Somali Reconstruction and Local Initiative: Amoud University

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*O*bservers of African nation-states assumed that Somalia was unique in the continent as the nation and the state nearly overlapped. The population shared many social and cultural traits, such as language, modes of economic production, and religion. Given its social and cultural base, the state was thought to be viable. Just over a decade ago, it would have been impossible to imagine the disintegration of the Somali state. Today, many political commentators are similarly strident about the clan structure being essential to the very essence of a Somali community. They argue that it is not possible to reconstruct Somalia without the clan being the basis of the new polity.

These essentialist arguments are grounded in a limited understanding of Somali political history. They also lack an appreciation of the art of state formation. The "shared social and cultural heritage" thesis fails to recognize that common traits can form *a necessary*, *but insufficient* foundation for building state institutions that cater to the community's collective interest. The ability of cultural resources to bind a society together depends on how they are used. The socially unifying appeal of these resources declines when mined continuously without the society reinvesting in them. The callous exploitation of shared cultural resources not only impoverishes their richness and resiliency, but may also turn them into a national liability. This is exactly what has transpired in Somalia. However, if a society does not take the long-term vitality of cultural resources for granted, but continuously and con-

sciously replenishes their richness and value, they will continue to be a source of social cohesion. This means that a society must actively nourish inherited shared values and develop new ones that reinforce the appeal of this common heritage.

The most important addition to Somalia's pool of shared resources since the middle of last century has been the (colonial) state and its institutions. The imposition of the state, in its colonial and post-colonial forms, induced social processes that had the potential to reinforce and positively transform shared values in an inclusive manner, or to undermine and distort their appeal to the entire community.[1] The state's impact on the vitality of shared values depends on whether the authorities use public institutions to nurture a common or a sectarian agenda. The diminishing attractiveness of traditional, shared Somali values is not due to Somalis' primordial predisposition for divisiveness. Instead, it is due to the misuse of public institutions and resources for private gain. Moreover, the use of public power to intimidate and punish those who try to protect common causes has delegitimated public authority and the worth of these public resources. The authorities' cynical manipulation of shared values and traditions to mollify public distrust and prolong their tenure further alienated the public from the state. Consequently, it has been extremely difficult to mobilize people on the basis of shared sentiments.

Traditional analysts of Somali society have cited two occurrences as evidence of the Somalis' sectarian nature despite the fact that they share a common language, culture, and religion.[2] These are the Somalis' recent antipathy toward the state and nationalism, and the warlords' success in carving up the country into fiefdoms. Advocates of the clanist thesis wrongly insist that a clan-based federal dispensation is the only political formula that will reunite Somalia. They assume that genealogical differences led to Somalia's disintegration.[3] I argue differently and propose that the causes of the Somali calamity are state leaders' failure to nurture shared cultural and social commonalities, and sectarian entrepreneurs' instrumentalist accentuation of social differences. The latter has become a lethal weapon in the hands of sectarians.

The state's credibility has been destroyed because it failed to guard the common interest. And the erosion of social solidarity based on inclusive values makes Somali reconstruction an awesome task. Putnam's thesis that building a stock of social capital requires many decades seems to apply here.[4] If Putnam is right, it will take a long

(almost millenarian) time for *generalized* social trust to develop. However, Tendler suggests that public trust can be built in a relatively short time.[5] These authors' seemingly contradictory positions are reconcilable. Communities and states can steadily generate trust and confidence for a common cause. Shared values across communities are the basis of civic bonds and trust in a *society*. But the state must take leadership in nurturing society-wide civic bonds. Communities, in turn, must scrupulously monitor state actions to ensure that public institutions function in ways that consistently enhance the quality of those shared values. Such partnership between state and community will facilitate social capital generation in a relatively short time.[6]

The following discussion about Amoud University shows that building people's confidence that they can work together for the common good and establishing their trust in public institutions are not necessarily long-term propositions. I argue that there is one critical factor to reversing the trends of the last three decades in Somalia. That key is to create institutions that constrain sectarian entrepreneurs while strengthening shared values and hopes. The community-owned Amoud University may signal a new type of public effort in Somalia, one that will enhance accountability, rebuild public trust, and advance a common agenda.

The rest of the essay is divided into three parts. The first section panoramically sketches Somali elite politics and describes how they destroyed public trust in state institutions and undermined the importance of shared norms. Part two narrates how some Borama community members are trying to resuscitate common cause through the establishment of Amoud University. The final section assesses Amoud University's significance to the remaking of public confidence in Borama and Somalia, and the re-forming of an inclusive national identity.

II. Elite Politics and the Destruction of Public Trust

A key development problem in Africa is the discrepancy between a state's claims and the impact of its actions on communities. Most Africans assume that state managers care little about the common good and are in business for themselves and their clients. Somalis are extreme among Africans in this antipathy. Hostile feelings toward state authorities rarely existed forty years ago when most countries became independent, hoping to replace colonial bosses with regimes

that respected Africans' dignity and managed public affairs justly. This section briefly sketches how the mismanagement of public institutions in Somalia turned hope into despair.

Public despondency in the continent is deep. In fact, today citizens are shocked when they receive courteous and efficient service from a public servant. This sharply contrasts with popular opinion from forty years ago when people embraced the nationalist project.[7] Somalis shared this optimism in 1960 and their nationalism generated incredible fervor and social unity that reflected *their hope for democracy and development*. However, the sanguine public did not realize that their hopes depended on the quality of the national elite and intra-elite politics. Somali elite politics manifested two contradictory political and economic tendencies. One emphasized a Somali-wide identity, nationalism, the protection of the common good, and justice in the dispensation of the rule of law (the civic movement). The other predisposition embraced sectarianism and clanism, driven by individualistic interest without regard for community well-being (the sectarian movement).[8]

The Somali-wide versus the sectarian trajectories were contradictory post-colonial national strategies embedded in the new republic's fabric, and marked the state's institutional history since 1960. Four elite qualities shaped the civic or sectarian impact on public institutions and public trust: the degree of elite unity or lack thereof; the legitimacy of its leadership within the group and in the eyes of the public; the leadership's understanding of the nature of the collective project; and the clarity of its strategy in translating plans into concrete reality.

