

Bereft of Trust: Reflections on the Causes of the Somali Catastrophe

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*Afrikadan is-wada daafacdee dabka noolaysay,
Dib baa looga joogsaday markay dibinta ruugeene,
Laga durug dorraad galab kuwuu dacasku saarnaaye,
Dirqi bey xornimada heshey laguma deeqayne,
Ninkii aan u doog-dhaban biyaha, looma soo daro e',
Daayeerna laas waa qoota doox haddu tago e',
Dudduntaan halkii lagu ogaa doorsen weligeede,
Daaimo carruurena wey is daba gurguurtaane,
Dakan wada dallacey dowladahan dahabka shiilaaya,
Dadeenay ahaayeen kuwaa loo dabbaal degaye,
Doqonniimo Soomaali waa loogu dawgalaye.*

— Cabdillahi Sultan (Timacadde).

*When you are nothing and have nothing, you have
to reinvent yourself...*

— Breyten Breytenbach, *The Memory of
Birds in Time of Revolutions*, 1996, p.67.

I. Introduction

As is known by most people familiar with African history, the land of the Somalis was carved into five colonial territories: the first two were under British dominance, the third was taken over by Italy, the fourth was occupied by France, and the fifth suffered under Ethiopia. Two of these gained their independence (British Somaliland in June 26, 1960; and a union with Italian Somalia in July 1 of the same year) to become, from then on, the Somali Republic (Touval S, 1963; Abdi Samatar, 2016). This union began its post-colonial period with a mixture of elation and hope, despite inheriting a profoundly underdeveloped economy and a population that was overwhelmingly illiterate. Moreover, the new Republic had the advantage of strong cultural, religious, and linguistic affinities unparalleled in post-colonial Africa. For most of the first decade of independence, key political leaders of the country honored the spirit and the directives of the nation's constitution and the most virtuous guidelines of the old traditional ethos. Such codes of conduct were soon jettisoned by elements of the elite who had a different agenda: the curtailment of the public's new freedom and democratic spirit and the blatant swindling in the sharing of common resources. Tragically, the latter group gained the upper hand and, for almost the next twenty-five years, except for a brief six years, subverted all the norms of constitutional democracy and ultimately turned the rule of law into the tyranny of force and violence (Africa Watch, 1990).

The destruction of democratic order and moral principles for human behavior, rise of civic betrayal, and subsequent nefarious authoritarianism wrecked the enduring cultural and political cohesion of Somalis. For the last thirty-five years of its sixty-two years existence as an independent country, Somalia descended into a *catastrophe* of unimaginable dimensions (Ahmed Samatar, 1994). Consequently, the country has been Balkanized into sectarian fiefdoms which are dominated by corrupt cliques at once bent on stealing every morsel of public assets and deepening wedges between communities in ways even worse than the colonial strategy of divide and rule (Abdi Samatar, 2020).

At the heart of the Somali calamity, then, is the dearth of *trust* in all the major cultural and political institutions and organs of the country. Somalia's prevailing condition is grounded in an utter and pervasive *faithlessness*: acute mutual suspicion among the elite; and between the elite and the rest of society. This essay narrates some of the ways in which the country's major sources of trust have been denuded, and

why it has become exceptionally difficult to reconstitute them under the current political environment. In 1983, one of Somalia's most distinguished poets, Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame, widely known as Hadrawi, who passed away some months ago, composed an instructive song titled *Diga Rogasho* (meaning transformation). A few lines of the composition address the relationship between societal wellbeing and dedicated collective action without which misery for all is the guaranteed outcome.

Dantu wadajir guud beydayac kaga fogata — Collective action is the shield against mass misery
Karti iyo dadaalba gobnimo daryeeshee — Competence and hard work are the sovereignty's shield
Dadku wuxu ka maala kolba siduu u daajee — People reap what they sowed and nurtured.

Dedicated collective action is key to development. However, Hadrawi failed to underscore that the prerequisite for solidaristic action is trust both within the community and in its public institutions and leaders (Odera, 2013; Fu, 2004; Cook, 2001; Bijl, 2011; Fukuyama, 1995). Trust or faith is the foundation of associational life and, without it, humane and reliable existence is inconceivable (Hipp and Perrin, 2006; Streeten, 2002). Much of what we take for granted in everyday life, such as crossing the street, would become a challenge without faith. Even family life requires a modicum of common presuppositions among its members to subsist (Purdue, 2001). Beyond the family, religion, culture, and civic institutions embody shared values which are the paramount wellsprings of reciprocity (Dingeman, et.al, 2015; Hosking, 2006; Bagnasco, 2004; Thomassen, Andreweg, and Van Ham, 2017). Despite the centrality of trust in all facets of a worthy life, *no one has used this lens to understand Somalia's seemingly endless political cataclysm and the decay of civic belonging*. This essay reflects on the ways in which colonial and post-colonial elites battered the main hinges of trust and social cohesion: culture, religion, political leadership, and public institutions.

In any society, when these four bastions of public life are predominantly inclusive and engender confidence, social affairs become a synergistic arena (Ebrahim, Heydar, Hadi, 2016; Waris, 2018; Purdue, 2001; Jovanovic, Gavrilovic, 2012). Conversely, if they morph into divisive, deceitful, and exploitative domain, they end up secreting mutual suspicion and ultimate alienation. Culture is an ensemble of common

norms and standards that enhance belonging, while setting boundaries between the group and those outside it (Sztompka, 1998; Karami, Mohammad and Mostafa, 2018; Bouma, Bulte, Vab Soest, 2008; Choluba, 2020). Similarly, religion provides a link with the supernatural while establishing touchstones for individual as well as communal conduct (Addai, Ghartey, 2013; Berggren, Christian, 2011; Proctor, 2006). Competent and legitimate political leadership offers a vision of the future and standards of behavior and performance that either inspire and unite or undercut collective political identity, thus provoking confidence or antipathy towards common causes (Hetherington, 1998; Doig, 1999; Sztompka, 1998). Public institutions are the fourth major source of *social cohesion* or *estrangement* (Newton and Norris, 2000; Blind, 2007). They can be vital generators of confidence if they operate effectively and impartially, or a source of bitterness and scorn when they become fraudulent and ineffective (McLoughlin, 2015; Yandong and Changhui, 2015).

The essay is divided into five parts. Part one describes the erosion of the cultural coherence of Somalis due to the fusion of an element of traditional culture with state centered politics. This fusion has undermined social bonding and progressive resurrection. Part two identifies the precipitous decline of the Ulema and Islam as societal assets for collective wellbeing. In fact, and appallingly, Islam's role in society has been degraded to its most individualistic elements which, in turn, has led to the total neglect of Somali Ummah's objective interests. Part three presents the ruination of public institutions and their instrumentalization for personal and sectarian gain. Part four analyzes the rise of mercenary political leadership and the dearth of leaders of integrity who could recharge the spirit of civic life. Part five concludes the essay by outlining how the dead weight of these four currents have eroded the density of communal and collective trust among Somalis. Ribald deceit, daylight robbery, and generalized malfeasance have taken the place of these four currents and become the hallmark of cultural, religious, political, and social performance.

II. Alloying Cultural and Political Identity: The Original Demon

The Somali people have experienced massive shifts in their culture and how they identify themselves politically. In pre-colonial pastoral times, cultural identity meant membership in a highly localized community, mostly pastoralist, and dominated by male elders. Each

extended family had its livestock, built its homes, and collaborated with others to insure survival and security: mutual interdependence. Male elders, without much institutionalized enforcement power, dominated the management of communal affairs, while females ensured the social reproduction of the family unit and the larger community (Abdi Samatar, 1989). Although occasional conflicts over pastoral resources led to clashes, these were contained through communal negotiations and compensations. Such localized society lacked a dominant political economic stratum that lived off the labor of others, and the associated state organs. Moreover, there was no political class that could misappropriate public resources and power for private gain. Consequently, pre-colonial Somali society was a subsistence-oriented culture and economy (Scott, 1977). This egalitarian society bred a sense of cultural pride and a feeling of equality among Somalis. These features afforded each Somali a sense of self-confidence. This was best captured by an observation recorded by a British colonial officer, based in the Somali region of Kenya, that he reproduced from assertions by other Africans under his command: "Bawana, these are no good; they are Somalis, and each is a *sultan* onto himself."

