The Somaliland Social Covenant

An Experiment in Non-State Coexistence

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Abstract

Somaliland, which emerged from the collapse of the Somali Republic as a self-governing territory, is today considered one of Africa's success stories, an experiment in locally-owned reconciliation and bottom-up democratisation that confounds scholars' views of the African State. But why conceive of Somaliland as a State in the first place? This thesis presents the Somaliland experiment in a new light, shifting focus beyond administrative institutions, drawing attention instead to the continued political salience of the horizontal inter-clan reconciliation compact on which Somaliland was founded. This compact, I argue, which established regulations for coherent, equitable and stable relations between clans, was more than an intermediate peace arrangement on the way to a State, but a self-contained and self-reproducing constellation of political logics in its own right. I designate this alternative, parallel political system the 'Somaliland Social Covenant'.

Drawing on in-depth interviews and immersive observation, the thesis builds an empirical picture of the Covenant and its continued operability within Somaliland's mainstream political culture by demonstrating its role in shaping three political controversies which captivated society between 2018 and 2019. These three cases, which cover a land dispute in El Af-weyn, a power-sharing tussle between centre and periphery, and a businessman's fight for citizenship protections against a capricious State, provide evidence of political environment where dual, contending systems—that of the State, and that of the Social Covenant—interact with each other. The research builds a methodological framework from anarchist theory and historical sociology, which enable the reader to peer beneath the analytical confines of peacebuilding and statebuilding literature to understand the historically-situated role of the State and inter-clan relations within the Somaliland context. It highlights three features of the Covenant as determining its qualitative distinctness from the State: that of direct, horizontal relations between a plurality of actors (horizontality); the localised, contextually-embedded roots of agency and social power (intimacy); and conditional, consensus-based decision-making (conditional association).

The primary aim of the research is to recentre the political ingenuity of Somaliland's founding inter-clan arrangement, and to demonstrate its lasting impact on Somaliland's peace and stability, in parallel, and often opposition, to the influence of the State. It builds this alternative account of the Covenant from the interpretive contributions of local stakeholders themselves, as captured in 299 interviews conducted during fieldwork. A secondary goal is to offer up the Social Covenant as a potential model for those seeking to 'think beyond the state', through demonstrating the concrete and historically proven ways in which a society can shape power relations and institutionalise political principles that promote order, political participation and non-domination without mediation through a State. In this, it does not seek to romanticise the Covenant, but merely present its strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the State. Lastly, it is hoped that the Covenant and its mechanisms can inspire better practice in future statebuilding and peacebuilding endeavours, offering safeguards to counteract the centralising, alienating tendencies of the (African) State.

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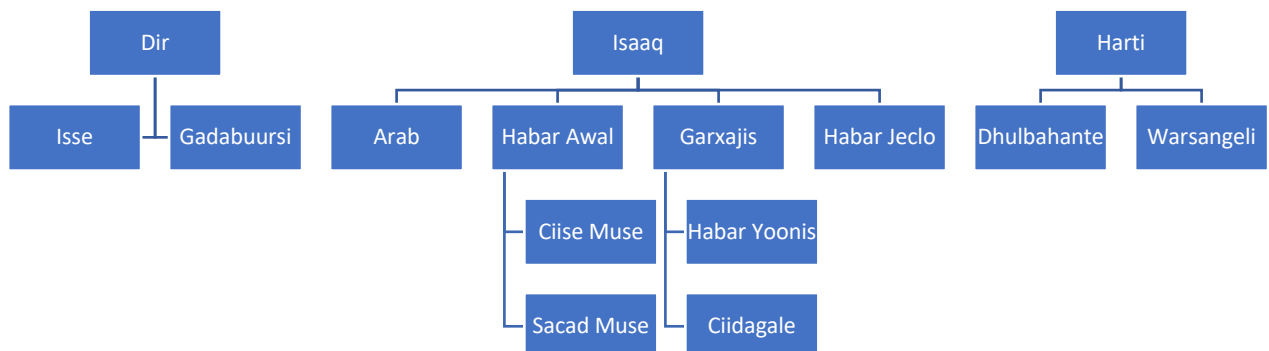
Glossary of relevant Somali terms, clans, sub-clans and locations

af-miinshaaro………….self-appointed "political brokers" or "spin doctors"

Arab………………………*Isaaq* sub-clan, mostly found in the Hawd area and Hargeisa

boqor………………………traditional leader, king

caaqil………………………chief, headman, elder, head of *diya*-paying group (pl: *caaqilo*)

Darawiish…………………popular Somali anti-colonial movement from turn of the 20th century

dhaqan……………………culture, tradition, way of life

Ciise…………………………non-*Isaaq* clan located where Somaliland, Djibouti and Ethiopia meet

Ciise Muse…………………*Isaaq* sub-clan mostly found in the Saahil region

Dhulbahante……………non-*Isaaq* clan mainly inhabiting Somaliland's eastern Sool region

diya…………………………blood money, compensation (also called *mag*)

Gadabuursi……………...non-*Isaaq* clan mainly inhabiting Somaliland's western Awdal region

Garxajis……………………*Isaaq* umbrella group of the *Habar Yoonis* and *Ciise Muse* sub-clans

Golaha Wakiilada…….House of Representatives

Guurti………………………Somaliland Council of Elders (or, traditionally, committee of wise men)

Habar Jeclo…………….. *Isaaq* sub-clan mostly found in the Togdheer and Sanaag regions

Habar Yoonis……………*Isaaq* sub-clan mostly found in the Togdheer and Sanaag regions

UCID………………………long-time opposition party in Somaliland

Isaaq………………………Somaliland's largest clan, primarily settled in the country's centre

jabhad……………………armed rebellion, resistance

khat…………………………leafy plant consumed as stimulant (also spelled *qaad/qat*)

Khatumo……………….…anti-Somaliland resistance movement active in the south-east

Kulmiye……………………ruling political party in Somaliland since 2010

muqadas……………………sacred, holy

qabiil………………………clan, tribe, race, nation

qabyalaad…………………clannism, tribalism

saami-qaybsi……….......power-sharing

shir…………………………meeting, conference, assembly

siyaasad………………….politics

suldaan…………………..chief, headman (head of sub-clan)

Waddani…………………main opposition political party in Somaliland since 2012

Warsangeli……………..non-*Isaaq* clan mainly found in eastern Sanaag region

war-saxaafeed………..press conference

xaalad deg deg ah…..State of Emergency

xalay-dhalay……………'born yesterday', convention of blanket forgiveness for offenses

xeer…………………..…………..custom, rule, regulation, traditional law

A Note on Language

Deciding upon the most appropriate spelling for certain Somali words proved difficult. It has involved balancing respect for the Somali language, with ease of understanding for a general audience, with past precedent within the scholarship. This is all made more difficult by the lack of prior consistency established within the academic literature, combined with the particularities that emerge from the fact that Somali is a language both only recently codified, and which adopts the Latin alphabet, but employs the letters in often unfamiliar ways.

What I have arrived at is a compromise of sorts. For names of persons and places, I have gone with the Anglicised spelling, except where this cannot be found. This is because, for places, the Anglicised term has often been more common, such as Borama (rather than the Somali *Boorama*), and is of greater use as a reference point vis-à-vis other scholarship if consistency is maintained. For names, a similar consideration was made (the current president is referred to as Muse Bihi rather than Muuse Biixi, for instance), added to the fact that most Somalis consent to Anglicising their names within international press material and correspondence. When it comes to the rest of the Somali terms in this thesis, the Somali version of the word is used, as will be indicated through the use of italics.

It is also worth addressing the use of the word 'clan', which, for the purposes of this study, is mainly employed to describe an identity marker based on patrilineal lineage. The term has rightly been criticised for the essentialising, pejorative uses it has taken on, especially in the way colonial regimes classified their subjects. While I toyed with the idea of using the more expansive and less tainted Somali term for 'clan' (*qabiil*), I ultimately decided against it for the purposes of ease of academic understanding, given how central the concept is to what I describe.

I ultimately felt comfortable in this decision because, for the Somalilanders I interacted with, this was the term of choice, not merely when engaging with foreign interlocutors, but also in their own discourse. However, in local usage, the content inflected in the term 'clan' takes on complex meanings far outstripping its often reductive anthropological and Western origins, and I caution against any understanding of clan that grants it a primordial, premodern status. Instead, as my writing hopefully shows, clan represents a multifaceted social tool and epistemological framework for placing oneself in relation to others, derived from complex webs of kinship-based relationality, with familial, religious, social, political and economic implications for one's social life, even if such identity, like all others, can be instrumentalised towards destructive ends.

My people: there is such a thing as society!
To the one who says you have no choice,
reply, 'You have no clue!'
Don't listen to his braying,
don't give him the time of day!

Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame Hadraawi,
from the poem 'Society' ('Bulsho')

Chapter I: Introduction

The Somaliland Social Covenant: An Experiment in Non-State Coexistence

If history and nature conspired to create an ideal social environment in which a new political experiment could be tested, what would it look like? It would certainly begin with a rupture, a fundamental break in the existing order, and, as Marxists might envision it, the revolutionary unsettling of prevailing relations of hierarchy and power (Traverso 2021). More than that, this rupture would need to escape a quick re-inscription into a new hegemonic order, and instead, like Rousseau and Hobbes's state of nature, serve as an open political ground on which a plurality of political actors could negotiate what comes next (Rousseau 2012; Hobbes 2017). To avoid constraint of the imagination, and a reversion to 'tried and tested' solutions, these actors would ideally be unshackled from the blueprints, schedules and disciplining pressures of outside powers, something akin to the epistemological and physical decolonisation called for amongst postcolonial theorists (Halperin 2006; Sabaratnam 2017). Such a political system might even, to borrow from the Rawlsians, include the equalising impulses and communitarian commitments brought about by an uncertain future, in which coexistence is solidified through the promise of baseline livelihood and security guarantees for all (Rawls 2003).

While reality, in all its messiness, is rarely so kind as to offer up such promising conditions, in at least one case it came remarkably close. This is the case of Somaliland, the focus of this study, a self-governing region of over 4 million people located on the African Horn. Formerly part of the Somali Republic, Somaliland came into existence following the implosion of the Somali State in 1991, after years of internal conflict and mass atrocity perpetrated against its people. From the ashes of this rupture, a newfound political openness, threatening to unleash chaos, was instead redirected by traditional leaders and other clan representatives towards a successful, if at times tumultuous, process of reconciliation and political consensus-building. This process, undertaken over the course of a decade largely beyond the gaze and reach of the international community, culminated by 2001 in the emergence of a political system boasting a constitution, liberal democratic ambitions and a popular mandate to pursue Somaliland's self-determination. In the 20-odd years since, this

former experiment in inter-clan coexistence has ballooned into a formidable geopolitical actor in its own right, lacking international recognition as a *de jure* State, but treated as a *de facto* State by its citizens and a growing list of foreign governments.

Somaliland's unlikely rise has, over time, come to be acknowledged and touted by academics, policy-makers and journalists alike. By the mid-2000s, Somaliland was dubbed 'an overlooked African success story' by the *New York Times*, and an 'oasis of stability' by the *Christian Science Monitor* (Gettleman 2007; Baldauf 2009). Within the scholarship, reckonings regarding Somaliland's self-initiated reconstruction have begun to challenge foundational truisms of liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding (see Rutazibwa 2019, 66), with Kaplan (2008) going as far as to remark: 'The success of its society-led, bottom-up process of democratization…calls into question the fundamental assumptions underlying the top-down, unitary state-building exercises so commonly attempted in fragile states' (144). More than a decade later, even as some of the lustre of novelty has begun to wear off, one still finds glowing descriptions of Somaliland as 'a political experiment whose apparent success challenges a range of patronizing assumptions about how poor and allegedly "backwards" societies find the light' (Rosen 2021). Such sentiments have even trickled their way into the halls of UK parliament, where, in a debate in 2022 dedicated to Somaliland's merits, one former cabinet minister described Somaliland as 'an amazing, shining beacon of everything we want to see flourish in Africa. It is the example we want others to follow' (HC Deb 2022).

As is clear from these accounts, Somaliland has managed to organise its society into something special, largely due to unique features of its evolution. This includes its rare level of autonomy from foreign intervention, the productive mediation of political struggles by legitimate clan representatives, and the inclusiveness of political buy-in among stakeholders. From these starting premises, scholars focusing on Somaliland have compiled a trove of first-hand records of proceedings from those involved in the peacebuilding and governance-building work, and produced pathbreaking studies seeking to trace its evolution and articulate its lessons (see in particular Bradbury 2008; Renders 2012; Richards 2014; Walls 2014; Phillips 2020). In many respects, this present study is a further contribution to that growing body of work, attempting to grapple with Somaliland in its depth and breadth, in part by complementing these exhaustive studies of Somaliland's foundational decades with more recent accounts of its political situation. However, I diverge from these previous approaches in one fundamental way: whereas the existing literature places Somaliland's evolution firmly

within the camp of a broader statebuilding narrative, treating it as an indigenous riff on a more universal theme, this study postulates that, to truly capture the innovation of the Somaliland project's political dynamics, we must free ourselves from the analytical constraints of the State form altogether, and look to something fundamentally 'other'. In order to bring this 'otherness' to light, the study will approach its object of analysis from an alternative analytical angle, by tackling the following research question: *How have non-state political logics influenced the evolution of the Somaliland project*?

To this end, whereas previous studies have seen Somaliland as a unique *type* of State produced by the rare circumstances of its origin, this study will instead seek to demonstrate that these foundational conditions, rather than forming the basis of a State, instead congealed into a decidedly non-State form of political coexistence, with a self-contained, self-reproducing and self-justificatory logic of its own. I call this alternative, non-State political arrangement the 'Somaliland Social Covenant', a form of inter-clan associationalism (or loose confederation) based around principles of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association, three concepts that will be detailed at length in the next chapter. Crucially, this Covenant not only preceded the parallel, and often countervailing, statebuilding process that would characterise Somaliland from 1997 onwards, but has persevered despite the establishment of the State, not as its precursor, but as a fundamentally alternative force to the State. As time has passed, these dual systems have learned to live with each other in a tentative, if increasingly unstable, balance.

Over the course of this study, I attempt to demonstrate both the bespoke existence and continued relevance of this Covenantal political arrangement, specifically through juxtaposing the tripartite logics on which it operates to the three unavoidable constitutive logics on which all States are based: verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy. Before delving into an introductory explication of these concepts and their constituent parts, it is necessary to give a brief outline of Somaliland's history, as well as the way in which this history has been interpreted up to this point, to demonstrate where this study stands in relation to existing scholarship.

1.1   A brief history of Somaliland

When the imperial powers carved up the Horn of Africa through conquest, treaty and warfare, the Somali people—a predominantly transhumant livestock-rearing society

organised around tight agnatic kinship networks internally and with acephalous and flexible coexistence between groups—found themselves spread out over five separate sovereign domains. This included a French-controlled territory that would become Djibouti; an Ethiopian-dominated area that would ultimately be incorporated as one of its federal regions; the northernmost sector of Kenya (formerly under British administration), which it remains to this day; an Italian Somali colony to the south, encompassing present-day Mogadishu, the current capital of Somalia; and a second British imperial administration known as the Somaliland Protectorate. It is this British Somaliland Protectorate that would in time become present-day Somaliland, or the Republic of Somaliland, as its citizens officially label it. Yet this road from colonised territory to self-contained independent polity proved painfully and tragically circuitous, and included a 30-year detour as part of a larger Somali union.

This journey began on 26 June 1960, when the protectorate's inhabitants won independence from the British, becoming a separate country for five days before being incorporated into the larger Somali Republic through a voluntary act of union with Italian Somaliland to the south. This union was intended as the first step in the unification of all five Somali territories under the umbrella of a single nation-state, 'Greater Somalia', a dream born of pan-Africanism that would never materialise, despite several wars fought in its name, including the devastating Ogaden War with Ethiopia of 1977-8. Instead, the two polities forged ahead alone, a three-decade marriage in which the former British entity served as the junior partner, marginalised within government representation and resource distribution. This situation became unbearable in the aftermath of the Ogaden War, when the autocratic regime of General Siad Barre, who rose to power during a coup in 1969, began a campaign of dispossession, surveillance and suppression specifically targeting the *Isaaq*, the majority clan in the north (Africa Watch 1990). In response, resistance sprang up from amongst the victimised communities, culminating in the formation of the Somali National Movement (SNM) in 1981. While blossoming from the diaspora, this armed rebel movement eventually built a popular base by drawing upon the 'moral economies' sustained through traditional authority and clan relations (Bakonyi 2009).

By the end of the decade, with Cold War patronage crumbling and popular resentment springing up throughout the country, the Barre government became more desperate, transforming from oppressive to genocidal. Embarking on a campaign of aerial bombardment, indiscriminate killing and clan militia mobilisation, the Somali State sought not only to crush

the rebellion, but to decimate the *Isaaq* population itself, including by turning neighbouring clans of the north against each other through a policy of divide-and-rule. In the end, over 100,000 people were killed and half a million more were displaced, while the major cities of Hargeisa and Burao were reduced to rubble (Ahmed & Green 1999, 119). This brutality was not enough to save the regime, and by 1991 the General was forced to flee, leaving the capital of Mogadishu to be fought over by rival southern militias, with the northern clans, reeling from divisions sowed during the conflict, left to work out a response to the collapsed State amongst themselves. The *Isaaq*-dominated SNM, seeing themselves as liberators, confronted neighbouring clans such as the *Gadabuursi* to the west and *Dhulbahante* to the east who had fought on the side of Barre and were seen by some SNM commanders as enemies to be either neutralised or conquered. At the same time, the SNM was plagued with infighting between rival factions, while bands of armed youth exploited the lawlessness to engage in banditry throughout the region (Bradbury, Abokor & Yusuf 2003).

At this moment of rupture, with society poised on the knife-edge of a return to civil war, events took a turn that few expected. Recognising that a competition for power would only cause collective destruction, the territories' customary clan leaders, revived during the SNM's resistance struggle, stepped up amidst the political deadlock and fragmentation to push for peace (Bradbury 2008, 79; Phillips 2020, 117). From 1991 through 1997, a series of clan-based reconciliation conferences were held of varying sizes and scopes, which generally adhered to a pattern of first negotiating pragmatic solutions to immediately pertinent issues, before pursuing agreement around wider peace-keeping norms and governance issues (Walls 2009). In this, the traditional mediators based their techniques and judgements on customary principles of justice (*xeer*), while adapting these tenets to account for issues requiring solutions of a much larger and more complex scale. As Phillips (2020) and others (see Bradbury 2008; Eubank 2012 and de Waal 2015) have argued, this process was enabled by the absence of foreign aid and intervention, which not only obviated short-termist competition over the spoils of international patronage and war economies, but equally empowered local actors to determine the trajectory of political dialogue and decision-making. Phillips (2013) describes this dynamic as productive and liberating in the following terms:

> The peace conferences were lengthy, deliberative processes that occurred according to local norms and rhythms. They were allowed to take as long as was necessary to reach an outcome satisfactory to those involved. The inherent

fluidity gave participants the time and political space to establish the institutions they believed were appropriate to the local context, rather than being rushed to adopt template institutions or hold elections…The process was ad hoc, reactive, consultative, inclusive, time consuming and, most importantly, was not working towards a pre-determined institutional outcome. The heavily domestic nature of the political settlement meant participants' incentives to find solutions were overwhelmingly internal, and thus immediate, rather than being responses to external pressures as was often the case in the south. (78)

Among the most impactful of these events was the Burao Conference of 1991, in which participating clan and SNM representatives 'restored relations between the *Isaaq* [and] other northern clans', and concluded by declaring Somaliland's return to independence, a response to a popular groundswell of support for exiting Somalia (Bradbury, Abokor & Yusuf 2003, 459). The SNM-dominated provisional government created in Burao proved unable to cope with internal divisions among major *Isaaq* factions, however, necessitating a more central role for prominent clan elders, particularly from non-*Isaaq* clans such as the *Gadabuursi*, which represented 'fundamental shifts in the locus of power' away from armed groups and towards customary agents of legitimacy and authority (Walls 2009, 386). At the 1993 Borama Conference, hosted and organised by the *Gadabuursi* in their territorial heartland, these elders assented to a Peace Charter which solidified many key principles of clan-based coexistence, including inter-clan forgiveness for past harms; tasking clans with responsibility for basic security and order in their own territory; prioritising consensus as the basis of inter-clan decision-making; and preserving traditional leaders as the main channel of mediation between parties (*ibid*). A National Charter was also produced, which set out further guidelines for a nascent State, with the long-time, well-respected Somali statesman Mohamed Ibrahim Egal chosen as the transitional president.

A dual system was thus instantiated at Borama, of inter-clan association on the one hand and State administration on the other, which, as I will argue below, most observers (both foreign and local) have interpreted as two stages, involving a transition from the former to the latter. From 1993 to 2001, these various stakeholders, divided across clan, institution, ideology and self-interest, underwent a process of sometimes destructive but ultimately productive evolution, in which contests over ownership of communal assets and resources (such as ports and airports), power-sharing arrangements, the relationship between the 'traditional' and 'modern' spheres of governance and law, were all worked out, at least

provisionally (Moe 2011; Renders & Terlinden 2010). President Egal, through coalition-building, coercion, co-optation, and patronage, sought to mould these conditional and temporary compromises into the basis of a liberal-democratic State (Balthasar 2013). In this he partially succeeded, orchestrating the 1997 Hargeisa Conference so as to consolidate his desired presidential system, with a strong executive and clan-balanced parliament, something that would be officially endorsed by the Somaliland people through a popular referendum on the constitution in 2001 (Phillips 2020, 121). At the same time, the foundations of clan-based associationalism lived on, not only integrated into the formal State system, in the form of the House of Elders (*Guurti*) made up of many of Somaliland's 'founding fathers', but also through everyday informal practices of conflict resolution, local self-governance and inter-group negotiation that served to buttress formal State proceedings (*ibid*, 125).

The subsequent history of Somaliland's State, which, as this study argues, is only one part of the story, has attracted much international attention, and for good reason. Beginning with municipal elections in 2002, Somaliland has, to date, conducted three local elections, two parliamentary elections, and three presidential elections, of which the latter, on two occasions, involved the relatively smooth transfer of power of the Head of State, a rarity in the often fractious region. While institutions of administration and service delivery have been slow to develop, and corruption and patronage continue to characterise many important governance functions, the Somaliland government has overseen a period of relative peace, security and political openness, in stark contrast to many of its neighbours in the region and on the continent as a whole (Pham 2012). In this, Somaliland has drawn disproportionately from homegrown resources, such as taxes, diaspora remittances and funding from prominent local businessmen (Eubank 2012). As a result, the terrorism, piracy, insurgency and predation that has plagued neighbouring Somalia (i.e. the rump State to the south formerly colonised by the Italians) has largely been absent within Somaliland territory.

Alongside this growing consolidation of internal authority, the Somaliland State has incrementally established considerable external legitimacy, despite falling short of international recognition as an independent sovereign entity. Through a process of 'engagement without recognition', the Somaliland government has leveraged both its strategic location and its role in maintaining regional stability and security to extract diplomatic concessions and developmental support from governments in the West, the Middle East and Asia, as well as from neighbouring governments such as Ethiopia and Kenya

(Pegg 2019, 427). As of 2016, this included a potentially transformational agreement between Somaliland and Emirati logistics giant DP World over refurbishment of Somaliland's Berbera port, moves which have attracted the attention of global powers such as the US and Russia, for whom Somaliland might serve as an important regional trade and military-logistical hub (Ahmed & Stepputat 2019). For many average Somalilanders, these changes augur well for their ultimate goal of becoming a full-fledged, recognised country, a privilege they hope will make accessible international financial flows, participation in international organisations and greater freedom to travel for work, study and health (Clapham *et al.* 2011, 10-12; various interviews).

For other observers, however, this fixation on recognition and formal statehood misses the unintentional beneficial consequences of Somaliland's liminal status between the diplomatically formal and informal. Indeed, it has been argued that Somaliland may have stumbled into the perfect mix of engagement without the undue burdens and temptations that come with full integration into the global system, including international debt and reliance on aid, thereby precluding Somaliland State dependence on external benefactors and facilitating State-society mutual dependency that has helped the polity succeed up to now (Richards & Smith 2015; Johnson & Smaker 2014; Eubank 2012). Moreover, for those who see the future prospect of recognition as compelling Somaliland society to mould its politics into something recognisably governable—of incentivising Somaliland to 'act like a State'—the country's liminal status has equally served the beneficial purpose of disciplining politics in the direction of democratic and effective ends, rather than the predatory ends of politicians in neighbouring Somalia, for whom unearned international legitimacy has promoted unaccountability and predation (Richards 2014). The material impact of this 'performance of Statehood' is generally evidenced by certain 'trappings of statehood,' such as the issuance of bespoke currency and passports, as well as nationalisation of the armed forces and many bureaucratic functions (Wilson 2018; Chutel 2021).

1.2   Contending with Somaliland: the existing literature

These historical broad strokes have served as the canonical foundations upon which the literature on Somaliland—whether historical, anthropological or political science—has been built, and I do not intend to challenge these insights. Instead, what this study provides is an attempt to disentangle the *interpretation* of these events from their roots in the

peacebuilding and statebuilding literature, offering an alternative perspective on what Somalilanders have created. In this section, I argue that statebuilding and peacebuilding scholarship, while employing the Somaliland case to produce many relevant, incisive critiques and lessons, has unintentionally served to narrow the scope through which the Somaliland experiment has thus far been understood (Phillips 2020, 6-20). In framing the Somaliland experiment in relation to peacebuilding and statebuilding projects elsewhere, including by demonstrating how unlike the other cases this experiment was—including how indigenous, indeterminate and endogenous its origins—Somaliland's inter-clan association has become inflected with peacebuilding's focus on the transitional nature of its arrangements, and statebuilding's focus on the State as the only viable endpoint, both of which obscure an understanding of the enduring and distinct nature of this clan association.

To substantiate this claim, it is worth dealing here one-by-one with the main prevailing interpretations of why Somaliland is such an outlier, and why it was so successful in consolidating peace and stability after State collapse and large-scale conflict. I group these standard interpretations into three categories: the sequential explanation, the indigeneity explanation, and the elite compact explanation. All three operate on a set of shared assumptions that cut across them all, including the influence of a lack of international interference, the resulting local ownership over political developments, and the availability of a traditional leadership stratum still legitimate and independent enough to shape outcomes. At the same time, each theory places a different emphasis on ways in which these factors matter, as well as their perceived impacts in shaping subsequent developments.

The sequential explanation takes the view that 'Somaliland's trajectory [can] be neatly divided into different phases of peace building and state building, with the former preceding the latter' (Balthasar 2014, 10). In this evolutionary reading, Somaliland's success is attributed to its consolidation of peace as laying the groundwork for a State to be built upon, thereby reversing the *de facto* liberal peacebuilding model, in which reviving core State functions are often prioritised in the absence of stable peace, thereby distorting efforts at achieving peace (Herbert 2014, 9). Ingiriis (2021) sums up this position, writing: 'Somaliland pursued a peacebuilding project while Somalia insisted on statebuilding project [*sic*] before anything else. Peacebuilding in Somaliland led to statebuilding, while statebuilding in southern Somalia has yet to contribute to peacebuilding' (5). Such suggestions of progressive maturation are not always so explicit, at times reflecting more subtle assumptions that clan-based consensus-

building flowered into, and gave way to, formal State politics (albeit with certain traditional elements integrated into it), as can be seen in this account from Kaplan (2008): 'Between 1991 and 1996, interclan dialogue went on despite conflicts and interruptions, eventually yielding the broadly legitimate government that has delivered security and growing prosperity since 1996' (148). Whatever the form, such accounts are notable for treating Somaliland's grassroots, consensus-based politics and inter-clan agreements not as distinct forms of political association in their own right, but instead primarily as precursors or seeds of the State institutions that will overtake them.

Despite capturing certain developments, this approach simplifies a much more complex, disjointed and indeterminate situation. Somaliland's development, as Balthasar (2014) puts it, is 'much less linear in reality' (10). In particular, while this developmentalist telos posits the rise of State institutions as the logical next step following the establishment of peace, this is not how all local stakeholders involved viewed things. According to one account of deliberations regarding the transition to constitutional statehood:

> Some Somalilanders therefore argued that it was unnecessary to change a system which had worked for twelve years…For many people the peace and stability enjoyed during this period had provided the bedrock for reconstruction and was more important than efficient government…They were circumspect about the implications of changing from a system based on consensus decision-making to one of hierarchical authority based on majority rule. (Bradbury, Abokor & Yusuf 2003, 464)

As these observations make clear, certain political actors not only failed to see a need to transition beyond existing inter-clan associational relations, but even believed that State institutions might counteract and undermine the achievements of the current system. So, while President Egal and the political class that succeeded him did manage to establish statehood as the hegemonic aspiration of the Somaliland majority, this did not mean that clan-based associationalism was absorbed or superseded. In fact, as this study will show, it lives on, often in coordination with the State, but at times directly challenging and offsetting it.

A second explanation foregrounds the extent to which indigenous institutions and norms were integrated into Somaliland's political development, in both the process (the peacebuilding and statebuilding) and the product (the resulting State). As Richards (2014) argues, 'without the inclusion of this traditional element from the beginning of [Somaliland's

rebuilding] process, the territory would not exhibit the level of peace and stability that exists today' (14). This uncontroversial analysis points to the trustworthiness, authority and mediation experience that clan elders lent to Somaliland's negotiations regarding a peaceful future, which helped to not only facilitate often long and uncertain dialogue, but also legitimise often painful compromises and risky political changes, such as militia demobilisation and resource nationalisation (Richards 2014; Schwoebel 2018). As with 'hybridity' theory more generally, this approach argues neither that such indigenous legitimisation is automatic, nor that it entails a complete disavowal of imported governance systems (such as the Westernised State form), but that it involves 'heterogeneous processes of bargaining, accommodation and cooperation between a range of different actors', both formal and informal, in which such flexibility and plurality tend to produce a *type of State* that is more 'tailored' to local cultures and expectations (Moe 2011, 152; Renders & Terlinden 2010; Richards 2014, 14). Indeed, Somaliland's type of State is one defined by its very 'hybridity', in which, through the formal integration of the *Guurti* into the administrative structure, 'the clan and clan governance is entwined throughout the institutions and the practices of the state,' with the former backstopping the 'modern' executive, legislative and judicial systems through acting as advisor, mediator and unifying force (Richards 2015, 11).

This approach, despite usefully highlighting the plurality of institutions and norms, ultimately conceives of these dual systems reconciling into a single order, through a process which Richards (2014) calls 'the institutionalisation of the traditional' (123). For her, this amalgamation yields a largely constructive balance, 'a compromise…between clan governance and modern democracy', 'a hybrid government' that is 'a product of reconciliation between "old" traditional structures and the "new" democratic structures and practices' (13). Renders (2007), for her part, despite recognising the initial role of traditional leaders in providing the political impetus towards innovative and dynamic conciliation, see them as ultimately reduced to tools instrumentalised by State elites for use in legitimising, substantiating and reproducing their political power, once peace had been consolidated. Hoehne (2013), on the other hand, argues that the dual systems have settled into a perverse and mutually-limiting stasis, a 'crippled hybrid', 'in which neither state nor traditional institutions function really well and in fact negatively influence each other' (200). What all these perspectives share, despite their alternatively encouraging or bleak outlooks, is the idea that the mechanisms through which social relations operated under the clan-based

associational model no longer hold following the emergence of the State, with traditional leaders and other conduits of clan-based cooperation being integrated into new roles aimed at the reproduction of the existing State order, whether inclusively or exploitatively.

This study will not deny the ways in which traditional institutions have been integrated into the State, whether productive, such as in cooperating towards maintaining peace, or destructive, such as in helping infuse political party competition with transactionalism and favouritism. Where it departs from these approaches it that it seeks to look beyond the spaces and moments where State and clan inevitably intersect, such as the position of the *Guurti*, who comprise much of Richards's analysis, but whose constitutionally-formalised role axiomatically entails its subsumption within State processes and excesses. Instead, it will draw attention to the parallel, largely *ad hoc* and informal, but equally important, ways in which certain clan representatives have continued to carve out spaces and moments of independence, not merely using such independence to reflect communal demands back to the State, but also to, at times, dictate the terms by which the State operates, in the service of those deemed to be suffering injustice.

A third explanation draws inspiration from the political settlements literature, and locates Somaliland's successful transition away from conflict in a political climate highly conducive to elite collusion. Here, international isolation and traditional leadership are useful to the extent that they dampened the incentives of elite competition, including aid rentierism, while also providing a space—the elder-mediated dialogue—where the terms of this elite class formation could be worked out with minimal miscommunication and suspicion (de Waal 2015; de Waal 2007). As such, within the specific matrix of wealth and power that characterised Somaliland's 'political marketplace', Somaliland's clan associationalism, which to the untrained eye might seem like a novel and innovative political arrangement, was just a historically fortuitous occasion on which elite self-interest was better served by peace and order than by war profiteering, given the available options (de Waal 2020, 576): 'Facing civil war and the limited scope of particularistic identities, local elites perceived the establishment of statehood as a way to build up sociopolitical order—even if it regulated and channeled their own power' (Debeil *et al.* 2009, 41). In this view, as Somaliland's centralised authority and global economic integration expanded over time, and its power and wealth creation dynamics shifted in tandem, so too did the place of political power-brokers and mediators within the system, settling on an 'oligarchic-corporate' 'collusion between business and

government officials', with the rest of society outmatched by or inculcated into the kleptocracy and authoritarianism that this elite alliance encouraged (Elder 2021, 1750).

There is no denying the raw power politics at work in the formation and survival of the Somaliland experiment, something which even the most optimistic account of the society's achievements must contend with. What this study finds lacking within these political economy approaches, however, is not their prioritisation of power and particular interest as such, but their preoccupation with certain types of power—those wielded by elites, political operatives, and State functionaries, whose currency is financial and military—to the detriment or even exclusion of other, more subtle, forms of social power. As such, while it is certainly true that the influence of transnational Somali businessmen and the spoils of State rentierism have created new incentives and opportunities within Somaliland's political sphere, and have in many ways transformed 'peace' from a laudable achievement into an instrument of social pacification (Elder 2021), this does not mean that decades-long practices of clan associationalism—from consensus-based negotiation, to strategic balancing against power, to norms of reciprocity—have disappeared. In fact, this study will argue that there is a stickiness to these alternative political arrangements, a fortitude that is itself the product of certain power dynamics.

Whereas elite-focused theory tends to treat local communities and traditional mediating bodies as appendages to their associated (State and business) elite, dragged into battle over elite interests through instrumentalisation, affiliation or coercion, this study will treat these lower-level actors as multifaceted agents, able to pursue divergent and conflicting social ends at different times (Harrison 2001). While they may be prone to succumbing to prevailing political-economic structures on many occasions, they are equally capable of utilising counter-hegemonic organisational capacities at other moments, to ends not sanctioned by the established hierarchy. To form a complete picture of relations between elites and the rest of society, then, one must also take into account the broader social setting in which Somaliland's elite compact is forced to operate, including the normative basis of elite legitimacy, the specificities of reciprocal relations between elites and their constituencies, the types of social limits placed on elite transgressions, and the salience of various identities, ideologies and arguments for political mobilisation, to name a few contextually-specific factors.

Drawing these strands together, we find three dominant explanations for the achievements of the Somaliland experiment that contain much to learn from, but which miss crucial elements of the picture. Given the way in which the study of Somaliland has been so ensconced in discourses surrounding peacebuilding and statebuilding from the beginning—whether challenging statebuilding's Western, liberal, one-size-fits-all normative foundations, or challenging those critiques themselves—it is no surprise that the existing scholarship has produced analyses in which the State is the ultimate reference point. While other institutions, norms and dynamics are acknowledged, they are generally viewed in light of how they relate to State governance, whether by strengthening or weakening the State, colluding with or mediating State interests, etc. This study, however, explores the possibility that all the political activity that buzzes around, niggles at, confounds, diverts and frustrates the plans of the State and its associated elites do not just represent unassimilated remainders of the State. Through recognising that these activities have a logic of their own, one that cuts across the logics of the State, a new understanding of what the Somaliland experiment *is*—i.e. how it operates—can be reached.

1.3   The Somaliland Social Covenant: the proposed alternative

Sarah Philips, in *When There Was No Aid* (2020), provides the first comprehensive attempt to understand present-day Somaliland independent of the statebuilding paradigm, developing an approach that looks at social dynamics beyond institutions, both formal and informal. For Phillips, the fact that Somaliland's inhabitants were socialised into certain ideologies, epistemologies and norms for peaceful coexistence prior to, or in the absence of, a functional State, has shaped the very relationship between the emerging State and the society around it, including the types of meanings and functions ascribed to the former by the latter. In particular, she highlights Somalilanders' direct experiences of State violence and post-collapse disorder, as well as their indirect observations of neighbouring Somalia's devastating internecine conflict, as cautionary tales that produce agreement in the political community about keeping social antagonisms within largely peaceful and stable bounds: 'Lacking strong coercive power, the ability of Somaliland's institutions to manage violence is contingent upon widespread fears about the re-emergence of violence as a result of that very weakness' (104). In other words, in this view, the primary guarantor of order is not the State, but rather society, who, recognising State weakness and fearful of the negative consequences

of this weakness, mobilised to fill the void. Such an approach, in contradistinction to the three explanations provided above, allows space for the active initiative of the non-State to come into view, rather than treating it as ultimately an appendage of a burgeoning State.

The richness of Phillips's analysis thus comes from its treatment of Somaliland's political agents as historicised entities, actors whose understandings and perceptions are influenced by more than iron-clad laws of self-interest, custom or developmental destiny, but also from the lessons they learned from lived reality over the passage of time. However, while constructed norms serve as the space where this politics is interpellated, power relations are by no means ignored. Indeed, key to the Somalilander collective narrative is a keen self-understanding of the overriding inter-clan balance of power on which their peace was forged, and how important its maintenance is to the fragile peace, as well as, accordingly, how its destabilisation risks a return to war. As Phillips explains it, 'Somaliland's political system rests on an underlying acknowledgement that the complete exclusion of any politically significant clan/subclan group will undermine the stability of the political system and make violence more likely. This resonates with the broader risk of one clan group becoming empowered to violently dominate others' (105).

My study seeks to build on the intellectual pathways Phillips has cleared, taking many of its insights to heart. In particular, I see the balance of clan power, and its implications for inclusive plurality, as a material starting point for any subsequent understanding of Somaliland politics, with or without the State. Indeed, where proponents of the State have tended, from Hobbes onwards, to see the decentralisation of power as a recipe for chaos and destruction, the Somaliland case shows that, through the agency, will and innovation of social actors, a relative equality of power in the absence of a paternalistic Leviathan can in fact provide the foundations for peace, peace of a different kind to that on offer from the State. This is because, as Phillips touches upon and I expand in more systematic fashion, while a patchwork of power bases can, under certain conditions, promote pluralistic competition in a way that a strong State might suppress, it equally cultivates other latent tendencies, which, if seized upon, can promote cooperation.

The three tendencies that this study detects from its analysis of the Somaliland case study are those of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association. 'Horizontality' speaks to the participatory inclusion and lack of domination suggested by Phillips, in which the relative equality in power relations amongst Somaliland's major constituent parts has

incentivised these parties to engage directly with each other on matters of political importance. This contrasts with the hierarchical, stratified social relations of the State, in which political interaction is funnelled through various administrative layers and manufactured vertical divisions between State and society. In other words, unlike with the State, where power is concentrated centrally and social actors are granted license to participate in politics through the permission of this central agent, within Somaliland society, each social actor (in this case clan grouping) retains its power, cashing in on that power for a seat at the decision-making table.

'Conditional association' refers to the nature of legitimate authority and decision-making resulting from this pluralistic organisation of power and politics. Unlike the State model, in which political actors are bound to unconditionally obey the political and legal edicts prevailing in the State territory they inhabit, within the Somaliland inter-clan associational model, the legitimacy of a decision or regulation requires the active consent of all parties to their stipulations. In such a consensual model, not just particular political decisions but the entire political system is open to constant negotiation, with participating parties (i.e. clans) claiming the right to dissolve the political arrangement if their conditions of participation are not met.

Lastly, with 'intimacy', we find a particular way that social actors relate to their power. Rather than experiencing power as an external force intervening from outside to shape local political dynamics, communities relating to each other through a politics of intimacy draw upon the latent social power embedded in intercommunal relations—such as shared stakes in peace and cohesion, established moral economies of obligation, mechanisms of social sanction and the like—to directly sway political outcomes. Unlike State governance, in which politics is mediated by the interests and influence of national and local elites, whose power is independent of their immediate context, within the politics of intimacy, there is no gap between those possessing agency and power on the one hand, and those experiencing their consequences on the other.

This study furthermore aligns with Phillips' reckoning with 'the constitutive relationship between war and peace' in Somaliland (4). Like her approach, it sees the peaceful relative balance of power that Somaliland has generally enjoyed as something perpetually kept alive through the background threat of a return to conflict and disorder. In other words, peace is not a steady state; it is not a stable order achieved once a period of conflict has been

graduated out of. Instead, the terms of peace are constantly renegotiated through new potential crises and their eventual resolution. Finally, and relatedly, this study follows Phillips in granting the normative realm partial independence from the structures of power, rather than seeing individual decision-making as ultimately determined by the circuits of wealth and power that structure society. While wealth and power are crucial, they ultimately are filtered through a society of historically-constituted agents with various perceptions of the possible and the socially acceptable, and with diverse commitments to multiple sources of authority and obligation. The analytical conclusion one can draw from this is the need to pay attention to a broader range of social power beyond that emanating from wealth and power exclusively.

At the same time, this study offers an alternative understanding of the political dynamics of the Somaliland experiment in two core respects. First, it puts forth a more expansive model of the impact of the inter-clan social consensus than Phillips does. For her, this consensus mostly has a negative (i.e. prohibitive) dimension, constraining both destabilising confrontation and, to a lesser extent, excesses of power, due to a societal vigilance against the vagaries of internecine conflict. This study, on the other hand, seeks to equally demonstrate the positive (i.e. generative) dimensions of the social consensus, demonstrating the ways that horizontality, intimacy and conditional association not only limit power's destructive force, but equally provide conditions of possibility from which power can productively and inclusively be channelled towards communally-beneficial ends. It is for this reason that I treat the social consensus identified by Phillips not simply as a contextually-specific normative hegemony that provides a particular shape to State-society relations, but as an entire political system in its own right, that not only keeps State and social agency within manageable bounds, but generates entirely new forms of agency and subjectivity that precede (and run in parallel to) the State-society bifurcation itself.

In other words, the Somaliland narrative that Phillips highlights is based around a cautionary tale of the dangers of unfettered self-interest; but this is not the only story that Somalilanders tell themselves. Another normative consequence of the society's self-initiated post-conflict reconstruction is an almost dogmatic belief in their power to change their collective circumstances, to draw from their internal reserves of social potential to change their circumstances for the better. This optimism, encountered in the vast majority of interviews conducted for this research (despite often pessimistic views of the present), is encapsulated in the remarks of one young activist:

I think the concept of being the miracle, the oasis for democracy and peace in the Horn, lies mainly in our success of getting here…[Somalia] couldn't achieve [what we have] with the repeated help of foreign powers. On the other hand, Somaliland, with little help, through our cultural and traditional ways, we [have reached a higher level]. So I think the miracle lies in the process…It's not perfect, as is [the case] with democracies around the world. They're always a work in progress. (Interview #200)

Therefore, as will be described in the next chapter, beyond the politics of fear that structures the 'peace at all costs' mentality is a politics of trust and reciprocity that derives from the shared stake that Somaliland's clans have in the political experiment, a result of their collective participation in (re)building their home together. This shared stake constitutes a certain type of political subjectivity, that of the clan stakeholder, who has earned the right to have their grievances heard and respected, on account of their previous investment and sacrifice in the collective project. In essence, beyond Somaliland as a mutual defence compact is Somaliland as a consensual political arena governed by certain principles for answering the fundamental political question of how to live with difference while respecting such difference (and the autonomy it entails). Whereas the State seeks to depoliticise difference by either submerging it within an imposed unity (homogenisation or assimilation), or by containing it in silos and away from decision-making (multiculturalism), Somaliland's inter-clan associationalism utilises shared stakes and collective security to bind the polity's distinct, separate clan agents together, while allowing them to retain their autonomy and power.

This leads to the second analytical departure made by my study. Phillips' work, for its part, presents a largely symbiotic, co-constitutive relationship between the State and the inter-clan consensus, in which 'institutions may help produce order but only in so far as they are simultaneously products of it' (7). While not denying the partial truth of institutions and social relations dialectically shaping each other's development, I instead see the underlying logics of the State and of clan associationalism as fundamentally at odds with each other. The State, I argue, however flexible and syncretised its institutions, and whatever regime type it hosts, cannot escape from certain fundamental tendencies, namely its verticality (in which power is dispensed from on high), its alienation (its abstraction of agency and self-determination from social actors themselves) and its unconditional legitimacy (its reliance on command as a decision-making tool). Somaliland's clan associationalism, however, relies on completely alternative tendencies: inter-clan balance of power in the absence of a dominant

power (horizontality), the localisation of political negotiation to the concerned communities (intimacy), and consensus-based decision-making (conditional participation).

So qualitatively distinct and separate are these dual systems, I argue, that each deserves to be treated as independent conceptual and ontological entity, with the State opposed to what I classify as a 'Social Covenant'. The term 'covenant' has been chosen as a deliberate alternative to the more commonly used related concept of the 'social contract', which, as will be argued in Chapter 2, has come to be associated with a binding relationship between a preordained State and society. Following Kaplan (2014), as opposed to the social contract's '*vertical* state-society relationship', a social covenant involves '*horizontal* society-society dynamics', in which 'the major groups within a society come together and agree on a new framework and vision for cooperation' (3). While historical examples of covenants are rare and idiosyncratic, three identifying features can be gleaned from the scholarship: (1) rather than evolving slowly, covenants emerge at times of crisis, when a singular group finds itself amidst a hostile world; (2) covenants are not primarily formalisations or expressions of pre-existing national identity, but are given meaning by a shared historical journey or mission originating from the time of crisis; and, (3) unlike the social contract, covenants do not bind a pre-existing people to a government system, but involves a multitude *making itself into* a people in the first place (Akenson 1992; Sacks 2009, 106-10).

The distinction between contract and covenant is granted its greatest theoretical explication in the work of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, for whom the State, and the social contract that establishes it, are subsidiary to the establishment of a moral community ('the us-together'), in which the 'rules, relationships, morality and vision' of the society are to be based (Sacks 2009, 106-108). In this, the State is a 'necessary evil', which any well-founded society must impose on itself to limit mutually agreed-upon infractions against common mores, but which can only contribute to maintaining order in the presence of a more fundamental social covenant that encourages collective coexistence, through supplying the 'the values we share and the ideals that inspire us to work together for the sake of the common good' (*ibid*, 108-110). For Sacks, the covenant is an alternative and precursor to matters of power and politics, and such profane but necessary affairs of human governance instead fall under the remit of the social contract.

I, on the other hand, see Somaliland's Social Covenant *precisely as* a particular configuration of power and politics, albeit one that, as we shall see, produces spaces of refuge

from political and power-based *alienation*. In other words, as will be argued, the Somaliland Social Covenant is not a pre-political precursor to the State's social contract, but a fully-fledged system of political organisation with its own strengths and weaknesses when considered in relation to the State form. What the Somaliland Social Covenant does precede, however, is any ideological abstractions that might divide society into separate allegiances. While Somalilanders of different clans, political persuasions and social status might take different positions on the matter of the independence and legitimacy of Somaliland—with peripheral, non-*Isaaq* clans often feeling ambivalent or hostile to the polity's separation from Somalia—all clans within Somaliland, *Isaaq* and non-*Isaaq* alike, have shown a willingness to participate in multilateral negotiations aimed at governing relations between communities on a horizontal level.

As with similar cases, the Somaliland Social Covenant emerged through contingent historical circumstances, and was sculpted in ways that reflected the particular needs of the parties involved. Here, the Covenant emerged from the reconciliation conferences of the 1990s, which, as outlined above, involved Somaliland's social actors fabricating practical, culturally legitimate solutions to end conflict and promote peace. Through agreements to consecrate clan self-governance over their respective territorial heartlands, promote power-sharing in all governance arrangements, return looted property, forgive past war crimes, desist from intercommunal violence, demobilise in public places and engage in mutual defence against outside aggression (APD 2008, 52-3), Somaliland's stakeholders put in place a principled framework of inter-clan relations that not only helped protect against the worst, but contained mechanisms for dealing with issues of justice, from (group) inequality and resource-sharing to interpersonal harm and cultural offense.

The State that was constitutionally ratified in 2001 and subsequently institutionally fleshed out, I argue, did not develop logically out of, but instead imposed itself upon, this Social Covenant. While it is true that the State would not have survived or been legitimised without clan associationalism providing a stable and cooperative ground on which to grow, no sooner did the State become functional and its inherently vertical, unconditional and alienating tendencies kick into gear, that it began preying on its host. As such, the Social Covenant did not disappear or get swallowed up by the emergence of the State, but instead, as this research's case studies will show, was forced to adapt to this manufactured intrusion, at times appropriating the State for its ends, at other times serving as its subordinate

appendage, and in other cases actively resisting it, depending on the issue at hand and the relative power relations between systems at any one time. While at times over the course of the polity's history these dual systems have coexisted in relative balance, their fit has increasingly been inharmonious, given the ability of Statist elite to appropriate global commerce and international military and developmental support to buttress its power, at the expense of the previous inter-clan balance of power on which the Covenant relies.

To summarise, the dynamics of inter-clan association that previous authors have considered a precursor, accessory, burden or complement to the Somaliland State can be better viewed as a distinct, self-contained and self-reproducing political system operating in uncomfortable parallel to that State, something the rest of the study will seek to demonstrate. The basis for claiming this distinction is in the fundamentally discrete and incompatible political logics that define the Covenant and the State, respectively: horizontality, intimacy and conditional association on the one hand, and verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy on the other. In what follows, I will describe the methodology I have used to analytically isolate and differentiate these parallel logics, and to trace their interaction, which has involved the selection of representative case studies drawn from stand-out political controversies within Somaliland's contemporary politics, tracing how various segments of Somaliland society responded to these events.

1.4   Methodology

1.4.1   Epistemological Framing

This research project's genesis can be traced to revelations experienced during five years living and working in Somaliland as a practitioner. During stints seconded to Somaliland's Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Development, as well as coordinating a land study throughout the country's six official regions, I was exposed to the everyday functionality of a political system that confounded assumptions regarding how a society maintains stable and peaceful order. It was not that society provided a survivalist safety net to compensate for a weakened State, nor that traditional authorities inculcated an obedient and disciplined populace through patronage and fealty—indeed, if anything, stability operated amongst a people defiant in the face of authority, prone to stirring up political controversy, intolerant of restrictions of freedom of expression, and impatient to translate their hard-won freedom into a much-improved life through their own volition. Instead, what

I witnessed was a myriad of subtle manoeuvres, cues and exchanges between various corners of society, informal means of reciprocity, redress and contestation that went far beyond the realm of traditional *xeer*, but equally flew under the radar of the formalised customary institutions so well known amongst academics. Indeed, it seemed the entire ebb and flow of political life was being contracted out to a diffuse network of interconnected *khat* chewing sessions, clan assemblies, late-afternoon tea gatherings and media appearances, perpetuated by actors sporting hats other than those they wore during the day. It seemed not so much that the State behaved *differently* in Somaliland, but that the very conceit of the State as the primary agent or focal point had gotten things the wrong way around.

While the predominant reaction to these elusive dynamics is to attribute them to one or another version of a 'shadow state' (Cheeseman 2021), with patronage networks, protection rackets, rentierist cliques or oligopolies pulling the strings behind the scenes, this interpretation, in my estimation, fails to do justice to a system much more dynamic, multifaceted, hopeful and democratically-inspired than that depicted by the likes of Chabal & Daloz (1999) or Bayart (1993). An introduction to the Decolonial literature at the outset of this research project helped reconfigure my epistemological horizons, rendering visible the ways in which knowledge production on African polities was already implicated in myriad analytical obfuscations deployed to render societies 'legible' and governable within Western systems of ordering (Go 2013; Bhambra 2014; Manchanda 2017; Bakonyi 2018). One common obfuscation—that positive social change follows a fixed, stadial progression towards the inevitable end of the State (the developmentalist telos) (Tansel 2015; Sabaratnam 2013; Berman 1998, 307)—has been particularly potent in the Somaliland context, burying the uniqueness of the Social Covenant in diagnoses that it represented merely a pre-State stage. In becoming aware of the normative biases that this position entailed, as well as the biases in the proposition that only a strong, centralised State can ward off societal collapse (the 'failed state' cautionary tale—see Gruffydd Jones [2008] and Niang [2018], 111-15 for critical appraisals), the possibility of treating Somaliland's clan associationalism as a non-State, Covenantal political force in its own right became much clearer.

With this in mind, the design of the project, from research conception to fieldwork and analysis, aimed to pare down, as much as possible, an understanding of the Somaliland project to its bare bones, absent deductively theorised institutions, causal relations or subjects, and then build it up again out of the interpretations and insights provided by the

interviewees. More constructively, postcolonial/decolonial theory draws attention to the specificities of political order formation outside of the (former) imperial core, including the particular kinds of political subjectivity this engenders—that which is not fully captured within the categories, livelihood patterns and ideological formations appropriate to a European context (Hammer & White 2018; Jabri 2013). In contexts where oppression often takes a more naked and brutal form than the biopolitical hegemony experienced within Western modernity, and where collective independence is often experienced as a dream deferred, perspectives on the State as the guarantor of security and of the vehicle for communal empowerment entail completely different calculations (Go 2013; Jabri 2013). In other words, how postcolonial subjects (and their identities, interests and meanings) relate to their compatriots and the State is fundamentally different from the relation of subjects in the West, not as a result of ontological alterity, but because of their different standpoints within larger power structures—thus requiring bespoke, grounded forms of understanding.

To foster the analytical openness and flexibility necessary to capture Somaliland's specific politically salient features, without collapsing them into conventional forms, my research was conducted through an analytical framework of historical sociology. While historical sociological analysis comes in many forms, they coalesce around a shared imperative (some more successfully than others) to eschew generalisable, context-independent laws and patterns of social cause and effect, in favour of context-specific understandings of the historicised, constantly evolving 'fields of action' in which actors operate (Lawson 2016, 113-16). As such, history intervenes between structure and agent to capture the dynamic, dialectical relationship between the two, in which each continuously contributes to the partial constitution of the other (Teschke & Cemgil 2014; Hobson, Lawson & Rosenberg 2010). This approach serves to apprehend the situated relationality between agents, such that the function an agent plays in a social structure is not determined by their fixed position within institutions or classes, but by the social actions they take in relation to other acting agents at a given moment in time, with social change generated by the contradictions these interrelating actions produce (Teschke & Cemgil 2014). An openness to unexpected political outcomes is thus maintained, as 'how contradictions unfold remains indeterminate' (*ibid*, 12).

This approach aligns well with a research project that seeks to demonstrate the way in which the local agency of Somalilanders defied expectations and structural inertia to

channel precarious power balances into the basis of a rare Social Covenant, through taking advantage of opportunities within the field of action. Furthermore, as Bhambra (2014) conception of 'connected sociologies' demonstrates, historical sociology, in offering the analytical prerequisites for prioritising relational thinking over categorical and axiomatic reasoning, has proven adaptable to the postcolonial/decolonial turn, through the way in which it upholds ontological multiplicity, neither subsuming subaltern societies into hegemonic Western political logics nor treating subaltern and Western societies as mutually distinct (as in the case of methodological nationalism). Instead, 'alternative' histories are integrated into an understanding of the social whole through treating them in tandem, and tension, with 'ideal-types' such as the State, highlighting their divergences and interconnections without collapsing such new conceptualisations into those preconceived (281-3). This chimes with Cooper's approach to African history, which calls for 'constantly shifting the scale of analysis from the most spatially specific…to the most spatially diffuse…and examin[ing] the originality and power of political thought by what it appropriated and transformed from its entire range of influences and connections' (Cooper 1994, 1539). Such a framework proved highly appropriate, given this study's aim of identifying and isolating the Social Covenant as a distinct sociological phenomenon separate from, although interconnected to, the Somaliland State.

