reconstruction phase. Building political institutions that are rooted in, dependent upon, and accountable to Somali society requires that strong linkages between the state and society not only exist at the beginning, but that they are continuously fostered. Yet providing resources, particularly in highly-charged, post-conflict situations, will affect the evolving balance of power among different actors in the social and political arena. It must be noted that the relationship between state and society in Somaliland has thus far evolved in a context of very limited international assistance. More than one Somalilander suggested that the lack of assistance to the state had benefited society, arguing that the connection between state and society could be rapidly short-circuited if the government were to again receive substantial external assistance, allowing it to become autonomous of society. This will require a new relationship between the international community and both the societies and the states that it seeks to assist. It has critical implications for the scale and content of assistance, as well as appropriate partners. International assistance has the potential to either facilitate positive relationships or distort them; all assistance should therefore be subjected to careful analysis of its impact on these emerging relationships.

Fourth, with regard to ideal political models, the focus should be on ensuring democratic political principles, rather than on specific structures, practices or outcomes. In other words, societies should be allowed the real space and opportunity to discuss and experiment with models of indigenization, or other approaches for that matter, rather than face an overt or covert insistence upon a fixed, internationally acceptable solution (which

²⁸ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 232.

most often takes the form of a demand for multiparty elections within a year or two of transition). Again, more than one Somalilander argued that Somaliland would institute multiparty elections in the near future because it is the only model they believe the international community will accept, despite the fact that considerable reservations were expressed about just what the impacts of multipartyism might be. It is instead possible to be firm on such principles as participation, transparency, and accountability, while recognizing the strengths and unique adaptations to local norms evident in indigenous practice. Fostering opportunities to debate and create, rather than simply to obey a perceived “international command,” could prove extremely beneficial.

Fifth, as many Somalis recognize, and as much of the discussion of the Somali context suggests, the ideal alternative to an autonomous and overbearing state is not a weak state, but rather a carefully limited one that has a narrow mandate, but also sufficient capacity to fulfill it. In other words, while it is necessary to be extremely cautious in supporting state institutions as discussed above, it is not necessarily advisable to abandon them altogether. The state’s mandate should be determined through an internal state-society debate, and appropriate capacity should be developed together with society’s capacity to check these powers. For example, many Somalis, much as they are now wary of central government power or capacity of any kind, also recognize the need for a central authority that can serve effectively as their interlocutor with the international community, especially in order to facilitate economic and financial interactions. But the recognition that society needs to maintain strict oversight is also widely recognized. The international community can support efforts to jointly increase state capacity and societal capacity for oversight.

Finally, experiences in Somalia and Somaliland, Afghanistan, and a host of other nations suggest that one area which may require special consideration is the emerging and evolving role of women in politics. In Somaliland, women remain largely marginalized from participation in the political system, even as their role in the economy has increased dramatically during and after the collapse. Finding ways to support their struggle to overcome cultural barriers that discourage their political participation, while also helping societies to build on the strengths of their indigenous practices, will be a continuing challenge.

Post-conflict transitions represent a unique, but relatively brief, opportunity. In Somaliland and in the rest of Somalia, it will ultimately be up to Somalis themselves to determine whether or not they successfully capitalize on this opportunity, or fail, letting the chance to create a better political and economic future slip away. Somalilanders remain actively engaged in the debate, and there are some positive signs to suggest that their experiment with new, hybrid political models may serve them well. But the story is far from over, and the practice of politics by both elites and society at large over the next few years will be critical in determining whether the early gains in legitimacy are reinforced or squandered. But the international community may also play a critical role. With a thorough understanding of the Somali context, past failures, and future possibilities, this role could be positive and facilitating, assisting Somalis to build more strongly connected, deeply rooted, accountable and effective institutions. But this will require a degree of care and attention to detail in providing assistance that it is not always easy for international organizations to muster. But the alternative – the possibility that international assistance will undermine positive Somali efforts through their ignorance or carelessness – should be taken extremely seriously. Somalis are living through one of the

most exciting political experiments of recent African history, but there are no guarantees of success. There is therefore a particular responsibility at the present juncture to make the necessary commitment – of political will, more than of resources – to help Somalis make a success of their efforts.

Bibliography

- Adam, Hussein M. "Somalia: A Terrible Beauty Being Born?" In *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I. William Zartman, 69-89. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.
- Adam, Hussein M. and Richard Ford, with Ali Jimale Ahmed, Abdinasir Osman Isse, Nur Weheliye, and David Smock. "Removing Barricades in Somalia: Options for Peace and Rehabilitation." United States Institute of Peace Peaceworks No. 24, Washington, D.C., October 1998.
- Africa Watch. *Somalia: A Government at War with Its Own People*. New York, Washington and London: The Africa Watch Committee, January 1990.
- Afrobarometer Network. "Afrobarometer Round 1: Compendium of Comparative Data from a Twelve-Nation Survey." Michigan State University Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 11, 2002.
- Ahmed, Ali Jimale, ed. *The Invention of Somalia*. New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1995.
- Ahmed, Ismail. "Understanding Conflict in Somalia and Somaliland." In *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, ed. Adebayo Adedeji, 236-256. London and New York: Zed Books, and Nigeria: African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies (ADCESS), 1999.
- Ake, Claude. "Rethinking African Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Winter 1991): 32-44.
- Ake, Claude. *Democracy and Development in Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1996.
- Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Ambroso, Guido. "The Somali Clan System: An Introduction to Somali Society and History." Report prepared for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Jijiga Sub-office, Jigjiga, Ethiopia, n.d..
- Barkan, Joel D., Michael L. McNulty, and M.A.O. Ayeni. "Hometown Voluntary Associations, Local Development, and the Emergence of Civil Society in Western Nigeria." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29 (1991): 457-480.
- Bayart, Jean-François. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. London and New York: Longman, 1993.

- Besteman, Catherine. *Unraveling Somalia: Race, Violence, and the Legacy of Slavery*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
- Bowen, Merle. "Peace, Politics, and Peasants: The Rural Challenge in Mozambique." Paper presented at the Workshop on Political Transitions in Africa, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, March 11-12, 1994.
- Bratton, Michael, and Beatrice Liatto-Katundu. "Political Culture in Zambia: A Pilot Survey." Michigan State University (MSU) Working Papers on Political Reform in Africa, No. 7, 1994.
- Bratton, Michael, and Donald Rothchild. "The Institutional Bases of Governance in Africa." In *Governance and Politics in Africa*, eds. Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, 263-284. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992.
- Bratton, Michael, and Nicolas van de Walle. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Bryden, Matt. "The Importance of Being Somaliland: Emerging Paradigm of Governance for the Somali Territories?" War-torn Societies Project, Nairobi, Kenya, May 2000.
- Bryden, Matt. "Somalia's New Order: Patterns of Political Reconstruction Since State Collapse." War-torn Societies Project, Nairobi, Kenya, June 1999.
- Bryden, Matt. "New Hope for Somalia? The Building Block Approach." *Review of African Political Economy* 26, no. 74 (March 1999):134-140.
- Bryden, Matt and Ahmed Yusuf Farah. "The Somaliland Peace Committee: Case Study of a Grassroots Peace Making Initiative." Report prepared for the United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UN-EUE), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, November 1996.
- Buzan, Barry. *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983.
- Chief Linchwe II. "The Role a Chief Can Play in Botswana's Democracy." In *Democracy in Botswana: The Proceedings of a Symposium held in Gabarone, 1-5 August 1988*, eds. John Holm and Patrick Molutsi, 99-102. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989.
- Clapham, Christopher. *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Clarke, Walter and Jeffrey Herbst, eds. *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1997.