Colonialism induced a steady process of political, economic, and cultural transformation. First, the imposition of colonial authority meant that free people in a relatively egalitarian society suddenly had to suffer under the diktats of a foreign authority unaccountable to it. As was the case in all colonized societies, such power seduced collaborators from the host community, who chose individual benefits over communal welfare. Further, cultural leaders were transformed into direct subjects of the colonial authority. As a result, they became colonial lackeys instrumentalized in dealing with Somalis. Among the key changes to cultural norms was this: the tribalization (so different from kinship relations) of the emerging colonial political identity—that is, a new relationship between the state and the colonized subjects (Abdi Samatar, 1989; Ahmed Samatar, 1986, 1994; Mamdani, 1996; 2004). The ethnicization of state-subject relation was designed to fragment Somalis into exclusive groups rather than common citizens. This prevention of the communal Somali identity has been fatal and enduring. We state, then, that the new order induced a political process where each group attempted to seek exclusive favors from the colonial authorities. Such change seeded an acute and diabolical *othering* within the society. This act of the colonial state is the Archimedean point in the making of the current dispensation in the form of a tribal federalism. Nearly

seven decades ago, Abdullahi Issa, the then Secretary General of the Somali Youth League (SYL, the leading independence party), noted the coming of this phenomenon in one of his presentations at the United Nations Trusteeship Council:

The present tendency to set up within the Trust Territory of Somaliland three separate tribal states, namely, the Digil and Mirifle State, the State of Hawiya and the State of Darot, is ... alarming. During the examination of petitions from Somaliland by the Standing Committee of Petitions the representative of the Administering Authority mentioned several times the infiltration of foreign elements into the districts of Baidoa and of Merka. Obviously, the foreign elements referred to are Somalis from other regions within the Trust territory who reside in the districts of Baidoa and Merka, either temporarily or permanently (United Nations Trusteeship Council, Official Records: 12th Session, June 16 – 21, 1953).

Parallel to the tribalization of state-society relation was the commercialization of the economy and the rise of merchant and bureaucratic classes. These new economic identities were not only politically detached from the old pastoral structures but were also fully hitched to the colonial state system and the engulfing peripheral capitalism. Such changes marked the demise of the original pastoral democracy and equalitarian culture, and the rise of urban and stratifying colonial political economy. In essence, old cultural relations and identities were emptied of their economic and social contents and rewired into a new order totally at odds with the ethos of self-reliance, justice, and equality. A key feature of the disconnect between the old and the new order was that the center of power shifted from pastoral communities to colonial urban and economic elites. These transformations shattered the traditional mechanism of accountability and checks on illegitimate authority. In other words, the urban elite was no longer accountable to pastoral and peasant communities.

But the new urban-centered development was not politically monolithic in its make-up. Two political tendencies reflecting the orientation of the two factions emerged in colonial and independent Somali Republic. The first tendency, an internalization of political and economic opportunism, became the paragon of small-mindedness and self-serving politics. The second, the alternative political current that led the independence movement, rejected the politicization of cultural identity and advocated for citizenship where all Somalis had

the same rights and responsibilities, regardless of their genealogical pedigree (Abdi Samatar, 2016). The latter, civic-minded cohort led the country for the first seven years. During that time, notwithstanding enormous burdens of underdevelopment, this cohort ran public affairs in as democratic and moral a way as possible. However, the sectarian opportunists took conniving advantage of the public's frustration at the slow pace of socio-economic development, abused the tolerance of democratic leaders and their sense of fair play, used corrupt means, and mobilized disparate members of parliament and the public to defeat the democratic leaders. Within a matter of months of the change of government in 1967, the tone of the political leaders shifted dramatically: outright fraudulence and opportunism, masquerading as tribalism, became the grammar of public affairs. Beyond the looting of the public finances, the most radical transformations induced by the new leadership were: genealogical mobilization of communities during the 1969 election for political purposes, and the determination to rig democratic politics so as to turn parliament into a passive organ dominated by the executive branch, as in the then already familiar single party states.

Within two years of the change of national leadership, the public's frustration with gross venality, mismanagement, and tribal favoritism peaked, leading to the murder of President Sharmarke by one of his bodyguards. Within two days of the president's burial, the military staged a coup and relaunched what *seemed* like a vigorous civic political program. But it took eight years for the program to morph into what its skeptics had foretold: a tribalistic-cum- military dictatorship. For almost another decade and half, genealogical pedigree and loyalty to the regime governed who had access to state institutions and who was prosecuted, tortured, or killed. This culminated in the 1988 use of the national defense forces in bombing the second largest city in the country, Hargeisa, and the annihilation of the regional center of Burco, in a fight with the militarized sectarian resistance movement known as Somali National Movement (SNM). Consequently, the destruction of the two cities led to the massacre of thousands of unarmed civilians and produced hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons. The only crime of these victims was that their genealogical identity was the same as the rebels. This mass murder of civilians in northern Somalia persuaded most Somalis that the state was now the full property of a certain genealogical line and their clients. Such an association of the state with an enclosed group

alienated communities from each other and condemned the majority of the president's genealogical group, many who had little to do with the tyranny, as enemies. To demonstrate the gulf between the regime and the rural folk from the dictator's home province, the following tale has been reported after the tyrant was chased out of the capital in 1991. When Siyaad Barre reached Garbahare, the main town in the province, he met with a gathering of the community elders. They asked him why he came to them seeking refuge after his defeat, since his regime had done little for the community, including the totally rough main road he had travelled. Known for his perverse wit, General Siyad Barre retorted that had he paved the road, those chasing him would be in their midst ransacking the town. He added that they should be grateful for the neglect! Humor aside, in the aftermath, most Somalis were compelled to accept the agenda of the sectarian political elite who peddled the logic of political tribalism as the way to 'prevent' another dictatorial and cruel regime. The net result was the cannibalization of the state due to mistrust of the national government.

Naked tribalization of political identity has been rising for over a decade before the destruction of Hargeisa and Burco. In the absence of organized alternative political movement to the tribalistic regime and ethnic-based opposition movement, the country slid into savage civil war that consumed hundreds of thousands of innocent lives (Ahmed Samatar, 2002) and turned ethnic political identity as the most powerful organizing political ideology. Thus, the depleting nature of tribalistic ideology has become like the proverbial rings of an onion—as internal divisions and conflicts emerged, the peeling of each genealogical layer became a master habit. Contemporaneously, then, this is what exists in each specific community in the country today: political and genealogical identity has been inseparably fused into one. This condition has wrecked any sense of national social cohesion, regional solidarity, and even the local sense of community. This fissiparousness depressingly reaffirms George Santyana's insight for the ages that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." It seems, then, that this dialectic haunts Somalis in the old and now defunct Republic; the tribalized order only reproduces the evils of the past under new guises and, therefore, thickens the density of mistrust and political despair. Political conversations and thought among the quasi-elite in the country revolve around tribalistic politics and personal gain, which thwarts the possibility of a reflective imagination about the common interest. This environment affirms the opposite of Rousseau's canonical asser-

tion: "...the more time that citizens spend thinking about public matters, and the less about their own private affairs, the better a society is." Such political and human tragedy has two main victims. First, ordinary life has run into an abominable *cull de sac*; and the quality of life continues to deteriorate for most of the population. Second, the state itself has become a victim as bickering factions of the *lumpen*-elite cannibalize it for their particularistic ends. Furthermore, state organs have turned into inert structures that only serve the immediate, impulsive, and insatiable appetite of those who control it. The communitarian culture of the earlier generation, then, has been totally disfigured. Each member of the state class angles to deceive others when he or she gets the first opportunity, notwithstanding claims of membership of the genealogical community when that is convenient.

The recent parliamentary "election" in southern Somalia provides an illustration of the degenerative tribal political current. Each politicized genealogical group and their 'traditional' leaders were supposed to elect their representatives. Contrary to the announced scheme, political kingpins ruthlessly mauled the 'community' and handpicked their clients as members of Parliament to bolster their interests rather than those of the genealogical group. This occasion marked the final death of the tradition and, with it, communal confidence and trust. Cash and instrumentalist power are the reigning values in the wake of thorough mutilations of the old culture anchored by a high degree of self-reliance, integrity, and mutuality.

III. De-socializing Faith

One of the major and enduring social thought that unified the Somali world was adherence to the edicts of their faith. Islam played a defining role in the life of the Somali people for the past five historical eras: late pre-colonial, colonial, democratic, military, civil war and warlord dominated times, and the federalism period (Abdi Samatar, 2022). It appears that the dominant political context Somalis created has always been partly molded by the role the Ulema and Islam played in the affairs of the community. In the old tradition, the Ulema cadres held a place of reverence and trust. That situation has changed dramatically in recent years. Historians and oral traditionalists have noted the Ulema were part of the so-called "safe from the sword" (*Bir ma Geydo*) groups in pre-colonial times. Other members of the *Bir ma Gaydo* included women, children, and the elderly. The Ulema had a critical role before

the country was colonized—they were the custodians of the Islamic faith among the overwhelmingly illiterate population. Since the Somali landscape was sparsely populated, there were only three major centers of Islamic learning in the land of the Somalis: Harar, Zeila, and Moga-dishu-Barawe zone.