1.4.2   Case Selection

Within historical sociology, social *processes* offer a particularly revealing insight into the dynamics of society, because, rather than centring predetermined units of analysis and social properties, they offer a glimpse into the assemblage of relative actors and discourses that cohere around socio-political activity at a particular ('singular') moment in time (Lawson 2016, 111). Methodologically, this entails tracing 'temporally specific assemblages' as they evolve, and then retroactively discerning the patterns and causal chains that account for such social change as it moves from beginning to end. Constructing such a processual narrative enables actors to be viewed not as static entities with fixed motives and perspectives, but as relational 'entities-in-motion that are made in and through time', modifying their actions in response to changes in both the structural 'field of action' and the contingent manoeuvres of other actors (Lawson 2016, 113-16). In this way, rather than deducing the 'logical' actions that the average traditional leader might take in the face of macro-level structural configurations

of power and wealth, for example, this approach enables the researcher to detect the unexpected and reflexive ways that actors respond to the singularity of historical events that engulf them at a particular moment, thereby providing an inductive measure of their historicised, rather than categorical, role in political developments (Knafo 2017).

My study utilises processual narratives, but approaches them with a twist. Rather than focusing on revolutionary moments or tectonic shifts, I examine events that are much more commonplace: the political controversies that occupy Somaliland's collective attention at any particular moment. For this, I drew inspiration from Comaroff & Comaroff's (2016) analysis of crime in South Africa, which utilised contemporary moral panics and episodes of cultural-political sensationalism as the social text through which to interpret the political dynamics and social structures underpinning the phenomenon of crime, to convincing effect. With this in mind, my study builds case studies out from highly politicised controversies selected upon the following criteria: that the issue, however localised its immediate pertinence, (1) captivated the attention of a national audience; (2) was not a mere blip on the societal radar, but remained a discussion topic for at least two months; (3) related not to a general theme (such as elections or press freedom) but to specific contextual struggles; (4) elicited strong and competing opinions from different camps (thus signifying political flashpoints); and (5) spoke to recurrent themes within Somaliland politics (such as power-sharing and resource conflict) rather than being a one-off phenomenon. In order to locate and test possible candidates, I observed public discourse ethnographically and monitored news media across the country on a daily basis, in order to ensure that the issue was spoken about both within and outside the capital for a sustained period.

Building sociological histories out of episodes deemed politically salient by the local population itself (i.e. worthy of becoming the 'talk of the town') holds several distinct advantages for constructing a picture of society that is inductive, locally-led, and anti-foundationalist. Using a metric of 'what the Somaliland collective consciousness finds politically pertinent' as grounds for case selection not only promoted significant local participation in the selection process, but also allows for the research focus to be one step removed from institutional affiliations or initiatives, as would not be the case if I traced certain institutionalised processes (such as elections) or a specific class of predetermined actors (such as traditional authorities). As such, this approach goes some way in contending with the difficulty of attempting to detect political processes whose impetus originated from outside

the State, in an environment where the State has cast its shadow over all political issues, even if in reality it only intervenes as one actor amongst many. At the same time, while the representative nature of three episodic events for the entire political system could be met with credible scepticism, I have sought to minimise this potential gap between the particular and the general by both ensuring, via Criterion 5, that each specific episode cut across recurring themes, as well as demonstrating the sizeable array of actors and expenditures of political energy each case consumed.

1.4.3   Data Collection Methods: Interviews and Political Ethnographic Immersion

In the end, my methodological focus on historical process-tracing and interpretivism led to the adoption of a mixed methods approach, centred around multi-purpose interviews combined with an immersive element. This was made possible by a lengthy (full-year) period residing in Somaliland, providing opportunities to maximise exposure to political conversations and gossip as they unfolded in real time. Regarding interviews, in contexts like Somaliland, where formal records are scarce and the media's factual accuracy is unreliable (Ali 2018), oral histories serve a dual purpose: not only do they offer perspectival understandings and interpretations of events, but they provide the bulk of the primary source material making up the record of events (Shopes 2011, 452). Interviews thus constituted the core of the fieldwork, and provided the bulk of this study's source material. In total, I conducted 299 formal interviews, the vast majority of which involved a single interviewee, but at times entailed small groups of related individuals (such as a group of elders from the same community).

The discussions were conducted either on my own or with the support of a research assistant, who translated, depending on the interviewee's comfort with speaking English. The research assistant, Abdifatah Ahmed Jama, a recent university graduate recommended by a former academic colleague, demonstrated a keen understanding of the project (and served as source of interpretive accountability in his own right), which was reflected in his translations and identification of potential interviewees. I have been studying the Somali language on and off since 2012, and more intensely in advance of the fieldwork, to the point of being fairly comfortable in my listening and reading skills, although much less capable in speaking and writing. Over the course of the fieldwork, I developed a substantial enough familiarity with the parlance to be able to understand the back-and-forth between the

research assistant and the interviewee(s), to the point that we could skip any on-the-spot translation.

One set of interviewees were selected for their proximity to the political action. At first, this meant a general involvement in, or exposure to, formal and informal governance processes, but over time, once the three cases were identified, came to mean a closeness to the events, whether through an insider's insight or an affiliational interest. This included current and former members of the cabinet, parliamentarians, official clan representatives (*Guurti* members and *caaqils*), informal clan representatives, politically engaged youth, intellectuals, civil society representatives and businesspeople. This group was generally selected through identification via public notoriety, snowball sampling and recommendation from networks, common techniques when conducting research in Somaliland, where 'networks are so important and vibrant' and where 'vouchsafing' provides immense social capital (Rader 2016, 21-22). Another set of interviewees represented those without any specific relation to the core themes, and were chosen to grasp, as much as possible, the diffusion of these events into wider society, including how the events were interpreted from the outside. This generally included civil servants, students, academics, local activists, professionals and members of the diaspora. This more randomised sampling of interviewees came about through accessibility and opportunity, with efforts to diversify distribution by age, gender, education and profession.

The methodological blend of historical process-tracing and interpretivist contextualisation called for an 'in-depth' interview approach, that combined the goal of determining and corroborating chains of events, while granting participants the opportunity to share the meanings and theoretical understandings they have of these events (Johnson & Rowlands 2012, 100). The interviews were almost solely open-ended, with the goal of gaining 'entry into the issues, concerns, and stories that motivate, compel, and capture the lives of others', but with follow-up questions that brought the discussion back to the identification of causal inferences and to agreements/dissonances with the emerging theoretical assumptions up to that point (Martin 2013, 119). As noted above, the nature of media in Somaliland, which concentrates on exchanges of opinions over investigative journalism, offered little support in independently verifying factual developments, as did the records of external agencies such as the UN, International Crisis Group or similar organisations, as the specific episodes covered in the cases generally went under their radar. As such, the accounts of historical

developments presented in the case studies must be caveated by the allowance for error and discrepancy that comes with pluralistic readings of events (including the order of episodes and causal relationships), though I tried to minimise this through the triangulation and verification of purported stories across a vast array of 'in-the-know' individuals.

The immersive element was inspired by the political ethnography pioneered by James Scott, in which immersion within a political community serves as a way to not only ground knowledge on a community within its broader contextual intricacies, but also to 'glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality' (Schatz 2009, 5; see also Scott 2013). A political ethnographic sensibility is, as Gledhill (2009) argues, especially useful in unpicking the complexities and tensions within power dynamics, as, 'through appropriately contextualized and situated analysis, we may find resistance with significant implications in places where we did not expect to find it and in forms that we did not expect either' (28). While participant observation, the principal method associated with political ethnography, was not used in this study to directly generate data—in other words, personal interpretations and accounts of directly witnessed events are not a crucial component of the collected material—it did serve as a backstop and guide throughout the course of the field research component. Questions of what actors and themes to focus on, how to interpret events and interviews, how to triangulate viewpoints and how to understand the standpoints of interviewees were all constantly being informed through an iterative process of (re)contextualisation and (re)sensitisation, in order to keep the field research continually grounded, to as much extent as possible for an outsider.

1.4.4   Interviewee selection process: Limitations and trade-offs in representation of voices

The interview selection process faced a number of limiting conditions that balanced against and circumscribed the desire for representational breadth and depth. First was the study's geographic restrictions, with the vast majority of the field research was restricted to the capital city of Hargeisa. This Hargeisa-centric bias has been noted and critiqued in many studies of Somaliland (Rader 2016; Hoehne 2015) as a common limitation, a result of strict travel advice emanating from academic home countries and the logistical and financial obstacles to travel. The capital, while containing a representative mix of elites from all clan communities, is disproportionately populated by the majority *Isaaq* clan, and skews towards higher standards of living, economic activity, pro-Somaliland sentiment and general proximity

to State functionality. Such gravitational pull to the centre also intensified the focus on the urban over the rural, although such divide is not very pronounced in Somaliland, where individuals from nomadic herders and traditional leaders to students, businesspeople and civil servants migrate extensively between these two worlds, creating diversified, hybridised rural-urban livelihoods, settlement patterns and networks (Malkowsky *et al*. 2022).

I attempted to overcome this bias through ensuring that each of the case studies concerned a different region, and was lucky enough to travel to the western city of Borama, the heartland of (non-*Isaaq*) *Gadabuursi* settlement, for two weeks of intense fieldwork. The other non-Hargeisa based case study concerned El Af-weyn and its surrounding areas, located in the region of Sanaag to the east, the site of off-and-on conflict throughout the course of the fieldwork period. This immanent risk greatly reduced accessibility, while the UK's strict travel warning, and my insurance provider's strict adherence to this guidance, made visits anywhere to the east of Somaliland's central cities of Hargeisa and Berbera prohibitive—a considerably more restrictive approach than Somaliland researchers faced even a few years prior. For the El Af-weyn case study, I was thus left to meet with representatives and affiliates of the community either residing in or passing through the capital. For a general sense the country's social landscape, I was able to rely on my previous experience traveling throughout the country on the land study of 2015, when I had the opportunity to visit El Af-weyn.

A second representational limitation regards demographic diversity, particularly when it comes to gender and economic class. As I describe more fully in Chapter 7 (7.4.1), present-day Somaliland society contains numerous forms of deeply-engrained forms of exclusion, marginalisation and subordination against women and the poor, through both its Statist and Covenantal power dynamics. These same hierarchies and exclusions are reproduced throughout the field research environment, impacting issues of accessibility, visibility and voice, to the extent that the space of knowledge production informing understandings of Somaliland's political process are generally shaped by (elite and educated) men (Dini 2009; Kapteijns & Ali 1999, 1-7). During my field research, this uneven social field was perpetuated through the interviewee identification process, with networks, referrals (snowball samplings), vouchsafing and media-based identification of relevant voices all operating on the basis of male- and elite-dominated discursive and relational dynamics. This is not to say that a diverse array of genders and livelihood brackets were not influentially involved in shaping the political

issues under analysis, but merely that one has to dig much deeper to identify their involvement (*ibid*).

Rather than develop a methodological approach that might transcend or upend these representational biases, my work only went so far as mitigate against some of their excesses through including a baseline number of female voices within each of the various stories. In the end, what was produced only went so far as to gesture to the fact that this male-dominated story does not capture the entire picture, instead of comprehensively doing the work of identifying and presenting such an alternative narrative on an equal footing. Such an alternative narrative is indeed necessary for any complete picture of the Somaliland political context, as well as the place of the Social Covenant within it, but I have left this element as something to be fleshed out in future research. It should be noted, however, that while what is presented is primarily a study told by men about men, this does not mean that it pertains *only* to men and their political needs and agency. Given the fact that this thesis focuses on the mediating forces within Somaliland politics, and given the fact that both men *and women* invest these mediating forces with trust, support and legitimacy *at certain pivotal moments* (even while potentially, at a more abstract level, aspiring to transcend the inherent maleness of these institutions eventually), what emerges through the study of the Somaliland Social Covenant is an understanding of social powers and inter-relational logics that all social actors might potentially utilise in pursuing their socio-political goals, even if access to this mode of influence intensifies and decreases based upon the distinct stratifications within society, with gender, class and generation being three of the most salient variables at play.

This relates to a third representational limitation of the study: the sizable proportion of the interviewee list who claim authority in one or another domain of social life, whether traditional, religious, governmental, financial or otherwise. As described above, while extensive engagement with those actively involved with the decision-making processes (both formal and informal) were vital to gain both an insider's understanding of historical events and a participant's perspective on the various social relations at play, such focus on influential actors equally risks promulgating elite-driven narratives, especially when it comes to making analytical judgements regarding the broader popular legitimacy and representativeness of those making such interventions (von Soest 2022; Badache 2022). However, in a context such as Somaliland, linking certain forms of authority (particularly the 'traditional' or cultural') with elite status can be misleading, and we need to be careful not to conflate the two. As Fumanti

(2004) notes, elites are a very diverse category and take on different meanings in different contexts, with Somaliland offering an interesting example of the considerable decoupling of traditional authority from other forms of power and interest (see also Morse 2019). For example—and this is something which my distinction between the Statist and Covenantal models of power throughout the thesis will itself seek to prove—many of the elders I interviewed, while bestowed with a right involve themselves with conflict-related matters, and while serving as a focal point for addressing daily intra-sub-clan disputes, were otherwise granted no advantages within society, and in fact commanding very little access to wealth-generation or political influence within increasingly State-based forms of politics (Interview #59; Interview #156). As such, treating traditional leaders and other visible figures as a monolithic category inherently linked to set, unified class (or occupational) interests can serve to muddle the necessarily multivalent nature of such roles, an institutionalist bias which this study's process-oriented analytical framework itself seeks to overcome.

Ultimately, this study sought to prove, rather than presume, links between contextually-specific sites of political contestation—which are inevitably restricted in terms of who is granted a seat at the table—and wider social grievances and interests of communities. This required speaking to actors beyond those directly invested with power, to understand the extent to which authority was actively granted, consented to and endorsed by the otherwise powerless to various mediating agents, whether traditional leaders or other political figures. As evidence of this authorisation, or extension, of power from communities to mediating agents (what elsewhere might be referred to as elites), I looked to both the interpretations of non-'elite' actors representation (youth, women and other community figures) to such claims, as well as to the quotidial ways in which 'elite' and non-'elite' social actors cooperated, coordinated and amplified each other through their practices. In other words, rather than taking for granted that the space of elder-led politics provides an alternative source of power for Somaliland's communities, I attempt to *demonstrate* these communities' own active turn towards elder-led politics as a means to empower themselves, through their statements in support of traditional leader interventions, as well as their mass mobilisations and coordination with elders in the service of collective, clan-based interests, while at the same time holding to account these leaders, through delegitimisation or disobedience, at moments where collective interests are abandoned. That said, given the limitations of this study, the extent to which these 'alternative voices' were called upon,

especially in proportion to the voices of more prominent figures, could only go so far, and will require further study—such as field visits out to the rural communities impacted by these national events—to truly grapple with the intricacies of the 'elite'/non-'elite' relationship.

1.4.5   Analysis Process: Some Epistemological Considerations

As will be apparent, this study exhibits what might be considered a trusting partiality towards the interpretations provided by the actors, in which, along the spectrum between taking their stories at face value and complete cynicism over motives, I lean more towards the former. Despite sharing the general caution around qualitative interviews as open to bias, selectivity and distortion, especially as they relate to political issues which actors have a direct stake in, I have nevertheless sought to treat oral accounts as the primary evidentiary and confirmational basis on which to construct my theories, while taking measures to improve the potential for accuracy (Bleich & Pekkanen 2013). These measures include extensive number of interviews, the selection of individuals from all sides of the political divides and the mixture of affiliated and non-affiliated interviewees, the combination of which has allowed me a sufficiently high degree of intensity and directional coherence to the representativeness of the quotations and citations provided. To communicate this representativeness to the reader, I have listed multiple references that confirm a quotation where appropriate and possible, and, in rare situations in which I give a single interviewee a 'good-faith' reading without corroboration, I qualify the account by indicating its 'reported' or 'believed' nature.

That said, these precautions are indeed only partial and limited, and, for those who take a sceptical view of interpretive license, might prove unsatisfactory. The value placed on insights offered by the subjective analysis of social actors represents an *epistemological claim*, one which, in foregrounding the 'political meaning' that targeted individuals impute to their actions, takes their 'moral agency' seriously, something which a long history of Eurocentrism in the academy has often failed to afford formerly colonised communities such as those in Somaliland (even if most of the scholars described above have proven exceptional in this regard) (Sabaratnam 2017, 42). Indeed, within Western scholarship, where oral expression is 'depreciated, undervalued, made invisible,' communicated histories and indigenous analyses of events are saddled with a prohibitively high burden of proof, something which my more accommodating disposition seeks to correct (Solano & Rappaport 2011, 127). For me, as an

outside guest of the Somaliland community, cultivating Somalilander agency in the research involved treating, with as much genuine attention as possible, these communities not as sources of 'raw data' to be 'mined', but as agents in the generation and explication of the theoretical model (Nhemachena, Mlambo & Kaundjua 2016). This disposition in my research was aided by the previous bonds I had formed with many of those interviewed for this study, as well as the personal gratitude I feel for Somaliland society as a source of home, friendship, education, purpose and humbling for over a decade.

This is not to deny the impact of the author in the interpretative process, as the very added value of scholarly research—the collation by researchers of disparate material and ideational phenomena for the deliberate expansion of societal understanding—also accounts for its shortcomings, the inevitable translational distortions produced by those (situated, particular) researchers (Chakrabarty 2000, 6). The best one can do is to maintain a self-reflexivity and deploy a flexible, transparent epistemological framework best able to transmit rather than repurpose the interpretations and insights of one's research subjects. To borrow from Rader (2016), my objective is similarly to 'offer the interpretations I have made within the landscape of meanings and understandings that Somalis have of themselves – to put my interpretations of interpretations amongst others of that kind' (16). Holding my interpretations accountable to those of Somalilanders meant adopting an iterative, inductive approach to the fieldwork. A continuous year of fieldwork in Somaliland offered the opportunity to repeatedly test and refine emerging themes amongst both subsequent interviewees and informal interlocutors, while also having the opportunity to present and receive feedback on preliminary findings to a dozen self-organised local intellectuals on 16 February 2019, as well as a public audience at the Hargeysa Cultural Centre on 14 August 2019.

I am also aware that, in covering well-trodden ground and drawing novel conclusions from it—positing an entire coherent political system beyond the State—I risk accusations of overextending the license afforded to theoretical innovation. With that in mind, and against accusations of positivism, reductionism or romanticism, I hope that my careful treatment of the source material, especially the contextual complexity offered in my accounts of the three case studies, will at least show that the systematic and perspicuous simplifications entailed in building a theory of the Social Covenant do not come at the expense of considerations of the diversity, intricacy, murkiness and at times banality of Somaliland's politics. Ultimately, I felt

like this project's ambitions were manageable because the research was preceded by five years of acclimatising myself to this complexity, coming to understand certain patterns and other rules of the game without any project of seeking to understand it academically, and only after building on these inclinations through the intentional project of which this thesis is the culmination.

1.4.6   Ethical considerations

Research ethics, as a set of principles and practical safeguards, concerns both the intentional protection of those who might be harmed by the carrying out of the research, as well as a commitment to guarantee the scholarly integrity of research material and outputs, including its handling, presentation, accuracy and conclusions (Israel & Hay 2006). In my study's case, the most palpable ethical consideration to manage involved the collection and presentation of source material of a highly politically charged nature. Interviewees were generally candid in their remarks, and often went out of their way to express their desire to be identified as the source of their statements, even though the pre-interview consent statement, spoken out before any recording took place and contingent upon orally expressed permission, made clear that all quotations would be anonymised. Despite the drawback that failing to attribute certain insights to specific individuals might deny them their chance have their perspective identifiably shared to a wider audience, this had to be weighed against an increasingly constrained atmosphere for information-gathering, especially among members of government.

While all Somaliland presidents have exhibited a willingness to jail journalists and opposition figures who cross certain shifting lines of acceptability, President Bihi's more commanding style of leadership had a noticeable chilling effect on disclosure, a trend that appeared to build over the course of the study. For this reason, it seemed safe to avoid any attribution of quotations across the board, so as to limit the potentially harmful effects of having someone say things that they were fine with sharing at the time, but might not feel as comfortable with by the time the study came out. Nevertheless, I avoided targeting potential interviewees from vulnerable backgrounds, relying on the work of those with more direct sensitivity training on approaching such communities. Beyond that, due care was taken to protect the security of recordings, including using trusted individuals to serve as translators and transcribers, and avoiding sharing as much identifying material as possible with the latter,

through anonymisation at all stages of the data storage process. Above all else, the vast majority of interviews focused on political opinions, something much less controversial in the Somaliland context than sensitive or secretive material.

An additional consideration involved the balancing of my position as a researcher, committed to prioritising the substance of my theoretical argument above all else, and my position as someone indirectly intervening into questions of Somaliland's statehood, an issue with political ramifications that touch the livelihoods of all Somalilanders. More than anything, this involved ensuring that I did not betray my interviewees, for the lion's share of whom the expectation was that my research would support their quest for international recognition. I became personally involved in this quest during the fieldwork after taking up employment within Somaliland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a place I had worked previously. This was originally intended as an option for ethnographic observation, but which, failing that, mostly served as a place to chat informally about developing political gossip, while remaining largely separate from my academic research process. When it comes to furthering my interviewees' and colleagues' ambitions for statehood, I believe this study does not let them down, even if the arguments of my study seem counterintuitive in relation to that task. To say that Somaliland is much more than its State is not to discount its state-worthiness, or to delegitimise the democratically-elected representatives of the people, but instead to show that Somaliland is founded on much more substantial and deeply-rooted footing than many of its contemporaries across the continent, an achievement that the international community would do well to preserve at all costs.

While recognition of Somaliland would not solve all its problems, and might indeed accelerate the erosion of the Social Covenant, this option remains preferable to the alternatives: to keep Somaliland chained to Somalia will only choke the life out of and punish Somaliland in the long term, while allowing it to remain in limbo will give its people little to inspire to, in a world where international connectivity is unavoidable. This study simply concludes with a recommendation that both the Somaliland people and the international community embrace the Social Covenant, see it as feature of Somaliland's hydra-headed political make-up that makes it special as a nation-State, rather than something to cast off in the name of an unadulterated 'ideal' vision of the State. It explores the possibility that Somaliland's best path forward, as it teeters on the edge of certain potential crises of leadership, representation, equality and inclusivity, is to see the Social Covenant as part of

the solution, a balancing force to the excesses of the State to be amended to better attune it to changing circumstances, rather than part of the problem.

1.5   Chapter Overview

Having thus far laid out an argument for treating Somaliland's clan associationalism as a distinct political arrangement (the Social Covenant), in Chapter 2 I take a step back and offer a theoretical mapping of how African Politics has addressed issues of 'otherness' when conceptualising the State form. I employ anarchist theory to demonstrate how State power compels local contextual environs to contort and conform to its logics—those of verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy—thereby rendering attempts to 'Africanise' the State through hybridisation or localisation unsatisfactory. The chapter goes on to explore theoretical tendencies that strive for alternatives to the African State, particularly those that harken back to precolonial forms, seek refuge within 'ungoverned' enclaves, or occupy structural positions outside the orbit of hegemonic power. It argues that, for all these various options' incisiveness and sophistication, any true alternative to the State form must account for relations of power that fundamentally diverge from the above-mentioned Statist logics. Drawing again from anarchist theory, it suggests alternative pathways towards a coherent, stable, peaceful and well-functioning society can be found in power structures that promote horizontal relationality, participatory democracy and non-coercive association.

Chapter 3 offers up the Somaliland Social Covenant as a particular, historically-situated manifestation of these anarchist alternatives. It begins by tracing the Covenant's origins and the particular conditions of possibility that allowed it to emerge where other similar conflict-affected polities have remained gripped by disorder. Building on the existing Somaliland literature and newly-collected accounts, the analysis first homes in on the particular power dynamics—including rupture and relative power balance—that set the stage for the Covenantal system to emerge. It proceeds by exploring how Somaliland's peace negotiators seized this political opening to reconfigure inter-clan relations along logics of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association, using techniques familiar to anarchist theory, such as voluntary association, confederation and the like. It aims to leave the reader with a blueprint—an analytical heuristic—of the basic moving parts of the Covenantal structure, while temporarily placing the Covenant's gaps, contradictions, real-world variations and shortcomings on the backburner.

These complexities are picked up in the next three chapters, which consist of three case studies, which each tackle separate political controversies bubbling to the surface of Somaliland popular consciousness during my fieldwork period (even if their origins preceded the research). I attend to these cases, which cover regional power-sharing disputes, rural land conflict, and the limits of State power vis-à-vis the individual citizen, through an approach that applies a historical sociological reading to unusually commonplace events. In particular, this entailed questioning participants and observers of these events to gather three types of information, corresponding to the 'structure-history-agency' trifecta of historical sociology (Hobson, Lawson & Rosenberg 2010): (1) interpretations of the social structures and power dynamics that shaped the events; (2) perspectival records of the various twists and turns to the story as it unfolded over time; and (3) descriptions of the motives of the actors involved, either directly related (for participants) or speculatively imparted (for observers). The purpose of these case studies is to gauge the persistence of the Social Covenant into the present, a period where the State's strength has begun to prove formidable, while also teasing out evidence of the incongruence and incompatibility of the Covenantal and Statist logics.

The concluding two chapters reposition the Somaliland Social Covenant within the relevant debates introduced early in the study, namely those regarding the African State and its various (postcolonial/decolonial and anarchist) alternatives. In comparing the present-day performance of Covenantal logics, situated as they are alongside parallel State logics, to the blueprint approximation set out in Chapter 2 (the Covenant 'in a vacuum'), I seek to derive lessons regarding the possibilities and limitations of thinking of an African political community (and even a political community in general) beyond the State. Whether or not readers find the Somaliland Social Covenant a desirable model, and whether or not they are convinced of the prospect of thinking beyond the State in the first place, the detailed explication of certain non-State logics in a real-world setting—whether horizontality, intimacy or conditional association—will hopefully provide inspiration to those attempting to develop novel, more fulfilling ways for individuals and groups to interrelate to each other within often demoralising, predatory and oppressive social environs.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Background

The African State and its Alternatives

With the imposition of colonial rule, much of the African continent underwent a drastic, destabilising realignment. While the exact nature of this transformation varied from place to place, all involved the subsumption of diverse populations under regimes of regulated exploitation, commodification and civilisational transformation (Cooper 2002). Though situated at diverse starting points, and pulled in numerous directions, the multitude of indigenous societies making up Africa eventually came to coalesce, by the time of their independence, around the singular overarching governance model of the State. This doesn't mean that political horizons were reducible to the State form—as Getachew (2020) illuminates, many anti-colonial nationalist movements viewed sovereign statehood more a springboard to broader federalist solidarity than as an end-goal in its own right. However, while in no way a teleological inevitability, the sovereign State has, as a result of historical exigencies, come to serve as the unassailable reference point for most of political life in Africa (and elsewhere), even amongst those seeking out alternatives (Niang 2018, 112).

The triumph of the State form as hegemonic has paradoxically coincided with a growing ambivalence regarding its capacity to bring about progressive change to African lives (Moe & Stepputat 2018). Long gone are the heady days of modernist, developmental statism that characterised the immediate postcolonial period in Africa (Young 2004, 30), during which centralised governance and unidirectional leadership were seen as capable of uniting a malleable population behind a single (national) identity and purpose, and of utilising sovereign control over resources and territory to catalyse socioeconomic transformation (Bakonyi 2015, 247). Instead, hollowed out by great power dependency, structural adjustment and personalistic regimes, African States have increasingly suffered from a retreat into rentierism and self-preservation, while scaling back their responsibilities over social welfare (Young 2004; Schmidt 2013). Furthermore, thanks to globalisation's twin pulls of transnationalisation and social atomisation, States have seen their room for manoeuvre over domestic policy and foreign affairs substantially reduced (Ali 2015; Abrahamsen & Williams 2007).

Yet the spectre of the State continues to haunt the imaginations of Africa's political reformers, despite its increasing incongruence with reality—more through 'structural inertia' than as an ideological commitment (Englebert 2009, 2). As a result, the line between statebuilding and crisis management has become increasingly blurred—a reality not too far removed from Agamben's notion of a 'permanent state of exception' (Agamben 2005). For example, during the post-9/11 securitisation turn, what began with a faith in external nation-building eventually descended into a more modest focus on remote counter-terrorism through the build-up of loyal local security actors (Andersson 2019; Hagmann 2016). In this, 'hybrid interventions' and 'kinetic counterinsurgency operations' have seen their original goal of peace traded for that of mere pacification, in which liberal interventionism's outward projection of strategic coherence has masked a more 'reflexive', reactive and erratic adaptation to changing local circumstances (Moe, 2016; Moe, 2018; Chandler 2010). At the same time, while the notion of a unitary sovereign actor has increasingly been abandoned in practice, deference to the sanctity of the State as the only viable and legitimate form of governance remains as strong as ever. Even in places such as Somalia, where even the capital is governed by a mix of foreign troops, public officials, insurgent groups and militias, diplomatic politics continues to be performed as if commonplace State logics such as 'sovereignty', 'territorial integrity', 'national unity' and territorial fixity were operational (Arman 2021, 246; Bakonyi 2015, 260).

This broad-brush, bird's-eye picture should not blind us to the diversity of State forms on the continent, however. Taking the Horn as an example, we find even within this small sample everything from Somaliland's quasi-statist liberal democracy to Eritrea's pariah military-authoritarian regime, and from Ethiopia's extremely centralised ethno-nationalist federalism to the comparatively decentralised clan-based federalism of Somalia, with the Djiboutian city-state, a patchwork of ports and foreign military bases, rounding off this motley group. Indeed, the way that State evolution transpires under the influence of international pressures is rarely predictable (Hameiri & Jones 2017; Tansel 2015). Rather than a straightforward interplay of contest and accommodation between the 'international' and the 'local', statebuilding within Africa emerges out of the complex interaction of a constellation of forces, entailing everything from a society's specific historical trajectory—including its precolonial governance legacies and specific colonial arrangements—to its particular place

within the global economic architecture, from value chains to regional economic blocs (Go & Lawson 2017).

Making sense of this muddled picture has not been easy, especially for those dedicated to correcting 'the failure by the postcolonial state to deliver material benefits and freedom to the ordinary people' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a, 86). It is no surprise, then, that a wide array of approaches has been proffered towards this corrective aim, from reformist institutional strengthening to the complete abandonment of the State form, in favour of communitarian alternatives. This chapter begins by investigating these various options, first interrogating their relationship to the fundamental diversity-vs.-unity problematic, and then dividing them into four main theoretical strands. Following that, an argument will be put forth that, despite these approaches' differences, they share a dependence on certain underlying logics of power that characterise all forms of State, namely verticality (a top-down relationship between rulers and ruled); alienation (the abstraction of agency from its local sources to the sovereign authority); and unconditional legitimacy (the incontestability of the legal order). Anarchist theory will be used to draw out these Statist logics, and, in the final section, to sketch out what their alternative might look like. By the end of the chapter, the stage will be set for Chapter 3 to explore of the Somaliland Social Covenant, an example of political association whose composition, I argue, embodies its own particular set of non-State logics.

2.1   Framing the Analysis: tensions at the heart of the African political project

The pursuit of statebuilding in Africa, as an exercise in bringing a diverse, fluid multitude of societies under a single governance umbrella (Berman 1998), has been haunted since its inception by the arguably elusive goal of establishing a stable and constructive balance between unity and difference. Where nationalist transformation was seen to take priority over socio-cultural plurality and minority rights, one-party States frequently positioned themselves as supreme, unchallenged authorities; and where ethnicity became the organising principle of political life, 'institutionalised division' has generally prevented the development of any sense of common purpose (Cooper 1994, 1543-44; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b, 89; Selassie 2003, 85; Bakonyi 2015). On the one hand, this could be said of any modern society, with the tension between the singular and the universal serving as the central theme in much of modern Western thought – from Rousseau's Social Contract, which

attempts to articulate a notion of the 'general will' that stands in for a population's various particular wills without negating them, to modern-day liberal multiculturalism, where tolerance and intercultural exchange seek to intertwine people separated across tightknit ethno-cultural communities. On the other hand, within modern African politics, this particular-general conundrum takes on a distinct, and seemingly more pronounced, pertinence, especially as intrastate violence and conflict within several post-Cold War African polities have come to define their political landscape.

Africa's legacy of colonialism goes a long way to explaining its distinctive circumstances, especially with regard to the continuing political salience of difference. Not only did Africa's late, and highly fettered, start to the statebuilding process mean that it has been afforded less time and space for warfare and capitalist expansion to exert their homogenising nationalist effects, as well as their domestication of plurality (Thies 2007), but it was also forced to embark on this journey under conditions where communal divisions were exceptionally institutionalised. As the scholarship of Mamdani (1996), Ranger (2012) and Ake (1993), among many others, illuminates, ethnicity, religion and race were appropriated by the colonising powers as tools of governmentality, codifying and hardening identity as markers of hierarchy and communal boundaries. Berman (1998) summarises this process as follows: the colonial 'state delineated the strategic contexts in which ethnicity was or was not salient, and moulded the choices of political actors with regard to both the ascriptive markers of ethnicity and the organizational forms in which it was expressed. This shaped, in turn, the scope of ethnic politics, its relationship with other social cleavages and the complex interaction of ethnic identities and interest' (313). While multiplicity was exploited by outsiders as a means of 'divide and rule' (Morrock 1973), it also served as a reservoir of anti-colonial mobilisation, in which local actors turned to identities beneath and beyond the territorial State colony to frame their resistance (Cooper 1994).

At independence, the State assumed a sphinx-like character — it was both the readymade political vehicle for the continuation of anti-colonial liberation and redemptive nation-building, and a force of coercive assimilationism, in which command-oriented modernisation largely strove to subsume ethnic and cultural particularity under collective projects (Mkandawire 2005; Campbell 1999). In this environment, the politicisation of ethnic identity proved hard to shake, and instead became the path of least resistance for the postcolonial elite to build bases of support. Through kinship-based patronage and the

instrumentalisation of affective association, inter-elite competition, whether electoral or intraparty, accentuated intercommunal division and exclusionary predation (Bayart 1993, 51; Berman 1998). At the same time, as State influence began to wane in the aftermath of externally-promoted neoliberal reforms and internal shocks to political economies, inter-communal antagonisms, now competing over more meagre and concentrated sources of wealth extraction, became increasingly zero-sum and destructive, leading to both increased privatisation of power, and, as a consequence, an erasure of 'the earlier post-colonial state's claim to unencumbered hegemony' (Young 2004, 43; Mbembe 2001). For a number of African countries, the endpoint of this trajectory was civil war or prolonged insurgency, leading many Africanist observers to call into question whether difference in Africa could be managed at all, or whether the personalisation, neopatrimonial parcellation and ethno-religious fragmentation of the nation-State were indelible features of the continent (Kaplan 1994; Herbst 2014; Chabal & Daloz 1999).

In sum, how the African State's many heterogeneous communal parts can best relate to the national whole remains an open question. Through the co-optation of community leaders into spoils politics, and through reliance on external, legalistic sources of sovereign legitimacy and territorial jurisdiction, facsimiles of national unity were purchased on the cheap, rather than forged substantially through broad-based inclusion (Englebert 2009; Herbst 1996). Moreover, once the State's resources and capacity for unconditional foreign patronage began to dry up at the end of the 1980s, these precarious, unstable sources of coherent order became tenuous, and the temporarily repressed social differences, as well as the inequalities that exacerbated them, came to the surface with a vengeance, creating a 'terminal' crisis in State legitimacy (Allen 1999; Fearon 2009, 362). For Doornbos (2002), what this historical statebuilding pattern showed was nothing less than 'a lack of fit between political forces and social structures' in Africa (807), a conundrum which the following approaches to social transformation have sought to remedy.

2.2 The Future of the African State: responses to the particularity-generality tension within African politics scholarship

How one interprets the false dawn of African statebuilding goes a long way in determining their position on the way forward. Among those who see the historical underperformance of the African State as the product of past policy mistakes and the

messiness of practical politics, faith is generally placed in reformist trial-and-error within the singularly viable confines of the institutionalised State. For those who connect this underperformance to the inflexibility of State institutions in the face of local practices and norms, the solution lies in institutional pluralism. At the same time, among perspectives that see this reformist faith as naïve, and local resistance to externally-imposed institutional designs as inescapable, two alternative options present themselves: either accepting the existing African State for what it is (seeing functionality in its flaws), or dispensing with the State altogether, in favour of indigenously-appropriate governance models. I classify the former, reformist path as the institutionalist approach, and the latter as the endogenous constitution approach, and use the rest of this section to present their arguments.

2.2.1   Institutionalist approaches

Institutionalists, while sharing a view that a nation-State's social, economic and political performance ultimately flows from its institutional make-up (Lemay-Hébert 2009, 23-4), come in two main forms. First, there are those for whom political change on the African continent is most fruitfully brought about through deliberate modifications to the opportunities and constraints that familiar State institutions allow (Cheeseman 2018; Acemoglu & Robinson 2010). In this view, standard liberal tenets, such as elections, formal courts and bureaucratic administration, are not inherently ineffectual or corruptible when applied to existing African social arrangements, but have the power to productively shape the choices and incentives of influential actors, so long as the 'rules of the game' are structured to promote conciliation, cooperation and constructiveness, rather than division and predation (Cheeseman 2018, 76-98; Rothchild 1997, 19-20). In the influential work of Robert Bates, for instance, political order is generated through the emergence of an institutional equilibrium in which it makes sense for rulers to coercively extract productive wealth rather than prey upon existing wealth, with political reform determining how rulers relate to constituencies and the country's endowed resources in making those calculations (Bates 2008, 5).

When it comes to managing plurality, whether in terms of multiple, competing elite factions or a diversity of identity groups, just as ill-advised reforms such as premature political liberalisation can provoke intercommunal rivalry and violence, so too can inclusive and 'rule-following' apparatuses of governance facilitate peaceful means for mediating disputes (Klaas

2018; Khan 2018). For example, for Branch & Cheeseman (2009), where liberal democratisation in Africa is seen as an inescapable good, 'the key challenge becomes one of creating institutional mechanisms that can reduce the potential for intergroup conflict as the process of democratization unfolds, a challenge which necessitates far-reaching constitutional review' (24). Such reformist faith should not be seen as necessarily functionalist or anti-historicist, however; indeed, scholars such as Klaas (2018) and Cheeseman (2018) readily acknowledge that reforms can create unintended consequences, and are disproportionately shaped by powerful actors. At the same time, however, the fact that the vast majority of African social actors invest meaning and energy in State institutions and their associated political processes compels scholars and policy-makers to foreground institutional design as the primary terrain of struggle (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis 2021).

A second strand of institutionalism sees this focus on the *content* of institutions as incomplete, because wrongly taking for granted the *form* they are presumed to take. Amongst proponents of the 'local turn', it is the ubiquity of the liberal, universalist model itself that has terminally harmed the legitimacy and compatibility of statebuilding efforts within the African context (Randazzo, 2016: 1351). To correct this, statebuilding must recognise and encourage institutional plurality, in which imported designs, whether from colonialism, intervention or normative diffusion, share space alongside long-held, indigenously-propagated norms of communal life (Boege *et al.* 2009, 17; Hagmann & Péclard 2010). In other words, the presence of the 'two publics', to borrow terminology from Ekeh (1975), should not be seen as a defect but an example of the 'hybridity' of African political orders, in which monopoly authority is spread across a wide range of political actors, from customary authorities and religious institutions to resource-extracting firms and vigilante groups, who engage each other across 'complex and shifting interrelations and interactions', both 'complementary and contradictory' (Bagayoko *et al.* 2016, 6-7). Plurality, in this view, does not merely disaggregate 'Stateness' across various institutions, it also, through the performance and negotiation of local actors, brings new functions and meanings 'into existence,' altering and reinventing State forms and functions to fit the 'tensions' and ambivalences' of new contexts (Justin & Verkoren 2021, 5; Perazzone 2019, 176). Or, as Mulugeta (2020) puts it, 'State ideas are hence refracted in the iterative practices and habitus' of political agents (61).

Prescriptively, the State can manage the plurality of African society by mirroring that plurality in its institutions, through treating statebuilding as an unpredictable, multilinear

process of assemblage, rather than a top-down exercise of unidirectional institutional expansion (Autesserre 2014, 99-107; Albrecht & Moe 2015; Mac Ginty, 2014; Richmond 2006). Embracing 'the local', then, through incorporating non-Western concepts of development, communal forms of agency and customary founts of authority, not only invests the resulting State with greater legitimacy and 'sense of ownership', but ensures that the political system is more inclusive of local particularity, difference and the multipolar nature of power (Albrecht 2017; Moe & Geis 2020). However, while local agency is seen as necessary to make peace and stability 'resonant' and 'sustainable', it does not follow that the State form is to be decentred or abandoned. As Richmond (2013) argues, for all its faults, the State remains 'necessary for peace' (395-6), as the centralising, unifying force that ensures that pluralism and local agency are directed towards collective stability rather than destructive competition.

2.2.2 Endogenous constitution approaches

Regardless of their differences, the two institutionalist strands share a faith in the capacity of the African State to fundamentally change for the better. This can be contrasted with those who view the current condition of the African State as its logical, unavoidable outcome. For Chabal & Daloz (1999), this is not necessarily a problem, as the prebendalism, clientelism and identity politics that outside observers decry as representing State dysfunction, in fact 'works' for the Africans subject to this system (15). In this view, one largely shared with their French contemporary Bayart (1993), the colonial encounter did not fundamentally reconstitute African politics around imported institutional arrangements, but instead instigated the local adaptation of existing customary relations in new, nation-sized forms (Bayart 1993, 154; Young 1999). Behind the 'vacuous' and 'ineffectual' façade of State institutions, then, lie pervasive, culturally-legitimised networks of material dependency and obligation, which, while engendering hierarchies and inequalities of power, equally promote reciprocity regulated by long-standing patterns of communalism, kinship and paternalism, adapted and expanded into Africa's postcolonial modernity (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 14). In this, the chaos, messiness, 'irrationality', 'superstition' and violence often (unfairly) attributed to African societies are treated not as evidence of socioeconomic failure and its consequences, but as expressions of local agency as refracted through the eccentric cultural modes characterising African societies (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 63; Meagher 2006).

Ultimately, both Chabal & Daloz and Bayart, while coming at the issue from different angles, come to see a close overlap between culture and power, in which cultural patterns (from sources of legitimacy to attitudes on obedience) are inevitably locked up in neopatrimonialism's personalised, hierarchical power relations, while such power relations remain impervious to change, buttressed by general cultural acceptance (Meagher 2006, 591; Young 1999; Dorman 2009, 13). This perspective is thus haunted by a 'path dependence' in which cohesion cannot be sustained and difference is ultimately unmanageable, as 'the poor sedimentation of the post-colonial political order' creates endless competition that sucks in both elites and communities through the 'instrumentalization of chaos' (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 82). In this pessimistic reading, on a continent where mass politics inevitably swallows up the State within a multiplicity of 'private indirect governments' (Mbembe 2001), intercommunal relations are doomed to be riven by a sliding scale of orchestrated division and strife, in which inter-ethnic armed conflict is 'in effect nothing but the continuation by other means of the violence of everyday life' (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 83).

A second response to institutionalism, rather than treating Africa's 'otherness' as circumscribing its destiny within immutable cultural limits, views this otherness as holding the key to transcending (colonial) modernity's downward trajectory. This approach turns the critique of African modernity on its head, arguing that the imported State is part of the problem rather than the solution (Niang 2018, 111-17). In gesturing to the comparatively organic harmony of the precolonial period, as well as violence and oppression that the colonial rupture imprinted onto all modernising institutions thereafter, we are implored to pursue a 'new search for certainty and alternative forms of organization of human life beyond Westphalian ideas that put the nation-state at the centre of human life' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013a, 239 Grosfoguel 2011, 13). We are to find these alternative forms not in an atavistic return to a prelapsarian condition, but rather through reinvigorating indigenous epistemes of spirituality, ancestral wisdom and counter-hegemonic thought, to serve as the inspiration upon which to reimagine social development on alternative, culturally-specific terms (Wai 2007; Ayers 2006). Whereas the State and the forces of modernity have 'drained political practice of all ethical considerations', these approaches seek to repair the social fabric, creating a renewed coevality and convergence between African communities' inherited epistemologies and values, on the one hand, and the social relations that govern their everyday lives on the other (Wamala 2004, 441; Ellis & Ter Haar 2007).

So long as the structural, temporal and spatial logics that have imprisoned African societies since the colonial encounter continue to operate hegemonically (Shilliam & Rutazibwa 2018, 4), these alternatives find themselves relegated to marginal spaces beyond the reach of the State. At least three sociological sources of indigenous, non-State inspiration can be identified. First are those that locate transformative political agency in the cracks and gaps in State structural power, such as urban slums, informal marketplaces and countercultural communities, where 'cosmopolitan intermingling' and 'continuously reconfigur[ing] allegiances, languages, and idioms' unfold in ways that resist everyday strictures of organised authority (Diouf 2003, 228; Mbembe 2001; Bayat 1997). Second are those who seek to channel the past in order to retrieve alternative, ancestral ways of life that predate the State and its vagaries, in order to build upon 'how the indigenous functions, negotiates, and relates with nature, and how its processes of socio-economic provisioning operate' (Ayers 2006, 155; Wai 2007, 91-3). Finally, there are those who look to liberated territorial enclaves (such as 'peripheries', 'frontiers' or 'ungoverned spaces') as 'regions of refuge,' whose distance from the reach of the State enables alternative ways of life to germinate (Scott 2009; Chitonge & Mine 2019; Schatzberg 2015). What such approaches share is a notion that the mission of African flourishing is one not of *progress*, but of *reparation*, of healing colonial wounds by returning local societies to their natural rhythms (Shilliam 2015, 21).

When it comes to the predicament of managing difference and cohesion, then, the primary obstacle is the postcolonial State, with its reliance on categorisation and racialisation to calcify and exploit difference, and to suppress the resistive power of collective bonds (Shilliam 2015, 29-30; Niang 2018, 112). With the State standing in the way, the innate socio-cultural tendencies that had previously stitched together local populations in webs of communitarianism—what Mbembe (2021) calls 'the active will to community' (2)—have become stultified. Once liberated from the State, however, buried 'cosmological frameworks' can emerge that go 'beyond oppositions', with plurality again becoming part of a larger totality (Niang 2018, 114-16). At such time, not only will human relationships again be woven together through 'genealogical ties and ritual interdependence', but new temporalities will open up that place 'the living and the dead, the past and the future…the "political" and the unpolitical in a common field of interaction' (*Ibid*). Particularity and unity are thus to be reconciled at the level of the ontological.

2.2.3 Summary: Finding common ground

Four sociological perspectives thus present themselves, with divergent outlooks regarding both what lies behind Africa's statebuilding predicament, and also how constructive change can be brought about. For example, the institutionalists, despite a growing recognition of the role of local actors in institution-building, continue to rely heavily on international supervision to catalyse change, either through 'distant' disciplinary mechanisms of global oversight, such as the International Criminal Court or IFI aid conditioning, or the interventionist policing of social antagonisms, such as through multilateral counter-insurgency missions (see Clark 2018; Harrison 2005; Moe 2017 for critical appraisals). For proponents of the endogenous constitution approach, on the contrary, the answer lies precisely in 'decolonising' local populations from these external constraints, which are seen as predatory and disempowering, or, at minimum, placing faith in the ability of local actors to exploit and re-appropriate dependent foreign relationships to their advantage (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013b; Bayart & Ellis 2000). Underneath a shared despair regarding the current health of the postcolonial African State, there are therefore highly divergent viewpoints on where the catalysts for positive change might be found, as well as the role of the State in this process going forward.

As a way out of this deadlock, I propose the need to unpack the State itself as a phenomenon. Despite often categorical claims regarding the indispensability or irredeemably of the State to governance on the African continent, and a plethora of analyses of the State's performance and effects, less attention has been paid to the State as a specific articulation of power and social ordering, and the way this particular artifice shapes the entire social field. In the next section, I attempt to distinguish the State from other social forms by offering a typology of characteristics that all States embody, which, if taken together, constitute a distinct modality of rule. To achieve this, I borrow from anarchist political theory and its analysis of Statist governmentality. Taking this path should help us overcome the ideological disconnects separating liberal institutionalists from decolonial post-Statists, by providing a common analytical point of departure for debating the African State.

2.3 Anarchist Theories of the State: an analytical framework

In order to understand the State's role in shaping African historical trajectories, we must begin by establishing an understanding of what the State *is*. Unfortunately, the more

theoretical effort that has gone into defining the State, the more obscured the object of analysis has become. For, the 'State', despite presumably exhibiting a more corporeal and perceptible character than other political meta-categories like 'freedom' or 'domination', seems similarly as elusive a concept to pin down. While conventionally viewed as some combination of institutions, actors, norms, rules, practices and physical infrastructure acting in concert to govern a territorially-bounded people, the contradictions between the ideal and the actual, the part and the whole, the performed and the experienced, have generated much disagreement over whether the State is a straightforwardly classifiable object (as we find with the Montevideo Convention's criteria for statehood), or more of a symbol (or metaphor) for some manifestation of modern power (Weber 1995, 7-8).

Definitions based on attributes and functions—such as Poggi's (1990) definition of the State as an autonomous, centralised, differentiated and coordinated 'organization which controls the population occupying a definite territory' (19)—are arguably insufficient, given their failure to account for both the changing shape and role of the State over time, and also the State's sociological function, namely how it privileges and/or disadvantages different segments of the population in relation to others (Jessop 2006). At the same time, relying on norms as a frame of reference proves equally unreliable, as interpretations of such norms are always multiple and conflicting, and seemingly transparent normative arrangements often obscure the contextually-specific, implicit rules of the game that underpin them (Grant 1998, 451-3; Raeymaekers 2009). Remaining at the level of the theoretical, then, one finds oneself tied up in knots. Either one tries to identify a fixed set of characteristics constituting a State, inevitably ending up with a partial, insufficient list, or one expands and thins out the concept to encapsulate an ever-expanding number of forms, losing the very specificity of the concept in the process (Grant 1998, 434-47). Fundamentally, when the State becomes synonymous with territorialised authority as such; when its façade of officialdom is seen to cast a shadow over all modern governance; when it cannibalises the imaginative limits of what political agency does and could look like, then the State loses its specificity as a social form, and becomes an all-consuming concept.

One potential way out of this dilemma, I argue, involves treating the State as a distinct *arrangement of power*, a way of organising governance that has its own specific approach to cultivating, wielding, and justifying power, one different to conceivable alternatives. Poggi (1990) gestures towards this perspective when he writes that 'the modern state constitutes

not just a unique, but a markedly superior way of generating and storing political power and of initiating, monitoring and controlling its uses' (69). What this means is that, regardless of normative and practical divergences over the nature of the State form as it varies across context and theoretical tradition, there is a trans-contextual consistency in how State power manifests and operates. This common substrate, I argue, is thus more than a particular hegemonic vision of the State raised up to the level of a universal; it rather represents a series of interlocking logics without which the State is no longer a State. Identifying and detailing these logics will allow us to better pinpoint what a 'true' alternative would look like.

In conceptualising the distinctiveness of the State as a matrix of power, anarchist theory offers several analytical advantages, particularly given its genesis as a critique of State power. Coming out of the modernist, utopian milieu, anarchist thought problematises the State not based on any *a priori* judgement—such as being alien, imposed or culturally incompatible—but through an internal critique of its logics vis-à-vis other potential forms of self-governance that humans might devise for themselves (Kinna 2019, 56). It thus does not compare some 'natural' or 'organic' way of life to the State's 'artificial' nature, but instead critiques the State for the *type of artifice* it is, something more oppressive and exploitative than other available and/or imaginable alternatives. The task of anarchist theory has been to demystify a belief in the State as the natural or superior basis on which security, order and rights are to be founded, and instead reveal it as a contingent and mortal social arrangement, 'established through multiple dominations and exclusions' (Newman 2011, 63; Lynteris 2013).

Anarchism, like the theory of Foucault, rejects a view of the State as ultimately *reflective* of power—as, say, the administrative instrument of capitalist class rule—and instead views it as *productive* of power, i.e. as a force that shapes power in distinct and consistent ways (Kinna & Prichard 2019, 230; Newman 2010). As such, whereas liberalism and Marxism treat the State respectively as a neutral or secondary phenomenon in relation to that of social organisation, seeing the State's orientation as changing with who is in charge (such as through the election of better representatives, or appropriation by the right classes), anarchism holds that the State engenders certain relations of domination and hierarchy regardless of its institutional design or the social context it is embedded in (Ritter 1980, 124). For Scott (2012), for instance, the centralised knowledge, decision-making and authority that characterises State governance in both episodes of political extremity and mundane matters of developmental planning and administrative classification, serve as 'landscapes of control

and appropriation' that 'lend themselves to hierarchical power' (34). In other words, the neutral functioning of the State, regardless of its regime type—whether authoritarian or democratic, for example—engenders hierarchy, inequality and domination at the best of times.

This claim is substantiated through a critical interpretation of the central conceit of Statists from Hobbes onwards: that the State, as sovereign, is brought into existence through *assuming* social power and agency *on behalf of* the multitude, which requires external coercion in order to be orderly and peaceful (Buchan 2018, 56). For anarchists, this theory of governance performs two functions: first, it denies the possibility of political order emerging from the power and agency of the multitude itself (i.e. the possibility of a 'self-organizing society based on voluntary cooperation'); and, second, it presupposes the need to place such power in the hands of a guardian class, thereby naturalising a governmental structure built on relations of dependency for the many and license for the few (Ward 2004, 10; Newman 2010, 261). State power, in this view, is seen not primarily as a capacity or property—namely, the *power to* protect and modernise society—but as a relation, a *power over* others (Brown 1996, 149-150). The resulting shift of focus is important for highlighting how the State not only negatively constrains the excesses of human existence (its supposedly war-like, competitive nature), but actively disempowers political subjects. As Scott puts it, 'the existence, power, and reach of the state over the past several centuries have sapped the independent, self-organizing power of individuals and small communities. So many functions that were once accomplished by mutuality among equals and informal coordination are now state organized or state supervised' (xxi). Whether or not one fully buys into this romanticised picture of non-State relations, it is illuminating to consider this shift in the locus of power and agency which Scott's analysis speaks to.

For anarchists, such asymmetric arrangements of power render attempts to balance pluralism and unity within a State-based political order inherently problematic. As will be elaborated below, when one part of society (the State) is seen to stand in for the whole (the people), then, at times of conflict between the State and any particular segment of the people, such quantitative differences between two (imbalanced) parts inevitably becomes extrapolated into qualitative differences between the whole and some internal 'other' (Lynteris 2013). In other words, not only does the State necessitate the production of agents that are excessive of the whole (both the preeminent State and the deviant 'other'), and thus

rule out 'unity', but its concentration of power and authority within certain pockets of society precludes the practical or formal equality that 'pluralism' requires. Moreover, the State, in emanating power and authority from a single, totalising source, imposes unity as a 'rigid schema…on situations from above and beyond them', thereby offering up a 'purely abstract representation' of the social whole that is ultimately unresponsive to 'every concrete historical particular' (Cohn 2006, 252).

In order to utilise the anarchist framework as a lens through which to understand existing scholarly approaches to the African State, it is useful to break down the dynamic just described into its component parts—into the three underlying logics of power by which State rule operates. The three logics that I identify are those of verticality (power as centralised, and exercised from on high), alienation (power experienced as abstracted from the contexts in which it operates) and unconditional legitimacy (power as ultimately monological, categorical and indivisible). While no actually existing State embodies all of these logics in their fullness, I follow anarchist thought in arguing that all statebuilding projects necessarily exert a pull on a society in these directions, given how fundamental they are to the constitution of the State. In the next section, I aim to substantiate this claim through demonstrating the way in which verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy serve as the instinctive, even unconscious, parameters shaping both the institutionalist and endogenous constitution approaches to the African State mentioned above. By employing anarchist theory to typologise Statist logics in this manner, we can then use the same framework to sketch out what an alternative would look like.

As one final caveat, while my analysis will follow anarchist theory in highlighting the hierarchical, oppressive features of these three Statist logics, I do not discount the advantages that State governance has over alternatives, which a wide range of policymakers see as worth the costs. For example, while the State's centralised coordination of political and administrative agency has orchestrated power towards vertical inequality, it has equally enabled the distribution of social goods and the mobilisation of economic forces on an unprecedented scale. In sum, while this project, given detectable failures within African State governance, places hope in the possibility that certain alternatives to the State might be normatively *preferrable*, and not just analytically *different*, it nevertheless adheres to the pragmatic view that all political systems come with trade-offs, and that no system on its own can alleviate all contradictions and tensions within one set of social relations without incurring

certain costs of its own. Nevertheless, verticality, alienation and unconditional association give State power its distinct character, for good or ill, and it is these dynamics we now explore.