The independence euphoria and the unification of former British and Italian Somalilands in 1960 generated national sentiments that masked differences between groups with competing agendas (1960–64).[9] The patriotic fervor induced by the 1964 war with Ethiopia prolonged this spirit's life span. But the appearance of nationalist solidarity was short-lived.[10] While the regime first enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy with the public, the leadership showed little understanding of the particulars of the nationalist project. Moreover, they did not articulate a clear road map for achieving any development agenda. Consequently, the regime undertook minimal institutional reform other than streamlining the British and Italian colonial administrations into a single apparatus.[11]

The second republic (1964–7) is singularly unique in post-colonial Somali history on two accounts. First, the 1964 national parliamentary elections exposed the ascendancy and strength of the sectarian forces

and the opportunistic tendencies of many elite members. The number of political parties proliferated and grew into twenty-four as individual elite members tried to gain a parliament seat in order to loot the public purse. Only four of these parties succeeded in winning parliamentary seats. Second, after the elections, the nationalist forces made their last systematic effort to contain the sectarian tide engulfing public life. For instance, the nationalist forces attempted to insulate the civil service from undisciplined politicians' particularistic intervention. Further, President Osman and Premier Hussein had an ambition to do more than merely integrate the two former colonies. However, this regime failed to enunciate its development project clearly. In spite of this weakness, the Hussein government understood that to make public institutions effective and root out corruption and the abuse of public power, it needed to *bureaucratize* its institutions.

Two of the Premier's initiatives signaled his institution-building strategy. First, he appointed his ministers based on their professional skills. As a result of this action, a significant number of key portfolios went to northerners. Many southern MPs were not happy with the ministerial line up and accused the Prime Minister of favoritism. One of the northerners, Mohamoud Issa Jama, who was nominated as Minister of Agriculture, voluntarily gave up his post so southerners could be accommodated. The second and most important decision was to reform the civil service and establish a professional and autonomous Civil Service Commission. The Commission's mandate, with technical assistance from United Nations experts, was to professionalize the service. The assignment started with reevaluating all major posts in the civil service and the qualifications of their occupants. It was discovered that many senior officials were incompetent and ill equipped to lead their departments. As a result, the Commission recommended relieving these individuals of their responsibilities for two years and giving them an opportunity to improve their capacity. The Prime Minister heeded this advice and dismissed nearly 200 senior officials over the next year.[12] Except for two northerners, all those discharged were from the republic's southern region, a significant portion of the southern elite's leading elements.[13]

This attempt at institutional reform was short-lived as an administration less concerned with curbing corruption and insulating the public service came to power after the 1967 presidential election.[14] President Osman appeared to have lost the election for three reasons. First, he was competing with a popular former Prime Minister. Second,

Premier Hussein's anti-corruption drive and termination of a large number of southern elite members from the civil service alienated a powerful political constituency. Third, candidate Sharmarke and his allies promised seductive recompense for parliamentarians who voted for him. Sharmarke's promises worked their magic, and he captured the presidency with a slim margin.

President Sharmarke and his Premier, Egal, understood the volatility of the electoral process. Immediately, they started planning for the 1969 parliamentary election. The elite, and especially those in parliament, failed to be united by anything except their willingness to trade off any public resource for private gain.[15] The leaders of the government, having fueled this tendency during the presidential election, knew the only way to remain in power was to appeal to the material interests of the MPs, tantalizing them with rewards and promises. Given these priorities, the regime abandoned the civil service reform initiated by its predecessor. Corruption and the politics of divide-and-rule, rather than fostering an inclusive collective project, became the name of the game.[16]

The 1969 parliamentary elections confirmed that the elite's sectarian faction had gained the upper hand. The struggle for individual political survival divided **and** united this cohort. Soon, the political process disintegrated as 62 political parties fielded candidates. Ambitious individuals who were not selected by the main parties formed their own. These self-styled opposition parties won 50 of the 123 seats. However, once the election was over, the opposition MPs abandoned their parties and joined the ruling party. The shift of political "loyalty" was induced by the clear recognition that MPs could access public largesse only if they were associated with the government. Moreover, political bosses in power enticed these MPs to join the ruling party. In the end, the sole opposition member of parliament was former Prime Minister Hussein.

The military took control of the government before the sectarian stampede could run its course, and the public poured into the streets to rejoice over the termination of corrupt politics. The new order enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy during the first years of its tenure. The swift and effective management of the 1973–74 drought, the introduction of Latin script for the Somali language, and the expansion of education and other services increased the regime's popularity. The military, with Soviet prodding, adopted socialism as its development strategy. However, the government showed no sign of comprehending

what socialism meant in the Somali context and it blindly adopted Soviet-tested but unproductive economic management methods.[17] Consequently, it retained, at first, the rudderless public service policy of the last civilian regime.

The Somali army's defeat in the Ethiopian-Somali war (1977 – 78) brought the regime's honeymoon period to an end. The government discarded citizens' rights and any pretence of supporting an inclusive national project as the public and significant elements of the military challenged the regime's right to govern. As paranoia engulfed the leadership, it began a massive campaign to put loyal supporters in all key government positions without regard to merit or due process. The majority of these new and quickly promoted public employees did not have the skills or experience to manage complex public affairs, further damaging the effectiveness of state apparatuses. Having lost legitimacy, the regime used military power to punish entire regions and communities deemed disloyal. A most sectarian and brutal use of the military machine occurred in 1988 when Hargeisa and Burao, two of the country's largest cities, were destroyed. These cities were targeted for special treatment after guerrillas from one of the opposition movements, the Somali National Movement (SNM), impetuously entered them. The local populations were devastated, and survivors fled to refugee camps across the border in Ethiopia.

The nation bled for another three years before the regime was finally ousted from its final stronghold in the capital. By then, unfortunately, all national institutions were ruined. Moreover, the separate opposition movements, that collectively destroyed the old regime, were sectarian themselves and had no national reconstruction program. They fought each other for control and in the process ruined what little the old regime left behind. The prolonged civil war and the terror instigated by warlords reversed integrative national processes. Warlords and faction leaders caused the fragmentation of the country into "clan" fiefdoms. Most reasonable Somalis agree that Siyaad Barre's regime was dreadful, but it was better than what followed. They often note that "a bad government is better than none." Every government since independence made some contribution to shared values, except for two: that of 1967 – 69 and those dominated by warlords since 1991.