Muslim clerks came into two kinds: Sheikhs and *Wadaads*. Sheikhs possessed relatively advanced learning in the faith and had two major functions: training the young to become *Wadaads* or sheikhs and ministering to communities scattered in large areas of the Somali territory. In contrast, *Wadaads* ran local settlement *madrasas* and instructed some of the settlement boys in the basic reading of the Quran and sometimes rudimentary Islamic ethos. Beyond these functions, and in the absence of Somali-wide political authority, these religious leaders always played the vital role of peacemakers when hostilities broke between communities. They also ministered to communities during births and deaths and led religious celebrations and events such as the birthday of the prophet, the fasting of Ramadan, and the celebrations of the two *Eids*. Because of the roles they played, the Ulema were highly trusted and considered a positive resource for the community—hence the category “safe from the sword.”

Once the Somali territory was invaded by European and Ethiopian powers, the political, social, and economic milieu changed dramatically. The colonialists, particularly the Europeans, slowly reoriented the subsistence-based economy, mainly livestock, to commodity producing system (Abdi Samatar, 1989 and Ahmed Samatar, 1988). In tandem, the colonial project turned free people into colonial subjects. Further, the British attempted to circumscribe religious practice by banning the call for prayer in the morning and allowing missionaries to convert orphans in their care to Christianity. These colonial activities and the brutal incursion of Abyssinian troops into Somali territory in the late 1800s compelled Somalis to respond to the challenge (Said Sh. Samatar, 1981, Abdi Sheikh Abdi, 1993). The responsibility to lead the resistance fell on a young religious man who had recently returned from his pilgrimage and a period of study in Mecca. Mohamed Abdille Hassan was not only a religious leader, but an extraordinarily gifted poet. He used these qualities to effectively mobilize the population. Initially, the British dismissed him, but soon changed their mind and dubbed him the “mad mullah and a terrorist,” while Somalis honored him with the title of Sayyid. Sayyid Mohamed embarked on liberation war that lasted for 21 years (the longest anticolonial war in Africa).

Midway through the war, the British evacuated their troops from most of the country as they were on the verge of defeat. Characteristic of colonial manipulations of native peoples, the retreating British distributed guns and ammunition to the “friendly” Somalis to resist the Sayyid’s onslaught. While the British regrouped in Aden, across the Gulf of Aden from Berbera, Sayyid Mohamed and his forces became overconfident and changed their effective guerrilla tactics and began to engage the returning British in conventional war. After a long and grueling resistance, the British resorted to aerial bombardment of the Sayyid’s capital, Taleh. This was the first-time war planes were used against a liberation movement in the colonies. Sayyid Mohamed fled the attack and composed a short poem, “*Commadi duulayey Cadan ka keeneenen, circa iyo dhulka is qobsadey cadho daraadeedea.*”

The Sayyid found a brief respite in the village of Imey, along the Shebelle River, in what is now the Somali Region of Ethiopia. A short while later, he fell ill and succumbed to malaria. Sayyid Mohamed called upon one of his closest confidants, before he passed away. He gave him a sobering instruction which foretold something that will become a characteristic feature of contemporary Somali politics: *betrayal*. He instructed his closest comrade to exhume his body from the grave, soon after everyone left the scene, and rebury it in an unmarked location. He explained to his comrade that the British would come in search of his remains and that one of his own brothers or relatives might be the scout for the expedition. The Sayyid’s associate complied with the *dardaarun*. As the Sayyid foretold, the British came looking for the grave with the help of a relative. They found it empty, and the Sayyid’s final resting place was lost forever.

The story of the treachery against the Sayyid underscores that some Somalis, religious leaders or otherwise, have no qualms collaborating with an enemy or unjust Somali rulers. With the Sayyid’s defeat, one group of the Ulema joined the colonial state apparatus, such as *Qadis* in *Sharia* courts and Quranic school teachers under the tutelage of the colonial authority. By taking on such tasks, they knowingly or otherwise legitimated colonial rule. For nearly forty years after the death of the Sayyid and before the attainment of independence, the Ulema were virtually dormant in national affairs, notwithstanding a handful of renegade individuals (Abdi Samatar, 2022). Except for a few sheikhs who became active politicians, such as Shiekh Ali Jimale, a presidential candidate in 1961, and a few others in parliament, most religious leaders shied from politics. They focused on the quotidian elements of

spiritual life during the democratic decade 1960-69. The only significant political intervention in public affairs the Ulema made during the democratic era was an attempt to preempt the government's intention to introduce the Latin script for the Somali language. They asserted that Latin meant *la diin*, which translates to faithlessness in Arabic. Worried that the religious leaders might create political trouble for the democratic project and national cohesion, the government quietly shelved the plan and the religious men reverted to their daily routines.

The military regime took over the reins of power in October 1969. It radically altered the nature of politics in the country, particularly the relationship between religion and politics. Early on, aggressive authoritarian rule and political intimidation became the order of the new times. Critics and all opposition groups were ruthlessly harassed or suppressed. The regime used its total grip on the forces of order to quickly push through the adoption of Latin script without any consultation or visible resistance from the Ulema. But the peaceful and smooth adoption of the script only foreshadowed troubling times ahead. A couple of years later, the regime decided to radically alter conservative Islamic family law without any consultation with the Ulema. Secularizing that law went to the heart of Somali family life and the change immediately attracted the wrath of the leading imams in Mogadishu. The reformed edict brought the decades-long political hibernation of the Ulema to an abrupt end. Traditional Muslim family law gave greater authority to fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons compared to mothers, wives, sisters, and other females in the household. In contradistinction, the new version prescribed greater equality; and the Ulema found the change an affront to *their* interpretation of the *Sharia*. Nearly a dozen Imams preached in mosques in Mogadishu that secularizing family law was an affront to Islam and the *Sharia* and must not be allowed to stand. Such a pronouncement rattled the regime, which speedily organized a Kangaroo's court to deal with the culprits. Ten Imams were sentenced to death and summarily executed by a firing squad, without any possibility of an appeal. This violence sent a chilling message to the different corners of the country that the regime would not tolerate any criticism or political dissention.

The long political profile of the Ulema changed sharply with the shootings. Rather than forming a unified front against the dictatorship, they split into three groups. One group became regime sycophants and were given prominent positions in the country. They made every effort to justify the legitimacy of regime, but most of the population

considered them as the regime's minions. A second cohort opposed the regime and went underground. This group was largely inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood movement or the Salafists in Saudi Arabia. They quietly led the rising dissent, without visible political organization. The third segment inconspicuously opposed the regime, remained in the country, and distanced themselves from the first group, but sympathized with the second.

The dictatorship's tyranny grew erratic and the economic conditions in the country became bleak, particularly after the war with Ethiopia in 1977-78. This resulted in the growth of the influence of the Islamist movements among the population. In addition, most Somalis increasingly adopted a more conservative (and imported) religious orientation, reflecting the influence of Somalis returning from the oil states of the Arab Middle East. A hallmark of this conservative shift was the imposed and gradual, yet visible change in women's dress code. Prior to this period, and for most of Somali history, women's dress was traditionally modest, best suited for the arduousness of daily work and the local climate. The new women's dress code, on the contrary, mimicked those of the Middle East /Arab World and appeared totally foreign, as well as ill-fitting for the country's tropical temperatures. In addition, the building of mosques and superficial religiosity proliferated while collective investment in civic institutions and behavior dwindled glaringly. As the regime lost whatever little legitimacy it had, it intensified its brutality against all opposition. The silent Islamist revolt sounded its clarion call on a Friday in June, 1989 when an Imam in one of Mogadishu's main mosques declared in his sermon that the regime was no longer legitimate. The young people in attendance poured into the streets after the completion of the prayers and denounced the regime. It took another eighteen months before the militaristic order collapsed as a result of the combination of its own deadweight and increasingly emboldened resistance.

