

The Porcupine Dilemma: Governance and Transition in Somalia

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Legislation considers men [and women] as he [she] is, in order to turn him [her] to good uses in human society. Out of ferocity, avarice, and ambition, the three vices which run throughout the human race, it creates the military, merchant, and the governing classes, and thus the strength, riches, and wisdom of commonwealths. Out of these three great vices, which would certainly destroy all mankind on the face of the earth, it creates civil happiness.

Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, 1968 (1744), p. 62.

In most of Africa, the state is a contested terrain where different nationalities, sub-nationalities, 'ethnic groups' and communities go to fight for the appropriation of resources including power. A state which is a contested terrain in this sense can only be an anarchy of self-seeking and a theatre of war.

Claude Ake, *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*, 2003, p. 167.

*Dalkeennii la kala qaybiyee cadowga loo qayday
Qaadan waa awoogeen amxaar qurub la siiyaaye
Qarqarsiga ka dirir iyo anaa qaabbil kuu taline
Maantoo qudhiisii xabaal lagu qarqooreeyey
Weli qoonti way taagan tahay quudhsigii shalaye
Qaxar iyo dhib nagu soo kordhiyo qolada mooyaane
Weli qoodhi kama ay dhammaan qaranka soomaale
Hal haddii qaddaru eebbahay kaare kala qaaro
In la qalo ninkii dhiqi jiraa aan ka qaanicine
Dabbaax baa mindida kula qadhqadha qaalinta irmaane
Qasdigoodu ba'anaa kuwaa qurus ka doonaaya
Qaabaanqabtiyo beelyadiyo haaddan qananaysa
EE waax qabiil lagu hantiyo garasho qoodaystay
Qorshohoodu socon maayo oo ways qatalayaane
EEbbow qarkay maanta taal qadanka soo meeri
Soomaalidaa kala qubane qoysba dhan u jeedo
Qaraabada isugu keen allow qaabad nabadaysa
Qarankeenni soo celi aallow qaaddirbaa tahaye!*

Maxamuud A. Cabdalle (Shiine) 2006

I. Introduction

As of this writing, too far from “civil happiness,” Somalis continue sliding deeper into a fallen time — pitiful victims of their own follies and an ill-informed, if not manipulative, international and regional system. More precisely, the fight over the state in the past decade and a half has been at once violent and so disabling that, in the eyes of the rest of the world, Somalis have become the paradigmatic embodiment of self-inflicted *politicide*. Dismayingly, though the Somali state institutions are no more, the contestants wage their battles as if the prize is just waiting to be picked up. Oblivious to the fact that the state and governance are more than the sum of capricious self-promotion and claims of Potemkin political appellations and appointments, the aggressively ambitious bestow a vulgar concreteness to Jorge Luis Borges’ metaphor of the condition of “two bald men fighting over a comb.” The ultimate costs of the death of the state and subsequent communal strife are a withering of the national civic identity and spirit and, therefore, a descent into moronic existence. Six instantiations of this condition are: (a) disunity exemplified by some in northern Somalia (Somaliland) calling for a separate sovereignty in that region; (b) an essentialization of clanist maneuvers and mischief that have proven to be incapable of producing legitimate and competent leaders fit for the challenges of the epoch, let alone bring forth workable institutions for the immediate juncture; (c) the degeneration of Mogadishu from the once breezy, relatively cosmopolitan nerve-center of the post-colonial order to a dilapidated hell’s gate overwhelmed by new deadly conflagrations and mountains of ill-disposed filth; (d) a deepening socioeconomic impoverishment, barely assuaged by remittances from relatives in the diaspora, decline in educational opportunities and standards, and deteriorating public health,¹ including the return of polio; (e) an acute national vulnerability to easy bamboozlement, and now direct military intervention or invasion by foreign actors, particularly neighboring Ethiopia in the case of the latter; and (f) a mixture of incredulity and contempt on the part of the larger global community. To be sure, these negative attributes (and many more) make up *the* defining face of Somali reality. But it is also vital to note that, among the paradoxes of the current sharp cut in time (the meaning of civil war), numerous ordinary women and men, in every zone of the country, have taken it upon themselves to address the immediate concerns of their families and neighborhoods, the virus of sectarian cabals, and, commensurately, keep the candle of civic values flickering for a future undergirded by a peaceful and democratic governance.

If at the core of the Somali catastrophe, defined as a series of interlocked crises, is the bloody and unending tussle over political power and the direction of the society, last year’s tidings from Mogadishu conveyed the appearance of a new actor upon the stage. Claiming to be at once fed up with polluting warlord shenanigans and inspired and tightly held together by an Islamic *zeitgeist* rather than kin loyalty or hunger for egotistical glory through personal rule, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) changed immediate history²: it defeated the warlords camped in Mogadishu; extended its influence into most of the deep south and the central regions; opened both Mogadishu airport and port facilities for general use; returned the streets of the capital to its denizens; challenged the legitimacy and leadership of what many Somalis had labeled a *fadhiid*-like (Somali for retarded) Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its regional patrons; and rattled the nerves of

some of the foreign policy officials of the current U.S. Administration³ and strict secularists. Despite some lightning successes and raising the already high temperature of politics in Somalia, the victory of the UIC did not last long. A combination of sophomoric tactical mistakes (e.g., reactionary and foolish social policy declarations and acts, severe lack of administrative and worldly sophistication, and ill-prepared but loud nationalist bravado against an Ethiopian regime itching for an opportunity to set up its own clients to run Somalia) and a desperate pleading by the leadership of the TFG (President Abdullahi Yusuf and Prime Minister Ali Geedi), under an alarmist fabrication that “Islamic terrorists” aligned with Al-Qaida had infiltrated the UIC, convinced the U.S. to bless and aid Ethiopia’s invasion.⁴ The ultimate objectives included these three: to destroy the Union of Islamic Courts, their leadership and base of support; to capture Mogadishu; and to install Colonel Yusuf and his agreeable regime.

At the moment of this writing, the Ethiopian invasion is five-months old and has had the following consequences: Mogadishu’s residents are thrown back into the violent and twilight zone where immediate deprivation and untimely death lurk; Ethiopian forces and their junior Somali satraps are pitted against an urban resistance that is not limited to the remnants of the armed wing of the UIC militia; over a thousand persons have been killed so far, and tens of thousands of civilians have fled, increasing pressure on already dismal conditions for refugees in campus inside and out side the boundaries of the country; hatred for Ethiopia and sympathy for, if not solidarity with, the resistance has become more visible, particularly among the diaspora;⁵ and any possible redemption and effectiveness of the TFG has all but evaporated, except among those who either betray stigmata of clanist vice or are driven by sheer opportunistic motivations. Here is how one reporter relayed the crux of these developments:

There was a burst of optimism beginning Dec. 28, when government troops, with Ethiopian firepower behind them, marched into Mogadishu and planted the hope that the anarchy was ending. Cheering crowds poured into ruined streets. Aid experts in Nairobi circulated ambitious reconstruction plans. Ethiopian and American officials, who had worked together to overthrow the Islamists, breathed a mutual sigh of relief.

But what has happened in the past few weeks has *killed* (my emphasis) that mood. A deadly insurgency has started, beginning with a few clans connected to the Islamists and now expanding to several more. . . . All analysts agree that the violence will continue and probably intensify unless the government reconciles with clan elders, who control as much as anyone controls, what happens in Somalia.

. . . So far, there’s been very little of that. Instead of reaching out to truly influential figures, analysts say the government has picked ministers not because they have any substantial support among their clans but because they will do the government’s bidding. The result is an increasingly isolated, authoritarian and unpopular government in which the transitional president, Abdillahi Yusuf Ahmed, is accused of behaving more like a *clan warlord* (my emphasis) — which he was — than a national leader.⁶

Looking at these reports closely reminds one of Aristotle's injunction in *The Politics* that two things are most corrosive of political leadership and institutions: hatred and contempt. The first is the antithesis of good will, compassion, and fairness; the latter is the opposite of respect, integrity, and wise competence — the essential ingredients of authority. Given such dire circumstances, the Somali catastrophe has entered a new stage: direct foreign occupation and an ugly spectacle typified by bloodletting and civic dishonor. This assignment, more urgent than ever, is an exploration of the *aporia* of governance in the contemporary Somali milieu. Seeking theoretical and narrative accumulation, it raises four pertinent and difficult questions:

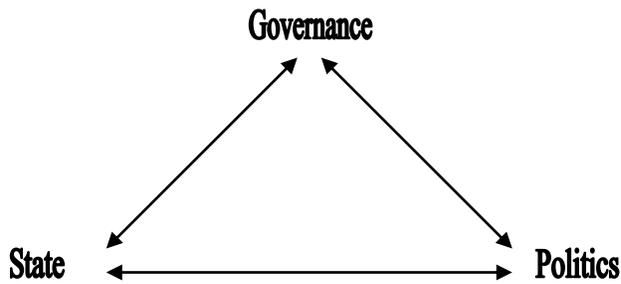
- What is the state?
- Why do Somalis need a national state?
- What kind of a state might that be?
- How might that state come into being and maintain a viable existence?

While it is not possible to treat exhaustively these large questions, I will attempt to enter into each one of them, with a hope of advancing the *practical reasoning* so much needed among Somalis, particularly those who aspire to influence the fate of the country in a constructive way. This essay, partly drawing on and updating already published research, has four main components. First, I will address briefly the phenomena of the state and governance. Second, I will present a historical sketch of the Somali context. Third, I will examine the current age of statelessness and some attempts to reconstruct the state. Fourth, I will reassert why the state is even more significant for the journey forward and will offer a quick look at some different arrangements of governance that a new state might take. I will conclude with a few civic meditations. Finally, there are two supreme convictions that inform this exercise. The first is that *the state is not only, in the famous expression of Jacob Burckhardt, "a work of art," it is equally a necessity for civilized living.*⁷ The second relates to the role of intellectuals in contexts similar to the Somali one. Since by themselves they can't stop politicians and their armies, in the memorable words of Julian Benda, "from filling all history with the noise of their hatred and their slaughters," intellectuals can deny them the opportunity of "thinking of themselves as great men [or women] as they carry out these activities."⁸

II. The State: What is it?

To talk about governance presupposes the existence of both political activity and a state. If governance is the concrete manner of conducting public power, politics is the sum of multifarious engagements that, first, establish contact and workable concordance among strangers and, second, accompany competition for influence and authority. The state is, essentially, the main institutional link between politics and governance. The interplay between the three is constant.

Figure 1.1



Basic political activities precede the appearance of the state and are not confined to its formal arena.⁹ Primordial groups, typified by small bands and intimacy or, more precisely, kin attachments, have existed and continue to survive, ever so precariously, without a formal authority structure solely designed to perform political tasks. Such communities negotiated myriad individual and family interests and idiosyncrasies, in addition to the vagaries of the general material and cultural context, through custom and a set of reciprocal (*talantaali* or *gemeinschaft*) but not necessarily equal arrangements. The seeds of what we call the state are buried in those early human activities, but the appearance of the state as we have known it is a relatively modern design. One would trace the genetic base and evolution through a number of historical thresholds, which perhaps began with “city republican forms” best exemplified by the little known but pioneering Mesopotamian urban experiences and, later, the other more celebrated version in classical Greece. These early aggregations of large, but by no means universal, interests and networks, provision of public goods, and the subsequent investments of authority in persons embedded in such institutions give glimpses of some of the enduring characteristics of what we contemporaneously identify as the state.

The evolution of the idea and structuring of the state is long and complicated, and with numerous variations. That story is not told here. What is relevant to our purposes is to note its ancient pedigree, define its morphology, and point towards its key attributes. I define the state as *a constellation of norms, institutions and those who inhabit them, ostensibly to manage the collective political fate of a given society*. Political destiny includes significant contradictions and concerns that add up to political identity and direction. Structurally, a state has the following features: monopoly on coercion, specific territorial boundaries, a relatively fixed population, economic and cultural functions, sovereignty, and recognition by other states and their organizations. The supreme public power, the state, in Stuart Hall’s phrase, is “a historical phenomenon;” that is, a creation of human beings in interaction which, in turn, also acts in profound ways upon individual and collective life.

A. Frames

The state is not some formless thing. Rather, its internal constitution can be anatomized. I suggest, heuristically, four main elements that make up the state: leader, regime, administration, and commonwealth. I touch upon each briefly.