The people's antipathy toward public management is the antithesis of how Somalis felt about the nationalist project in 1960. Any thoughtful citizen who takes account of what unifying values have been added

to the old stock of shared traditions since independence will find slim pickings. The first reinforcement of shared traditions was the unification of British and Italian Somalilands in 1960, spearheaded by northern leaders. The second episode is President Osman's dignified and democratic departure from the presidency in 1967 after failing to be reelected. President Osman's compliance with the constitution signaled that no one was above the law of the land. Somalis now recognize him as an exemplary founding president whom they wish others would emulate. A third tangible addition to Somali social capital was Premier Hussein's valiant effort to professionalize public service and insulate it from sectarian political intervention. Premier Hussein's qualities underscore the character of public service for which most Somalis so desperately yearn. The fourth and perhaps the most enduring addition to Somali social capital was the development of the orthography of the Somali language. This act is taken for granted to the extent that even faction leaders desperate to create their little "homelands" use it as their official medium.

Somalia's social and political balance sheet since independence is dominated by liabilities that have significantly diminished the nation's sense of a common destiny. The murderous and illegal uses of state power and the sectarian exploitation of national resources figure prominently in the population's collective memory of the last three decades. Moreover, the incompetent management of public affairs for most of the recent history has eroded Somalis' communal self-confidence. *Undoing these liabilities is what reconciliation and reconstruction is all about.* Common projects that are effectively and fairly managed are essential to establishing collective self-worth and rebuilding inclusive polity and identity. These seem to be Amoud University's guiding principles.

III. Amoud University: The Rebirth of a Public Spirit

Attempts to rebuild the Somali state have floundered and conventional international strategies seem not to produce meaningful results.[18] Warlords' and faction leaders' machinations to create homeland-like mini-states in the provinces, akin to apartheid in South Africa, have also failed to gain the public's respect and the international community's recognition. Two of the more "advanced" clan-states have succeeded in restoring peace in most areas of their provinces, but have yet to establish legitimate, functioning, inclusive

institutions. Even some of the ardent supporters of these entities admit that they are corrupt and beyond reform.[19] In their present guise, then, none of them can be a blueprint for national redemption. The alternative has been civic-minded local initiatives to repair community infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, water, and electricity. These local initiatives have made important contributions to reducing hardship in many communities across the country. However, these and other efforts by non-governmental organizations, whether local or international, have not been able to do more than restore local services.

Amoud University is the only *known* exception to this locally oriented activity. This recently chartered, *community-owned* institution is also instigating a new debate between localities about national concerns. Before examining the dynamics this event generated, it is necessary to consider the historical background of the Borama community that made the university's establishment possible.

A. Borama: A Brief History

Like other towns in British Somaliland, Borama, a village established in 1921, had only Quranic schools. Religious men dominated Borama's social circle. However, many urbane people from Zeila (an old cosmopolitan coastal port) who moved to town had a moderating influence.[20] A British colonial officer with a leg injury came to Borama in the mid-1930s to determine whether the town's population was more receptive to secular education than others in the Protectorate. Borama's elders learned that people opposed to secular education in Burao had injured the officer. Since religious men dominated Borama, they, too, rejected the officer's message and influenced Borama's opinion makers to organize a demonstration against the officer's visit by hoisting tall religious flags and singing religious hymns. Nonetheless, the demonstrators never threatened the officer's personal safety.

Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur established Borama's first non-Quranic one-room school (*Madrasa*) in 1932.[21] He taught Arabic and arithmetic. Similar schools existed in other regions of the country. Religious leaders did not object to *Madrasas* since Christians did not run these schools and the language of instruction was that of the Quran. Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur, however, was not a typical religious man who taught in *Madrasas*. He invented non-Arabic and non-Latin script for the Somali language and trained some of his pupils in the use of this script. Moreover, some of the merchants in Borama and Zeila used the script to

conduct their business correspondence. Borama's religious opinion makers did not object to Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur's Somali script, despite its not being Arabic. Although Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur's history and that of his script have not been thoroughly investigated, Borama's religious men may have tolerated his invention since he was a member of their club and came from a prominent religious family.

The religious community's acceptance of Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur's orthography as a non-threatening innovation may have softened Borama's political terrain for secular education in later years. Within a decade, his *Madrasa* students were among the most educated and respected young men of Borama. Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur's school had become an institution with an excellent reputation by the 1940s. About this time, the unforgettable Mahmoud Ahmed Ali visited Borama. Ali, a former head clerk in the colonial service in Berbera, had resigned from his job to, single-handedly, campaign for secular education in the Protectorate and to convince Somalis of the benefits of modern education.[22]

Ali's initial strategy was to introduce secular education in English to Somali people through *Madrasa* teachers in various towns. He assumed that by collaborating with religious *Madrasa* teachers he would blunt the opposition of the more traditional leaders. His first encounters were in *Madrasas* of Sheikh Jama in Berbera and Sheikh Ali Ibrahim in Hargeisa. The two teachers turned down his offer, for they did not intend to become involved in non-Islamic education. Ali tried but failed to win over the two teachers to the proposition that modern education meant neither abandoning Islamic learning nor proselytizing for Christianity.

Ali's final stop was in Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur's *Madrasa* in Borama. He explained his secular education program for Somalis and his disappointing encounters in Berbera and Hargeisa. Aw Abdi told Ali that he would call a meeting of town elders so that Ali could directly present the issue to them. When Ali explained his ambition at the elders' gathering, they endorsed his mission.[23] "Qabuul," which means *accepted* in Somali, was the word the elders used to signal their approval. Ali was moved by the elders' simple response and that approval marked a watershed in northern Somali educational history. Borama's elders decided to try something, namely secular education, that the leading lights of the northern Somali community had rejected. This was the second time Borama took the initiative in such matters. The first occasion was Aw Abdi's invention of a Somali script.

At that meeting, Ali inquired about who paid Aw Abdi's salary for teaching in the *Madrasa.* The answer was no one. Aw Abdi depended on his father. Ali then asked whether the community would be willing to collect 360 rupees to pay for Aw Abdi's services for the following year. The elders successfully raised the money by noon the following day. Ali took the money and deposited it at the main government office in town and told Aw Abdi to collect monthly pay of thirty rupees from that office.