Tragically, the militarized opposition was quite fragmented and had no political program to stabilize the country. Instead, they mercilessly fought one another to claim the leadership of a state that no longer existed except in name (Ahmed Samatar 1994). A violent civil war ensued that destroyed what was left of the national government and infrastructure, and the country fragmented into warlord fiefdoms. Thus, millions of Somalis became refugees inside and outside of the country and several hundred thousand of them perished in man-made famine and mindless violence. The ruthlessness of the war-

lords exceeded, by far, the cruelty of the old regime; and life became exceptionally precarious in all corners of the country. While one group of religious men, *Al Itihad*, became politically active and attempted to establish an Islamic government (first in the Northeast and later in Bakool region), those efforts failed to dislodge the warlords and their local or international allies. Moreover, most of the active religious groups became involved in charities and established schools whose curriculum was imported from the Middle East and glaringly devoid of Somali content, including the teaching of the Somali language/literature and history. Others created communal based Sharia courts in Mogadishu's neighborhoods to dispense justice and deal with crime in the absence of a government. After a decade and half of warlordism, the American Administration claimed that the terrorists who had bombed its embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 had found refuge in Mogadishu. Consequently, the US funded the creation of a warlord club—namely, Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism. The key objective was to snatch and deliver religious men thought to harbor fugitives or who were themselves accused of being associated with terrorists. Once this became public knowledge, religious men in Mogadishu supported by some local businesspeople took on the warlords. The public rallied around this group who came to be known as the Union of Islamic Courts (UICs). It took them several months to defeat the warlords and restore some modicum of order in Mogadishu, for the first time since 1991 (Abdi Samatar, 2006).

Somalis across the world celebrated the defeat of the warlords. Soon, however, it became clear that the leaders of the movement had neither the commensurate imaginative talent nor the practical capacity to undertake the task of rebuilding the national spirit and key public institutions. They endlessly debated the form of Islamic government they would establish, without having a functioning model to guide their deliberations and agenda. In addition, they spent a great deal of effort defining the appropriate social relationships in the city, such as ensuring the strict application of a female dress code, banning sports and entertainment such as football and cinema. One of the authors, while in Mogadishu, witnessed the futility of the agenda in a meeting with some of the Court's senior leaders in July 2006. A friend's wife gave him a ride to the meeting venue where she decided to join. She was "properly" attired, and took her seat in one corner of the area when an aggressive zealot member came to her side of the room and instructed her to get up and go to the back of the room. This was stun-

ning; it foretold of the theocratic and restrictive changes to come. After a complaint to one of the senior clerics, the young militant was told that his behavior was inappropriate, but, nonetheless, he was reassured that it was right to segregate women and men in public places. The female, a highly educated woman, was offended by the treatment but simply ignored the act. We retell this incident to demonstrate that most of the ICU's leaders and their followers had no idea how to prioritize the enormous challenges facing the country.

The UICs defeated the warlords but, in the end, they lost the war. Ethiopia, supported by the United States, invaded Somalia on the pretext that the UICs was in cahoots with terrorists. Once Ethiopian troops entered Mogadishu, the UICs abandoned the city, its leaders relocated in Asmara, and the rank-and-file militias shifted their approach and adopted guerrilla strategy to exhaust and, ultimately, defeat the occupation. America foresaw the coming of the Ethiopian defeat and engineered a breakup of the UICs leaders. One of these leaders, Sharif Sh. Ahmed, became Somali president in 2009 and left his comrades in the political wilderness. Those he abandoned politically turned their guns against former comrades. Sharif's presidency underlined the first time a Sheikh became Somali president, but it also marked the most egregious political betrayal by a Somali leader. Those left in the bush were labelled terrorist and, soon, their resistance to the new regime mutated into cretinous extremism that haunts the country to this day.

Sharif's government failed to win the war against Al Shabaab. Many of his fellow religious political leaders lost their vaunted spiritual aura, as the public saw them for what they were: members of the incompetent and venal political class. Three types of religious leaders dominated public affairs for the first two decades of the 21st century: politicians, terrorists, and others. Some individuals in the final category quietly supported the terrorist or silently opposed them, while others became inwardly drawn. Still, all three groups share one thing: they have forfeited the old tradition of the Ulema—that is, the primary task of bringing the community together and defending its collective welfare. One of the starkest manifestations of this stance is that all three are vigilant when it comes to individual behaviors of people which might, in their eyes, trespass on their interpretation of "proper" Islamic behavior. For instance, they pay excessive attention to the dress code of women and try to publicly berate or sanction anyone who defies their conception of how a woman should appear in public. This discomfort with democratic and pluralistic ways of life has propelled many religious leaders

to become exceptionally quick to condemn any effort to open debate on the proper interpretation of religious edicts. What is lost in all cases, then, is the attention to the most supreme and daily concerns of the population: sectarian politics, rampant fraudulence, violence, dehumanizing poverty, and the destruction and abuse of public institutions. Combined, all are causal factors in the acute cultural denudation and gridding material destitution of Somalis. Furthermore, the irrelevance of the Ulema to the grave condition of the people has corroded their once admirable and historical standing among the society.

IV. The Demise of Public Institutions

The colonial state was, by nature, authoritarian and its institutions were designed to serve its objectives while appeasing the natives. One paramount element of those objectives was to maintain its dominance over Africans. This was partly achieved by giving calculated privileges to some—acts that triggered competitive divisions among subject populations. A most effective instrument to Balkanize the population was centering, if not inventing, political ethnicity. Colonial authorities segregated the African population into tribes and treated them as political silos rather than citizens with a common heritage and destiny (Mamdani, 1996). Africa's liberation had the promise of reversing the politicization of culture by creating new civic bonds. Post-colonial political and public leaders had the sole responsibility to model this agenda in their public and private lives. Tragically, many African leaders failed this test. Broadly speaking, African nationalist politicians came in two categories: leadership that endorsed and sustained inclusive politics; and their opponents who peddled exclusive and tribalistic currents. Two countries modeled these contrasting agendas in the 1990s: South Africa and Ethiopia. Independent South Africa followed the civic route, while Ethiopia adopted ethnic political identity as its national framework. In the case of the first, the colonial and apartheid regimes' centuries long segregationist policies deprived the native population of its birthright: land and freedom. This was coupled with deliberate acts of dividing them into tribes under the dominance of white settlers. South Africa's liberation movement led by Nelson Mandela's ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress, and Mass Democratic Movement fought against this agenda for more than a century before triumphing in 1994. Independent and democratic South Africa rejected ethnic politics and embraced common civic citizenship for all its people.

In contrast, the Ethiopian leadership that came to power in 1991 formally divided the country into ethnic regions and created a political wedge between communities, which has been reinforced by one ethnic political community's leaders dominating others. It is in part due to this scheme that Ethiopia is experiencing an existential crisis today. Somalia mimicked the Ethiopian model, despite the cultural homogeneity of the population, and even went further than Ethiopia in two catastrophic ways. First, the absence of effective central government facilitated centrifugal forces that have disabled the national government from making any progress in rebuilding coherent national institutions. Second, because of the first condition, ethnic identity and corrupt money became the two most important criteria for political office, employment in the public service, and anything that deals with government business. The net effect of these circumstances has been the despoliation of the state's integrity and the annihilation of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. To illustrate the deeply corrosive effects of this milieu, here is an example that captures the fate of two institutions and a citizen.

One of us met Hawa, a young female student in Istanbul, Turkey, several years ago. After successfully completing her graduate degree in Finance and Business Administration, she began seeking employment in Mogadishu. She requested a reference letter, in the event that she made to that stage of selection. Given her credentials, she was eminently qualified. A few weeks later, there was an opening in the Somali Central Bank. She successfully applied. After the submission of her application, she was directed to meet the woman responsible for placing new recruits. Hawa got the shock of her life. She had met this official in Istanbul a few months earlier. In that encounter, the official asked her what genealogical group she belonged. Hawa simply answered that she was a Somali. The officer was offended by the young women's audacity not to react as the officer expected. Hawa faced the same questions again when she met the lady in the Bank and responded in the same fashion. Angered by the courage of the young woman, the officer placed her in a pay grade significantly less than her qualification and experience deserved.

Hawa relayed her frustrating new circumstance to one of us. Subsequently, one of the authors called an old friend and former university mate who was then a Minister. He inquired if his ministry had any job opportunities for a young bright MBA in Finance. The minister responded positively and asked for the curriculum vitae and a refer-

ence letter. Two weeks later, the Minister's staffers called Hawa and told her to report to the ministry for an interview with the Minister. She was successful and was offered a fitting post. She became an assistant in the office of the Minister. On that same day, she went back to the Central Bank to submit her resignation to the women who supervised her. One more time, the same supervising officer insisted on knowing Hawa's "tribe." Unlike her previous responses, Hawa startled the banker by answering with the identity of her community. The officer was severely embarrassed when she found out that Hawa shared her children's genealogy. A couple of months later, word came from Hawa that she was facing new hostilities at her work environment at the Ministry. Some of the staff originally assumed that she was a relative of one of us and, therefore, the Minister hired her because of what was assumed to be her "clan" identity. But once it became clear that was not the case, she became the object of outright hostility from her co-workers. Hawa was increasingly alienated, although the Minister was satisfied with her work. The combination of petty hostility in the ministry and wider insecurity in the city forced Hawa to leave the country and go back to Turkey, crushing the spirit of an aspiring educated woman who was dedicated to the rebuilding of her country and community.