- Clough, Michael. *Free At Last? U.S. Policy Toward Africa and the End of the Cold War*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992.
- Davidson, Basil. *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*. New York: Times Books, 1992.
- Dia, Mamadou. *Africa's Management in the 1990s and Beyond: Reconciling Indigenous and Transplanted Institutions*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1996.
- Diamond, Larry. "Introduction: Roots of Failure, Seeds of Hope." In *Democracy in Developing Countries*. Vol. 2, *Africa*, eds. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, 1-32. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, and London: Adamantine Press Limited, 1988.
- "Djibouti-Led IGAD Peace Process for Somalia: Peace Plan, Somalia National Peace Conference, Djibouti, 20 April – 5 May 2000."
- Doornbos, Martin, and John Markakis. "Society and State in Crisis: What went wrong in Somalia?" *Review of African Political Economy* 59 (1994): 82-88.
- Drysdale, John. *Whatever Happened to Somalia?* London: HAAN Associates, 1994.
- Ekeh, Peter P. "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (1976): 91-112.
- Englebert, Pierre. *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.
- Ensminger, Jean. "Changing Property Rights: Reconciling Formal and Informal Rights to Land in Africa." In *Frontiers of the New Institutional Economics*, eds. John Nye and John Drobach, 165-196. New York: Academic Press, 1997.
- European Union and European Community (EC) Somalia Unit, with assistance from the United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS). "A Study of Decentralised Political Structures for Somalia: A Menu of Options." Report prepared by consultants from the London School of Economics and Political Science, August 1995.
- Evans, Peter. *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

- Fadal, Mohamed. "Rebuilding Somaliland: A Critical Appraisal of the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Process." Report prepared for the International Development Research Centre as part of support to the War-torn Societies Project, Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 1996.
- Farah, Ahmed Yusuf. "Political Actors in Somalia's Emerging *de facto* Entities: Civil-Military Relations in Somaliland and Northeast Somalia." War-torn Societies Project, Nairobi, Kenya, January 2000.
- Farah, Ahmed Yusuf, and Ioan M. Lewis. "Peace-Making Endeavors of Contemporary Lineage Leaders in 'Somaliland' (Northwest Somalia)." In *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*, eds. Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford, 317-325. Lawrenceville, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1997.
- Farah, Ahmed Yusuf, and Ioan M. Lewis. "Making Peace in Somaliland." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 146 no. XXXVII-2 (1997): 349-377.
- Galvan, Dennis. "Institutional Syncretism and Culturally Generic Democracy in Rural Senegal." Paper prepared for the 1999 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Philadelphia, November 11-14, 1999.
- Geddes, Barbara. "Paradigms and Sand Castles in Comparative Politics of Developing Areas." In *Comparative Politics, Policy, and International Relations*. Vol. 2, *Political Science: Looking Toward the Future*, ed. William Crotty, 45-75. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991.
- Geshektek, Charles. "The Death of Somalia in Historical Perspective." In *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century*, eds. Hussein M. Adam and Richard Ford, 65-98. Lawrenceville, NJ and Asmara, Eritrea: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1997.
- Ghalib, Jama Mohamed. *The Cost of Dictatorship: The Somali Experience*. New York: Lilian Barber Press, Inc., 1995.
- Gilkes, P.S. "Somalia/Somaliland: Is There a Way Forward?" Report prepared for Save the Children Fund UK, August 1999.
- Gilkes, P. "Two Wasted Years: The Republic of Somaliland 1991-1993." Manuscript, 1993.
- Green, Reginald Herbold. "Towards a Macro-Economic Framework for Somaliland's Post-War Rehabilitation and Reconstruction." In *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, ed. Adebayo Adedeji, 257-281. London and New York: Zed Books, 1999.

- Hashim, Alice Bettis. *The Fallen State: Dissonance, Dictatorship and Death in Somalia*. Lanham, New York and Oxford: University Press of America, Inc., 1997.
- Haugerud, Angelique. *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Herbst, Jeffrey. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Heinrich, Wolfgang. *Building the Peace: Experiences of Collaborative Peacebuilding in Somalia 1993-1996*. Uppsala, Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, November 1997.
- Hewitt de Alcantra, Cynthia. "Uses and Abuses of the Concept of Governance." *International Social Science Journal*, no. 155 (March 1998): 105-113.
- Holm, John D. "Botswana: A Paternalistic Democracy." In *Democracy in Developing Countries*. Vol. 2, *Africa*, eds. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, 179-215. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, and London: Adamantine Press Limited, 1988.
- Holsti, Kalevi J. *The State, War, and the State of War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Hyden, Goran. *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective*. London: Heineman, 1983.
- Jackson, Robert H. *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Jackson, Robert H. "Quasi-states, Dual Regimes, and Neoclassical Theory: International Jurisprudence and the Third World." *International Organization* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 1987): 519-549.
- Jan, Ameen. "Peacebuilding in Somalia." International Peace Academy, IPA Policy Briefing Series, July 1996.
- Kaptejins, Lidwien. "Women and the Crisis of Communal Identity: The Cultural Construction of Gender in Somali History." In *The Somali Challenge: From Crisis to Renewal?* ed. Ahmed I. Samatar, 211-232. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994.
- Karlström, Mikael. "Imagining Democracy: Political Culture and Democratisation in Buganda." *Africa* 66, no. 4 (1996): 485-505.