The *leader* is the individual who immediately embodies the state in question. He/she can make a positive difference in his/her time, leaving behind a legacy of competence, constitutionalism, and order. On the other hand, the leader can also preside over ineptness, corruption, and institutional disarray, whose consequences include an undermining of constructive efforts by others and the killing of civic spirit.

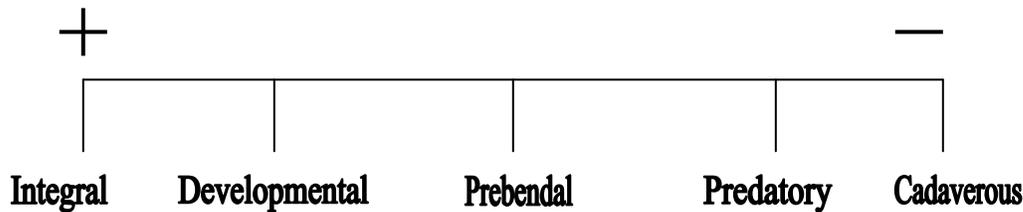
But leadership in *not* just “personal.” Usually appointed by the leader, a *regime* is a constellation of officials assigned to the highest portfolios of executive authority. To be sure, even under the most favorable circumstances, both a leader and her/his team have their own individual and clique interests that they represent. Nonetheless, if a regime is to attain any modicum of acceptance and legitimacy by the larger society, self or factional gain would have to be tamed by a combination of inclusive aspiration, a consciousness of needs, ethical and legal conduct, and effective management. Thus, members of a successful regime are, in Walter Lippman’s expression, “the custodians of a nation’s ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, of its permanent hopes, of the faith which makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals.” Moreover, leadership or regime cannot limit itself solely to the role of the keeper of tradition and noble ambition; rather, progress depends on the intellect to detect and the courage to articulate the hidden, and even the unutterable, elements of what is often called “vision.”

The *administrative* frame underscores the infrastructure of the state. Here are located institutions (e.g., civil service, courts, law enforcement, and educational policy, facilities, curricula and personnel) that carry out the day-to-day assignments, and preserve procedures and documents of the operations of the state. This is important for the way a society governs itself — one which presents a test case for a regime to monitor itself, the relative autonomy of offices and institutions, and their competence. In other words, the greater the compliance with basic rules and the legitimacy of state apparatuses, the larger the dividends for both a regime’s reputation and the viability of public life and order. In contrast, the more the operational organs are tied to the whims of regime interest, the greater the degree of evaporation of the rightfulness of all three frames. This is the ultimate cost of incompetence and corruption.

The final element of the state is the most complex yet foundational: *commonwealth*. In its most inclusive sense, this entails the association and spirit of public belonging that is not easily derailed by narrow impulses. To create an identity large enough to accommodate kinship with the other *beyond* filial or other exclusive affiliations is to transmute the self into a *citizen* — the oldest of the challenges to the establishment of a political community. Here, then, particularity meets universality — that is, individual or group interest engages the imperative of a large social bond characterized by civic values and, in the felicitous expression of Edmund Burke, “common affections.” To be sure, leadership and regime formation in one sense are testimony to a significant and inescapable alienation that comes with the momentary victory of one group. Commonwealth, by contrast, absorbs the divisive fallout from oppositional politics as it reinvigorates *vivere civile*. The result is the return of the state, through sound governance, to societal ownership, a source of competence and an architect of common destiny. Without this grounding spirit of belonging, particularity becomes the norm — the antithesis of a national project. Politics, through the operations of the state, then is an unavoidable and contradictory activity that at once unveils centrifugal issues and facilitates centripetal ideas and action. In weighing the balance of the tension between difference and commonality, it is the latter that defines the health of political life in a given society. For, beyond the struggle for power, a rather narrow objective that could easily lead to a desolation of the spirit, a politics fit for “symbiotic creatures” is, in the lasting reflections of Johannes Althusius, “the art of associating men [and women] for the purpose of establishing, cultivating, and conserving social life among them.”

Each of the four frames of the state, much like the parts of a body, performs at once its own local functions and works in concert with the rest to keep the whole purring along. Any damage to one means trouble for the others; and when the accumulation of deficiencies becomes greater than the assets, the state and its society are confronted with major problems. Be that as it may, it will be a mistake to overlook the significance of both the larger society, that is, the matrix of private space and action, and the global environment. Put more precisely, in addition to the vitality of the frames, the degree of health or morbidity of the state is also conditioned by its history, endowments of its society, and the vagaries of regional and transnational circumstances. Such a configuration of frames and forces produces different state forms that, in turn, have consequences for the seminal project of development.

Figure 1.2
Forms of State



Adapted from Abdi Ismail Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar, eds., *The African State: Reconsiderations*, p. 9.

States come in many guises (see Figure 1.2). For the sake of parsimony, however, one could offer a spectrum that registers five possible types that vary from, at one extreme, the highly effective, to its opposite, the dead. The primary distinguishing factors include (a) the haleness of each frame; (b) the degree of coordination; and (c) the depth of interior attachments to fellowship and collective realization.

Since no state is immune to the vicissitudes that result from the jostling among individuals as well as larger social forces, a quintessential element of human historicity, an *integral* state is emblematic of a moment of delicate balance. That is, the cost of the quotidian grind and its intimidating ambiguities is compensated by efficacious state actions that replenish a mentality of collective stake-holding and exude hope. Antonio Gramsci, so existentially and theoretically aware of this supreme contradiction, reduces the challenge to its basics:

What is needed for [an integral state] . . . are men [and women] of sober mind . . . who don't cause an absence of bread in the bakeries, who make trains run, and who provide the factories with new materials and know how to turn the produce of the country into industrial produce, who insure the safety and freedoms of the people . . . who enable the network

of collective services to function and who do not reduce the people to a despair and to a horrible carnage.¹⁰

Gramsci's effective state does not only succeed in delivering public goods but, particularly important, the leadership generates a degree of moral and intellectual bonding with the citizens. This "organic" affiliation is central to what he calls "hegemony," or the establishment of the "national-popular." Africa has yet to produce an integral state.

If an integral state is the guardian of isonomic polity and general prosperity, a *developmental* state is the next best project. In this context, the state is conspicuously activist in both the improvement of human capital and the enhancement of the productive forces and national accumulation. But, as has often been the record, achievements in the economic and social realms may come at the cost of civic pluralism and basic liberties. Because the developmental state is primarily driven by ambition to quickly mollify external and domestic vulnerabilities of the society, such a singular attention leaves little room for open dissent and debate. In the end, a developmental state is visibly Janus-faced — impressive in marshalling resources and building economic capacity, but relatively less attentive to the creation of an ambience conducive to republican individuation. Moreover, and in acute cases, heavy disincentives are presented to those who dare to disagree or insist on moral autonomy.

There are exceptions to the discrepancy between development and democracy, as the case of Botswana demonstrates. The Botswana state has been Africa's premier developmental state. Despite the shackles inherited from British colonialism, the state qualitatively transformed its society from a South African labor reserve to one of the fastest growing economies in the world for the better part of the last 35 years. Botswana maintained genuine commitment to liberal democracy since independence. This blending of development and democracy makes Botswana unique among developmental states. Botswana has some of the ingredients necessary for establishing an integral state.

Post-apartheid South Africa is a state in transformation. The independent state has strong democratic credentials. Leadership committed to democracy is supported and monitored by vibrant civil society. South Africa is striving hard to undo white economic domination and to empower the majority in order to sustain its new democracy. This requires the broadening and deepening of the country's physical and social infrastructure. The successful dual transformation of South Africa will depend on the quality of state management, and how supportive the global economic climate is. The key question in the South African debate is whether the neo-liberal shift in development policy will broaden and deepen the market.

A *prebendal* type is typically preoccupied with the protection and reproduction of the immediate interests of a regime and its associates. At the same time, the economy becomes a source of personal and group enrichment, usually in the form of shady rent-seeking; and the political institutions amount to little more than a haven for personal privilege. A key feature of a prebendal state is high dependency — a combination of subservience to external powers, venality, and despotism at home. Unless turned around, and there is time and space for such action, these liabilities increasingly blunt any developmental propulsion, creating a general culture of disregard for the common good. Nigeria was the archetypical prebendal state. However, it degenerated into a predatory

institution under successive civilian and military regimes. The cost of predation became exceedingly onerous under General Abacha's regime. Consequently, key organs of civil society struggled against the regime during much of the 1990s. At the end, the military retreated and a civilian government was elected. Retired General Obasanjo's leadership of the past decade made some encouraging attempts in rebuilding public institutions so they may gain legitimacy and sufficient capacity to meet the development needs of the Nigerian society. Nonetheless, heavy reliance on rent from oil, ethnic and religious antagonism, and a misappropriation of national wealth continue to be part of political practice.

The *predatory* state is synonymous with diabolical politics. When the prebendal state loses what little functional capacity and stability it had, alienation mounts apace. No more even a symbol of disordered legitimacy, the last veils of collective belonging drop, and scavenging over dwindling public resources becomes openly vicious. For the regime, with an ever-narrowing grid, leadership turns into its antithesis — that is, cruel selfishness that slides into open criminality. In the meantime, as decay advances, a mixture of aghastness and hyper anxiety over personal and family survival becomes the paradigm of social and political conduct. With the full atrophy of the vital functions of the state, the *centaurs* become one-dimensional beasts. Together, these factors dissipate the stock of citizenship and mark the beginnings of the death of civic virtue. As Maurice Godelier asserts, "without development of the material and intellectual productive forces, any society risks becoming gradually and unwittingly stagnant and turning in on itself, becoming less able to cope with the effects of internal conflicts." Mobutu's Zaire, Taylor's Liberia, and Mugabe's current Zimbabwe come to mind as proximate examples.

Sadly, the predatory state may not be the last stop in the glide towards optimum degeneration; it can get worse. With heightened physical and economic insecurity, and the evaporation of public discourse and life, many take flight to anywhere before the final curtain. Those who stay behind are enveloped by a new barbarism, one defined by a looting of what is left of the commons, further retailing of identities, and prodigality of terror. Thus spoke Wole Soyinka, as he reflected on such happenings in parts of the continent:

The land of Syle Cheney-Coker, poet, who declares himself content to be 'the breakfast of the peasants,' 'the hands that help the fishermen bring in their catch,' 'a hand on the plough that tills the fields,' is silenced. This land also of the playwright Ullis Amadu Maddy, of the urbane critic Eldred Jones, of skilled silver and goldsmiths, of the sublime sculptures of the Nimba peoples and the timeless lyrics of their griots (a traditional musician/poet or minstrel), has been turned into a featureless landscape of rubble, of a traumatized populace and roaming canines among unburied cadavers. How does a sculptor begin to carve with only stumps for arms? How does a village griot ply his trade with only the root of the tongue still lodged at the gateway of memory? The rest has been cut out—often the hand that wields the knife is the hand of the future, the ubiquitous child-soldier—and the air is bereft even of the solace of its lament.

A lament can be purifying, consoling, for a lament still affirms the retention of soul, even of faith, yes, it is a cry of loss, of bereavement, an echo of pain but is, therefore, an affirmation of humanity, a reaching out to the world that is still human or to forces that shape humanity. A lament does not emerge from atrocities, for an atrocity is the very silencing of the human voice. It deadens the soul and clogs up the passages of hope, opening up in their place only sterile accusations, the resolve of vengeance, or else a total surrender to the triumph of banality. We can no longer speak of wars on the continent, only arenas of competitive atrocities.¹¹

The end point of such an experience is the *cadaverous* state. Every frame is damaged to such an extreme extent that civic life is, simply put, no more. An immediate lesson is how easy it is to demolish in quick time what has taken years to build. The Somali case is an instantiation of this type.

III. History: A Backward Glance¹²

A review of the evolution of political order and authority in the Somali context could be periodized into the following: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. This section of the essay attempts to offer a highly compressed account of each, before I move on to the current conjuncture of collective moral and institutional failures.

A. Pre-Colonial Order

The descent of Somali society into mutual hatred and full disintegration, best exemplified by the demise of the state, cannot be understood solely within the orbit of one isolated factor or another. Rather, the condition is better understood by seeing it as the total shattering of a mode of being in the world and a companion failure to invent a new one. This now defunct mode of existence included a lean but sustainable material production and reproduction; a cultural pattern, informed by a sense of the divine, which portrayed a moral code and common sense; and a loose political practice marked by local legitimacy and accountability. Buffeted by a compounded mixture of its own shortcomings and a series of powerful external intrusions, however, the old “form of life” gradually lost its delicate calibration and grace. No other moment in contemporary Somali history so somberly reflects such a loss of way than the killing of civic politics. Here, then, I attempt to: (1) recapture the substructure and nature of the old order; and (2) identify some of the major transformations (mostly focused on the state) that could be associated with the prevailing madness and destruction of virtue.