Hawa's experiences in the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance reflect the horrific effects of tribal politics on public service. Each ministry or government agency has become the fiefdom of a certain genealogical group, as far as staffing the public service is concerned. In addition, political tribalism and bribes are the vehicles citizens are compelled to deploy to access whatever mediocre services the state provides. These dynamics have created systemic vulnerabilities and dependencies in the last thirty years that almost seem fool proof to change. Thus, public service, including security, is a bottomless sinkhole that drains the disorganized reform efforts of civic-minded individuals or any small groups that try to change the political orientation of the country. Such institutional environment enervates public confidence and trust.

V. The Rise of Opportunistic Leadership

Leadership, at whatever level of society, is a pivotal force in setting the agenda for a community or a nation. Ethical and competent leaders inspire citizens, keep public institutions operating and accountable, and generate trust. The converse is equally valid. Somalia started its

postcolonial history with leaders of remarkable devotion, prudence and integrity. However, once they left the stage, leadership quality declined precipitously. This led to the decay of public institutions and the evaporation of citizens' faith in national leaders. Somalia led the continent in the art of democratic leadership and professionalized public service for almost the first post-independence decade, but the standards of political leadership has been on steep decline since the 1967 presidential election and, with that marker, the autonomy of public service (Abdi Samatar, 2016). We proffer five types of leadership which have dominated the country's history since independence in 1960. These are: (a) genuine democrats; (b) bogus democrats and rent-seekers; (c) ruthless dictator; (d) warlords and pseudo-religious politicians, (e) corrupt and tribalistic looters.

Authentic Democrats: This category of leadership acted like trustees and honored their responsibilities in word and deed. They cherished their constitutional obligations and respected their oaths of office (Ahmed Samatar and Abdi Samatar 2002). Such was the practice of the first president and his second prime minister. Nearly twenty years after this team left office, the most distinguished Somali journalist of his time confirmed the authenticity and quality of their leadership:

One thing is indisputably certain. It had never even occurred to the Aden/Abdirazak [Osman/Hussein] team to look into the possibilities of applying the norms of Somali tribalism to the state, or its institutions and functions. One reason for such disregard of any such thought is that the applying of tribal norms and criteria to the state and its institutions would have been then a flagrant violation of the Somali constitution. ... Paradoxically, the principal targets of the Dalka's verbal violence were the governmental team of the first president of the Somali Republic, Aden Abdulle Osman, and his choice of Prime Minister, Abdirazak Haji Hussen—whose government is now accepted by all to have been the best Somalis ever had. Dalka itself was not oblivious, even then, of that fact. ... Dalka then noted ... The basic distinguishing feature of the ... team was the fundamental factor underlying the political framework ... consensual ... One of the results of such consensual approach was the removal of the need to resort to political violence. Hence, neither the government nor its opponents considered intimidation as an instrument to use in the political arena. ...The advantage of this system of mutual tolerance ...included ... freedom from physical intimidation and from the resulting worry about their personal safety. Consequently, one of the common sights [in Mogadishu] of the period was to see Prime Minister

Abdirazak Haj Hussein sitting in Juba hotel, sipping a cup of tea while dueling verbally with the critics of his government. He would, at the end, calmly walk, usually alone, to his house, situated a few hundred metres up the hill to the then Monopolio. An equally familiar sight of the period was to find the President of the Republic, Aden Abdulle Osman, performing his Maqreb prayers, beside his small Fiat, alone or with an ad hoc prayers gathering on the road side. There just were no reasons then for either of them to worry about his personal safety.

In their assessment, Yusuf Dhuhul and other observers have identified four essential characteristics of those founding leaders: absence of tribal favoritism and political violence, consensual politics, anti-corruption, and dedication to professional public service. In 1966, a year before the second presidential election, Dhuhul eloquently recorded this leadership's pioneering drive against corruption in senior levels of the state:

The important political development ... has been the dismissal of the Minister of Industry and Commerce, the Minister of Agriculture and the Under-Secretary of Agriculture ... The dismissals were due to charges of corruption. This is an epoch-making development. No longer will the appointment to a ministerial post mean a license to rob ... Another important political fact is that the dismissal of a minister because he has been charged with corrupt practices is a development we could not possibly have expected from any of our prime ministers. The present Prime Minister has his faults - certainly many of them. But it would be neither fair nor honorable to deny him the support and praise he deserves for re-establishing the principle that even ministers cannot afford to be caught in compromising situations, involving the misuse of public funds or power of office. A third important aspect - perhaps the most important - is that the Attorney General's office has applied to the National Assembly for authorization to institute criminal proceedings against the two ministers and the Under-Secretary. Such a request must be moved in the assembly by a fifth of its members and must be approved by a two-thirds majority in a secret ballot. The requests for the authorization to prosecute in respect of at least ex-Minister of Industry and Commerce is believed to have been submitted to the President of the National Assembly some months ago (Duhul, 1966: 2-4).

Two other keen observers of the time have confirmed those leaders' drive to professionalize public service and ensure that public institutions were managed by competent cadres. A senior Canadian expert,

seconded to the Somali government by the United Nations, reported his work with the reformist Somali Prime Minister (PM) pertaining to the civil service:

...While Mr. Hindle gives unstinted praise to the Abdirazak government, on several occasions in the past he has remarked that Abdirazak may be ahead of his time; i.e., too progressive for Somalia's present state of political development. ... Mr. Hindle stated that he has been working for long hours, at times until 4:00 AM in private sessions with Abdirazak... on the reorganization of the Somali civil service. The task was difficult according to Hindle, because the civil service was more than doubled in the last two years of the UN Trusteeship Administration under Italy. Without further elucidation Hindle claimed that this was done for political reasons. As a result, the GSR has been saddled with the problem of an over-staffed civil service since independence (United States Department of State, *Airgram A-427*, January 30, 1965).

The PM's reform agenda of the civil service was passed into law by a contentious parliament. Here is how one member, Haji Bashir Ismail, remembered the event:

[Hussen] is a tough man; many deputies believe he has been excessive in his zeal for reform, though not quarreling with his objectives. Many dismissed civil servants have been calumniated by insinuation of (unproved though likely) graft and disloyalty. Nevertheless, the Assembly respects and praises [Hussen's] courage. He is the first prime minister to have had any (US Department of State, May 24, 1965).

Finally, the leadership's commitment of fair play among the citizens is best demonstrated by the ethical and professional way that the search for recruits for the nascent national air carrier was conducted. The American Government donated three refurbished Dakota planes to Somalia but would not train Somali pilots. The PM and his Minister of Public works approached the German Government to take up the assignment of preparing the first cohort of Somali pilots and ground crews. Germany accepted the request with two conditions: that the Embassy would conduct the examination and do so in the English language. The minister who was from the former Italian Somaliland did not challenge the set conditions knowing that his regional constituency might be disadvantaged by the English language requirement. Further, the PM also turned down his sister's request to ensure that his

nephew would secure a slot among the finalists for pilot training. The PM responded by telling her that the nephew must take his chances like other competitors. The nephew was not one of the winners. Once the German Embassy announced the results of the examination, it became clear that all pilot training slots were won by young secondary school graduates who hailed from the *northern* region of the Republic. Those exam results became an embarrassment to a significant number of northern MPs who were in opposition to the government. The only southerners who qualified were selected for ground crew training.

The final litmus test that President Osman and Prime Minister Hussein were dedicated to the national interest and devoted to democratic ideals was how the former conducted his last presidential campaign in 1967. While his opponent was literally buying MPs votes and making many ministerial and other promises to MPs, President Osman stayed above the fray. Not only did he not pay money to MPs, but he also refused to accept money gifts from a Somali businessman who wanted to contribute to his campaign. Here is how the President noted the affair in his daily diary on May 1, 1967:

He said that he was 100% for me, and that he will work with certain deputies and that he is ready to donate -give me Sh. So 100,000 to spend as I believe best. He exhorted me to have certain deputies come to me (Haji Yusuf Iman, Ismail Duale Warsame, Awil haji Abdillahi) and ask them to support me! I thanked him, telling him, however, that I do not have need of any money because I find that embarrassing, not only that, but it is not useful to accomplish things by means of corruption" (Osman, May 25, 1967).

Osman narrowly lost the presidency, but his legacy has stood the test of time as a leader with high civic ethics who honored his oath of office. In retrospect, the transition from the President and his team marked a major watershed in the history of the Somali people. For over the last fifty years, the diminishment of in the quality of leaders that began at that time went in tandem with the fizzling out of citizens' trust of national authorities and, ultimately, the spread of a generalized repugnance towards public affairs.