- Kokole, Omari H., and Ali A. Mazrui. "Uganda: The Dual Polity and the Plural Society." In *Democracy in Developing Countries*. Vol. 2, *Africa*, eds. Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, 259-298. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988.
- Kumar, Krishna. "The Nature and Focus of International Assistance for Rebuilding War-Torn Societies." In *Rebuilding Societies After Civil War: Critical Roles for International Assistance*, ed. Kumar, Krishna, 1-38. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997.
- Laitin, David D., and Said S. Samatar. *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*. Boulder: Westview Press, and London: Gower, 1987.
- Landell-Mills, Pierre. "Governance, Cultural Change, and Empowerment." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30 (1992): 543-567.
- Lewis, Ioan M. *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society*. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1994.
- Lewis, Ioan M. "Introduction: The Uncentralised Somali Legacy." In *A Study of Decentralised Political Structures for Somalia: A Menu of Options*. Report prepared for the European Union EC Somalia Unit and the United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS), August 1995, 1-13 (also published by London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1995, xv-xxxiii).
- Lewis, Ioan M. *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*. New York: Africana Publishing Company for the International African Institute, 1961, 1982.
- Lewis, Ioan M. *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. London and New York: Longman Group Limited, 1965, 1980.
- Luling, Virginia. "Come Back Somalia? Questioning a Collapsed State." *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1997): 287-302.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Mansur, Abdalla Omar. "Contrary to a Nation: The Cancer of the Somali State." In *The Invention of Somalia*, ed. Ali Jimale Ahmed, 107-116. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1995.
- Maren, Michael. *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity*. New York: The Free Press, 1997.

- Menkhaus, Ken. "Systems of Governance in a Collapsed State: A Comparative Analysis of Five Southern Somali Regions." Paper presented at the African Studies Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, November 1999.
- Menkhaus, Ken. "Somalia: Political Order in a Stateless Society." *Current History* (May 1998): 220-224.
- Menkhaus, Ken. "International Peacebuilding and the Dynamics of Local and National Reconciliation in Somalia." In *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention*, eds. Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, 42-63. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1997.
- Menkhaus, Ken and John Prendergast. "Conflict and Crisis in the Greater Horn of Africa." *Current History* (May 1999): 213-217.
- Menkhaus, Ken, and John Prendergast. "Governance and Economic Survival in Post-Intervention Somalia." *CSIS Africa Notes*, no. 172 (May 1995): 1-10.
- Migdal, Joel. *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Mohamoud, Ahmed Mohamed "Silanyo." "The Challenges in Somaliland." Ministry of National Planning and Coordination, Hargeisa, Somaliland, October 1999.
- Mohamoud, Omar Haji (Omer Dhere). "Paper on Statehood and Recognition of the Republic of Somaliland." Hargeisa, Somaliland, n.d..
- Neale, Walter C. Review of *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, by Douglass C. North. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 41 (January 1993): 422-425.
- Nordlinger, Eric A. *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- North, Douglass C. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Osabu-Kle, Daniel T. *Compatible Cultural Democracy: The Key to Development in Africa*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000.
- Ottaway, Marina. "African Democratization: An Update." *CSIS Africa Notes*, no. 171 (April 1995): 1-6.
- Owusu, Maxwell. "Democracy and Africa – A View from the Village." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30 (September 1992): 369-396.

- Peace Committee for Somaliland. "The Search for a Peaceful Solution to Fighting in 'Somaliland': An Interim Report." Hargeisa, Somaliland, n.d..
- Pinckney, Thomas C., and Peter K. Kimuyu. "Land Tenure Reform in East Africa: Good, Bad or Unimportant?" *Journal of African Economies* 3 (April 1994): 1-28.
- Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967.
- Prendergast, John and Matt Bryden. "War and Peace in Somalia and Somaliland." Report prepared for the Center for the Strategic Initiatives of Women (CSIW), Washington, D.C., July 1999.
- Puntland State of Somalia. "Charter for the State of Puntland, ratified at the Constitutional Conference of Puntland State, May 15, Garowe." Unofficial translation prepared by United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS) Information Unit, 17 August 1998.
- Rawson, David. "Dealing with Disintegration: U.S. Assistance and the Somali State." In *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?*, ed. Ahmed I. Samatar, 147-187. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994.
- Republic of Somaliland. "The Revised Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland." Unofficial English translation prepared by Ibrahim Hashi Jama, LL.B., LL.M. Accessed July 2, 2001. Available from <http://www.somalilandforum.com>.
- Republic of Somaliland, Ministry of National Planning and Coordination. *Somaliland in Figures*, 2nd ed. Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 1999.
- Republic of Somaliland. "Draft Constitution." January 1996 (mimeo).
- Republic of Somaliland. "Republic of Somaliland, General Meeting of the Elders of Somaliland, The National Charter." No date (prepared 1991, adopted 1993) (mimeo). Available from United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS) Documentation Unit.
- Republic of Somaliland, "Submission on Statehood and Recognition of Republic of Somaliland," June 1996 (mimeo).
- Robinson, Pearl T. "Democratization: Understanding the Relationship Between Regime Change and the Culture of Politics." *African Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (1994): 39-67.
- Rothchild, Donald and Naomi Chazan, eds. *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*. Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988.

- Samatar, Abdi Ismail. "Leadership and Ethnicity in the Making of African State Models: Botswana versus Somalia." *Third World Quarterly* 4, no. 18 (1997): 687-707.
- Samatar, Abdi Ismail. "Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Convention." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (1992): 626-641.
- Samatar, Abdi Ismail. *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1884-1986*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.
- Samatar, Abdi Ismail. "The State, Agrarian Change, and Crisis of Hegemony in Somalia." *Review of African Political Economy* 43 (1988): 26-41.
- Samatar, Abdi Ismail, and Ahmed I. Samatar. "The Material Roots of the Suspended African State: Arguments from Somalia." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (December 1987): 669-690.
- Samatar, Ahmed I. *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1988.
- Sangpam, S.N. "Neither Soft nor Dead: The African State is Alive and Well." *African Studies Review* 36, no. 2 (September 1993): 73-94.
- Schaffer, Frederic C. *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Schatzberg, Michael G. *Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Simons, Anna. "Somalia: The Structure of Dissolution." In *The African State at a Critical Juncture: Between Disintegration and Reconfiguration*, eds. Leonardo A. Villalon and Phillip A. Huxtable, 57-73. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.
- Simons, Anna. *Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- Skinner, Elliot P. "The Issue of Disemia as African States Move Toward Democracy: The Case of Burkina Faso." Paper presented at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 1993.
- Sklar, Richard. "African Politics: The Next Generation." In *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Richard Joseph, 165-177. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999.

- Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD) and War-torn Societies Project. *Rebuilding from the Ruins: A Self-Portrait of Somaliland*. Hargeysa, October 1999.
- Somolekae, Gloria. "Do Batswana Think and Act as Democrats?" In *Democracy in Botswana: The Proceedings of a Symposium held in Gabarone, 1-5 August 1988*, eds. John Holm and Patrick Molutsi, 75-88. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989.
- Tilly, Charles. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*. Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs IRIN Humanitarian Information Unit, "Somalia: Looking After the Unwanted," 15 June 2001.
- Unruh, Jon D. "The Relationship Between Indigenous Pastoralist Resource Tenure and State Tenure in Somalia." *GeoJournal* 36, no. 1 (May 1995): 19-26.
- Uvin, Peter. *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1998.
- Verba, Sidney, Norma H. Nie, and Jae-On Kim. *The Modes of Democratic Participation: A Cross-National Comparison*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1971.
- Warabe, Faisal Ali. "The Root Causes of the Somali Crisis." Manuscript, n.d..
- War-torn Societies Project Somali Programme (Puntland component). *Building from the Bottom: Basic Institutions of Local Governance*. Nairobi, Kenya, 1999/2000.
- War-torn Societies Project Somali Programme (Puntland component). *The Role of Somali Women in Post-Conflict Reconstruction*. Nairobi, Kenya, 1999/2000.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons. New York: Scribners, 1950.
- Weber, Max. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. New York and London: The Free Press, 1947.
- Wunsch, James W. "Centralization and Development in Post-Independence Africa." In *The Failure of the Centralized State: Institutions and Self-Governance in Africa*, eds. James S. Wunsch and Dele Olowu, 43-73. Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1990.
- Young, Crawford. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994.

Young, Tom. "Elections and Electoral Politics in Africa." *Africa* 62, no. 3 (1993): 299-312.

Youssef, Abdulrahman "Bobe". "The Rise and Development of the Free Press in Somaliland." Paper presented at the International Congress of Somali Studies, Turku, Finland, August 6-9, 1998.

Zartman, I. William. "Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse." In *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I William Zartman, 1-11. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.

Zartman, I. William. "Putting Things Back Together." In *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I William Zartman, 267-273. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995.

Interviews – Somaliland

Abdi Haji Hassan, committee member in Hahi, with Ismail Abdulahi Hassan. Interview by author. Hahi, Somaliland, June 4, 2000.

Professor Abdi Timir. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

Abdirahman Abdulahi Jimaale, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, November 4, 1999.

Abdirahman Farah Sugal, Chairman, Somaliland Chamber of Commerce, with Abdulahi Diriye, Secretary. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, June 10, 2000.

Abdirahman Mohamed Ajab, Director General, Ministry of the Interior, Government of Somaliland. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, June 10, 2000.

Abdirahman Yuusuf Artan, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 20, 1999.

Abdirisak Sheikh Aden, Vice-Mayor, Gabiley, with town and district officers Mohamed Abas, Ahmed Mohamed, Mohamoud Elmi, Asha Abdi Ali, Abdi Ahmed, Ismael Ali Abdulahi, Hasan Filfil, and Ahmed Ismael Farah. Interview by author. Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf "Kulumbe," contractor/businessman and owner of National Rehabilitation and Development Co. (NAREDCO). Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

Abdulahi Ibrahim Habaneh “Abdulahi Dhere,” Secretary of the Somaliland *Guurti*, with Musa Jama Mohammed. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

Abdulkadir Jirde, Deputy Speaker of Parliament. Interviews by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 25 and 30, 2000.

Abdulrahman Youssef “Bobe,” Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), former Secretary of the SNM, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Somaliland Government, and former editor of *Jamhurriya*, Somaliland’s leading independent daily. Interviews by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 17, 1999 and Gabiley, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

Dr. Aden Abokar, Director, International Cooperation for Development (ICD), former director of Hargeisa Hospital and member of the “Hargeisa Group” of political prisoners under Siyad Barre. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 23, 2000.

Aden Nur with Badria Mohammed and Sulub Ismail, Program Officers, International Rescue Committee (IRC). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 29, 2000.

Ahmed Hassan Afi, Minister of Justice, Government of Somaliland. Interviews by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 20 and 21, 2000.

Ahmed Hussein Omani, Minister of Fisheries, Government of Somaliland. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 29, 2000.

Ali “Dhere” Omar Ahmed, member of the Somaliland *Guurti* representing the Dulbahante clan in eastern Somaliland. Interview by author. Gabiley, Somaliland, June 9, 2000.

Dr. Ali Salah, Program Officer, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, May 31, 2000.

Amina Haid Dirie, coordinator of KULMIS women’s group umbrella organization and member of TAWAKAL, with Chuwahir Ahmed Abdi of Candlelight, Fozia Nur Mohamed of DAWO, and Ibado Deria Arteh of Iftin, a Gabooye women’s organization. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 1, 2000.

Amran Ali Mahmoud, wife of former mayor, presidential candidate and founding member of the SNM Mohamed Hashi. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 29, 2000.

Anab Mohamed Nur, Chairperson, Awdal Women's Solidarity Group, with Asli Abdi Hasan, Chairperson of Nasrulah (a Somaliland NGO), and Marian Qayat and Habiba Abdulle, both of HAFO (a Somaliland NGO). Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 16, 2000.

Anab Omer Ileeeye, Chairperson, Nagaad (an umbrella group for Somaliland women's organizations), with members Run Yusuf Ayoon, Amina Ali Omer and Shukri Harir Ismael. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 26, 2000.

Dr. Axmed Hussein Esa, Director, Institute for Policy Research (IPR). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 24, 2000.

Axmed Mohamed Mohamoud "Silanyo," Minister of Planning, Government of Somaliland, and two-time former chairman of the Somali National Movement (SNM). Interviews by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 28 and 30, 2000.

Axmed Sheikh Jama "Axmed Maalin," resident of Sool region in eastern Somaliland, and a former regional governor and assistant minister in the Siyad Barre government. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 23, 2000.

Baki elders. Interview by author. Baki, Somaliland, March 19, 2000.

Burao elders, including Adan Abdi Ismail, secretary to Suldan Mohamud Guleid of the Habr Ja'alo, and Suleiman A. Duale, Abdulahi Ahmed Yusuf, Adam Tarabi Ogle Kulumbe, Abdi Hussein, Dahir Warsame, Abdi Timir Ali and Awil Mohamud Qayir. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 1, 2000.

Chuwahir Ahmed Abdi, Fadumo Yusuf Mohamud, and Abdikarim Sheikh Hussein Mohamed, staff of Candlelight for Health and Education (a Somaliland NGO) Burao office. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, May 31, 2000.

Drysdale, John. Interview by author. Gabiley, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

Edna Aden, Director, Edna Aden Women's Hospital, and first woman to enter Somalia's the senior civil service in the 1960s. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 20, 2000.

Faysal Bihi Abdi, Deputy Mayor, Odweyn, with Odweyn elders. Interview by author. Odweyn, Somaliland, June 3, 2000.