1. The Constitution of *Umma*

Somalis of traditional times were not feral creatures, bereft of *phronesis*, who roamed lawlessly the range land of the Horn of Africa; on the contrary, they did create a long time ago a pastoral, and later some agro-pastoral, political economy based on a thorough

awareness of the vagaries of a very exacting ecosystem. This mode of livelihood, based on the household and largely self-sufficient, had an intricate division of labor. For example, womenfolk were primarily responsible for the management of domestic concerns, including the condition of the portable home or *Agal*; men dealt most with issues of security, knowledge about the weather and the range, general welfare of the herd, and formal relations with the world outside, including relatives. Finally, young boys and girls were assigned to look after small ruminants grazing around the homestead. Such material existence had some notable communitarian characteristics that included *Miilo* (a precise and transparent procedure for fair distribution of water, the most precious of all resources on the range), agreements on access to pasture, and an informal but reciprocal claim on each other's labors. But there was a downside to these arrangements. For instance, even in a good season, when the rains and pasture were plentiful, surplus was, at best, meager — turning economic activities into a perpetual effort of living on the edge. In other words, shortages and hunger were familiar shadows that haunted the Somali landscape. In the modern era of the late twentieth century — an age of expanding human and livestock populations, declining ecosystems, and changing appetites and habits of consumption — the old and precarious, if somewhat balanced, material life was bound to come under great stress.

The economic basis of early Somali society had correlate political institutions and practices: kinship — a combination of blood-ties and customary law. Each household, *Reer*, was led by the oldest male, usually the father or grandfather, who was expected, particularly at a certain age, to have acquired a degree of competence in local history, culture, and values. Further, this person was connected to two kinds of immediate social networks. The first and most primary was the *Tol*, a solidarity with male-kin based on a belief in a common male lineage; the second, though more shallow and of less weight, was based on marriage ties, or *Xidid*.

Male-lineage identities performed many positive functions of which security and the payment of blood-money, *Mug*, or restitution to an injured party, and mutual assistance in hard times like droughts were paramount. On the other hand, *Tol* identity was totally exclusive, liable to group privilege and, in times of high stakes, susceptible to chauvinistic demonization of the “Other.” *Xidid*, bonding through marriage, was the first counterweight to the narrowness of *Tol* in that it expanded a man's self-definition by obligating him to his in-laws and the people of his mother. A second element of kinship was *Xeer*, an unwritten code of conduct that set specific guidelines for intra- and inter-kin transactions. Within the compass of *Xeer* were the following: preservation of the wisdom of the ages and habits of community, delineation of obligations and entitlements, and supervision of criminal justice. The combination of *Xidid* and *Xeer* further offset the parochialism of *Tol* by enlarging the range of affiliations. The incarnation of the confluence of those pieces of kinship culture was the elder, one of two foundations of traditional leadership. In a few larger and somewhat more structured kin communities, august appellations like *Sultan* or *Ugaas* were used.

The other part of the old moral order was Islam. Arriving on the Somali shores around the tenth century, Islam, through *Al-Quran*, *Al-Hadith*, and *Al-Sunnah*, infused new and powerful values into the existing Somali cosmology. Among these were a deeper spirituality and a greater sense of piety. At the worldly level, Islam also brought *Qanoon*, a set of laws to guide the behavior of the believers. Much more than *Xeer*, Islam extended

the margins of the relevant universe by linking Somalis to a world of co-religionists. The bearer of this new knowledge and, as a result, the leader in this realm was the *Sheikh*, the learned and reverent. Under the aegis of such leaders, the crucial affairs of the community were discussed in open meetings, *Shir*. Finally, from the perspective of the modern world, it is worth registering that the old Somali order carried the seeds of two essential ingredients of democratic practice: separation of powers and open, participatory deliberations, albeit male-centered. The calibration of the above elements set the basis of Somali society for a large stretch of its existence. Despite a rigorous environment with a very modest economic base that frequently created tensions among various kin groups and clashes with the neighbors (particularly Abyssinians), the Somali people of the Horn of Africa moved through history with a sense of independence and confidence. But that situation did not last forever, for new and momentous transformations that will dramatically alter the nature of political authority and culture were in the offing. I will present a thumbnail sketch of critical watersheds.

B. Conquest: The Colonial Order

Somali contact with the outside world did not start with the onset of colonialism. Earlier, as mercantile trade spread into the Indian Ocean littoral, coastal towns like Mogadishu, Merca, and Zeila appeared. The main purveyors of these activities were Middle Eastern and Islamic merchants. Although the center of gravity of Somali society continued to be located in the interior, or *Miyii*, the establishment of urban centers underlined a growing economic and cultural interaction with other and distant worlds. In short, Muslim traders became the first bridgeheads in the gradual “incorporation” of Somali society into the expanding “modern world-system.” New commodities began to find their way into the hinterland, slowly impacting social relations and habits. With their new wares and culture of literacy, Middle Eastern arrivals to the coast began to attract a few Somalis with their inducements. Here was the genesis of the family “middleman” who will divide his loyalties between the merchants from other lands and kin group in the countryside.

Whatever was the balance of forces between the urban/coastal towns and the hinterland, by the closing stages of the nineteenth century, a new and revolutionary force arrived: multiple colonizers. First there were the British and the French, and later the Italians, to be joined at the table for the scramble for Somali territories by the Emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik. By 1920, despite a fierce resistance on the part of Somalis led by the legendary Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, colonial order in five guises was in place. For our purposes, some of the most visible consequences of the conquest were the following:

- Persuasion of some Somali elders to become clients of the new colonial schemes represented by a governor or district commissioner.
- Intimidation and humiliation, or ultimately dismissal, of those who failed to comply.
- Appointment of collaborators who were, in large measure, accountable only to the colonial authorities.
- Emerging class differentiation based on lowly bureaucratic appointments, participation in the colonial economy — particularly the export of

- livestock from the North — and land expropriation by the fascists in the riverine areas of the South.
- Calculated manipulation of differences and disputes among kin groups, which frequently pitted one group against another and gave old communal antipathies new combustion.
 - Conscious and frequent use of state violence to bring populations to heel.
 - Relegation of Islam to a private affair with little relevance to the political order.
 - Decoupling of the operational side of the state from a sense of righteousness and inclusive community.
 - Total defeat of Somalis by turning them into subjects of five different colonial administrations.

Nearly half a century after the consolidation of colonialism, nationalist forces taking the inspiration from the heroism of the Dervish movement of Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, a general awakening of other subjugated societies, and emboldened by a moral as well as material weakening of the colonial metropole due to the circumstances surrounding the Second World War, won their campaign for independence. Precisely, on July 1, 1960, British Somaliland and Italian Somalia joined together to become the new Somali Republic, leaving the other three (Djibouti, the Ogaden, and the NFD) under foreign rule.

C. The Post-Colonial State

Typical of African decolonization, the Somali post-colonial state came into the world draped in sharp contradictions. On the one hand, it effused a populist temper that promised both a retrieval of collective honor and peoplehood, and a quick march towards socio-economic development. On the other hand, there was very little understanding, particularly on the part of most of the new leadership and regimes, of the complexities of domestic reconstitution, let alone the difficulties inherent in profitably engaging a bi-polar international system.

Within a few years, the glow of independence began to dim. In fact, as early as 1961, signs of regional discontent appeared when a group of mutinous junior military officers from the North took over Hargeisa. In that same year, in a referendum, a very thin majority of the Northerners voted against the constitution, which was designed to become the basis of the new polity. On both occasions, a component of the Northern elite saw the new dispensation as biased towards the South. Looking at the distribution of the senior political leadership, regime portfolios, high echelons of the new bureaucracy, and other state apparatuses, as well as the concentration of most significant decision-making in Mogadishu, the seeds of regional jealousy and suspicion were planted — to be a lasting source of exploitation by a few ambitious individuals. Furthermore, while investments were made in a few agricultural and educational projects, serious socio-economic development was left on the back burner. Those early years, then, set the basis for three characteristics that will define a considerable part of the civilian tenure of the post-colonial state: relentless competition among a narrow elite over the spoils of the state through reckless looting of a very precarious economy; fixation on liberating the other

three Somali territories; and a desperate search for international patrons that will supply both economic and military aid.

The one exceptional but brief moment was between 1964 and 1967. Those four years are now overwhelmingly regarded by both Somalis and others informed about the country's political history as an interlude of extraordinary leadership as a result of the combined ethical resoluteness and diligent demeanor of President Aden A. Osman and Premier Abdirazak H. Hussein. Between them, they set competence and probity as the signature tune in the conduct of the state. Meditating on the disheartening history of governance in Somalia over the past three-and-a-half decades, one of the country's most respected senior civil servants, Ali Said Araleh, testified thus:

Aden was so strict with the taxpayers' money that he saved enough from the presidency annual budget to build a presidential retreat in Afgoi, while others were pocketing public money. For instance, Prime Minister Egal used public revenue to build his private villa (Villa Baidoa) on the road to Afgoi. Prime Minister Abdirazak's respect for the law and his anti-corruption effort has no parallel in our history. His hands are absolutely untainted and the two are peerless as Somali leaders.¹³

In those yesteryears of civilian order, obsession with winning a seat in parliament turned electoral politics into a fractious business in which over sixty parties were registered for 123 seats in 1969. Further, office-holding became a license for indulgence in *Musuq Maasaq*, that is, corruption and unethical behavior. The second item made the population somewhat schizophrenic in that the very regimes that were so offensive to them were, in the same breath, asking of them to mobilize selflessly for a continuation of the nationalist struggle. The third issue set Somalia on its reputation as a beggar nation, heavily reliant on external contributions to both the annual budget and the financing of development expenditures. It also drove the whole region into the vortex of Superpower competition. By 1969, nine years of civilian incompetence and malfeasance culminated in the assassination of President Sharmarkee, testimony to the widening gulf between the state and society. A few days later, the military stepped in.

General Siyaad Barre's regime's tenure (1969–1990) can be divided into two broad periods: 1969–1979 and 1980–1990. Siyaad Barre and his cohorts (the Somali Revolutionary Council or SRC) came to power with the promise of eliminating corruption, rebuilding the economy and social institutions, returning to a genuine democratic governance, and a re-enchantment of the sense of national purpose. The first few years were notable for a number of bold initiatives. For instance, an official orthography was set for the Somali language, accompanied by a successful literacy campaign. New schools and roads were built, cooperative farms were established, and laws affirming the equality of women were introduced. All in all, despite an expansive nationalization of economic activity and the public shooting of two very senior SRC colleagues of Siyaad Barre and ten theologians, the regime enjoyed a modicum of popularity up to the middle of the decade.

The years from 1975 to 1978 were determinative. Nationalization bred new forms of cronyism and inefficiencies that began to enervate productivity and transactions,

compelling many to withdraw from the official economy. Relationship with the Soviet Union and its allies had developed into a tighter embrace, with more military equipment pouring into Somalia and, in the process, creating one of the largest armed forces in Black Africa. Further, the rhetoric about socialist democracy began to wear thin and voices of dissent started to speak about what they saw as the emergence of a harsh state and sycophantic politics. By mid-1977, with the Ethiopian regime of Col. Mengistu still reeling from gruesome internal power struggles, Somali forces in combination with guerillas of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) mounted a surprise and initially successful attack on the Somali-inhabited region of Ethiopia. They captured almost all of the Ogaden, except the three large cities of Jijjiga, Harar, and Dire Dawa. By early 1978, the Soviets had shifted their allegiance to Ethiopia. Together with Cuban and South Yemeni troops and new Soviet weapons, the Ethiopians counterattacked. Within a short time, the Somalis were decimated and then compelled to withdraw. By all accounts, the cost was enormous. In addition to the loss of thousands of lives, the war generated high inflation, as well as made the face of state power more militaristic. In the wake of intense recriminations that followed, a group of military officers staged a bloody but unsuccessful coup. The year 1979 closed with no external patron, deteriorating economic conditions, large refugee populations, serious damage to regime credibility, and the appearance of organized dissidence claiming the loyalties of their respective kin groups. Siyaad Barre and the regime responded by manipulating kin-based identities and, worse than the colonial administrations, pitted one segment of society against another, while the state was turned into a fortress. At this juncture, the Somali state clearly showed the same maladies that Clapham identified in many countries on the continent:

The rapid increase in the militarization of Sub-Saharan Africa from the mid-1970s onwards was a response, not simply to external developments, but to the desperate attempts of autocratic states to impose themselves on increasingly rebellious populations. The result, generally speaking, was to accelerate the process of state decay, while vastly increasing the cost in human suffering.¹⁴

The period from 1980 to 1990 was the decade of real decay, unprecedented repression, civil war, and final dissolution. Despite aid from the new Reagan Administration, including military training and supplies, the economy got worse. Here, the most onerous of the burdens fell on the farming communities of the lands in between and adjacent to the Shabelle and Juba rivers. For instance, tensions between customary land tenure and post-colonial state interventions in the form of lease-holding became acute. In addition, as the urban economy — including salaries and other amenities of state offices — declined precipitously, political power was deployed to arbitrarily grab pieces of land in these riverine zones. In many situations, this was tantamount to a full dispossession of the tillers of the land whose generations of intensive labor made these regions into the most productive parts of Somalia. But economic suffering was not limited to the southern regions. In many parts of the North, a growing privatization of the common range, more permanent settlements, and supervision of communal practices of land use had pressed hard on the environment. In addition, by the end of the 1980s a combination of highly

top-heavy state decisions, mounting and commodified economic activities, and changing habits of everyday life had created new and dramatic circumstances. An extensive study in even remote Erigavo District underscores these transformations. It is worthy of extensive quotation.