Pseudo-Democrats: President Osman resigned ten days before his departure date. He did so in order to give the president-elect, Shar-marke, and the new executive team, led by Prime Minister Egal, an opportunity to move quickly in order to put their stamp on their

administration. As if to declare the coming of a dark agenda, the new leaders swiftly moved to restructure SYL to suit their political schema. Their first act was to try to remove the former PM, Hussein, as the leader of the party. They thought they could eliminate him by bribing the party's Central Committee which had the final say about the fate of the party's Secretary General. Reminiscent of the founding ideals of the party, the last member of the Central Committee they approached, after failing to convince others, was an old man by the name of Omar Bore who they thought would be vulnerable and, therefore, might be tempted by a cash bribe. But his response unnerved and drove them away. Omer Borey reacted emphatically, and, after rejecting their offer, declared this: "If I do what you are asking me, then who will marry my daughter as I will become so utterly disgraceful." Hussein was deeply moved by the defense the Central Committee gave him but realized, at the same time, that the glorious liberation party was no longer what it used to be. He subsequently resigned from the Central Committee and cancelled his party membership. The next task of the Sharmarke administration was to emasculate parliament by introducing a law which made MPs subject to arrest, beyond the confines of the premises of the parliament building. The MPs passed the law as many of them were bribed and felt secure since they thought they were part of the new government's coalition. Two other acts were taken by the Sharmarke regime to constrict the democratic space in the country. First, they replaced the Italian head of the Supreme Court and appointed a new young Somali who had less than seven years of legal experience. The immediate aim of this appointment was to politically tame the Court to an extent that it will endorse the regime's agenda in the upcoming 1969 parliamentary election. The Court's new leadership did exactly what the regime coveted. That is, it dismissed all the petitions contesting the format of the 1969 election.

In a decision which may well be an unfortunate benchmark in Somali judicial history, the Supreme Court on February 23 rejected the appeals filed by the DAP, SNC, HDMS, and SDU when these parties were unable to register their lists of candidates for the March election in Bur Hacaba. The Court made only one announcement, saying that the Bur Acaba appeals, as well as the appeals of SNC in Zeila, and appeals concerning intra-SYL disputes in Adale, and Garoe were denied on "technical ground". ...The rejection of the Bur Hacaba lists, and in particular the DAP list of ...Zoppo ... is the most significant and from all indications,

a blatant injustice which the GSR may live to regret. It is likely that President Sharmarke himself is the principal villain in this piece in that he apparently gave instructions to one and all concerned that the DAP list was to be blocked (United States Department of State, July 8, 1969).

Beyond gerrymandering the electoral process, the Sharmarke-Egal team used the national treasury as their political slush fund.

Egal must now tackle an imposing backlog of political and economic matters swept aside during the campaign and its aftermath. There is not, according to the local IMF representative, “a single financial law in the Somali Republic that has not been flagrantly disregarded in the last six months” (United States Department of State, February 26, 1969).

The parliamentary election of 1969 was thoroughly rigged, giving the ruling party a comfortable majority. Hence, the election produced many political grievances. Once the dust had settled, the significant opposition MPs realized that parliament was not going to be the forum for democratic debate and all members, but one MP, decided to join the ruling party. This act turned the country into a single party state. Corruption, maladministration, tribalization and regionalization of politics, and clique rule, rather than democratic dialogue, became the political master plan of the regime. Just when the regime felt sufficiently strong and secure in power things fell apart. President Sharmarke was shot dead by a member of his own police bodyguard, while on a tour in the town of Las Anod.

Military Tyranny: The military staged a coup the day after the President was buried. This ushered-in twenty-one years of a most brutal dictatorship. Initially, a majority of the public applauded the change as the regime articulated a seemingly progressive agenda. Its early days focused on campaigns in the form of anti-corruption, expansion of educational and other worthy services, adoption of the Latin script for the Somali language, and a fleeting attention to environmental concerns. What was not immediately apparent to the average citizen, however, was the destruction of the democratic institutions and the rule of law. The initial friendly face and patriotic mood displayed by the military rule gradually gave way to naked tyranny that ultimately instigated a vicious war, which led to state failure.

A few Somalis who were politically vigilant recognized the military rule for what it was, once the regime threw out the country's democratic constitution and replaced it with the junta's decrees. Three years

after the coup, the impact of the change was clear to one of the authors, who was posted in the town of Gabileh as a national services primary school teacher. The District Commissioner, then a military captain, had all the local government legislative and executive authority, despite the existence of a district council and a local administrator. He arbitrarily took decisions which no one in the district could challenge. Senior government civil servants all became the captain's underlings, and he ran the district like his fiefdom. Such political and administrative arrangement at the district level copied the power structure at the national level where all civilian leaders and staff in government were subservient to military bosses.

A political illusion prevailed among the public for the first eight years of military rule. This was for two reasons. First, the memory of the corrupt civilian regimes remained vivid among the public and was also overshadowed by the junta's claim of fighting corruption. Second, the massive government intervention in all aspects of life, such as the national literacy campaign, the successful drought/famine relief program in 1974/5, and the expansion of all levels of schooling created an aura of progress that provided a certain degree of legitimacy for the regime. What most people did not realize, at the time, was the slow process of power consolidation in the hands of single individual, General Siyad Barre. The essence of the regime was fully exposed during and after the disastrous Ethiopian/Somali war of 1977/8. The Somalis were thoroughly defeated, after a massive airlift of Soviets weapons to Ethiopia and the intervention of Cuban and Yemeni troops on behalf of Ethiopia. Hereafter, a small circle of people around Barre took command of the state and gave it an outright and vulgar tribalist cast. This made loyalty, if not outright supplication, to the tyrant the most important qualification for holding public office. Such a rot at the center, in addition to the brutality of rule, incited opposition groups from two regions of the country. Using the old colonial strategy of collective punishment, the regime heartlessly treated anyone from those regions as the enemy, unless they declared their fealty to the prevailing order. The regime's scorch earth policy began with the poisoning of nomadic water wells in the northeast region to be followed by the massive destruction of the two largest cities in the northern region of the country (Africa Watch, 1991). Such barbaric use of raw power drove the populations from those regions into the hands of the sectarian opposition. From there on, the struggle for reform was defined along tribal lines which catapulted the country to venomous and greater fragmentation. Nearly

twenty years after it came to power with the promise of better times for the Somali Republic, Siyaad Bare's regime collapsed, and the country disintegrated into sectarian and unstable domains. Subsequently, the civil war consumed nearly a million people and the country has yet to recover from that calamity. An authoritarian and personalistic leadership, unhinged from national ethos and civic agenda, destroyed the public's trust and brought forth the biggest political and humanitarian catastrophe in the history of the Somali people.

The Antithesis of Leadership: Once the regime crumpled, a devastating civil war ensued – particularly in the wake of the failure of various opposition cliques to agree on a common agenda. Each rebel leader and his entourage, driven by crude lust for personal power, scrambled to become the new dictator. All failed to do so. The net result of this depraved squabble transformed the country into regional or warlord zones. Bloodletting continued for the entire 1990s and the early years of the 21st century, except for the breakaway Somaliland which slowly reemerged as relatively peaceful entity. This judgment is to be qualified, at this moment of writing, by the eruption of bloody conflagrations in the city of Las Anod—the capital of Sool region. Puntland, the northeastern region of the country, also restored peace and some semblance of political order despite such arrangements being deeply tribalistic. The rest of the country, particularly south-central, remains chaotic and bloody.

Several exceptionally violent warlords began to dominate various regions. Among the most brutal were those that subjugated the capital, Mogadishu, carving it into separate and abject ghettos. Kismayo and Baidoa had the same fate. In Mogadishu, the city's international airport and seaport were shut down as the warlords could not agree on a security and management plan to safeguard the region's air and sea transport. Consequently, a makeshift seaport (Ceel Macan) was set up about 20 miles north of the old port, while an unpaved landing strip was hurriedly constructed 40 miles south of the old capital. Whatever little public infrastructure the country had was ruined. Mogadishu's streets were reclaimed by drifting sand, with garbage everywhere. For fifteen years, then, violent disorder defined Somali life in Mogadishu. Even in Puntland and Somaliland, despite the commendable—but still fragile—peace, mistrust among the dominant political factions and between them and their general public, compounded by severe material impoverishment, remain the Achille's heel of attempts at civic rejuvenation and institutional vibrancy.