Ali told his supporters in Borama that he would go to Hargeisa and solicit the colonial government's support for secular education. He also promised that Borama would receive its fair share of whatever resources he was able to obtain from the administration. A few months later, he returned to Borama and reported to the elders that the colonial government gave him 17 pounds sterling for education. Ali invested most of the money in a classroom hut in Hargeisa. However, he presented a set of textbooks, pencils, and chalk to the Borama elders. The elders were disappointed as they thought that Ali should have given Borama a larger share of the money.

In 1944, the colonial regime finally decided to initiate its educational program for the Protectorate by building elementary schools in several towns, including Borama. For the first two years, Borama children were smuggled into school to register, as the religious leaders' opposition to secular education was still fierce. However, that opposition dissipated in the third year, as people realized that the children were not being converted to Christianity. Consequently, the school could not accommodate the large number of children who came to enroll.

The need for an intermediate school arose as the first group of children approached the end of the elementary program (third grade). Intense competition ensued between Hargeisa and Borama over the intermediate school's location. Ali, who was then a senior education officer, was the chief advocate for the Hargeisa location. Claiming Borama was a better location than Hargeisa, the Borama elders petitioned the Education Department. R.C. Bell, a new education officer for the Protectorate from Rhodesia, arrived in the middle of this tussle. After some deliberations, Hargeisa was ruled out as a site for the school due to a water shortage in the area. Arabsiyo (35 miles west of Hargeisa) was discussed as an alternative site. Bell was so impressed with the persistence of the Borama elders that he decided to travel there with a deputy, Yusuf Haji Aden. Once in Borama, he asked the town elders to take him to the school's potential site. The elders took

him to Amoud Valley. It had rained a few hours before Bell and his guides arrived, and the intermittent river was still full. Amoud Valley was then thickly forested, and the beauty of the vista and the surrounding mountains absorbed Bell's attention. Before leaving the valley, he decided to build the first intermediate school in British Somaliland there.

Four years later, the struggle began over the location of the Protectorate's first Vocational Training Center (VTC), a training center for primary school teachers and government clerks. The contest was between the Protectorate's eastern (areas east of Hargeisa) and western regions.[24] The governor and his team awarded the bid to Amoud. R.C. Bell laid the foundation stone for the school in 1952. When VTC accepted its first class of students, Borama needed a secondary school to have a complete primary, vocational, and secondary school system. Amoud Secondary School was established later. Sheikh village in the east, between Berbera and Burao, was the only other town in the Protectorate that had a complete primary and secondary school system at this time.[25]

Borama was at the forefront of educational development in northern Somalia during the final years of colonial rule. Now, let us briefly consider Borama's role in Somali post-colonial politics up to 1991. During the civilian regimes, 1960–69, Borama had three members of parliament. Abdi Booni was Deputy Prime Minister in the first government, while Aden Issaq was the Minister of Education and Defense in the cabinets of Premiers Hussein and Egal. During the military years, Colonel Musa Goud was Borama's native son in the governing military council. He held various ministerial posts during the military's long term in office. Generally speaking, Borama district, and later Awdal region, played a political role proportionate to the size of the region's population. Some dispute this and claim that Borama played a greater role in public service in the Somali Republic due to its more educated population. Whatever the relative merits of these arguments, Borama avoided being caught in the conflict of "clan giants." Consequently, for the most part, Borama was spared the physical devastation of the civil war that ruined Hargeisa, Burao, and later Mogadishu.

In 1991, the sectarian, armed Somali National Movement claimed sovereignty over northern Somalia after the collapse of the military regime. Immediately thereafter, the SNM declared northern Somalia's pseudo-independence. This act broke the SNM's promise, made dur-

ing its years in the political wilderness, that Somali unity was sacrosanct. The north's secession did not produce immediate peace nor establish a functioning administration. The governing coalition's tenure ended in April 1993, before stability was restored.[26] Elite SNM and non-SNM factions could not agree on a leadership succession method and many feared that a regional civil war might erupt in Hargeisa. Borama elders took the lead to mediate between the two groups by hosting a regional peace and political meeting in Borama that lasted for more than three months. A new head of the self-styled Somaliland Republic was elected without hostilities breaking out immediately.[27] Borama remained one of the most peaceful towns in Somalia during this period, and the community's elders were the principal guardians of stability. Two of the most distinguished, Haji Dahir Elmi and Haji Jama Muhumed, had supported education in Borama for over five decades.

Borama residents began to rehabilitate local schools and the hospital, which had fallen into disuse. By 1997, nearly 8,000 students were in schools in Borama and its vicinity. Such success alerted town elders to the question of what was to become of the growing number of pupils after completion of high school, without jobs or further educational opportunities available to them. Some of these children had already joined militias that terrorized people in the region. At this time, the idea of a Samaroon-owned[28] university began to circulate among some of the educated people in Borama. Several pamphlets, entitled Awdal University, were produced in the Middle East and distributed among the Somali diaspora in late 1993 and early 1994.

B. Amoud University: Investing in Community Institutions

The idea of establishing a university originated with a small group of Awdal natives living in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates. Four of these individuals, Abdisalan Ahmed Nur, Hassan Ali Haji, Suliman Ahmed Walhad, and Idris Ibrahim Awaleh, came to Borama in the summer of 1994 to share their idea with local groups. Given the community's dire need to find resources to support the small community police force and rehabilitate water and electrical services, most citizens considered the proposal to establish a university impractical. The advocates went back to Arabia, but conversations continued in the community. A year later, they returned in another attempt to persuade the community of the value of the venture. This time, the discussions

held in Borama and in Hargeisa were encouraging. A small committee was created to plan and organize a workshop in which the proposition would be ventilated.[29]

Fifty individuals participated in the deliberations of the workshop, held in Borama on August 6–7, 1996, including senior town elders, intellectuals, and other concerned citizens. Participants debated three key issues: the need for and feasibility of the university; proprietorship; and location of the university.

The town elders, inspired by the workshop organizers' commitment, took the lead in affirming the need for a university. Haji Jama Muhumed and Haji Dahir Elmi were key figures. Being pivotal in the development of public schools in Borama since the first one was built, the elders insisted that all major institutions of higher learning in other parts of the world had humble beginnings and Borama's should not be different. Despite the audience's skepticism, the elders' enthusiasm carried the day. By the first evening of the workshop, participants saw the need for a university. Furthermore, they concluded, in line with the modest beginning argument, that Borama natives at home and abroad would have to mobilize the necessary resources to lay the institution's foundation.