The development of a cash economy, coupled with the remittances from the Gulf in terms of goods-in-kind for animals sold there, has meant that the average pastoralist now has greater access to consumer items such as mass-produced cooking utensils and clothing. Also now more readily available are substitute foods, in particular white flour and white rice. The pastoral women claimed that to a large extent these new foods were substituted for their traditional diet, based on meat and sorghum. This change in customary diet, while convenient for pastoralists as the new foods can be easily stored and transported, had a negative nutritional impact. The new foods are significantly lower in iron and the B vitamins than the traditional meat and sorghum diet. . . . The Erigavo District has the dubious distinction of recording one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, a trend which could be markedly reversed if a return to the traditional diet could be achieved.¹⁵

New IMF structural adjustment policies triggered the devaluation of the shilling by more than 90 percent, further cutbacks on state employment and social spending, and a worsening trade balance. In 1985, the national debt climbed to the tune of US \$1 billion. Further, armed dissidents started to mount guerrilla-style challenges, crippling the reach of the authority of the state. The momentous year was 1988 when the forces of the Somali National Movement (SNM) crossed from their bases in Ethiopia and fought their way into some of the major centers in northwestern Somalia, including Hargeisa. A fierce engagement ensued in which the full military weight of the state was unleashed on mostly Isaaq-inhabited zones of the region. Thousands were killed, two of the towns heavily damaged — Hargeisa with the help of aerial bombardment — and tens of thousands hurried across the border in search of refuge in Ethiopia.

These events awakened the world to what was happening in Somalia. Consequently, international aid, including nearly \$680 million from the United States, began to dry up, further isolating the regime. In 1989, rebellion spread to many areas of the South. Siyaad Barre, in a last-ditch effort to salvage his authority, sent more weapons to his kin and cronies while at the same time doubling his efforts to weaken the opposition through greater exploitation of lineage differences. By the end of the year, the capital and a few other urban centers were under the effective rule of the regime.

In January 1991, Mogadishu itself exploded. After a month of hand-to-hand combat between the last remnants of the new fully clanized Somali army and the forces of the United Somali Congress (USC), who had a large following in the capital, the regime expired. Thousands died, and Siyaad Barre escaped to the territory of his kin, leaving behind a ruined country and people.

IV. Dissolution and Political Squalor

From 1991 to the present could be best characterized as years of misanthropy, blood-letting, greater destruction of whatever was left of the elements of the national state, massive and concentrated starvation, the break-up of the North and South, failed international intervention, continuing exodus from the country, and a generalized existential bleakness, especially for the majority inside the country.

As soon as Siyaad Barre fled, the leader of the civilian wing of the USC, Ali Mahdi Mohamed, was declared the interim president. Two immediate consequences followed: (1) General Aideed, the chairman of the USC and commander of their fighting forces, was quick to anathematize the act as an unwarranted and unilateral power grab; and (2) he threw a gauntlet by announcing himself to be the rightful person to assume the office. These developments destabilized the already fragile alliance within the Hawiye lineage group, which was predominant around the environs of the capital. In the meantime, other armed organizations, or *Jabhad*, around the country, of which there were no less than a dozen, made their own counter claims. Personal ambition combined with assumed representation of local interests, and the disappearance of central authority, gave aspiring individuals confidence to press for any advantage.

To compress, in quick time other developments transpired. First, some of the better organized and armed kin groups declared war on the USC and, subsequently, helped spread the post-Siyaad Barre atrocities to many areas of the South. Second, the SNM proclaimed the northern region a new sovereign state — the Republic of Somaliland. Third, Mogadishu entered its second and longest phase of mayhem and savagery. Since the capital was the premium, the Mahdi and Aideed forces went at each other with unrestrained ferocity. Simultaneously, thousands of armed hungry men and derelict youth gangs roamed the streets and neighborhoods, pillaging with great abandon. Fourth, hundreds of thousands were made destitute and displaced, causing greater movements of people inside the country and across the borders to the neighboring countries and beyond. Fifth, with a total lack of security and disruption of economic activities, particularly in the agricultural zones of the South, widespread hunger turned into a carnival of starvation.

Offended and alarmed by vivid pictures of suffering and grim news from Somalia, in early December 1992, a multinational force of over 34,000 troops (of which 24,000 were Americans) landed on the beaches of Mogadishu. By mid-1993, the immediate goal of delivering food to the starving was accomplished. However, other objectives like disarmament of clan militias, inception of a national dialogue, and rebuilding of basic public institutions proved very difficult.

The United Nations, which took over command of the multinational forces as well as the political mission, convened a number of high-profile conferences among the more than one dozen factions and a few representatives from other segments of the society. While these meetings came to be generally known for bizarre disagreements and petty jealousies among the participants, General Aideed became the most obdurate of them all. In addition, during the summer and autumn of 1993, two ugly and jarring events took place. First, on June 5, twenty-two U.S. troops were killed and more wounded, while dozens of Somalis lost their lives. The day after, the body of one of the dead Americans was dragged through the streets. In the wake of all this, a general consensus was reached

that Somalis had their chance and, therefore, they should be left to their own devices. President Clinton set March 31, 1994, for complete American withdrawal, with the U.N. mandate to end soon after.

A. Regional Particularities

If the last sixteen years were, quintessentially, a time of further descent into internecine warfare, destructive claims and counterclaims by somewhat known as well as obscure clanists, and international bewilderment, it has also been a time of some dramatic changes. Among the latter was the appearance of regionalist identities, partly as a logical extension of the confluence of the death of the national state, the rising prominence of genealogical affinities, and even narrower individualist sub-texts that always hid in the inner folds of identity politics. The two most pronounced examples of arguments for regional distinctiveness were: North (Somaliland) and Northeast (Puntland).

1. North (Somaliland)

This was, and still is, the most extreme of any advocacy for regional particularity. Founded on the assumption that the post-colonial Somali Republic was no more, proponents of this new entity (primarily incited by an agitated and armed wing of the SNM) declared the secession of the region from the rest of the country in Burao in May 1991. A careful inquiry into the atmosphere surrounding the event shows that, in addition to the horrible developments taking place in Mogadishu, the Burao declaration was endorsed by those present non-SNM not because they were sold on the value of the idea but as a temporary acquiescence to prevent immediate bloodshed and to buy time for a return to non-coercive and democratic deliberations over the direction of the politics of the region. To date, that communal-wide and free conversation among the people of the area has *not* taken place. The only relevant act worth mentioning, in this context, is the conduct of an abruptly arranged constitutional referendum on May 31, 2001. Though it was reported that 97 percent of the votes cast endorsed the constitutional basis for an “independent Somaliland,” it became quickly evident that: (a) active encouragement and menacing discouragement dominated the atmosphere — that is, on the eve of the voting, enthusiastic mobilization was accorded those in favor of secession in contradistinction to intimidating pressures on dissenters, and (b) a boycotting by the communities of the eastern zone of the region was staged, a disaffection that has turned into defiant and bloody resistance in this portion of the territory.

Despite the above, this region has produced significant accomplishments, superior to any other initiatives in other parts of Somalia.¹⁶ First, and most noteworthy, is the creation of an indigenously constructed *modus operandi* among the various communities, which has resulted in a modicum of order. Second, rudimentary political structures of governance are in place. Here, the main units are: executive, legislature, and judiciary. The executive comprises a President and Vice President (and their appointed cabinet) directly elected through a general election for a five-year term; the legislature is made up of a Council of Representatives and a small Council of Elders (the former is elected every five years; the latter every six years). Third, competition for electoral office is channeled through competitive party politics. Fourth, a small but still growing proportion of

children is attending school. Fifth, the rhythm of daily material existence and minimum economic transactions, particularly in urban areas (albeit overwhelmingly buoyed by overseas remittances), are visible.

Notwithstanding these commendable accomplishments, there are worrisome issues. First, there are still many small arms in the hands of individuals or households. Second, on balance, the exodus of talent continues, as there are no major sources of employment. Third, with a puny (less than \$30 million) annual budget and an absence of any external productive investment, severe impoverishment is common among the vast majority. Fourth, there is a visible return to the corrupt habits of the old and dead order — witnesses to such a reversion are the total dominance of the capital, Hargeisa, over the rest and the appearance of a commensurate sociopolitical class that monopolizes major decisions and privileges. Fifth, apostasy with regard to the sanctity of national unity is promoted while any advocacy for the preservation of the national union is criminalized. Here, there is a calculated “othering” of Somalis from outside of the region in order to deepen suspicion and, thus, create a new identity. Sixth, thus far political appointments have been profligate (e.g., a 40-member cabinet), ignoring the yawning discrepancy between, on one side, the necessity of parsimony and effectiveness and, on the other, an irresponsible use of very meager public resources. Seventh, despite nearly a decade and a half of campaigning for international acceptance, no state has yet extended recognition to a new sovereignty called Somaliland. Eighth, the elite in Hargeisa have tied their own interests to the strategic designs of Ethiopia to such an extent that, as I write, there are no reports of any public outcry over the invasion of Ethiopian troops deep into the central regions of the South and the capital. Perhaps this is a measure of how deeply beholden to Ethiopian suzerainty are the region’s political class and their cause.

To recapitulate, the people of Northern Somalia (Somaliland) have made achievements worthy of note and deserving of further enthusiastic support. This is a source of victory and pride that I have called *guul*. However, the damages done are also substantial. Among the latter stands out the sectarian and instrumentalist ambition to secede that, in the act, degrades and then tears up national belonging, a phenomenon I have designated as *godob*. If used wisely, the transitional period ought to be an opportunity for the people within the region, as well as the rest, to explore the possibilities for a new and workable political dispensation and governance.

2. Northeast (Puntland)

Like the rest of the country, the people of the Northeastern region found themselves caught in the aftermath of the implosion of the Siyaad Barre government and the demise of the national state. Subsequently, a dual yet connected struggle ensued: on one side was the release of personal and political venom as well as ambition to grab local power; on the other was the collective urge to pick up the responsibilities for the general well-being of the region. Compounded by the arrival of large numbers of people fleeing from Mogadishu or getting out of refugee camps in other zones, the challenge of balancing narrow political interests, new religious militancy, and broad civic imperatives ended in violent encounters and instability, particularly between 1991 and 1998 (five administrations in seven years!). The primary responsibility for this failure was attributed to the then dominant political organization, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front

(SSDF), and its leadership. In addition, the United Somali Congress made its own forceful sectarian claims to the southern part of the region.

On July 23, 1998, in the wake of many months of multiple communal discussions and infighting, the region was given a new name, "Puntland State," with its charter to consecrate the decision. In August of 1998, a regional executive committee of nine ministers was named, to be followed by a regional assembly of sixty-nine members.