The tyranny of warlord's misrule which devastated life in the capital for fifteen years was discarded within six months in early 2006. A population traumatized by warlords' cruelty was led and inspired by religious leaders (Union of Islamic Courts –UICs). Mogadishu's speedy liberation gave hope to Somalis everywhere, but it enraged Ethiopia and its principal military ally, the USA. The subsequent Ethiopian invasion opened the way for two forces to dominate Somalia since. First, there was the corrupt and sectarian Transitional Federal Government (TFG) cooked up in Nairobi that became isolated in Baidoa. Second, the designation of the youth wing of the UICs, Al Shabaab, as a terrorist organization in 2008 by the United States. This act triggered a deadly struggle between the TFG and Al-shabaab.

Mercenary Leadership: Long before the defeat of the warlords, the United States, the EU, and IGAD sponsored a national 'reconciliation' conference in Kenya for Somali warlords and the feeble TFG that lasted for nearly eighteen months. The central agenda of the conveners was to put in place a new regime that was friendly towards Ethiopia and Kenya, and that would prioritize Western interests in the region. Conference overlords did not care whether their agenda dovetailed with Somali national interest. A new regime was inaugurated at the end of the long meeting which had two defining attributes. First, the new dispensation reinforced the odious formula where political identity was defined tribally. This arrangement divided all Somalis into 4.5 tribal-political groups and sanctioned that only a tribal man or women of one's 'kind' could represent him or her politically in public. Such formal politicization and vulgarization of descent created deep wedges in communal and public affairs in ways unknown in the past. Ethnic political representation reinforced the tribalization of the yet to be formed federal states in ways no previous Somali system had known. Second, cash bribes became the key tool for securing senior political offices, including the presidency. One of the new MPs captured the essence of the amount of cash bribes the major presidential candidates offered to members who were ready to auction their votes. He remarked that "if money had a parent, such a guardian would weep for the reckless abuse of its offspring."

Ever since the formation of that government in 2004, tribal identity and sleazy money became the prime instrument for a class of politicians whose insatiable avidity for power had no other purpose but self-glorification. But the influence of money and tribalism dipped slightly in the 2008 change of government. That transition took place

in Djibouti through a process organized by the United Nations but directed by the American Government. One of the candidates in this contest was the former leader of the UICs who was seduced by the United States to split with his comrades in Asmara, Eritrea. Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf, the reigning president, was conveniently and unceremoniously forced out of office before his term ended and Sharif Ahmed was promised the presidency. To facilitate Sharif's rise to power, the United States, under the cover of the United Nations, engineered a political scheme to make that possible. The United Nations declared that the Somali parliament would be doubled in size from 275 to 550 MPs and Sharif was granted the sole authority to appoint the new 275 MPs. This machination allowed Sharif to win the contest without offering money to MPs.

Four years later, in 2012, political tribalism and bribes returned with vengeance during the parliamentary and presidential elections. Unlike in previous years, Middle Eastern money, most particularly Emirati and Qatari, poured into the coffers of the top political candidates. Subsequently, those presidential candidates funded as many clients as possible for parliament since the cost of securing a parliamentary seat skyrocketed. We know of one candidate who received \$275,000 from a patron presidential candidate to virtually buy his seat. In the absence of any written contract, some individuals who became MPs quickly turned around to sell their forthcoming presidential vote to the candidate offering the highest bid. Sharif, whose campaign was funded by the UAE, was defeated and another candidate financed by Qatar and the UAE won the presidency. The cashier of the President-elect uttered a year later that his team spent several million dollars to buy nearly 151 MPs. The mixture of grand venality and political tribalism in the 2012 election produced a parliament and a presidency whose core values were to serve singularly narrow political and economic crookedness. Colossal fraudulence and wide-spread incompetence became the order of the four years. One eagle-eyed Somali poet noted, "*Awaey gancantii dheereyed.*"

Among the most visible acts of the pillaging of public property was the privatization of the strategic and highly valued land overlooking Mogadishu's International Airport and the Indian Ocean. The area was home to many internally displaced and poor people for two decades. These citizens were discarded, and their shacks demolished. The authorities justified the removal of the indigent people by claiming that their presence in the area created a major security risk for

the international airport. However, within a short period, after the poor were evicted, unscrupulous senior politicians shared the spoils. Subsequently, they built private mansions costing millions of dollars. Such callous acts accurately represent the stark ways in which public officials use the power of the deformed state to serve their myopic concerns rather than the wellbeing of their compatriots.

The promise of change vaporized quickly, and President Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud's final year in office was dominated by futile attempts to whitewash his image. But the public could not be fooled. Nearly two dozen candidates ran for president in 2016-17, all of whom promised a clean government after the election. Despite such vows, however, the top candidates deployed a toxic mix of dark money and political tribalism to win the race. In such a milieu, the price of becoming an MP or president skyrocketed. This change was triggered by the fact that the president's former chief strategic collaborator as well as financial patronship from Qatar, two sources of money to oil his campaign, now switched their support to a competitor. The President's new cash came from privately harvested Somali state revenues and UAE contributions. Close associates of the successful challenger, Mohamed Abdillahi, "Farmajo," who won the race reported that they spent over \$10 million to buy seats for parliamentary clients and woo others. One of the authors was able to witness this firsthand two nights before the election. Three MPs called and came by. They were eager to share some information. Each of them was carrying \$30,000 in a set of envelopes. They counted the money under the light. These MPs named the presidential candidate who was the source of the money and they added that there was a similar appointment from another candidate, the following night. The same three MPs called back the following night and reported they had collected a slighter smaller sum from the candidate who would become president the following day.

Farmajo was elected as the new president by the MPs the following day. His victory was a product of three things. First, he had a huge campaign money brought from Qatar which he used without restraint to buy MP votes. Second, many MPs, old or new, knew the reigning president was surrounded by a tight-knit team which foreclosed opportunities for them if he was re-elected. Hence, they decided to cast their lot with a new person. Third, Farmajo promised ministerial appoints to MPs if he was elected—dangling this carrot, despite the fact that the constitutional authority of appointing ministers was in the prime minister's purview. The latter issues were confirmed by the both

the new prime minister and, later, by one of the new senior ministers. Recovering from the civil war, rebuilding the country's institutions, and revamping the nation's moral values were not a priority of the new Farmajo Administration. On the contrary, the supreme and core intent was to prepare for the next election after the four-year term ended. The President's new team immediately set about to depose regional political leaders and put loyalists in place. Regional leaders controlled the process of electing MPs as has become patently clear in 2021 and 2022. Three regions and the Mogadishu municipality attracted the attention of the "reformers." The first province to entice such machination was Galmudug. After a prolonged internal political struggle, the President, the PM, and their team foisted a former junior warlord on the province. Subsequently, they turned their attention to the Southwest region with its capital in Baidoa. Here, they ignobly removed the incumbent from office and developed a plan to find a malleable replacement. But they underestimated the anger felt by many in the region against the attempt to mold the province as Mogadishu wished.

The regime's plan was almost spoiled by an outsider who declared his candidacy for the governorship. Sh. Mukhtar Roobow, a former leader of the Al-Shabaab who had parted company with the terrorist group, was welcomed in Mogadishu for propaganda purposes. Initially, the regime did not object to his candidacy as he filed all documents required; they thought that he could be easily defeated by their candidate. But once they realized that Roobow had a good chance of winning, they resorted to violence. On the eve of the election in the regional capital, they asked all the candidates to assemble in the regional administration's headquarters, and deployed loyalist troops they sent from Mogadishu and Ethiopian forces stationed in the city. They violently disbursed the crowd that has come out to challenge the assault and forcibly apprehended Roobow, killed over a dozen members of his supporters and people in the crowd, flew him to Mogadishu where they have held him as a prisoner ever since. The regime quickly had their candidate, an assistant to a former warlord, "elected" as regional governor against public uproar. Meanwhile, the United Nation's Special Representative to Somalia, Nicholas Haysom, a South African citizen and diplomat, severely criticized the government for its heavy handedness. He was the first UN official to do so. Within days, the diplomat was declared *persona non grata* and forced out of the country.