The item in the workshop that caused the most spirited debate was the university's name and ownership. The workshop organizers and others felt that the institution should belong to the Samaroon clan. This sectarian attitude was (and is) typical in all regions of the country, even at the time of this writing. Some vocal participants cautioned that it would be difficult to raise money from the local population and the diaspora if the university was not the sole preserve of the Awdal community. However, this feeling did not run as deep as one might have expected, given the conditions in the country. Other workshop participants argued that the university should belong to the community but must be open to all qualified Somali students, regardless of their region of origin.[30] The reasoning behind the inclusive pan-Somali thesis moved many. Consequently, they accepted Amoud as the university's name. After all, Amoud had been the home of the oldest public schools in northern Somalia. Moreover, the old boarding secondary school had had a national reputation for academic excellence, and its student body had come from all regions of the country.

Once participants reached these agreements, they elected two bodies: the University's Board of Trustees and its Management Committee, now known as the Technical Support Committee. The members of

the Board of Trustees were respected Borama elders. The Technical Support Committee (hereafter, Committee) consisted mostly of intellectuals and other professionals, some of whom had taught at the former Somali University in Mogadishu.

The Board and the Committee had two strategic short-term objectives: (a) to challenge the community to materially and morally support the establishment of the university (self-reliance on local resources), and (b) to rebuild community trust in public institutions and, consequently, reduce the influence of sectarian ideas. Well-attended public rallies and focused group meetings educated the public about the project. The Committee set a first precedent in self-reliance and each member contributed $150 to the university fund. Next, the Committee invited forty business leaders to a meeting with the Board and the Committee. All invitees appeared for the meeting, and Committee members broached the university idea and their plans for self-reliance. Once initial introductions had taken place, a leading businessman thanked the group for its efforts and invited his colleagues to take the lead in the venture. The business people agreed to donate $8,000 to the fund.

As the community's support surged, the Board and the Committee traveled to Hargeisa. They jointly petitioned the authorities to transfer ownership of the dilapidated former Amoud Secondary School property to the university. The authorities granted the community its wish. The Board and Committee then focused their attention on repairing the eight-kilometer gravel road that links Borama and Amoud. Many members of the community contributed labor and machinery to fix the road. The total cost of the repairs was over $8,500, of which the university paid $350.

Earlier, looters had completely vandalized the former intermediate school buildings, stealing all removable parts, such as roofing material, doors, and window frames. This was the fate of many public and private properties in all parts of the country during the civil war. As people fled the war, bandits stole whatever they could, often destroying valuables they could not take with them. Such acts of banditry came to be known as *bililiqo*.[31] The school buildings were completely ruined, except for the principal's house, which was saved by a family occupying it. In contrast, the old secondary school, less than one kilometer away, sustained minimal damage. Once Borama elders and the families who lived around the school realized what had happened to the intermediate school, they protected the properties of the secondary

school by taking residence in the buildings. Further, they hid away all school materials, such as books[32] and furniture. In one instance, a known Borama resident stole a window frame from the school. When the guardian families discovered the missing frame, they went to town, confronted the thief, and demanded the return of the frame. The thief refused. Fearing that the standoff would lead to violence that sectarian entrepreneurs could exploit, the elders intervened and purchased the frame back from the thief. Although the guardian families and the elders were worried that, by buying the stolen frame, they might be setting a precedent and encouraging other thieves to follow suit, fortunately no more stealing occurred. The only other damage the secondary school buildings sustained was from the elements because nearly all glass windows were shattered early on during the civil war.

The families living on and around the campus had turned two of the old classrooms into a school for their children, and university authorities permitted the community to use the building until a primary school could be built in the neighboring area. Moreover, families were allowed to continue to live in the school's residential compounds until they found proper accommodation. The university employed as groundskeepers those who had protected the property, and promised that their children could attend the university, providing they were academically qualified. Finally, the administration decided to slowly reclaim all school land from trespassers. (Some of the latter will become well-known and well-off Borama natives, within the next few years.) The university's considerate and nonconfrontational approach to solving social problems has endeared the budding institution to the community.

The date for Amoud University's first entrance examination, to be held in Borama, was announced. Sixty-nine students qualified to enroll in preparatory courses. In September 1997, they began a yearlong remedial course in basic sciences, English, and mathematics. Since university facilities were still under repair, these courses were conducted at the Sheikh Ali Jowhar Secondary School in the town. Borama citizens in Arabia bought and shipped textbooks (six subjects) to the students. After completing their pre-university courses, forty-seven of the students received satisfactory grades that qualified them for entrance. Currently, students pay a monthly tuition fee of $15 that covers a fraction of the university's operating costs.

The pace of activity increased as the opening date drew closer, and classroom, library, and office repairs neared completion. Organized

women's groups played a significant role in these preparations; they poured onto the campus in large numbers to prepare the buildings for use. Two of the three classroom buildings, each consisting of four lecture halls, the library (which was completely renovated and expanded), and staff offices were in mint condition before the university was formally inaugurated. A local manufacturer produced the classroom tables and chairs at a generous discount, and the Committee bought two buses to transport students since the campus was several kilometers from town and boarding facilities had not been restored yet. Somalis in the Middle East paid $18,000 to get the buses to Borama in time for the school's opening.[33]

The university needed two drivers for its buses, and the Committee consciously used the hiring process as a trust building exercise. A committee of ten people was selected of which five members were designated watchdogs of the five examiners. The monitors' duty was to insure that applicants received fair treatment. Such transparency was necessary because people did not have confidence that this competitive hiring process could produce a just outcome. The university advertised the posts in the local media; twenty-three applicants met basic requirements. Each candidate was interviewed and tested on traffic rules. Only eight candidates qualified to proceed to the next stage of elimination. The committee then announced to the community the date of the road test, and many people came to witness it. Three candidates were selected as the best drivers. The university employed two of them and placed the third on a waiting list. After the monitors had concurred with the selection, the onlookers applauded and declared the process fair and professional.