Gabiley intellectuals, including Ali Ahmed Olhaye (community promoter), Abdulahi Yusuf Warsame (teacher), Ahmed Ismael (agricultural officer), Abdihakim Mohamoud (livestock officer), and Dr. Mohamed Yusuf (private doctor). Interview by author. Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

Gabiley women's group representatives, including Mariam Jama (HAWO), Rhoda Abdi Dahir (TUSMO), Nimo Sheikh Mohamed, Urub Mohamed, Asha Hasan, Sarah Abdi Samatar, (MARWO), Waris Abshir Diriye (DDC), Asha Abdi Aden (DDC), Sarah Dahir Isman (WVVO), Amina Mohamed (KULMIYE), Sara Abdi Buni (AWO), and Medina Abdulahi Deqsi (TOWFIQ). Interview by author. Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

Haji Abdi Hussein Yusuf "Abdi Warabe," Deputy Chair of the Somaliland *Guurti* and head of the security committee, with Mohamed Ismail Abdi, businessman. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, June 9, 2000.

Haji Jama Mohamed Ugas Elmi, Chairman, Boroma's "Social Committee of Elders." Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

Hasan Axmed "Hasan Embassy," Area Manager, African Educational Trust (AET). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 24, 2000.

Hasna Haji Saeed, Bon "mother's committee," with Barkhado Ali Geleh, Ibaado Elmi Lodon, Sofia Aw Barka, and Ardo Abdullahi. Interview by author. Bon, Somaliland, March 17, 2000.

Haybe Abdillahi Ali, Mayor, Burao. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 1, 2000.

Hussein Haji Abdi Amir, Member of Parliament. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, June 6, 2000.

Hussein Madar Hosh, Deputy Chairman of the Somaliland *Guurti*, with *Guurti* members Mohamoud Hared Robleh, Abdirahman Ahmed Arayeh, Dini Abdulahi Handa, and Aden Shire Farah. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 21, 2000.

Ibrahim Magan Nur, Mayor, Boroma. Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

Ismail Mohamoud Abdi, businessman. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 1, 2000.

Jama Mohamoud Omar, Program Officer, with Ismael Isse Abrar, Governance Trainer, Life and Peace Institute (LPI). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 20, 2000.

Kinzi Hussein, Field Officer, and Sarah Aden, Project Officer, Candlelight for Health and Education (a Somaliland NGO). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 27, 2000.

Mohamed Barood Ali, Director, Somali Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SORRA), chemist and member of the “Hargeisa Group” of political prisoners under Siyad Barre. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 22, 2000.

Mohamed Hasan Ibrahim, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 26, 2000.

Mohamed Hassan Ahmed, Vice-Governor, Awdal Region. Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

Mohamed Hashi, businessman, former mayor of Hargeisa, former Somaliland presidential candidate, and founding member of the SNM. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 31, 2000.

Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, President of Somaliland, and formerly Prime Minister of the Republic of Somalia 1967-69. Meeting with a delegation from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), including author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 14, 1999.

Mohamed Rabile, with Mohamed Isman, members of Boroma’s “Social Committee of Elders.” Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

Mohamed Said Mohamed “Gees,” Minister of Finance, Government of Somaliland. Interviews by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 18, 1999 and May 28, 2000.

Mohamed Salah, intellectual from Burao. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 30, 2000.

Mohamed Samale, Member of Parliament. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, June 10, 2000.

Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, Executive Director, Awdal Relief and Development Association (ARDA) and Chairman, Awdal Association of Indigenous NGOs (AAIN). Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 16, 2000.

Mohamoud Adan “Dhere,” Governor, Togdheer Region, with Yasin Mohamed Abdi, Deputy Governor. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, May 31, 2000.

Mohamoud Sheikh Nur, elder and former mayor of Gabiley, with Gabiley elders Saleh Elmi Warsame, Abdi Hussein Farah, Musa Warsame Dubed, Isman Robleh Bidid, Mohamoud Elmi, Ismael Ali, Ali Ahmed Olhaye, Abdulahi Omar, and Omar Abdulahi Shable. Interview by author. Gabiley, Somaliland, March 22, 2000.

Nurine Michael Mariano, Director, and Amina Yusur Arr, Assistant Director, CCS (Somaliland women’s NGO). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, September 19, 1999.

Odweyn businessmen, including Ahmed Ismail Awil, Muse Sahel Geleh, and Mawlid Dahir Hersi. Interview by author. Odweyn, Somaliland, June 3, 2000.

Odweyn elders, including Ali Ibrahim Dirie, Ali Mohamed Hasan, Nur Ahmed Jieer, Mohamud Musa Afeeye, Mahamed Ibrahim Ismail, Mohamud Mohamed Guleed, Yusuf Jama Fidhen, Mohamud Ibrahim Mohamed, and Ahmed Ali Abdi. Interview by author. June 4, 2000.

Odweyn women's organization SWWO, including Faduma Mohamed Abdi, Asha Jama Haji Mohamud, Anab Rabe Mohamed, and Sofia Abdilahi Gamute. Interview by author. Odweyn, Somaliland, June 3, 2000.

Odweyn youth, including Said Usman, Suleban Hersi Awale, Khadar Ibrahim Jama, and Mwalid Dahir Hersi. Interview by author. Odweyn, Somaliland, June 4, 2000.

Omar Mumin Nur, headman, Tog Wajaale, with elders Abdi Kahin Raghe, Mohamud Hussein Tukale, Musa Hassan Shiridon, and Sahardid Daud Ibrahim. Interview by author. Tog Wajaale, Somaliland, June 5, 2000.

Osman Sheikh Umar, Vice-Mayor, Baki, with Mohamed Said Kahlief "Farahan," Finance Manager, Suleyman Mahamoud Emrahe, Administrative Officer, and Barre Jama Yusuf, Baki elder. Interview by author. Baki, Somaliland, March 19, 2000.

Osman "Dhere" Sheikh Omar Mohamoud, elder of Baki area. Interview by author. Baki, Somaliland, June 8, 2000.

Osman "Dhere" Sheikh Omar Mohamoud, elder of Baki area, with elders Dahir Hamoud Gafane, and Nuh Alin Farah. Interview by author. Baki, Somaliland, June 7, 2000.

Raghe Osman Wabire, headman, Bon, with Abib Aw Aden Jama, committee member, and Abib Robleh Hosh. Interview by author. Bon, Somaliland, March 17, 2000.

Rashid Sheikh Cabdilaahi Axmed "Garweyn," Chairman, Somaliland War Crimes Investigation Commission, with Hasan Aw Barakali, finance officer. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 23, 2000.

Robleh Michael Mariano, lawyer, former Somaliland MP, and founding member of the SNM. Interviews by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 27 and 29, 2000.

Saado Nur Gedde "Adamio," women's support organizer for the Boroma Conference. Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

Said Shukri, Chairman, SOYAAL (Somaliland veterans association), and founding member and former central committee member of the SNM. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 25, 2000.

Sanaag Agricultural Development Organization (SADO) staff, including Ismail Ahmed Hayir (accountant), Ismail Mohamoud Jama (administrator), and Ali Saleh Nasir (program manager). Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 1, 2000.