2.4 Anatomising the African State: Verticality, Alienation and Unconditional Legitimacy

2.4.1 Verticality: The Structure of State Power

States, unlike acephalous and confederated forms of social organisation, centralise power within a singular source of authority, even if such power is conditionally lent to certain subsidiary actors within an administrative hierarchy (Poggi 1990, 22). Practically, what this entails is that any State deemed functional is expected to possess the primacy of power necessary to determine the 'rules of the game', something which is guaranteed through a monopoly (or at least preponderance) of the legitimate use of force, as the famous Weberian dictum postulates. Furthermore, unlike various personalistic regimes, centralised State power does not exist merely as a superior or exalted part of society, but claims to be fundamentally extracted from society, a part that stands in for the whole, as the trustee responsible for overseeing the welfare of the collective (Chowdhury & Duvall 2014, 196-7). State power's structure, then, following Ferguson & Gupta (2002), can be characterised through the notion of 'verticality', a metaphor of spatial elevation in which the modern State is felt to stand above society, managing social affairs in a 'top down' manner, in contrast to 'grassroots' communities, which are seen to be '"below," closer to the ground, more authentic, and more "rooted"' (962; see also Scott 1999). Within such hierarchy of status, agents of the State, as Graeber (2007) puts it, take on an air 'somehow abstract, sacred, transcendent, set apart from the endless entanglements and sheer physical messiness of ordinary physical existence' (13).

When it comes to statebuilding in Africa, verticality is apparent in the way that democratic space and social rights are perpetually sacrificed to the imperatives of building State power. When the enjoyment of rights and democratic participation becomes dependent upon the stability and order that only the State can guarantee, statebuilders find themselves regularly forced to 'suppress certain forms of political expression in order to build the foundations for a stable and peaceful democracy,' fostering certain 'illiberal' tendencies at the heart of liberal statebuilding (Jahn 2007, 223; Paris 1997; Olonisakin, Ababu & Muteru 2017). As Srinivasan (2021) argues, at the policy level, this verticality—this reproduction of top-down power—is reproduced through the choices and trade-offs that statebuilding

projects confront, in which 'plural, unpredictable, contested, and often "inefficient" civil politics, when contemplated as an end of peace…works against the risk appetite of those who pursue order and stability in a statist and goal-oriented fashion' (63). This rationale goes a long way in explaining why statebuilding interventions in Africa, including the ongoing mission in Somalia, remain wedded to the goal of erecting national administrations able to exert top-down command and discipline on society, despite growing consensus that grassroots political bargains prove more effective in bringing about lasting peace (Ansorg & Gordon 2019; Chandler 2008; Reno 2019; Balthasar 2014; Brickhill 2010; Menkhaus 2018, 27).

Such perverse incentives can be seen in the role of the elite compact as the starting point of statebuilding, a political phenomenon which, in essence, enables power-brokers to both consolidate their position atop the hierarchy and determine the 'rules of the game', before other social actors are given a chance to influence political outcomes (Menkhaus 2018). Nevertheless, for those committed to State institutional reform, ceding determinant authority over the space of politics is the inevitable price to be paid for elite buy-in to the technical reforms required by statebuilding, such as adherence to the electoral process, thereby trading 'substantive' politics for concessions on 'the distributive aspects of the political' (Bakonyi 2018, 265; Menkhaus 2017; Cheeseman 2012). The knock-on effect of these concessions, however, as even Africa's democratic optimists admit, is granting elites the power to hold society hostage to their rule, as Cheeseman *et al.*'s (2019) conclusions regarding Kenyan electoral dynamics reveal: 'we should not underestimate the way in which elite pacts have underpinned the emergence of a more dynamic, competitive and democratic political system in Kenya, if only by preventing it from falling apart' (230). In other words, even the possibility of a democratic opening within State governance requires the prior acceptance of a vertical relationship between elites and masses, while also validating violence and coercive power as legitimate forms of political currency in substantiating claims to authority (Richmond 2013, 301-4). 'One may wish away the dimensions of power', writes Bendaña (2005) of the constraints on dialogue, participation and empowerment within liberal peacebuilding interventions, but 'the power structures tell us there is no alternative' (14).

For those emphasising the hybrid nature of African political orders, institutional pluralism has not precluded this tendency towards centralisation and verticality. Indeed, implicit within the hybrid statebuilding model is the idea that, at some point, the inherent instability of plurality will have to be contained and domesticated, in the name of containing

disorder, insecurity and desperation (Meagher *et al.* 2014, 2). In this view, order-making comes about precisely where multiple centres of power and agency are able to negotiate an end to antagonisms through a political settlement that consolidates coercive potential (Meagher 2012). Indeed, as Bakonyi (2013) recognises in relation to sub-national administrative structures in Somalia, any political order built on the personalised coercive power of competing big-men remains unstable and liable to violent power struggle, unless it is able to translate that power into 'stable structures of domination' based around 'supra-regional' governance and authority (285-6). This understanding of statebuilding can be detected within the 'political settlement' literature more generally, in which the goal is not to overcome the predation and rent-seeking of armed fiefdoms, but instead to regularise and centralise them through elite collusion, as a means to overcome conflict and fragmentation between these competing forces (De Waal 2009; De Waal 2015). In other words, when stability takes precedent over the type of political arrangement that is produced (such as its level of equality and inclusivity), then statebuilding becomes about consolidating hierarchies of power into a stable equilibrium—i.e., into an 'institutional structure that creates benefits for different classes and groups in line with their relative power' (Khan 2010, 20)—rather than altering them.

This is not to deny all power or initiative emerging from outside the ruling class, but only to recognise that, so long as the State is granted primacy of place in the stabilisation of society, subaltern agency will remain confined to working within, not against, this imperfect hierarchy of neopatrimonialism, rentierism and divide-and-rule politics. In fact, we see in the institutionalist literature not primarily a concern with directly accessible social power within civil society, but rather the *containment* and *restraint* of State transgression through neutral, mediating institutions. With the conceit that power has already been ceded to the powerful, the goal then becomes to coax, acculturate, shame and condition it into agreeing to certain limitations, such as respect for term limits, the expansion of electoral competition, and the moderation of corrupt practices (Cheeseman & Peiffer 2020; Dietrich & Wright 2015; Kaldor *et al.* 2020). So long as democratic action remains depoliticised in this manner, with questions of fundamental reorganisation of power and wealth ruled out, States will find little trouble assimilating such reforms to existing hierarchical relations (Ayers & Saad-Filho 2014, 600). For example, popular movements pursuing electoral change against a discredited regime are usually forced to tie their fortunes to an out-of-favour faction of 'recycled' politicians, while

civil society groups organising against State violence often find themselves relying on financial support and authority from the same international actors equally invested in building the military capacity of the State (Hassan 2020; Kaldor & Theros 2018; Chabal & Daloz 1999).

One powerful demonstration of the enduring nature of Statist logics of verticality, even where conscious efforts have been taken to mitigate them, involves cases of African federalism. Take Ethiopia, where the post-1991 constitutional model of ethnic federalism is so permissive of self-determination and autonomy as to license the secession of federal regions under certain circumstances (Abdullahi 1998; Bihonegn 2015). Despite these institutional innovations, however, the bureaucratic might of State institutions and the tight-knit organisational culture of the vanguard ruling party have enabled the central government to devolve authority and administrative functions to regional administrations 'without significantly altering power relations' between the centre and the peripheries (Samatar 2004, 1131), with Addis Ababa even extending its reach through the co-optation and integration of local intermediaries (Hagmann 2005, 528-532). As Bethke (2021) notes, 'the central government essentially monopolized control over revenues and spending of public funds, which deepened the financial dependence of regional governments, effectively impeding their self-determination rights'. It is no surprise, then, that, as tensions over the direction of leadership ratcheted up between the newly installed Abiy Ahmed regime and Tigrayan regional forces in 2020, formally devolved institutions offered few mechanisms for negotiation, and were instead swept aside by central State brinksmanship, assertions of sovereign prerogative, deployment of emergency powers and the criminalisation of opposition, ultimately precipitating civil war (Verhoeven & Woldemariam 2022, 18-22).

This pattern is not unique to Ethiopia, but, as Dickovick (2014) argues, is common across all major examples of African State federalism, in which 'de facto centralism [has] ensured the propagation of central state power, to the satisfaction of national elites' (557). Indeed, even in Somalia, where the central government is comparatively weak, elites at the national level have been blamed for 'the lack of true devolution of power', something which, according to Dahir (2021), 'fuels the argument that the federal model does not prevent power abuse in Somalia.' In sum, so long as centralised, vertical power remains the overriding conceit which any Statist politics must work around, African publics beholden to such top-down power will find little room to fundamentally challenge the domination, inequality and hierarchy that have become common across much of the continent. Moreover, as will be

explored later, when this raw vertical power is legitimised through a relationship of unconditional subjugation to the authority of the State—with no get-out clause or escape route—then the agency of non-State social groups is even more circumscribed.

2.4.2   Alienation

Next, we come to alienation, which concerns the way that political subjects *experience* power under the State. With verticality's gravitational pull drawing in power centrally, those on the other end of the spectrum find political activity increasingly dislocated from its immediate social contexts, and progressively determined by those occupying this expanding centre. Indeed, for Proudhon, 'political alienation' involves the individual 'making over his [*sic*] own powers of independent action to the state which he obeys', a notion which, in its positive form, chimes with Hobbes's own idea of how the sovereign is authorised (Vernon 1979, xvii; Gauthier 1999). As with the economic alienation described by Marx, political alienation is not necessarily (or primarily) the loss or suppression of power; labour power remains within the exploited class, just as social power remains latent amongst citizens (Kandiyali 2020, 562-71). Instead, what is alienated is the right, and capacity, to enjoy that power autonomously, to deploy it in the direction of one's choosing, with owners of capital expropriating the fruits of labour power, and the State refashioning social power to its ends of self-preservation and order. Prichard (2013), following Proudhon, describes alienation in precisely this manner, as not the actual transfer of power upwards, but its orchestration from on high: 'This collective force and collective reason[, once fetishised in the form of a State,] is then exploited by those who could best manipulate the symbolism of collective reason in order to rationalise collective force in their own interests' (104).

Within the logics of State rule, this estrangement of citizens from their power serves to make society as a whole more governable, through increased dependence on, and vulnerability to, the State. Moreover, as Scott (1999) and Koch (1993, 347) note, such governability is sustained through the production of subjectivities that reflect this dependence, in which individuals find themselves increasingly determined not by the intimate, complex relations they are enmeshed in, but through abstract classifications and categories that render them legible to the State. Social, political and economic life—pertaining to everything from resource distribution to rights—henceforth becomes increasingly determined by designations of inclusion and exclusion (based on behaviour,

identity, expression, etc.) beyond one's control. Such externally-defined social distinctions come to shape one's status, role and value in the nation-State division of labour, thus reinforcing hierarchy and inequality through the way in which some are granted the authority to exercise control over others, who are then duty-bound to show obedience and loyalty in return (McLaughlin 2007; Ranciere 2008). As such, whereas 'horizontal', 'face-to-face' engagement amongst communities nurtures opportunities for the exercise of reason, judgement, duty, deliberation and sympathy to guide social relations between individuals, within the State, the terms of engagement between citizens are primarily determined by the 'representative, anonymous, mechanical relationships' dictated by law (Cohn 2006, 210-11).

This alienation of one's immanent personhood from their political personhood is disempowering in a number of ways. First, in relegating the citizen-as-subject to the arena of depoliticised 'society' and away from spaces of authority and power, it distances individuals and their social referents from the mechanisms of decision-making. As Cohn (2006) writes, the '''constituted or transcendent power'' of [the] State…''cuts us off or separates us from our active power'' by instituting a mediating distance between ''the moment of decision'' and ''the act of its realization'' (205). Additionally, this political distance also serves to obscure the levers of power, by filtering judgements and their implementation through a vast organisational web, thereby denying political subjects the visibility and contestability in decision-making that is required for meaningful participation in political life (*ibid*, 213). It also serves to alienate the individual from their capacity to approach a particular instance of conflict or grievance through their own conceptions of justice, imposing instead an abstract, general standard of judgement (Ross 2019, x-xii). In short, Statist alienation cultivates disempowerment, which, in turn, cultivates dependence. As Landauer (2010) puts it, 'On the one side, we have the power of the state and the powerlessness of the masses, which are divided into helpless individuals…The entire system would vanish without a trace if the people began *to constitute themselves as a people apart from the state*' (214).

The African continent, with its amplified experience of colonial domination, has arguably suffered political alienation to an extent unrivalled elsewhere. In the present, while this alienation has continued to influence everything from Africa's global representation to its prevailing knowledge-production systems (Gabay 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013), its impact on postcolonial governance has been particularly consequential. Young (2017), for example, contends that 'the structures of a postindependence polity were grafted onto the robust

trunk of colonial autocracy' (33), even if, as Boone (2003) reminds us, an overemphasis on exogenous determinants of African State formation can blind us to the role of local power dynamics in shaping this trajectory. The fact that the African State 'was often imposed through colonial rule rather than internally generated' (Niang 2018, 3) has at times earned it a reputation as simultaneously invasive and remote, where 'imported institutions' remain 'disassociated from broad social interests of the segments of society who dwell in the traditional institutional space' (Mengisteab 2009, 184). The profound sense of estrangement this engenders is summed up by Mbembe (2001), who paints the picture of a present-day social reality in which 'the boundaries between production, extortion, and predation have been blurred. No one knows very clearly any longer what belongs to whom, or who has the right to what, still less who must be excluded and why' (50-1). As diagnosed within the anarchist literature, as power is increasingly appropriated and obscured, African societies increasingly lose the familiarity with social reality necessary to make sense or act.

The operation of alienating logics is most noticeable in the African State literature with regard to the evolving role of traditional authorities. The work of Mamdani (1996) and Ranger (2012) trace the colonial origins of the transformation of both authority and tradition to fit the prerogatives of a more expansive and centralised administration, including the new hierarchies, roles and avenues of political mediation created in the process. In the postcolonial environment, the co-optation of local political life by neopatrimonalist pressures expanded, with kinship-based and religious modes of dispute resolution, obligation, rights-claiming and affiliation increasingly tethered to modern forms of elite competition and predation (Mbembe 2001; von Trotha 1996, 80-90). As a consequence, ethnic identity has increasingly become a property to be instrumentalised and bartered in return for political advantage for some and survival for others, thus alienating cultural and kinship attachment from their local complexity and feeding them into larger struggles with higher stakes (Lynch 2015; Amone 2015, 136-9).

For scholars such as Chabal & Daloz and Bayart, as we have discussed, such processes are, by definition, not seen as alienating, as they are merely a reconfiguration and intensification of transhistorical, culturally-defined authority structures and power relations (Meagher 2006). On the other end of the spectrum, with the 'hybridity' model, for which spontaneous and self-regulating dynamics of power struggle, economic bargaining and negotiation thrust communities into institutional transformations beyond their control,

alienation is as inevitable as it is natural, and thus not something that one can take a normative position on or seek to overcome (Richmond 2015). In between are the institutional reformists, who primarily see the political fate of communities as dependent upon the matrix of choices that those with coercive potential are institutionally incentivised towards, thus largely divorcing non-elite actors from presumptions of agency in determining their political circumstances, but not necessarily seeing this as a problem, so long as the institutions that structure their life are productive, inclusive and protective, rather than predatory and exclusive (Bates 2008; Cheeseman 2018).

What the institutionalist approaches overlook, however, in their attempt to distinguish between empowering and disempowering *types* and *designs* of State institutions, is the alienating disempowerment inherent to the State form itself. Conventional statebuilding, as Bakonyi (2018) argues with reference to local governance reforms in Somalia, places 'expertise, knowledge, and agency in the hands of experts', who use this power to 'speak for, act upon, and act in the interest of the powerless' (266). We can detect this disempowerment in the critiques and failures of the liberal rights regime as it is applied to African contexts, in which the problem is not only the failure of specific governing regimes to enforce rights protections, but the more fundamental encumbrance that the State must necessarily serve as the arbiter of rights in the first place, thus alienating the power to enforce and declare judgement over specific rights cases to the ruling apparatus (Douzinas 2007, 100-1). Nyamnjoh (2004) captures what is lost in this process of State authorisation, arguing that citizenship rights are 'predicated on the assumption of no intermediary communities or loyalties between the state and the individual as an autonomous agent,' thereby stripping the individual of many layers of communal political association (33). The effects of this alienation from one's inherited solidarities can be seriously disempowering and depoliticising, by 'cauteriz[ing] communal struggles of the land-hungry, women and workers [,among others,] by suggesting that such struggles are redundant since their objectives will be met eventually through the enforcement of individual rights' (Kanyongolo 2004, 77).

In summary, the various scholarship on the African State, while differing in perspective over *what kinds* of alienation are acceptable and/or transformable, all conform to the idea that alienation as such is unavoidable. Indeed, this is correct, to the extent that it seems impossible to imagine a political system completely devoid of mediation, representation and indiscriminate regulations. However, the alienation characterising State rule goes beyond

human fallibility and institutional imperfection; instead, it is a defining feature of how power is organised and experienced, in which hierarchies of domination and exploitation are reinforced through the self-reproducing logic of selective empowerment and disempowerment. As anarchist theory argues, and the Somaliland Social Covenant model suggests, however, alternatives to this logic exist, particularly among political arrangements that derive their social power from intimate forms of relationality.

2.4.3   Unconditional legitimacy

Within the theoretical paradigm of the State, the State exists as the simultaneous manifestation of dual personas: the government and the sovereign. While the former, as the sum total of laws, institutions and actors—i.e., the 'regime'—is historically particular, the latter, as the embodiment of the political community as such, is timeless and universal (Walker 1990, 10). This dissonance has implications for respective conceptions of legitimacy, with the legitimacy of any specific regime subject to judgement and conditional on meeting certain criteria, whereas the legitimacy of the sovereign, as the prior political grounding for any specific regime to fill, is ultimately treated as incontrovertible, in the sense that its authority is tied to its facticity rather than any external criteria—if the sovereign is able to demonstrate and reproduce its unrivalled (sovereign) power, then it is authentic (Philpott 1995, 355-6). Seen in another way, the sovereign, as the ultimate guarantor of the Law of the State as such, must retain the right to exceed the confines of the law in order to preserve it (as is the case during a 'state of emergency'), and thus, in the last instance, is not bound to whatever legalistic or moral limits a society might uphold in assessing righteousness, justice or the good (Agamben 2005; Derrida 2005). As such, what sets State rule apart from voluntary association and other impermanent forms of political coexistence is that such rule, in being 'unconditional', is seen as legitimate *prior to* its performance or social acceptance, rather having its legitimacy be *conditional upon* its performance or social acceptance.

These distinctive attributes of State sovereignty produce a fundamental imbalance of power in relations between the State and society, with the qualitative incommensurability of status between the two spheres built into the 'social contract' that is seen to bind them (Proudhon 2011, 29; Bakunin 1973, 68). For, what is distinct about the State-society social contract in relation to, say, an interpersonal contract, is that the former requires the prior alienation of power and agency to one of the parties (the State) as a precondition, thereby

granting that party, and *only* that party, the capability to ensure enforcement of the contract (Gauthier 1988). As a historical phenomenon, this precondition of ceded power is detectable in the fact that most (if not all) States came into being with little consideration paid to what the populations in question thought about it—some were forged through war, others through the mutation of absolutism into secular domination, and most with the majority of the population condemned to disenfranchisement, if not slavery, servitude or colonial rule (Sartwell 2018, 469). Rather than consent, then, it is obedience that glues the Statist social contract in place, with political legitimacy therefore left to make a virtue out of such compliance. As a result, whatever affordances it guarantees to the autonomy of the individual, the State ultimately imposes an overriding demand that each citizen has 'a duty to obey the laws of the state simply because they are the laws', regardless of their desperation or grievances, up to and including to the point of death (Wolff 1998, 18).

International statebuilding interventions in African contexts have reproduced this uneven distribution of power and obligation in their own efforts to establish and enforce social contracts. For example, within the growing body of World Bank and UN policy-making guidance on the topic (see Cloutier *et al.*, 2021; NOREF/UNDP 2016; UNDP 2015; WBG/IEG 2019), the social contract, while setting out 'mutual roles and responsibilities' that are deemed to emerge from 'citizen-state bargaining', reinforces the disparity between State agency and decision-making, which is deemed to be authoritative, and societal influence, which is deemed to affect decision-making and executive outcomes indirectly, by placing constraints on State actions (Cloutier *et al.*, 2021, 23-38). In other words, although the social contract, as conceived of by the World Bank or the UN, places obligations on the State to deliver effective governance and protect citizen rights, the fact that these obligations are predicated on the State's prior monopoly on violence and control over resources and their distribution, validates the State's claim to supremacy through the very act of responsibilisation. In short, while the particular ways in which the State wields power and authority (over law, taxation, punitive justice, etc.) is open to scrutiny, the prior, more abstract question of whether the State requires the *unconditional and unadulterated right* to wield power and authority is beyond questioning (Schouten 2013; Leonard & Samantar 2011; Robinson 2022; Prichard 2019).

Such unconditional legitimacy is built into the institutionalist approach, which necessarily takes the existing arrangements of State power and authority as given, and then

seeks to maximise room for political manoeuvre within those parameters. Cheeseman (2015), for example, despite holding up electoral democracy as the best hope for change within the State context, readily admits that, while States may rely on citizens to hold up their end of the contractual bargain and vote their support, it is far from certain that such compliance will be reciprocated in the form of 'economic dividends': 'while political competition may create opportunities for formerly excluded groups to challenge the status quo, in the short-term democracy is as likely to reflect the existing social and political state of affairs as it is to transform it' (197). And, while upholding the electoral bargain has proven unreliable as a source of social power, it has, in Cheeseman's own estimation, been much more successful at legitimising, both internationally and domestically, the State and the status quo it benefits from (Cheeseman & Fisher 2021, 104). For Boone (2018), also from an institutionalist standpoint, behind the idealised promises of mutual accountability, the social contract serves a much more conservative function—acting as a practical social instrument for moulding 'the prevailing distribution of forces and interests' into a set of 'basic rules that structure relations between rulers and ruled in ways that help produce political order' (204).

Chabal & Daloz (1999) espouse a similar understanding of the unequal relationship between the political elite and their supporters, viewing legitimacy as based on a 'logic of clientelistic reciprocity', in which the public is willing to submit to authority so long as their 'expectation' of 'shared spoils' is met (36-7). While providing the façade of conditionality and mutuality, in which the authority of any particular big man is subject to his ability to deliver certain benefits to his constituency, this moral economy is characterised by the underlying acceptance of elites as a class of select 'gatekeepers' whose own wealth and status entitle them to sit atop this pyramid of wealth distribution in the first place (Wai 2012, 30; Bayart & Ellis 2000). Richmond (2013) calls this dynamic the 'illiberal social contract', in which 'state resources are used in various ways to support elites and to buy off citizens, preserving local patterns of power responsible for state formation itself' (301). In other words, neopatrimonialism, in 'naturalising' the idea that the trickling down of wealth is a form of culturally-mandated beneficence rather than political extortion, treats the big man phenomenon as an unconditional feature of African politics rather than a pragmatic adaptation to man-made inequalities (Englebert 2009, 54/92). Weigand (2015) sees a similar disjuncture between legitimacy and active social consent in the hybridity and 'local turn' literatures, in which normative judgements regarding the representativeness and ownership

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of a given political order are seen to derive from institutional type (those plural and/or indigenous), rather than from the social relations they engender (12-3).

Ultimately, the parameters afforded individuals within a State to construct a political system that rings true to their notion of legitimacy are highly constricted. With certain relations of ultimate power and authority—such as the 'monopoly of coercive force'—deemed settled before individual agents are invited to begin shaping their circumstances, many of the most important decisions regarding the nature of social relations are taken off the table before negotiations regarding any State-society contract get underway. In other words, while subaltern actors can challenge the validity and acceptability of any *particular* law or judgement, what they cannot do is call into question the legitimacy of the Law as such, at least not without being credibly accused of being a criminal, terrorist or spoiler (Hagmann & Korf 2012). It is in this sense that State legitimacy can be seen as unconditional, and thus of a qualitatively different type from the conditional legitimacy of voluntary associations.

2.4.4 A word on existing non-State alternatives

As touched upon in Section 2.2.2, alongside the 'Africa works' literature is a second approach to endogenously constituted African polities that rejects the State altogether. Since the analysis presented above only pertains to models that adopt the State as their basic structure, these alternative, non-State forms of political association were excluded from the discussion. That said, I would argue that these approaches, which range from Mbembe's African cosmopolitanism to various resurrections of precolonial communitarianism, themselves risk reproducing logics of verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy so long as they fail to offer *alternative social relations of power* to those of the State. In other words, if a theory's response to the oppressive tendencies of Statist power is to devise an alternative that seeks to evade, deny or erase power altogether, rather than confront it, that theory will inevitably fall into the trap of ceding the grounds of power to the very forces of oppression that it seeks to counteract (Bendaña 2005, 14; Menkhaus 2018, 26-7).

While a full analysis of these proposed non-State African alternatives is beyond the scope of my current study, I admit to detecting within some of the most prominent examples of these alternatives (see Shilliam & Rutazibwa 2018, 4; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 3; Lanfranchi 2019, 192; Mbembe 2003, 21; Comaroff & Comaroff 2016, 57) a conception of power which offers little room for appropriation by subaltern actors. In placing power distinctly on the side

of coloniality, necropolitics, command and predation, these theories deprive power of its character as a field or property that any social agent might appropriate towards an indeterminate number of ends, and instead reduces it to a single-minded and self-reproducing logic that embeds all it encounters in its structures of domination and discipline. In other words, while they correctly diagnose power as responsible for reproducing, more than addressing, inequality, supremacy and exclusion, I worry that the most radically intriguing of alternative approaches swing the pendulum too far in the other direction, relegating the scope of subaltern agency to those spaces at the territorial, structural or cultural margins which power has not yet infected. Moreover, while recognising that such margins provide many of the seeds of fluidity, promise and creativity from which alternative modalities of social life might be cultivated, I argue that they can only emerge to challenge existing State relations if they are able to contend with power both internal to their movement and found within the larger political context. In the final section of this chapter, I use anarchist theory to gesture towards how such power arrangements might look, before using the rest of the study to demonstrate how the Somaliland Social Covenant, as an example of horizontal, intimate and conditional power dynamics, offers a potential real-world manifestation of the kinds of social power necessary to counteract State power.

2.5 Conclusion: towards a non-State power dynamic

In detailing the convergence of various approaches to African statebuilding around these three irresistible tendencies of State power, the question then arises: is transcendence of such tendencies possible, or are verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy merely the price a society has to pay for the widespread maintenance of stability, order and security in the modern era? In search of answers, we turn to anarchist theory, whose usefulness in dissecting the inner-workings of State power can also aid in conceptualising alternative possibilities beyond it. For, in challenging the view of the State as a neutral, inevitable backdrop upon which all modern politics must operate, and reframing it as a particular configuration of power useful in legitimising certain hierarchies and exclusions, the possibility is restored that society might overcome this artificial condition and assert its capacity for self-governance. As Lynteris (2013) argues, the State 'functions as an apparatus of capture of the potentialities of social relatedness. What it encloses is no less than the capacity to be social, i.e. to engage in a reciprocal and convivial worldmaking'. Having now pried open these

analytical closures, we can proceed to sketch out what alternative potentialities of social relatedness might be realisable.

It would be naïve, however, to assume that this latent potential for spontaneous self-organisation, once liberated from the yoke of the State, would erupt automatically, like steam released from a pressure valve. As history from Jacobin France to the Arab Spring has shown, the collapse of a State or regime does not lead to the pure negativity of the 'power vacuum', but instead redistributes power along much more fragmented, uneven and unruly lines, in which the most disciplined surviving pockets of organised violence—such as the military or the revolutionary vanguard—hold the upper hand (Achcar 2020, 6-7; Tackett 2015, 96-120). Building non-State alternatives thus does not primarily involve transcending, evading or annulling power, but rather reconfiguring power, through 'a re-calibration of forces' such that no single actor is afforded the upper hand (Prichard 2013, 92). As long as 'force [remains] central to politics', as Prichard reminds us, then alongside the relative disempowerment of domineering forces, liberty involves the equitable 'empower[ment of] social groups', so that a government-by-imposition is rendered impossible, and social actors instead have little choice but to build governance co-constitutively through consent and compromise (*ibid*, 136).

What type of political arrangement makes a virtue out of such fragmentation of power, especially with the spectre of non-State chaos and conflict looming large in the background? Scott finds expression for an alternative, anarchist power dynamic in his notion of 'mutuality without hierarchy,' in which social actors of relatively equal status and wealth find value in 'informal cooperation, coordination and action', provided that such equality instils trust that the common fruits of such cooperation will be shared fairly—i.e., that they 'believe, legitimately, that the preservation of civic order is in their interest' (Scott 2012, 122; Scott 1999, 281-2). That is to say, 'voluntary, reciprocal relationships between free and equal parties' (Graham 2018, 38) can emerge when social relations are organised around a favourable balance of equality and freedom, such that relative equanimity in power and resources ensures that each stakeholder is free from the threat of domination by another, and that this very freedom allows each stakeholder to hold their counterparts accountable in a way that ensures such equivalencies are not unsettled.

In the remainder of this study, I focus on one particular version of what these reconfigured power relations look like in practice—those shaping the Somaliland project—using as a reference point the typology of State power logics identified here. I name this

alternative power configuration the 'Somaliland Social Covenant', and spend the next chapter detailing how it became embedded within Somaliland's political foundations through the territory's various peace agreements. It is at that point that we can begin answering the research question, through identifying the specific non-State (i.e. Covenantal) logics of power that have influenced, and continue to influence, how the Somaliland political project functions. In other words, just as it is possible to trace the ways in which State verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy have altered the course of Somaliland's post-conflict reconstruction, so too are we able to trace the ways that the Social Covenant's non-State power logics—those of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association—shape the types of agency, subjectivity and relationality that Somalilanders are able to draw from in pursuing their socio-political goals.

Over the course of this chapter, I have shown that various attempts to transform African State politics for the better have, despite their different understandings and ambitions, fallen back on a similar set of logics serving to reinforce hierarchical, privileged and estranging modes of rule. In utilising anarchist theory as an analytic tool to identify these patterns, we are better equipped to devise a way beyond them. I aim to do this not by theorising or investigating potential 'anarchist forms of governance,' but instead by seeking out social relations that operate on different patterns and imperatives, using the lessons of anarchist thought as one guide amongst many. The Somaliland Social Covenant, as a non-State political arrangement that exhibits certain promising features and embodies certain promising principles, is my chosen avenue into this exploration, which unfolds over the next several chapters, first through an explication of the Social Covenant as analytical 'ideal-type', and then, with the presentation of three case studies, as a real-world political force.

Chapter 3: The Social Covenant

In 1991, through circumstance and volition, the Somaliland people embarked on an experiment in self-initiated governance that would diverge substantially from the fundamental logics of State politics outlined in Chapter 2. In what follows, I provide a skeletal model of this experiment, what I call the 'Somaliland Social Covenant', which will be fleshed out in subsequent chapters. This model identifies an underlying configuration of Covenantal power constitutively distinct from, and ultimately antithetical to, the vertical, alienated and unconditional power dynamics of the State—based on logics of power that I classify respectively as 'horizontality', 'intimacy' and 'conditional association'. The three logics comprising the Social Covenant present Somaliland's various clan stakeholders with a means to activate and deploy their social power without reference to the State, enabling them to shape the Somaliland project's political evolution in ways that operate alongside State-based forms of power and influence.

At its core, the 'Social Covenant', as a concept, simply represents a political compact between multiple actors of relatively equal stature over how to coexist peacefully, as guaranteed by adherence to a set of conditional arrangements for cooperation on certain governance functions. In the case of Somaliland, where a Social Covenant was forged between major clan groups, these conditional arrangements included collective security guarantees, vows to address harms caused across communities, respect for each other's autonomy, and fair distribution of stakes in all governance arrangements and wealth sources collectively produced. As argued in the Introduction, I distinguish the Social Covenant from the more commonly deployed concept of the 'social contract', given the latter's connotation as a prescribed relationship between State and society, and an implicit legitimisation of the prevailing political order, however inclusive and desirable that status quo might be. With the Social Covenant, on the other hand, what I am describing avoids any presupposition of the existence of State and society, and instead looks to a specific set of political engagements through which non-State actors produce new ways of living together. For Somaliland, this creation of something new came as a result of its post-conflict peacebuilding efforts (1991-1997), in which practical, short-term arrangements for avoiding open conflict grew into a self-

sustaining set of political logics, which not only preceded, but subsequently withstood, processes of statebuilding.

In order to advance an overarching, generalised picture of the Social Covenant, this chapter will present the Social Covenant in an 'ideal-type' form, introducing the 'set of essential qualitative features'—in this case logics—'which, when combined, constitute' the Social Covenant as 'a logical whole' (Balzacq 2015, 103; Weber 2011, 98-102). As Eliaeson (2000) notes, constructing social phenomena in an ideal-type form does not, at its best, entail offering up an idealised, reductive, abstracted or unidimensional picture, but instead involves partaking in an 'intensification' of certain features for the purposes of enhancing 'causal understanding' (246). At stake, then, is not the abandonment or sacrifice of empirical groundings for the sake of causal and analytical simplicity, with the author's predesignated impressions of the context imposing itself deductively on top of raw material realities, but instead the construction, out of the social practices of Somalilanders and the interpretation of these social practices by some of these same Somalilanders, of an analytical artifice that captures the coherence of various interacting, interrelating and causally-linked social fragments. In order to assemble the Social Covenant out of a diversity of social fragments, this chapter draws upon the interpretative analyses of my Somaliland interlocutors, whose insights are brought in as quotes which, rather than providing empirical evidence for my claims (that will come later, in the case study chapters), serve as guides and collaborators in the co-production of the Somaliland Social Covenant ideal-type model.

All told, while temporarily placing to one side some of the richness, complexity and idiosyncrasy of modern-day Somaliland's social context, what this chapter seeks to do by way of the ideal-type is to set out, in the most streamlined and clear terms possible, the general dynamics of the Social Covenant, and then leaving it up to the case study (empirical) and analytical chapters that follow it to reintroduce this richness, complexity and idiosyncrasy. Indeed, the very structure of the entire thesis, with the general (ideal-type) model (Chapter 3) preceding and being complemented by the more specific (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), and then synthesised in the subsequent analysis chapter (Chapter 7), represents a conscious analytical choice, which asks of the reader to view the various elements in relation to each other, and to trust that as they progress the various pieces eventually fall into place.

In other words, taken on its own, this chapter can only but present an (empirically informed) abstraction—one that needs to be understood from the outset, as a frame of

reference from which the specificities and the layers of the social context coalesce around—which requires the subsequent sections of the thesis to bring to life in all its three-dimensionality. Like all analytical choices, this approach came with certain trade-offs, however, in that it put the boldest claims regarding the coherence of this system out in front, leaving the full substantiation and fleshing out of such claims to the end. However, to the extent that the Social Covenantal logics presented in general form in this chapter are able to be located and ascertained in an embodied (i.e. socially actualised) form within the accounts of the case studies, the reader is thereby presented with ample opportunity to test out and validate the claims to be made in what follows below. It also bears noting that the Somaliland Social Covenant, insofar as it is conceived of as a set of particular social relations rather than a totalising structure, can and does exist alongside the State as a parallel force. In such a dual system, the same political actors may assume roles or pursue practices in both domains at different times, and its subjects may be pulled in multiple directions as a result of the multi-layered nature of the social body. These dynamics require an ontology that recognises the indeterminate nature of social power, as a property and potentiality appropriated by agents in the service of manifold ends, rather than simply as an all-consuming, self-reproducing and single-minded phenomena that structures the entirety of agents' lived experiences. In describing the emergence of the Covenant, I will demonstrate how the decentralised distribution of power produced conditions conducive to inter-clan compromise around a set of peaceful social relations, and how these resulting relations themselves preserve the autonomous power of clan constituencies vis-à-vis the State. To this end, in what follows, I will justify the concept of the Social Covenant as a useful and appropriate descriptor for Somaliland's peace compact, first by demonstrating the social conditions (i.e. power relations) that made it possible, and thereafter by articulating the ways in which Somaliland society exploited these conditions of power to produce something new: a self-determined, indigenous form of governance.

3.1   Precipitating conditions: power dynamics favourable to the Social Covenant

Living under the strong central government in Mogadishu had restricted the agency of the Somaliland communities in the north, especially after General Siad Barre came to power in 1969. Not only did the top-heavy executive and party structures disproportionately

exclude members from *Isaaq* communities, but the wider structure disempowered the general population across clan lines in restricting political, economic and social life to unelected and non-participatory central command structures (Lewis 2011). Power emanated downwards and outwards from the presidential compound in Mogadishu, and while the country was too vast and disparate, and State institutions too underdeveloped, for substantial social control and social engineering, the security and intelligence services were pervasive enough to prevent rival pockets of power forming within Somali territory (Africa Watch 1990). As such, Somalilanders found it impossible to determine their own political destiny or enjoy practical freedoms so long as the Siyad Barre regime remained, and the SNM rebellion became the only option.

This rebellion, of course, helped precipitate the disintegration of the central State, and with it the top-down power structures that dominated Somaliland's social life. Military forces retreated and governing institutions were abandoned, while the basic social patterns that had constituted life up to that point collapsed through mass killings, displacement and destruction (SCPD 1999, 62; Interview #58). This 'rupture' (Hoehne 2016, 1381), while generally, and rightly, viewed through its catastrophic, genocidal dimensions, was also the successful culmination of a decade-long 'war of liberation' against military occupation (Interview #49). As such, alongside mourning and despair, there also existed a tinge of the 'heady optimism' that accompanies newly-won freedom (Omaar 1994). For one civil servant, capturing a feeling shared by many *Isaaq* at the time, liberation will be remembered as a moment of 'euphoria and excitement', with independence day as a moment when 'we were reborn' (Interview #187). For those looking out over that uncertain horizon, 'everything was new,' and this 'new dawn' or 'fresh start' in self-governance offered fertile ground for 'an experiment of freedom…and of living together in peace' (Interview #85; Interview #115; Interview #23).

Without romanticising this period of destruction and chaos, it is worth viewing these eulogistic recollections as pointing to the political openness and possibility that this disruptive historical juncture equally provided. In particular, as will be explored here, it is important to fully make sense of the ways in which the collapse of the State in Mogadishu fundamentally altered power relations, allowing previously subordinated actors to assume a measure of self-determination. In recognising this mix of possibility and peril, we avoid reducing State degeneration to total 'failure' or 'lack', and can instead look to the way agents responded to their new circumstances to fashion something wholly new. These shifting dynamics can be

best understood through charting the changing nature of power relations sequentially, as the Somaliland people first saw the dissipation of Barre's sovereign State power, then experienced the failure of any alternative hegemonic power to assert itself, before ultimately contending with a relative balance of power between clan actors, thus setting the stage for the forging of a new political settlement between these equivalent clan forces.

3.1.1 Dissipation of Sovereign Power

With the fall of the regime in Somalia, not only was a leader deposed and a system of governance annihilated, but the very phenomenon of sovereign power collapsed. With the dismemberment of the cult of Siad Barre, no heir-apparent to the fallen government presented itself, creating a political field that was open and fluid. Despite being strong enough to endure and outlast the regime's last gasps of terror, the SNM was in no position to fill the resulting governmental void by imposing its own order. First, the Movement was not operationally set-up to attempt to install a regime built on force or strongman politics: 'the civilian leadership, the democratic practices, the lack of external sponsors and the formal role of elders meant that no warlords emerged from the ranks of the SNM' (Bradbury 2008, 72). Secondly, the structure and coherence of the SNM was also too loose and diverse to remain intact following the disappearance of the common enemy, resulting in a situation in which 'real military or political control by official SNM structures' became 'erratic and dispersed,' and much territory ended up 'controlled by roaming clan militias' (Renders 2012, 88; Lewis & Farah 1997, 370). As one former minister put it, 'When the SNM defeated Siad Barre, they were not an organised body. They were just a collection of clan forces supported by the clan of their area and lead by a general from that specific area. It was what crippled the government [formed in Burao], and it led the country into a civil war that lasted over two years' (Interview #267). These armed clashes, which pitted SNM factions against each other as well as against non-*Isaaq* populations, and alienated the Movement from local constituencies, created a situation in which the SNM's transitional administrative structures found themselves too weak 'to carry out its transition tasks', thus creating a 'political vacuum' (Bobe 2017, 81).

Ideologically, the very boundaries of where formal authority lay became an open question, with populations split over whether the territory had a place within a future Somali State, or whether the only option was to declare independence and go it alone (Interview

#61). The abrupt collapse of the Somali state had come as a shock, and its downfall had derailed the SNM's primary objective of capturing and then democratising the government in Mogadishu. While political leaders from Somaliland initially held out some hope that a power-sharing arrangement could be reached with the other anti-Barre rebel movements in the south, by the time of the Burao Conference in mid-1991, the descent of the Somali capital into internecine violence had soured the prospects of resuscitating a Somali State in the eyes of many, while generating enthusiasm for the prospect of Somaliland independence, particularly amongst the *Isaaq* (Hansen & Bradbury 2007, 464). As such, when participants in the Burao Conference declared Somaliland's return to independence from Somalia in May of 1991, the decision came about not as part of a deliberate political programme, or as 'something that was premeditatedly decided on' (Interview #49), but rather as 'a response to a particular set of events and to public pressure, without benefit of planning or careful consideration' (Bradbury 2009, 82-3; Interview #58). In the absence of 'ready-made plans for post-war administration' (Balthasar 2014, 6), the SNM found itself unprepared to take on the mantle of ideological or political lodestar, and unable to impose a vision of order.

This absence of *de facto* authority and hegemony enjoyed by any political aspirant was matched by a lack of external legitimacy. As is well documented, Somaliland forged its peace with a negligible degree of foreign involvement, which created incentives for powerful actors to seek legitimacy locally, by drawing from local support and resources (Bradbury 2009, 82; Pegg & Kolstø 2016; Eubank 2012; Johnson & Smaker 2014). Such dependence empowered the Somaliland population with a means of accountability with which to exert pressure towards peace rather than particularist gain. What is less discussed is the impact this had in disassembling concentrations of legitimate power altogether, of negating the political space conventionally occupied by the sovereign. Whereas the international recognition of a faction or institution as the representative of the nation-state inevitably endows that entity with some semblance of supreme authority, creating an alluring axis of power around which aspirants converge and compete, in the case of Somaliland, peacebuilding took place in a situation absent a sovereign. As one former minister argued, 'Somaliland is not a recognized county yet. We have to deal with issues differently because there is no powerful government that enforces the rules' (Interview #267).

So long as the international community reserved its diplomatic recognition for whoever might emerge atop the pile in Mogadishu, political actors from within Somaliland

would get no external support in legitimising a sovereign advantage from outside. Instead of being externally designated, sovereignty would have to be internally *constituted* (collectively willed into being). As one retired aid worker from Borama put it, describing the way in which authority was not *assumed* (in both senses of the word), but rather inclusively *produced*: 'The SNM was not a country. They were accommodated, appeased [by us, rather than submitted to]. [We, the non-*Isaaq*] said "yes, fine, take two years administration, nobody will take that from you. But, after two years, we will discuss our future thoroughly and frankly"' (Interview #272). As will be shown below, this assertion by Somaliland's constituencies of the conditional right to govern would shape the nature of the political order that emerged.

3.1.2 Emergence of balance of power

What emerged with the disassembly of central State rule was thus the splintering of power across numerous local actors, without any visionary, formidable force stepping up to subdue disorderly actors and monopolise power. As de Waal (2015) observes:

> In other cases of liberation movements in power, the ruling party has drawn on a combination of popular legitimacy derived from its standing as liberator…to continue in power to the detriment of democracy. The SNM did not have this capacity. Military commanders had lost the bonds of discipline, and the [SNM Central Committee] did not meet, so there was no prospect of them asserting military control. Theft and harassment by SNM militiamen, and their involvement in internecine conflicts, discredited them. (133)

Yet, despite this absence of coercive restraint imposed from on high, what followed was not wanton disorder, but instead a tentative and precarious stalemate, which allowed a different type of order to be built. Indeed, de Waal goes on to state that 'political order was created from the fact that the contending forces – military, civilian, commercial – were evenly matched…' (de Waal 2015, 133). If Statist theory tends to see centralised power as controlled and diffuse power as chaotic (see Angstrom 2008; Burgess 2017), what emerged in the case of Somaliland was a third option: a pluralist, non-hierarchical configuration of force, in which the latent threat of multidirectional violence served to cancel each other out—what we might call a relative *balance of power* (Interview #78; Bobe 2017). Among those navigating Somaliland's volatile political environment, such power relations were not immediately recognised, but became apparent as these actors tested the limits of their strength, finding that attempts to conquer others led only to destabilising backlash: 'If there had been

retribution, the war would never have ended, and there would have been no winner. You can't defeat a clan. Ultimately, they will consume you' (Interview #20). Such lessons have remained powerful, informing relations between the centre and periphery to this day: 'It is the nature of Somalis, if you try to suppress the Somali people by force you cannot win, that's my experience. So, if we say that Somaliland pumped a lot of military [force into the restive peripheries] and there is an occupation from Somaliland, that's absolutely a lie. You cannot live in a hostile area unless you have the support of the local people' (Interview #216).

As time went on, the realisation of the futility and impotence of military might, and its growing danger if left unchecked, fostered a willingness among the country's armed actors to cede ground and allow actors previously politically marginalised to devise a way out. By the time of the Borama Conference, then, the stage was set for the SNM to relinquish control and allow for 'a process led by clan elders rather than asserting its authority through force' (Richards 2020, 1071; Interview #85). This intervention by clan elders did not occur on the back of military power, but in the political space vacated by it. Nor, once initiated, did such efforts seek to occupy the space of power, but instead merely provided a platform from which all sides could participate and channel their efforts, power and resources toward the construction of a new political order: 'Clan elders did not necessarily ascend to executive state rule, but they mediated the formation and nature of the state and exerted a measure of political control over it' (Renders 2012, 87). In other words, these customary leaders, who commanded popular respect and influence but were unable and unwilling to translate that into formal political dominance of their own, served as a locus of governance, which defied the rules of statebuilding and sovereign power by divorcing social power (legitimised authority) from coercive power (the capacity for violence) (Arendt 1972). Indeed, the elders' soft power came from their very disavowal of hard power: 'people were traumatised by the Siyad Barre regime, so they wouldn't trust anybody with a gun. That is where the *Guurti* came into play' (Interview #120).

In this manner, power dynamics, rather than evolving towards either domination or violent competition, fostered a balance that served three productive functions. First, it granted society protection and recourse against the emergence of unequal concentrations of power. As Hassan-kayd (2020) documents, it was the very assurance that the SNM was in no position to dominate power unilaterally that convinced clan representatives to risk exposure to vulnerability by disarming and demobilising clan militias (80-4). To facilitate this organised

resistance of social actors to traces of domination, the social power of clan representatives combined with a more general popular distrust of tyranny, accumulated over the course of two decades of military rule, to mobilise against dictatorial pretences amongst its leadership when such pretences become too egregious: 'Every person in our society has the memory of dictatorship. The refusal of oppression and killings are what glue us together, as a result of our previous experience. The people look for dictatorial traits in any government and if they find them, they respond immediately' (Interview #89; also Interview #2).

Second, this balance of power also opened space for a politics based on bargaining and societal accountability (de Waal 2015). As Phillips (2020) notes, the fact that 'local power' was 'precariously…balanced between potential competitors,' and that Somaliland's political stakeholders all became conscious of this reality, mitigated against the 'complete exclusion of any politically significant clan/sub-clan group,' lest the excluded party were to lose a feeling of stake in the system and decide instead to fight against it (105/163). The absence of a monopoly of coercive power therefore forced different sides to confront each other as stakeholders with an equal right to sit at the negotiating table on all matters of collective interest, in the process cementing a link between particular (clan) interest and collective betterment. As one local think-tank documenting the early peacebuilding initiatives noted, what made them so inclusive and participatory was that 'there was no single party strong enough to wield undue political influence' (APD 2008, 21). Third, with arms and violence ruled out as deciding forces, other previously excluded actors were able to influence proceedings in a way not afforded in the past, with, for instance, 'pressure applied by women's groups for a greater involvement in the political process' resulting in 'the appointment of Somaliland's first female Minister' (*ibid*). In short, armed stalemate, in closing down the opportunity for the assertion of domination or unilateralism, forced groups to contend by way of argumentation, moral appeal, concession, compromise, lobbying, influence-peddling and financial inducements, a dynamic whose results we will trace next.

3.1.3 Summary

When the Somali State collapsed, then, it was not a 'power vacuum' that emerged. Certain forms of power were indeed erased, such as 'sovereign power', the presumed right and capacity to rule on behalf of a people through the mechanism of the State. However, for the most part, power was not extinguished but instead dispersed and reconfigured, with most

coercive force spread out across various SNM factions, clan militia groups and criminal outfits, and normative influence (i.e. legitimate authority) percolating in nascent form amongst traditional leaders. Such power was spread fairly evenly, conditions seemingly ripe for descent into a Hobbesian state of nature. Yet, the chaos of the post-Barre rupture proved to be more open and unanticipated, neither harnessed successfully by certain dominant actors nor dispensed indiscriminately in the heedless panic of competition, but coalescing around a felt need to regulate this power to the benefit of a multi-clan collective. This loci of power was therefore poised as a latent potential that might be rendered malleable in the hands of human agency, towards the construction of a new order. In the next section, we will trace how such latent power (or 'constituent power', as Negri [2009] classifies it), was indeed reappropriated towards the goal of constituting a novel system of governance, the Social Covenant.

3.2   Sketching out the Social Covenant: a conceptual model

In the previous chapter, anarchist theory granted insight into how a balance of power might be translated into collective forms of freedom and equality, so long as human agency intervened to convert these 'conditions of possibility' into reality. Having just described the process through which non-sovereign, decentralised and relatively balanced power dynamics emerged in the early days of the Somaliland experiment, the rest of the chapter will look at how Somalilanders transformed these circumstances into a new political system—that of the Social Covenant. This famously occurred through a six-year national reconciliation process based around successive multi-clan conferences, lasting from 1991 to 1997. The two best-known of these meetings were the Brotherhood Conference of Northern Clans, held in Burao in mid-1991, where Somaliland's independence was first announced, and the Borama Conference of 1993, at which a 'Peace Charter' of clan reconciliation and a 'National Charter' of inter-communal governance were agreed. At each of these conferences, traditional authorities, military leaders, politicians, businesspeople and civil society came together as representatives of their clans, first to address issues of immediate concern, such as ceasefires, property restitution and compensation, thereafter progressing to issues that reconstituted future power dynamics, such as demobilisation of militia and the formation of governance arrangements.

The agreements reached at these conferences have conventionally been viewed in terms of their direct outputs, whether the institutional arrangements set up (the *Guurti*, transitional executive committees, etc.), the powers authorised (mandates, term limits, etc.) or the thematic areas covered (security, restitution, etc.) (see Richards 2014 and Renders 2012, for example). This bundle of achievements is seen as constituting the emotionally straightforward, yet analytically vague, 'peace' and 'security' that Somaliland has enjoyed from the mid-1990s to the present, themselves precursors and building blocks of the State that would emerge after 2001. Through the proposed model of the Social Covenant, however, I seek to reconstruct both the social processes at work and their outcomes in a different manner, based not on the surface-level signs of change but on the underlying logics that made those changes possible, given the power dynamics, normative horizons and other contextually-specific factors that prevailed. I argue that, when taken together, these logics constitute a distinct, comprehensive, self-contained and self-reproducing system of social relations that not only perform the minimum tasks of restraining violence and instability, but address—albeit in an imperfect and incomplete manner—the fundamental political dilemmas faced by all aspiring political communities, regarding particularity and generality, plurality and unity, freedom and equality. The Somaliland Social Covenant is simply the name that I give to this particular articulation of social relations.

3.2.1 The Social Covenant, in brief

If the State is nothing but a set of particular social relations imagined as a (corporate) whole (Lynteris 2013), then so too is the Social Covenant. What distinguishes the State from the Social Covenant is thus not any distinction of genus, evolutionary stage, ontology or worldview, but instead merely the types of social relations they engender, and the social outcomes these structural differences produce. Owing to young Somaliland's pluralistic distribution of power and its lack of a designated, unitary authority, the Social Covenant could not emerge as a political system through hegemony, the preponderance of coercive force or externally imposed order. Instead, it would have to be developed collectively, via negotiation and agreement, and then be consecrated through the buy-in of all major organised social constituencies, in this case clans, whose relative autonomy and equality gave each of them a voice and a stake in any social relations manufactured.

Unsurprisingly, these particular background social conditions shaped the types of social relations on offer, ruling out certain options (such as the purposeful, centralised enforcement of law and order) while opening up alternative possibilities. Those Somalilanders involved in building peace and stability not only demonstrated their awareness of the opportunities and constraints they were dealing with, but managed to devise a particular set of mutual responsibilities and allowances between clans responsive to these opportunities and constraints. I group these various inter-clan responsibilities and allowances into three categories, which I call logics, based on the three different dimensions in which power is organised. 'Horizontality', the first logic, relates to the unmediated plurality of power, and the types of direct, multilateral engagement this fosters between the assemblage of evenly matched clan actors. 'Intimacy', the second logic, speaks to the forces pulling disparate clan actors together in collective enterprise in the absence of a unifying State actor to coercively bind them, and involves the deeply interpersonal and situated ways in which clans and individuals are implicated in each other's lives and futures. Lastly, 'conditional association', refers to the underlying conditionalities shaping this direct, multilateral engagement, in which each clan party, as a contributing stakeholder to the collective Covenantal system, retains the right and the power to divest from this system if its conditions for participation are not met.

In short, what emerges is a system of governance without a 'ruler'—when it comes to the Social Covenant, there is no 'right to rule' invested in any personage or entity, either individual or institutional. Instead, political decision-making, agency and other unadulterated functions of governance are invested directly in processes and acts: negotiated agreements related to specific relations between groups at specific times. The place of power is not something to be occupied permanently; power becomes a substance that is generated temporarily and contingently at times of crisis, and then dissolved when no longer operational. The Social Covenant is thus a political assemblage of groups based on association rather than domination. Such alternative logics directly contradict, and thus are unassimilable to, the logics of State-based rule, and, as a result, have produced insoluble tensions between Covenant and State within the make-up of Somaliland's present political order.

3.2.2   The historical evolution of the Social Covenant

The life of the Social Covenant can be separated into two periods: the pre-State era and the post-State era. During the first decade of the Somaliland experiment, from roughly

1991 to 2001, any semblance of central governance, whether domestic or externally imposed, was at first non-existent, and then, after the introduction of the National Charter, embryonic. Even as late as the constitution-ratification process, which would not be completed and voted upon until 2001, there existed trepidation across many corners of society that Somaliland was being unwelcomely 'catapulted from a clan-based to a political-party-based system', with the proposed presidential system seen as an abrogation of 'what we agreed previously', and a divergence from 'respect [for] clans' (Interview #115). Despite these protestations, the constitution passed through the transitional legislature by the smallest of margins (Interview #38), ushering in a period, from 2010 to the present, where Somalilanders find themselves embedded within dual sets of social relations, on the one hand 'represented as citizens by political parties' chosen through elections, and, on the other, 'represented as a clan by clan elders' selected through customary means (Interview #23). The resulting political order was therefore 'hybrid' in three meaningful ways: (1) incorporating institutions of both modern statecraft and of traditional authority; (2) endowing official government actors with parallel representative duties, towards both respective voting citizens and affiliated clans; and (3) building governance systems simultaneously downwards from artificial institutions of elite design (the National Charter, the State), and upwards from grassroots, practical measures of inter-clan coexistence (the Peace Charter, the Social Covenant).

Covenantal relations have therefore not disappeared with the emergence of the State, but in many ways have adapted. Take clan-based representation, for example. While horizontal inclusivity and equality were initially fostered through pluralistic participation in clan conferences, as these conferences progressed, efforts were made to entrench equitable clan representation within more permanent governance structures. As early as 1993, the nascent government, which included twin legislative bodies, was set up to ensure that seats were 'proportionally allocated to clans', creating, in the words of Bradbury (2008), 'a genuine multi-clan parliament', with 'non-*Isaaq* members [holding] a greater share of seats than they had in the legislature under British rule' (99). Together with the appointment of a *Gadabuursi* politician as Vice President and a *Harti* individual as Speaker of the House of Representatives, such measures served to reaffirm 'support for Somaliland' and increase 'stake in the state' amongst non-*Isaaq* clans (*ibid*, 100). As statebuilding has gained momentum, especially in the aftermath of successive elections and increased collaboration with international development partners, perceptions of inter-clan horizontal equality have become entwined

with formal State representation, as this derisive comment from a local lawyer makes clear: 'the only way [Somalilanders] define justice is through comparison to other clans; they compare the amount of ministers, directors and job positions their clan members hold and they go from there. Whether they have justice or injustice depends on where they stand in relation to others' (Interview #80).