The university and the hiring committee earned much public trust for the unbiased, professional way that they conducted this minor, but foundational, event. The *symbolic value* of this association of the university with professionalism and fair management of public affairs was enormous. Now, the community calls on the university's services when public issues are at stake, or demands that others emulate the university's practice when carrying out responsibilities.[34]

The Board and the Committee set the inaugural date for November 4, 1998, and invited 300 guests from the region to the opening ceremony. Senior authorities from Hargeisa came to give their blessings to the university and donated $5,000. The occasion turned into a major celebration, with nearly 4,000 people, rather than only the 300 invitees. Most Borama businesses closed for the day. Many spectators com-

pared the crowd's joyous mood to the sentiment people expressed during the commemoration of independence in past decades. The university leaders announced that November 4, 1998, marked the beginning of a new and important chapter in Somali history. They told the audience that all resources that helped establish the university (except for book donations to the library from Book Aid International) came from Borama citizens or other Somalis in the region and the diaspora. They challenged leaders in the audience to heed their civic duty to harness the enormous latent energy in communities to promote the public good.

Students began their classes the day after the inaugural ceremony. All registered for twelve credit hours. College English, Introductory Psychology, and Biology were taught during this first term. Spring semester course offerings included Algebra, English, Somali Literature, and Psychology. The university has two departments, education and business administration. Education was selected as a foundational discipline due to the country's dire need for qualified schoolteachers. However, the community and the administration intend to reverse an old Somali educational tradition in which all university graduates expect to obtain positions in government. By contrast, it is hoped that those majoring in business administration will secure employment in established private enterprises or create their own businesses. Other disciplines envisaged for the future include public administration, public health and medicine, veterinary medicine, and agriculture.

Twelve lecturers, including the university's two administrators, teach in the degree program. Three of them lectured at the former Somali University, and the chief administrator of Amoud University, Suliman A. Gulaid, was a former Dean of the College of Education at the Somali National University in the early 1980s. Earlier, he had been the principal of Amoud Secondary School from 1970 – 71, while his deputy, Farah Shuun, taught English at Somalia's College of Education. Seven of the other instructors hold M.A. degrees. In addition, the pre-university program has three teachers. Other staff members include a registrar, librarian, eight groundskeepers, drivers, and watchmen. Staff salaries range from $100 to $500 per month. Since the university does not have a wealthy benefactor, its ability to pay staff on time depends on contributions from the local population and the diaspora.[35] Thus, the institution operates on a shoestring budget.[36]

Nearly all faculty and staff members are from the Awdal region, but three instructors in the degree and pre-university programs are not

originally from Borama. Until last year, all Board of Trustees and Technical Support Committee members were from Borama. Awdal natives also dominate the student population. Only three of the fifty first-year students are from other regions. The distribution of students in the 1999 – 2000 class has become slightly more diverse in regional terms. Ten of the sixty-two students are from as far away as Mogadishu. The class of 2000 – 01 is expected to be more diverse. Gender balance remains skewed. There are only fifteen female students at the university.

According to university policy, any Somali student who passes the entrance examination will be accepted. However, the problem is that most students live in regions where the university cannot conduct the entrance examination. As a result, Borama natives dominate the student body. This year's entrance examination was conducted in two locations: Borama and Hargeisa. The addition of more examination centers in other regions will help to further diversify the regional distribution of the students. In fact, many areas in the country have asked for such centers. Somali communities in other zones are putting growing pressure on the university to expand and rehabilitate boarding facilities speedily so that students from outside Borama can be accommodated.

University administrators are particularly sensitive to the gender gap in its student population. Local women activists have been urging authorities to quickly develop a strategy to narrow this gap. Both groups agree that a major factor in girls' low enrollment in high schools, and consequently the university, is the heavy responsibilities girls bear in families. Such a burden in the family has become more exacting since Somalia's disintegration. For instance, the ever-increasing rate of male unemployment, now estimated to be about 70 percent, and excessive male consumption of *kat*,[37] have forced women to become their family's main income earners. Income-generating activities take mothers out of the home, compelling daughters to take over their mother's responsibilities. In some cases, this means daughters do not attend school. In other situations, they are permitted to go to school, but they are still expected to manage many daily family chores. As a result, they have little study time.[38] These conditions have reduced girls' enrollment in schools and negatively affected their classroom performance. A few women activists and a fledgling institution cannot immediately rectify these serious social problems. However, university administrators have taken some initial steps by creating

tutoring and other special programs to help prepare girls for the entrance examination.[39]

Amoud University faces many challenges that may altogether undermine its existence. Two of the most formidable risks are the following: first, the university's shallow financial base and the possibility that sectarian entrepreneurs in other regions may try to duplicate the university and, therefore, undercut its national and civic scope, and second, divisive local elements may subvert its inclusive identity. Despite these dangers, Amoud has already made its mark on the national map. The question is how significant the mark is locally and nationally in terms of rebuilding shared values and public institutions that cater to the Somali community's common interest?

IV. Amoud and the Recovery of Somali Identity

The collapse of the military dictatorship gave many Somalis false hope that a second liberation would come. Instead, they suffered the worst calamity in their history: political and social disintegration. Comparatively homogenous Somalia, which *seemed* free from ethnic cleavages, disintegrated more easily and speedily than other multiethnic countries on the continent. Sectarian entrepreneurs' ruthless exploitation of shared values and the unwillingness on the part of Somalis to protect public institutions made this fate inescapable. The failure of the international community and organizations that used clan divisions as the basic building block for reconstruction to help restore national institutions confirms that genealogical divisions within Somali society are not the cause of Somalia's disintegration. This last section of the essay encapsulates the *symbolic significance* of Amoud University in rehabilitating trust in public institutions and remaking social relations and national identity. The results of two surveys illustrate the social meaning the Awdal community attaches to the University. Furthermore, the results show how Amoud University students are rediscovering their national identity in a context of sectarian politics.

Borama differs from other major urban areas in Somalia on three accounts. First, nearly all public schools were reestablished within five years of the country's fragmentation. Second, in 1993, Borama hosted the most successful peace conference in the country since 1991. Finally, Borama established the only institution of higher education in the country. A handful of seasoned community elders and intellectuals were responsible for these unique accomplishments. Borama citizens

are keenly aware of these achievements and approve of the elders' guidance. In contrast, the people have nothing but disdain for the local and regional governments. Two students and I interviewed sixty Borama residents. To determine knowledge about Amoud University, their sense of identity (clanist or nationalist), and their attitude toward the university and Borama local government, we randomly selected interviewees who worked or lived in the center of town. Residents' responses to these five questions are summarized below.

(1) Do you know about the university?

Yes	No
59	1

(2) Who owns the university?