Sheikh Ibrahim Sheikh Yusuf Sheikh Madar, Chairman, Somaliland *Guurti*, with *Guurti* members Sheikh Ahmed Sheikh Nur, Aidiid Abdi Mohamed, Hasan Ahmed Farah, Omar Farah Boduye, Mohamed Gahanub Jama, Ahmed Musa Absiye, Suldan Abdirahman Sheikh Mohamed, and Abdirahman Qawden Mohamed. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, May 30, 2000.

Sheikh Ibrahim Sheikh Yusuf Sheikh Madar, Chairman, Somaliland *Guurti*, with *Guurti* members Sheikh Axmed Sheikh Nur, Sheikh Haji Abdi Hussein Yusuf, Sultan Abdirahman Sheikh Mohamud, Omar Sheikh Abdi Fure, Sheikh Musa Godad, Mohamed Dualle, Abdulkadir Mohamed Hasan, Farhan Isa Ubahale, and Abdulahi Sheikh Hasan. Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 30, 2000.

Shukri H. Ismail “Shukri Bandari,” Coordinator, Candlelight for Health and Education (a Somaliland NGO). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, January 30, 2000.

Suad Ibrahim Abdi, Researcher, Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD), lawyer, and Secretary General, Nagaad (an umbrella group for Somaliland’s women’s organizations). Interview by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, November 4, 1999.

Suldan Ibrahim Daar, leader of Boroma’s minority Gabooye community, with Mohamed Hasan Abdi. Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 18, 2000.

Suleiman A. Duale, member of Burao mobile court. Interview by author. Burao, Somaliland, June 2, 2000.

Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, President, Amoud University, with Boroma intellectuals Hasan Omar Halas, Abdirahman Abdulahi Jimaale, Mohamed Sheikh Abdillahi, Yasin Kalinle, Ahmed Nur Alim, and Abdirahman Mohamoud Musa. Interview by author. Boroma, Somaliland, March 15, 2000.

Zeinab Mohamed Hasan, Women’s Coordinator, Life and Peace Institute (LPI). Interviews by author. Hargeisa, Somaliland, March 23 and May 28, 2000.

Interviews – Puntland

Abdirahman Osman Shuke, Director, Puntland Development Research Centre (PDRC). Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 27, 2000.

Abdulahi Muse Yusuf, intellectual. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 28, 2000.

Abduljabar Hassan Dini, Director, Care-Puntland. Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 28, 2000.

Abdulkadir Sheikh Mohamoud Salah. Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 25 and 27, 2000.

Abdisalam Ali Farah, intellectual. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 26, 2000.

Asha Gelle Dirie, MP. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 27, 2000.

Beldacha Ali Farah. Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 25, 2000.

Bosteio Said Yusuf, Chairwoman, Somalia Reunification Women's Union (SRWU). Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 25, 2000.

Deeqa Jama Olujog, President and founder, Abjan Research and Development Centre (ARDC), with Ahmed Maalin Sheikh Jama, Director of Development of Somali Language Studies, and Mohamud Musa Ali, social sciences and administration. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 26, 2000.

Ibrahim Aware, Dandoor NGO. Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 24, 2000.

Ismail Abdi Ahmed, Director, NetCo (telecommunications business). Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 25, 2000.

Ismail Haji Warsame, Chief of Cabinet. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 26, 2000.

Mohamed Abdulkadir "Deak," Editor, Sahan Newspaper. Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 24, 2000.

Mohamoud Ali Said "Gumbe," Diakonia NGO. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 26, 2000.

Mohamoud Jama Afbaylaar, MP for Bari Region. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 26, 2000.

Mohamoud Sheikh Hamid, Chairman, and Abdulahi Issa Ali, Project Manager, Kaalo NGO. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 27, 2000.

Mulki Caydiid Maxamed, editor and publisher, Garsoore (newspaper on women's and social issues). Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 27, 2000.

Osman Haji Mire, Mayor of Bosaso. Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 28, 2000.

Osman Haji Mohamoud, Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU). Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland, June 26, 2000.

Salad Dahir Aden, Administrator, Puntland Development Research Center (PDRC). Interview by author. Bosaso, Puntland, June 23, 2000.

Yusuf Maalim Ibrahim, Director General, Ministry of Interior. Interview by author. Garowe, Puntland. June 26, 2000.

Interviews – Other

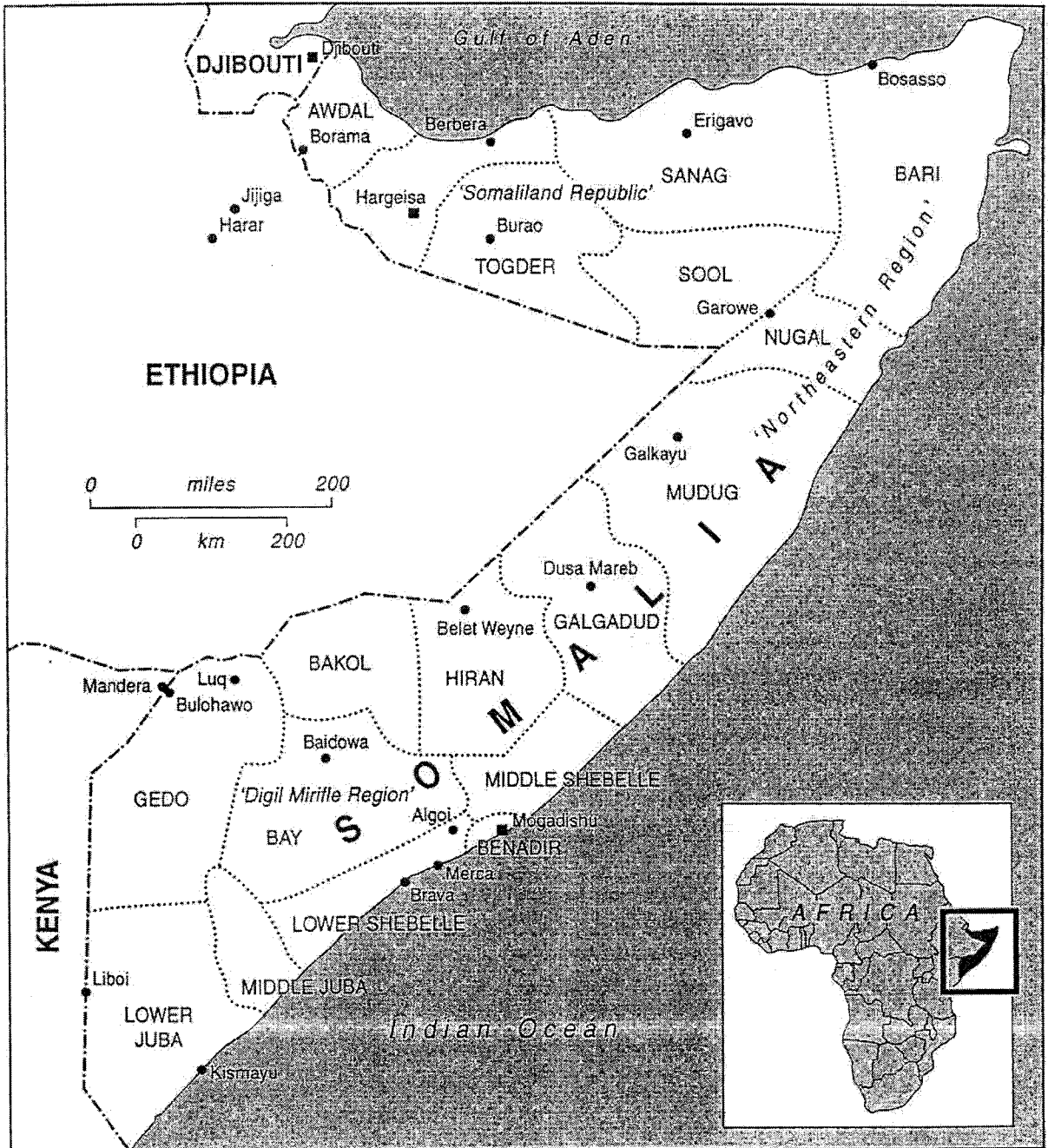
Ahmed Yusuf Farah, War-torn Societies Project. Interview by author. Nairobi, Kenya, January 12, 2000.