The Northeast's new government is different from that of the North in one crucial point: the former declared itself to be no more than an autonomous part of a united Somalia; the latter is still categorical in the intention to secede. As for deficiencies, there are many. First, the Northeast's material resource base is even more limited. With very low annual rainfall, for instance, there are no known areas suitable for any type of farming. Outside of the main city of Bosaaso, where the port is the focal point of some import/export transactions, and a few smaller urban enclaves, there are hardly any other significant sources of local employment. Like the North, what there is of investment comes primarily from remittances from the people of the region who have sought and continue to look for refuge in other parts of Africa and beyond. Second, until a few years ago, the politics of the region was bedeviled by elements of the old leadership of the SSDF (particularly in the form of Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf), who insisted through violent acts on keeping political power to themselves. With Yusuf's attention focused in the last few years on how to salvage his ambitious leadership in the hapless Transitional Federal Government, the Northeast is relatively more stable. Given the feeble nature of the power and reach of the regional institutions, however, the coast of "Puntland" has become a haven for local pirates. Such criminal activities are known to be disruptions to maritime law and freedom of the seas. Therefore, international counteraction (particularly in the form of the presence of the United States Navy) is part of the oceanscape. Third, "Puntland" is embroiled in a simmering contest with "Somaliland" over the boundaries of the eastern zones of the latter. Propelled by both a clanist ideology that sees the kin groups of Sool and Sanaaq as belonging to an identity called *Harti* and with the active encouragement of some of the denizens of the two local communities, political leadership in "Puntland" has militarily clashed with the authority of the North, poisoning in the process the relationship between the two regions. Fourth, the southern settlements (e.g., Galkayo) of the Northeast are peopled by diverse kin communities, which, in times of incompetent and sectarian leadership, easily divide themselves into highly belligerent camps. Here, both the fissiparous reputation of the leadership and an absence of significant representation from the kin communities of the Southern border areas diminish legitimacy and effectiveness. The new military collaboration between Ethiopian forces and Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf's militia, which had culminated in the invasion of the southern parts of the country and the bloody engagements in Mogadishu, could only wreck any modicum of good will existing between communities sharing settlements or borders, especially in the North and central area.

If the North and the Northeast have been, relatively, zones of a return of some order, with the adoption of some constitutional procedures and attempts at building public institutions, then the rest of Somalia, until the now temporary rise of the UIC, has been mired in bloody underdevelopment. Unable to see through the trap of "othering" and compounded by the diversity of communities (an asset in times of peace and the construction of a cosmopolitan culture) and the allure of capturing the capital and urban

centers as well as laying claim to the rich farmland between rivers, these regions have been theaters for vicious “warlord” appetites. For many keen observers, it is in these parts of the country (primarily from Mogadishu to Kismayo) where the cost of dissolution to the Somali people has been the greatest.

B. Attempts at Reconciliation and the Revival of the State¹⁷

Since 1991, over a dozen gatherings, sponsored by different elements of the international society, were convened to bring representation from various groups. The declared purpose of all of these conferences was to restore peace and national authority. Two of them stand out among the rest for being at once promising and utterly disappointing.

1. Arta: A Betrayal of a Gift

Warlords and factional leaders dominated each of the eleven conferences before Arta. All failed to produce consensus, as each self-appointed warlord was adamant on insisting to be the rightful candidate for the presidency of the country. As a result, most Somalis submitted to the prospect of not seeing a national state in their lifetime. The bleakness of the predicament proved so paralyzing that it would fall to the partially Somali-populated small Republic of Djibouti and its leader to recharge hopes of saving Somalia from itself. Ismail Omar Gaileh, with the zest that accompanies a new presidency, coupled with his own primordial affinity with the Somali people, made a personal assignment of the pressing necessities of reducing regional instability and Djibouti’s immediate vulnerabilities.

With his surprise announcement at the U.N. General Assembly in 1999 to convene a different gathering to rebuild Somalia, President Gaileh put the full energy of his administration behind the endeavor. So it was that this meeting of Somalis took place in Djibouti in March 2000. A series of workshops were conducted for a month. Traditional leaders, businessmen, women, intellectuals, and others were invited. Most significantly, warlords were also extended a welcome, but *not* as veto holders. All in all, nearly 5,000 delegates came from every region to deliberate the future of their country. Predictably, most of the more self-important warlords stayed away; they complained that they were devalued by not being treated as the preeminent leaders of their respective communities. In response, the Djibouti hosts reinstated their welcome as individual participants, equal to the rest and, therefore, with no *a priori* privileged role. While the Government of Djibouti provided modest facilities and acted as a fair broker, the key actors were Somali “traditional” leaders and former politicians. One moment in the proceedings is etched in the memory of those who were present: negotiations came to a halt when sharp conflicting interests clashed. Fearful that the whole conference was in danger of collapse, Gaileh intervened by appealing to the delegates to consider their collective interest. In an emotionally charged tone, he pleaded, “*Somaliyee ii hiiliya aan idiin hiiliye*” (O Somalis, help me so that I can help you). The appeal moved the delegates and broke the logjam. Afterwards, the key obstacle proved to be the selection of the official delegates to the conference who, ultimately, were to choose a new parliament of 245 deputies. The formula for working out the distribution of the seats was set at dividing the nation into 4.5 communities. In the meantime, a national transitional charter was drafted which the

delegates approved and the provisional parliament later adopted. Perhaps the most daunting task was how to equitably parcel out the parliamentary seats *within* each community. This milestone was reached after some acute wrangling and, subsequently, Somalia's first "democratically" *selected* chamber of deputies was put into place. Moreover, the chamber proceeded to elect an interim president from several competing candidates. These developments took place without notable interference from the Djibouti Government; and, critical to note, none of the defeated candidates expressed any doubt that the host government was anything but impartial. In short, the Arta reconciliation conference brought achievements that seemed farfetched only a few months earlier. The Somali public, on the whole, responded with a conspicuous sense of relief, elation, and anticipation. In short, though not immune to intrigues among the delegates and their hangers-on, Arta seemed, in the words of the ancient poet Horace, "not to draw smoke from the brightness of light," as others before it had done, "but to bring out light from smoky murk." What would result from this initial success depended on the caliber of the new leadership, its reception in Mogadishu and the rest of the country, and the attitude of the neighboring countries, particularly Ethiopia.

Interim President Abdiqasim Salad and his entourage made an unplanned visit to the ruined capital. Despite the chaos, hundreds of thousands came out to celebrate what they hoped to be the beginning of a peaceful era. But the promise soon tumbled as the Transitional National Government (TNG) was hobbled by a combination of Ethiopian-cum-warlord subversion, the clanistic formula (4.5) used to set representation, and the inherent defects of the new team.

The first signal of trouble was the transparently unhappy presence of the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, among the dignitaries during the inaugural ceremony to congratulate Abdiqasim Salad. In retrospect, Zenawi's attendance belied his hidden agenda of what he desired to become of Somalia. Salad immediately dispatched an envoy to visit Addis Ababa to relay that the new Somali Government was intent on collaborating closely with its neighbors and strengthening positive relations between Somalia and Ethiopia. Later, several other expeditions were sent to emphasize Somali perspectives, but every delegation met with Ethiopian skepticism. Within six months, the Ethiopian strategy became clear. It at once started to stress the incompleteness of the peace process since the warlords were absent, and also declared that Islamists of the *Al-Itihaad* orientation dominated the interim government. In response, Salad and his cohorts made several attempts to demonstrate otherwise and to reassure the Ethiopian leadership. However, the situation deteriorated to a point of no return when Ethiopia accused Salad himself of being a member of *Al-Itihaad*. From then on, Addis Ababa adopted a four-pronged strategy to destabilize and delegitimize the TNG. First, Ethiopia convened a meeting for the warlords and, in the process, helped establish an umbrella structure for them, to be named the Somali Reconciliation and Reconstruction Council (SRRC). Second, Ethiopia increased military supplies for members of the group. Third, Ethiopia actively lobbied at the OAU (now AU) and other international organizations to unseat the TNG. In this context, Ethiopia gave more encouragement to the self-proclaimed "Somaliland Republic" to enhance the latter's search for recognition as an independent country while simultaneously repeating platitudes about the unity and territorial integrity of the Somali Republic at public forums, such as the assembly of the Heads of State and Governments of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) in Eldoret

and, more recently, at the AU meeting in Maputo. Finally, Ethiopia intensified its campaign at the IGAD forum to convene an IGAD-sponsored conference to “complete” the Arta process.

In the eyes of some, perhaps the conference’s greatest weakness was the working assumption that both clan identity and its associated numerical weight were to be the mechanism for representation. Many communities were alienated by the use of what they saw as an ill-founded and atavistic formula. In the meantime, the weaknesses of the TNG leadership were exposed. First to come to the fore was the fact that both the interim President (Mr. Abdiqasim Salad), and the Prime Minister (Dr. Ali Kalif Galyedh), as well as many of the cabinet appointees, were remnants of the Siyaad era. Having failed to publicly atone for that association undermined any popular hope for the beginning of a new political history. Second, no broad vision, let alone a specific one, was articulated for a national mobilization fit for the difficulties of the interregnum. Third, hardly any attention was paid to competence or integrity in the appointment of a new team, reviving memories of the vulgar and cheap horse-trading that crippled the old Somali national state. Fourth, no immediate tactics, never mind a strategy, were conceived to reach and win over the large and relatively talented diaspora communities. Fifth, no quick advantage was taken of the international community, which was admittedly tired of Somali insouciance toward their national well-being but which may have become genuinely responsive to a mature, collective, and intelligent plea from a new and legitimate Somali leadership. Sixth, Salad and Galyedh clashed and then turned on each other. Salad accused Galyedh of arrogance, a deficit of dexterity, and, most damaging, malfeasance, while the latter labeled the former as power-hungry and dictatorial. With barely half of the three-year term of TNG gone, and after a parliamentary vote of no confidence, Galyedh was dismissed while abroad. The TNG’s tenure of three years ended without a single lasting achievement. Meditating on the utter disappointment in the autumn of 2005, and with an eye on the current developments, President Gaileh attributed the main and constant cause of the failure of leadership to a “preoccupation with grabbing as much money as possible and as quickly, even before any new governance is fully installed.”¹⁸

2. Eldoret and Mbagathi: Corruption and Ethiopian-Warlord Axis

Ethiopia’s lobby at the OAU/AU failed, but its efforts at IGAD paid off. Members of the organization agreed to launch a Somali conference managed by what came to be dubbed “frontline states,” comprised of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya (the last country acting as Chair). Under enormous international pressure, the TNG and the Djibouti Government agreed to this proposal. Moreover, the TNG assumed the neutrality of Kenya. Sadly, this naïve presumption enabled Ethiopia and representatives of the international community to change the nature of the conference from one of reconciling the TNG and the warlords to a completely new one. The generation of lists representing three groups — the TNG, the warlords, and civil society — and the appointment of a Kenyan, E. Mwangle, well known for his proclivities toward venality, set the stage for a disheveled and Ethiopian-dominated process. The earliest alert that this was not a neutral approach transpired when the names of individuals in the civil society group whom Ethiopia deemed unfriendly were expunged from the list of participants. Furthermore, when members of the

international community suggested that the conference needed Somali resource persons, Chairman Mwangle (Kenya's special envoy) submitted the list to warlords for their approval. They rejected it, and, consequently, this act gave them the confidence to thwart further conference deliberations that were not to their liking. The international representatives reintroduced the list to the IGAD Technical Committee. Once the Ethiopian delegation realized that the list could not be vetoed, they argued for an expansion by adding five names they felt were amenable to their agenda. As a result, the list of resource persons grew to nearly twenty. This proved to be quantitatively too cumbersome. Therefore, it was agreed that both Ethiopia's and Djibouti's additions would be put aside. In spite of this consensus, however, Chairman Mwangle made no attempt to call in the resource persons to the conference. Moreover, he never convened a meeting for those among the group who were already in Eldoret.

When the conference commenced, non-Somalis started to make the agenda. In one instance, an American doctoral student presented the points, which comprised the key items in the rules of procedure and the declaration of the cessation of hostilities. Among them was the establishment of a *federal* system of governance, a crucial issue in which Somalis did not have any say. In addition, the "mediators," including the graduate student who held the title of "advisor" to the Chair, created warlord-dominated "leaders' committees" as the paramount decision-making organs of the conference. Again, there was no input from either the Somalis (outside of the warlords) or those who study Somali society. The upshot of all these compounded occurrences was that Ethiopia and its allies continued to try to gerrymander both the composition and quantity of the delegates. The final list of the participants in the plenary sessions was finalized as a newly elected government of Kenya appointed a new envoy (and Chair) to the conference. Furthermore, in January, the site was moved to Mbagathi, on the outskirts of Nairobi. At that stage, representatives of the international community and other observers confirmed that Ethiopia single-handedly controlled two-thirds of the list of conference participants.