Samaroon	Somaliland administration	Somalis	Do not know
12	30	9	9

(3) Who funds the university?

Samaroon	Somaliland	Diaspora	Development agencies	Do not know
27	6	15	6	6

(4) Who can attend the university?

Samaroon only	Somaliland only	Any qualified Somali	Islamic world	Do not know
6	18	24	3	9

(5) If you had to choose giving a loan to the Borama local government or to Amoud University which would you choose and why?

University	Local government	Do not know
48	0	12

Three key points are clear from this survey. First, according to question two, 50 percent of those interviewed think the university belongs to the regional administration. Another 15 percent assume it to be a Somali university. Only 20 percent consider the university to be clan property. In other words, nearly 65 percent of the sample believe that Amoud University belongs to Somalis, not the Samaroon clan.

Second, over 50 percent of respondents to question three indicated that Awdal natives in Borama and in the diaspora fund the university. This contradicts the interviewees' answer to question two that the Samaroon clan does not own the university. Why would Awdal citizens fund a university belonging to Somalis in a society where clan identity is presumed to be supreme? The respondents told us that clan identity is necessary in the context of lawlessness, but that clan cannot

replace nationality and the nation-state. Furthermore, they indicated that since the community initiated the idea of the university, the population is responsible for taking the lead for the time being, but, in the end, the university is a Somali institution.

Third, most respondents to question four recognized that the majority of current university students are from the Awdal region. But this situation is both natural and temporary. Because the natives of the region founded the institution, it is normal, at the early stages, that proximate settlements will have an advantage. However, as Amoud takes root and expands, the composition of its students will change. Ten percent of those interviewed believe that only Awdal natives can attend the university. In contrast, 75 percent indicated that the university should be open to students from the entire country and to other Muslims.

Survey respondents' answers to questions two, three, and four suggest that despite Awdal region's significant contributions to funding the university, all Somalis should have access to its educational opportunities. This nonsectarian attitude of the majority of those interviewed is surprising in the face of the common interpretation that clanist identity is the supreme driver of the country's fragmentation. Given the retreat of civic-minded people from the public arena and the dominance of sectarian political entrepreneurs in the country, Borama citizens' nationalist attitude flies in the face of the supposedly deterministic force of clan identity.

Answers to question five further establish the shallowness of clan identity. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents felt that they would prefer to loan their resources to the university rather than to Borama's local government. Interviewees also commented that the local government had yet to use taxpayer money in accountable and productive ways.[40] They contrasted this corrupt behavior with the transparent way the university is managed. About half of our informants noted that they would still lend money to Amoud University, even knowing that they may not get their money back. They considered contributions and loans to the university (but not to the local government) as a worthy investment. When asked why they were willing to invest in the university when a majority of its students will be non-Borama natives, they replied that education and clanism do not mix. They underscored their hope that these investments will help create a better Somalia.

Nearly everyone interviewed was proud of Borama's civic leadership in national reconciliation and reconstruction. Most of the popula-

tion feels good about the civic role its elders played in the 1993 Borama peace and political conference, the mediation of conflicts in the eastern part of the northern region, and the pioneering role of Amoud University in jump-starting higher education in the country. This in no way means that clanist chauvinism is absent from Borama, but it does suggest that most people prefer to be part of the larger Somali community and yearn for public institutions that are democratically and professionally managed.

The second survey questioned first- and second-year university students about their identity. The students echo the population's sentiments. I wanted to know what the students thought of their identity given Somalia's fragmentation into warlord or clan fiefdoms. Like the Borama population, their response was counterintuitive. Nearly 74 percent of the first year's cohort and 76 percent of the second year's class identified Somalia as their country of citizenship. Eleven percent of the second-year students and 19 percent of the first-year students claimed to be "Somalilanders," 5 percent of the second-year students identified themselves as Samaroon, and the remaining 8 percent chose not to answer the question. Seven percent of the first-year students saw themselves as Africans and none claimed clan identity. Most of those who claimed Somali citizenship were emphatic about who they were. The three most assertive answers were: "I am a citizen of Somalia but not Somaliland;"[41] "I want to be Somali, as I was before, because nobody can change my [nationality];" "Obviously, I am a Somali boy who live[s] in Somalia and never had the will to go elsewhere. [I am] not those who denied their nationality and claimed [to be] Americans or Europeans. I am a Somali patriotic boy."

Already, Amoud University has had several far-reaching influences on its students and on the local population. In addition, the inaugural celebration and commencement of classes held additional meaning for some guests from war-torn or conflict-paralyzed communities in other regions. The first and most obvious lesson Amoud has driven home is the necessity of peace and stability for any development. A Hargeisa elder, Abdi Warabeh, summed this up. He told his old friend, Haji Jama Muhumed, "You are establishing a university for your young people while mine are roaming armed bandits." The restoration of peace and stability in Borama does not mean that the community is conflict-free and has reached consensus on all major issues. Rather, it signals that no issue is sufficiently important in and of itself to polarize people and give sectarian entrepreneurs the opportunity to profit from

discord. Focusing on common ground may, in fact, lay the ground-work for peaceful resolution of contumacious differences in the future. Second, the opening ceremony also held another significance for some Borama natives and others who came from afar. Many of these indi-viduals had been enthusiastic contributors and had supported the idea of the university, but they were skeptical the organizers could refrain from using public donations for their private gain. With such suspicion in their minds, they inspected the university's rehabilitated infrastruc-ture with particular care. The organizers' appropriate use of public contributions to jump-start the university restored a measure of the skeptics' faith in the feasibility of collective projects.

Third, from the opening day, Amoud University underscored the preciousness of investing in collective projects that strengthen com-mon values and deepen peace. Without such effort, peace will remain fragile, and the community will be incapable of leaving anything behind other than a legacy of civil strife. Fourth, nurturing collective projects advances common cause and inclusive politics, and marks the transition from peacemaking to development. Fifth, the university's foremost impact is that it has given the population confidence that local resources can be effectively mobilized to address development needs. The demonstrated effective use of resources and the establish-ment of professional and transparent management systems convinced Borama citizens that public institutions need not be corrupt and ineffi-cient. In fact, the public often contrasts the university with the corrupt local government — a difference associated with the latter's appoint-ment by a distant regional government and hence not accountable to the population. This is not the case with the university, which is finan-cially dependent on the local people and the diaspora.