Bowen, Merle, Professor of Political Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Interview by author (telephone). April 17, 1994.

Fatima Gibril, Director, Horn of Africa Relief and Development (Nairobi- and Puntland-based NGO). Interview by author. Nairobi, Kenya, July 18, 2000.

Mohamed Abshir “Waldo,” businessman. Interview by author. Nairobi, Kenya, April 20, 2000.

Appendix A: Map of Somaliland/Somalia



Appendix B: Notes on Field Research

This appendix provides further details on the fieldwork conducted in Somaliland and Puntland, including the sources of financial, logistical and research support for this research, details on the survey instrument, the political context in which the work took place, and constraints and their implications for the choice of methodology.

Research Support

This research was made possible by a Democracy Fellowship sponsored by World Learning, and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). From December 1997 through July 2000 I served as a Democracy Fellow with USAID's Regional Economic Development Services Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA) in Nairobi, Kenya. In addition to providing advisory and program support to USAID/REDSO's own programs in conflict prevention and mitigation in East Africa and the Horn, this fellowship also afforded me the opportunity and provided some financial support for conducting field research in Somaliland and Puntland. The primary field research was carried out during several research trips of one to two weeks each to Somaliland, as well as one to Puntland, between September 1999 and June 2000.

I received assistance in the field from two local organizations that are affiliated with the War-torn Societies Project (WSP) of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). The Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (SCPD) in Hargeisa and the Puntland Development Research Centre (PDRC) in the Bosasso and Garowe in Puntland provided invaluable logistical and research support and a local base from which to conduct my work.

The Basic Survey Instrument

As described in Chapter 1, interviews with respondents were loosely structured around the following set of questions:

On the founding of Somaliland:

- Did you participate in any of the peace conferences (Sheikh, Burao, Boroma, Hargeisa, etc.) that have led to peace and the founding of Somaliland? What was your role in the conferences, and what can you tell me about them?
- What was the role of the elders and of the Somali National Movement (SNM) in the peace conferences?

On the Guurti:

- How did the elders and the *Guurti* come to be part of the government?
- How were members of the *Guurti* and Parliament selected? Did you participate in the selection? Was the selection process good, or were there problems?
- Do you know who your clan representatives to the *Guurti* and parliament are?
- Do you contact these representatives or other members of government for help in solving problems? If so, who do you usually contact, and on what kinds of issues?
- Do these representatives ever come to your community? Can they help you or your community to solve problems or meet needs?
- How does the role of your representatives today compare with the previous regimes?
- Does having the *Guurti* as part of the government make the government better? If so, how?
- Are there problems with having the elders as part of the government?

- What should be the role of the *Guurti*? Will its role change over time? Should it have a role in running the daily affairs of the government?
- Is the *Guurti* only needed during the transition, or will it always be needed?

On clan and political party representation:

- What are the benefits and problems of selecting representatives based on clan?
- What role should clan identity play in politics and government?
- Is Somaliland ready for multiparty elections?
- Do you see any problems with multiparty elections? How will the problems of the multiparty system of the 1960s, when parties became more and more divided along clan lines, be avoided?
- How will multiparty elections affect the negotiated clan balance that Somaliland has now?

On the role of women:

- How would you describe the role of women in the Somaliland political system?
- How does this compare to the role of women in the past?
- Is having the *Guurti* as part of the government good or bad for the role of women?
- Do elders understand the needs of women? Do they listen to women? Do they represent women?
- What are the attitudes of other men towards women's role in politics? Of other women?
- How can women improve or increase their role and voice in the political system?

On local government and decentralization:

- How are decisions made about community needs and community development projects and priorities?
- How does the decision-making process now compare to that under the previous regimes of Somalia?
- What is the role of the central government and the line ministries in the decision-making process? What services does the central government provide, whose salaries does it pay for, etc.?
- How are revenues raised and allocated locally?
- How are local administrators selected or appointed? Why have they not been selected locally?
- What role do local elders play in decision-making processes, project implementation, etc.?

The Political Context

The regions of the former Republic of Somalia undoubtedly provide a challenging political environment in which to conduct research. Having spent the last decade or more in various stages of civil war and complex post-conflict rebuilding processes, there are many political sensitivities apparent. The ebb and flow of conflict in the south, various peace efforts, the words, actions and distribution of resources of the international community, and a variety of other factors produce a dynamic, complex, and sometimes tense, atmosphere. In Somaliland, however, the increasing longevity of the peace and the stability of the new political structures despite numerous challenges has led to a

mounting confidence among Somalilanders, and an increasing relaxation of barriers to open communication and debate. Puntland's less consolidated political status contributes to a somewhat more reserved attitude towards discussing recent political developments with a foreign researcher.

A key factor that may have influenced the attitudes and responsiveness of interviewees during the course of this research was the at times tense political situation arising due to the controversial Djibouti peace initiative for Somalia. President Ishmael Omar Gueleh of Djibouti announced his initiation of the peace process that came to be known as the "Djibouti Initiative" shortly after I began my field research in September 1999. Initially this had only limited impact, but by February and March 2000, when the Initiative was gaining momentum, it became a very sensitive political issue in both Somaliland and Puntland. Gueleh was trying to convince Somaliland and Puntland to participate in the discussions, but in both cases the governments rejected these overtures. While this decision generally met with public support in Somaliland, it was very much against apparent public wishes in Puntland. During this period, there was somewhat greater sensitivity about this research given that it involved asking questions about the foundations of the governments and their current functioning and effectiveness. This was a relatively minor impediment in Somaliland, where feelings were relatively high on this issue during only one of my research visits, and I only faced minor direct interference on account of this issue.