Previously serving in senior diplomatic posts as well as top civil servant positions in Kenya's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador B. Kiplagat came with a clean reputation; that is, a degree of professionalism in a postcolonial Kenya known for the opposite. This appointment injected a sense of hope into the proceedings and Somalis expected him to behave as an honest mediator, one who would correct past misdeeds. Ambassador Kiplagat moved quickly to restore propriety to the process by relocating the conference to a cheaper location housed in a college rather than in an expensive hotel in Eldoret.

The first real test came with a contest over the nature of the list of participants, and the differentiation between the pirates and the legitimate individuals who represented civic communities. Unfortunately, Ambassador Kiplagat failed to take action, for he seemed barely knowledgeable of the Somali problem, his superb diplomatic skills notwithstanding. Such a shortcoming emboldened those whose project was to have their own instrumentally advantageous way. Most significantly, the warlords and their Ethiopian backers felt ensconced in their dominant role. But the issue of legitimacy could not be easily avoided, and Ambassador Kiplagat had to find a way to come to terms with it. Subsequently, he took the initiative of bringing forth a list of "traditional leaders" whom he intended to invite to the conference. This the warlords rejected, demonstrating three pivotal factors: (1) the Ambassador's lack of knowledge about Somali culture and

his unwillingness to seek counsel from informed Somalis (traditional leaders are not subjects of anyone in communal affairs, let alone warlords); (2) the degree of power ceded to the warlords since the inception of the conference; and (3) the significance of Ethiopian partisanship in distorting the negotiations. The puzzling question, then, was this: Why would a civic-minded and religious man acquiesce to the chicanery of people loyal only to their caprices (with criminal records to boot) and their patrons, allowing them to gain so much potency under his gaze? A plausible explanation was revealed when, on one occasion, the Ambassador confided in another diplomat that he “did not want to fight Ethiopia.” This sentiment was reinforced by another statement he shared with a keen observer of the conference to the effect that the interests of Ethiopia and Kenya should be looked after during the conference.

Ethiopia and warlord dominance took a slight dip when Ambassador Kiplagat appointed an independent Somali group to harmonize the documents produced by the conference’s six functional committees. The Ethiopian envoy and his deputy were alarmed when the Chairperson of the Harmonization Committee, Professor Abdi Ismail Samatar, was introduced. The Ambassador claimed that Samatar was “partisan,” and therefore ought to be excluded. This line of argument did not convince the rest of IGAD’s Technical Committee, which compelled Ethiopia to change its tactics. Ethiopia proposed that if Samatar was approved as Chair, Ethiopia should be given the opportunity to name Samatar’s deputy. This demand was turned down. It is important to note here that neither Kenya nor Djibouti demanded the same privilege. From there on, Ethiopia and its clients focused their energy on how to derail the Harmonization Committee’s work, and warned that they would not accept the Committee’s report. Ambassador Kiplagat found himself in a tight spot. He tried to mend fences with Ethiopia and the warlords by suggesting that the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the six committees join the Harmonization team. But soon the Ambassador realized that the quality of the work would suffer, as these additions were bound to bring their disagreements into the task of harmonizing the documents.

The Harmonization Committee handed its report to the chairman of the IGAD Technical Committee, and, after two minor changes, he requested that the document be presented to a full gathering of the entire Technical Committee and official representatives from the international community. Immediately, the Ethiopian emissaries walked out of the meeting, before reading the report or hearing its verbal presentation. Nonetheless, the discussion proceeded and the remaining members of the Technical Committee and international partners commended the overall professional quality of the Harmonization Report and, more particularly, the draft charter that could cater to the common interest of the Somali people. Despite the news that, when it became public, Somalis inside and outside the country were enthusiastically receptive to the Harmonization Committee’s document, Ethiopian representatives began to discredit the draft charter and egged on their clients to resist it. The Ethiopian ambassador accused Professor Abdi Samatar of being a “traitor” and anti-Ethiopian. But he failed to articulate both the reasons behind the charges and the connection between the Harmonization Report and Ethiopia. After all, the peace process was for Somalia and not concerned, at least at this stage, with Somali-Ethiopian relations!

Later, the warlords attempted to produce their own version of the charter, but brought out a one-page document that addressed only three articles (the Harmonization Committee’s draft charter had 120 articles). When this proposal did not convince anyone,

they put forward a version of the draft charter favorable to their interests. Eighteen warlords signed a cover letter to Ambassador Kiplagat in which they openly stated that their version alone should be presented to the plenary of the conference. If not, they threatened, they would walk out of the peace process altogether. There were six issues that distinguished the perspective of the warlords and the draft charter forwarded by the Harmonization Committee. First, the harmonization document had 120 articles while the warlords' contained 60 articles. Second, the warlords stipulated that the proposed interim parliament should have a total of 450 members; the Harmonization Committee suggested 171. Third, the warlords asked for an open-ended size of the executive portfolios of the new government; the other specified that cabinet appointments should not exceed thirteen. Fourth, the warlords demanded that a federal form of governance be adopted immediately; the other preferred that a national constitutional commission be given the responsibility of developing a federal constitution and determining what the constituent units should be. Fifth, and most critically, the warlords proposed that they themselves select members of the new parliament. The implications of such an idea meant that unelected delegates in the conference's plenary would automatically become deputies and, moreover, the warlords would nominate the remaining fifty-nine MPs. In contrast, the harmonized charter suggested that communities ought to select their representatives in the interim parliament. Sixth, the warlords asserted that the tenure of an interim government be a period of five years; the harmonized document designated three years. The two documents were electronically posted (Hirraan.com) for three weeks, and readers were able to vote online to register their preference. Eighty percent of the respondents favored the harmonization charter.

Whatever the relative merits of the two documents, it was flabbergasting to witness the audacity of Ethiopia and its clients to demand that their self-serving draft charter *alone* should be debated in the plenary session. Also enigmatic was the fact that Ambassador Kiplagat, as Chairman of IGAD's Technical Committee, succumbed to their demands despite the fact that a significant number of the civil society group and the official delegation of the TNG did not share the warlords' demands. Soon thereafter, the Chairman's task was made easier by a growing split within the ranks of the TNG. The Prime Minister (Mr. Hassan Abshir) and the Speaker of the TNG Parliament (Mr. Abdulla Deroow) decided, without prior consultation with the TNG's decision-making committee, to vote in favor of a warlord's proposal for a compromise on major issues. With full realization that this change of mind contradicted the TNG's official (written and on file) position, the Chairman took advantage of the split by rushing the "signed compromise" to the plenary. Even more bewildering, the plenary's function as the supreme locus of final debate and decisions (through consensus), duly stipulated by the conference's rules of procedure, was premeditatedly preempted. Ambassador Kiplagat side-stepped this protocol and relayed to the plenary that the "leaders" had agreed on four key issues: the size of the assembly at 351 members; immediate adoption of federalism; an interim period of four years; and warlords and faction leaders, in consultation with traditional leaders, selecting members of parliament. Many of the delegates supporting the warlord and Ethiopian agenda, having received early notification of what was to come, cheered as Ambassador Kiplagat made the announcement. Others who were not forewarned objected to what they saw as a deceitful stampede. Subsequently, they requested that the issues be discussed. Ambassador Kiplagat responded that the decision

was *final* and immediately adjourned the meeting. The Ambassador's behavior contravened the letter and spirit of reconciliation, and fueled a growing suspicion that he was predisposed from the outset toward a warlord-Ethiopian pact. At such a late hour, unless he regained his role as an impartial mediator, the entire process was likely to become illegitimate, with Kenya's accepted role as a neutral Somali neighbor fatally damaged and the peace conference doomed to the same fate as the many others that preceded it. For Ethiopia and its client warlords, their long-term project was clear: the warlords desired to either take total control of the country without concern for the niceties of representation and democratic legitimacy or to remain in command of separate fiefdoms. For its part, Ethiopia seemed bent on helping establish either a weak client state in Somalia led by a favorite warlord or, perhaps better, fragmented and Bantustan-like territories in which Addis Ababa would call the shots more directly. In brief, the last scenario Ethiopia would welcome was a united and reinvigorated country, led by independent-minded and able Somali leaders.

The conclusion of the Mbagathi conference produced the following: (a) a transitional Charter shaped by the political interests of the victorious warlords, through eighteen members of the Leaders Committee; (b) a new name for the country, Somali Federal Transitional Republic; (c) a national legislature consisting of two chambers; (d) supremacy of law; (e) freedom of the media; (f) the right to establish and organize political parties; and (g) a tenure of five years for the Transitional Federal institutions.

A careful examination of the Transitional Charter conveys some familiar but still laudable guarantees that were key ingredients in the Constitution of the old Somali Republic. These include equality of citizens in front of the law, freedom of expression and association, and the right to education and property. But there are major deficiencies. These could be divided into two: Charter-specific liabilities and TFG shortcomings. Among the first are the endorsement of the change from a unitary state to federalism without any nationwide discussion or referendum, an open invitation for endless clanist intrigue for regional status, the affirmation of an exaggerated number of seats in the new Parliament (initially 337, later reduced to 275 for the lower house and 113 for an upper house yet to be set up), and an assumption that the extremely feeble economy of the Somali Republic would be able to support such an elaborate structure of governance. After nearly three years of existence, the main weaknesses of the TFG have become even more public. First, President Abdullahi Yusuf has proven to be short on leadership capabilities fit for making the transition into a time for reconciliation, peace-making, and visionary competence. On the contrary, he has undermined the promise by, among others: acting unilaterally (a reminder of Siyaad Barre's style); violating the division of power as set by the Charter; threatening any opposition with violence; selecting a prime minister with no leadership experience or qualifications suitable for such a complex task; acquiescing in the creation of 102 Cabinet positions whose appointees were mostly unqualified warlords or their recommended kin; continuing the use of the idiom and logic of clanism in his public and private utterances/calculations, all the way to the composition of his intimate advisors and adjuncts; and, most distressingly, inviting Ethiopia as a patron for the physical survival of his presidency and that of his regime.

The combined consequences of these structural and leadership deformities have been grave and numerous. Perhaps most telling were these facts: First, the TFG, in addition to serious internal and combustible divisions (typified by last year's resignation of eighteen

key ministers), has yet to find a permanent physical location inside the country from which to govern, notwithstanding the highly temporary sites in confined Jowhar earlier, latter insecure Baidoa, and now furiously fought over Mogadishu. Compare this reality to President Abdullahi Yusuf's overconfident address to the Summit of the Islamic Conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, on December 8, 2005:

The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is now fully functional inside Somalia trying to reclaim the country from its lawlessness. We are basically starting from scratch and despite our meager resources we are steadily achieving a tangible progress on the ground. The consolidation of the New Government inside Somalia, together with improving stability, create a real opportunity to achieve peace and security, promote governance and the rule of law and begin recovery, reconstruction and development throughout Somalia.¹⁹

Second, the division within the TFG continues to be deep and wide:²⁰ 29 members of the cabinet resigned last August; the Prime Minister was confronted with a vote of no confidence by a large majority of 200 parliamentary deputies who gathered to debate the efficacy of the regime; and a senior minister was assassinated, while another was injured. Third, and above all, there was the appearance and fast victories of the Union of Islamic Courts, who were defeated only with the large Ethiopian invasion and brutal occupation — evidence for a thick and broad alienation on the part of the larger public from the TFG.

C. The Union of Islamic Courts: An Alternative?

At the root of an awakened Islamic consciousness are at least eight factors: globalization and its nefarious economic and social effects on Islamic communities around the world; the total crash of the national state attributed to the destructive policies and corrosive personal leadership and regime of Siyaad Barre; the subsequent descent into unprecedented internecine wars; the spread of clanist warlordism in pursuit of individual and sectarian interests; an evaporation of ethical values in public affairs; a paucity of a unifying civic action to successfully respond to the prevailing conditions (particularly safety, order, and economic well-being); an absence of an attractive vision expressive of collective redemption and a regenerative future; and a glaring loss of national pride that had ushered in new levels of dependence and submissiveness to external machinations.

Notwithstanding a simplistic typecasting by some observers, the composition of UIC was complex. Consequently, at this stage, let alone during its brief triumph, it is still difficult to discern fully the make up of the organization, its full philosophical outlook, the sources of its funding, its conception of the transitional period, its style of leadership and preferred form of state and governance, its long-term aspirations for the country, and its complete strategy to interact with the rest of the world. I will keep these “on hold” for another time. A point to note here is that, despite the demise of the structure of the UIC, there is little doubt that its broad national outlook is held on to by a significant portion of the Somali people. The sharpening contest over the long-term future of Somalia by its people will be shaped by, among others, the presence of social and political Islamism.