Sixth, Borama citizens have witnessed the birth of a new type of public institution that is answerable to the community. If Somalis are by nature *clanist* as some analysts claim, Amoud University, which was created after the national government's disintegration, should have hardened clanist feelings. Instead, Amoud has had the opposite effect. By contrast, Borama's fraudulent local government has been fer-tile ground for divisive politics. Perhaps, a most crucial lesson of Amoud University, then, is that well-managed community or public institutions are the best defense against exploitation by sectarian entre-preneurs. This conclusion supports the initial thesis that shared cul-tural norms are a necessary but insufficient condition to insure cohesion and national integration. Accountable institutions, which

strategically build on shared traditions, foster tomorrow's common values and identity. The implication of this finding is that Amoud University and similarly run community enterprises can play a vital role in reestablishing Somalia's national government and inclusive, rather than sectarian, politics.

Seventh, the Somali calamity and Amoud University's establishment speak directly to the ways in which social capital is destroyed or formed. Instrumentalist uses of public institutions can easily demolish shared values built over decades, perhaps centuries. This means that communities and states cannot take trust and common traditions for granted. Somalia's story alerts us that national authority and the people should continuously reinvest in public institutions lest the nation's social capital be eroded or destroyed. Moreover, common heritage is not sufficient to purposively unite people unless it is embodied in collective projects that cater to the entire community. Institutionalized, they become the best defense against sectarian fragmentation and disorder. Finally, state collapse, as in Somalia, need not lead to despair as individual communities can draw on their social capital to deal with collective needs. However, single community-bound attempts may not be enough to re-ignite national conciliation and development. Building national institutions that supercede particularistic projects and embody common cause is the next indispensable step.[42] This is, precisely, the essence of Amoud University. ◉

Notes

1. Abdi I. Samatar 1989; Ahmed I. Samatar 1994.

2. Lewis 1994; Luling 1997; Laitin and Samatar 1987.

3. For a critical analysis of ethnicity and national development in Africa, see Mustapha, forthcoming.

4. Putnam 1993.

5. Tendler 1997.

6. Lemos 1998; Evans 1995.

7. Mkandawire 1998.

8. This section draws on Samatar 1997.

9. This division was clear even in the first Somali governments formed under Italian and British colonial masters in the late 1950s. A.H. Hussein (Prime Minister 1964–67) Interview, Minneapolis, October 21, 1999.

10. Major differences emerged between the President and his Prime Minister with regard to the government's public management strategy. The President then appointed a like-minded Prime Minister.

11. It must be noted that the integration of these two administrative systems into a coherent one was a major accomplishment of the first and second republics.

12. Several hundred junior employees appointed on the basis of clientelism were also dismissed. Among those fired was the Prime Minister's older brother who was employed by the Italian colonial administration. A.H. Hussein Interview, October 23, 1999.

13. Abdirazak H. Hussein, Interview, Minneapolis, October 30, 1999.

14. Abib 1996. He was Cabinet Secretary under Prime Minister Egal.

15. Lewis 1972.

16. Abib 1996.

17. Samatar 1993.

18. There have been over twelve international conferences, but none has produced tangible results. In fact, some of these conferences organized by regional leaders became instruments for exploiting Somali fragmentation to extend the interests of Ethiopia, Kenya, or Eritrea.

19. These were revealed to the author in discussions with senior officials of the self-styled Somaliland Republic in June 1999, in Gabileh and Hargeisa.

20. Haji Jama Muhumed and Haji Dahir Elmi, Interview, January 28, 1999, Borama.

21. "Aw" and "Sheikh" are religious titles. The latter is more educated than the former.

22. Various Somali governments recognized Ali as the father of modern Somali education. Schools and other institutions were named after him.

23. Haji Dahir Elmi was present in this meeting as a young man and a former student of Aw Abdi Sheikh Nur.

24. Borama and Hargeisa supported the Amoud location. Hargeisa people were comfortable with Amoud, as their children were already in the intermediate boarding school there. The chief advocate of the eastern location was none other than Ali. The speaker for the Borama-Hargeisa coalition was Said Abby, a broker for the Wasame Birko Company in Hargeisa. The two groups faced each other at the Protectorate Advisory Council held in the town of Sheikh. The Protectorate Governor, nicknamed "Kamekame," chaired the meeting, and Bell participated. The vocational school was the last item on the agenda, and the two sides presented their cases. The debate between the two sides was acrimonious and the Governor had to intervene and cut the debate short.

25. Somaliland Protectorate Education Department, 1953 and 1956.

26. Abdirahman Ali headed this coalition. He was the younger brother of Mahmoud Ahmed Ali.

27. Ali is recognized for gracefully accepting his defeat and relinquishing power as the head of the self-styled Somaliland. He is the only one among the faction leaders and warlords to have done so peacefully since Somalia's disintegration.

28. Samaroon or Gadabursi is the clan name for the majority of people of Awdal origin.

29. This section is based on my observations and interviews I conducted over the last two years.

30. I attended, as an observer, the meeting in which some of these issues were debated.

31. This term was added to the Somali language during the height of the civil war to denote brutal banditry.

32. When I visited the school in June 1995, I saw the physics and history textbooks I used as a student in the secondary school. These books were stored in one of the dormitories and protected from the elements.

33. More recently, the Djibouti government donated a new bus, one electrical generator, several computers, and 200 chairs and tables.

34. In contrast, no one wants to deal with Borama local government, as it is thoroughly corrupt and staffed by sectarians. Moreover, the rehabilitated old intermediate school turned into an agricultural school. The school was temporarily closed as nepotism marred its management.

35. Somalis in the diaspora are organized into three groups: contingents in North America, Europe, and the Middle East. All belong to the Friends of Amoud University.

36. The university has repeatedly submitted requests to local government authorities to invest in the institution by levying marginal taxes on water and electricity. The former mayor of Borama district repeatedly turned down these requests. The new mayor has promised to examine the feasibility of such taxes.

37. *Kat* is a mild stimulant mostly chewed by men.

38. University's Women Support Group, Group Interview, Borama, April 3, 1999.

39. A. Gulaid, Interview, Borama, April 3, 1999.

40. This is changing slightly as a new mayor has started to rebuild city roads in Borama.

41. Somaliland is the name of the clan fiefdom established in what used to be northern Somalia.

42. Evans 1996.

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