On the other hand, in Puntland there was continuing open confrontation between proponents of the official government position and the public, and there were relatively large scale protests in Garowe, the Puntland capital, both before and during my visit there in June 2000, in some cases leading to violence. In this sense, the timing of my research

visit was somewhat unfortunate, as most Puntlanders assumed that my research must somehow be connected to these highly sensitive issues. This to some extent limited my access to individuals in Puntland, particularly in the government, as I was unable to interview a number of individuals who were thoroughly embroiled in this debate. I also suspect that it had a greater impact on the openness with which interviewees responded than in Somaliland.

Security concerns, along with logistical constraints, also limited my access to the two eastern regions of Somaliland, Sool and Sanaag, where political tensions are somewhat higher due to contested sovereignty between Somaliland and Puntland.¹ The security situation in central and western Somaliland, however, is generally quite good, and I had ready access to those regions of the country. In these regions, it was simply time and travel logistics that limited my access.

Other Methodological Constraints

A key methodological constraint arises from the fact that I do not speak Somali. While quite a few of the interviews were conducted in English, for many others I required the assistance of a translator, which has obvious implications for the quality of interview data. Information may be lost or changed in translation of both questions and responses, and the nature of my sometimes complex questions may not always have been clearly understood.

Perhaps at least as important, it is necessary to be perpetually cognizant of the potential impact of the additional presence of a translator in an environment where

¹ Somaliland's claims are based on the British colonial borders. Puntland makes its claims based on clan affiliation, since the Dulbahante and Warsengele clans that primarily inhabit these regions are part of the Harti Darood clan grouping together with the Mijerteyn who inhabit the other regions of Puntland.

willingness to talk openly is not always unlimited. Political sensitivity often, though by no means always, is associated with clan affiliation. One must consider, therefore, the possibility that using a translator from one clan when interviewing representatives from another about sometimes sensitive political issues may have an impact on the interviewee's openness and honesty in responding.

I chose to work primarily with one translator each in Somaliland and Puntland, rather than trying to find separate translators to work with each clan. The latter approach might have had some advantages in ensuring greater openness from the individuals that I interviewed, but on the other hand would have been widely perceived by those watching the conduct of my work as a negative, clanist approach of the sort that is more likely to exacerbate rather than reduce tensions. Moreover, in Somaliland, while inter-clan issues certainly do exist, the overall level of comfort with the present inter-clan agreements, and perhaps the particularly open character of northwesterners as well, meant that working with multiple translators was clearly unnecessary. Somaliland is increasingly known for its openness, and it was rare that I had any indication that my translator's presence inhibited discussion. Finally, I made every effort to find translators who were highly regarded within their communities at large, seeking recommendations from a wide range of individuals, and I was successful in finding individuals who were able, in addition to translating, to offer many insights into the political workings of their regions, and the roles and perceptions of particular individuals as well.

It is important to note that despite all of the factors that might have inhibited individuals in being open about their beliefs and experiences, the transcripts of the interviews themselves reveal that most individuals were extremely open and outspoken, regardless of the presence of a translator, political sensitivities, or other issues. Many of

those interviewed freely expressed controversial views, whether regarding the legitimacy of Somaliland's secession, the actions of the president or other government officials in Puntland and Somaliland, or with respect to other "hot" issues of the moment.

Particularly given Somalis' experiences under the Siyad Barre government, where every word had to be carefully guarded, especially with a stranger, this openness was particularly revealing of both the true character of Somalis – many of whom love to discuss and debate issues such as these – and their confidence in their present situation.

A few words on the decision to undertake a very informal approach to the interviewing methodology are also in order. This informal approach was in part an adaptation to local modes of political debate among Somalis. For example, particularly among men (though occasionally among women as well), the afternoon "khat session," at which men gather informally to chew khat, drink tea, and debate the issues of the day, serves as an excellent forum for exploring political attitudes and values, but it is necessarily informal. My occasional opportunities to conduct interviews during such sessions provided a wealth of insight. Use of a formal survey instrument would have changed the dynamic in ways that, while more rigorous, might have proven less productive.

Similarly, an egalitarian, open-door attitude is often evident among Somalis, particularly in rural areas. Bystanders and passers-by often joined the interviews, and respect for local norms often made it difficult to control who actually participated, especially as private interview spaces were not always available. But even in government offices in Somali culture, doors tend to be very open, and individuals other than those with whom I had arranged the interview might enter in and participate. Again, flexibility in the interview methodology seemed to be the most appropriate way to handle this

factor. A more rigorous technique would certainly be possible in a Somali context, but would be better employed in a context where one had the opportunity to spend an extended period of time in a community. Unfortunately, in group interviews it was often more difficult to explore issues in depth, but there was often the added benefit of hearing participants respond – positively or negatively – to the ideas of others. Individuals and groups also varied in terms of the amount of time they were willing or able to devote to the interviews, so some interviews did not reach the depth or answer all of the questions that I might have hoped.

Finally, with respect to the sampling and interviewing among women I highlight several points. First, while it would have been preferable to conduct interviews with women using a woman as a translator, this was not possible due to both the logistics involved in traveling with a large party to the rural areas where translators were most often needed, and to the shortage of women available to work with the necessary language skills (since most with adequate English skills and education were already employed by local or international NGOs). However, as with the men, the openness of women in expressing their views, including at times their anger with men, is readily evident from the interview transcripts. Secondly, while I attempted to capture a broad cross-section of Somaliland society in my sample, including women, women's views were undersampled, and not all sectors of society were captured (e.g., groups such as urban women traders and nomadic women were both largely excluded). There is both need and opportunity for exploring the attitudes of women towards politics in general, and indigenization in particular, in much further detail. This should be a priority for further research.

Somali Language

Where I use Somali words in the text, they are italicized and defined with the first usage. Note that Somali does not have standard spellings for either names or places. The capital city of the former Republic of Somalia, for example, can be written as either Mogadishu or Moqdishu, the capital of Somaliland as Hargeysa or Hargeisa, and the name of the former dictator as Mohammed Siad Barre, Mahammad Siyad Bare, or a number of other permutations of each of these. In the case of place names or the names of public individuals such as Mohamed Siyad Barre that appear multiple times, I will simply select one of the spellings and try to be consistent in its use throughout the text, although I will preserve the spellings used in any written quotations. For interviewees, I have tried where possible to record names as respondents themselves spell them, although in many cases this was not possible.