At the same time, as will become clear throughout the case studies, while Covenantal relations may integrate themselves within the structural parameters of the State, they do not emerge unscathed, but are often debilitated and distorted in the process. Turning our attention again to representation, we find the individual's relation to their kinsfolk changing once mediated by the State, with clan (*qabiil*) transforming from a web of inherited reciprocal relations and responsibilities to one's community, into 'clannism' (*qabyalaad*), a 'discriminatory' marker of inclusion and exclusion filtered through networks of power and patronage (Interview #185 Interview #79; Interview #95; Interview #115). This politicisation of clan, as will be shown, is hardwired into the structure of Somaliland's liberal democratic governance model (what one interviewee described as 'democracy with the shirt of clan' [Interview #275]), with political parties building electoral coalitions out of clan alliances, and clan elders fastening themselves to the political machinery through playing the identity politics game. For one journalist, the intersection of State politics, self-interest and clannism is not hard to detect: 'when it comes to clannism and clan politics, some [individuals] take part in them more than others. Those who perpetuate hate and divide often have a [political] interest [at stake]. It's not the average person' (Interview #39). In sum, the increasing concentration of power and sovereign advantage within the State not only increases competition among the elite, but can alienate clan relations, the bedrock of Covenantal sociability, into instruments towards these competitive ends.

But despite these extremes, where the State either accommodates elements of the Covenant or swallows them whole, it is more accurate to see the two modes of relationality operating in unstable and disharmonious parallel to each other, as dual systems. For political subjects navigating this dichotomous field, the incompatible logics of the State and the Covenant offer both constraints and opportunities for action, with individuals drawing from each world at different moments, depending upon their interest at the time. All told, the tripartite logics of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association, while feeling the pressure of the State and its penchant for vertical relations, alienation and unconditional

legitimacy have equally managed to maintain their political saliency by motivating and empowering Somaliland's social actors to cut across, resist, integrate or circumvent such actions at certain times and within certain contexts.

3.2.3   The analytical framework: building the Covenant out of its component parts

Having sketched an outline of the Somaliland Social Covenant, the rest of this chapter will provide a more detailed picture of its component parts—the tripartite logics of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association. The remaining sections will take each logic in turn, first analysing how the logic functions within the Somaliland context, and thereafter detailing the process by which it came into being. Each section will not only describe how horizontality, intimacy and conditional association respectively shape the ways that Somalilanders, as members of clans, interact with each other socially and politically, but will also illustrate the various mechanisms employed by political agents in Somaliland to develop and reproduce those logics in the first place. By the end of the chapter, the reader should have a clear understanding of how the Somaliland Social Covenant, as a self-contained, self-reproducing system of social relations, operates, as well as of the types of power dynamics and normative processes by which it is sustained. As a guide, Diagram 2 illustrates the relationship of the Social Covenant model to its component parts.

A few caveats are worth noting here, first regarding the relationship between the functional analytical model of the Social Covenant I present here, and the complexity, diversity and unpredictability of social life in Somaliland when viewed from the standpoint of everyday contingencies. While I do not deny those complexities, nor see them as incompatible with the viability of social logics as such, I merely put them aside at this stage, so that the reader can view the Covenant in its most pronounced, coherent and socially relevant form, no longer concealed below the shadow of the State, where we as political scientists are usually trained to focus. In other words, given the common-sense ubiquity and self-evidence of the State as the only viable systemic game in town, any comparison between it and the Social Covenant requires first placing the two on equal normative standing by making the case for the Covenant based primarily on its merits. By recognising that the burden of proof in introducing any original paradigm lies in demonstrating its affirmative functionality in the face of inevitable knee-jerk scepticism, my justificatory strategy is to put the Social Covenant's 'best foot forward', and only then, after making the strongest case, complicate

matters by demonstrating the undeniable shortcomings and complexities at work. It is to the Case Studies that I have delegated this latter task, where the Covenant will be presented in all its intricate relations to the Somaliland State, flaws and all.

An additional cautionary consideration concerns the voices and perspectives I call upon in constructing this picture of the Social Covenant. While quoting from and referencing a wide variety of sources—mainly interviews, but also academic literature—in both articulating the Covenantal logics and demonstrating their social relevance, such sources, as I acknowledge in section 1.4.4, disproportionately come from the more 'elite' segment of society, although by no means exclusively. As such, what is presented below, while demonstrating a coherent and consistent imaginary that is detectable amongst a diverse multitude of actors, can, as a result of the limitations in terms of consultative scope, offer only an incomplete window into this phenomenon, one that could and should be broadened out through further research. For the purposes of the current study however, the representativeness of these views beyond the individuals consulted herewith, particularly in relation to the legitimacy of those conjuring up and reproducing the Social Covenant as a mechanism of power beyond the State, can be illustrated through the ways in which these perspectives concur with the practices of communities in actively turning to such practices during times of crisis, vulnerability and grievance (as will be substantiated in the three case study chapters). In short, the viability of the Social Covenant as a source of communal, non-'elite' empowerment is to be demonstrated not only through the interpretations of those interviewed, but through the everyday practices of communities in participating willingly and actively to futher such Covenantal processes, including through adhering to the resolutions that come out of conflict mediation initiatives.

Diagram 2: The Social Covenant, its logics and their component mechanisms
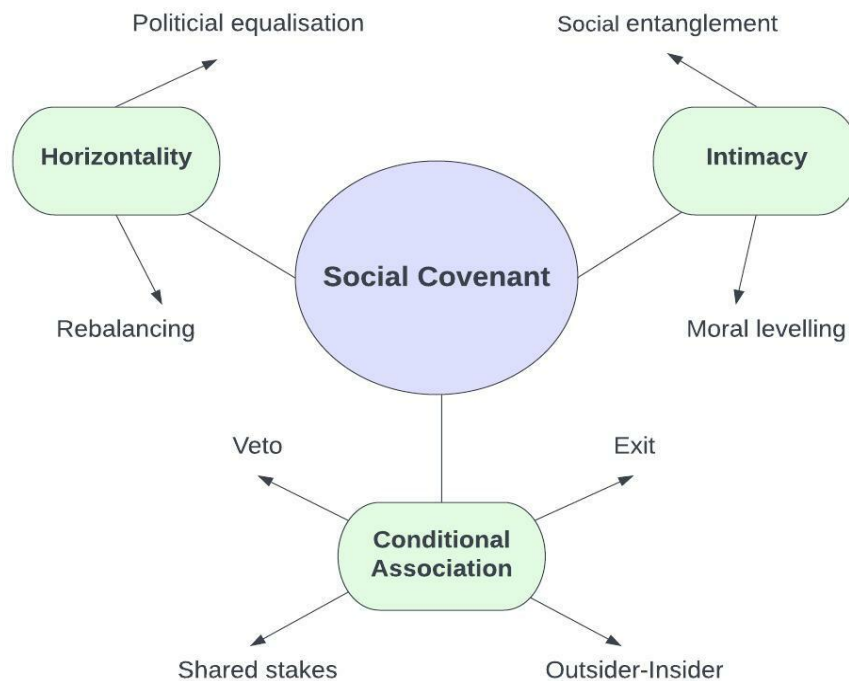
3.3 Horizontality: Direct association through levelling

3.3.1 What is horizontality?

Somaliland, one could rightly say, was a contract, or a marriage, among hostile clans. (Interview #115)

'Our power-sharing came from the ground...It is painful, it is slow. There is not a lot of finesse. But everything is negotiated here, everything. Everything was negotiated. It was not imposed from above. (Interview #220)

'Horizontality', as I touched upon in Chapter 2, is premised on the primary and direct engagement of Somaliland's various clans with each other, without the intervention of a higher authority under whose auspices or interests this engagement is to be subordinated, mediated or controlled. It is thus distinct from, and stands in opposition to, the verticality of State rule, in which power is concentrated centrally, and where agency and judgement are initiated from on high. It is founded on the belief that each constituent party of the Social Covenant—i.e. each clan—is a free and equal member of the collective, and thus has an equal and conditional stake in the protections or benefits the collective offers and achieves. A simultaneous autonomy and mutualism is thus maintained between the various independent clans, in which the forces that bind and those that enable separation are kept in tense

equilibrium, so as to avoid either consolidating clans into a singular entity or fragmenting them into competing, stand-alone enclaves. How this equilibrium is sustained will be described later, in the sections on 'intimacy' and 'conditional association'.

The horizontalist dynamic first took concrete form during the early days of the reconciliation process. Over the course of the Berbera, Sheikh and Borama Conferences of 1991-1993, clan representatives developed and refined the notion of '*ama dalkaa qab, ama dadkaa qab*', a directive in which 'clans took responsibility for events in areas controlled by them', not merely overseeing security and justice within their own community but promising to act in situations where one of their kinsfolk violated the security or justice of those outside their community (APD 2008, 53). In designating that 'each clan would be responsible for the peace of its territory', 'a very, very powerful' kind of 'collective responsibility, collective protection' was fostered, in which, in situations of murder, theft, banditry, rogue armed attack or other forms of grievous harm, 'you don't have to count on the police' (Interview #115). While such arrangements in some ways mirror those of a federation, what sets them apart, first and foremost, is that they were regulated and adhered to *in the absence of* a State, through direct, horizontal forms of accountability and reciprocity. Additionally, rather than depending on clear territorial delineations in demarcating clan jurisdictions, the traditional leaders tasked with upholding the agreement relied on lineage connections, often overlapping with loose, flexible settlement patterns, to determine where their responsibilities began and ended (Hoehne 2016).

At the structural level, what compelled these horizontal dynamics was the aforementioned relative equality of power between clans. On the one hand, relative parity ensured that no actor was so dominant that it could either ignore the concerns of others, or be insulated from the effects of events transpiring between others. At the same time, each party's respective trust in its own strength to resist the advances of others inspired confidence that its autonomy was not under immediate threat, thereby mitigating against defensive postures of skittishness or brinksmanship. In other words, all clan actors have come to realise that collective survival entails a baseline level of involvement in solving each other's issues and addressing each other's grievances, to avoid the risk of being sucked into the destabilising exploits of neighbours (Interview #43; Interview #147; Interview #267). As one prominent *Isaaq* politician described such dynamics:

We are willing to share everything with [the non-*Isaaq*], not because we are magnanimous. We won the war...[But, as they remind us] "you didn't defeat me you defeated Siyad Barre's army. If you wanted to fight, we would have fought for a long time." No clan ever gives up…They would have never relented to the SNM. So, it was in the interests of the SNM and the centre to accept peace with these people. (Interview #220)

Somaliland thus survives less as a singular 'government', in any classical sense of the word, and more as a voluntary association of members, a loose confederation involving cooperation based upon a limited set of conditions, the most paramount of which is maintaining peace between groups: 'Somaliland is a collection of clans that come together to share power', to quote one opposition politician from a peripheral clan (Interview #258). As such, while generally residing in separate neighbourhoods and regions, and largely taking care of developmental, economic and social affairs exclusively amongst their own kin, these relatively self-contained communities come together during times of crisis, when issues threaten to spill over into the public realm, such as major inter-clan disputes. At such moments when parties involved in friction are unable to handle things themselves, the next practical step is not to defer to a higher authority or vertical chain of central command, but instead an almost reflexive, horizontal self-mobilisation of the other communities bound by the Social Covenant, who treat it as their duty to lend their hand in maintaining the peace. As one local councillor from Burao boasted, 'When it comes to the whole country, the people are brothers from corner to corner. When something happens somewhere, whether it is us or some other people, we prefer that it is resolved, and will get involved in mediating the conflict. It is something that's ingrained in us Somalilanders. We like that peace happens everywhere' (Interview #96).

3.3.2   How has horizontality been developed and maintained? A lesson in political levelling

Somaliland, like all societies, produces rich and poor, celebrity and layman, well-connected and marginalised, and any number of other inequalities. Yet, in order to facilitate the kinds of parity required for political dialogue and justice to be worked out fairly amongst individuals and groups, mechanisms for actively levelling these imbalances, at least temporarily, have proved necessary—as critics of deliberative democracy know all too well (Lupia & Norton 2017). Below, we look at two techniques—political equalisation (4.1.1.1) and

rebalancing (4.1.1.2)—adopted by those forging the Social Covenant for neutralising power asymmetries to the greatest extent possible, so that agreement over peace could be reached with buy-in from all parties, and with little opportunity for particular actors to impose their desired outcomes. As Renders & Terlinden (2010) acknowledge, this levelling of the playing field transformed inter-clan dialogue into an '*arena* in which statehood was [to be] negotiated', allowing 'informal, clan-based consensus building and the careful balancing of representation along clan lines [to become] watermarks of the emerging hybrid political order from the start' (729).

3.3.2.1   Political equalisation

The elders were also key in matters of peace, because their involvement allowed conflicting parties to approach one another as clans, rather than as competitors for state power. This lowered the stakes temporarily setting aside the allocation of state power as an aspect of the conflict. (Renders 2012, 88)

While Somaliland's peace conferences were attended by various influential stakeholders, it was respected traditional elders who filled the void of authority vacated by armed actors, and determined proceedings. While negotiations certainly benefitted from the positive qualities of elders, their wisdom, experience and legitimacy, equally important was what their presence and oversight mitigated *against*: namely, the macro-level politics (and geopolitics) with which Somaliland's political and military elite attempted to secure their position atop a future Somaliland (or, in certain leaders' case, a future Somalia). For example, during the days of these pivotal conferences, there were factional struggles between Abdirahman Tuur's provisional administration and his opponents over leadership positions, with Tuur eventually defecting to Somalia (Balthasar 2013, 219-20). And, while traditional leaders could do little to influence events on the battlefield or within the SNM's organisational infrastructure, what they could do was carve out a space where such elite-led political machinations held less sway. As one of the country's most respected *suldaans* contended, 'regardless of the specific titles these traditional leaders had, what they managed to accomplish at the time was to control and inhibit the greed of individuals who wanted to fulfil their self-interest by making claims to the throne/chair [*kuursiga*]' (Interview #278).

Inter-clan mediation efforts were able to insulate decision-making and relationship-building from the undue influence of power, military might and economic largesse by bringing

these processes down to a level where nationalist, inter-elite politics had little resonance. As one elder from the east described this process of political equalisation, rather than involving horse-trading over authorities and privileges, the currency operating at this level was primarily that of interpersonal relationships, historical connections, moral standing, basic needs and reputation (Interview #295). For Hassan-kayd (2020), 'the longevity and open discussion' of the peacebuilding conferences gave 'time to all parties to share their issues and listen to others', and that this inclusion as equals pre-emptively 'disregard[ed] their influence, power, or clans' population density' (84). As Renders (2012), quoted above, makes clear, lowering the site of negotiation to a more level playing field, where military might and economic influence commanded less influence, served also to 'lower the stakes'. This entailed the depoliticisation of negotiations around future coexistence, so as to minimise divisive questions, such as over distributions of power, and maximise areas of commonality, such as basic communal safety, survival and freedom. According to Moe (2011), 'by pursuing a "thin" government with only a minimum of authority and functions, while prioritizing local processes of reconciliation driven by customary authorities, the process of state formation was not turned into a zero-sum conflict-producing exercise' (154).

Sequestering power in this manner not only occurred at the level of resisting top-down authority, but equally through regulating the practical, quotidian proceedings of these conferences. In this regard, control of space was key, with traditional leaders serving as gatekeepers, actively working to exclude self-interested actors (what Somalis call *af-miinshaaro*: 'self-appointed "political brokers" or "spin doctors"') from sites of conflict resolution (APD 2002, 39). As one Somali peacebuilding researcher explained:

> [When the SNM's *Guurti*] invited elders from the other clans, what they tried to avoid [was] the [inclusion of] military personnel as well as politicians—they had to be taken away…The reason why was politicians have their own interests…And also the military, they didn't want peace, because they are thinking about making power by the gun. But [the elders], they think "Okay now, let's talk to the hostile clans." (Interview #115).

Through the political equalisation of concentrations of power and wealth, political contestation between clans was rendered less threatening and more manageable, thereby creating more favourable conditions for difficult reconciliatory issues to be worked out between groups.

In some ways, this side-lining of potential spoilers might seem little different from the 'normative exclusion' of certain 'anti-peace' elements (such as designated terrorist groups or war criminals) from international conflict resolution efforts (Lanz 2011, 282-5). However, two key differences are at play in the Somaliland context. First, within Somaliland's peacebuilding, former militant actors weren't excluded or circumvented, but were rather persuaded to 'detach [themselves] from decision-making circles', to give up their air of authority or presumed privilege, and dissolve back into the population (Interview #21). In other words, the SNM and the political elite, while stepping aside from positions of leadership at these conferences, equally gave them their blessing, actively assenting to the notion that traditional leaders from their clans were speaking on their behalf. Second, unlike most international peace conferences, in which the extrication of political struggles from the arena of decision-making is carried out by reducing political contestation to technocratic problem-solving (Isikozlu & Heinke 2018, 11), Somaliland mediation processes overcome the politicisation of peacebuilding through another approach—namely, through the normative injunction to separate 'the cultural' (*dhaqanka*) and 'the political' (*siyaasadda*) (Interview #187).

While the *dhaqanka/siyaasadda* distinction is not easy for an outsider to fully comprehend, what it generally points to is a contextually-specific division of responsibilities between those that reinforce communalist ethics within the horizontal social fabric, and those that entail the vertical deployment of power, whether for good (such as national development or law-making) or for ill (for inter-elite competition). Such nuances can be detected in the unwritten norms that Somalilanders use to judge whether actors from both the State and customary spheres have transgressed the confines of their mandates, as can be seen in this political commentator's assessment criteria for present-day inter-clan conferences: 'If the meeting is a cultural one to solve [outstanding] issues and forgive each other, then it is fine. But if it is to establish a political alliance, there is no place for that' (Interview #237; Interview #185; Interview #79). In this way, in foregrounding processes that promote cultural, clan-based ways of interrelating over those that promote political, competitive dynamics, these conferences allowed for the temporary suspension of existing power struggles and political divisions so that new forms of social connection might appear, pertaining directly to the immediate context.

3.3.2.2 Rebalancing

Horizontality, as 3.1 describes, involves a relative balance of power between clans at the macro level, which is reproduced and reinforced at the level of political decision-making through deliberate acts of stakeholders, such as the politically neutralisation of individual pockets of emerging power. At the same time, in situations where power disparities could not be excluded, Somaliland's mediators took efforts to defang and recalibrate them on the spot, a process I call 'rebalancing'. For example, a former SNM secretariat member notes the importance of elder mediation in 'exposing and criticising spoilers and employing the "interval effect", which involves having the parties vacate the meeting place during periods of recalcitrance and heated emotion so that informal talks and recitations of poems and religious readings can calm the situation' (Bobe 2017, 84). Rebalancing equally served as a guiding principle when developing the terms of the peace agreements, with efforts taken to undo concentrations of property and arms accumulated through the conflict, by returning stolen land back to their original owners or to communal ownership, and placing excess weaponry under the control of the nascent government (Farah & Lewis 1997, 374-5; Interview #272; Interview #259). In such cases, budding divisions and hierarchies between groups were identified and kept in check by those involved the peace negotiations, so as to ensure that any peace settlement was built on a relative balance of power between clans.

These considerations live on not only in present-day conflict resolution but in electoral politics, where inter-party competition has remained highly fractious, especially given the significant overlap of clan and party politics. To lessen the blow of the highly centralised, winner-takes-all nature of Somaliland's presidential system, the actual multi-party vote-winning contest is supplemented by an antecedent phase, a rebalancing process in which cabinet posts and other political appointments are redistributed to reflect clan concerns over balanced representation (Interview #66). Such appointments, while formally the sole prerogative of the victor, derive their social legitimacy through the extent to which clans are able to shape the outcome of the selection process through collective bargaining. In other words, all governments are treated as if they are a 'national unity government', or a 'government based on a national idea', in which 'power-sharing should be done out in the open', so that the outcomes reflect social ideas of fairness (Interview #48).

As such, at times when formal democratic elections threaten to divide the nation, as was the case in 2017 (see Chapter 5), the overriding imperative immediately becomes for all stakeholders to 'unite the people', by 'bring[ing] into the fold, *by any means necessary…*the clan[s] of the [candidate] who did not succeed' (Interview #8). On one hand, the inclusion of a broad coalition of clan representatives into the political leadership can be seen as a reshuffling of the elite compact, in which public sector spoils are reapportioned amongst a new circle of political heavyweights. At the same time, these power-sharing measures take on both practical and symbolic meaning as an overriding justice principle and measure of political inclusivity, in which such rebalancing serves to re-establish and restate the horizontal, shared stake in the Somaliland project:

> The moment the election completes, [we] forget about political parties, and everything changes to clan…We fight, we run, and then when [a party] wins they say "Everybody come! Yesterday you were competing [electorally] against me, and although you lose this seat you come and take your share [of ministerial posts]!"…We are sharing everything we've got...one party is not taking the whole thing. So, campaigning creates a political problem for five months, after that we all mix up, and who was opposition, who was with the government, who was with that party, that's all done with. They're all the same. (Interview #66)

In sum, both political equalisation and rebalancing entail wresting individuals, especially those with power, from their uneven and divided political relations, and inserting them into the identities and personas they take on as members of a clan, where horizontal, if competitive, relations prevail. Such methods of conflict resolution, in actively disarticulating the realm of deliberation from the realm of power, is, I argue, only possible where no established sovereign power operates. For, when inter-clan mediation is conducted under the authority of State power, individuals find themselves already alienated from their immediate potential for coexistence and thrust into the winner-take-all world of interest and competitive advantage beyond their control. Horizontality enables the Covenantal model to successfully function, in other words, by limiting, to the greatest degree possible within any given context, reconciliation from being instrumentalised as a tool of larger political domination or advantage.

3.3.3 Summary

Horizontality, fostered through processes of political levelling such as political equalisation and rebalancing, helped consolidate the foundations of Somaliland's new political order, by institutionalising a relative balance of power into relations between clans. Within reconciliation negotiations, political advantages based on supremacy in population, wealth or territorial expanse were afforded to no clan, with the resumption of equality of status and righteousness spread equally across all stakeholders. This enabled the parties to engage with each other as equals, with those institutions that stood in the way of this horizontal relationality—such as the outdated, divisive and power-seeking SNM military architecture and transitional administrations—eventually being dismantled. As such, the plurality of power was not tamed through the alienation of this power to a central, unity, vertical authority, but instead productively channelled towards forms of horizontal inter-clan collaboration aimed at addressing collective issues.

3.4 Intimacy: Mutuality through entanglement

After Siad Barre's government collapsed, no one reconciled [Somaliland's clans], no foreigners or other Somalis came to them. They reconciled because they were people who knew each other and lived together, interacted and married each other. (Interview #110)

3.4.1 What is intimacy?

Somali State violence upended complexly-intertwined intercommunal relations throughout the country, causing communities to retreat to clan strongholds and hardening divisions of mistrust, antagonism and 'otherness' between them. The task of Somaliland's reconciliation process would be to repair these social relations. Within Somali peacebuilding, the social rebuilding process starts from the ground up, from the most basic and local to the larger and more complex. Rather than designing expansive institutions of justice or organising major tribunals and truth-telling commissions, Somaliland's dispute mediators target deep-lying interpersonal connections that cut across the more circumstantial rifts created by politics. As one *suldaan* described this exorcism of politics from inter-clan relations:

> The traditional leader shouldn't get involved in politics…It is our job that when the politicians lead you the wrong way, we have to tell them "no". We should reject them leading us to chaos again. My role should be limited to reconciling clans and supervising the exchange of compensations. [At the same time,] it is our job to

speak up against politicians using clannism, and remind people that we are one community, one family, and we can't separate from each other. We are all related somehow, as cousins, in-laws, or uncles. (Interview #153)

'Intimacy' is my term for this deliberate process of shedding successive layers of accumulated political baggage and alienation to retrieve a common kernel of relationality. As discussed in the previous chapter, alienation occurs when larger political, economic and social forces entangle local agents and issues in struggles whose stakes go far beyond immediate circumstances, by, for example, turning a dispute over land into a national-level struggle for territory between clans, or transforming an isolated instance of criminality into an opportunity for the State to assert its control over personhood and judgement. Elder-led mediation is able to counteract alienation by actively unsettling the grip of powerful actors on local situations, instead carving out space for local communities to engage directly (horizontally) with each other. As one journalist puts it:

> When rural communities fight, they are much more comfortable with [intervention from] the *Guurti* than the elite, who are generally responsible for this political fighting. The *Guurti* has this aura of respect, which comes from their ability to essentially know the situation better—to know the names, sub-clans, personalities [involved locally]—than the educated elite of the towns. (Interview #20)

Rather than being implicated in the causes of the conflict, elders are embedded in the local context they are seeking to mend, thereby granting intimacy its social power.

Yet such intimate interaction does not emerge organically, especially in the midst of conflict and division, but must be painstakingly produced. For example, during the conference in Borama, before any headway was reached on negotiations, the delegates spent months sleeping next to each other on mattresses strewn out across abandoned classroom floors in a rebuilt school, taking tea together by day, chewing *khat* alongside each other in the evenings (Interview #5; Interview #46). Through these small gestures, political divisions were slowly chipped away at, enabling interpersonal bonds to resurface, as described by one civil society leader present during the proceedings:

> The Borama Conference brought together…people who were schoolmates, relatives, intermarried families, and stuff like that. [When] people came there, the first thing that happened, they were made to feel at peace with each other. Before any conference started. It took about two months for all those people to come

and speak to each other about their relative experience in the past...And only then, after maybe two-and-a-half months, people started to [develop] an agenda for peace and for selecting a new government. (Interview #58)

To this day, respected elders, politicians and government officials describe their conflict resolution techniques as humbling, grounding experiences for all sides, in which interveners shed their pretensions and live amongst the people, aggrieved families are given opportunities to vent their anger, and normalcy and trust are slowly allowed to surface in daily routines (Interview #147). This occurs, in part, by transporting dispute resolution outside the hallowed, sanitised halls of official politics, and placing them within stripped-down settings 'where neutrality and open dialogue' are built into the aesthetics and environs (Bobe 2017, 82). The shady tree (*geedka*) around which Somali mediation traditionally takes place, argues Bobe, serves as a 'focal point' tying communities to their surroundings: 'The tree cannot be taken out of its context and transported to a desert or conference room; it must be embedded in the community' (*ibid*, 83). In post-conflict Somaliland, this lived, embodied context, where the landscape still bears the physical scars of conflict—from bullet holes to informally displaced encampments—also adds a visceral sense of proximity to the tragic political stakes of conflict and peace (Phillips 2019, 688).

Such intimacy has value beyond 'liberal' ideals of 'humanisation' and 'inter-group bridge building', however (Plonski 2005, 393-4). The more actors are able to extricate themselves from family ties, historical connections and the like, the less accountable they are to society as a whole, something that Somalia's elite 'peace' negotiators, operating out of remote conference halls in the presence of international community representatives, rather than amongst local constituents, know well (Ahmed & Green 1999, 124; Johnson & Raghe 2010, 49). The accountability inherent within the clan structure occurs as a result of the way lineage chains serve to locate individuals in shared histories and social positions, with individuals not able to survive on their own esteem or influence, but being beholden to the actions and reputations of the clan at large. As one former minister put it: 'This is our system: as livestock herdsmen, you have to know who you are dealing with, you have to ask [others] who they are. Because all you are thinking about is maybe you had problems with that clan, maybe you are at peace with them. They have to calculate things politically. It's like the internet, you have the domain address. It's the same thing' (Interview #297). In this way,

someone's actions speak both for themselves and their kinsfolk, breeding certain levels of restraint, decorum, and discipline in political negotiation, conflict and struggle. Intimacy as a Covenantal logic refers precisely to how such embodied, situated forms of inter-group relationality shape the parameters of political exchange.

In sum, whereas the abstraction and alienation of modern politics—from large-scale conflict to State governance—divides people in order to instrumentalise their fear and desperation, intimate relations of connection counteract such divisions, providing space for commonality to translate into coexistence. At the level of the individual, this can be empowering, as one's identity is protected from being determined by external sources of power, such as the State, for whom one might otherwise be cast as an enemy, foe, opponent or criminal, merely because of ideological or ethnic difference. Instead, one's clan is able to vouch for and defend one's reputation, something that has come in handy for journalists and opposition members unlawfully detained by the State (Interview #80; Interview #216).[1] The concrete, situated individual, in all his/her intimate corporeality is granted layers of protection from alienation and abstraction in matters of conflict and political life.

3.4.2   How has intimacy been developed and maintained? Entangling the social

Intimacy, then, is a deliberate technique for translating social power into peace by strengthening basic social ties. It can also be conceived of as a means of promoting collectivity in the absence of a unitary force such as the State to either impose unity, or at least provide the symbolic architecture with which unity can be imagined. Below, I highlight two mechanisms of Covenantal power deployed by Somaliland's social actors to foster intimacy— social entanglement (3.4.2.1) and moral levelling (3.4.2.2)—that have served to pull Somaliland's clans toward each other, implicating each of them in each other's lives whether they like it or not. As will be seen in our later exploration of the logic of conditional association, this horizontal form of integration differs from that of territorially-bounded citizenship in that it enables the various parties to the Social Covenant to choose the terms under which they are included and participate, thus granting a fundamental level of power and autonomy to actors.

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[1] This is not to say that clan intervention in justice is always positive, especially for women. In Chapter 7, we explore these negative elements.

3.4.2.1 Social entanglement

'Social entanglement' involves the substantial degree to which social groups are interwoven into each other's worlds, almost as if community relations were scaled up to the level of the nation. In this regard, clan heritage and affiliation serve as a connective tissue imbricating ever-increasing webs of communities in shared social realities, through the historical accumulation of instances of intermarriage, cohabitation and *xeer* compacts between clans, something altered but not broken by conflict and urbanisation. At the level of the individual, one's position within these entangled, intimate clan relations dictates a wide range of commitments, obligations and privileges expanding out in all directions. One's lineage might, for example, make them a legitimate target for intercommunal revenge killing as a result of the actions of a cousin, but also likely entitles them to hospitality across vast expanses of Somali territory: 'If I am in Hargeisa or Borama, it is the same for me. Nobody will say "this is not your place". We don't have that. If I go to Erigavo, they may even prefer me rather than someone from Erigavo, because there are tribal intrigues there. But me, everybody will see me as non-partial, so I could be very welcome there' (Interview #272).

These entanglements are further reinforced through Somaliland's intimate public sphere, which, rather than exhibiting the anonymity and distance normally associated with modernising societies, produce new interpersonal bonds. For example, the spread of modern media in Somaliland has not led to increased atomisation and homogenisation, but has instead embedded pre-existing clan relations, political narratives and expressed grievances in a larger, more intertwined common discursive space, stretching across press conferences (*war-saxaafeed*), local *khat* chewing sessions, hotel-based lecture halls, tea shops and social media spaces (Journal, various). As such, when a political controversy arises, developments unfold in ways not restricted to the original participants, with others relegated to the status of observers and consumers, but rather play through the active participation of clan representatives who amplify and interpret events within larger political discourses and narratives.

As a witness to the controversies captivating the Somaliland capital in 2017-2018, some of which make up the Case Studies of this research, I was struck by the ways in which everyone from government officials to traditional leaders to aggrieved communities engaged in a daily back and forth with their political counterparts, whether across mediascapes or

through the subterranean backchannels of gossip and rumour, with nearly everyone with even a small bit of influence in a community counting themself amongst the cast of characters. As one activist described this deep, intimate overlapping of imagined community and entangled polity, when a politically significant issue emerges, 'everybody will [talk about] it, standing on different sides, having different opinions…Here, we all know each other. You can't just say anything you want to this guy because you know that the next day, you will meet the guy and you do not want to create that whole space of hatred. [You have to] be careful' (Interview #200). All told, this creates a sense among Somalilanders that 'the people are all interconnected' (Interview #79), and that, as 'an oral society', 'everybody knows everything' going on (Interview #68).

Historical and material conditions also foster relations of intimacy across society. At the level of elites, common bonds were formed through colonial-era schooling, military postings, resistance-era activism and/or diasporic business and social networks, which, while facilitating relationships of collusion and patronage, have equally fostered the inter-elite trust and common purpose necessary to contain power struggles within peaceful limits (Phillips 2020, 77; Phillips 2013, 6; Elder 2021). Alongside this deeply collegial oligopoly at the top, we find a largely informal economy for the masses, in which regulation and contract are forged through bonds of mutual aid, trust, reciprocity, beneficence and charity (Leonard 2009, 19). Here, social relations based on kinship, proximity, and 'shared history' are converted into informal practices of exchange and accountability, not merely making trade circulate smoothly, but equally conjuring up a collective interest (*dan-wadaag*) based on 'trust, mutual association and community sharing' (Brown *et al.* 2017, 15). These layers of horizontal entanglement, while sources of fraternal conflict as much as of solidarity, cultivate an intangible and amorphous sense of commonality and togetherness. This collectivity requires no singular sovereign agent to speak on its behalf or bring it into existence; instead, it is generated and woven together intimately through the spontaneous, decentralised circulation of opinions, discourse, material exchanges and accumulated interactions.

3.4.2.2   Moral levelling

While intimacy is a powerful tool in bringing about peace, the violence that any peace must address general frays bonds of intercommunal intimacy, particularly through estranging and dividing groups as adversaries, thus creating competing moral hierarchies between friend

and foe, and righteousness and criminality. During the war between the SNM and the Barre regime, cycles of conquest and revenge were set in motion that persisted into the immediate post-independence period, with clan militias accumulating a litany of injustices such as massacre, looting and the occupation of formerly communal or private land. The level of violence over the course of the conflict was so vast and incommensurable that traditional (*xeer*) modes of compensation, retribution and reconstitution would not suffice. Furthermore, enmity escalated beyond the familiar realm of respected inter-clan adversarial competition and offense, reaching the height of 'eternal enemy', one that was to be hated and vanquished—in which each side saw the other as less than human, as '*faqash*' and '*qurmis*' (the respective derogatory labels of choice at the time).

When representatives from the various sides met as part of reconciliation conferences, they chose to confront such deep-rooted wounds by bypassing the tallying of individual harms and losses that usually characterises *xeer* compensation negotiations. Instead, they mutually agreed to deploy a model of blanket forgiveness with customary roots known as *xalay-dhalay*: a mode of compromise that is 'used when costs and reparations are deemed incalculable and instead of seeking compensation and perpetuating the conflict, an agreement is made to forfeit all claims in the interest of reaching a peace' (Sandstrom 2013, 62). In collectively 'forgetting' their acutely-felt harms, Somalilanders demonstrated the practical flexibility of the negotiation process, as well as the overriding strength of the pull towards peace (Walls 2009, 382). The process through which this occurred, as relayed somewhat apocryphally by a former Somali peacebuilding researcher, is worth describing at length:

> The SNM *Guurti* told the other hostile clans: "you fought against us, and we won. What do you expect from us?"…And do you know what the elders said? They didn't cry, they didn't say that nothing happened. They told the truth. They said, "you labelled us *faqash*, but you were also spoilers…You destroyed the whole country". So, they have leverage. The SNM delegation was shocked, that they had been labelled with this. Because they were heroes!...The next question was: "what do we do?...Shall we continue the fight, or shall we have another way out?"…One of the things [the SNM demanded]: "even if we agree peacefully, you have to admit that our sons were martyrs, they were *mujaahidiin*. And yours were not"…And the other clans said, "No, we cannot accept", and then they agreed that

they were all *mujaahidiin*…And that was the most difficult to swallow…That's why it's called the "Grand Brotherhood Conference". (Interview #115)

What made this process of forgiveness so conducive to moral equivalency was that it dispensed with any distinction between judge and judged. There were no designated victors and/or victims on one side bestowing forgiveness onto designated turncoats or perpetrators, nor any outside adjudicator—whether the State, a special court or foreign bureaucrats—to weigh up claims on behalf of the combatants, at its discretion. Instead, it called upon all parties to directly wipe the moral slate clean in one collective act of good faith, by first tearing down the abstract, politicised identities that each adversary had constructed of the other, and then confronting the other intimately, as concrete individuals caught up in the same bad choices that their leaders had foisted upon them. In other words, 'forgiveness' was not offered up and then accepted, but forged communally. As one politician previously engaged in the reconciliation process described the reasoning involved:

> We didn't defeat you, we defeated Siyad Barre's regime. And you were not part of that regime, you were a clan. You looked after your interests when you were fighting us. Like you people the *Isaaq* were looking after our own interests. And now [that] Siyad Barre is out of the picture, we should talk as equals.' (Interview #220)

As such, the intimacy of relations between actors not only fostered forgiveness, by drawing upon a historical sense of fellow-feeling to overcome conflict-induced hierarchies of righteousness, but was equally reinforced by the very process of forgiveness, by compelling all sides to treat each other again as on the same moral level. Such blanket reprieve equally delivered a blow to the friend-enemy dichotomy that had been orchestrated to fuel violence, paving the way for a jointly produced, more inclusive narrative based on 'brotherhood' to emerge: '*Somaliland la wada leeyahay*' ('Somaliland owned by all [clans]'). As one youth political commentator notes, reflecting on the legacy of reconciliation politics for Somaliland's present-day identity, 'we always refer back to forgiveness among the Somaliland people, because what came out of it are the bonds that hold the Somaliland people together" (Interview #178).

3.4.3   Summary

The Somaliland Covenant proves that social cohesion does not require an external, neutral force to corral a multiplicity of actors into cooperation, but can emerge from relations

of mutual dependence and ingrained familiarity. Indeed, whereas political inclusion based on manufactured borders or imposed loyalties often provides a very thin and fractious compulsion towards unity, especially in Africa, those built on intimate entanglements and inclusive moral worlds and ethical responsibilities offer arguably more fertile grounds, especially in the case of Somaliland. Furthermore, while, as my Case Studies demonstrate, Somaliland society is by no means free of exclusions and divisions, it is the moral arguments and source of power afforded by Covenantal relations that marginalised actors continue to turn to in addressing these deficiencies. In short, whether clans like it or not, they are implicated in each other's security and satisfaction, and awareness of this fact has compelled them to come to the aid of their compatriots during times of crisis and distress.

3.5   Conditional Association: the terms of participation

Whenever you think about Somaliland, the main thing that you have to remember is consensus. Every issue that happens in Somaliland is dealt with through compromise—the political leaders come together and ask how they can deal with it, and they come to an agreement. (Interview #19)

They [the non-Isaaq populations] are Somalilanders because they want to and not because they're compelled. Here in Somaliland, there's no clan that has taken over another clan by pushing them to be Somalilanders otherwise there will be slaughter! (Interview #20)

The most interesting point is why Somaliland never showed an interest to have its military be present in Sool. Because the people of Sool were showing a willingness to cooperate without being oppressed, because they needed peace. (Interview #99)

3.5.1   What is conditional association?

Anarchist thought finds an alternative to State-based forms of social belonging—derived from territorially-bound citizenship, reinforced by a unitary and unremitting sense of national identity—in 'voluntary association' (Gordon 2018). While interpreted in various manners, the concept's underlying premise denotes an agreement by the individual to coexist and cooperate as part of a larger social group beyond the self, but only insofar as it both serves their interests as an individual, and also affords the freedom to disengage without undue consequence (Guerin 1970, 30). Within the Somaliland Social Covenant, I argue, we find a form of inter-clan cooperation that is not predetermined by identity or geography, but which falls somewhat short of voluntary association, to the extent that the latter tends

towards spontaneity, transience and benefit maximisation. The consensus reached among parties in Somaliland, on the other hand, while inclusive and participatory, and while arguably preferential to all available alternatives (in particular a return to war), was not free of concession, ambivalence or coercion, and so to consider the agreement 'voluntary' does not quite capture its essence. Instead, more apt description might be 'conditional association', in that participation in the Social Covenant was, and continues to be, premised on a set of baseline conditions, which, when transgressed, leaves clan parties feeling justified in desiring to exit or even destabilise the inter-clan compact. Like voluntary association, then, this wiggle-room for participation in the collective can be seen as the way in which the Covenantal model accounts for freedom—freedom of the part in relation to the whole—albeit only to the extent of partial, rather than complete, autonomy.

Consensus-building—reaching decisions through the collective assent of all major stakeholder groups—is a major component of conditional association in the Somaliland context. In fact, consensus has been a cornerstone principle of customary Somali mediation since pre-colonial times (see Ibrahim 2010; Oker 2010), and clan elders understandably drew on this legacy when resurrecting *xeer* governance mechanisms following the collapse of the Somali State. Numerous scholars have treated the re-emergence of consensus politics as solely the product of the return of customary practices (see Leonard & Samantar 2011; Walls *et al.* 2017, 5; Johnson & Raghe 2010, 48). This is insufficient for two reasons: first, whereas the *xeer*-based consensus-building of yore, as practiced by nomadic, acephalous communities, rarely extended beyond the local and circumstantial, within present-day Somaliland, consensus politics have been scaled up to the national level, and have been transformed in the process (Cassanelli 2019; Renders 2007, 453). Furthermore, to treat consensus politics as something culturally or institutionally determined disregards the extent to which (post)colonial Somali politics has equally been characterised by persistent dispute and stalemate, as caused by top-heavy governance models, inter-group competition, 'war economies' and conflict spirals (Faleg 2019; Webersik 2014; Bryden 2013; Besteman 1998; Kapteijns & Farah 2011; Gaas 2018).

In reality, large-scale consensus politics emerged from the historically-specific power relations of Somaliland's social context. According to Graeber (2007), 'consensus decision-making is typical of societies where there would be no way to compel a minority to agree with a majority decision—either because there is no state with a monopoly of coercive force, or

because the state has nothing to do with local decision-making' (341). It is no surprise, then, that in Somaliland, where power was spread widely and thinly, and where social cohesion thus required the buy-in of all constituent parties, practices of consensual decision-making emerged (APD 2008, 55). Moe (2011), for example, quotes a Somali political analyst for whom the establishment of the political community during the peacebuilding period was predicated on 'reaching consensus': 'every clan had to accept the rebirth of Somaliland, and to accept Somaliland they had to deal with the "next door" clan, to address all the grievances and to exchange *xeer*. Only then could we start to agree on how to build a state' (153-4). A relative balance of power was crucial to shaping such political calculations, as any imbalance in any side's favour, such as that which might be produced through the intervention of external actors, risked undercutting the need for compromise: '[The Borama Conference] was entirely local. There was not any role from the international community, or assistance. And that is why we value it. Because we believe that if there were some other players dictating the resources, we wouldn't have reached the consensus we have reached' (Interview #61).

What began as a precondition for peaceful coexistence was thereafter transformed into a regulative principle of life in the new multi-clan polity, a point Richards (2020) summarises well: 'Political opposition has been accepted within Somaliland, and negotiating solutions to obstacles or addressing oppositional challenges has become a feature of the forming Somaliland government. Indeed, Somaliland is negotiating a government, and a state, as much as it is building one' (1072-3). This is most noticeable in the realm of conflict resolution. When it comes to mediating disputes over retributive violence, access to land, or cases of cultural offense, for instance, the consensus-based approach does not entail judgements based on abstract notions of rights, criminality and punishment, but rather, at its best, repairs social relations by slowly crafting a solution that all parties find acceptable, building on contextually-specific precedent, moral accounting, root causes and expectations of human dignity (Mohamed 2007; Lewis 1999). This alertness to a holistic understanding of social harmony can be detected in the way one *caaqil* describes the painful but necessary sacrifices made by parties in mediation on behalf of the collective:

> We have always promoted compromise…For example, if you've done me wrong…on purpose, I will make a compromise and forgive you to keep stability and peace alive, because if I retaliate, it will ruin things between us even further. If I take the high road, the other party will also surrender and announce that they did something awful, and in the future they'll approach each other with tolerance

and the confidence that there will not be further disputes. Peace comes before everything. (Interview #95)

Conditional association is about more than consensus-making, however. While important matters are indeed seen to require the active, explicit consent of all actors involved, this does not always transpire, whether because of political expediency or because those in government exploit their grip on formal channels of decision-making to exclude others. The Social Covenant system is able to account for such circumstances, by empowering clans who might otherwise be bypassed in decisions to respond robustly, through threats of withdrawal or resistance, as will be explored in the next section. In other words, while it cannot be guaranteed that all segments of society will voluntarily respect the right of others to have their say, countervailing forces are built into the associational dynamics that enable resistance to top-down efforts to impose authority and legitimacy unilaterally (Interview #115; Interview #43). To this day, local subversion and provocation continues to compel the State to accommodate and include marginalised actors, rather than override them, as this former minister recalls from his time in office:

> The policy that Silanyo and his government followed [when armed resistance sprang up] is what we have done always: cool down things, try to solve problems, let the people know that they can take part in the decision-making process, and sometimes use government funds to calm down things…[We were] willing to solve problems at any cost—even at one point we allowed [one secessionist movement] to hold their conference *in* Somaliland, just [so they could] say "no, we are not part of Somaliland." But we did not touch them, because we know we can solve it later. We didn't use the military. (Interview #298)

Lastly, it is worth noting the role conditional association plays in shaping expectations of justice and legitimacy. Indeed, the key barometer for assessing the relative fairness and justness of any decision or situation remains the degree of consensus and inclusivity achieved, rather than the authority from which the decision or act originates. For example, in the political battle between the Somaliland Government and the *Gadabuursi* clan over governmental power-sharing allocations (detailed in full in Chapter 4), criticism and grievance were largely voiced in relation to normative expectation that such an issue required consensus-based decision-making, as promised in the Covenantal pact. As one retired aid worker from Awdal complained:

> In the context of that moment [in the 1990s], our elders took the right path. But to be honest, there was no agreement, nothing written, it was just [based] on

consensus, on a gentleman's agreement. You take that, we take that…The promise was that Somaliland will reconvene as we pass through these hard times, so let the mud purify itself, then at the end of that purification or that appeasement, Somaliland will reconvene and discuss thoroughly, frankly, face-to-face, [representational] power-sharing. It was never done. (Interview #272)

3.5.2 How has conditional association been developed and maintained? Ensuring plurality through veto, exit, shared stakes and the outsider-insider dynamic

Diversity only becomes meaningful plurality when each constituent part of society is empowered to have their voice heard and taken seriously by others (Cerny 2006, 81). The Social Covenant model contains several mechanisms through which clans are able to demonstrate their necessity to the collective project of harmony and peace, and can leverage this mutual dependency as means to push back against instances where they feel their interests are being undermined. These mechanisms, namely veto (3.5.2.1), exit (3.5.2.2), shared stakes (3.5.2.3) and the 'outsider-insider' dynamic (3.5.2.4), are manifestations of the autonomous power of each clan, which they can deploy vis-à-vis the State or other clans to demonstrate the conditional nature of their participation in the Somaliland project—i.e., to remind others of the conditions of fairness and inclusivity on which their inter-clan cooperation is based. As one former SNM soldier argues, this power to willingly authorise government authority has granted the Somaliland people a say in how the government operates: 'During the early days, we permitted our brothers in arms to become government officials and hold the power of the country. [As a result,] we felt that we built the government on the people's desires, and it is for this reason that we feel the government is responsive to our democratic and justice needs' (Interview #85).

3.5.2.1 Veto

The nature of conflict [in Somaliland] is that if relations between two main clans are shaken, the rest will be shaken too. It's like the stem and the branch. If the stem is not on stable ground, the branches will come down with it. [For this reason,] the two sides have to be listened to. If there is a legitimate reason [for the dispute], it has to be accepted. If not, they have to be told as such. (Interview #298)

All clan groups have political mechanisms they can call upon when their terms for participation in the Somaliland Social Covenant are not being met. First, we have 'veto', the latent power of any sufficiently-sized clan to reject a decision or action taken by others

through the threat (implicit or explicit) of destabilising protest, violence or sanction. This mechanism could be considered a kind of 'mutually assured destruction', in which, as a result of the delicately poised power-balance and the entangled nature of social relations, each clan possesses the capacity to destroy others as well as themselves through instigating violence or instability. One might think that such potentially destructive veto power, with its ability to undermine and thwart peace and statebuilding, might descend into 'spoilage', with errant actors using this power to extort Somaliland society for spoils (Menkhaus 2003, 415; Greenhill & Major 2007). While such racketeering is indeed a feature of clan militias' relation to the Somaliland State, I argue that veto power equally serves as a potent threat to other clans and the State not to exclude a clan from participation within governance, lest that clan lose a sense of ownership within, and thus a stake in preserving, the governing order itself. What keeps misuse of the 'veto card' in check are the implicit society-wide norms distinguishing acceptable and unacceptable forms of threat, dissent and rabble-rousing, in which—similar to the stipulations of *jus ad bellum*—actions must be seen as proportionate, limited and used as a last resort, when pleas for dialogue have failed.

Veto power manifests in many practical forms, including threats to boycott elections, withdraw clan troops from the army or engage in armed resistance, to name examples drawn from my Case Studies alone. In some cases, the threat of destabilisation or disunity is quite subtle. To take an understated example, during my period of fieldwork, one of Hargeisa's more marginalised districts captured national attention by responding to a decade of neglect from the city's mayor by not only threatening a tax boycott, but even announcing their own parallel mayor and local administration, chosen through an unofficially-performed pseudo-election (Interview #44; Interview #64). The initiative, taken after their many attempts to address their grievances through dialogue were 'paid no heed', aimed to 'send a message to the president reminding him to fulfil his promises', otherwise the community would continue to 'do things themselves' (Interview #35; Interview #199). What distinguishes these subversive acts as expressions of veto power rather than generic resistance was not only the message—that the government's very right to rule was conditional on its Covenantal obligations to distribute State resources equally—but also the consequences that were threatened: that 'the people will rise against them if they don't listen to us' (Interview #199).

In other words, insofar as such acts of defiance are a form of communication, it is the way that such acts are interpreted by the political system that matters. And here, this direct

challenge to the legitimacy of the State was construed not as an 'everyday form of resistance' (Scott 1987), but instead as a demonstration that, as one of the parties to the Social Covenant, any transgressions of inter-group equality and fairness would throw the entire pact into jeopardy: 'This country is for all and if we aren't getting the same benefits as everyone, we should defect.…We liberated this country and everything we fought against is happening to us' (Interview #52). Ultimately, then, these kind of political manoeuvres, as with all instances of veto, pit autonomous clan power and horizontal relationality against injustice emanating from concentrated powers of authority (such as the State), as one community organiser involved in the activities observed:

> The government doesn't want people to come together and cooperate…They are afraid of any kind of unity among clans…We are taking part in the development of the nation, [but] unfortunately, it seems our leaders don't understood these benefits very well, and instead think whenever people come closer they are against them and their leadership. (Interview #64)

3.5.2.2   Exit

If a certain clan feels that there is injustice towards them within the structure of the government, they just say "Somaliland, we are out!" It could be both ways [to opt in or opt out]. That is Somaliland nationalism—subject to the advantages, not of the whole country, but the advantages that that project has got for their own clan. If they see any injustice going on, they will go against the idea [of Somaliland], and opt out. (Interview #23)

'Exit' is a more extreme form of refusal that veto, in that it entails disgruntled actors not merely withholding consent, but instead 'voting with their feet' (Warren 2011) and ending the association with Somaliland altogether, at least temporarily. Such possibility of exodus or withdrawal derives from two related features of Somaliland's ambiguous political condition. First, its status as an unrecognised state means that the entire territory is characterised by a parallel, overlapping multiplicity of sovereign claims, in which allegiance to either the Somaliland or Somalia project can be an open and shifting question (Renders & Terlinden 2010, 725). Second, the fact that Somaliland is surrounded by ethnic-Somali territories in all directions (whether Djibouti, the Somali Region of Ethiopia or Puntland/Somalia), and that most clans' kinsfolk spill over across the border, offers hospitable spaces of refuge for political dissidents beyond the jurisdiction and control of the Somaliland State (Rader 2016, 106).

For the average Somaliland citizen, such conditions, taken together, offer a get-out clause, in which they can, at times, rebrand their identity and allegiance away from the Somaliland project and towards that of Somalia or elsewhere. There are many practical reasons an individual might do this; for example, for an unemployed youth, the prospect of employment in Somalia's civil service, media, arts or INGOs, can tempt them to disavow their connections to the Somaliland government and move to Mogadishu (Interview #106). For politicians, temporarily defecting to the Mogadishu administration provides an opportunity to 'double-dip' in the dual rent-seeking pies of Somaliland and Somalia (Interview #297). At the same time, such shapeshifting often equally serves a political purpose, as a way for actors to express their disagreement with Somaliland's political status quo, or to passively resist them through flight (Interview #224; Scott 1987, 245).

Beyond the level of the individual, the exit phenomenon has a group dynamic which is even more consequential. There are three main types of 'group exit'—secessionist rebellion (*jabhad*), clan militia defection and peaceful withdrawal. Regarding the former, Somaliland has experienced numerous occasions of guerrilla activity, at times led by powerful traditional leaders or politicians with safe havens across borders, as we will see in the case of Colonel Caare in Chapter 5. While such rebellion is often a marginal side-project of a disgruntled elite, at times it latches onto public sentiment in favour of secession, especially in non-*Isaaq* areas, where 'minority' status and nostalgia for Somali unity produce substantial constituencies in favour of re-joining Somalia. On the other hand, there are cases of clan militia from peripheral regions who switch allegiances to a rival administration—primarily Puntland to the east—as a way to express dissatisfaction with their treatment by the Somaliland government. In this way, the patchwork of sub-clan alliances horizontally stitching together Somaliland's territorial contiguity ebbs and flows in direct correspondence with the constant flux of centre-periphery relations. Lastly, there is the more intangible and subtle compulsion amongst frustrated non-*Isaaq* regions to opt-out of Somaliland, a kind of slow waning of legitimacy granted to the Somaliland political project, rather than any particular manifestation of rebellion. One political activist from Borama describes this ambivalent, conditional allegiance to the Somaliland project:

> I'm not suggesting that Awdal is considering leaving Somaliland right now…But grievances are there. It is only a matter of time before it could take a political form…and I don't know where that would lead. If the rest of Somaliland doesn't

accommodate Awdal's demand to be an active participant in Somaliland politics, and have a greater say than they have now, then it may put off Awdal's interest in Somaliland, and that might [lead them to] start thinking about other avenues. (Interview #7)

As such, whether through active resistance or nonviolent declaration (an endorsement or disavowal), a group or individual is able to self-authorise a change in citizenship and/or national affiliation, thereby threatening Somaliland's precarious claims to authority over its alleged territory. What prevents such separatist politics from rapidly descending into open conflict is that the flexibility inherent in identity and allegiance—a result of the liminal nature of Somaliland's status—mitigates against any rigid binary between insider and outsider, friend and enemy. Such flexibility has allowed, until recently, for negotiations over participation in the Somaliland project to not get bogged down in ideological difference or unconditional loyalty, but instead remain responsive to practical considerations. As one parliamentarian from the non-*Isaaq* east admitted: 'If decentralisation was implemented, if people saw their rights protected, and if basic necessities like education and health were upgraded, all my constituents would be properly convinced to be proud Somalilanders' (Interview #70). This capacity to embrace liminality can be seen in the fact that the Somaliland government has welcomed into its fold as ministers avowed anti-Somaliland guerrilla leaders in exchange not for unconditional surrender, but mere quietism (Interview #99).

These dynamics, in which ambivalent actors neither fully commit to Somaliland nor fully pull themselves away, show that veto and exit are not primarily ways of escaping or undermining the Somaliland project, but of empowering oneself from within it. Take the *Warsangeli*, for example, a non-*Isaaq* clan whose territory spans both Somaliland and Puntland. Its powerful *suldaan*, rather than committing to one administration, instead 'plays many roles for different governments', with 'no intentions of changing that by picking a side to support', instead using his legitimacy to extract concessions from all sides (Interview #157). For, given 'how easy it is for the *suldaan* to organise a conference denouncing Somaliland' or rejecting Puntland or Somalia, every Somali 'president in the region wants to negotiate with the *suldaan'*, as, without his endorsement, their respective territorial administrations become a lot less inclusive and viable (*ibid*). For the *suldaan* and his people, this pragmatic approach has won them representation in all administrations, and several major infrastructural

development projects in recent years. As such, while, as Bakonyi (2009) notes, 'the exit option' has long been a preferred 'pattern of rural resistance in Africa' (438), when it is applied to the Covenantal politics of modern-day Somaliland, it takes on a power of a different sort—not of abstention but of acting out the conditionality of inter-clan association.