Such a development, in its generic necessity, is unavoidable. Both historical identity and the pestilential nature of the present political climate press forth the relevance of a collective salvation informed by Islamic thought. If this is accurate, then, it seems appropriate and timely to sort out different orientations that might claim Islam as a source of inspiration. I proffer three broad scenarios. The defunct UIC was not an exception. In fact, its members conveyed all three perspectives. More importantly, both the current resistance to Ethiopian invasion and its allies the TFG, and debates over the future, are couched in heavily Islamist terms. Only the last option, in my opinion, has the potential to fully capacitate the faithful to deal with an entropic Somali Republic and an impatient hypermodern world.

1. Reactionary

In light of contemporary global affairs and the preoccupation with “terrorism,” this is the most common scenario that jumps immediately into the minds of the ill informed, especially non-Muslims. Beyond that stereotypical reflex, however, there are occasions when the label fits. An inventory of features associated with a reactionary Islamic perspective includes: (a) a counterfeit innocence and zeal, (b) a backward-looking, literal, and completely dogmatic interpretation of the great texts of the Quran and the *Hadith*, (c) brute application of that hackneyed interpretation to every aspect of human life, (d) aprioristic hostility to other faiths, (e) annihilation of basic civic freedoms, (f) imposition of extreme patriarchal domination, (g) intolerance toward secular learning, the play of reason in shaping human affairs, and scientific explorations and consequent ordering of relationships between humans and the natural world, and (h) suppression of the autonomy of the aesthetic and, subsequently, the reduction of everyday life to an existence bereft of such creativity and joyous sensibilities as art, music and song, poetry, theatre, dance, and sport. Albert Memmi, a long-term sympathizer with the peoples of Africa and the Islamic world, has come to the same and scathing conclusion:

But the victory of the fundamentalists would be a step backward; none of the problems that threaten the modern world would be resolved. On the contrary, it would be a systematic return to the past, involving the exclusive use of traditional texts, suspicion of all novelty and critical thought, the restriction, if not suppression, of the majority of civil liberties, greater police surveillance than that experienced under lay rulers, increased attacks on women, the rigorous separation of the sexes, the stifling of most anodyne and most natural aspirations of the young — music, dancing — whose youth will be stolen, confiscated by the monster of the theocratic state.²¹

In short, a reactionary Islamist project, appealing though it might be to some who are caught up in a chaotic and dehumanizing context, is replete with cruel and disabling dead-ends. An example of such an order was the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

2. Conservative

An immediate attribute of this option is that it is at once more flexible than the reactionary mode and yet saddled with some similar problems. First, a conservative Islamist approach has a modicum of appreciation for the modern world, at least in the areas of administrative management, economic growth, technological adaptation, social welfare, and, though highly filtered, a calculating engagement with the rest of the world. Among the deficits are resistance to innovative interpretations of the great texts, major constraints on basic personal freedoms, and a limited participatory political order tightly woven into a patriarchal tradition. This perspective's potential liabilities in the long haul might be weighty enough to denude the assets. The Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and some of the Gulf States, in their at times drastically different styles, manifest a basic mixture of these attributes.

3. Democratic and Developmental

This scenario integrates the best of these three sources of tacit knowledge and worthy values: Somali kinship, Islamic piety, and democracy and development. The Somali tradition of kinship (as distinct from clanism) emphasizes fairness, generosity, and obedience to *Heer*. At the heart of a worldly Islamic philosophy are the promotion of peace, justice, and equality for all. "The basic élan of the Quran," writes Fazhur Rahman, is its "stress on socio-economic justice and essential egalitarianism." On the other hand, democracy's chief characteristics include individual liberty, choice, and accountability of power, while development underscores a perpetual but measured transformation of the cultural, environmental, scientific, economic, and political spheres of the society. Essential indices for gauging such a strategy are an accent on ethical competence and legitimate achievement; tolerance, if not respect for, nuance and diversity through a normalization of *Ijtihad*; and freedom of thinking in a non-coercive atmosphere. No Muslim country in the modern world has fully achieved this scenario. A few are slowly moving in that direction, however, with Turkey and Malaysia as the most frequently mentioned.

In an earlier work of nearly a decade-and-a-half ago, I suggested that a dual challenge was facing Somali society: the first was how to make a successful transition from an older and now atrophied mode of being in the world to one that could enable Somalis to respond to the critical vagaries of their existence — that is, subjective experiences and objective imperatives thrown up by the demands of the modern world; and, second, that such a transition required a creative and effective synthesis of kinship, Islamic virtues, and the fruits of modernity.²² Together, transition and synthesis are tantamount to a gearing up for a new ontology. That assignment and what is at stake are even more apparent today. If Somalis make headway in their epochal project, then, they will have added a precious contribution to the struggle for an Islamic cosmopolitanism robust enough to simultaneously co-exist comfortably with the multi-civilizational modern world and to negotiate successfully the ambiguities of globalization. To be sure, this is the most daunting option — one whose pursuit will require all the intelligence, creativity, dexterity, discipline, and patience that Somalis can muster. Despite the enormous difficulties, it is a journey pleasing to Allah, possible and most thrilling to begin against the humiliating political squalor of the present.

V. The Necessity of the State and Options of Governance

Somalis are no different from other societies in that none could meet its basic collective needs (ranging from security to environmental and economic well-being to education and scientific advancement) without an effective public power. As Adam Smith, the great sage of markets and international exchange, taught us long ago, “the authority and security of civil government is a necessary condition for the flourishing of liberty, reason, and happiness of humankind.” While this is uniform across the modern world, the imperative is greatest among late-developing societies. The state is not and cannot be everything but its absence is a form of acute social homelessness. Even the World Bank, contemporary apostle of market economics, made this landmark assertion in 1997, with regard to the indispensability of the state for a viable society:

. . . good government is not a luxury, it is a vital necessity for development
. . . an effective state is vital for the provision of goods and services — and the rules and institutions — that allow markets to flourish and people to lead healthier, happier lives.²³

The condition of the past sixteen years testifies to the supreme deficits that come with the destruction of national political structures. Another decade or more of the present situation is too horrible to contemplate. But, in order to construct a new national and effective state, Somalis will have to address this most difficult of issues: *the resurrection of a vibrant peoplehood*. In that regard, it is a fact that the nationalist spirit of collective belonging has been gravely damaged. The consequences include mutual suspicion, anger, pent-up revenge, outright hate, and social pulverization. At the same time, Somalia cannot amount to much even in East Africa, let alone in the world, without a revival of that very national identity. Put another way, if Somalis are unable, at least at the present, to recreate an intimate political community, they still have no choice but to establish a workable civil association that will undergird a *capable* state. This is where a lesson from a metaphorical pack of porcupines caught up in trauma similar to the Somali dilemma is instructive.

There was once, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer tells us, a colony of porcupines. They were wont to huddle together on a cold winter’s day and, thus wrapped in communal warmth, to escape being frozen. But, plagued with the pricks of each other’s quills, they drew apart. And every time the desire for warmth brought them together again, the same calamity overtook them. Thus they remained, distracted between two misfortunes, able neither to tolerate nor to do without one another, until they discovered that when they stood at a certain distance from one another they could both delight in one another’s individuality and enjoy one another’s company. They did not attribute any metaphysical significance to this distance, nor did they imagine it to be an independent source of happiness, like finding a friend. They recognized it to be a relationship in terms not of

substantive enjoyments but of contingent considerabilities that they must determine for themselves. Unknown to themselves, they had invented civil association.²⁴

1. Annulment of the Union

This option denotes acceptance of the breakup of the Somali Republic into two (and more) separate and sovereign states and a return to, at minimum, the boundaries established by the colonial powers. The rationale for this would include distinct colonial heritages, kin affiliations and sub-cultural differences, and a perception that the thirty years of union were the basis for nefarious rule best symbolized by Siyaad Barre's regime.

A tearing up of the union, based on these arguments, is hard to sustain. First, distinctions between colonial legacies (Britain and Italy) had some relevance only during the early years of independence. For instance, although both the English and Italian languages gave the educated elite of each territory a sub-identity, thirty years of union have had an impact of such significance that many southern Somalis have learned how to function in English (Italian is less frequent). Moreover, both languages and their cultural accoutrements were limited to a very small segment; the bulk of the population spoke (still speaks) Somali (Mai/Maha). Second, though spatial proximity could foster affection and intimate exchanges — including intermarriage — it can also create anxieties and mutual antipathies (especially in an environment of very scant and dwindling resources). In addition, many Somalis have, at one time or another, crossed their boundaries and found the experience pleasant and enriching. Third, neglect by earlier regimes was nationwide; the exceptions were places such as Mogadishu and commercialized spots in the riverine farming areas. The brutality of the Siyaad Barre regime touched many, although the destruction of Hargeisa and Burao were unmatched until Mogadishu exploded. Fourth, smallness, coupled with underdevelopment, is *not* beautiful, but hideous. It combines internal brittleness and vulnerability with external manipulations. But the accomplishments must be acknowledged and preserved. In the new dialogue to resurrect a national state, then, the leadership of the North ought to use these chips as part of a strong inspirational and bargaining stance rather than as obstacles to thwart a productive national conversation.

2. Confederation

A confederated arrangement means an extremely loose relationship between two or more equal states. These states relate to each other through some international treaties and cooperate in specifically identified areas such as trade and defense. In the end, the power of authority or sovereignty belongs to each state in the confederation. This minimalist arrangement strengthens regional identities and interests at the cost of vibrant national institutions. Moreover, there is the real danger of some people wanting power for themselves regardless of the consequences for the rest. In the modern world, a confederal arrangement is mainly instructive as a historical artifact, the famous Swiss exception notwithstanding. Some will retort that the current EU resembles such a design. Here, however, one must note two points: the great diversity the EU is aggregating, something

akin to the numbers of contemporary African states, is grounded on many of its members as already strong states and, moreover, the insistence on the ultimate creation of an effective pan-European form of political authority — perhaps a super state.

3. Federation

This form of governance underscores *sharing* power between regions/provinces and a central authority. Though the nuances vary, in a federal system the central government solely designs and manages areas such as defense, international, and fiscal policy. Moreover, it shares with the regions responsibilities like revenue generation, education, transportation and communication, health care, law and order, judiciary, public administration, etc. Because of the nature of the distribution of power between the central structures and the somewhat autonomous provinces, federalism also carries some potential major dangers. First, and particularly in the current climate, there is the difficulty of establishing legitimate provinces. Where does one draw the boundaries? Second, what becomes of equity/equality in those potential regions that will house within their boundaries different kin groups? What would be the lines of accountability between the province and the federal state? Who will pay the cost of these levels of political privileges and bureaucratic administration? Since this scenario is the one most discussed, if not strongly proposed by many, an extremely careful and workable response to these concerns is necessary.

4. Decentralized Unitary State

A unitary state need *not* be a highly centralized form of governance in which the regime of the day and the capital of the country monopolize power and privilege. This, to a great extent, is the most unforgettable lesson from Somalia's post-colonial era, particularly the Siyaad Barre era. A decentralized unitary scenario implies a strong central authority but leaves some limited but *important* local decisions to the provinces of the country. In comparison with a federal system, the center will be mightier, with a clear secondary role for provincial and local authority. The latter's power is voluntarily ceded by the center; the central state, however, monitors how that power is applied. There is little doubt that a decentralized unitary state could be an effective mechanism to speak on behalf of the whole Somali nation, and immediately undertake the urgently needed projects of reconciliation, law and order, and rehabilitation of the national infrastructure. But there are unavoidable and large questions here too: How far will the authority of a decentralized unitary state go? Will the provinces have the constitutional mandate to reign in a dictatorial central leadership? What liberties must be sought *through* the structure of governance? What liberties must be promoted *within*? What liberties must be protected *from* the reach of political authority? In other words, what concrete constitutional arrangements are needed to shield the society from a repeat of the worst of the post-colonial experience? Are the porcupines ready and willing not to embrace too tightly, yet get close enough to each other to form this type of a state?