Having secured leadership in two "states," President Farmajo and his acolytes gunned for a third region—namely, Jubaland, where the

governor's term of office was about to expire. However, Jubaland was no Galmudug or Southwest— three obstacles stood in their way. First, the physical distance between the regional capital, Kismayo and Mogadishu was vast, and the regime lacked the military capability to bridge the gap. In addition, much of this territory is occupied by Al Shabaab that would not allow national government troops safe passage. Second, Unlike Baidoa where the major AMISOM forces consisted of Ethiopian troops that facilitated the raid there, a strong contingent of Kenyan military guarded Kismayo and its airport. Ethiopian troops from the Eastern region of Ethiopia attempted to fly to Kismayo airport and repeat what they did in Baidoa, but regional troops made it impossible for the plane to land as they placed huge concrete blocks on the runway. Finally, the regional governor had planned his strategy in advance by working with traditional chiefs to outflank the pro-regime opposition. Consequently, he was “re-elected” for another term of four years. After failing to dislodge the Governor of Jubaland, the regime imposed an air embargo on Kismayo airport. Somalia air traffic control headquartered in Mogadishu was used to deny incoming and outgoing flight to Kismayo. This embargo negatively affected the regional authorities as airport revenues were lost, but more importantly, it had a devastating impact on ordinary people and the businesses community. Regardless, the federal authorities failed to dislodge the leader of Jubaland. Subsequently, President Farmajo's regime turned its attention to concocting supporters elsewhere by creating a fake electoral district in the national capital which had no place in the constitution. It appointed another warlord as the mayor of Mogadishu and attempted to nominate 13 individuals to become members of the Upper House of Parliament. Fortunately, the leader of the Upper House blocked this unconstitutional ploy. The regime's final bid to place loyalists in the regions was in Hirshabeele. Using corrupt money, they forced out the governor and organized a fraudulent “election” which produced their candidate as the new governor. Their success in putting this candidate in the governorship seriously upset the original political agreement between the two largest genealogical communities in the region. Jowhar was made the capital of the region as a nod to the local community while the governorship of the region was to always come from the community that dominated Belt Wayne. This change in the political agreement between the two biggest genealogical communities in Hirshabeele disrupted the balance and has created a political impasse in the province.

The regime's final assault on the rights of regions and communities to autonomously *select* their representatives in the national parliament was in Somaliland. Here, the dominant political forces in region declared their return, in 1991, to the status of the independence of British Somaliland Protectorate in 26 June, 1960. This meant immediately cutting away from the union with Italian Somalia. Still, a significant political contingent from Somaliland, who say that they are "committed" to a united country, have remained politically active in Mogadishu. They hold 57 seats in both chambers of the Somali parliament. President Farmajo and his team connived to take over the process through which members of the parliament from Somaliland were selected. He bypassed the highest elected official from the region who should have presided over the proceedings and, astonishingly, decided to handle it himself, in association with the head of his national security team. This created an unnecessary and prolonged political tug of war. When the process was completed, the regime had gerrymandered the proceedings and, as a result, was able to give nearly 45 seats to its *clients* from Somaliland. It is important to note here that Somaliland was not the only community whose seats in the then forthcoming parliament were hijacked by the regime. Other regions suffered the same fate, as loyalist or opposition governors single-handedly *selected* the MPs without any inputs from the 'traditional' elders or independent members of society. Thus, the current leadership at the national and provincial level have produced what could well be the most corrupt parliament in the history of post-colonial Somalia. Such an edifice does not inspire public confidence or trust in the political leadership and direction of the country.

VI. A Recapitulation: Down but Not Yet Out

This essay offered a synoptic history of the loss of trust amongst the elite, between the elite and the rest of the politically active population, and within the larger society. Somali cultural, political, religious, and other stores of social capital and cohesion have been emptied of their genuine value. This condition has left the population *almost* incapable of embarking on a civic journey towards national resuscitation. Any realistic attempt to rebuild the civic fabric of the communities and the nation must begin by undoing the damage inflicted on these institutions.

Scholarship on contemporary political affairs of the country has overlooked the centrality of *trust* in the making of the social and polit-

ical health of the nation. Defining the problem and its causes is the first step in fashioning an enduring and robust solution. This essay has attempted to illuminate how the four core pillars of trust in this society have been battered. Somali tradition, represented by genuine community elders in pre-colonial Somalia, symbolized independence and a source of consensus to address difficult collective affairs. As a result, traditional leaders affected communal cohesion. This changed radically when they became a cog in the colonial wheel. Two consequences followed this transformation. First, they lost their autonomy and became instruments of the colonial state. Second, the colonizers used 'traditional' authority to splinter Somali political identity along flammable genealogical lines to undermine the population's collective political identity and enlarged social belonging. In the process, traditional elders lost their communal appeal and never regained the people's respect. Moreover, since the collapse of the Somali state, "tribal" elders have morphed into sectarian and deeply debauched actors whose livelihoods have become contingent on transactional politics and cash exchanges with those in power or vying for authority. In such circumstances, these elders have become accomplices to political indignities, fragmentation and disunity.

Similarly, Islam has been the source of binding national ethic, and the Ulema were the guardians of the faith in earlier historical periods. As custodians of Islamic tradition, they mediated communal conflicts during the pre-colonial period, and led the public when external menace confronted Somalis. Examples of such leadership rose at the dawn of the colonial era. The last attempt by the Ulema to defend or liberate Somali territory from outsiders or local tyrants was in 2006 - 08 when the UICs defeated warlords who held the country hostage for over a decade. Later, they led the successful challenge to the Ethiopian invasion. In all these instances, the community held the Ulema's leadership in reverence. But in recent years, the Ulema has fragmented into three hidebound components. One group became the terrorist camps and live by the bullet or the suicide vest. They dominate much of the rural areas in Southern Somalia and terrorize the rest of the country. Their tyranny and violence elicit neither respect nor trust, but provokes deep fear and strong antipathy. The second faction has joined formal politics and are indistinguishable from other corrupt actors, despite cloaking their deeds in the aura of Islam. Yet, most Somalis see them for what they are: self-seeking and greedy politicians. They, too, do not evoke public trust. Lastly, the third group constitute a majority of the

Ulema who cast their role as preachers of the faith. Three things feature in the agenda of the last cohort. First, their primary preoccupation is to persuade the population to focus on their afterlives, narrowly defined, through strict prayers and other rituals. Second, they devote lots of energy to suppress the freedom of women as equal citizens and their rightful role in public life. Third, they have shown little attention towards the seminal causes of the people's misery and the rampant malfeasance of the elite that degrades human life. Though a significant portion of the population appear to trust this cohort of the Ulema, they, unfortunately, have failed to use that confidence to forge a progressive civic agenda. On the contrary, their influences have alienated people from engaging in politics and any civic cause, thus leading to collective disempowerment and the privatization of Somali socio-economic ills.

A third possible source of trust was political leadership. Tragically for Somalia, politics has been dominated by individuals and groups unworthy of faith. The only exception to this order were the democratic leaders during the first seven years of independence, who scrupulously lived within the bounds of the constitution, and left office when they were defeated. Somalia has had the misfortune of over half a century of a progressively degenerate political leaders who trigger contempt and deep misgivings among the people. The last source of mutual credence among the population could be public institutions, such as ministries, courts, schools, the police, etc. Bruce Berman, the Canadian scholar, pithily describes the relationship between the institutions and citizens in neighboring Kenya:

For ordinary people the central problem lies in their day-to-day contacts with local authorities and agents of the state where they cannot expect disinterested competence and fairness. Instead, they expect and mostly get incompetence, bias, venality, and corruption. So long as this persists, they cannot develop the critical relations of trust in their dealings with the state...

Despite the dreadful circumstances Kenyans face, Somalis would be thrilled to instantly trade places with their neighbors. It has become second nature for Somalis, then, not only to pay bribes for any lousy state service they might receive, but to be treated with derision. Further, those seeking employment in the state sector cannot even get available jobs for which they are the most qualified unless they are of the *right* genealogical pedigree in this fallen country. Transparency

International has consistently ranked Somalia as the most corrupt country in the world in the last two decades. By extension, this means that the managers of the state and its institutions are also the least trusted in the world.

Finally, notwithstanding the grim realities Somalis from the old Republic face, there is a great deal of hunger for radical and intelligent reform. For instance, many of the educated young, a notable fraction of the youth bulge in the country, are restless. Nonetheless, they have yet to find a workable and inclusive ideology, a community of civic values, a touch of leadership fine grace, and an organization that can galvanize an effort to bring peace, competence, justice, and development. Two chief impediments to the rise of this conscientious civic tide are: the lawlessness and violence in many parts of the country, and the sectarian old guard who tenaciously cling to power using their time-tested strategy of divide and rule. To be sure, and akin to others, Somalis are human beings in time and, therefore, not immune to the circumstantial disruptions of political life, or what Machiavelli called, so long ago, *fortuna*. Still, Somalis of goodwill and sense of collective agency and dignity must muster the will to power and intelligence (i.e. *virtue*) to break the chains of hopelessness. In that historic task, it is instructive to recall an assertion made to us by a young European Union employee in Nairobi. "The International Community or the African Union," he declared, "are incapable, if not uninterested, to aid progressive change in Somalia." After more than three decades of hell, if not political death, Somalis must wake up to the fact that they are the *only* ones who can redeem themselves and their country.

Acknowledgements: The editing and preparation of this volume has greatly benefited from the assistance of Rachel Colson. Rachel is a highly intelligent and thorough third-year student in International Studies at Macalester College. She read and helped edit all the manuscripts. We salute her for her most valuable contributions.

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