3.5.2.3   Shared stakes

My family helped create peace, in mobilising the people to reconcile…Our caaqil had a big role in the peace-making. Baladul-amiin, the place where the elders met and decided to trust each other, is where I was elected from. When I speak to my constituents, what they tell me most often is: since they're a clan that brought peace, they should get the share of ministers and director generals which they have a right to…When the Somali government was destroyed, a treaty was made between the clans. And what helped us was an organization that was based in Djibouti which was headed by a cousin of mine…That organization facilitated the funds, and solved many of the issues there. (Interview #70).

Both veto and exit compel clans to include each other as equals in governance—as consensual partners—through the threat of mutually assured destruction. Alongside these coercive measures are certain moral imperatives that clans can appeal to towards the same goal of inclusion and participation—what I call 'shared stakes.' As presented in the above quote, clans claim entitlement to an equal stake in the accumulated power, wealth and opportunity of Somaliland based on the moral goodwill they incurred through contributing to the founding and construction of Somaliland in the first place. In this moral economy of historical debt and obligation, investments made in the Somaliland project in the past—particularly the sacrifices, risks and struggles endured in the name of building peaceful coexistence—are to be redeemed in the present. To build on the economic metaphor, conditional consent to the Somaliland project transformed each clan into a 'stakeholder', with the idea that whatever concessions made at the time would be earned back with interest in the form of 'peace dividends', whether in terms of developmental benefits or shares of power in a future government (Interview #43; Hassan-kayd 2020, 83). This can be seen as another framework through which conditional association is negotiated, as it establishes a justice claim in which further participation in the Somaliland project becomes tied to fulfilling the promises that the original Social Covenant was founded on.

This particular sense of 'ownership' derives from the exceptionally bottom-up and inclusive basis on which Somaliland was founded. First, as a result of the marked absence of international aid or guidance in reconstructing peace and governance, Somalilanders are able to attribute tangible development gains accumulated over three decades to their own blood, sweat and tax revenue, from the business class who 'paid everything they could afford to build the nation,' to the 'contribution made by the mother of six children who's now selling tomatoes in the market', to the neighbourhood watch volunteers who 'keep us secure for little payment' (Interview #20; Interview #89; Eubank 2012; Phillips 2020). As a result, rather than deferring to State sovereign prerogative over the common yields of the nation's hard-won peace and development, the Somaliland public is able to lay claim to these returns-on-investment by pointing to the government's acute dependence on their labours and initiative for everything from healthcare and media to development and security: 'Somaliland is not built by the government; it's built by the people' (Interview #20; Interview #185). At the same time, the fact that the Somaliland project, as a collective enterprise, requires society-wide participation to survive and thrive, inculcates a mutual dependence that bolsters Somaliland's communitarian and egalitarian ethos: 'Every street in Hargeisa has its own security guards, which come from the people…The little boy who lives in the IDP camps and the [sons of prominent businessmen] all hold the security of the country in the same regard' (Interview #259).

As will be detailed in Chapter 4, Somaliland's 'minority' clans have in particular made use of this line of argument, framing claims to power-balance and inclusion in the moral-political language of evenly shared stakes. Particularly at times when the *Isaaq* have sought to imprint their majoritarian advantage upon the political system, the non-*Isaaq* have responded by harkening back to the concrete promises entailed by the Social Covenant, to assert their claim to equal standing vis-à-vis their compatriots. As this remark from a young *Gadabuursi* demonstrates, such arguments reflect a position of conditionality with regards to the nature of political cooperation between the *Isaaq* and non-*Isaaq*: 'If we are treated the same and get the same benefits, I would support Somaliland and would advocate for Somaliland to be recognised. But if Somaliland is owned by one clan, I would not support Somaliland to be recognised' (Interview #287).

In this sense, group entitlements within the Somaliland political system are seen to come not simply from abstract citizenship privileges nor from universalised human rights (i.e.,

minority protection, etc.), but from longstanding obligations and duties, traced back to the early reconciliation conferences, that each clan owes to others, and which cannot be readily forsaken. It is thus an argument based on equality rather than charity. In other words, within this stakeholder model, any clan or sub-clan, when facing a glaring injustice or grievance in relation to other groups, may feel justified in making reference to their role in the constitution of a peaceful, viable Somaliland when making their appeal for redress. This is exactly the sense in which Somaliland is a Covenant, in that the political terms of association and justice are derived not from any external, timeless antecedent, but from agreements entered into at a specific, contingent point in historical time, and kept alive through the intersubjective remembrance of the consenting parties themselves.

3.5.2.4 Outsider-insider

This dialectic of mutual obligation and mutual dependence has an additional dimension, which revolves around the role 'neutral' (i.e., non-belligerent) clans can play in resolving disputes between two warring communities. Third-party mediation is indeed common in inter-clan disputes, particularly where the implicated clans cannot control the violence internally, with outside delegations of clan elders (*ergo*) often called upon to serve as 'independent', 'external' mediators by negotiating, authorising and overseeing the implementation of peace agreements (Walls & Kibble 2013, 261-3). While conventionally a localised peacebuilding dynamic, the pivotal role of the 'outsider-insider' took on a completely new significance during the consecration of the Social Covenant, involving entire clan communities or political constituencies mobilising themselves and exerting great energy and resources to solve the conflicts of others, out of the self-interested understanding that, if the stabilising force of the social covenant unravels, all socially entangled parties will be affected.

More specifically, we find in the immediate post-Barre era, amidst the disintegration of *Isaaq* unity into SNM internecine struggles, non-*Isaaq* clans mobilising to intervene in the disputes of their neighbours, out of fears that such conflict would spill over into their own lands. In particular, it was the readiness of the *Gadabuursi* clan to 'come to the rescue of their brothers' and hold the 1993 conference in their home capital of Borama that enabled the ceasefires and reconciliation activities to be so successful (Bobe 2017, 78). One of the conference participants described how this worked:

As part of the agreements [leading up to the major peace forum], the parties said they would hold the conference in Borama. Deliberately I think, to take it outside the *Isaaq*. Because...there was a lot of infighting amongst the *Isaaq*. So, they needed outsiders, somebody who would be seen as neutral, to hold it on neutral ground. So, the community in Borama was very important also. (Interview #58)

Therefore, the inclusion of non-*Isaaq* clans in all major peace agreements was crucial not only because it guaranteed their own stake in a post-conflict political settlement, but because it served a purpose for the *Isaaq* themselves: providing them with an external agent willing and able to overcome their internal divisions. This served as a pull factor of conditional association, creating an incentive for the *Isaaq* to welcome the participation and inclusion of non-*Isaaq* on key governance issues, based on a dependence on their help in keeping the collective peaceful and stable.

In this way, Somaliland's horizontal Social Covenant was able to conjure up a mechanism for overcoming divisions not by appealing to a higher sovereign to adjudicate and decide on behalf of the multitude, but by locating a neutral, external arbiter *from amongst* the multitude. Here, the 'outsider-insider,' as an *ad-hoc* segment of the social body called upon at times of inter-communal conflict to mediate, draws strength from its simultaneity as a stakeholder within the social body but yet not also a party to the immediate conflict. This 'fluid', temporary approach to mediation—in which 'groups or individuals who are "external" in one context may be seen as "internal" in another' (Walls & Kibble 2013, 260)—contrasts with that of the State, whose authority to preside over dispute resolution comes with the price of granting it permanent and unyielding power and legal jurisdiction writ large. By relying on the intervention of actors collectively agreed-upon by stakeholders, and who thus alternate with respect to the demands of the situation, the 'outsider-insider' dynamic divorces responsibilities of decision-making and judgement from any assumption of a right to rule over the entirety of the polity's affairs, granting any actor a potential role as a conditional lead agent in a given context. Seen in another way, the 'outsider-insider' dynamic has enabled parties to the Social Covenant to overcome the conflicting particularisms and relativism of the multitude, not by appealing to an overarching homogeneity of subjection to abstract sovereign law, but through using pluralism to their advantage.

3.5.3   Summary

Through these various demonstrations of autonomous power and moral right, clans remind their counterparts and the government that their participation in the Somaliland project should not be taken for granted, but must instead be earned. As will be demonstrated in the Case Studies, such politics of conditional association draw strength from the credible threat of instability and violence, in which the possibility that things might spiral out of control is always present. Yet history has proved Somalilanders impressively adept at keeping such power games within limits, through both maintaining trust that mechanisms are in place to negotiate practical solutions (thus lowering the temperature of any dispute), and in adopting a position of flexibility and openness towards arriving at those practical solutions. In this way, plural demands are given room to operate while providing mechanisms to absorb those many-sided demands into the social whole.

3.6   Conclusion: The Social Covenant Revisited

I have here presented a broad picture of the Social Covenant, including the principles and mechanisms of its operation, stripped of some of the nuance, contradictions and counterfactuals that equally plague it. The primary aim was to demonstrate how the specific power dynamics that emerged during Somaliland's early days afforded local actors the conditions and means to build non-State forms of social relationality, and that these forms of relationality not only engendered peace, but provided workable solutions to matters of equality, collectivity and autonomy. Such solutions, by keeping elite power struggles within bounds, and doing their utmost to divorce alienating nation-level politics from localised efforts of social repair, instilled logics of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association that live on, even as the State grows in prominence. In the next four chapters, consisting of three case studies and a subsequent analysis of the findings, I bring the nuance and inconsistency back in, exploring not only the internal weaknesses and contradictions of the Social Covenant, but also the challenges the Covenant has faced in adapting to State logics of verticality, alienation and unconditional legitimacy over the past 20 or so years.

To anticipate the broad thrust of these findings, we see in the evolution of the Somaliland Social Covenant both noticeable vulnerability and a striking resilience. Even as more and more Somalilanders either rest their hopes on statehood and eventual recognition, or reject the concept of Somaliland statehood altogether, they continue to rely on the forms

of social power that they have carved out through the Covenant. This is both the organisational power of the clan to protect their own in the face of growing State overreach, and the moral force that comes with being a stakeholder and contributor to the collective peace. As the State has amassed influence over the fields of political agency and resource distribution, however, those actors and practices that have kept Covenantal relations alive are seeing their influence increasingly eroded, thereby weakening horizontal, intimate and semi-voluntary social relations. What I therefore present in the following chapters may well be the dying embers of a once powerful and effective alternative to the State, in which the legacies of such power and effectiveness nevertheless remain plain to see.

In the next chapter, we begin the first of three case studies, which draws attention to an instance of political contestation between the *Gadabuursi* clan of Awdal and the Somaliland government. Through a process tracing of the incident, I demonstrate the way in which the forces of State unconditionality and Covenantal conditional association are simultaneously invoked by different social actors towards different ends. Through an analysis of the case, the continued role of non-State logics on the politics of the Somaliland project will come to light. In the subsequent two case studies (Chapters 5 and 6), both the alienation-intimacy and verticality-horizontality dichotomies with be explored, based on an order that maximises narrative clarity, even while diverging from the order that they were presented here.

Chapter 4: Case Study I

The 18 May-26 June Debacle: Conditional Association and the Challenge of Majority Rule

On the evening of 9 May 2019, Somaliland counter-terror units raided the Hargeisa home of Mohamed Ahmed Dhakool, without warrant, arresting the parliamentarian on the spot. His crime: calling 18 May, Somaliland's official independence day, a 'dark day', which was 'relevant to a special clan' (the *Isaaq*) rather than celebrated unanimously (*Horn Diplomat* 2019). The remarks of this Dhulbahante (non-*Isaaq*) politician, recorded a few days earlier during a fiery televised interview, had riled much of the Somaliland public, who took offence to its perceived inaccuracy, harsh sentiment and unfiltered tone (*Bulsho* 2019; Interview #181; Journal, 11/05/2019). Several observers expressed credible mistrust of the MP's motives, given rumours that his outburst was a response to the president's decision to cut off some of his illicit rent-seeking activities (Interview #213; Interview #216; Journal, 11/05/2019). At the same time, however, the government's heavy-handed response to these offences, which included discharging live rounds in the vicinity of Dhakool's sleeping family, elicited equal public concern over the implications for free speech and the constitutional protections of parliamentary immunity (Interview #165; Interview #166; Interview #181).

18 May—the fateful day in 1991 when both reconciliation and independence were declared—is central not only to Somaliland's self-identity, but also to its claims to statehood (Chonka 2012). Its story of redemption, celebrated yearly, places the victims of Somalia's rule over Somaliland (primarily the *Isaaq*, who were targeted for genocidal erasure) centre stage, with liberation at the hands of the SNM transforming these victims into self-determined agents of their own historical destiny (Deyr 2022). For many guardians of this project, however, 18 May was about more than a national myth. To call into question the day's sacredness, and to deny its inclusivity, was to reopen old wounds, deny Somaliland's multi-clan heritage and 'dig up the country's foundations' of forgiveness and reconciliation (Interview #218; *HWN* 2019; *SAAB TV* 2019; Abdullahi 2019).

Such concerns aside, the fact that Mohamed Dhakool would spend the next 40 days in detention, without trial, on charges of 'treason' and the 'weakening of the self-governance and independence of Somaliland', seemed a disproportionate response, when a simple

apology and renunciation would have sufficed (Interview #165; Interview #166; Cumar 2019; Interview #216; *Star TV* 2019). For one lawyer familiar with the case, the president's response went well beyond practical concerns over security and unity, and instead represented 'a new phenomenon...of a highly politicised nature,' an attack against decentralised power and dissent (Interview #166). A such, the Somaliland government found little support for its actions amongst the broader public, while legislators from across the aisle sank the legal case against Dhakool by refusing to strip him of his parliamentary immunity. Nevertheless, it would take a direct appeal from the MP's clan elders to the president to eventually secure his release from captivity (Human Rights Centre 2019).

To understand this outsized governmental response to one dissenting politician, we have to look beyond the immediate circumstances, and take stock of the surrounding political environment. These events transpired at a time when what it meant to be a Somalilander was being fundamentally unsettled. For a conglomerate of clans that had founded and rebuilt political society as communal property, the emergence of the State had seen this communal property increasingly redirected towards those able to manipulate the new apparatuses of power, such as elections and patronage networks, to their advantage: primarily the *Isaaq* elite. As a result, the idea that 'Somaliland is for all' (*Somaliland la wada leeyahay*), a founding 'principle' of 'partnership' underpinning the Social Covenant (Interview #295), was increasingly being called into question by those outside this circle of winners, particularly those on the non-*Isaaq* peripheries—a nerve which MP Dhakool's words struck. Coalescing around this issue, then, we have, on the one hand, the State, for whom rejection of the 18 May narrative represented an act of disloyalty against the statebuilding project, and, on the other, many within non-*Isaaq* society for whom the one-sided narrative served as yet another marker of *Isaaq* infidelity to multi-clan inclusivity. In short, we find a confrontation between the univocal, unyielding demands of State authority, and a clan-based rejection of this presumption, on the premise that decision-making legitimacy is earned not compelled—and is thus *conditional*.

This chapter will begin by placing the Dhakool affair within the wider context of struggle between non-*Isaaq* regions and the governing elite. It will investigate the ways in which statebuilding has closed down space for clans to negotiate their inclusion in the Somaliland project, by both undermining the autonomy of clan envoys, and replacing clan-based legitimacy and agency with that of majoritarian ideology and power. In particular, it

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will look at how debates over power-sharing, once the domain of multi-clan, conditional negotiation, has increasingly become a site which the State has sought to manage by non-participatory decree. It will then analyse the response to such State assertiveness by the *Gadabuursi*, one of the non-*Isaaq* clans losing out under the increased appeal to majority rule. Drawing from the continued salience of certain features of Social Covenantal relations, primarily the mechanism of the 'veto' and the normative appeal to 'shared stakes', the *Gadabuursi*, it will be shown, was able to make a valiant, if ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to reassert agency over the power-sharing process, by demonstrating its basis in the conditional association on which the Social Covenant was founded.

4.1 Contextual Background: power-sharing, elections and debates on the meaning of independence

Dhakool's arrest came at a time of heightened tensions between non-*Isaaq* regions (Awdal, Sool and Eastern Sanaag) and the Somaliland government over the longstanding issue of political representation. Since the inauguration of State politics, no issue had proved as contentious as the distribution of governmental positions by clan, whether within the council of ministers, parliament, military or civil service. Regarding the legislature, power-sharing distributions were first established under the transitional administration of President Egal, based on a formula of regional percentages inherited from colonial times, in which, given the overlap between clan settlement patterns and political geography, region served as a proxy for clan. This arrangement, which was meant to be temporary, was seen to benefit the former SNM majority bloc, whereas minority clans believed they had made temporary concessions in the name of peace (Interview #56). Awdal and its *Gadabuursi* inhabitants, for instance, were allocated 13 out of 82 representatives to the *Isaaq*-dominated areas' 57, thereby granting the *Isaaq*'s various sub-clans a combined majority over the entire non-*Isaaq* population (APD/IPP 2021, 9).

Following the move to constitutional democracy, however, this tentative bargain was challenged, when, in advance of Somaliland's first popular elections of the House of Representatives (*Golaha Wakiilada*) in 2005, the *Gadabuursi* and *Harti* clans lobbied the Riyale government to address these perceived imbalances. Instead of confronting the issue head-on, the president deferred to the Supreme Court, which decided that, to prevent elections from being delayed by such a thorny issue, the original seat distribution would

remain in place one last time, before being resolved legislatively by the newly-elected parliament. Unsurprisingly, parliamentarians from majority sub-clans were in no rush to concede any of their power, and blocked subsequent *saami-qaybsi* reform efforts under the Riyale and Silanyo administrations, stalling legislative elections in the process (Interview #108). The problem, as one local researcher noted, was political: 'That is why [the elections are] postponed. It's not technical, it's a power-sharing problem, and it's sensitive…[The president is] afraid to face the clan' (Interview #115). Facing the clan would mean, first and foremost, the State risking ceding the initiative to alternative sources of legitimate authority, particularly the non-*Isaaq* traditional system.

When Muse Bihi took office in 2017, he thus inherited an unenviable situation. On the one hand, he faced a public exasperated by extensive delays to parliamentary elections, which were seven years overdue at that point (CPA 2019; Interview #258). At the same time, he risked potential backlash from many corners if parliamentary seat allocations were not redirected in their favour before such elections took place (Interview #56). Such pressure would further mount from an unfamiliar direction, with the arrival of two prominent political castaways onto the scene. Dr Ali Khalif Galaydh and Dr Ahmed Samatar, of the *Dhulbahante* and *Gadabuursi* respectively, were veterans of Somalia's politics, Khalif having served a year as prime minister and Samatar having attempted a disappointing bid for president. Both had opposed Somaliland's independence on ideological grounds, but, judging the political fortunes of themselves and their clans better served within the Somaliland political system, reinserted themselves into Somaliland affairs in the mid-2010s, albeit by very different routes: Samatar joined the Bihi presidential campaign as an adviser, while Khalif established the secessionist Khaatumo State armed movement, eventually negotiating a power-sharing agreement with President Silanyo in 2016 (*S-RM* 2016; Samatar 2018). However, by 2018, with Samatar excluded from Bihi's post-election cabinet and the president unwilling to implement his predecessor's peace plan with Khaatumo, the two figures saw their faith in the current Somaliland set-up wane, turning their attention away from high politics and towards grassroots campaigning for change (Interview #139).

This involved embarking on a self-described 'tabliiq siyaasadeed', a political proselytization tour of sorts throughout the country, in which the two intellectual heavy-weights conducted lectures before crowded conference halls (*Geeska* 2019). These lectures, which challenged Somaliland's inclusive self-image, were particularly valued by educated

youth as a 'change of narrative' from typical traditional and elite-based discourse (Interview #261; Mataan 2020). Capturing the mood of the moment, this duo underscored the political ills of a State project descending into elite capture, gerontocracy and increasing clan-based inequalities. Both Khalif and Samatar used their lectures to decry the instrumentalisation of clan, particularly the way in which the *Isaaq* community was using such identity politics to cement their majority hegemony. To transcend such 'tribalism', the intellectuals prescribed substantive inter-clan equality, to be realised through both a root-and-branch reconfiguration of governing institutions and the invention of new narratives. On the latter point, Samatar in particular believed that foregrounding Somaliland's original 26 June independence day (of 1960) would serve as an antidote to the divisive 18 May dogma:

> When you say 18 May, everybody in the east and the west see that as a poison—as an indication that Somaliland has now become a tribal state and an SNM clan project…[On the other hand] when Somaliland's independence [declaration] was signed on 26 June 1960, the four people who signed this were Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, Ahmed Keyse—two *Isaaq* guys—Garaad Ali Jama from the *Dhulbahante* and Haji Ibrahim Nur from the *Gadabuursi*—the big three clans. It tells you at that particular time there was still some degree of collective belonging symbolised by this historical moment. (Interview #134)

As for the governance reforms, Khalif envisioned an elaboration of the agreements made with President Silanyo, including more substantial regional equality and additional leadership positions to balance against the president, such as a prime minister (Interview #263). Such drastic reforms spoke to an ethos of conditionality, in which Somaliland's basic constitutional structures must be flexible and negotiable enough to meet the demands of inter-clan equality in the present:

> If this constitution is considered a document from the sky, we won't be thankful for the outcome. It isn't a holy document, it's something created by men, and it needs to adapt to changes in politics…As Khaatumo, without being bribed or bought, we made a conscious calculation that our interests lie with Somaliland. But we won't be a part of a place that we don't co-own, a place whose constitution, laws, justice and citizen rights are not shared equally by everybody. There isn't a Somali clan that would accept being second-class citizens. (*HCTV* 2019)

While capturing the previously unarticulated marginalisation felt by many of the nation's youth, such discourse elicited a more mixed response from established political corners. Some accused the pair of being fly-by-night political mercenaries, others of importing

misguided foreign ideas to an uncongenial context: 'people can demand more equity, but within our local context. When I'm not given a post, I will [merely] claim that there is no equity in Somaliland...I believe that they are talking good words, but without good intentions...Where was [Samatar] when his people were suffering?' (Interview #205). Others exploited the public debates for their own political ends, with many parliamentarians jumping on the *saami-qaybsi* bandwagon as an excuse to further delay elections, or to build populist support (Interview #297). Yet, amongst more sympathetic politicians, the debate was welcomed as providing a genuine political opening, a way to address certain unresolved tensions at the heart of the Somaliland project, with one *Isaaq* MP saying: 'We don't share power and resources with the other clans. How can they accept to be part of a government, of a country, where they are totally marginalised, and seen as second-class citizens?' (Interview #149).

In the rest of this chapter, I will attempt to sort through this cluster of perspectives and interests to better elucidate their wider political stakes. In doing so, I shall single out one particular non-*Isaaq* community—the *Gadabuursi*—for detailed attention. Residing mainly in Somaliland's westernmost region of Awdal, the *Gadabuursi* were not only one of the most influential communities in the formation of the polity, including as hosts of the 1993 Borama Conference, but also, by the same token, one of the most vocal sources of dissent against the inequalities, hierarchies and exclusion accompanying Somaliland's statebuilding project, from its Hargeisa-centric development model to the consolidation of *Isaaq* supremacy over electoral politics and public sector employment. Furthermore, Dhakool's broadside against 18 May found significant resonance in Awdal, especially given the silences regarding the SNM's own violence excesses against the non-*Isaaq* entailed by this narrative. As will be shown, it was at the intersection of this normative battle for equal recognition within the collective narrative and the political struggle for inclusion in power-sharing that the *Gadabuursi* community demonstrated that their participation in the Somaliland project was not to be taken for granted.

4.2   Unconditional legitimacy and Statebuilding in Somaliland

As the previous chapter argued, clan participation in the Somaliland project was predicated on certain baseline conditions of inclusivity, equity and tangible benefits (peace and survival primarily among them) being met. In order to both adjudicate and hold other

clans accountable to their performance in fulfilling these expectations, Somalilanders leaned on inter-clan dialogue and consensus-building led by respected, independent traditional leaders. However, as this section will demonstrate, both the practical autonomy and normative legitimacy of clan elders to perform this function was challenged with the emergence of the State, in which the relationship between the political order and the Covenantal parties was turned on its head. Rather than the legitimacy of the State being conditional on the assent of the clans, henceforth it was the State that claimed to set the terms under which clans and their representatives could legitimately engage in politics, thereby assuming unconditional authority. In what follows, I highlight two processes by which this played out: the co-optation of traditional political agents into formal institutions and informal patronage networks (4.2.1), and the consolidation of majoritarian rule through elections (4.2.2).

It was statebuilding that provided the conditions making these changes possible. With support from the international community, the bureaucratic arm of the Somaliland State expanded substantially, which, while not yielding substantial gains in service delivery, did greatly expand the number of individuals dependent on the national and municipal governments as a source of income and patronage (Hersi 2018, 15). Correspondingly, through public administration reforms concentrated in the capital, such as the refurbishment and recapacitation of national ministries and the enlargement of centralised tax revenues, new imbalances were produced between the centre—i.e., the *Isaaq* heartland—and the peripheries, whether in terms of 'decision-making, resources or access to opportunities' (Interview #7; Interview #170; Interview #269). Within Somaliland's 'social geography,' Awdal's peripheral location was thus translated into a peripheral status and voice: 'When delegations come from abroad, they confine their fact-finding to Hargeisa, thinking that Hargeisa speaks for all other regions' (Interview #7; Interview #269). Moreover, following the demobilisation of clan militia and the integration of armed personnel onto the State payroll, the politics of security has increasingly orbited around the central government (Ali 2014; Interview #132). In sum, as statebuilding has proceeded apace, the pluralistic power and agency that had underpinned Somaliland's inter-clan associationalism found itself increasingly absorbed into the centralising web of State politics.

4.2.1   Co-optation of traditional political agents

That spirit of negotiating everything is dying…Circumstances change, urbanisation and the market economy comes in, so relations get loose…Now there are very few traditional leaders who the people can trust…Every politician [anoints] his own traditional leader for his political purpose, and mostly [these leaders] are contesting each other, and that deepens confrontation and division within each clan…Now a traditional leader will go on TV and he's saying whatever he wants, and instead of addressing the conflict, he is accelerating and escalating the conflict. (Interview #217)

As detailed in Chapter 3, traditional mediation depends on the ability of customary representatives to transcend particular interests and contain power dynamics, so as to act autonomously in pursuit of communal peace. With the introduction of State politics, however, clan envoys increasingly saw their roles institutionalised and regulated. Many of the heroes of reconciliation, for instance, were integrated into the formal legislature as the House of Elders (*Guurti*), with their power to influence legislation and delay elections endowing them with unprecedented access to formal power (Fadal 2012; Farah 2012; Hoehne 2013). Other customary authorities, mainly the *caaqils*, became formally integrated into the security apparatus as salaried envoys of the Ministry of Interior, thereby tying their economic fate to compliance with State authority, even if their role in local dispute resolution remained largely unchanged (Interview #74). Lastly, with the introduction of elections, clan representatives positioned themselves as key conduits between politicians and the electorate, using their power to mobilise campaign funds and voters as leverage in the nomination of candidates and insertion into patronage networks (Verjee *et al.* 2015, 24).

The effect of these changes was two-fold. First, through incorporation into governing institutions as decision-makers and 'intermediaries', clan elders increasingly became 'part of the establishment,' 'gradually losing that neutrality' and 'their touch with the people', while becoming more uncritically beholden to the government (Interview #19; Interview #74; Cooper 2013, 94; Bakonyi 2013, 273). According to one civil servant within the Ministry of Interior, 'today, the role of traditional leaders within the community has diminished. They have left that field [of neutral mediation], and transferred to politics—they are busy supporting political parties now. They don't have the same influence…or reputation within their clan' (Interview #28). Additionally, the newfound power and wealth afforded to customary authority through patronage networks artificially 'inflated' the supply of rival

claimants to these roles, as established leaders found themselves in greater competition with power-hungry newcomers. These 'self-proclaimed traditional leaders,' who have 'little leverage or respect' amongst 'the families they claim to represent,' but rather 'sit in front of cameras and claim to be *suldaans*,' are generally 'supported by politicians, [who] want to use these so-called leaders as ladders to gain political power' (Interview #278).

This dilution and constraint of traditional leadership significantly reduced the scope of its social domain. Where once clans of relatively equal power would be forced to negotiate over land use or criminal recompense, once the State stepped into these disputes, solutions became increasingly unmoored from the social power of inter-clan deliberation, and ever more subject to the wanton and unruly 'politics of money and interest' (Interview #216). With the State now intervening as a stakeholder, its leaders were able to pre-empt or deflect calls for re-balancing and redistribution which traditional negotiated settlement usually entails, through buying off those with political grievances (Interview #58; Interview #95). Such transactional politics, with its focus on short-term, reactive pacification over visionary solutions to political discord, rests on bringing instigators into the fold through governmental appointment or hush money, temporary robbing communities of credible representatives until new, as-of-yet unspoilt leaders emerge to resume the struggle (Interview #283). One former instigator explicitly contrasted such reactive, piecemeal politics, with the durable solutions offered by inter-clan negotiation:

> The government and the *Isaaq*…don't believe in genuinely addressing the issues. All they want is to get all of these guys and give them a bribe and then they'll go back into the fold. I think it will be healthier, more productive and more cost effective to make sure that [all marginalised clans] are coming together [to discuss their relationship to Somaliland]. (Interview #260)

The emergence of rent-seeking and patronage networks did not entail the complete collapse or corruption of traditional authority, as elders with 'deep roots', those who were able to 'see the broader communal interest,' continued to keep Covenantal politics alive (Interview #134; Interview #209). However, forced to operate within a crowded political marketplace of 'genetically modified traditional leaders' and State interference (Interview #220), Somalilanders have developed an ambivalent relationship to the traditional system, simultaneously caught up in one group's divisive political machinations and relying on the other group's ability to reunify and repair intercommunal wounds. In other words, to the

extent that traditional leaders have transformed from a horizontal force mediating between communities to an intermediary strata in the neopatrimonial hierarchy between the State and society, they have become less and less reliable as a source of relative voice and influence for their constituents, and more and more a technology of power that the State can deploy over the people, through playing upon inter-can divisions (Renders 2007). 'I think we are losing touch with reality', says one educator, 'because reality dictates that the more you grab, the less somebody else has. And the less it gets, the more violent it becomes for others to grab as well. It seems like everybody is fending for himself at this stage, and that is unfortunate, that people are not building wider consensus so that we are able to move forward together' (Interview #7). As elite competition draws in clan and traditional to its single-minded orbit of power struggle, the multipolar, consensus-based logics of clan associationalism becomes lost in the process.

Pertinently for the case at hand, this political transformation is detectable in the evolving political meaning of *saami-qaybsi*. During the days of reconciliation, power-sharing, as described in Chapter 3, was a co-produced political condition of relative equality negotiated between communities, where even issues as radically unorthodox as clan territorial self-governance—a veritable confederal model of association—had been on the table. Within State politics, however, the horizon of possibility was substantially reduced, with each clan's right to shape the dynamics of power replaced by the opportunity to take part in an uneven competition over privileged control of centralised power (i.e. elections) (Interview #39). For those unsuccessful in this bid, the consolation prize was appealing to the winner for temporary, dependent access to and/or enjoyment of this power, in line with the winner's prerogatives. Gesturing towards this closing down of political space, one *suldaan* bemoaned the reduction of political discourse away from issues of substantive ideological difference, and to endless bickering over a fixed number of seats, roles, employment opportunities—of '"you gave Clan X more, you're denying this amount to Clan Y," and so on' (Interview #159). What had changed was the very nature of power, transformed from something mutually *constituted* by clans into something discriminatorily *possessed* by governing authorities: a 'thing' to be divided up and parcelled out.

This shift in both the stakes of power distribution and its mechanisms (from consensus to bestowal) came to a head during the heated debates surrounding *saami-qaybsi* between 2018 and 2019. Tensions initially emerged during a meeting between the president and a

delegation of *Gadabuursi* elders, after Bihi refused to engage seriously with the proposal they delivered, which set out practical means to address representational imbalances (Interview #279; Interview #276). Then, during a speech at the February 2019 Kulmiye Party Central Committee Conference, held in Borama, the president earned the ire of the host population by accusing those advocating for more parliamentary seats of engaging in 'clannism' and 'regionalism', while attempting to play one clan off the other by suggesting that seats for Awdal would have to come at the expense of other marginalised clans (*Geeska* 2019). For those in his party, Bihi's presidential mandate to speak on behalf of the entire polity, transcending clan, meant this perspective must be respected: 'The president holds the highest position in the country and the constitution gave him the power to take any decision [on how *saami-qaybsi* should be settled]…We can't say the president represents a certain clan, he's the president of all of Somaliland' (Interview #81).

Ultimately, the president called on the people of Awdal to 'relinquish' their demands in the service of elections, and conduct their struggle for more representation through the ballot box, words which pulled in the opposite direction of the *Gadabuursi* community, who saw it necessary for the president to 'relinquish' his control over the process, an instead 'welcome all stakeholders, political figures, and traditional leaders with an open face, so as to achieve compromise' (*Geeska* 2020). What emerged then was a stark opposition in political outlook, divided between an executive that saw 'tolerance and concession as…weakness' (Interview #266), and those for whom competing, particularist interests could only be overcome through inclusive, participatory negotiation between stakeholders (Interview #61; Interview #289). In the latter view, concentrated State power, in operating in the interest of its own elite, was itself the obstacle:

> The people that we're expecting things from are the ones that are still holding on to their shares of power, and are avoiding opening a discussion about it. They are all fixated on what they'll be losing…even though the majority of the people support the idea of everyone coming to the table. When people come to the table together then definitely an agreement will be reached. Somaliland is famous for compromising and coming to an agreement on everything. (Interview #56)

On one level, then, this shift in decision-making from conditional assent between stakeholders to unconditional control by the executive was a practical means for consolidating the power of the political elite, whose interests dovetailed with a more dominant and unchallenged State. On another level, however, I argue we find a fundamental

tension between the logics of two parallel yet divergent models of social relationality, between plurality of social power against the monopoly of coercive force. In other words, for the State to allow clans to retain the capacity to selectively authorise power, based on its conditions of justice being met, would fly in the face of its claim to unconditional decision-making authority. As one politician, concerned by the president's decision to use *saami-qaybsi* as a mechanism to assert power over clans, lamented:

> It is strange that instead of this administration pushing peace, reconciliation and widening this circle or at least [including] people who are partners, [Muse] is fearful of these clans coming together and…[is instead] telling them to not meet…What is complicating things is micromanagement, it is one-man rule, and nobody in the cabinet or a traditional elder can have a say in the final decision. (Interview #260)

Essentially, as elder-based, inter-clan negotiation was increasingly replaced by politician-led, inter-clan control and competition, State politics transformed plurality and difference from prerequisites of agonistic cooperation to conditions of friction to be managed, exploited and contained by the ruling power. In other words, as State power and its authority over decision-making has grown more unconditional, traditional authority and clan associationalism have weakened as sources of community empowerment vis-à-vis the rest of society, and expanded as sources of disempowerment (pacification and competitive instrumentalisation) vis-à-vis the State. Where once the autonomy and influence of traditional leaders afforded clan communities substantial and comparable power to influence how collective power is organised, increasingly it has been the State that sets the rules of the game. Moreover, as the next sub-section will show, this process, in which one subset of society assumes the authority to speak on behalf of the whole, has been bolstered by another trend brought on by statehood, *Isaaq* majoritarianism.

4.2.2 Majoritarianism

Majoritarianism is the belief that the majority community should rule whichever way it wants, by disregarding the needs, ideas and wishes of the minority…Always they try to rule you. They don't care [about] your problems, your feelings. (Interview #271)

State politics not only worked to divorce decision-making legitimacy from inter-clan negotiation, but also introduced an alternative claim to legitimate authority in its place:

majoritarianism. This was a product of the move to electoral democracy, particularly the way in which political competition altered the nature of clan identity. While the civil war of the early 1990s had mobilised kinship relations in pursuit of conflict, with the onset of reconciliation, clan identity had eased as a marker of exclusion and opposition, and instead became more relevant as a localised resource of communal protection, insurance and social welfare (Richards 2020; Interview #151). However, similar to other African electoral contexts (Mozaffar 2006; Koter 2013), with the rise of electoral politics in 2002, the politicised dimensions of clan identity—or what one Somali scholar called the 'vulgarisation of kinship' (Interview #134)—again came to the fore, in which rival clan-based party blocs became the primary medium for determining political fortunes and economic advantages (Interview #108; Interview #17; Interview #36). As a result, unlike the Covenantal model of inter-clan associationalism, where all clans must assent to a governance objective for it to be pursued, under the electoral model, in which there is a clear 'winner and loser,' one electorally victorious part of society achieves a mandate to rule on behalf of the whole (Interview #187).

Within this winner-takes-all environment, the cards were stacked in favour of the *Isaaq*, whose demographic and commercial dominance granted it perpetual electoral success since the end of the Riyale era. As one activist explained: 'in Somaliland, now, there are two ways we can fight: one is population, and the other is money. If you have these two, democracy will work for you' (Interview #271). Through superior voter numbers and campaign finance, the *Isaaq*'s main sub-clans have come to dominate all three official political parties, leaving non-*Isaaq* voters to hitch their fate to a party that reflects their interests only indirectly: 'a *Gadabuursi* man can make his own party, but there is not much hope that they will be elected, because they are from a minority clan, which [is prominent] in just one region' (Interview #292). Within parliament, these demographic factors have resulted in a 68% majority for the *Isaaq*, granting it both a unilateral mandate and one-way legislative veto, in contrast to the reciprocal veto of the Covenantal system: 'When you look at the parliamentary seats, the clans from the *Isaaq*, they can block any vote from non-*Isaaq* clans' (Interview #275; Interview #277; Interview #279). This situation has effectively stopped power-sharing reform in its tracks, with all three political parties opposed to such change: 'When power distribution is mentioned, the three chairmen and the central clan all have the same opinion' (Interview #270). In other words, elite *Isaaq* collusion trumps party difference.

This subordinate status trickles down the entire system of politics and government, with minority clans having less access to polling stations, courts and political forums, and its politicians granted appointments with great ceremony but limited power (Interview #76; Interview #271; Interview #290). For example, while the vice presidency and certain minor cabinet posts have been informally reserved for *Gadabuursi* individuals since Egal's time, so long as such roles are dependent upon the caprices of the president, their influence and independence face inherent limits: 'constitutionally, Awdal has the vice presidency, but he is not granted any authority. All the authority goes to the president, and he can lead a country in whichever direction he wants' (Interview #283; Interview #292). Furthermore, the role of non-*Isaaq* clans as supplementary, 'swing' voters fought over by *Isaaq*-dominated parties, has often involved party leaders pitting one minority group against another, sometimes with violent consequences (Walls & Kibble 2013, 30; Interview #292).

This supremacy over the mechanisms of power found its corollary in the ideologies legitimating that power, and here is where the 18 May narrative comes in. The Social Covenant was predicated on mutual forgiveness, in which competing narratives of friend and enemy, righteousness and criminality, were torn down. However, as the Somaliland government's external and internal legitimacy became increasingly tied to the redemptive narrative of *Isaaq* victimhood and self-determination, and as the country's reputation for democracy came to overshadow the majoritarian nature of this democracy, the SNM narrative of *Isaaq* redemption again reared its head. In particular, appeals to the legacy of the SNM struggle served as a means for the *Isaaq* political elite to reassert a preordained 'right to rule.' In the words of one diaspora businessman, 'This particular government thinks that it's rightfully theirs, since they used to be SNM, and they have actually sacrificed their lives for this…The problem is then that they don't want to listen to or care about anybody else' (Interview #163; also Interview #217). At times, this self-righteousness was seen to veer into a sense of being above the law: 'Those who are SNM, they are not [being held] accountable, because they say we fight for this country, and we are not accountable to anyone. We cannot build our future from past memories' (Interview #271).

At the societal level, he SNM narrative was increasingly institutionalised through national symbolism, performance and ritual, including everything from state insignia (such as national monuments), to the independence parade on 18 May (Chonka 2012, 9-14; Chonka & Healy 2021, 71; Serunkuma 2018; Gikandi 2021).The result has been a picture of Somaliland

statehood as fated and 'sacred' (*muqadas*) (Interview #149; Interview #65), a view inevitably incompatible with and defensive towards alternative narratives. In particular, the perspectives of the *Gadabuursi* and *Harti*—for whom independence was accompanied by a diminution of status, reprisal violence at the hands of the SNM, and a sense of ambivalence towards Somaliland statehood itself—have often been treated as complicating factors to be quieted (Höhne 2006, 409-10; Interview #292). Similarly, in the service of an outward presentation of unity, expressions of inter-clan imbalances have often been downplayed or papered over, rather than openly confronted (Mills *et al.* 2021; Interview #79; Interview #215).

When it came to the enjoyment of national power and wealth, the SNM's sense of historical mission, combined with an appeal to sovereign entitlement, became a pretext for national leaders to lay claim to the public sphere itself: 'The main problem in Somaliland now is that the country that was owned by everyone is now possessed by a distinct group' (Interview #151). As such, we find reported instances of elite land-grabbing justified either as the just rewards for the liberation of the country, or, in the case of Muse Bihi's attempt to forcibly appropriate IDP land to build a new presidential palace for himself, as State prerogative (Interview #126; Journal, 16/04/2019; Interview #160). Equally, whereas once the Covenantal compact had ensured that public resources were 'eaten collectively amongst clans,' over time the enjoyment of such spoils has narrowed substantially, with the president, his family and inner circle 'saving everything for themselves, [rather than] sharing with other people' (Interview #151; Interview #275; Interview #163). Furthermore, on a much larger scale, where once the Somaliland government had sought to negotiate directly with peripheral communities to ensure their participation in Somaliland politics, over time it has increasingly sought to extend its control over these hinterlands through military expansion, based on a conception of monopoly authority over its allocated territory (Hoehne 2019, 256-7; Meservey 2019). This link between SNM/*Isaaq* supremacy and the crowding out of alternative sources of power is clearly articulated in this analysis by one senior opposition politician:

> With Kulmiye coming into power the game has changed, in two ways. One is that
> the institutions have a degree of growth, and are working somewhat naturally,
> and so the clans no longer have the weapons and power they once did…[Second],
> because they are from SNM mainly, they perceive that they deserve this

[unrivalled power], and they own it, so they don't accept external accountability.'
(Interview #170)

Majoritarianism in Somaliland, then, is about more than unequal electoral outcomes between clan blocs; it has altered the very nature of where legitimate decision-making is seen to derive from. Where once direct, elder-mediated negotiation presumed a balance and equity of all voices, majority rule now elevates a particular kind of voice, whose electoral validation or privileged historical position entitles it to speak on behalf of the collective. In other words, if relative equality in power dynamics and authority had forced each clan, for the sake of collective peace and security, to take into consideration its neighbours and negotiate concessions, then the valorisation of multiparty electoral competition, by disassociating power from the realm of multipolar coercive force, and tying it instead to demographic and financial supremacy, replaced consensus as the basis of political agency with that of presidential discretion, license and decisionism. Furthermore, as Somaliland society became separated into those legitimately endowed with power and agency as those legitimately denied it, so too did a political caste system (of second- and third-class citizenships) seem to emerge in the eyes of many: 'I think we have an Orwellian mind-set which says all Somalilanders are equal, but some are more equal than others…This is the same mind-set which divides the Somaliland people, its own people, as us and them' (Interview #99).

Therefore, when figures such as Dhakool, Samatar or Khalif pushed back against the 18 May narrative, they were reacting to this conflation of the majority with the whole, and the resulting diminishment of Covenantal plurality. As the next section will show, at stake in the political campaign that these politicians sparked was not greater inclusion within the prevailing Somaliland political narrative, but the very idea that participation in the Somaliland project was conditional on an openness to narrative multiplicity as such. This sentiment is captured by prominent *Isaaq* politician:

> People in the centre say, "You guys deserve whatever comes to you because you were on the wrong side." It doesn't work that way. We have to sympathise with them, and say "We suffered, you suffered, we came together to share the Somaliland State, you are part of this set-up. You keep your narrative, we won't force our narrative." They don't see the SNM as freedom fighters. The problem is, [when] you celebrate 18 May, they have their own narratives. They say, "That doesn't concern us…we came together to form a government. We negotiated as

clans in Burao...Let us start from that...When Siad Barre left, we decided, let bygones be bygones, and the clans came together. We didn't deal with the SNM— we want to deal with the clans." So you don't force your narrative on them. That means you are showing respect. And they demand respect. (Interview #220)

4.3   Conditional Association and the *Gadabuursi*'s Quest for Equity

The idea of alternative narratives was not an abstract concept—indeed, other practical contenders for the national day existed. In particular, for Dhakool and Samatar, 26 June, the day in 1960 when the Somaliland territory achieved independence from colonial rule, was a moment that went beyond *Isaaq*-centric narratives, by foregrounding non-*Isaaq* heroes, such as the *Harti*-based *Darawiish* resistance movement against the British (1899-1920) (*Boramanews* 2019; *Wax iga baro* 2017). Lacking the baggage of SNM triumphalism and civil war, 26 June was a day that could 'fuse together all of Somaliland' behind a 'shared fight against a foreign intruder,' granting the *Gadabuursi* and *Harti* 'pride' and 'purpose' as 'stakeholders' (*Wax iga baro* 2017; Interview #231; Interview #178). As I have already shown, where once the non-*Isaaq*'s 'stakeholder' status had been well understood, with the rise of the State's centralising, majoritarian tendencies, this was no longer the case.

During the period under study, with parliamentary elections long overdue and power-sharing grievances still unaddressed, dissatisfaction in Awdal began to boil over. The faith, embodied in the Social Covenant, that all political differences could be worked out deliberatively had, by the mid-2010s, given way to a sense of 'exclusion' felt amongst minority clans, which risked delegitimising the Somaliland project altogether (Interview #279; Interview #280; *HWN* 2020). In the words of one disgruntled leader of a marginalised sub-clan, 'There is nothing called "Somaliland"; there is no "Somaliland for all" here—it's "*Isaaq*-land"' (Interview #76). Many *Gadabuursi* youth expressed their frustration against this exclusion through everyday acts of counter-cultural rebellion, particularly outward demonstrations of pro-Somalia sympathies, such as wearing the light-blue of Somalia's flag (Journal, 09/04/2019). More provocative was the organisation of a vigil, on 4 February 2019, marking the 28th anniversary of the so-called 'Dilla massacre', in which the activists in attendance protested the decades-long enforced public silence against the crimes of the SNM (*Boramanews* 2019; Interview #271). While some politicians from the region disowned the initiative as divisive, others defended it as a means for highlighting the epistemic and practical injustices the community was subjected to over time—injustices perpetuated by the

Somaliland government's decision to imprison those responsible for the vigil (*Bulsho TV* 2019; *Sharbi Media* 2019; *SAAB TV* 2019).

As the State increasingly relied on suppression to contain these acts of dissent, and as the space for a negotiated solution the *saami-qaybsi* issue seemed to narrow, the *Gadabuursi* upped the stakes by threatening to boycott the elections altogether, presenting the president with a list of 'ultimatums' to this effect (Interview #271). While a *Gadabuursi*-led initiative, its message struck a chord amongst all who saw institutionalised inequality as a creeping source of division. As one *Isaaq* politician argued: 'We can't keep simply reminding people of the 1988 genocide—it's getting old. We can no longer sell it as the reason for separation because Somaliland has many clans living in it, but the *Isaaq* clan was the only one victimised by Barre—that is why we need a reasonable alternative argument' (Interview #230). As will be shown in what follows, this sense of dwindling legitimacy was expressed through the issue of electoral power-sharing, in which Gadabuursi resistance to the power-sharing terms on which the elections were set to be held demonstrated that its continued association with Somaliland was *conditional* upon its Covenantal entitlements to equality being met. In making this claim, the clan used the threat of boycott, and even secession, as mechanisms of 'veto' and 'exit' (4.3.1) to bring attention to these grievances, while framing the justice-claims at stake in the language of 'shared stakes' (4.3.2).

4.3.1   Veto and exit

I don't recognise [the Somaliland government]. I revoked [this recognition] in 2014 and am now working on an independent state of Awdal…A clan sitting on top of another clan, that can't be a government….We were seeking our rights in peaceful talks, but disagreement has reached a level where discussion will no longer work. (*Horn Cable* 2019)

These words were spoken by Suldaan Wabar, the head of a major *Gadabuursi* sub-clan, who, in 2014, fled to the 'jungle' of Ethiopia to initiate an armed campaign for Awdal's reintegration into Somalia as a federal member state, after finally giving up on the Somaliland project (Egeh 2015). While open insurrection represented an outlier among responses to marginalisation within the Somaliland State, and was publicly disowned by most of the *Gadabuursi* (even if many reportedly sympathised with the cause in private [Journal, 08/04/2019; Interview #292]), I argue that Wabar's explanation for how this insurrection came to be places it on the wider continuum of political 'veto' and 'exit' logics, albeit on the

extreme end. Rather than rejecting the Somaliland project on ideological grounds or on the basis of any inherent or categorical difference in identity or history, Wabar justified secession through appeal to a time-bound assessment of the failure of the Somaliland government to meet the conditions of equality, independence and unity for his community's participation in the polity. Indeed, for those pursuing *saami-qaybsi* reform through electoral boycott and other forms of withdrawal, Wabar's movement was merely another strategic mechanism of 'political pressure' in their arsenal, a form of communication aimed at both the Somaliland State and their counterpart clans 'drawing attention' to a fundamental breach of the Covenantal conditions of inter-clan equality.

What separates the 'veto' or 'exit' of the Social Covenant from conventional acts of anti-State resistance or rebellion is not the tactics by which grievances are expressed, but rather how such political contestation is assimilated into social relations between clans. By tapping into a form of injustice that harkened back to the origin Covenantal promise, and by expressing that injustice in a socially-acceptable manner—i.e., by demonstrating assurances of ultimate restraint, an unswerving openness to dialogue, and a commitment to target political anger against the State or politician, but never the clan—such provocative acts are interpreted as within the bounds of acceptable, legitimate politics, and are thus responded to with calls for mediated dialogue rather than suppression through force (Interview #281; Interview #292; Interview #271). Within this system of implicit safeguards and mutual understanding, shows of force and threats of disunity are prevented from spiralling out into open conflict, so long as all sides trust each other to play by these rules, and show a willingness to treat each other as equal, respected partners in dialogue, something which Wabar accused the State of violating.

It was within the liminal space between influencing the Somaliland State from the inside and challenging it from the outside that the people of Awdal mounted their multipronged campaign for *saami-qaybsi* reform. Things began in early 2019, when politicians and intellectuals organised a semi-clandestine conference in Borama to assess the political situation, with the election boycott floated for the first time (Journal, 08/04/2019; Interview #288). At the same time, youth activists built up an expansive network of *Gadabuursi* supporters, who would 'make noise' across social media and other public platforms, in order to pressure the president and parliament (Journal, 08/04/2019). The campaign united clan members across party lines (Interview #283; Interview #277), and developed a public face in

the person of the parliament's Deputy Speaker, Ahmed Yasin Ayanle, who used public speeches to explicitly threaten the region's 'veto' (*codka diimada qayaxan*) over the election if power-sharing was not resolved (*Geeska* 2019). As one former minister from the area explained, this seemingly disparate barrage of protest, civil disobedience and withdrawal was held together through informal, ad-hoc coordination, which ensured that all manoeuvres walked the fine line between legitimate and illegitimate threat:

> We gathered all the politicians and elders from Awdal and decided not to participate in the elections. [Soon] we will re-evaluate our options, because if you reject something, you must have alternative plans. We don't want to provoke the youth and cause problems that we don't know how will end. *We need to change the system but not destroy it…*Refusal alone won't work, so we should know what exactly we want. (Interview #281, emphasis added)

The threat of abstaining from elections carried particular weight regarding Somaliland's internal and external legitimacy. Somaliland's claims to statehood rest on (a) being founded as a successor to a previously independent State (the Somaliland that gained independence in 1960), and (b) embodying the democratic will of the people of the territory. For Somaliland's most faithful non-*Isaaq* community, and one of its six regions, to spurn elections en masse would call into question both the country's democratic credentials and the very legitimacy of the Somaliland project, reducing Somaliland to a nonviable clan enclave, as all sides of the political struggle were well aware (Hoehne 2015, 158; Gilkes 2003, 182-3). For example, one former aid worker described the weight of the *Gadabuursi* threat in the following terms: 'There is a measurement [required for] being accepted internationally, rather than "the *Isaaq* has a majority." It doesn't work that way. Recognition can be aborted by any asshole *Gadabuursi*…who says my personhood is not well respected—if he says that, the international community will listen' (Interview #272). President Bihi is also reportedly recognised this, with Deputy Speaker Ayanle recounting a conversation with the leader in which he conceded: 'Awdal is one of the most populated, richest and strongest regions of Somaliland, it is impossible that something they disagree with happens in Somaliland. You're not people to deny…You have a veto power; an election you don't accept won't be held in this country' (*Xuseen Caateeye* 2019).

Amplifying the impact of this threat was the increased feasibility of alternatives to the Somaliland project, particularly as Somalia's statebuilding gained steam. On the one hand, the Somali State's weakness and the isolation of Awdal in the far corner of the Somali

territories made any practical 'rejoining' of Somalia unlikely in the short-term (Interview #117; Interview #287). On the other, the *Gadabuursi* were able to exploit flirtations with pro-Somalia sentiment as a form of protest, while also establishing connections with kinfolk politicians in Mogadishu, whose own access to finance and power lessened Awdal's dependence on Hargeisa. Indeed, one source of perceived strength vis-à-vis the centre was the region's *de facto* relative autonomy and self-sufficiency, with 'the projects that happen in our districts [mainly] the people's doing, whether we are talking about health, education centres [or] security' (Interview #277). Awdal's political figures, from Wabar to more mainstream actors, saw further autonomy, in the form of local ports and connections abroad, as a strategic tool in the fight against the Somaliland State (*Horn Cable* 2019; Interview #251). Such autonomy was to be found in the realms of business and traditional authority, with regional and local governance denied any 'actual power', instead being beholden to the Ministry of Interior and its local appointees, as one Borama municipal councillor complained (Interview #284).

This autonomy to organise arms, finance and manpower, combined with the relative weakness of the State, left the possibility of anti-State violence a powerful implicit threat underpinning all these political machinations. Indeed, one lesson that *Gadabuursi* activists learned from the Wabar saga was that 'we can repeat that again if we want to. If these power-sharing arguments do not finish, then maybe the people will look at something else, like to fight' (Interview #271). Similarly, warnings of general instability in the absence of proactive change lay behind the *Gadabuursi*'s messaging to a wider public. As one opposition politician cautioned, 'If injustice continues, there will come a time when the people in Awdal will explode like a volcano from the political pressure, and that will result in them resenting or even hating Somaliland—people may start taking action and cause explosions, or they may try to separate from Somaliland' (Interview #277; Interview #281). In other words, while an undesirable last resort, violence was an unavoidable outcome of sustained inequality.

What ultimately makes this campaign of resistance an example of Social Covenant logics at work, rather than an example of the Statist politics of secession, rebellion or political advocacy, is the belief that the resolution of the conflict required not an action by the State, but the bypassing of the State altogether. For one thing, as described above, the formal mechanisms of governance offered no level playing field to the *Gadabuursi* and other smaller clans. At the same time, the State, in holding up debate and suppressing dissent,

demonstrated a willingness to use its monopoly over formal authority to overpower, rather than encourage, alternative voices. This can be observed in Bihi's unreserved dismissal of the delegation of elders presenting him with the ultimatum: 'Muse didn't take it seriously and the answer he gave them was that the whole country has grievances, that the delegation was stating their own beliefs, and that their people don't share the same feelings as them, which was offensive to the elders' (Interview #277). For one *Gadabuursi suldaan* involved in the campaign, the State's intransigence reflected a commitment to its own particularist interests, rather than the communal good, which could only be fostered through collective cooperation among Somaliland's multipolar society:

> Obstacles to resolving this issue do not reside within the population, but can be traced to politics—those in power today have no interest in reopening such a discussion…Because of this, *there is truly no higher power that can help* revisit this issue regarding members of Parliament today. What is simply required is that all parties involved discuss and mutually agree to change the setup of parliamentary representation. (Interview #278, emphasis added)

The *Gadabuursi* campaign thus set its sights on fully breaking the State's stranglehold on the power-sharing process, calling for direct negotiations between clans. In a public plea to the president, for example, one elder from Awdal exclaimed, 'Somaliland is [nothing but] clans. Let us sit at the table of clans [*miiska beelaha*] and negotiate…In 1991, we all decreed Somaliland, and today we are holding you all accountable' for what was promised (*Badacas 24* 2020). Even Awdal's younger generation, despite their greater openness to liberal democratic politics, promoted inter-clan negotiation, with one young opposition politician conceding that, for any progress to be made, 'Somaliland will always go back to the elders, because they formed the country', a vote of confidence in those who 'are always ready to do what is right, because they want to leave a legacy for their region,' in the words of a student (Interview #258; Interview #269). According to this line of thought, it was through the practical give and take of consensus-building, beyond the winner-take-all nature of formal politics, that cooperation could be reached:

> A formula can be found, if the issue is faced sincerely. It will come out from debate. When people come together, and everybody talks from his heart, they can reach an agreement. There can be some other areas that can be compensated, [to make amends for] what they are complaining [about]. But first, the people must come together, and talk sincerely about the issue. I am sure they will reach a fair agreement. (Interview #108)

As such, while clan authority had been weakened by politicisation and co-optation, it had not been broken.