VI. A Concluding Remark: Beyond the TFG

The Somali people, like other humans, cannot avoid the maelstrom of their own history. Consequently, the choice is stark: bear the testing burdens of transition and invent a stronger *somalinimoo* and a correlate civic agenda or to continue, to paraphrase Bunyon, pulling flesh from each other's bones — the price of living in chronic political ignominy. In addition to the discredited way in which the TFG was born, the transitional leadership has been directly responsible for at least two phenomena hitherto believed by almost all Somalis to be so obscene that they took for granted that they would never occur: a Somali invitation for an Ethiopian military invasion and consequent occupation of Mogadishu; and a demonization of any Somali political consciousness intersecting with Islamic thought and deduced practical design. The latter is often prejudged through the prism of “terrorism.” For Ethiopian ruling elites, it is an easy stance to embrace. It fits well into a longstanding maltreatment of Muslim Ethiopians. Despite the fact that at least half of the population is Muslim, the power of the state, the commanding nodal points of the economy, and the national cultural symbols have been dominated by the interests and identity of the Coptic Christians. More specifically, the Somali-inhabited region is still the most impoverished of them all. In this regard, although some changes in the way citizens of Somali heritage are dealt with have been less harsh than during earlier regimes, their marginalization is still acute. Compounded by an apprehension based on the Somali national belief that the region was wrongfully ceded to Ethiopia by the colonial powers, the Ethiopian political class has consistently maintained a deep suspicion of, if not outright hostility towards, a purposeful Somali people and their state. In other words, Ethiopian leaders have always maneuvered to weaken any Somali national project. Notwithstanding the fact that the old Somali state gave direct and concrete succor to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi during his years as a hard-up dissident, the old grammar of Ethiopian obsession with Somali national identity has not changed. Consequently, it did not take much for the current leadership to jump into the front seat of the bandwagon of equating the resurgence of Islamist thinking in the Horn of Africa to being *the* dangerous “other” and thus deserving of military preemption. Among the great tragedies of the moment, however, is the hoodwinking of the United States, much admired by most Somalis, to endorse and actively support both the Ethiopian invasion and the much detested warlords masquerading as legitimate national leaders of a new Somali democratic political dispensation. The aerial bombardment of fishing villages in the most southern coastal tip of the country, alleged to be hiding places for individuals suspected of participating in the terrorist destruction of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, cost at least seventy lives. This is now part of a bitter and spreading lore among the Somali people who are at a loss as to why the United States is prone to act so blunderingly. The bewilderment is accented because most Somalis believe that the UIC invited the United States government to come in and conduct a maximum search for the suspected individuals said to have a sanctuary in the country.

If it is true in this contemporary historical dispensation that the Somali Republic is nothing and has almost nothing, it has only one choice: to reimagine itself. To do that, the most immediate and supreme tasks for the Somali people, inside and outside, are these:

- establish a well-organized and vocal movement that salvages the country from Ethiopian occupation and manipulation;

- create a credible alternative (a prefiguration of a future that is not — yet) to the TFG in terms of ideas, organization, and leadership;
- link tightly the domestic communities and a mobilized diaspora; and
- effectively explain to the world, particularly the United States, the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of Islamic States, the United Nations, and major NGOs, the realities of the situation in the Somali Republic and the yearning of the majority of the Somali people for a democratic developmental order and legitimate and competent leadership, enriched by their own virtuous traditions.

Notes

This document was prepared with the assistance of my student, Erin Gullikson, and my Executive Assistant, Margaret Beegle.

1. Stephanie Nebehay, the UN Somalia humanitarian coordinator, released an alarming report that the current conflict in the Somali capital between Ethiopian troops and “Somali insurgents” was about to turn “a humanitarian crisis . . . into a catastrophe and very soon.” In the report 12,429 cases of acute diarrhea have been identified since January and 414, mostly children, have already succumbed to the disease. “UN Somalia Humanitarian Chief Warns of Catastrophe,” Geneva: Reuters, 19 April 2007.
2. Jeffrey Gettleman, “Islamists Calm Somali Capital with Restraint,” *The New York Times*, 25 September 2006, pp. 1 and 10.
3. The current American Administration’s perspective on the rise of Islamic political consciousness in almost all Islamic societies around the world seems to be guided by a deeply flawed reductionism — one that forecloses any intelligent exploration of the reason behind the embrace of Islamist thinking in situations of unbearable globalization or hypermodernity and the varieties of responsive Islamists’ political orientations and agendas. Here is how a keen scholar has expressed this American strategic blunder — a repeat of earlier and costly mistakes:

U.S. foreign policy and political Islam today are deeply intertwined. Policy makers, particularly since 9/11, have demonstrated an inability and/or unwillingness to distinguish between radical and moderate Islamists. They have largely treated political Islam as a global threat similar to the way that Communism was perceived. However, even in the case of Communism, foreign policymakers eventually moved from an ill-informed, broad-brush, and paranoid approach personified by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s to more nuanced and pragmatic policies that led to the establishment of relations with China in the 1970s, even as the tensions remained between the United States and the Soviet Union. John L. Esposito, “Islamists and US Foreign Policy,” *ISIM Review*, Autumn 2006, p. 6.

4. Ignacio Remonet reports that, “The Pentagon encouraged it to launch an offensive against Somalia, providing aerial reconnaissance and satellite surveillance support.” Ignacio Remonet, “Somalia,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February 2007, p. 1. The U.S. is contributing \$14 million to the cost of “peacekeeping.”

5. Somali Solidarity of North America (SOSIVA), “A Word of Warning to the World: Genocide in the Making,” accessed at somali.solidarity@gmail.com. This release includes the following (a tad hyperbolic) statement:

We are not using the world ‘genocide’ loosely here. The mass murder, rampant slaughter of innocent Somalis, the displacement of more than 100,000 people and the campaign to wipe out whole Mogadishu neighborhoods is comparable to the Darfur genocide. We perceive the Somali version of the Janjaweed as the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) supported militia from Puntland belonging to the President’s clan, numbering 4,000, camped in Villa Somalia and the Military academy that are intentionally shelling and targeting heavy artillery into the neighborhoods populated by rival clans. This is a calculated clannish vengeance that the international community is unfortunately condoning.

The Chief of the European Commission’s delegation to Kenya announced that he had created a team to examine serious allegations of war crimes said to be committed by Ethiopian-cum-TFG militia against civilian populations. Jeffrey Gettleman, “Somali Battles Bring Claims of War Crimes: Ethiopia and Allies Faulted as 300 Die,” *The New York Times*, April 6, 2007, p. A8. See also, Ibrahim Farah, “Somali Diaspora Communiqué,” Leicester, England, April 6-8, 2007; “Response of Concerned Somalis to Report of Monitoring Group Re-violations of UN Sanctioned Arms Embargo on Somalia,” Mogadishu, November 28, 2006; and “*Bayaan Ka Soo Baxay Jaaliyada Daarood Ee London*,” London, 21 April 2007. This last group (who consist of political figures, intellectuals, religious authorities, women, and youth representatives) met for three weeks of intensive conversations in London. In their communiqué they articulate a number of important points but two seem to stand out: (1) “*in aan laga aamusnaan karin fal gaboodka iyo xasuuga ay ka geysanayaan magaalada Muqdisho ciidamada cadawga ee Ethiopia & damiirlawayaasha u adeega* [There should be no silence over the aggression and destruction visited upon the city of Mogadishu by Ethiopian enemy forces and the conscienceless who serve them] and (2) *Waxaan ugu baaqeynaa ummada Soomaliyeed in si wadajir ah dalka & diinta loo difaaco, lagana gayb galo dagaalka looga xoreynaayo dalka gumeystaha & u adeegayaashiisa*” [We urge the Somali nation to defend, in solidarity, the homeland and the faith; and to partake of the battle to liberate the country from colonialists and their collaborators].

6. Jeffrey Gettleman, “The New Somalia: A Grimly Familiar Rerun of Chaos,” *The New York Times*, 21 February 2007, p. A3.

7. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, translated by S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), p. 4.

8. Julien Benda, *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, translated by R. Aldington, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 30–31. On the tasks of the intellectual, I add here two that have been asserted (for poets/critics) by Breyten Breytenbach: “He [she] is the questioner and the implacable critic of the mores and attitudes and myths of his [her] society. . . . he [she] is also the exponent of the aspirations of his [her] people.” Breyten Breytenbach, *End Papers: Essays, Letters, Articles of Faith, Workbook Notes* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), p. 99.
9. The following section of the essay directly draws on Abdi Ismail Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar, eds., *The African State: Reconsiderations* (Portsmouth, Maine: Heinemann, 2002), pp. 5–12.
10. Antonio Gramsci, *Ordine Nuova*, quoted in Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 181.
11. *The Mail and Guardian*, Johannesburg, South Africa, 3 September 1999.
12. This section directly draws on my “Statelessness as Homelessness,” in *The African State*, pp. 226-234.
13. Abdi Ismail Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar, “Somalis as Africa’s First Democrats: Premier Abdirazak H. Hussein and President Aden A. Osman.” *Bildhaan*, vol. 2, 2002, p. 59.
14. Christopher Clapham, “Democratization in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects,” *Third World Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1993): 430.
15. Julian Prior, *Pastoral Development Planning* (Oxford: OXFAM, 1994), pp. 66-67.
16. Mark Bradbury, Adan Yusuf Abokor and Haroon Ahmed Yusuf, “Somaliland: Choosing Politics over Violence.” *Review of African Political Economy* 30 no. 97 (2003): 455–470. Also, A. Huliaras, “The Viability of Somaliland: Internal Constraints and Regional Geopolitics,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 20, no. 2 (2002): 157–182.
17. This part of the essay draws directly on Ahmed I. Samatar and Abdi Ismail Samatar, “Somali Reconciliation: Editorial Note.” *Bildhaan*, vol 3, 2003, pp. 3-11. Also see Che Aulu, “The Reasons for Fairness in the Reunification of Somalia,” *Africa Insight* 34, no. 1 (2004): 69–76.
18. Interview with President Ismail Omer Gaileh, Baltimore, Maryland, November, 2005.
19. Also see “Statement by H.E. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, The President of the Republic of Somalia at the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly, New York,” September 17, 2005.

20. See “Joint Communique” released by Sherif Hassen Sheikh Adem, Hussein Mohamed Farah Aidid, and Sheikh Sherif Sheikh Ahmed. They are identified as: “Chairman of the Somali Parliament,” “Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Somali Public Works,” and “Chairman of the Executive Council of the Union of Islamic Courts of Somalia.” Asmara, April 17, 2007. The salient declarations made in the communiqué are:

- “We congratulate the heroic people of Somali, and their victorious resistance, and we call upon all citizens everywhere to oppose the Ethiopian occupation, defend their country, and guarantee the freedom and independence of the nation.”
- “We condemn the brutal occupation of Ethiopia in Somalia and call for its immediate withdrawal from sovereign Somali territory.”
- “We condemn the atrocities committed from Thursday 29th March to 1st of April 2007 by the Ethiopian armed forces that have resulted in the killing of approximately 1,086 civilians and wounding of 4,244 sustaining various light and serious injuries.”
- “We condemn the destructive actions undertaken by the Deputy Secretary of State for African Affairs, which incited Ethiopian troops to continue down its path of destruction and genocide against defenseless civilians via promising financial and political support to continue its illegitimate war and devote Ethiopian brutal occupation.”
- “We ask the international community and the United Nations to establish a special International Tribunal in the search for the crimes committed against the Somali people and prosecute the criminals responsible for these hideous crimes.”
- “We condemn Ethiopia for establishing detention camps in its territory like that of ‘Guantanamo Bay’ in Cuba, where innocent people are being tortured.
- We inform the world that the Ugandan troops currently in the Somali Capital are a ‘Trojan Horse’ for the unjust Ethiopian occupation.”
- “We regret and condemn the stand of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda in the Ministerial Meeting of IGAD member states that was held on Friday April 13, 2007 against the independence and sovereignty of Somalia, where they praised and incited the brutal assault carried out by the Ethiopian troops in Somalia. We commend the honest and genuine approach of the governments of Eritrea, Sudan, and Djibouti towards their view in the Somali issue.”
- “We request the concerned local and international humanitarian organizations to deliver urgent relief supplies to displaced Somalis everywhere in particular food and medical treatments because concentration of human population formed suddenly may result in sweeping epidemics such as cholera and typhoid.”

21. Albert Memmi, *Decolonization and the Decolonized*, (trans. Robert Bononno), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, p. 48. Also, Sadia Ahmed, “Islam and

Development: Opportunities and Constraints for Somali Women,” *Gender and Development* 7, no. 1 (1999): 69–72.

22. Ahmed I. Samatar, “The Curse of Allah,” in *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal*, Ahmed I. Samatar, ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994), p. 138.

23. World Bank, *World Development Report* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

24. Quoted in Michael Oakshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), pp. 460–461.

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