The difference between inter-clan negotiation and State-society bargaining was one of power—namely the disparity between clan power (based on the ability to undermine/preserve peace and stability) and State power (based on numerical and financial weight). While the *Gadabuursi* was rich in the former, as a result of being a key stakeholder in keeping the Social Covenant together, it was poor in the latter, being reduced to a mere 'minority'. This comparison was articulated by one educator, who declared that: 'I really hate when people write that the *Harti* and *Gadabuursi* are "minority groups." To me, "minority" is related to power…They are not deciding [the direction] Somaliland is going at the moment, that is true, but they are powerful' (Interview #7). Or, as one former vice president put it: 'there is no dominant and non-dominant, anybody can be dominant…Without the *Gadabuursi* elders, things would have been difficult…They did a good job. All sides listen to them, and they can play that role any time' (Interview #205).

Harnessing clan power could only come when clans confronted each other as independent, equal agents, rather than a State looking down upon one of its subjects. As one former mayor of Borama argued: 'Being heard is a minimum condition. A person who listens to you is a person who gives you a gift. We live and share the country together, we are the people responsible for it; if we don't listen to each other, then justice will not follow' (Interview #270). This plea for being listened to as an equal is, no doubt, an appeal to consensus politics, not merely as a practical option when State-oriented solutions have failed, but as a precondition for justice. For one observer, whereas an authoritative State created division and hierarchy within the inter-clan arrangement, a humble and open one brought all clans together through equality and dignity:

> Somaliland people don't agree with each other about the way forward, or about the past…President Bihi forgot that this is Somaliland. When it comes to Somaliland, you need to be very humble…There are people who see him as a warlord, a factional leader. You cannot attack the other side when your people are [are in power]. You must come to them in peace, consult with them, ask them their opinion, show them your legitimacy…There's no way you can ignore those voiceless people. There's no democratic mechanisms to hear their voice because they are few. (Interview #209)

As important as how the *Gadabuursi* interpreted their 'veto' was how it was responded to by the other clans, whose cooperation the campaign directly appealed to. Given the option to see it as a provocation or threat to their elections and stability, or as a valid grievance to be addressed, the vast majority of *Isaaq* consulted for this study chose the latter (Interview #297; Interview #259; Interview #149). One *Isaaq* member of parliament remarked: 'While some grievances [among the public] are only hallucinations to shake the government and this State, grievances like power-sharing are tangible issues that should be a priority. Its solution is a matter at hand, and it will be solved' (Interview #165). This willingness to discern between legitimate and illegitimate causes was matched by a faith that the legitimate means of grievance-making—a period of disruption giving way to a negotiated outcome—would be followed, generating trust in the process: 'While one day you think [the country is on the verge of] being destroyed, the next day everything becomes okay. This is the culture of Somaliland. When the people gather together, they'll collect the necessary advice from amongst each other, and the decision that comes will be based on what is possible today' (Interview #246). Indeed, the issue of power-sharing was eventually mainstreamed as an issue to be resolved before elections took place, both amongst local civil society organisations, political parties and even international donors (CPA 2019; *Geeska* 2018; *Garowe Online* 2018).

Political 'veto', as a tool of the Social Covenant, aims not only to exert power in order to alleviate a grievance, but to shape the very way power is exercised politically (by empowering social groups to decide their own fate through negotiation). As a result, such an approach not only pushes back against the power of the State, but also calls into question its very legitimacy, by exposing its reliance on the consent of the governed. What makes this a form of conditional association is that, through the list of ultimatums, the *Gadabuursi* was claiming that the Somaliland State had no claim to the region's *a priori* participation in elections, but was dependent upon *Isaaq* society remaining faithful to its Covenantal promise that 'Somaliland is for all [clans].' The conditional aspect of these claims to justice will further come to light in the next section, as we explore the moral economy in which such claims were made: that of 'shared stakes.'

4.3.2   Shared stakes

Conditional association links political belonging to an assessment of ownership and hope in a political community. Such choice and agency is often left out of discussions of Somaliland's peripheral communities, whose loyalty or infidelity to the Somaliland project (vis-à-vis alternatives such as Puntland or Somalia) often centres on a battle between borders and clan affinities. For example, the ambiguous, shifting allegiances of eastern *Harti* communities are generally depicted as an oscillation between 'a justification of nationhood based on ex-colonial boundaries [Somaliland]' and 'one based on clan affiliation [Puntland]' (Arieff 2008, 78; ICG 2018). Yet, as one young *Gadabuursi* activist explained, his political stance towards Somaliland was not identitarian (national vs. clan affiliation), but came about through a growing sense of betrayal over what was promised: 'The problem is lack of balanced justice…It's the reason we're always speaking about power-sharing. The people of Awdal don't hate Somaliland or its leaders, there are people who contributed a lot to the construction of the State. But the governments that came since negated the love they had; they took away the taste of nationhood' (Interview #280).

This description of a founding hope since betrayed fits precisely within the moral economy of conditional association, which revolves around the reciprocal expectations all clans have towards each other. As discussed in Chapter 3, this moral economy, of 'shared stakes', positions each clan as a stakeholder in the collective Somaliland project, with expectations of investments and returns. Given the clans' entangled fates, the returns include the security and survival of the project itself, with each clan enjoying the peace that comes from good relations with their clan counterparts, but also involves the 'dividends' from this peace, including shares of power, resources and economic opportunities. To earn a right to enjoy these benefits, each clan is expected to contribute to the common cause in the form of sacrifice, moral debts and expended energies, whether in establishing and maintaining the peace or in rebuilding society itself.

In challenging the *Isaaq*'s domination over the sphere of governance, the *Gadabuursi* ultimately made their case for redress with reference to historical debts and reciprocations. Although appeals for greater shares primarily on the basis of demographic percentages, individual citizenship rights or regional balance were entertained (Interview #25; Interview #20; Interview #142), the Awdal movement ultimately decided on a '50-50 formula,' an even

split between *Isaaq* and non-*Isaaq*, which would not only signify present parity between communities, but would also reject the sense that any single clan enjoys privileged ownership over a polity that they all contributed in building (Yousuf 2019). In making this argument, *Gadabuursi* political actors pointed to three major historical episodes where their investment in the project was demonstrated, and thus where their right to an equal share (as a 'return on investment') was solidified.

First was their begrudging acceptance of Somaliland's independence as part of the Burao agreement of 1991. While taking a gamble on an *Isaaq*-led independence project was the best of several bad options, it was still a sacrifice, given how relatively secure the *Gadabuursi* had been under a united Somalia. In conceding to the proposal for self-determination, the *Gadabuursi* representatives in Burao therefore engaged in an act of goodwill, which they hoped would lead to future peace (Interview #275). As such, consent to the project amongst the *Gadabuursi* and other non-*Isaaq* was ultimately conditional and contextual, a wager on the future realisation of certain promises, particularly an equitable share of the eventual spoils of self-governance.

The Borama Conference, the *Gadabuursi*'s crowning achievement, was a second source of perceived historical indebtedness. Coming at a time of SNM infighting, the Borama Conference represented a moment where *Gadabuursi* elders, as 'outsiders' to the intra-*Isaaq* conflict, first assumed roles as 'the principal guardians of stability' (Samatar 2008, 119), coming 'to the rescue of their brothers by organising a ceasefire and facilitating reconciliatory meetings attended by all clans' (Bobe 2017, 78). As described previously, the *Gadabuursi*'s Covenantal role as an 'outsider-insider'—a non-combatant actor with self-interest in maintaining inter-clan peace—allowed the community to rise above the temporary divisions of the conflict to represent the interests of the Somaliland whole (Interview #58). In the short-term, assuming such responsibility 'gave non-Issaqs [*sic*] a more active role in determining the future of Somaliland' (Bradbury 1994, 73), while, in the long-term, the *Gadabuursi* cemented a reputation and self-identity centred around this peace-making quality: 'the *Gadabuursi* folks have always been pretty competent in solving serious disputes. Every time there is a blow-up among the *Isaaq*, the *Gadabuursi* are called to solve it. This was the case in Borama' (Interview #134). As Renders (2007) notes, in assuming this role on behalf of all Somalilanders, the *Gadabuursi* inculcated a subject position of mutual stakeholder: 'By saving Somaliland from

civil war, the *Gadabuursi* gained a more important stake in it. Consequently, Somaliland could no longer be perceived as a merely *Isaaq*-driven political entity' (447).

A third contribution to Somaliland was the symbolic role played by former president, *Gadabuursi* Dahir Riyale, in legitimising and unifying the polity, by showing that it was 'possible for someone that isn't from the *Isaaq* tribe to lead the country' (Interview #267). Riyale's 2003 electoral victory not only reinforced faith in State institutions, demonstrating, at minimum, that formal democratic pathways remained open to *Isaaq* and non-*Isaaq* alike, but also, at a deeper level, signified healing, forgiveness and fellow-feeling among the Somaliland citizenry that went beyond clan: 'Previous elections [i.e. 2003 and 2010] were more nationalistic. Slogans, the feeling of the people. In every aspect it was more nationalistic. Because Dahir Riyale was *Gadabuursi*. If there was tribal feeling, he wouldn't have [even received] 20% of the vote' (Interview #108). The sense of welcome and inclusion felt as a result of Riyale's election is summed up by one *Gadabuursi* former politician, who boasted: 'they elected him [against] their best candidate ever [Silanyo], the struggler, two terms of SNM leadership…[Riyale] knocked him out! That is our people. They are good and sincere people, and want good leadership' (Interview #205).

While both the Borama Conference and the Riyale presidency were important sources of honour and opportunity, they were also major sacrifices. Regarding the former, in acting as traditional third-party mediator, the people of Awdal were saddled with a litany of obligations, in everything from manpower and resources to time (Bobe 2017). The *Gadabuursi*, Phillips (2013) writes, were compelled by custom to take 'responsibility for much of the organisation and logistics for the nearly five month-long conference held in their territory' (44), including, so Farah & Lewis (1997) attest, feeding and sheltering an estimated 700 participants for the duration (373). Furthermore, in order to ensure a positive outcome to the conference, the *Gadabuursi* placed the power-sharing needs of others above their own: 'The central clan is divided into eight sub-clans, and each wanted an equal share, and wouldn't let others take more than them. In order to prioritise peace, we had to make them happy by compromising our shares' (Interview #283). Additionally, when it came to Riyale's eight years as president, the gift of leadership was equally a curse, with the statesman forced to engage in constant placation of the majority population, in order to withstand pressure from *Isaaq* elite and maintain his role as neutral figure. Indeed, the prime governmental positions and public assets at the executive's disposal were disproportionately allocated to those outside

the *Gadabuursi*, significant concessions which Riyale's successors were not forced to make (Interview #56). To this end, Riyale left office without redressing the *saami-qaybsi* issue, preferring that his legacy be that of conducting the first multiparty parliamentary elections, boosting Somaliland's reputation while deferring the redress of power-sharing imbalances into the future (Mohamed 2019).

In the debates surrounding power-sharing nearly three decades later, the *Gadabuursi* would cash in on the moral debt inherent in this past sacrifice. In their public speeches, politicians from the region, including former president Riyale, reminded the government 'that the Somaliland nation was built (in Awdal) by our fathers and our mothers', while also drawing attention to other contributions and sacrifices of the non-*Isaaq*, such as their role in achieving independence in 1960 and their own experiences of massacre during the period of civil war (*HWN* 2018*; Geeska* 2020; *Geeska* 2020). For one student, betraying this past by failing to address *saami-qaybsi* was a dangerous prospect: 'Somaliland was made by the Awdal people. The flag and national anthem were made by people from here…The traditional leaders who made peace in the east were from Awdal. So, Awdal people own Somaliland and there is no clan closer to it than them. But if Somaliland continues like this, it will collapse like Somalia' (Interview #287). These reminders came with both a moral debt and a warning: *we built this country, so not only do we deserve our fair share, but we can pull the plug on this project if we don't receive that share*. Or, in the words of one politician from Borama:

> Somaliland is a collection of clans, and no clan can bully another…The only people who are keeping Somaliland together are us, and we don't seem to get what we deserve…If we don't get our shares back it's no recognition [of Somaliland's legitimacy] from us… We don't want Somaliland to cease existing because we have invested a lot. [But] we are not only concerned with ourselves; we also want the other regions to get their share' (Interview #283).

What makes this idea of just desserts for one's investments efficacious is that it is an argument made, understood and recognised as credible by the general population. In fact, not only, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, did other non-*Isaaq* clans frame their calls for greater inclusion in these terms, but so too have temporarily sidelined *Isaaq* sub-clans. To take one everyday example, we have a plea, directed over press conference to the president, from youth and intellectuals of the *Sanbuur* sub-clan of the *Habar Jeclo*, arguing: 'We are from one of the clans of the SNM who played a big part in its victory, and we have the right to receive that which we have been denied by the Somaliland government' (*Sahan* 2022). Importantly,

despite each respective sub-group seeing righteousness and entitlement in their own historic role, for those *Isaaq* politicians devoted to inter-clan equality, there was recognition that minority clans deserve special consideration:

> The Awdal and Sool regions didn't fight for Somaliland, it was the *Isaaq* that came to them with ideas of separation, and they accepted it, but we haven't delivered what we promised yet. Since we destroyed what they had in place, we have to accept their terms. The day the borders are all in our hands and the vote becomes one man, one vote, will be the day every man gets what chance gives him. But until then, [the *Isaaq*] have to make sacrifices [when it comes to power-sharing]. (Interview #259)

What makes mutual recognition and assimilation of each other's moral debts so fundamental to the Covenantal model is that it mitigates against two dangerous alternatives: on the one hand, the suppression of all expressions of victimhood, and, on the other, the emergence of competing, self-reinforcing, mutually exclusive narratives of victimhood. The former we find among Somaliland's political elite, who, out of fear of disrupting the status quo, aim to neutralise grievance-making and critique (Interview #285). With leaders treating all dissent as a threat to stability, Somalilanders, in the eyes of many, are rendered 'hostages to peace' (*HRW* 2009; Stremlau 2013; Interview #99; Interview #149). The latter emerges when a fear of repeated victimisation leads to a siege mentality, as can be found in the mainstream Somaliland independence narrative, in which State power and military might become the only solid defences against Somalia's aggression (Interview #40). For many *Gadabuursi*, however, in a critique similar to that lodged against the post-genocidal States of Israel/Palestine and Rwanda (Ibreck 2010; Wermenbol 2021), such obsessions with self-preservation become problematic when it blinds a community to their persecution of others: 'Somaliland separated from Somalia because of unjust power-sharing, and now the SNM is repeating that history!' (Interview #283). When one's victimhood is pitted against another's, intercommunal justice itself can fragment into partial, antagonistic positions, as captured in these remarks by one former minister from Awdal: 'I believe we love the country more than the SNM leaders because they practice the injustice they ought to erase' (Interview #281).

However, what we find with the mutual recognition and inclusivity of the inter-clan negotiation is a tearing down of exclusivist narratives and the forms of domination they enable, thereby opening up space for plurality. As one elder statesman describes the stakes

involved in the contest between the *Isaaq*'s one-sided morality play and the dialogical alternative:

> It [becomes] tit-for-tat when you don't acknowledge their loss, and you concentrate on your loss. Their elders don't want to disturb the peace, but the youth feels "Why should we be grieving the *Isaaq* deaths, if we are not getting our acknowledgement?" In truth and reconciliation, you acknowledge the other side's story. If you don't acknowledge, and concentrate on yours, you are [sowing] the wrong seeds…some people will politicise it. Unless and until you put that demon to rest, it will always be there…Chauvinism begets chauvinism from the other side. (Interview #220)

Here we come full circle. What links the *saami-qaybsi* debate and the 18 May controversy is the dual sense of loss felt by the *Gadabuursi*, of both a governance arrangement shared by all and a political imaginary shared by all. In this, the majority's one-sided narrative arc was as much a threat to the normative pluralism of 'shared stakes' as majoritarian electoral rule was to the political pluralism of a balanced *saami-qaybsi* arrangement. Dhakool, Samatar and Borama's youth, in reviving the memory of a non-SNM collective past, sought to challenge this increasingly hegemonic history, asserting the political agency of the non-*Isaaq* back onto the political map in the process, even if certain political elite sought to instrumentalise this past to their own particularist ends (Interview #218; Interview #165). While the State and many of the elite benefitting from the status quo sought to crack down on these expressions of dissent, the campaigners of Awdal and their sympathisers, in galvanising the power-sharing debate, pushed for dialogue amongst clan equals as the only path forward. In other words, what we have in the opposition of the State-based model and the Social Covenantal model, are competing perceptions of what makes rule legitimate, with the former based on a single part standing in for the whole, and the latter seeing the whole as solely representable through its parts.

4.4 Conclusion

On 31 May 2021, Somaliland's first parliamentary elections in over a decade-and-a-half were finally held. In a blow to the *Gadabuursi*'s campaign for substantial reform of the seat allocation formula, however, the elections were conducted under an amended electoral law, endorsed by the president and rubber-stamped by his party's parliamentary majority, 'which stipulated that parliamentary seats would again be distributed according to the 2005

arrangement' (Gani 2021). These developments, which occurred after the period of my fieldwork, and whose political dynamics could not be confirmed, were certainly a triumph for the power of the State and formal politics over horizontal, consensus-based forms of accountability and social change. More likely than not, it was the overwhelming desire of Somaliland's heartlands to have elections at all costs, combined with international pressure for the Somaliland government to finally conduct these elections (CPA 2021), that again triumphed over Awdal's resistance to another election on unequal terms. The fact that there was 'dismally' low participation among the non-*Isaaq* (*Harti*) east, an apparent sign of 'disaffection with authorities in the capital,' seems to point to their soft exit from the Somaliland political community, in which a loss of legitimacy of the inclusiveness of the Somaliland project is responded to with a quiet slowdown in participation (ICG 2021). In the end, the *Isaaq* even increased its seat tally in parliament by four, something which, the International Crisis Group warns, 'may thus harden widely held perceptions…that Somaliland is little more than an *Isaaq*-dominated clan entity' (*ibid*).

Does the triumph of the Statist status quo in the face of non-*Isaaq* clan-based pressure signal the failure of Covenantal logics of conditional association in the Somaliland project? Is this evidence that horizontal, pluralist negotiation as the basis for inter-clan coexistence is a thing of the past? I argue not necessarily, for several reasons. While the intervention of veto power and shared stakes by the *Gadabuursi* were not enough to tip the political outcome in their favour, they did influence the nature of debate and horizons of possibility for political outcomes, winning over many Somalilanders in the process. It remains common practice to push for 'solving political disputes through consensus' beyond the confines of formal politics (CPA 2022), with disaffected youth galvanising around campaigns such as that led by *Gadabuursi* traditional leaders, despite equally seeking liberalising reforms to State institutions. Additionally, certain surprise results to the parliamentary elections, including the decisive victory of the opposition parties and the election of certain marginalised minority candidates (ICG 2021), reveals a Somaliland public willing to challenge elite, majoritarian rule by choosing candidates and parties who temporarily appeal to a more inclusive vision of Somaliland (*Anti-Tribalism Movement* 2021). And lastly, one only has to look and the increasingly oppressive nature of ruling regime's efforts to close down space for electoral competition, and the increasingly destabilising and violent lengths that opposition parties are willing to go to challenge this grip on power for their own instrumental ends (Sheikh & Yussuf

2022), to see the necessity of alternative forms of intercommunal relationality as a stable basis for political associationalism. Luckily, for Somalilanders, that alternative—horizontal, equalising inter-clan cooperation—is already institutionalised, and can still, at times, prove decisive at moments of crisis.

Chapter 5: Case Study II

The El Af-weyn Conflict: Intimacy in the Face of Alienation

Across the arid plains of Sanaag, both war and peace are intimate affairs. Conflict over grazing land, water and settlement can pit cousin against cousin, neighbour against neighbour, setting in motion tit-for-tat revenge killings, accumulations of violence that are etched in the collective memory for decades. The inter-clan conflict around El Af-weyn in August 2016, for instance, was sparked by a dispute between brothers-in-law over use of a well. For the two communities implicated on opposite sides of the conflagration, interspersed settlement and intermarriage had fostered a proximity that provided fertile ground for escalation: 'the problem is, these people settle in the same area…The one whose father or brother was killed in the last fight, when he sees someone from the other side sitting [nearby], he will take revenge' (Interview #213).

Conventionally, that same intimacy has equally made resolving such conflicts simpler, with deep-rooted trust and familial connections assisting in communication and negotiation. As one elder describes it, conflicts such as El Af-weyn are

> easily solved these days; people don't want the issue to leave a lingering negative impact. The families quickly confront and solve the issue. Killings in the [eastern] region are not unusual, [because] a lot of clans live there together, yet there is no longer prolonged civil war…The hostility you can develop for those close to you might be stronger than what you feel towards people further away. But once violence starts, such issues can be solved quickly through the involvement of traditional leaders. (Interview #110)

In other words, conflict in Somaliland, as in any nation, is natural, yet exists within well-defined limits, particularly since nation-wide reconciliation restored stable inter-clan governance arrangements. For this, neighbouring communities can draw on long-standing protocols for righting wrongs committed in the name of resource competition and interpersonal dispute, mobilising familial representatives and previously agreed *xeer* to contain hostilities before they spiral out of control.

Yet, in the fighting that erupted in El Af-weyn in 2016, something within this predictable sequence of dispute followed by resolution seemed to short-circuit, taking Somaliland society by surprise. Early responses by the government and traditional leaders to the initial violence, rather than producing a lasting settlement, were immediately overtaken by new rounds of revenge killings and militia attacks, leaving upwards of 68 dead and 155 wounded over the course of several interrelated skirmishes (SONSAF 2018). For many observers watching from Hargeisa, this recurrence proved both worrying and perplexing: 'People tried to solve this problem, the government, elders, every group…They tried to solve it by coming together as we used to do before, but it's not working! Why? It is a mystery' (Interview #210). Making sense of this dynamic, one commentator argued, required coming to grips with the new political realities facing Somaliland as its Statehood became more explicit, and as its original Covenantal set-up showed signs of wavering:

> The El Af-Weyn conflict is a new chapter in Somaliland which is completely
> different from what we have been through in history, because [although] we used
> to fight each other, we [would eventually] agree. That norm is our culture…But
> now the issue is the elders, sheikhs, everybody have been there for a long time
> but it's not yet resolved. When you ask yourself "Why?", it's politics. A political
> matter. But we don't know between who and who. (Interview #209)

In what follows, I seek to explain the anomaly of El Af-weyn by reframing events around an analytical divide between alienation and intimacy. I will link the conflict's intractability to the increased expansion of State politics into local political dynamics, including by influencing, instrumentalising and hijacking the grassroots mechanisms by which communities hitherto governed social relations. In particular, this chapter will look at how the calculations, interests and rationales of those involved in the dispute and its resolution became progressively alienated from their local context, and increasingly implicated in the high-stakes national politics of electoral competition, elite self-enrichment and sovereign territorialisation, which only served to intensify inter-clan divisions. Following that, it will explore how, given the failure of the State, various non-State actors, acting on their in-built commitment to the norms and obligations of the Social Covenant, mobilised to mediate in the name of peace, supporting local actors by restoring space for the intimacy of interpersonal and familial bonds to again flourish. It will argue that, whereas State intervention alienated local actors from the

intimate sources of their social power, traditional conflict resolution processes restored this local agency, thereby creating conditions amenable to a lasting solution to the conflict.

5.1 The El Af-weyn Conflict: Background

By 2016, Somaliland's eastern livestock-rearing heartland of Sanaag had suffered a great reduction of its communal grazing land, as a result of intensified drought and land enclosure. For the *Sacad Yoonis* and *Biciido* communities of the *Habar Yoonis* and *Habar Jeclo* sub-clans, respectively, who had previously enjoyed overlapping migration and settlement patterns in and around Sanaag's El Af-weyn district, scarcity bred competition, with both sides claiming exclusive use of rangeland and water points through the construction of private villages and wells. By the time of the *Xagaa* dry season, these escalatory actions came to a head in the village of Bacaha, 90 kilometres outside of El Af-weyn, with a resource-based dispute between relatives from opposite sub-clans spiralling into a cycle of revenge killings. Given the area's high unemployment, absence of government institutions and surplus of weapons, youth were easily mobilised by both sides for battle (Interview #259; Interview #205).

In the immediate aftermath of the initial violence, the Silanyo administration, in power at the time, was quick to intervene, organising the *Guurti* and other high-level elders from both clans to mediate. In this initial phase, seven meetings were held, in which stipulations for a ceasefire were achieved before each time being stymied by a flare-up of violence, with the two sides bedding deeper into militarised positions each time. On 21 September, however, an agreement was reached between the two clans, which, alongside the standard compensatory measures, required newly-built structures and boreholes to be destroyed and the land to return to common usage (Jama 2016). While peace would prevail for the rest of Silanyo's time in office, tensions still simmered, with the *Sacad Yoonis* left feeling that the State was implementing the agreement selectively, to their detriment, based on political and clan biases (Interview #156).

The 2017 presidential elections caused these simmering tensions to boil over. In the previous chapter, we looked at how democratisation imbued clan identity with new political salience, creating division, competition and hierarchy between clans based on their ability to mobilise electorally. In addition to establishing a majority-minority division between *Isaaq* and non-*Isaaq*, elections increasingly fomented rifts within the *Isaaq* itself, due to the

increasing association of different *Isaaq* sub-clans with distinct parties, raising the competitive stakes relations between them: 'Every new election has its own problems…a lot of people are being politicised, a lot of people are being caught up in this phenomenon of clannism. The party and clan are actually becoming synonymous' (Interview #202). During the 2017 presidential poll, the two communities involved in the El Af-weyn dispute found themselves on opposite sides of the political divide, with the *Biciido* supporting Bihi's Kulmiye, and the *Sacad Yoonis* aligned with opposition Waddani.

With the local dispute now embedded within nationwide political divisions, newly-elected President Bihi revived mediation efforts. The fact that he hailed from neither of the two clans inspired greater confidence in him than his predecessor (Interview #150). In his first attempt, Bihi sought a tougher approach, replacing the *Guurti*, who institutionalised status had weakened its legitimacy and effectiveness, with handpicked government officials and political figures, who threatened harsh punishment for those violating the peace (Interview #163; Interview #28). When this failed, the president turned to a mediation body of less politicised figures, composed of both non-*Isaaq* elders, and, in an unusual move, religious leaders (Interview #156; SONSAF 2018). The ease with which defunct traditional authorities could be replaced by those whose reputation and neutrality remained intact demonstrates the flexibility and dynamism of the Somali mediation system.

As I began my fieldwork, this mediation committee had successfully brokered a new peace agreement, which had to cope with the complexities of the steady accumulation of victims over time. Following the lead of the mediators, the government was fulfilling its duty in facilitating the implementation of the agreement, by deploying troops as a buffer between warring parties, arresting those violating peace protocols, paying logistical expenses and subsidising compensation payments (Interview #28). However, amidst this relative tranquillity, two major political events erupted that not only derailed this progress, but also shook the Bihi administration out of its disinterested posture, coaxing certain top-down, unilateral proclivities into action.

The first incident involved the deputy commander of the Somaliland armed forces in El Af-weyn, a *Sacad Yoonis* man known locally as Colonel (*Kornayl*) Caare. Caare had amassed grievances over perceived *Biciido* supremacy within local security forces, and felt that these concerns were side-lined by the Bihi government during the mediation process (Interview #223). His frustrations were exposed in dramatic fashion, when a video circulated throughout

Somaliland media in August 2018, capturing the Colonel threatening his *Biciido* commander with a pistol, before declaring armed resistance (*jabhad*) against the government and Somaliland project as a whole. Realising the gravity of his acts, Caare fled across the border into Puntland, where he was given refuge to assemble a rag-tag anti-Somaliland militia. Those within his clan family, while distancing themselves from the *jabhad*, saw his motivations as a legitimate expression of injustice and 'a loss of faith in the system', which the government was duty-bound to correct (Interview #62; *Elsar Media*, 2018). The State responded by taking a hard line, refusing any negotiated solution, preferring instead to deal with Caare through military tribunal. A stalemate ensued which, from that point onwards, meant that any efforts to settle the El Af-weyn conflict had to equally contend with the political struggle between Caare and the government.

A second source of upheaval concerned an event initially only tangentially related to the El Af-weyn affair—the murder of two military commanders in a nearby area of Sanaag. This attack was a response to the botched imprisonment of a local alcohol trader, who died in custody under dubious circumstances, with his family taking revenge on the alleged perpetrators. Rather than facilitating compensation and the prosecution of the killers, Bihi instead issued a State of Emergency (*xaalad deg deg ah*) for the first time in the nation's history, placing towns of El Af-weyn, Garadag and Erigavo under a three-month curfew and martial law (Interview #166). While official government sources claimed the emergency decree was necessary to ward off extrajudicial revenge killings (Interview #168), the more plausible motive was Bihi's insistence that a civilian attack on military personnel must be responded to with an 'iron fist'—'the president was showing his power', as one opposition MP put it (Interview #165).

As elaborated in the next section exploring the alienating, disempowering effects of State-based governance, the Bihi administration's insistence that State authority should take the lead on these issues, over the head of local efforts to calm things down through dialogue, prolonged the conflict and complicated its resolution. It will be argued that the El Af-weyn affair, as it expanded from a localised conflagration to a national event, owed its shape to a tussle between a State-centred system committed to solidifying its authority and maintaining the interests of its elites, and those for whom peace required liberating the concerned local parties from these forces of abstraction, and returning them to the intimacy of face-to-face negotiations and claims-making which allowed all sides to feel listened to and included.

5.2   Alienation and Statebuilding in Somaliland

Sanaag is one of the original places that Somaliland's peace was initiated. As elders, we made a contract. As part of our contract, when there is conflict between any two sub-clans, the others are empowered to settle it by any means…From that day onwards, for almost 28 years, nothing happened in east. Now it is the Habar Jeclo and Habar Yoonis who are fighting, and the others are supposed to settle that. We called our suldaan and he…collected about thirty elders from among the non-Isaaq…We came up with an agreement, because after 30 years we are still one family. But, when we took the agreement to the government, they said, "No, it's a disgrace that the [non-Isaaq] are settling the problems of the Isaaq!"
(Interview #295)

As the above comment from the *Warsangeli* elder makes clear, the El Af-weyn issue, while not a unique instance of violence in the region, represented a major shift in the dynamics of both conflict and conflict resolution. Layered on top of the intimate, interpersonal harm and grievance that local mediators commonly deal with were the political interests of the State, its power-brokers and other external interests, whose dynamics not only raised the stakes of the conflict but increasingly determined its direction. In other words, whereas, following the reconciliation period, social regulations of intimacy, tolerance and accommodation prevailed to mediate relations between neighbouring clans, by 2016 this Covenantal order was thrown off-kilter by unfamiliar, exogenous forces. The encroachment of State influence into El Af-weyn, rather than bringing order to a lawless land, actively worked to unsettle the self-reinforcing entanglements, reciprocities and other forms of intimate coexistence that had contained dispute, and guaranteed relative peace, up to that point.

Alienation, as argued, involves the rearticulation of social relations and social power within a given context, to align them better with external demands over and above local concerns. Regarding the present case, such dynamics can be witnessed in the appropriation of violence in the interests of certain national power-brokers and transnational agitators, as well as the subordination of the peace settlement to the demands of State authority. For the purposes of analytical clarity, I separate these alienating logics into two categories—division (5.2.1) and instrumentalisation (5.2.2)—and then use the remainder of this section to explore how the historical events described above were shaped by these processes. My overall aim is to demonstrate how the intractability of inter-communal conflict is merely the symptom of a

longer process of social transformation (i.e. statebuilding) by which agency in shaping social relations is actively taken out of the hands of local actors, and increasingly ceded to forces beyond their control.

5.2.1 Division

Clan identity, as social marker of affiliation, obligation, rivalry and historic debt between communities, connects as much as it divides. However, as State politics has increasingly infused lineage relations with wider political significance, the forces of division have been accentuated, with social entanglement increasingly replaced by partition, segregation and estrangement, in which the essentialisation of clan identity marks out difference as potential threat. In this section, I will highlight three sources of political division—the territorialisation of land, elections and the counter-insurgency against Caare— in order to demonstrate the alienating effects of this division, in which individuals can no longer afford to interact with their neighbours and kinsfolk through the everyday, intimate relations they are used to, but instead are forced to confront them through the existential, adversarial lens of political competition.

Statebuilding, which ties authority to 'a strong vision of territoriality,' transformed the relationship of Somali clans to their land, which, in turn, transformed their relations to each other (Hoehne 2016, 208). As Hoehne notes, whereas horizontal inter-clan relations operate on a 'network logic' that subjects land use, passage and settlement to negotiations between groups, with the emergence of 'state logics' of territoriality, including competing claims to sovereignty among rival Somali powerbases, descent groups have become bound 'more strongly to certain locations and landed resources than was previously the case' (*ibid*, 206-8). Within Somaliland politics, territorial control, in addition to being an underlying signifier of statehood, increasingly became an asset in electoral competition and inter-elite power struggles. In this, El Af-weyn, although previously of little relevance to all but rural nomads, became a significant prize, located not only at a conjuncture of multi-clan settlement, but also atop exploitable resources, including petrol. These socioeconomic changes inevitably trickled down to local inter-clan relations: 'These two clans never fought before, and settled amongst each other. But these days they started claiming space, and it seems that people start to love the land more than each other' (Interview #164).

In the years preceding the conflict, then, the two clans began carving up formerly communal land into mono-clan villages, enclosed ranches, private plots and exclusively-owned waterpoints (Interview #255). Such reshaping of the physical infrastructure not only became a coping mechanism for local livestock herders as suitable grazing land and water dwindled, but equally offered political benefits, with dominance over polling stations, village leadership positions and distribution of decentralised services all tied to physical control of territory (Menkhaus 2015, 65; Interview #238). Additionally, as political competition at the level of umbrella sub-clan (*Habar Jeclo*, *Habar Yoonis*, etc.) became more common, communal pride became increasingly tied to notions of numerical majority, electoral success and geographic expansiveness, compelling politicians and diaspora to support their sub-clan's land acquisition through financial and military means (Interview #254; Interview #103; Interview #189). As a result, not only did certain communities find their seasonal migration patterns restricted, but both sides also came to view the actions of their neighbours with suspicion, as potential plots to reshape the landscape to their political advantage.

The intersection of electoral calculation and inter-clan conflict had other dimensions. Over the course of Somaliland's nearly two decades of liberal democracy, competing narratives of clan grievance had solidified, with the political ascendency of one clan seen to come at the expense of the other. Regarding the two relevant sub-clans, '[The *Habar Jeclo*] believe that they were marginalised because of their political affiliation with Kulmiye. Similarly, when they came to power, they [believed] they had to take the largest share, every single penny coming into El Af-weyn, whether international NGO activities or government projects' (Interview #255). By the 2017 elections, the presidential contenders found these competitive fears ripe for exploitation, and broke with previous taboos against open, unambiguous clannist rhetoric, instead signalling to voters that their opponents' clans could not be trusted to remain peaceful or faithful to Somaliland. Among those caught up in the discursive fray, clan-party mobilisation from opponents was interpreted less as a practical electoral strategy, and more as a chauvinist plot of domination and elimination (Interview #108).

As the political leaders from both major parties 'enlarge[d] and broaden[ed] the issues' to the level of identitarian supremacy, 'the credibility and legitimacy' of the El Af-weyn conflict resolution became a bit loosened' (Interview #144). Under such conditions, the two local sides often called into question trust in external mediators from the government, *Guurti*

or elsewhere. For example, the fact that both Silanyo himself and Muse Bihi's Minister of Interior came from the *Habar Jeclo* caused the *Sacad Yoonis* to *a priori* scrutinise their motives (Interview #291; Interview #156). It also meant that actions to enforce the peace agreement taken by the State against individuals—such as punishing aggressors—risked being interpreted as targeting the entire clan: 'when you try to do something about a particular traditional leader, there is an extensive narrative now, which means that you are [seen to be] using pressure against some particular clan, [even if] it's not like that' (Interview #261). In short, electoral competition politicised identity to the point that clan difference became primarily a signifier of intractable political difference, more than a marker of relationality.

The Somaliland government further entrenched division through its handling of Colonel Caare's defection. On the one hand, the mobilisation of a prominent *Isaaq* military official against the Somaliland project was a harbinger of growing societal rifts: 'If the situation isn't changed, more Caares will come. The power is on the side of the people, and no one will accept just sitting around. They will rise up in protest…like Tunisia or Egypt' (Interview #73). At the same time, the rebellion was small, and traditional leaders were well equipped to negotiate Caare's conditional surrender. Rather than work with these elders, Bihi's administration, via the general of the national army, Nuh Tani, instead inflamed tensions by publicly demonising the colonel as an enemy of the State (*dambiile qaran*), and urging his execution at the hands of a military tribunal (*HCTV* 2019; *SAHAN* 2019): 'When something [like this] happens, the government usually sends the elders…But Muse did not do that! So [the elders] took the initiative and went [to Caare]. But when they came back [with a solution], Muse did not accept them. And then, when General Nuh spoke, the whole thing fell apart' (Interview #297). As such, rather than imposing order on a volatile situation, the State's actions only served to 'politicise' and 'tribalise' things further, by dividing the conflict up into *Habar Yoonis* 'traitors' against a law-enforcing State (Interview #89; Interview #190).

At stake in the president's militant, anti-consensual stance was more than customary disrespect. Instead, it entailed denying the right of clans to take ownership in solving their own political disputes: '[Muse] should've ended it right away, but he did not…It's mandatory to respect Somali traditions. You didn't just reject Caare, you've refused everyone he represents with their name, not just the *Habar Yoonis* committee, but half of Hargeisa, let alone El Af-weyn, Sanaag and Togdheer' (Interview #259). This opened up the president to the charge of selective discrimination against a rival political constituency (Interview #50):

'Caare is not the first one to defect and come back...So why treat Caare differently? It could've been avoided if the government had let Caare be part of the last peace negotiation...but the government chose to deal with the situation militarily' (Interview #252). In narrowing the dispute to a judicial issue between the State and a single criminal, the issue was abstracted from the purview of Somaliland's Covenantal stakeholders, where the primary interest was in restoring peace, and projected into the realm national politics and identitarian struggles, in which one side must win and the other must be defeated. 'It would've been better if it was the elders of Zeila, Hargeisa, Burao, Borama and Las Anod that went together' to mediate, argued one former politician, rather than the president going at it alone. 'This shows that collective nationhood is no longer present...The honour between all Somalilanders from west to east has vanished' (Interview #246). In sum, whereas inter-clan, consensus-based negotiations would have fostered a collective, level space for dialogue, President Bihi instead choose 'military procedures' against a prominent member of the *Habar Yoonis* sub-clan, which further stoked divisions by separating the different sides of the issue along the lines of friend and foe (Interview #216; Bakonyi 2009, 450).

5.2.2 Instrumentalisation

Political division alienates by wresting individuals from the complex moral and social attachments that make everyday life liveable and meaningful, chaining them instead to essentialised identities not of their own making. Instrumentalisation, by contrast, enmeshes individuals in incentives, choices, affects and projects that serve the interests of others more than their own, thereby estranging them from more self-determined forms of sociality. Absent such political division and manipulation, largely interdependent Somali communities have long proved capable of keeping conflict, however inevitable, within stable bounds, developing extensive, legitimised social regulations to share resources and settle moral accounts. As such, when conflict does persist with unnatural intensity, it is likely that destabilising forces from outside the community have been introduced, those with less accountability to, and reliance on, local social cohesion for their survival and welfare. In this section, I emphasise three exogenous forces which instrumentalised El Af-weyn's social relations: political power struggle, diaspora proxy-warfare and State expansionism.

Sitting at a fault-line between major *Isaaq* sub-clans, El Af-weyn was the perfect staging ground for powerful actors to instrumentalise instability for personal political gain.

For example, following Bihi's rise to power within Kulmiye, one of his main competitors, a power former minister with close familial ties to both the *Biciido* and *Sacad Yoonis*, exploited his influence in the El Af-weyn area to turn on and off the taps of conflict, in order to place pressure on the newly-elected president (Interview #291). In this, he found common cause with certain local agents, such as aspiring, self-proclaimed 'traditional leaders', willing to perpetuate conflict and hold peace settlements hostage, as a strategy for enhancing their influence (Interview #28; Interview #216). Similarly, one prominent *boqor* from the area, an affluent livestock exporter with connections to the Gulf, reportedly manipulated the conflict as a means to pressure the government to expand his private rangeland acquisitions (Interview #252; Interview #188; Interview #156). While such elite political meddling in local conflict has generally been beyond the pale, the emergence of a class of national political elite less reliant on their home constituencies for authority and wealth created new incentives to risk local instability in the name of personal interest.

Alongside political interference, burgeoning economic interest in El Af-weyn, a centrally-located transport node, increasingly reconfigured local economies around cartels and speculative ventures. For rival khat traders and alcohol smugglers competing over market shares, regional weapons dealers looking to exploit conflict for profit, or the military officers taking a cut of these trades, conflict over territory was equally a battle for economic advantage (Interview #237; Interview #259). Additionally, as Somaliland's peace and stability began to attract exploratory interest from oil and gas investors, rumours began to trickle down from 'politicians and members from the government' to the local communities 'that 75% of Somaliland's petrol and natural gas' are located within their territory,' fuelling mutual suspicion of impending land-grabs from the other side (Interview #254; Bamberger & Skovsted 2016). In short, we find evidence of a political economy developing over time around El Af-weyn that has cumulatively embedded local relations over land and resources within competitive logics perpetuated by rigid, elite-led clan blocs, thereby giving conflict dynamics a momentum that transcended the concerns of local actors.

Another unwieldly external force was the diaspora, whose prominent role in information-sharing and funding violence created a virtual front in the conflict far removed from the realities on the ground, shaping them nonetheless (see Adamson [2013] for an overview of diaspora involvement in conflict). In their search to exert influence over, and prove loyalty to, their clan, diaspora are often, in the words of some Somalilanders, 'the most

radical, the most destructive,' with their incendiary rhetoric, financial contributions, 'unnecessary pride' and 'postcolonial ideas' merely adding fuel to the fire: 'the diaspora doesn't want to be forgotten…They want to be the one to decide which way the clan go…[Yet] the only times they gather is to finance clan politics of their fellow clansmen' (Interview #176; Interview #59). In abstracting politics from the embodied realm of the local to 'the anonymity of the [deterritorialised] internet', a space unaccountable to and protected from the violent effects of inflammatory discourse, a disconnect was created between influence and agency on the one hand, and risk and harm on the other (Interview #220). 'It's not the people on the ground who are politicising' the El Af-weyn conflict, decried one analyst, but the diaspora, who feel undeterred by the negative repercussions of prolonged violence because 'everything happening isn't impacting them, they're in a safe place' (Interview #59). It was because warring families saw those external to the conflict as lacking a credible stake in the peace agreements that they repeatedly 'emphasised [to the mediators] that they no longer wanted the diaspora's involvement, but instead wanted to be left alone to solve their problems' (Interview #278).

The State under Muse Bihi also sought to stamp its authority on the conflict, by using the opportunity to expand its dominance over inter-clan politics. While the outbreak of violence owed more to State neglect than State imperiousness, once the wheels were in motion, President Bihi, while enabling traditional leaders to work unopposed in managing a resolution to the fighting, sought to contain the influence of alternative sources of authority, whether traditional or political, by 'separating local issues from military issues' (Interview #216). This thinking influenced the State's approach to Caare, whose actions, in rising to the level of 'treason' by threatening the 'sovereignty of Somaliland', required the castaway to be subjected to the military courts—a view shared by others committed to the modernising Statist project (Interview #114). To the president's credit, this lack of leniency was applied evenly to both sides, and entailed resoluteness in the face of more convenient options, such as the short-term solution of buying peace through government handouts (Interview #252). However, what the president forsook by abandoning Covenantal protocols in favour of Statist logics was described by one political activist:

> Muse doesn't always use unregistered [elders]; mostly he goes through government institutions. This does have the advantage of teaching people that this is the way that Somaliland should do business. But, on the other side, insofar

as the State is still under construction and young, such traditional political dynamics cannot be revolutionised immediately from the top-down; you have to change it from the bottom-up. (Interview #261)

Bihi's decision to declare a state of emergency when other, more localised options seemed available, is exemplary of this approach. Whatever the intention, the effect was not to control the situation, but to spark backlash from almost all corners of society. Without the resources or coercive force to implement martial law across a large, sparse and mostly self-governed territory, the alarmist gesture was instead seen to unfairly target an already misfortune-ridden area, including by scaring away humanitarian aid organisations (Interview #165). While some national opposition forces protested the move as despotic (Interview #230), people in the area generally dismissed it as farcical, as this account from El Af-weyn makes clear:

> The people were laughing [when they heard the news]. They don't know the government. Why would they obey?...The people respect the peace of Somaliland because they like it…Of course they are not scared! Because they know nobody can catch them! They are just like the military. If you have a gun, and the military has a gun, then you two are equals. (Interview #190)

Even as the expansionary ambitions of the executive outstretched the material capacities of the State, these top-down machinations left their mark. In attempting to conform political processes and protocols to the demands of the sovereign, Bihi not only exposed State legitimacy and authority as relatively hollow, but placed State interventions in direct conflict with local peacebuilding efforts. Recognising that attempts to impose State authority on the unruly periphery would only further destabilise tense relations, parliament rejected the decision, in one of the few examples of cross-party resistance against a government decree. As one lawyer described what was at stake: 'If parliament were to approve the state of emergency, problems [in the region] would only increase. The president has many better options to take [if it wants to create peace]…In fact, this decision went against the expressed opinion of the communities, who did not want a larger national army presence among them' (Interview #166). In a similar way, the president's refusal to provide Colonel Caare with an off-ramp that would both save face and address some of the underlying grievances of his *Habar Yoonis* compatriots only prolonged the violence and bad blood (Interview #259). As one observer summed up the shortcomings of this approach: 'The

government refusing to do things the same way it was done before can exacerbate things' (Interview #216).

5.2.3 Summary

The various political and economic forces explored above had varying, divergent impacts on both the course of the El Af-weyn conflict and the pursuit of its resolution. Some factors, such as diaspora involvement or territorialisation, saw local actors alienated of their agency and influence through outside political and economic interference, taking the stakes of political struggle to a much higher level. Other elements, such as the state of emergency, while demonstrating the direction of State intent, had symbolic significance but little on-the-ground impact. And while the two presidents overseeing the conflict took divergent approaches—Silanyo's more accommodating of clan-centric solutions but willing to exploit local dynamics for economic gain, and Bihi's more committed to cementing State authority while less interested in benefitting personally—they shared a common conduit and focal point for influencing proceedings: the State. In other words, while the personalities were different, the constellation of power and authority they operated in—increasingly imbalanced between the national and local, the elite and the common, and the sovereign and the customary—was the same.

These compounding forces also shared an overriding effect: the 'nationalisation' of a local dispute. Here, the calculations, decisions, emotive responses and perceptions of actors involved in the actual fighting became increasingly overtaken by a convergence of conflict drivers, which displaced the location of power and agency to a level ever further beyond the source of the action. Such alienating dynamics, in disrupting the 'traditional' mechanisms of peace-making from kicking into gear, lent the dispute a lingering intractability that confounded many Somalilanders (as one activist decried: 'For twenty years we have solved these kinds of problems—what is wrong with us now!?' [Interview #144]). However, as will become clear, Somalilanders, in remaining faithful to forms of sociality accounted for by the Social Covenant, have a way of unlocking the most intractable of situations, through harnessing the power of intimacy.

5.3   Intimacy as Agency in the El Af-weyn Conflict

Somali conflict resolution is premised on the notion that sustainable peace is impossible so long as there is a gap between those possessing agency and power on the one hand, and those suffering its violent consequences on the other. When the State seeks to impose peace and order 'from the top down' onto a society based around the 'loose coming together of groups' (Interview #58), this gap is widened. Somali dispute mediation aims to close this gap, by not only importing as little external power as possible into the mix, but also actively insulating the disputing parties from whatever larger power dynamics they might become implicated in. Instead, it harnesses the latent social power of communities themselves. What makes an ideal mediation body 'neutral', is its prioritisation of mission over power and authority: 'The *Guurti* were supposed to be neutral...maybe they should not be an institution that is tied to the government. They should be regional and come together on a more *ad hoc* basis, when there is a need. And also limit themselves to peace and reconciliation—not debating all these [political things] in parliament' (*ibid*).

To break the power of instrumentality, mediators should ideally not be incentivised to play their role through government mandate or external funding, but through the entreaties of their community or neighbours: Somaliland's original peacemakers 'were never funded by anyone. They used to go [across the land] by their own [initiative]. They were there not to make money, not to create an issue, but simply to make peace between the clans' (Interview #187). The influence of traditional leaders in solving disputes thus comes not from their own coercive capacity or institutional power, but from their ability to open up space for the productive, bonding power of local communities to overcome their own destructive potential (Mohamed 2007, 227; Bakonyi 2013, 273). They achieve this through serving as a repository of information ('we have knowledge of the property owned by everyone in our clan, unlike someone who works at the court'); conveying messages across broken channels of communication ('our role is to be their voice and to convey their needs'); re-establishing trust in the processes governing their lives (mediation is 'only possible because of the respect, trust and admiration our people have for us'); and reigniting 'rapport' between communities (Interview #95; Interview #126; Interview #278; Interview #21). Such measures facilitate conflict resolution by granting communities the tools (validated information and moral recognition), confidence (faith and trust) and will (intercommunal fellow-feeling) to put aside

differences in the name of the common good. In Table 1, I summarise the differences between the Statist model and the Social Covenant model in their approaches to power and political agency.

Table 1: *Distinguishing the State and the Social Covenant – How Political Agency Functions*

	State	**Social Covenant**
Mediation	Performed by an unrivalled authority, utilising a monopoly of power	Performed by a contingent set of envoys tailored to the context, utilising reputation and skill over formal power
Coercion	Derived from a centralised power, directly organised in a top-down and univocal manner	Derived from decentralised power, indirectly proliferating across society as a latent fear of disorganised violence
Orchestration	Directed by a single agent acting on behalf of the (multi-clan) collective	Emerging from the collective set of (clan) agents acting on behalf of themselves

Practically, Somali conflict management involves the enforcement and (re)negotiation of 'specific bilateral agreements between specific sub-clans that traditionally live adjacent to one another,' regarding issues where intercommunal dispute may arise, such as killing and other harms, family obligations (including dowry and inheritance) and resource utilisation (over water, rangeland, etc.), as well as the general 'maintenance of inter-clan harmony' (Le Sage 2005, 32). These social rules, known as *xeer*, while the common property of all adult males, who have the right to speak at any political gathering (*shir*), were customarily overseen by those with established credentials of virtue and influence—predominantly respected elders—who were called upon on an *ad-hoc* basis (Mohamed 2007, 227). As Kapteijns (2004) notes, however, the 'characteristics, functions, meanings, and so forth' of Somali clan dynamics 'have changed and do change with changing contexts' (4). In particular, following the imposition of colonial rule, certain social titles and statuses were either invented or codified, such as the *caaqil*, leading to the partial integration of traditional mediation efforts into administrative governance (Mohamed 2007; Kapteijns 2004). Nevertheless, with the collapse of the Somali State, the horizontal, fluid and unmediated dimensions of Somaliland's inter-clan customary relations were unshackled and revitalised.

As Mohamed (2007) explains, *xeer* cannot be reduced simply to regulatory law—instead, it should be seen as a horizontal 'social contract' that, through 'explicit treaties' between kinship groups, 'define[s] the terms of their collective unity,' thereby making 'possible the creation of a political society' (227/244). In the modern era, creating the conditions where inter-clan political society can flourish has meant grappling with relative power between communities—particularly regarding access to institutions, representation, territory and the means of violence—something which *xeer*-based mediation has adapted to. One way to think about *xeer*'s political dimensions, then, is that, alongside restitution for property theft, murder and harm, attention is equally placed on redistributing power in favour of balance and mutual security. This can involve the confiscation of heavy weapons, the dismantling of clan-exclusive settlement, the creation of communal resource use arrangements or the rebalancing of responsibilities in the local security forces.

Through interviews with elders of various titles, I formed an overall picture of the process of mediating a dispute like El Af-weyn—involving two major sub-clans, and where violence has spun out of control (Interview #278; Interview #126; Interview #88; Interview #104; Interview #109; Interview #103; Interview #234). The resolution process is slow and incremental, with the mediation committee spending possibly months on end in a location. It typically begins with the mediators embedding themselves in the city, both to familiarise themselves with the relevant stakeholders and their concerns, and equally to build trust and equanimity through informal interactions, such as socialising over tea or *khat*. When the time is right, the committee meets with aggrieved and victimised families from both sides, listening to their concerns, both as a means to vent frustrations to a sympathetic body, and to tally offenses. Meticulous records are kept, used to inform deliberations—often lasting several days—over the exact distribution of compensation (*diya*), calculated using pre-agreed (i.e., *xeer*-based) measures of recompense for different types of offence, ranging from killings and injury to damaged or stolen property. Sharia may be used to supplement these calculations if the parties so choose. Once a decision is reached and deemed acceptable by all parties, their representatives announce the agreement via a public ceremony. Here, a committee is inaugurated to oversee the agreement's implementation, including the scheduled disbursement of *diya* payments, with the authority to sanction those failing to settle their debts or breaking ceasefire edicts.

As we shall see, what makes this process of reconciliation so successful is that it occurs in a social milieu steeped in Covenantal logics, in which there is collective agreement among stakeholders that the politicisation of clan conflict is a red line not to be crossed. This shared principle enhances the leverage of the mediators whilst limiting the scope for deviation by self-interested actors, who find their attempts to extract wealth and influence limited by the social power of intimate local relations to resist these external, alienating forces. Mediation reintroduces relations of intimacy through a multi-stage process. Before the intimate re-integration of communities can take place, a preliminary effort of political levelling is required, in which political equalisation (5.3.1) and rebalancing (5.3.2) rid communities of the alienating inequalities that have created division and animosity. After that, meditators help engineer the re-entanglement (5.3.3) and moral levelling (5.3.4) of formerly adversarial parties so that the intimate forms of everyday coexistence and moral obligation that binds them together as a community is re-established. To demonstrate these mechanisms at work, the following analysis will focus on the round of mediation that was initiated on 16 July 2018, early in Bihi's presidency, by the committee of religious leaders and non-*Isaaq* elders—an intervention notable for its relative success, as well as for the difficulty of conditions faced (coming in the aftermath of the elections), thus showing Covenantal mediation logics at their most robust.

5.3.1   Political equalisation of the local and national arenas of conflict

When the 65-person mediation committee arrived in El Af-weyn, they found a society whose emotions and grievances were running high, and trust in the government ebbing low, a situation 'fuelled by clan-based politics, with people either supporting the Kulmiye or Waddani party' (Interview #104). Formerly taken-for-granted intimacies were forsaken, with classmates barricaded in their respective homes, pedestrians transformed into potential reprisal targets, and children taught to treat even their own grandparents with suspicion (Interview #28; Interview #223). The first major task was thus to 'put politics to the side', by 'telling the government to stand aside' and instead allow 'the traditions and the clans' to take the lead. To this end, it was agreed that clans, rather than the government, would be primarily responsible for dealing with anyone 'causing problems,' thus granting local actors greater ownership over the actions of their own communities (Interview #104). Such depoliticisation at times also involved calling out and isolating agitators from their communities:

It is our job as traditional leaders to prevent and hold accountable politicians or other individuals who inappropriately organise clans for their own interests, towards causing a civil war…When politicians are held responsible for their actions, they no longer have the support of the public and are left standing alone with their own self-interest. (Interview #278)

Therefore, rather than serving as political actors in their own right, the mediation team filled the vacuum that self-interested actors often exploit during conflict, thus sheltering local dynamics from external manipulation.

Furthermore, in serving as a political bridge or conduit between warring communities, the mediating committee not only helped mend the segregation and atomisation caused by conflict, but equally coordinated local actors to channel their social power more productively, towards 'broader communal interest' (Interview #134). Such a role is important in disrupting the cycles of escalation and fear that take hold in communities when channels of communication are broken, and mutual perceptions become warped by distorted images of the 'other'. In fact, the very presence and oversight of a mediation committee can reassure local communities that order, calm and supervision are returning, thereby allaying immediate security dilemmas. This is evidenced in one *suldaan*'s account of how the committee was greeted by local communities when they first entered the city: 'All weapons were withdrawn and those in conflict instead turned to welcome us into the city. In fact, even schools reopened during our visit' (Interview #278). Such willing exposure to vulnerability among the communities, the *suldaan* believed, was an important sign of faith in both the committee and each other, a gesture of goodwill in which each side placed their lives interdependently in the hands of the other.

While the involvement of national security forces was required to separate communities during the initial ceasefire, it was not coercive power that ensured local communities' compliance but the soft power of traditional leaders. As the *suldaan* put it, such an accommodating welcome 'was only possible because of the respect, trust and admiration our people have for us. Self-proclaimed traditional leaders are unable to take part in such issues because they lack endorsement from their families' (*ibid*). In this system, respect and trust are not immutable attributes tied to status or administrative function, but are continually earned and lost based on local perceptions of neutrality and independence. This

is why, when the *Guurti*, who initially intervened in the conflict, was dismissed as overly beholden to governmental and 'tribalist' agendas (Interview #161), other potential envoys were found, who exhibited the practical, contextually-specific qualities necessary to garner acceptance from both parties. Ultimately, distance from organised power was the only sacrosanct attribute:

> There are traditional leaders within the system who are of high standing, but are not registered with the government. They have a capacity to resolve much of what those institutionalised traditional leaders cannot. When a particular registered elder wants to resolve conflict…he'll not go alone, but will use the capacity and the authority of those unregistered elites. (Interview #261)

In fact, one *Guurti* member conceded as much in justifying his institution's diminished role in the El Af-weyn resolution: 'Peace matters are a shared thing; it is not exclusive to [the *Guurti*] only' (Interview #120).

While local-level intervention can often be enough to overcome political and economic interference, the 'nationalisation' of the El Af-weyn conflict required action to be taken at a higher level. In this, the dual role of politicians and government officials within the Somaliland system—representatives of the State and ruling elite on the one hand, and of their clan on the other—enabled clan-based influence over formal politics (Renders & Terlinden 2010, 735; Interview #23). While at times politicians may exploit this dual role to their advantage, mobilising clan affiliates to support their bids for power, at other times they feel pressure from elders and other constituents to wield power in the service of the clan's horizontal, Covenantal interests. Over the course of the conflict, certain events transpired that motivated prominent political figures from within the government or the opposition to overcome their sectional interests to act on behalf of the inter-clan collective.

The state of emergency became one such political battleground between sectional and collective interests. While the motives behind the president's decision is hard to determine, individuals close to Bihi believed it was a genuine attempt to restore order to an increasingly violent situation (Interview #164; Interview #181). Yet even Bihi's defenders shared concern that his unilateral approach had alienated several important constituencies, with the leader not only refusing to buy-off parliament to ensure the emergency decree passed, as had become common practice, but also refusing to consult with key stakeholders in advance of the decision, to garner collective consent: 'The government failed to educate

the wider public about the intention of this state of emergency. It even failed to meet with politicians from that region or with the political parties. They are all stakeholders…and they have the right to have their views respected' (Interview #254). In rejecting these consultations, the president failed to grasp the humanitarian concerns of the Sanaag people, who feared that, in singling out the region as unsafe, the declaration would negatively impact the levels of foreign assistance it would receive (*Borama News* 2019; Interview #165; Interview #166). As a result, parliamentarians joined across the aisle to publicly reject the decree, some out of personal vendetta against the president's abstention from kickbacks, but the majority in response to these humanitarian concerns, following pleas from the affected clans.

In an attempt to circumvent such parliamentary resistance, the president instructed the Speaker of the House to forestall a vote on the matter. However, the die was already cast, with political pressure, combined with the impracticality of implementing the decree, preventing the emergency protocols from getting off the ground (Interview #220). In the end, the operation dwindled with little fanfare or success, quietly expiring after its initial three-month mandate, with parliamentarians claiming victory over the expansionist ambitions of State power:

> What we rejected was putting more pressure on poor people already suffering from drought and inflation…When we saw that the government was expanding its authority, showing its power and misusing the law with this state of emergency, we opposed it. We've had experiences with state of emergencies [under Siad Barre], and it's what destroyed Hargeisa…We thought bringing in the military would cause bigger issues than what they're [already] trying to solve. (Interview #165)

What the interventions of both the mediation committee and parliament show is that obligations to clan and collective security serve as potent forces, compelling actors to organise against prevailing power dynamics and financial incentives. Despite the legislature's general weakness and corruptibility in the face of executive power, at moments when social forces have aligned in opposition to the State, parliamentarians and even cabinet ministers are emboldened to harness these forces within formal institutional spaces. It is here we can see the logics of the Social Covenant at work. Not only are certain actors or unofficial roles activated and granted license to intervene in social spaces they would otherwise not venture into, but they do so with the socially-endorsed legitimacy and authority to restrict and/or

dismantle State and other self-interested actors from operating within those social spaces. Moreover, the fact that these parliamentary manoeuvres occurred in lockstep with numerous other societal efforts to contain the conflict, from traditional mediation on the frontlines, to quotidian acts of information-sharing and fundraising across major cities, without centralised coordination and through horizontal, self-initiated activity, demonstrates political sensibilities and forms of agency not capturable within State-based understandings of politics: 'We went all the way to El Af-weyn, and we…lectured in every village and pacified those families that had been victimised. No one told us to do this. It is our sacred job to reconcile our people' (Interview #205).

5.3.2   Re-balancing

External interference in El Af-weyn's politics was so damaging precisely because it disturbed the relative balance of power between groups. For the *Biciido*, political and economic favouritism during the Silanyo era enabled the clandestine build-up of weaponry, including heavy artillery, while granting them an advantage in elections and land-grabbing ventures. These biases were translated into superior territorial control and governmental power at the local level (*SONSAF* 2018). Furthermore, the State's leniency towards the *Biciido* on matters of punishment and accountability during the early mediation processes emboldened them to consolidate their advances rather than concede (Interview #195). For one political commentator, such imbalances ensured that the conflict persisted: 'The peace of two clans can only come if they have the same power…If one clan is weak, then that clan will be overpowered; if not, then the two clans will live in peace. Revenge is based on the power of the clans' (Interview #177).

To counteract this unstable condition, relative equality had to be restored, which first and foremost meant a mediation process that narrowed rather than widened power imbalances. When Bihi's initial approach of threatening harsh punishments for any deviations against the peace only served to rouse both sides further, the government turned to a mediation committee that could be trusted to rein in the excesses of the warring parties (Interview #254; Ross 2018). This included religious leaders, who are generally seen to transcend clan: 'When people hear [the name] "Sheikh Dirir", they stand up and get excited, no matter which side. They feel like sheikhs' judgements and religious guidance answer to a higher authority [than particular interest]' (Interview #28; Interview #234). *Suldaans* from the

Gadabuursi also revived their role of 'outsider-insiders' within the 2018 meditation committee, with one *Gadabuursi* intellectual boasting, 'the only people who can mediate between [the warring parties] are the *Gadabuursi* elders', because when the government tries to insert itself between the 'big three *Isaaq* groups', it only further stokes conflict—in the end, they 'have to retreat and let the *Gadabuursi* lead a kind of consensus' (Interview #134). As such, whatever power asymmetries the *Biciido* and *Sacad Yoonis* experienced at the level of formal politics was neutralised within the apolitical mediational space of religion and *xeer*.

In this environment, the role of the government was tightly controlled, reduced to the provision of security, funds and logistical support, but only at the mediation committee's behest. As one committee member described things:

> The scholars were independent; there was no influence from any government member. [Government representatives] were called in when the discussions were over to be informed of any decisions, but they didn't contribute a single word to the programme. It was highly protected: we had soldiers guarding the door and the ministers weren't allowed to enter. To us, they were civilians at that point. (Interview #234)

Such disregard for prior status or influence contributed not only to an atmosphere of equality between actors, but also to greater balance in outcomes, as one minister involved in the process quipped: 'You can accuse the previous government of being biased to one side because one side was complaining the whole time, but now both sides are accusing us of being biased. That's how you know you are close to fairness' (Interview #164).

While a depoliticised mediation committee ensured the short-term parity of the negotiation process, rebalanced relations over the longer term were consolidated through the stipulations of the negotiated settlement, which was finally reached on 2 August 2018. Given the uneven build-up of arms, levelling the playing field involved 'managing the loaded gun,' with the two sides agreeing to both hand over heavy weaponry and demobilise newly-formed clan militias (Interview #259; Interview #267; Interview #234). The agreement expanded upon previous peace deals in calling for a literal levelling of the built environment, so that the rangeland was returned to common ownership (*Goobjoog* 2018); *Dawan* 2018). As one former minister involved in the earlier agreement explained things:

> We decided to cancel three villages altogether so the water and food for animals will be free. We brought two bulldozers to completely destroyed everything:

school, mosque, we made it clean and empty. But before we destroyed [anything] we [agreed to] pay [all owners compensation]…They evacuated and took whatever they could, [and by] next Saturday the village again became a free place for the people. (Interview #102)

In the end, while efforts to negate imbalances in power, control and resources were sound in intention, they ultimately failed in execution. The demolition of villages under the Silanyo administration, in treating both sides equally, ended up equating the new-built *Biciido* villages, a product of expansionary competition, with the villages that the *Sacad Yoonis* had lived in for over two decades, thereby actually serving to exacerbate feelings of bias and imbalance (Interview #254). Equally, the *Biciido*, whose decision to hand over arms under the August 2018 agreement came at a time when Caare's *Sacad Yoonis* rebellion remained armed and dangerous, were left feeling betrayed and exposed (Interview #238). In both cases, despite the great progress made by neutral parties in overcoming external interference, existing centres of both State and militia power could still disrupt this progress.

5.3.3   Re-entanglement

As described in Chapter 3, fostering inter-clan cooperation requires both favourable structural conditions (relative equality of power) and a favourable intersubjective dimension (the deliberate cultivation of intimately entangled fates). Through fostering the reintegration of communities back into each other's everyday lives, inter-clan conflict mediation re-establishes interdependence between communities, making peaceful relations more difficult to dismantle through instrumentalisation or division. In the El Af-weyn dispute, as elsewhere, this involved reconvening communal activities (from rangeland use to petty trading), reopening intermixed spaces (such as schools and markets) and returning to jointly settled land. Moreover, with the conflict as much a national issue as a local one, intimate relations held by national elite were also exploited in the name of peace, both familial—through their rural kinsfolk in Sanaag—and intercommunal—towards counterpart elite of the opposite clan. In the rest of this section, we will explore these national and local forms of re-entanglement.

Given the profound intermixing of the two clans, many politicians had close relatives on both sides of the conflict, engendering a personal interest in seeing the issue resolved, as well as providing the connections necessary to bridge the two sides. One of these doubly-implicated political figures, an opposition politician from El Af-weyn, remarked that, as

someone from one of the warring clans married to a woman from the other side, he '[felt] that problem more than anybody, because it is my house' (Interview #190). As a result of this personal stake, and through constant engagement with traditional leader acquaintances on the ground, he claims to have helped coordinate local and national responses to developments, succeeding in 'placing the issue on the agenda' in meetings with his party, other parties and the presidency. Similarly, one *suldaan* from a non-aligned sub-clan recounted the initiative he took from Hargeisa to raise popular awareness via social media, convey advice over text to counterpart elders, and even convince a taxi driver from the *Biciido* not to join the fighting (Interview #131). While anecdotal, such stories conform with observations made during my fieldwork, in which influential figures in Hargeisa, despite being far removed from the action, orchestrated responses across vast inter-city networks in support of ending the conflict.

More decisive than these personal entanglements, however, was the society-wide understanding that all sides would suffer the same violent fate if the conflict spun out of control. 'The problem won't be confined to just the countryside, because they're both huge clans that can be found in Burao, Berbera and even Hargeisa,' observed one poet. 'If the conflict expands it'll engulf every region…Everyone taking part in the conflict resolution knows the [severe] consequences it could have if not contained' (Interview #89). As such, while certain self-interested actors might have been comfortable enflaming tensions for personal gain, the vast majority of society knew that, given the fragile, interwoven patchwork of inter-clan relations on which Somaliland's peace was based, no Somalilander's self-interest could be fully divorced from achieving a peaceful end to the El Af-weyn dispute. For one prominent member of the mediation committee, these calculations were front and centre in his decision to intervene: 'I must say that if there is conflict in Hargeisa, Burao or in Berbera then Borama, [my] region will also fall into conflict. It is for this reason that we are forced to mediate and complete our duties as traditional leaders and elders so that we can keep the peace [at home]' (Interview #278). Intimacy, experienced as the lack of moral and physical distance from the effects of conflict, thus served as a force of restraint.

Recognition of these intertwined fates equally placed certain restraints on those perpetuating the conflict for their own ends, especially when the issue reached the point of impending crisis. As one opposition politician argued, if State actors or private interests take their incendiary interventions into the conflict too far, then 'others not benefiting from this

arrangement will prepare against this and will gain support from others. If it [becomes clear] that the government is funding one side, we, the opposition, will fund the other side, and war will get bigger. For this reason, the government is careful and puts national interest first' (Interview #150). Indeed, even while leading a rebellion against the State, it was reported that Colonel Caare upheld his communal obligations to arrest and hand over criminals from his clan who had defected to his safe haven, so as not to damage goodwill between *Habar Yoonis, Habar Jeclo* and government negotiators at the national level (Interview #240). The business elite, who 'know that if the peace is violated, they will not get [an opportunity] to trade,' were another force pushing clan actors towards peace rather than war. As one peace researcher notes, these social obligations of businesses towards their customers is built upon intimate relations of reputation and moral expectation, in which the business class 'are accountable to the people to not be part of any conflict…If one of our businessmen is named as part of the problem, it will damage his reputation and his trade. They know the cost of conflict' (Interview #254).

This overriding willingness of clans to proactively mobilise to restore peace, even if it meant going around or through a State unwilling to constructively contribute, was on full display in the aftermath of Caare's defection, when Bihi's heavy-handed response risked destabilising the situation further. Rather than simply lobbying the government to change tack, traditional leaders and other high-level powerbrokers of the *Habar Jeclo* and *Habar Yoonis*, drawing from a sense of shared fates, decided to circumvent the government and hold a bilateral clan reconciliation conference of their own. The conference, announced in late 2018, was to address all outstanding issues between the two sides, from the actual violence to the post-election fallout, with the ultimate aim of making 'a bridge [between us], and establish[ing] a community of brothers. We need to erase the divisions between the regions. Therefore, it is not a political meeting, and it is not against the government. It is actually in the name of the country and in the name of the community' (Interview #183). Despite being worried that the meeting might serve as the pretext for the formation of a new *Habar Jeclo-Habar Yoonis* electoral alliance, the president had little choice but to allow the meeting to transpire, given its prospects for peace. As one government official described such political calculations:

> We could say that it's a political [conference], as some people believe it's about the next election. But [the organisers] told the government that it is about the El

Af-weyn issue, which is good for the government, if they get peace for the area, as it is in line with the traditional way of solving problems. The president said they can have their conference because the El Af-weyn situation has been deteriorating for the past years and we need a permanent solution for it; and it is the people who need to get that [solution] because the government can't impose it by force. (Interview #191)

In the end, the bilateral clan conference would not go ahead, for reasons unclear to this author. Nevertheless, the fact that it was so seriously considered and afforded such across-the-board legitimacy, to the extent that even a recalcitrant leader was forced to give ground, speaks to the power of social entanglement in mobilising the social power of clans into action. 'Clan conferences are common; Somaliland was even formed by clan conferences,' one opposition politician notes of the enduring link between social entanglement and inter-clan association. 'These two clans are neighbours who have a lot of things between them to negotiate about, so they can have meetings if they want' (Interview #185). In sum, this commonplace assumption, that issues directly affecting communities can and should be directly addressed between them without the decision-making power of a higher authority, serves as a powerful force of intimacy, while placing intimate limits on how alienated politics can get from their communities.

At the interpersonal level, mending frayed intercommunal bonds is a painstaking, intricate process. It requires slowly tearing down the political abstractions that distort and distract from the everyday forms of interdependence and respect that people rely on to coexist. 'The worst part of war', laments one journalist, is that 'it brings many things that you actually don't realise at the beginning… Because when social life collapses, the law of the jungle comes!...Brothers will fight brothers, friends will just take the land from each other' (Interview #20). However, through mediation techniques that revive the intimate social, moral and familial ties connecting individuals to each other, such abstractions can be overcome. One former teacher involved in many reconciliation agreements in Sanaag describes these dynamics in the following terms: 'there is acquaintance [that remains between the sides]…"this is my nephew; this is my cousin." But because they had become enemies, they couldn't see each other! But when the people came back together [following successful mediation efforts] the people hugged. As if they didn't have any enmity!' (Interview #101). In short, while conflict is perpetuated through the accentuation and manufacturing of

difference, traditional mediation resurrects intimacy, an 'in-common', as the antidote to difference.

As described above, the divisive abstractions involved in the El Af-weyn conflict took many forms, from the essentialising affiliations of clan-party politics, to the fears brought on by competitive economic speculation. These distant, often opaque socio-political forces displaced the 'face-to-face' interactions that communities rely on to navigate their everyday peaceful coexistence (Interview #220). Within the mediation process, intimate, 'face-to-face' encounters were reasserted at all stages, including through the medium of the 'oath', an interpersonal promise that shifts moral responsibility back down to the level of clan and community. Oaths are taken by victims and accused parties before making testimonies, as well as by leaders responsible for each clan, as a way to signal that all ceasefire protocols and negotiated outcomes will be dutifully fulfilled. More than anything, however, the ritual significance and social function of the oath, as one political activist tells it, is to provide a measure of accountability through binding each clan's reputation to the honesty and integrity of their testimonies:

> The bottom-up approach taken in El Af-weyn began with selecting members from the stakeholders to take an oath. This oath binds elders from clan A and elders from clan B to be honest in participating in all means and measures moving the sides towards peace. With that oath comes a moral responsibility along with it, which is carried by the responsible traditional leaders, who relay the tenets of the oath back to their constituencies, in order to caution against doing anything that goes against the [protocols] of the mediation. (Interview #261)

The social accountability mechanism inherent within intimate relations combines embodied, interpersonal recognition and social sanction, and permeates all segments of the mediation process (Bakonyi 2009, 440; Mohamed 2007). As one long-time politician explains: 'Even though their clans are fighting, when the elders come together, the way they talk to each other [is] with respect, with decorum, with dignity. Even though you are fighting, you don't want to lose face. Face is one of the highest things: it is a commodity' (Interview #220). Furthermore, when formerly divided groups again feel accountable to each other, collaboration towards the shared goal of peace becomes possible, as the common interest that was obscured by war is again placed at the forefront. As one *suldaan* from the *Habar*

Yoonis explained: 'When sitting together and engaging in face-to-face dialogue, we can directly point the finger at each other, we can really sit together and make the hard choices: are we going to finally put a stop to this fighting, or are we going to let it destroy us? We put all our cards on the table' (Interview #240). Where war makes rival sides unaccountable to each other, traditional mediation, at its best, revives reciprocal relations and duties between social groups.

There are several forms of accountability at play in the mediation process, both in terms of material punishment and social sanction. While disinformation and subterfuge reproduced freely at the level of national and transnational politics, far from the heart of the action, new rules of the game emerged when the adversaries were confronted with one another in a shared space: 'They couldn't hide any secrets from each other because they are related to one another', as one minister involved in the mediation put it (Interview #164). 'When politics are involved people can change their story every time, but when people [are compelled to be] honest and not lie, problems [can be] easily solved by whoever gets between them first', he added. Yet mediation did not only close down malfeasance, but opened up opportunities for free expression, with 'six hours [of mediation dedicated] to sharing common grievances between the two clans', in which 'people were expressing themselves honestly' (Interview #234). For the victims, the mediators' presence helped to overcome the barriers to expressing such pent-up pain and anger, such as the 'fear of being punished for their beliefs for speaking openly', or the feeling of being overwhelmed by the scale of the harm done (Interview #255; Interview #103).

In tandem with the practical promises of compensation and security, this reconditioning of intimate associations set the stage for substantial reintegration, through the re-entanglement of clans in each other's lifeworlds. With barriers broken, the mediation committee, with the support of the government, worked with representatives of each clan on 'the resettlement of the people, through the facilitation of their return to the deserted towns' (Interview #234). Such a major leap of faith amongst formerly adversarial parties was only possible once trust between the mediation committee and the communities had been fully earned, and once trust in each other had been restored. Under the cover of this safety blanket, 'life slowly returned to El Af-weyn in a step-by-step manner, in which you could feel the ambiance become livelier by the day. The one hundred and fifty elders sent to the town, alongside many independent *suldaans* and businessmen who came to support and observe,

spent every night for a month in El Af-weyn, creating an atmosphere that was totally different from the previous one, in which the small diners and mosques were reopened' (*ibid*). The reinvigoration of relations beyond war and political difference would provide the building blocks of peace.

5.3.4   Moral levelling: Colonel Caare, from enemy to equal

Despite the progress made at the local level between the sub-clans, one area that was not addressed was the perceived imbalance between the *Biciido* and the *Sacad Yoonis* within the local security forces, something which only the government could deal with. It was anger over this failure that had led Colonel Caare to rebel, setting in motion a standoff that would delay any final resolution of the conflict (Interview #223). While the president was quick to brand Caare a traitor, and his clan swiftly distanced themselves from the militant aspects of the colonel's programme (Interview #73), many people from his own clan and elsewhere saw his grievances as legitimate, and worthy of being heard out: 'Caare is from Somaliland and is complaining about injustices. He and his followers are trying to get something corrected and that's a reality check' for the country (Interview #19). In his lists of demands, Caare referred back to the complaints issued previously by his clan elders, calling for redress against the unequal nature of nature of power-sharing and resource distribution, and calling for greater assurances of participation among marginalised clans, as well as accusing Bihi of betraying the founding agreements of the Somaliland project: 'What we've assembled together at the meeting of Burao, and then made the constitution for, is now in the pockets of a single person: [the president]!' (*Daray TV* 2018; Interview #218; *Elsar Media* 2019). As one of his *suldaan*s argued, 'he is from the clan that suffered injustices in El Af-weyn: the two cannot be separated' (Interview #240).

Despite the severity of the rhetoric and the armed manoeuvres, what is striking is just how simple the resolution of the predicament seemed to informed onlookers, so long as Caare was given a chance to have his grievances heard by the government, and be treated as a moral equal (Interview #267). 'The State, they think they can rule by the gun,' complained one long-time Somali politician. 'But that is not possible…He should have been welcomed, asked "what's the problem"?...And I am sure this incident can be utilised for strengthening democracy, discussions and inclusion in politics. But if the government reacts in the way it did, then it could be very dangerous' (Interview #217). 'The *suldaans* fixed things and came

to agreement with Caare', a former governor in the east despaired, but Bihi refused to negotiate with them. 'He should've ended it on that day no matter what it took but he did not, and things got out of hand then. If it was just Caare yesterday, today it became the *Habar Yoonis* committee, and it's mandatory to respect the Somali traditions. If you refuse them today, you've refused everyone they represent with their name' (Interview #259). In other words, Caare, in acting in the name of compounding *Habar Yoonis* political concerns, represented more than an individual, but instead stood in for the clan, thus entitling him to be heard out on the level of equals, rather than be singled out as a national criminal (*HWN* 2019).

Despite the president's unwillingness to transform this issue from one of military discipline into one of inter-clan exchange, the clans involved pushed forward with inter-clan negotiation regardless. As one seasoned politician noted: 'Force is counterproductive. He [Caare] will come to his senses. Because his clan does not want this thing to go on.... If he starts these things, then they have to shoot back and go out. Everybody will lose…They don't want that. They want peace' (Interview #220). A similar sentiment was voiced by an intellectual, for whom: 'the people don't want to resort to conflict and war again. A good example is Caare. The people want the government to be patient, and deal with him through compromise, because they're not going to break that social contract at all, and why should they?' (Interview #74). As such, over time, as the colonel and his brigade of military castaways holed themselves up in the mountains of Sanaag, his clan camped alongside him, pursuing shuttle diplomacy between Caare and the capital, until finally, at the end of 2019, a truce was reached (Interview #240). In exchange for ending his resistance and handing in his weapons, Caare received pardons for himself and his men, along with the integration of his rebel army into the national force and the promotion of certain senior officers (*Universal TV* 2020). It was through moral levelling and consensus-building, then, that Caare was welcomed back into the fold.

5.4 Conclusion

With this major stumbling block out of the way, the jar top that had already been loosened by years of negotiation finally came off, and the conflict reached a conclusion. Interestingly enough, it was the traditional leaders of the *Biciido* and *Sacad Yoonis* sub-clans that forged the peace compact themselves, without any third party facilitator, either a

traditional mediation committee or the government (Interview #299). The agreement, which was completed in November 2019, and unveiled at a ceremony attended by officials from across the nation one month later, placed mutual forgiveness at its centre (Jama 2019). Despite all the ebbs and flows of alienation and intimacy, the self-organisation of those to whom peace was dear, and for whom coexistence was unavoidable, prevailed, while those who had sought to instrumentalise the conflict to their own ends came out with little to show for it, even if they managed to cause great damage along the way.

For the people of El Af-weyn, this outcome was a bittersweet victory—their area remains poor, isolated and drought-ridden, and the underlying environmental and developmental factors that helped spark the outbreak of violence remain unaddressed. However, what this chapter has hopefully shown is that cycles of conflict and resolution in Somaliland are not mere exercises of reaction, survival and pacification, but involve channelling social power to productively mobilise against injustice, while keeping the dangers of such mobilisations within manageable bounds, so as not to jeopardise common security. The case study has also hopefully demonstrated that such social power is not itself an abstract quality, whether a 'will of the people' or a 'vibrant civil society', but is woven into society through material, historical and lineal relations of intimacy and entanglement. Lastly, as we have seen, for these relations to persist and remain resilient, human agency and political subjectivity must be organised and dedicated to their preservation, something built into the system through the norms of neutral mediation, inter-clan justice and political equalisation, all of which embody the intimate, dis-alienating elements of the Social Covenant.

The Somaliland mediation process is thus not a conventional case of peacebuilding. Whereas peacebuilding is generally associated with the eradication of instability and antagonism, and the consolidation of durable stability (Roberts 2008; Leonardsson & Rudd 2015), the Somaliland Social Covenant functions precisely by leaving space for instability, with clans only agreeing to participate in preserving the peace so long as they are equally able to retain the social power to threaten the peace if their grievances are not met. By the same token, sacrificing this autonomous clan potential to create instability, such as through the imposition of effective State domination, while indeed creating the conditions for stability, would equally undermine two other dimensions of the Covenant, equality and autonomy, thereby sacrificing buy-in for the project among marginalised clans. In other words, within the interplay of division and reunification that makes the Social Covenant tick, the latent

power of clans to threaten instability is as necessary to the vibrancy of the political system as the social power of traditional leaders to alleviate instability.

As this and the previous chapter both demonstrate, Somaliland's clans were thus successful in building peace, but in a manner where they retained the power to undo what they built. This power, so long as it is matched by the autonomous agency of traditional leaders to control and contain that power within limits, ensures that each clan is accountable to the others, enabling each clan to leverage mutual security interdependence into a greater stake in the collective project. In this way, when Somaliland's traditional leaders mediate a dispute, they are not simply stabilising and pacifying populations, they are re-founding the terms of the inter-clan association, rebalancing social relations and power dynamics when they deviate too far from the equality and autonomy of all.

Chapter 6: Case Study III

The Ahmed Geelle Affair: Justice through Horizontality

6.1 Introduction

Sometime at the end of President Silanyo's seven-year term (2010-2017), one of Somaliland's wandering 'sons', Ahmed Osman Geelle, returned home, under circumstances of unprecedented panic. While the international businessman had made the journey back to Somaliland many times before, this time he did so as an exile from neighbouring Djibouti, with the full force of a foreign government on his tail. Geelle arrived seeking refuge in the neighbourhood of Hargeisa inherited by his *Arab* clan, and his kinsfolk did not disappoint. They closed ranks, offering him unequivocal support from any move against him, whether from the transnational arms of the Djiboutian secret police or any other co-conspirators of Djibouti's powerful president, for whom the issue was highly personal. Once settled in Hargeisa, the businessman would live in relatively quiet limbo until, in mid-2019, the political winds blew against him, setting in motion a controversy that would reverberate across the region.

In the previous chapter, we looked at the ways the Social Covenant was able to remain relevant in addressing rural territorial conflict, its 'bread-and-butter' domain, despite the emergence of the State and its alienating tendencies. In what follows, we will see the Covenant called upon to intervene in a far less conventional situation: a transnational plot concerning over $125 million in assets, involving presidents, multinational banks, foreign spies, and potentially even Interpol. As we shall see, Geelle and his *Arab* clan, the targets of this intrigue, were able to successfully fight back by reducing these high-level stakes to their most basic, foundational dimensions: horizontal relations between clans. Against the 'verticality' of foreign arrest warrants, presidential decrees, high court rulings, State patronage, intelligence service collaboration and assertions of sovereignty—orchestrated by two maverick heads of State, above the heads of the general population—traditional leaders deployed the 'horizontality' of cross-clan sympathies, relational (inter-clan) notions of justice, and the power possessed by each clan as a result of social entanglement.

Horizontality, it will be shown, operates at two interconnected levels: the strategic and the normative. The former involves deploying the political levelling force of clan autonomy to contest top-down attempts to subordinate a community. Here, at the level of the horizontal, the State loses its elevated position in determining development and justice, and becomes 'politically equalised' (3.3.2.1) as just another stakeholder among many to negotiate and contend with regarding these issues. Rather than seeing issues of justice through the binary, vertical lens of State-society relations, with rights and socioeconomic privileges bestowed from the top and appealed to from below, horizontality treats justice as something that all clans owe equally to each other, with the horizontal Covenant entailing reciprocal commitments and expectations that must be met for cooperation to persist. And where such horizontal relations are thrown out of whack, they are to be 'rebalanced' (3.3.2.2).

This chapter will begin by outlining the immediate events of the Ahmed Geelle affair, thereafter seeking to place it in the larger context of Somaliland's changing place in the international system. It will show that, with the rise of the State, not only did Somaliland become increasingly entangled in geopolitical manoeuvrings, but its political elite found new avenues for tying their authority to international power and finance, rather than to the consent of their citizens. However, it will then go on to demonstrate that, when a member of the elite falls out of favour with the government, as in the case of Geelle, mutual dependence between himself and his community still serves as a powerful force of protection, in which (clan-based) horizontal power relations kick in to neutralise (State and interstate) vertical threats. It will conclude by drawing lessons from this incident for our understanding of the operation of Covenantal horizontality under conditions of the State.

6.2   The Ahmed Geelle Affair: Background

Ahmed Osman Geelle was born and raised in Somaliland, but went to neighbouring Djibouti in search of economic opportunity, eventually finding his way into the elite circle of businessmen orbiting around Ismaïl Omar Guelleh (IOG), whose family dynasty had ruled the small Horn of Africa entrepot since Djibouti's independence in 1977. Over time, this tiny, underdeveloped nation emerged as a preferred destination for international military bases and key hub of trade in the Horn of Africa, offering openings for a small pan-Somali business class to succeed. Geelle, through his business instincts and close ties to both the presidency and the influential Director of Djibouti's Central Bank, became one of several Somaliland-

origin industrialists and merchants to rise to the top of Djibouti's tightly-restricted commercial marketplace. By the mid-2010s, his *Laas Group* empire had developed a conglomerate of factories, logistic networks and services across various Somali territories.

Geelle's luck would change in the mid-2010s, when his independent business activities increasingly saw him fall afoul of the Djiboutian autocrat. In 2012, Geelle made his first major investment back in Somaliland, injecting $15 million into a Coca-Cola bottling plant, and, five years later, opened *Lis*, a milk production factory, the first of its kind locally (*The Star* 2019). As several accounts attest, President IOG attempted to seize on this expansion by demanding a stake in these ventures, but was rebuffed. The subsequent fall-out between the two heavyweights was severe, with IOG, during a trip by Geelle to Europe, not only confiscating $125 million worth of the businessman's assets in Djibouti, but issuing a warrant for his arrest (Interview #148). The arrest warrant coincided with the opening of a civil suit by a French Bank operating in Djibouti which Geelle had borrowed from, seeking $20 million in unpaid debts (Interview #136). Combined, the two judicial cases would, as the majority of local commentary interpreted things, be used as a bludgeon to punish Geelle for stepping out of line, making him the latest in a growing list of Somaliland businesspeople who had been forced out of Djibouti following disagreements with the leader (Interview #257; Interview #153). As luck would have it, Geelle was tipped off about his impending arrest before returning to Djibouti, and instead flew into Hargeisa, where he took refuge.

In response, Djibouti reached out to Somaliland's president at the time, Ahmed Silanyo, to seek cooperation in extraditing the renegade, to no avail. However, circumstances changed following the election of Muse Bihi, in whom, for reasons elaborated below, Djibouti found a much more willing partner. In April 2019, Djibouti sent Somaliland a follow-up diplomatic request for Geelle's extradition, this time being waved through the ministries of foreign affairs and justice, as well as the attorney general, before eventually reaching the desk of the Supreme Court (Journal 09/04/2019). However, the Somaliland government's plans to surreptitiously implement the request were thwarted when news of the letter was leaked to Geelle, who then approached his traditional leaders, of the *Arab* sub-clan of the *Isaaq*, for support.

According to several of Geelle's advocates (Interview #136; Interview #195; Interview #199), the case against taking punitive action against him was clear. While the lapsed debt he incurred from the French Bank required repayment, there was plenty of collateral to cover

such debt. It was the Djiboutian President who, in commandeering his assets, had deliberately sabotaged this solution, in order to force Geelle into the position of a delinquent. Matters could be easily settled if the two parties were able to handle things directly, without government interference, something made more difficult by the fact that IOG owned a 40% stake in the French bank's local branch (Interview #148). Meanwhile, to deport the businessman back to Djibouti would likely entail his unlawful detention, torture and potentially worse, given IOG's notoriously harsh track record in dealing with opponents (Smith 2016).

Despite entreaties by *Arab suldaans* towards a mediated outcome to the issue, President Bihi stood by his initial decision, and instructed his spokesperson to hold a press conference detailing to the public the reasons behind his decision, labelling Geelle a 'fugitive' and a 'thief', and his clan elders 'uninformed', in the process (Interview #196). The widespread public backlash was immediate, with pockets of youth coming out in protest and *Arab* elders taking to the airwaves with stark recriminations and threats levelled at the president, warning him against following through with the order and castigating him for his administration's harsh language. Bihi, overwhelmed, was forced to back down, agreeing to lay off Geelle while a committee of businessmen with investments in both Somaliland and Djibouti arbitrated a solution agreeable to all parties, with the situation approaching a peaceable conclusion by the time that the fieldwork concluded.

And so, in the face of an increasingly combative executive acting at the behest of a regional 'strongman', one of the parties to the Social Covenant, the *Arab* clan, had forced them to back down. We shall now look at the conditions allowing for this confluence of vertical power on the one hand, and the horizontal forces that served to challenge such top-down power on the other. It begins, in the next section, by describing how Somaliland's global integration accelerated the State's verticalist tendencies (6.3.1), before then outlining how this dynamic played out with regards to Somaliland-Djibouti relations (6.3.2) and the Geelle affair specifically (6.3.3). It is followed by a look at the horizontal mechanisms of power by which the Arab clan resisted this verticalist tendencies, such a levelling of the playing field (6.4.1), and the use of threats of withdrawal (6.4.2) and veto (6.4.3), at both the national and transnational (6.5) level. All told, we find that, what to the untrained eye might seem a simple power struggle between various elite actors, was in fact the complex working out of collective rights, justice and freedoms in the face of State and inter-state domination.

6.3 Verticality and Statebuilding in Somaliland

6.3.1 Somaliland's international relations and verticality

One cannot understand the evolution of the Somaliland State without reckoning with its role in the wider geopolitical landscape. Indeed, while the territory's peace, stability and order emerged through the initiative and determination of local actors to put an end to violence and division, various international actors have indirectly benefitted from such achievements, whether neighbours wary of Somali conflict spilling over into their borders, or Western governments seeking to insulate themselves from the blowback of African migration, terror and piracy. 'An unstable Somaliland would be a big disaster for both Djibouti and Ethiopia', as one former SNM officer remarks, and much policy analysis concurs (Interview #49; see Pham 2012; Shillinger 2005, 50). For these reasons, the Somaliland State has managed to make itself largely indispensable as an international partner, creating a mutually reinforcing situation in which Somaliland's fate is positively tied to the region's. Moreover, Somaliland has managed to exploit this dependence, converting the international community's desire to see Somaliland succeed into development cooperation and bilateral diplomatic partnership at a level rare for unrecognised governments (Ylönen 2022, 9; Pegg 2019).

That said, the benefits of increased international engagement have not been shared evenly. Unsurprisingly, members of the political elite and business class have been best placed to take advantage of not only the securitised nature of these relations, but also the commercial opportunities that have followed. Indeed, while traditional authorities remain disproportionately responsible for holding Somaliland together, both neighbours and global powers have failed to make sense of this reality, instead taking a narrow view of stability as reliant on a strong State (Fisher 2019; Interview #36; HC Deb 2018). The UK and Ethiopia in particular have supported training and capacity-building programmes for Somaliland's intelligence, security and border agencies, including of certain 'extra-legal and militarized' policing units (Moe 2018, 338; Hills 2016, 1072; Interview #216). As a result of these interventions, a governing stratum of 'nightwatchmen' and 'securocrats' has been legitimised and empowered with the 'coercive resources to pursue its own political and security agendas', leading to a brand of State-society relations increasingly 'experienced as violent,

arbitrary and unaccountable by the subject population' (Walls & Kibble 2011, 3; Moe 2018, 338; Interview #135).

Somaliland's international affairs cannot be reduced to its inter-'state' relations, however. In fact, as a result of the distinct way that colonial border-making scattered ethnic Somali populations across various administrative jurisdictions, Somaliland finds itself clustered amongst various Somali-majority governments living in close proximity to each other—thus creating a complex and dynamic overlap between inter-national and inter-Somali politics. Thus, in addition to sharing borders with Somali-majority administrations—Djibouti, the Somali region of Ethiopia and Somalia—on all sides, its various clans claim residence and a political and economic stake in several territories simultaneously, thereby granting leverage and opportunities to each clan that go beyond their specific place in the Somaliland social geography. For example, across the Somaliland-Djibouti border, we find medium-sized commodity traders, pan-Somali livestock herders and multinational importer-exporters exploiting transnational, kinship and interpersonal linkages for profit and livelihood; 'business knows no borders', as more than one interviewee noted (Interview #235; Interview #222; Interview #23; *FEWS NET* 2011).

While the benefits of these vast inter-clan networks are spread throughout Somaliland society, those with political and economic capital have been particularly adept at inserting themselves favourably into circuits of finance and commerce. Somaliland's reliance on 'import-export industries and the expansion of financial and business services' ties its economy to a regional network of what Elder (2021) describes as 'powerbroker industries,' in which 'trade and security rents' are predominantly captured by an oligarchic elite (1752-3). While to a certain extent this commercial elite has served as an independent, constraining force in relation to the State, with the government often reliant on loans from these multi-clan financial networks to stay afloat, such financial might has increasingly been brought under the influence of 'those who control central state institutions' (Stepputat & Hagmann 2019, 808; Musa *et al.* 2021, 115-8). For instance, Somaliland's $442 million agreement with Emirati logistics giant DP World to upgrade the Berbera Port has enabled State powerbrokers to consolidate their control over rent-seeking opportunities, over and above the sub-State clan economic fiefdoms that previously held so much sway (*ibid*).

Only through this complex interplay of geopolitical and pan-Somali relations can one make sense of the coordinated manoeuvres of the Djiboutian and Somaliland heads of State

against Ahmed Geelle. How such interactions cash out in practice, however, is highly complex. As we shall see, such forces of trans-ethnic integration equally contend with more straightforward clashes of competing national interests, in which Somaliland's rise as a formidable regional player has come to threaten Djibouti's primacy as the most influential geopolitical actor along the strategic Red Sea coastline (Kennard & Einashe 2019). At the same time, not only is this rivalry blunted by the need for cooperation between the two countries over security and immigration, but levels of cross-border elite collusion have been important in aligning the fates and fortunes of the two nations (Interview #20). All these various forces and considerations influenced the strategic calculations and political assumptions guiding actors involved in the Geelle case, in particular shaping the way Djibouti has attempted to lay claim to authority and influence over its neighbour.

6.3.2   Djibouti's influence on Somaliland politics: verticality beyond borders

In many ways, Djibouti, under the personalistic regime of IOG, serves as a haunting image of Somaliland's potential post-Covenantal future, demonstrating what life looks like when vertical power snuffs out horizontal relationality. And, as this section will show, the vertical fates of the two polities have indeed been intimately intertwined, with Djibouti's influence in the Geelle affair part of a much broader pattern of authoritarian collusion. Djibouti's own 'gatekeeper state' ambitions precede that of Somaliland by several decades — from independence in 1977 onwards, its government has hosted increasing numbers of foreign military bases in exchange for self-preservation and enrichment, with foreign patronage enabling a single family dynasty to maintain ironclad rule to this day (Hönke 2018, 356). Indeed, both the nation's first leader, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, and his nephew, IOG, persevered by turning the country's geostrategic 'location into both a substantive income stream for the patronage-based state coffers, and an important source of international political capital' (Styan 2016, 83), combining this externally-endowed power and legitimacy with an increasingly repressive and undemocratic stance towards all domestic opposition (Metelits & Matti 2015). As one Somaliland elder put it: '[Djibouti is] a difficult place to live in, and anyone that goes against the president is jailed no matter what their titles are. Many of them die inside prisons' (Interview #199).

Djibouti's situation undoubtedly contrasts sharply with a place like Somaliland, where both regular elections and the strength of traditional leaders constrained and replaced State

leadership much more frequently. For Somaliland's first few decades, it seemed these systems were hardly compatible, with President Egal clashing with IOG over the direction of pan-Somali politics, and his successor, Dahir Riyale, becoming embroiled in a cross-border clash over the livestock export trade (Interview #226; Interview #24). Indeed, more than a few Somalilanders assumed that, for the Djiboutian regime, Somaliland's existence was a threat to the Djiboutian State's very legitimacy and viability, not only challenging its maritime geopolitical hegemony, but also offering ideological inspiration to Djiboutians in search of a less oppressive alternative (Interview #15; Interview #20). To ward off this challenge, they mused, it made sense for IOG's regime to intervene menacingly into Somaliland's political system, to bring its governance practices down to Djiboutian levels.

However, as Somaliland's statebuilding and regional economic integration progressed, new opportunities emerged for collaboration between the two countries' political elite. This began under Silanyo, who strengthened relations with IOG through not only utilising close connections between their respective spouses, but also assisting the Djiboutian leader's 2011 and 2016 electoral races, by opening the border to sizeable outflows of Somaliland-based voters from IOG's *Ciise* clan (Interview #199; Interview #225). As Silanyo's successor as leader of Kulmiye, Muse Bihi banked on his own ties to the Guelleh family when making his 2017 presidential run, including his *Sacad Muse* roots, which connected him lineally to president's wife, and his dual Somaliland-Djibouti nationality (Interview #267). Moreover, Bihi had earned the trust of the Djiboutian government through his involvement in regional security and intelligence issues, making him a safe pair of hands at a time when much-feared political Islam was gaining influence amongst many of his political rivals (Interview #147). As a result of these factors, Djibouti, as several credible sources indicate, joined certain wealthy businessmen and likely the UAE in financing and otherwise supporting Bihi's rise to power (Interview #207; Interview #257; Interview #209).

The likely influence of Djibouti on Bihi resulting from this electoral *quid pro quo* was amplified by a more general economic dependence of Somaliland on Djibouti. Somaliland, whose lack of recognition has disqualified it from much formal global commerce, has outsourced to Djiboutian territory many of its economic and diplomatic dealings with the outside world. In fact, one of the main reasons Somaliland-origin businessmen such as Geelle have based their operations out of Djibouti is that it offers them access to insurance, letters of credit and commercial banking that would otherwise be denied them as enterprises based

in unrecognised Somaliland (Interview #19). Similarly, with many foreign governments reticent to initiate official diplomatic contact with Somaliland officials, Djibouti, alongside Addis and Nairobi, has become an important outpost through which countries conduct more informal intelligence-sharing and bilateral discussion with Somaliland emissaries (Interview #6; Interview #36). In other words, Djibouti has served as a vital gateway to the world for Somaliland, even as new options, such as Dubai, have opened up.

Similarly, the Djiboutian government has exploited the difficulties Somalilanders face in travelling abroad, as a result of their lack of recognised travel documents. In positioning themselves a lifeline against exclusion from the global migration regime, Djibouti has established new layers of dependence. As one local journalist describes it, 'the Somaliland people are isolated from the world…so the majority of the people take the Djiboutian passport [if they can]. That's the leverage they have over Somaliland, because all the government officials, ministers, DGs, and the UN workers are going after this passport' (Interview #193). This also includes a much wider list of individuals, from sick persons in need of foreign medical treatment, to youth seeking education abroad, who draw on connections to middlemen in Djibouti to secure a travel document: 'Because of the situation of the Somali passport, that was a helping hand for the Somali people. Get a Djibouti or Ethiopian passport and travel the world' (Interview #275). Bihi and his family, dual nationals who regularly travel on Djiboutian passports, were equally reliant on the discretion of the Djiboutian leadership to continue benefitting from such freedoms, a point often referred to by informed interviewees questioning the president's allegiances during the Geelle affair (Interview #146; Interview #195).

Lastly, security cooperation has unleashed more nefarious forms of influence. Djiboutian intelligence services are known to operate clandestinely throughout Somaliland, and have been accused of bribing and intimidating politicians, journalists and other outspoken critics of the IOG regime (Interview #55). Indeed, a parliamentarian interviewed for the study revealed receiving phone calls warning him against making further public interventions into the Geelle affair, while a journalist received death threats for reporting on the case (Interview #136; *Geeska* 2019). The Somaliland government has been known to cooperate closely with Djiboutian security services, including by purportedly handing over three of its citizens following the 2014 terrorist bombing of Djibouti, in which the culprit was believed to have entered the country through Somaliland territory. One of the individuals is

believed to have been beaten to death, while the status of the others remains unknown (Mataan 2019). The collaboration between the governments of Somaliland and Djibouti in pursuing the arrest of businessman Geelle should be seen as part of this same cross-border security regime.

6.3.3 Verticality and the Geelle affair

Despite the advantages that Djibouti's recognised status, as well as its financial and military muscle, have offered, Somaliland has, for the better part of its history, resisted this influence from reaching too far into society. From President Egal's refusal to support IOG's 2001 Arta plan for reconstructing Somalia, to Silanyo's decision to exploit the rift between Djibouti and DP World in order to bring the company to Somaliland, Somaliland's leaders have exhibited a substantial degree of agency in determining their own affairs, despite this external pressure (Interview #22; Interview #154). While bilateral cooperation has traditionally been predicated on some degree of acquiescence to IOG's anti-dissident manoeuvres, the Somaliland government has largely been uncomfortable in letting things escalate to the point of fundamentally altering its relationship with its citizens. For the kind of collaboration we find between President Bihi and IOG at the time of the Geelle dispute to emerge, then, a significant deviation from longstanding political practice had to take place.

For President Bihi to side with Djibouti against the interests of one of Somaliland's citizens was seen not just as a personal betrayal, but as a fundamental challenge to the very understandings of authority and power that the polity had grown accustomed to. As one *suldaan* from Geelle's *Arab* sub-clan defiantly argued in the heat of the controversy: 'we declared Somaliland a sovereign country that stands its own…I don't remember when we joined Djibouti. We believed that we are a country with a government and rules. What happens in Djibouti isn't our concern, and whatever happens in Somaliland isn't Djibouti's business' (*Nagiib Media* 2019). This elite-let plot to import the authoritarian writ of Djibouti into Somaliland territory, over and against the consent of the stakeholders of the Somaliland experiment, threatened its very political foundations, as one intellectual explains: 'The lifestyle of the Somaliland government and clans and the lifestyle of Djibouti's clans and government is 100% different. In Somaliland, they can insult the president, they can shout, they can be against the government because its influence is limited. They can say "no," but, in Djibouti, they can't say "no"' (Interview #256). In short, Bihi's actions were interpreted as

a strong statement of verticalist intent in the face of popular obstinance against all threats to their hard-won freedoms (Interview #262; Interview #199).

Bihi's change of tack on this issue, while in part explicable by his personal dependence on Djibouti, must also be seen in terms of the president's *own* agenda, which seemed to involve an active embrace of the Djiboutian way of doing things. While Silanyo, his predecessor, oversaw a loose, multipolar system of State governance, in which powerbrokers from each clan were appeased, played off each other and granted much free rein, under Bihi, this was replaced by the impulse towards a strong, commanding executive, a model that IOG had already perfected (Interview #267; Interview #108). Indeed, one intellectual perceived a direct 'influence of [Djibouti's] dictatorial system' upon Somaliland, positing whether 'Djibouti's dictator is a role model for Muse Bihi' (Interview #196). One area where this emulation seems most overt is the way Bihi sought to control the circulation of finances, commercial activity and resources. This involved not only concentrating all nontrivial government spending decisions in his office (earning him the nickname '*handraab'*, or padlock), but also pursuing efforts to subdue Somaliland's powerful business class, just as IOG has previously mastered.

To this end, as several local political analysts have seen it, despite relying heavily on donations from segments of the national business elite to reach power, once in office, Bihi sought to turn this relationship of dependence on its head. As such, just as the president had sought to enfeeble traditional authorities, so too did he envision taming Somaliland's freewheeling commercial oligopoly, by consolidating all major enterprise into a cartel under the clientelistic control of his close familial accomplices, including his son, nephews and at least one entrepreneur ally (Journal, 09/04/2019; Interview #222; Interview #163; Interview #117). Indeed, a donor-funded investigation of Somaliland's business environment in 2019 discovered collusion between the Somaliland Government and Djibouti aimed at thwarting a number of deals between Somaliland companies and counterparts in the UAE, Oman and Ethiopia, effectively limiting their independence and power (Journal 19/02/2019). The fact that a businessman as influential as Ahmed Geelle would find himself hounded by the Bihi regime thus speaks to a larger pattern of behaviour. Even if no explicit motives have been revealed, indication that the Geelle incident was indeed not divorced from larger power struggles can be found in reports from two years after the initial controversy, which include

allegations that the president, through his nephew, attempted to expropriate one of Geelle's lucrative maritime logistics contracts through extra-legal means (*HWN* 2021).

6.3.4   Summary

This confluence of forces was arrayed upon the person of Ahmed Geelle as he attempted to navigate a way out of his predicament. More than just an inter-elite power struggle and shakedown, this episode of Somaliland politics was wrapped up in much grander designs of verticalisation, in which two separate governments co-conspired in cross-border, parallel efforts to bring an influential agent of autonomous power under their control. Indeed, the course by which these two heads of State pursued this mission had all the hallmarks of vertical power: direct, clandestine collaboration between coercive arms of government, with the goal of exercising raw discretionary authority downwards towards a member of the citizenry, while circumventing normal channels of decision-making and accountability formally containing such power. Verticality can also be detected in the normative appeal by both IOG and Bihi to diplomatic protocol, legal rulings, international criminality and executive decisionism, which sought to elevate these political machinations beyond the purview of ordinary citizens and into the abstract, technical realm of sovereign proceduralism.

In relying on extraversionary practices of collusion and patronage to bolster its power, the Somaliland State is hardly different from most postcolonial African polities (Bayart & Ellis 2000; Peiffer & Englebert 2012). What sets Somaliland apart from the vast majority of its continental counterparts, however, is that this foreign involvement was not hardwired in from the outset as a legacy of colonialism, but instead, following an extended period of relative isolation, slowly encroached into Somaliland society in a piecemeal manner. As a result, rather than dictating the shape of politics, extraversionary and verticalist tendencies have at all times been forced to contend with potent indigenous social relations with an independence and internal coherence of their own: namely, the Social Covenant. In the case of Geelle, this involved confronting both Somaliland's multipolar inter-clan power dynamics and the wider, trans-Somali spaces of mobility, exchange, circulation that continually evade the grasp of State hierarchy. As we shall see in the next section, efforts to impose executive power on top of this unruly conglomerate were met by forceful opposition, resistance that went beyond mere protest, condemnation and obstruction, and instead triggered the

organised mobilisation of horizontal social power that every Covenantal party has at its disposal.

6.4   Horizontality as Resistance in the Ahmed Geelle Affair

At the level of the State politics described above, Geelle and his *Arab* sub-clan had little leverage. While a key constituent of the *Isaaq* lineage group, the *Arab* have, over time, seen themselves marginalised within Somaliland politics. Unlike the *Sacad Muse*, *Ciise Muse*, *Habar Yoonis* and *Habar Jeclo*, the *Arab*'s modest numbers and territorial marginality have left it as a junior partner in any electoral or political bloc, unable on its own to sway the fate of any particular strategic alliance. As a result, the community remains underrepresented within centres of formal power—whether ministerial offices, business cartels, patronage networks or political party leadership—and the neighbourhoods within Hargeisa that it inhabits have long been some of the most underserviced in the capital, with, for example, less than 10% of houses having access to running water, according to one local community development initiative (Interview #44).

The sub-clan's successful challenge to Muse Bihi's aggressions against Geelle thus required an appeal to a different type of power and influence, one tied to their indispensability to the survival of the Somaliland experiment writ large. In fact, in situations where State politics have conspired against them, such as their failed 2012 bid to form a national political party (Hersi 2015, 59-60), or the more recent dispute with Hargeisa's mayor over his complete neglect of their neighbourhoods' wellbeing (as referenced in Chapter 3), the *Arab* have exploited their relative autonomy vis-à-vis the State to make their presence felt, through both appealing directly to other parties to the Covenant, and also demonstrating their raw coercive power in relation to the State (Interview #199; Interview #64). In what follows, I will first flesh out the sources of *Arab* clan agency (both their autonomy and coercive potential), before demonstrating how this latent power was strategically deployed as a force of political levelling—through political equalisation (6.4.1), veto power (6.42) and rebalancing (6.4.3)—to enable the *Arab* to confront the State on equal, horizontal terms.

6.4.1   Bringing Politics Down to Earth: The *Arab* Clan and the Political Equalisation

It might be argued that the more a clan is marginalised within the formal structures of political and economic life, the more tightly and fiercely they organise themselves as a clan.

The *Arab* are case in point. For a community disproportionately overlooked in terms of employment and development opportunities, the fact that Ahmed Geelle, one of their own, had achieved economic prominence was especially significant, and any attack waged against him particularly unnerving. Simply put, the *Arab* clan depended overwhelmingly on the largesse and success of Geelle and those like him, both for long-term development and job creation in their areas, as well as for the basic, everyday welfare needs of underprivileged families (Interview #193):

> Besides his employment, Ahmed Geelle is a generous businessman who takes part in the development of his area and the country, supporting things with his own money. Sometimes he acts like a donor:…[chipping in] if a hospital is needed, schooling, educational programs. Besides that he may contribute funds if there is a death or marriage, for example. I think that's the main thing that influenced the people in standing up for him. (Interview #196)

As such, the government's targeting of Geelle was treated not as an attack on a particular member of the family but as an attack on the clan itself, making it a matter not merely of personal persecution but of collective injustice (Interview #257): 'Ahmed Osman and his family are the head of the clan, and if you cut our head, we will have nothing left' (*Nagiib Media* 2019).

As we have seen in previous cases, this clan-based expression of a collectively-felt injustice is legible most clearly through the Social Covenant. One of the founding principles of the Covenant cemented in Borama, it will be recalled, was mutual respect for the autonomy of other clans, as protection against domination. Such autonomy is crucial because it not only allows groups to tolerate a certain degree of government maladministration without having to resort to destabilising resistance, but also, more importantly, because it avoids creating dependencies that the government could wield to discipline clans seeking justice. And autonomy, within the highly imperfect constellation of forces that shape Somaliland's political economy, is heavily tied to the fate of one's economic elite. While reminiscent of the 'big man' syndrome that is deemed to have befallen African societies (Driscoll 2020), and in certain ways operating as such, I argue that, within the context of the Social Covenant, the role of these economic elite takes on a whole new dimension, given the mechanisms of accountability that clans can impose upon them.

To this end, we must thus place the Somaliland elite businessman, as an archetype and unit of analysis, within a larger context, in which mercantilism, entrepreneurship and

brokerage have served as sources of agency in the face of authoritarian, corporatist leadership and global economic stratification. It was businessmen stationed in the Gulf, Djibouti, UK and North America that helped spearhead the SNM under conditions where the regime had rendered on-the-ground resistance untenable, and it was the same business community that provided the funds and external linkages necessary to keep Somaliland afloat during the volatile early years (Ibrahim 2010; Ali 2022). As numerous interviewees have argued, the commercial prowess of Somalilanders continues, to this day, to contribute to the autonomy felt vis-à-vis both the outside world and their own government: 'Somalilanders are good at business—we are entrepreneurs, traders. We can create something out of nothing' (Interview #149; Interview #222; Interview #74).

The ability of entrepreneurs to penetrate markets both throughout Africa and globally, has enabled Somaliland to capture financial flows and global wealth that would otherwise elude it. During the COVID pandemic, for instance, Somaliland's privately-operated transport and logistics links have helped keep an otherwise isolated country connected to key supply chains for medicine and other goods (*Somaliland Chronicle* 2020). Furthermore, it was economic brokers, leveraging foreign interest in Somaliland's logistics, consumption and natural resources markets, that first facilitated the nation's improved relations with governments such as the UAE, Kenya, Turkey and Egypt (Interview #154; Journal, 24/03/2019). Faith in commercial diplomacy as a wedge for prying open deeper bilateral ties has also convinced much of the Somaliland public that the Berbera port deal and future oil concessions could be 'parlayed' into greater diplomatic status in the future (Interview #61; Interview #36).

Closer to home, the business community has acted as a backstop and welfare provider of last resort in safeguarding the population from destitution, conflict and social collapse. This role emerged during the period of 1990s conflict resolution, in which businesspeople found the viability of their enterprises tied to the re-emergence of nation-wide social cohesion and stability—whether to safeguard domestic markets or trade routes (Musa & Horst 2019). More recently, this has entailed providing humanitarian relief and services far in excess of what the government offers to communities afflicted by drought and other disasters (*Som Tribune* 2017*; Som Tribune* 2022). Geelle's SBI, for instance, donated $5 million as part of a larger project aimed at expanding Hargeisa's water pipelines, something which stood to be of particular help to his underserved kinsfolk (*Geeska* 2017; Interview #196). Moreover, the

business community has on many occasions served as a lender of last resort to the government, at times acting as the only bulwark against budgetary collapse (Phillips 2013, 64). As such, while certain individuals have become rich in a generally poor country, their own communities have received advantages as well.

Of course, this is a highly unequal arrangement, in which the business class is given license to profit with minimal regulation and taxes, maintaining disproportionate political influence while getting to determine how much of their wealth to disperse to the public (Stepputat & Hagmann 2019). And yet, in a world where all of everyday Somalilanders' economic interactions are characterised by lopsided power dynamics, this is arguably the least alienating and exploitative. While a poor *Arab* youth looking for funding to study abroad has little access or recourse to international organisations to support his ambitions, he can reach out to one of his clan patrons to make a request, either through phone contacts or by finding him out on the town (Interview #257). Beyond the advantages of accessibility, there is a more fundamental mutual dependency between clans and their businessmen, that make the latter a more reliable outlet for support:

> If you're rich, you need us people to protect you, because you can't survive on your own. Being rich can be more problematic at times, and so you'll need some fellow clansmen who will defend your interests…For example, if one rich guy wants to take a project from the government, he will not go to the president and the minister alone; his traditional leaders will go with him…On the other side, people lean on him to give not only money but work for their people. (Interview #261)

The symbiotic (if unequal) relationship between a Somaliland businessman and his clan ensures that the wealth and power of the former is not completely capturable by the State, but continues to operate at least partially in the service of his clan. The attack on Geelle by the governments of Somaliland and Djibouti, then, whatever the particular stakes of the original legal case, struck a political chord. It threatened the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the entire *Arab* community, without which they would find themselves at the mercy of a State they had little trust in. State power was thus asserting itself as inherently superior to clan power, creating an imbalance in the Somaliland Covenantal equilibrium, an imbalance which the Arab sought to politically equalise by reasserting their clan autonomy vis-à-vis the State.

6.4.2   Horizontal power and the *Arab* veto

As will be recalled, the tipping point in the Ahmed Geelle affair occurred when the presidential spokesperson publicly defended the president's actions against the businessman, disparaging those who disagreed. After witnessing such open intransigence by the State, the *Arab* traditional leaders, who, up to this point, had attempted to appeal the decision through entreaties behind the scenes, concluded it was time to up the ante. On 31 March 2019, four *suldaans* from the *Arab* clan invited the media into their home, with the representatives taking turns to explain their perspective on events, vacillating between wry suggestions of Somaliland's independence being forfeited, angry castigations against the legal and moral failures of the government system, and pleas to settle the issue fairly, in the name of peace (*Nagiib Media* 2019). But these finer points came with a stern warning, that not only hinted at the need for those responsible to pay for their actions, but also, more importantly, threatened the full withdrawal by the *Arab* clan of participation in the State edifice: 'I advise the president to rethink and manage his people, and I want him to resolve this issue and do something about it. If he doesn't, we will recall our troops, both those at the borders and in the military camps, and then we will decide what to do' (*ibid*).

As one of the suldaans would later admit, this threat to decommission all *Arab* troops from the national forces was mainly a performative jab, to be taken with a grain of salt, as seems to have been understood by those it was addressed to (Interview #151). As an *caaqil* from the clan himself put it: 'It was an empty threat because [we traditional leaders] love the country more than the politicians. Although we don't have much, we will not allow anything to jeopardise the peace' (Interview #207). Yet even crossing this normative threshold—in effect, expressing a willingness to end the collective security pact that ensured Somaliland remained stable—was duly significant in its own right: 'By claiming they were taking back the soldiers from the government, my clan leaders were showing…that they are willing to take things as far as possible—that if they have to choose between defending him and [letting] Somaliland collapse, they will defend him' (Interview #257). A clear demarcation was drawn between the politically tolerable and the politically intolerable, signalled through the act of veto.

Here is where the consent element of the Social Covenant comes into view in all its richness. It is based on the understanding that, while the various clans are willing to endow

the State with its legitimacy and lend it its coercive capacities, when push comes to shove, it is the clans, as the constituent power on which the edifice of the State is constructed, that continue to hold sway through their veto power. As such, for the *Arab* soldiers, it is not a case of 'competing' or 'dual' loyalties, in which there is a clash between allegiance to the State and the clan, as much of international statebuilding and some of the Somaliland intellectual class has argued (Interview #170; Wojkowska 2006, 21-3). Instead, it is about managing relations between the two institutions so that allegiance to the State does not come at the cost of one's interests as a clan, with clan autonomy and self-sufficiency as preconditions for participation in the wider State project. This set of conditions mediating between the Social Covenant and the State was described well by one *Arab* elder, in his discussion of the logic underpinning his clan's approach: 'It was just a threat. The army protects the country, especially their own people and businessmen. The army doesn't get much money, and businessmen like Ahmed help put their children through college, so we should respect them. If we don't, the army won't take it, and will leave, and the country will collapse' (Interview #199).

While such warnings demonstrated a willingness to push the government's buttons, traditional leaders equally went out of their way to assure their interlocutors that they would not do anything to undermine Somaliland's stability. These intentions were signalled through an apologetic disclaimer that accompanied the *suldaans*' press conference: 'Our decision [to speak up] wasn't an easy one. We love our country and are not the type of people to come on television and give interviews, but instead keep our opinions to ourselves' (*Nagiib Media* 2019). These gestures of devotion to the Somaliland project went beyond words. For instance, only a few days after engaging in a game of brinksmanship with the government, the same traditional authorities held a press conference praising the president's successes in enhancing the country's prospects of international recognition (*SLNTV* 2019). The *Arab* community also made sure that their presence was felt during the nation's independence celebrations, with one village head telling his local council chairman: '"Look, Mr. Chairman, at all these people that gathered to attend the celebration, even though the government still considers us people with grievances who are against them"' (Interview #171).

Such precarious balance between inflammatory and conciliatory rhetoric is what grants this style of defiance its efficacy, causing enough chaos to force others to listen and to be taken seriously, while showing enough care and restraint to avoid panic (which might lead to overreaction, social condemnation, etc.), on the condition that their grievances are

addressed in good faith. And, because each clan understands the dubious situation that their counterparts find themselves in—commanding the capacity to spoil the entire project for everyone (by intensifying the situation towards violence or chaos), yet having an interest, as a stakeholder, in the continuation of this project—they approach others' thundering claims of injustice not with defensive panic, but instead genuine engagement. The fact that the Bihi regime showed little desire to reply forcefully to the *suldaans*' provocations speaks both to a common understanding of the dynamics at play, and to the efficacy of this sophisticated approach.

In other words, the strong push to maintain autonomy from the State under conditions where self-sufficiency remained a powerful tool against domination and overzealous punishment—such as that which Geelle faced—only served to reinforce (not distract from) participation in the Somaliland project. It is this push and pull, a desire to go off on one's own but a realisation that one's fate is tied to others, that animates the Social Covenant. It endows clans with a power and impetus to test the limits of threats such as withdrawal and exit at moments when they feel they are suffering injustice, yet compels them to ultimately direct those energies and frustrations back towards the collective, to bargaining with the other clans for greater justice, in the name of preserving the political system on which their fate ultimately rests. In this, the logic of conditional association, in addressing counterparts at the level of political equal, reinforces horizontality at the same time.

6.4.3   Escalation to the Level of National Politics: rebalancing power

In defending Geelle, the *Arab* went beyond an appeal to (and activation of) clan autonomy, and equally framed the stakes of the dispute in relation to the sanctity of the original clan compact. This became evident in the language used in justifying *Arab* grievances, and in denouncing the actions of the government. Here, transgressions against Geelle on the part of the State were framed not only (nor even primarily) in terms of a failure of legal due process, or as a violation of State-citizen obligations, but as a reward unfit for a community so pivotal in securing coexistence between clans over time. This form of justification, I maintain, is decidedly horizontal, appealing a reciprocal exchange between clans to the effect of: *an injustice has been visited upon us; will you rise to the challenge and defend us, as we had you in your darkest of hours? Or will you allow everything we built to collapse at the hands of discrimination against one of us?* Such an appeal stands in stark contrast to justice claims-

making within the State paradigm, in which the State is petitioned 'upwards,' and can, as the ultimate source of judgement, bestow either punishment or leniency at its discretion.

To understand the way in which this appeal was framed, it is worth reconstructing the historicised narrative that *Arab* representatives commonly referenced when making their claims to justice, and the moral accounting that they embedded in this narrative (see *Daray TV* 2019; *Nagiib Media* 2019; Interview #199; Interview #207; Interview #151; Interview #196). As with other *Isaaq* sub-clans, the *Arab* took up arms as part of the SNM resistance. Nevertheless, they claim a special contribution thanks to the role the clan's territory played in hosting and instigating key periods of the rebellion, with the town of Baligubadle at its centre. This role has much to do with the region's sparse terrain and strategic position along the Ethiopia-Somaliland border; however, within the lore, it also spoke to the reliable character of the land's inhabitants: 'They chose Baligubadle because there were no spies amongst the *Arabs*. We are trustworthy people who can guarantee the safety of our land, and are always united' (Interview #207).

Once the liberation had succeeded, the *Arab* would have a further virtuous part to play. Like the other main stakeholders, their representatives took part as one of the official 'signatories' to the Somaliland project, but it was in solidifying this speculative pact during the dark days that followed that the *Arab* truly shone. As it became clear that the proliferation of heavily-armed clan militia was contributing to a climate of fear and insecurity, it was Suldaan Mohamed Suldaan Farah from the *Arab* clan who—in a gesture 'to honour the Burao Agreement'—was the first to break with the military stalemate and agree to lay down arms, bringing their militias' cache of weapons to the national stadium to set in motion a cascade of demobilisations by the other major clans (Interview #207; Hassan-kayd 2020, 82). During the same period, the clan also stood by President Egal as he fought off opposition from multiple sides, offering him protection rather than tipping the balance of forces against him (Interview #199). Such acts led to the formation of the Somaliland national army and helped end the cycle of intra-*Isaaq* war that plagued the period from 1992 to 1994.

What resonance does all this have today? I argue it serves as a historical ledger of moral exchange, which, while lacking admissibility within the formal court of law, provides grounds to have one's pleas for justice taken seriously by other clans. It was for this reason that these past exploits kept re-emerging in discussions with these figures around the Geelle affair. This link between historical deeds and present-day justice is captured succinctly in one

Arab caaqil's reflections on what is at stake in the Geelle case: '[We] have been the leaders of every initiative towards the sustainability of the nation, if it's laying down weapons, making concessions, or finding solutions…We pride ourselves in that, and believe that we are the glue holding the country together. If we leave the whole thing will fall apart' (Interview #199). These remarks could be whittled down to an essential warning: *without us Arabs doing what was right in the past, we, the 'collection of clans' of Somaliland, would never have come together in peace; and, without you other clans doing what is right now, we will fall apart.*

That this appeal to justice was aimed at the other Covenantal parties rather than the government is clear from one revealing part of the public statement made by *Arab suldaans* in response to the president's actions. In outlining the grounds on which Geelle's rights were being violated, it was the president's position as a powerful representative of his clan, rather than as head of State, that was invoked: 'I think he is forgetting the agreement between us and his clan. Muse knows the rules and traditions, but now, it seems like nobody trusts Somaliland with himself or with his wealth' (*Nagiib Media* 2019). This is not to say that the traditional leaders did not also appeal to statutory miscarriages of justice (such as State 'abuse of powers') and other legal technicalities (such as a lack of an extradition treaty with Djibouti) (*Bulsho TV* 2019). But while the legal appeal is largely an unenforceable entreaty to the levers of government to operate properly, the clan-based approach comes with mechanisms, such as 'veto' and 'exit', that grant traditional leaders power in their contest for justice: 'Somaliland is [ultimately] a collection of clans…It has a constitution, but it also has a sub-tribal system that is based on a culture that we can go back to when we need to [influence things]' (Interview #199).

The *Arab*'s pan-clan clarion call was heeded from several corners, despite scepticism from others. Among its most vociferous defenders were the *Garxajis*, who seemed to find common cause in their shared feeling of injustice. Even before the Geelle incident, this clan pairing had been drawn closer together as a result of their shared experience of marginalisation under a ruling party clan alliance that excluded both groups. While avoiding the explicit establishment of an opposition clan coalition of their own, the two sides had come together in a partnership aimed at achieving greater self-sufficiency on matters of development, forming an inter-clan humanitarian and development committee under an umbrella organisation known as *Mataanaha Arab iyo Garxajis* (MAAG), with the two clans 'twinned' (*mataano*) both lineally and in terms of political circumstance (Interview #44).

This partnership was called into effect immediately after the *Arab suldaans* went public with their criticisms against the government, with *Garxajis suldaans* openly expressing support and agreement with the *Arab* and their position (*Daray TV* 2019). A team of 31 elders from the *Garxajis* soon after met with their *Arab* counterparts to 'ask them what their accusations were, and what they needed' (Interview #151). While the exact role they played was not made known, it is likely that they used their own informal channels to pressure the president into relenting, while also helping to organise a delegation of high-level mediators to be sent to Djibouti, which included several heavyweight *Garxajis* politicians. Additionally, it is likely that the traditional leaders acted to rein in politicians who might have used the controversy to stoke conflict, as is often the case at times when a contentious issue takes on national significance (*ibid*).

The horizontal entanglement of Somaliland's clans in regard to this issue ensured that a wider spectrum of constituents had a stake in the outcome of this dispute. What happens to the *Arab* clan, the thinking went, could happen to others too, and for the government to successfully threaten the citizenship rights and economic activities of one powerful individual might set a bad precedent, thereby whittling away the existing privileges won up to this point. The *Arab* elders evoked such stakes in their own address to the media: 'The conspiracy is bigger than Ahmed, and it's the beginning of a new trend where any *suldaan* who speaks against the government is deported to Ethiopia or somewhere, and every *sheikh* who criticizes the president will be accused of terrorism and will be taken to the US. If we don't stop this today, everybody will suffer the same fate' (*Bulsho TV* 2019). Indeed, the very fact that businessmen from other *Isaaq* sub-clans had been forced out of Djibouti as a result of souring relations with IOG, had made Somalilanders across the board feel increasingly vulnerable. As one commentator argued: 'Somaliland people were offended because they were wondering what it means for them if Somaliland becomes obedient to Djibouti. If Djibouti says tomorrow that they need [me], then I should be handed over, Mr. So-and-so should be handed over…anyone can be a victim, so no one can support this action' (Interview #195). With the State at the heart of these worrying actions, it was up to groups from amongst society to work together to mobilise in the collective interest.

Indeed, resistance to Geelle's perceived maltreatment sparked protests by groups of politicians and youth across major cities throughout the country. For the younger generation, the injustice had little to do with the Burao agreement, but came from a sense of

socioeconomic reciprocity: 'The pressure [came] from Burao, Erigavo, Borama, Gabiley, Hargeisa—it was unanimous pressure, it was cross-tribal. Everybody spoke about it! Because they said "listen, this guy invested in this country"' (Interview #136). Those employed by the *Laas Group* took to the streets to save their livelihoods, while many of those not directly impacted expressed sympathy based on Geelle's reputation for better treatment of his workers than many other wealthy businessowners (Interview #195; Interview #228). For others, it was about a more general appreciation of Geelle's contribution to the development and self-sufficiency of the country: 'People in every region were protesting this from day one, and you can't go against what the people want. Ahmed was doing projects like expanding the water system in Burao and in Hargeisa too. That is the reason he is supported by everybody, not only his clansmen' (Interview #193).

Alongside these arguments were those against the perceived subjugation of Somaliland's sovereignty to the writ of a dictatorship, not solely in terms of practical fear, but also as a moral affront to those that had, decades earlier, secured freedom from the grips of the harshest oppression. Safety and relative freedom have been the two most palpable and cherished benefits of independence for Somalilanders, and for the government to hand these cheaply over to a government that valued neither was deemed unacceptable (*HCTV* 2019). Exemplary of this view, one frustrated traditional leader asserted that the Geelle affair 'shows you that Djibouti owns Somaliland, that the current system serves Djibouti and is powered by Djibouti, and that it is other people who are being handicapped for it…What Djibouti says is what goes here' (Interview #126). As such, within political discourse, how the Somaliland government responded to Djibouti's pursuit of Geelle came to symbolise the extent to which it would stand up for the polity's self-determination full stop. For example, given Somaliland's reliance on its business class for much of its global economic and diplomatic reach, defending Somaliland's businessmen from capture by a foreign government became a matter of protecting the country's ability to survive autonomously. As *Garxajis* suldaans exclaimed in their televised defence of Geelle: 'We recommend the Somaliland government respect the rights of its citizens and stop bullying its prominent businessmen because the country depends on them' (*Daray TV* 2019).

All told, while appeals to the promises embedded in the Social Covenant and appeals to socioeconomic and political self-determination came from very different perspectives, I

argue that they converged in important ways. They both saw the lack of accountability of the State to the protection of its citizens as a threat to horizontal social power, irrespective of the specific clan targeted in this instance, something to be remedied through rebalancing power such that no clan remained at the mercy of central or external prerogative. Similarly, both saw self-determination and collective agency as a multi-layered phenomenon, requiring both freedom from dependency on outside actors such as Djibouti, as well as autonomy vis-à-vis 'bullying' from the State, something which the reassertion of balanced relations between State and clans would guarantee. As we shall now see, counteracting this multinational campaign of vertical domination entailed a response from clans that was equally multi-layered, drawing from the transnational nature of clan relations.

6.5   Horizontality Beyond Borders: mobilising cross-border power

6.5.1   The transnational politics of clan relations: a general overview

We now turn to another dimension of horizontality, one that cuts across, rather than punches upwards at, the high politics of interstate, sovereign affairs. These are the transnational forms of direct engagement whereby Somali clans mediate relations outside of, or in the absence of, interference from the State. As described above, 'Somalianised' dynamics of kinship, communal rivalry and informal networks facilitate collusion between political elite and geostrategic cooperation between governments across the Horn. The State is not the only actor able to exploit the complex matrix of international power relations mediated through clan, however; so too are non-State clan groupings, as formidable and well-organised institutions in their own right. Indeed, just as the Somaliland State built off the Social Covenant's foundations, even while cannibalising it, so too are interstate relations between Somaliland and its neighbours sustained by the hidden engine of 'traditional' governance. A brief overview of clans' cross-border relations can help illuminate this mutual feedback between the geopolitical and the pan-Somali.

Particularly within the Somaliland-Djibouti-Ethiopia triangle, the clans associated with Somaliland's western regions—the *Isaaq*, *Gadabuursi* and *Ciise*—are equally to be found across the border in the other territories. While traditional leaders may base themselves in any one of these locations based on preference, political climate or community need, their remit extends beyond boundaries, even if the larger level of freedom/repressiveness of any given national context determines their actual influence locally (Interview #208). In situations

where individuals commit crimes and flee across borders, or where livestock herders encroach into land outside their country without permission, or where suspicious, clandestine elements exploit the porousness of border areas, it is often traditional authorities that take the lead in confronting these issues, given their access to thick clan networks on both sides of State lines. In the area of commerce, these intra-clan 'web[s] of reciprocal arrangements' facilitate the trust, market access, physical security, regulatory evasion and logistical connectivity to 'allow goods, capital, and people to move across clan divides and national borders' (Lochery 2020, 98; Interview #275).

Such quotidian forms of inter-territorial exchange serve to stitch together relations between Somali nations in a way that State diplomacy cannot do on its own, given its often fickle and tenuous nature. While, for example, these nations regularly shuttle security sector delegations back and forth to take part in joint security committee meetings, such official discussions and exchange of intelligence are only effective as a result of the local authorities who supply the foot-soldiers and information on which these operations rely (Robinson & Matisek 2020). Furthermore, when disputes arise between neighbouring administrations, it is often behind-the-scenes clan envoys who step up to mediate, as, 'like the culture goes…a lot [more] is said informally than is said formally and officially' (Interview #217). The degree of this informality depends on both the issue and the bilateral pairing—for example, between Somaliland and Puntland, one an unrecognised government, the other a sub-national federal entity, and both officially enemy of the other, formal diplomatic channels are almost non-existent: 'The only clear relationship between Somaliland and Puntland is that between the traditional leaders of both sides. They solve the problems when the two sides fight' (Interview #218).

Somaliland, as an unrecognised government, maintains no full diplomatic relations with any foreign government, and so must engage with all international counterparts through some degree of formal/informal 'hybridity' (Bouris & Fernández-Molina 2018). When it comes to Somaliland-Djibouti relations, the level of formality is comparatively high, with Somaliland's liaison office receiving full diplomatic protocols, its officials meeting regularly with their Djiboutian counterparts, and its diplomatic representative treated as a fully separate entity from Somalia (Abdullahi 2019; Interview #6). Additionally, each Somaliland president's first foreign visit upon taking office has notably been to Djibouti, a mark of Somaliland's close ties to the country, as well as of Djibouti's importance to, and influence

over, Somaliland (Interview #226; Interview #296). On the other hand, unlike several other countries, Djibouti does not officially accept Somaliland passports, nor will it engage in formal bilateral agreements, such as the extradition treaty that would have been required to legally hand over Geelle. Furthermore, while official Djiboutian diplomatic representatives have been dispatched to Hargeisa since Silanyo's time, President Guelleh has thus far shunned visiting Somaliland, likely in deference to Somalia (Interview #146).

As a result, even the most formal of relations between Somaliland and Djibouti have their informal underside, with *khat*-chewing sessions an especially profitable space in which politicians and diplomats shed the restrictions of officialdom and share intelligence and viewpoints as intimate acquaintances (Interview #6). There is also the natural inclination of the business community, traditional leaders and everyday citizens to spontaneously intermingle and exchange across borders, using such relations to adapt to often harsh international realities, such as when Somaliland livestock traders shifted to Djiboutian ports when Saudi Arabia implemented its livestock important ban against Somaliland (*FEWS NET* 2011). To this end, cross-border communities have equally served as host and protector to their displaced brethren during times of conflict—'playing active roles in not only receiving but also helping the refugees to integrate into their host communities'—demonstrating the 'strength of cultural solidarity as a factor of social integration' (Ssereo 2003, 27). As one local councillor put it: 'Whatever we can do to help communities in Somalia, Djibouti or Ethiopia, we will definitely do, because they are our neighbours, and whatever happens to them will also affect us. It's ingrained in our people' (Interview #96).

Such connectivity generally only finds itself undermined at times of interstate dispute, such as the on-and-off-again closing as borders between the two countries as a tactic of punishment (Interview #262; Huliaras 2002, 169). In other words, it is the politicization of identity, territory, rule and history that creates difference: 'Somalis, when they are dealing with each other on a personal level, they don't think about politics…But the moment you talk about politics and countries, then the lines are drawn quickly' (Interview #297). Or, as one female student from the *Arab* sub-clan remarked in relation to the Geelle affair: 'Djibouti as a whole isn't intervening, each country has leaders. Our communities are brothers and share many things…There is no bad feeling between us, the interference is coming from Ismaïl Omar Guelleh and his government' (Interview #228). The tension between such top-down politicisation by State officials and elite, and such (economic, cultural, familial) exchange

amongst co-equals making up the everyday, is the same verticality-horizontality struggle at play in the Geelle affair.

6.5.2   Transnational clan politics and the Geelle affair

In an environment where the official arms of diplomacy in both Djibouti and Somaliland were conspiring to apprehend Geelle, this horizontal set of informal relations came in handy as an axis of opposition. Just as IOG had called upon clan affiliations with Bihi to transpose his influence into Somaliland territory, so too did the *Arab* clan seek to infiltrate the domestic political environment of Djibouti through customary routes. Such behind-the-scenes machinations began in the immediate aftermath of Djibouti's failed entrapment of Geelle, before Bihi's involvement, at which point *Arab* traditional leaders organised two committees. The first committee consisted of influential figures from among the *Isaaq*, and was dispatched to Djibouti; the other, made up of nine *Arab suldaans*, set off for Dire Dawa, in Ethiopia, where the *suldaan* of IOG's *Ciise* clan resides (*Nagiib Media* 2019). Their goal was to get all sides to agree to a meeting between IOG and Geelle, so that they might 'settle their accounts freely' (*ibid*).

This two-pronged approach initially yielded little. The delegation sent to Djibouti failed to even secure a meeting with IOG, despite the fact that its leading figure, the formidable former Minister of Interior Ali Warrancade, had gifted the Djiboutian president a lion a few months earlier (Interview #200). This 'humiliating' rebuff of such 'prominent figures' was compounded by IOG's similar dismissal of the *Ciise suldaan*, who had accepted the *Arab* clan's request that he mediate, with the president 'insist[ing] that this case wasn't a traditional one.' The opening salvo of the *Arab* clan's trinational movements thus ended in failure, with Warrancade's team 'disgracefully return[ing] to Somaliland' and the *Arab suldaans* 'coming back with nothing after being with the *suldaan* for two weeks' (*ibid*). In the *Arab suldaans*' later media address, they would accuse the leaders of both countries of colluding to thwart these efforts (*Nagiib Media* 2019).

So long as these clan politics remained out of public view, the two presidents might have felt able to weather them comfortably. However, once revelations of the extradition request became common knowledge, and 'shouting' amongst the *Arab* prompted a chain of agitation amongst sympathetic clans, IOG and Bihi lost the upper hand, according to one senior justice sector official involved in the case. IOG, all of a sudden, had more to worry about

than pesky phone calls from his *suldaan* that he could ignore; now, an entire *Ciise* movement against his actions had been triggered, at the same moment as Bihi's own machinations were tied up in the courts due to popular resistance (Interview #148). With the controversy threatening to spiral out of control, IOG thereupon felt compelled to call upon prominent members of the pan-Somali business community, such as those representing Star Group, Telesom, Somcable and Dahabshiil, to mediate (Interview #148; Interview #196).

These 'neutral' businessmen, whatever competitive squabbles they may have had with Geelle, were compelled out of self-preservation to intervene, to ensure that neither governments normalised practices of the arbitrary seizure of assets or of extrajudicial imprisoning of competitors. As noted above, several other prominent businessmen had already been forced to flee Djibouti as a result of intimidation by IOG and his circle, a fate no remaining cross-border businessowner wanted to suffer themselves (Interview #239). At the same time, this group was eminently qualified to serve as a bridge between powerful adversaries, given the role of these Somaliland-originating entrepreneurs in propping up both regimes economically, whether directly or indirectly (Interview #8; Interview #25). As one long-time Somaliland politician put it: 'the *Isaaq* component in Djibouti are well off, and most of the main business people [there] are from the *Isaaq* clan. Nowadays they are coming back, and they [are bringing] their clout' (Interview #220). Armed with not only the will but also the power and the transnational reach, the business class accepted the request to intervene.

The team of tycoons soon met with Bihi, who 'gave them permission to work towards lowering the conflict and finding a solution,' and, by 10 April, the president and Geelle met face-to-face for the first time since the furore erupted (*Geeska* 2019; Mataan 2019). That meeting reportedly ended with an agreement to drop the suit against Geelle in the Hargeisa courts, put a stop to the inflammatory public rhetoric, and find a solution to end tensions between Geelle and the Djiboutian government. This outcome seems to have been realised, as, by 18 May, Geelle was spotted at a VIP dinner at the presidential palace, something one observer saw as a sign of mended relations (Interview #196). While the exact settlement reached between the parties was not learned during the course of this study, Geelle seems to have emerged from the ordeal with his debts settled, his business and personal activities in Somaliland resumed, and his future in Djibouti still tenuous.

And so the affair came to a temporary conclusion, without extrajudicial punishment or the escalation of inter-clan conflict. In the end, it was the horizontal relations across

borders that proved decisive, affording Geelle not only an initial escape route, but also defence against the sovereign powers arrayed against him. Traditional elders, despite failing to unilaterally sway their governments, had primed populations of sympathetic clans—notably the *Arab*, *Ciise* and *Garxajis*—to react harshly and visibly against any attempts to move on Geelle, thus forcing the hand of both IOG and Bihi to seek a way out of their own mess. Lastly, it was the business class, with its own stake in challenging the arbitrary use of State force, who stepped in to bring all sides toward a solution.

6.6 Concluding Analysis

Horizontality, as an element of the Social Covenant, is at its core about clan power, although of a specific kind. It is the power to put aside the pretences of rank, command and authority, and to address others at the level of clan equal. One fundamental precondition for the operation of clan power is relative autonomy, a safeguard against domination. Indeed, autonomy serves as its own condition of possibility, affording the room to manoeuvre necessary to protect itself against encroachment from external authority, as the *Arab* clan's actions clearly demonstrate. Clan power also requires the ability to be actualised, a process that includes the collecting and synthesis of information, the organisation of personnel, the ability to coordinate actions, and the development of coherent representation to make demands and negotiate with others. Traditional leadership, with its deep roots, provides this.

In this case, horizontality took shape in response to the 'verticality' of the decision to arrest Geelle, which cascaded down the chain of command, from the Djiboutian president, hovering above his putative 'client' Bihi, through the ministries and judicial agencies necessary to take the case forward. In order to stop this process in its tracks, Geelle did not appeal back up the State hierarchy, mounting a legal campaign or pleading for leniency via a representative arm of the State. Instead, he cut the State (of both Somaliland and Djibouti) down to size, stripping it of its decrees, protocols and other authoritative pageantry and dealing with those in power on a clan-to-clan basis, where the balance of legitimacy and influence followed the rules of the Covenant. In this, the threat to withdraw *Arab* troops from the national army was *powerful* because it exposed the reality of Somaliland as a 'collection of clans' with the power to counteract or veto the decisions of another part of the system (even if that 'part' went by the name of 'the State'), and it was *legitimate* (i.e. it was responded to with open support by some, and without fear or scorn by those with less at

stake) because it appealed to a form of justice recognised by the Social Covenant. In short, justice claims framed in the language of the Covenantal stakeholder sends a certain message, alerting others to a social danger, while simultaneously assuring them that such danger will be addressed with the fullest care, and will not be allowed to escalate too far.

It might seem incongruous to use the case of an affluent businessman to demonstrate the operation of horizontal, non-hierarchical justice. Indeed, Geelle's wealth and prominence undeniably afforded him a level of protection that others in his clan would find hard to receive: 'he has money, a name, privilege and all that contributes to people's willingness to fight for him. I believe if the case concerned me, I wouldn't have found such support' (Interview #257). And such elite power, while trickling down to the rest of the clan in some form, does undeniably leave the clan heavily dependent upon their rich: 'You can see a lot of fellow clan members who are defending the rich but not defending the poor, because the rich are those who they should align with at the worst case scenario' (Interview #261).

This arrangement is highly imperfect, then. It is the result of adaptations of inter-clan horizontality to circumstances of global integration and statebuilding, in which the constellation of power has altered dramatically. For the most part, such changes have been exploited by State actors and the business elite to enhance their own status, as IOG and Bihi have done through monopolising gatekeeping functions. Yet, as the case of Ahmed Geelle shows, as a result of the continued vitality of the Social Covenant, these same power dynamics can, at times, be channelled in ways that push back against the State, providing an entire community with the agency and autonomy to guarantee the rights and dignity of themselves and their kin are protected.

Chapter 7: Analysis

What the Social Covenant Offers Theories of the African State and Anarchism

In the preceding chapters, the Social Covenant has been presented in two forms: the paradigmatic and the concrete. In Chapter 3, for instance, I isolated the Social Covenant from its surrounding context, as an 'ideal-type' (Weber 2011, 98-102), so as to bring its features into relief, in the same way that a scientific experiment might take place in a vacuum or in otherwise artificially ideal climatic conditions. In many ways, the early days of Somaliland's development approximated such ideal conditions, in that the horizontal, conditional and intimate social relations characteristic of the Social Covenant flourished in the absence of both international interference and any competing statebuilding process. Over time, however, as the country's leaders moved forward in nationalising security services and building institutions under the authority of the State, the Social Covenant increasingly confronted a competing set of political tendencies which sought to occupy a similar terrain to that it had thus far operated within.

My three case studies took stock of how these parallel systems—the Statist and the Covenantal—have developed in tandem with each other over the course of around two decades. We zoomed in on several present-day political issues where the interaction of the two systems was most prominent. What the case studies found, beneath the messiness of political controversy, was an unstable and precarious, yet still functional, coexistence of these corresponding models. While the political elite has increasingly turned to the coercive and wealth-capturing arms of the State to reinforce its position, those social actors outside this small class bubble have often reverted to Covenantal relations to compensate for the political empowerment which the State has failed to provide. To refer back to the research question, we can now say with confidence that Somaliland's non-State logics continue to play a definitive role in shaping the political character of the Somaliland project.

A more generous reading of these dynamics might see something complementary about the Statist and Covenantal systems, in which the opposing nature of their logics balance each other out, taming each other's excesses and making up for each other's weaknesses.

Indeed, insofar as cases of inter-clan conflict mediation have benefited from the supportive intervention of State power to stop the immediate bloodshed and punish deviations from peace agreements, the case could be made that the Covenant is at times stronger for having a (restrained) State to fall back on. On the other hand, one cannot help but notice the State's parasitic relationship to those actors upholding the Covenant, especially traditional leaders. While relying on them to maintain everyday peace (if increasingly begrudgingly), the State has, at the same time, worked to disempower them, either through co-optation or delegitimisation. Consequently, even as Somaliland's clans remain, for the most part, able to lean on established expectations and norms to address their concerns vis-à-vis their neighbouring clans, the State continues to make this more difficult every day, casting the future of the Covenant into doubt.

Taking into account what the various case studies have taught us, this chapter seeks to draw out the complexities of the Covenantal model as a lived, historically-situated phenomenon. It will first revisit the theories of the African State presented in Chapter 2, in order to gauge whether the Covenantal model might offer a way out of the underlying conundrum all such theories share—namely, an inability to achieve simultaneous plurality and unity, without collapsing the former into the latter, or vice versa. From there, I will position the Covenant in light of the anarchist literature on non-State political alternatives, as a means to gauge what scope there is for the sustainability of non-State political alternatives in a world that continues to privilege State agency as incomparably legitimate and inevitable. This is as much to suss out the practicalities of anarchist praxis under existing political conditions in Africa, as it is to understand certain practical concessions and constraints of Somaliland's Covenantal model. I then argue that even such evaluation of parameters and possibilities requires a recalibration, to better attune itself to the horizon of politics adhered to by Somalilanders themselves. I deem this horizon a 'tragic understanding' of social reality, one that distinguishes itself from the more utopian tradition of radical modernist politics. The chapter concludes with a short account of four major limitations of the Covenantal model as implemented within Somaliland, including its exclusion of women and youth and its failure to offer mechanisms for addressing class inequality or developmental needs.

7.1   What does the SC mean for the future of the African State?

Chapter 2 highlighted the tension between plurality and unity at the heart of African statebuilding's travails, and then made the case that the State's combined vertical, unconditional and alienating dynamics make this tension insoluble, at least on a theoretical level. I then looked at how anarchist theory, with its principle of 'mutuality without hierarchy,' might offer a non-State path out of this tension. In this section, evidence gathered from my various case studies will be used to assess the extent to which these theoretical assumptions are borne out in reality. By taking into account the performances of the Somaliland State and Social Covenant in responding to various pressing political challenges, the aim is to arrive at a better understanding of how the Social Covenant offers a potential means for alleviating certain tensions within the African State.

7.1.1   The Somaliland State: division through (attempted) unity

As noted early in this study, the State model derives its legitimacy from presenting itself as, inevitably, the only force standing in the way of the total collapse of societal order. For Schmitt, the State plays the role of a *katechon*, a 'restraint on chaos', with humanity's fallen nature requiring an unyielding sovereign to save it from catastrophe (Ostovich 2007, 64). However, lessons gleaned from the case studies point to different conclusions, at least in regard to the Somaliland context: that, in fact, (1) efforts to create a State that stands above, and prevails over, some idealised social peace have in many ways enhanced instability in Somaliland; and (2), the Somaliland State has required, and continues to require, the Social Covenant to come to the rescue and repair the divisions it creates. One intellectual from the non-*Isaaq Dhulbahante* clan describes this gap between ideal and reality: 'While from the perspective of Hargeisa, the State [intervenes as] peacekeepers in our shared territory, from the perspective of the [*Dhulbahante*-populated] Buhoodle nation, the State [intervenes] as a government [directed] against its own people' (Interview #99).

In El Af-weyn, the State's role in exacerbating divisions was most apparent in its approach to Colonel Caare. As described in Chapter 5, despite clear governmental protocols for pacifying military defectors through accommodation, President Bihi decided to make the wayward colonel into an example, threatening to punish him as an 'enemy of the state' through military tribunal, as a means to demonstrate the State's zero tolerance for breaches of military command and social order. What Bihi achieved instead was the alienation of the

El Af-weyn land dispute from its immediate context to an intractable stand-off between the State and a clan, in the process not only undermining customary mediation efforts but risking the escalation of violence to the national level. While some interviewees attributed this undesirable outcome to a failure of leadership (see Interview #297; Interview #292), it was the view of one opposition politician, despite being a prominent critic of the Bihi government, that the president's actions were the inevitable consequence of a State trying to embed and expand rule of law: 'The government refusing to do things the same way it was done before can exacerbate things, but if we want to build the state institutions, [then resolving the Caare issue through military procedures] has to work' (Interview #216).

The controversy over power-sharing between the *Gadabuursi* and the State highlights another tendency pulling Somaliland away from the plurality that it was built upon. With electoralism and formal representation becoming the main terrain of struggle in the country's increasingly winner-take-all State politics, new hierarchies for participation in governance have been imposed on top of a system that had previously presumed the voluntary and equal participation of all clans—even if such presumptions were imperfectly realised in reality. As the chapter showed, within Somaliland's liberal democratic State, authority has increasingly been parcelled out unevenly in relation to numerical advantages and wealth disparities across populations, fostering both an *Isaaq* majoritarianism and the increased capture of State power by a small group of elite from a small number of clans. As such, whereas issues of power-sharing under the Covenantal model promoted unity amongst the plurality of clan stakeholders by offering them a direct means to negotiate and effect power-sharing outcomes, these stakeholders have become disempowered from such participation, with the alienating forces of elections and economic competition taking over the distribution of power. For Somaliland's newfound 'minorities', such as the *Gadabuursi*, violence then becomes one of the few options for recourse, for forcing one's claims to be heard within the political system. This can be seen with the increasing attraction of rebellion among the *Gadabuursi*, and points to a more general understanding that the move away from consensus politics and towards majoritarian rule has had a destabilising effect, as the result of a logic that one 'minority' group representative sums up bluntly: 'If we had weapons or bombed ourselves like Al-Shabab, we would've had our shares. The people with weapons get shares, but we don't have any and that's why we get nothing from them' (Interview #76).

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Moreover, the growing abstraction of the State from the rest of society, what I call verticality, has equally failed to live up to expectations—rather than depoliticising social divisions, it has instead enhanced them. As the case of Ahmed Geelle shows, the Somaliland government has increasingly relied on external legitimacy and support to sustain itself. By the time of the Bihi administration, the sense of impunity vis-à-vis domestic constituencies licensed by this extraversion emboldened the president to trade the interests of the *Arab* clan for those of the Djiboutian State. However, while President Bihi may have believed that the government was sufficiently insulated from society that it could arrest and extradite businessman Ahmed Geelle without societal spill-over, what instead occurred was the withdrawal of the *Arab* clan's confidence in and loyalty to the State (although not to the Somaliland project as a whole), and the threat of the partial disintegration of Somaliland society into its component clan parts. Again, we have the centralised, univocal State, in asserting its authority and prerogative over and above the deliberations of society, contributing to the fraying of social bonds, as a former minister remarked during a televised interview on the subject: 'The spokesperson of the presidency…solely accused a single side [of wrongdoing], without even mentioning what [Ahmed Geelle] suffered in terms of financial losses. It was for this reason that the traditional elders spoke in a harsh manner and threatened the State. Hereafter, the population took sides, and that was caused by the administration's initial actions' (*HWN* 2019).

As the evidence from the three case studies indicates, then, for a polity such as Somaliland, where patterns of coexistence and order have been woven into the social fabric, the State makes itself felt not as a point of convergence but as an intrusion. By inserting itself in inter-clan relations, appropriating wellsprings of social power and laying claim to prerogatives of judgement, the Somaliland State's expansion has entailed not a greater unification of the society it presides over, but rather the unsettling of existing ties, through the politicisation of differences based on clan and region, and the thrusting of such differentiated actors into competition over power, wealth and representation. Perversely, the record would suggest that, as the State has strengthened, its early attempts to incorporate the entire Somaliland territory have been abandoned in favour of a more myopic concentration on the political and economic heartland (Hills 2016), where control over the lucrative logistical belt linking the Berbera port to the capital and to Ethiopia has been consolidated while the rest of the territory and population is merely kept at bay. As one elder

from the eastern peripheries claimed, 'Now everybody knows that Somaliland is shrinking from the whole territory of Somaliland down to Maroodijeex [the centremost region of the country]…Muse is very much satisfied with ruling from Berbera to Wajale, of being a governor for that area. Otherwise, he could have made manoeuvres. He doesn't care about the rest' (Interview #93).

7.1.2   The Social Covenant: clan autonomy united through horizontal agreement

Whereas under the State, the patchwork of clan territories is bifurcated into a hierarchical division of orders—the core and the peripheral, the economic heartland and the sterile borderlands, the land of sovereign administration and the land of unruly nomads, the zones of security and the 'no-go zones' (Andersson 2019; EASO 2021, 16)—within the Social Covenant such distinctions take on far less meaning, as the social terrain is much flatter and social distance is measured in terms of interpersonal connections rather than geography. As argued in Chapter 3, it is thus no surprise that Somaliland's two major reconciliation conferences occurred outside what would become Muse Bihi's circumscribed domain, in Borama and Burao, cities where peripheral clans played a disproportionate role in healing the divided centre. Indeed, as continues to be the case today, whereas the ministers and elected representatives are rarely seen to leave the capital, except in extreme political circumstances, the traditional leaders and other clan envoys continuously criss-cross the country with tidings of intel, compromises and communal grievance, and are generally welcomed without discrimination. The Social Covenant, as previously discussed, thus produces its own interconnected social terrain.

These interconnections are most apparent during periods of conflict mediation, as in the case of the El Af-weyn dispute. Despite being a long and uncomfortable car journey from Somaliland's urban centres, the villages in and around El Af-weyn for months became the centre of the country's inter-clan political life, bringing together prominent figures from all over *Isaaq* and non-*Isaaq* areas to help negotiate a settlement. Then later, even as the Bihi regime tried to ignore the simmering dispute, Colonel Caare, from his remote hideout in the Daallo mountains 500 kilometres northeast of the capital, pulled the president back in with his subversion, and then utilised media messages and a nationwide network of clan envoys to open channels for negotiation. By this we can see that the intimate interpersonal linkages sustaining the inter-clan Covenant, while inevitably coalescing in certain local communities

and specific points in time, play a far-reaching role in uniting various nationwide stakeholders behind a common purpose, thereby helping to prevent the disintegration of intercommunal relations. The power of intimacy, in times of conflict, to unite all particular interests and perspectives behind a single solution in the interests of the collective, was expressly highlighted by one *Habar Yoonis suldaan*, while in the process of negotiating the Caare dispute: 'When sitting together and doing face to face dialogue we can directly point the finger at each other, and we can really sit together and make the hard choices: are we going to finally put a stop to this fighting, or are we going to let it destroy us? We will put all cards on the table.' (Interview #240).

The *Gadabuursi*'s power-sharing saga pitted two competing conceptions of Somaliland unity against each other: the SNM-centric narrative of national liberation (the 18 May story) on the one hand, and the decentralised narrative of mutual stakeholders (the 26 June sentiment) on the other. While the former was accused of imposing the *Isaaq* majority's vision of a predestined, righteous national project onto the whole of the population, the latter rejected the presumption that the Somaliland State was a foregone conclusion, and instead focused on a coexistence founded upon on the intercommunal exchange of sacrifices and obligations built up over time. This second narrative, what might be called the Covenantal narrative, provides the ideological infrastructure for the Somaliland Covenant's particular brand of particularity-within-unity. In this, each particular clan is seen to autonomously contribute to the collective enterprise of peace, while expecting to reap its portion of the communal dividends of such peace, including fair and equitable shares of power and representation. This moral economy, which might be likened to a worker cooperative, was summed up by a former deputy speaker of parliament: 'When you look at Somaliland, the agencies of government were invested in collectively [*la wada maal gashaday*] and were built through collective participation [*laga wada qeyb galay*]. Somaliland is not owned by one particular entity—it was built by all, it is a country owned by all [*waa dal la wada leeyahay*], and without the traditional leaders none of this would be possible' (*Geeska* 2015).

Lastly, we come to the Ahmed Geelle debacle, which exemplifies the ways in which the politicisation of particularity (rather than difference) is accounted for under the Social Covenant, while at the same time mitigating against particularity's excesses. In claiming the right to pull out of national governance structures in the event of the government's betrayal of one of their kinsmen, the *Arab* clan exposed the reality that any authority the State might

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have was dependent upon the prior buy-in of each clan. This speaks to the significant autonomy that the clan retains vis-à-vis the State, allowing them to approach their participation in the State collective as something akin to a voluntary association, albeit with higher stakes: 'The [*Arab*] clan…[argued] that when we compare Somaliland government and this man, we like this man more. Even where Somaliland might be destroyed, we will protect him. So, you can simply understand how the clan system is more powerful than the government' (Interview #175). At the same time, as Chapter 6 showed, this assertion of autonomy did not dissolve or destroy Somaliland's unity. This is, in large part, because of the norms and expectations constituting the Social Covenant, which engender informal agreement regarding how grievances are to be voiced, including parameters and red lines to be observed when pursuing threats and other potentially destabilising acts. In fact, the *Arab* elders, in their press conference defending Geelle, made a point of publicly appealing to these common understandings, while suggesting sinister intentions behind the president's flouting of such understandings: 'Since our country isn't strong enough, people can't be forced to do anything, but the president dared to provoke war despite knowing clearly where our *suldaans* stood on this issue. I wonder why the president would risk war, sacrifice peace, and endanger the existence of Somaliland. What did he get in return that can overshadow all this?' (*Bulsho News* 2019).

7.1.3   Summary

The question posed by these elders points to an overarching lesson that the Somaliland Social Covenant model can offer to debates regarding the African State, particularly in terms of how particularity and unity might be balanced. Statebuilding paradigms, for their part, have sought to avoid division and fragmentation by creating an obedient and dependent society, through *disempowering* most of society while strengthening one select part. Rather than pacifying the majority, this has instead created an unaccountable and unconstrained State, which has felt licensed to pursue its self-interest at the expense of the collective, thereby fuelling the division and fragmentation it was meant to overcome. The Social Covenant, on the other hand, is built on a model that seeks order and stability through equal *empowerment* of all social groups, with unity fostered among this plurality of groups not through external disciplining but through exploiting the incentives for collaboration brought about by mutual imbrication in each other's fortunes, and a shared stake in the

future. The divergent impacts of these two systems implore African statebuilding to reconsider its implicit view that unity—i.e. security and stability—must come at the expense of freedom and equality, and instead open up space to think of how unity might come about *through* the right balance and integration of freedom and equality.

7.2   How can anarchist thought help us make sense of Covenantal dynamics?

Up to this point in the study, anarchist theory has served two pivotal functions. First, it offered analytical tools for pairing down the State, as a discrete social phenomenon, to its most basic relations of power, setting out a trio of discernible, contrastable logics of power through which to compare alternative social phenomena. Second, it served as inspiration for the identification and explication of the social logics making up the Somaliland Social Covenant, with the concepts of horizontality, intimacy and conditional association deriving their categorical denominations from select elements found within anarchist theory, even while taking their content from the empirical reality of the Somaliland experiment. Now, I ask anarchist theory to play a third role: offering its own 'ideal-type' understanding of what a desirable non-State alternative looks like, that will serve as a point of comparison from which to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the Social Covenant model.

While the first two functions of anarchist theory remained at the level of the descriptive, what follows will combine the descriptive with elements of the evaluative, so as to not only situate the Somaliland Social Covenant in relation to common denominators of the anarchist ideal, but also to use this comparison to make judgements regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the Social Covenant as both a model and a real-world phenomenon. I take as my evaluative 'yardstick' (Aspalter 2012) the following common features of the anarchist ideal-type, as derived from Graham's (2018) description of the anarchist model used in Chapter 2: (1) mutuality without hierarchy (i.e. reciprocal relations between free and equal parties); (2) participatory decision-making (i.e. voluntary and spontaneous social ordering); and (3) complete and fundamental freedom from the State. In assessing how the actually-existing Somaliland experiment stacks up in relation to these idealised features, the resonances and deviations between what might be expected and desired, on the one hand, and what *is*, on the other, will come into view, thereby further expanding our understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the Somaliland Social Covenant.

7.2.1   Mutuality without hierarchy: balance of power and cohesion

In contrast to the statebuilding paradigm, anarchist theory challenges the notion that society can only be held together peacefully and stably through externally-imposed restraint. Instead, it maintains that, under the right conditions, humans can be motivated to cooperate through their own initiative alone, as this aligns with their interests and desires. As argued in Chapter 2, this belief is encapsulated in the idea of 'mutuality without hierarchy', 'forms of informal cooperation, coordination, and action' fostered through 'voluntary, reciprocal relations between free and equal parties' (Scott 2012, xxi; Graham 2018, 38). Here, freedom and equality are not seen as natural, ontological conditions of humanity, but as incontrovertible political goods that must not be sacrificed at the altar of order—and such a trade-off is seen as more imagined than real anyway. Preserving the autonomy of political subjects thus hinges upon making the case, addressed below, that non-coercive compulsions exist for binding the multitude together—and that competing passions and particular interests, rather than needing to be tamed, can be galvanised and productively redirected.

First things first, it is worth noting that anarchists see freedom and equality going hand-in-hand, with the former impossible in the absence of the latter—if power is distributed unequally, then certain individuals hold the capacity to dominate others, thereby creating opportunity for the denial of their freedom (Clark 1978, 16). Indeed, only relative parity vis-à-vis others provides the degree of autonomy necessary for an act of association or sociality to be voluntary, rather than imposed (McLaughlin 2007, 13; Wolff 1998, 18-19). How such social levelling is to emerge in practice remains an open question, however. Within anarchist literature, hierarchy and domination are either to be escaped, by withdrawal from existing institutionalised forms of authority, such as the church or the political party, or constructively replaced with a prefigurative politics, in which presupposed egalitarian relations are directly acculturated through practice and learning (Blanes 2017; Ince 2012; Gordon 2007, 63). On the more radical end of the spectrum, what is required is the complete negation of the existing flawed order, through revolutionary or epistemic rupture, in which the weight of worldly hierarchies and authorities cease to hold sway, and individual essences are liberated to interact without mediation (Hamacher 1991; Magun 2013, 201-2019).

Once liberated and equalised, the question then arises: how can the multitude be prevented from descending into the archetypal 'state of nature' of solitary, atomised, self-

regarding actors, and instead come together in some form of 'mutuality' or 'sociality'? Within the literature, various forces of attraction have been identified that are seen to compel voluntary association and cooperation. Thinkers such as Kropotkin (2015), for instance, see self-interest and utilitarian calculation as sufficient to promote spontaneous cooperation between private actors, whether individuals or corporate entities. As Ward (1966) characterises it, anarchism exists 'where-ever men [*sic*] link themselves in an association based on a common need or a common interest' (1). For others, such as Landauer, people are moved to mutualism through an ethical commitment to solidarity and mutual aid (Gabay 2021, 114; Löwy 2015). Scott (2014) and Graeber (2011), on the other hand, treat cooperation and coordination as informal capacities, which humans as social creatures naturally possess and tend towards, and which spring up through the everyday interaction of people in their efforts to survive and prosper. What all such theories share is a view that mutual dependence among individuals compels them to overcome collective action problems, and instead devise mutually-agreeable regulations for ensuring the enjoyment and exchange of shared material and spiritual needs, from security to resource cultivation (Schulder 1899, 7; Mbah & Igariwey 1997, 13).

Coming to the case of Somaliland, one can detect many resonances between the types of autonomy, equalisation and associationalism just outlined and the processes through which the Social Covenant was formed. As detailed in Chapter 3, the relative equality of status and balance of power between Somaliland's various clans levelled the playing field to the extent that no actor, not even the zealous advocate of central authority, former President Egal, could impose their will without the substantial buy-in of clan stakeholders (Balthasar 2013). This relative equality, rather than dragging down statebuilding progress, has generated a social power which has served, and continues to serve, as an obstacle to State capture, as one SNM veteran indicated with reference to President Bihi: 'He doesn't have the power to be a dictator because [if he tried to be one] the whole thing is going to collapse…The social contract will not allow it, and even the [State] political system that's there won't' (Interview #74). Indeed, one reason that Somaliland's elections have earned the consent, buy-in and participation of so much of the population is that the openness of the political contest, as evidenced in the regular transfer of office, has cultivated a public confidence that no central figure has accumulated sufficient power to game the system in his/her favour (Interview #215; APD 2012).

And when it comes to translating this balance of power into new forms of mutualism, Chapter 3 demonstrated the role of clan-based consensus politics in building trust and communication, and in overcoming collective action problems through highlighting shared advantage. Self-interest and necessity certainly played their part in this, as one traditional leader recognised: 'people identified with one another because they shared their losses and their benefits. That facilitated reconciliation between them. What came in-between them was just politics; [rather than pursuing conflict,] they said let's return to what we had before' (Interview #110). At the same time, 'remnants of civic life and collective belonging' have served, alongside Islamic customs of reciprocity and charity, as the ethical substrata enabling the Social Covenant to tick along (Interview #134). While such ethical dimensions should not be overstated, one does find faith within society in their ability to keep the Somaliland experiment afloat: 'in my opinion, Somaliland exists because of the culture and the tolerance of its community, not because we have a strong government that can sustain control over their territory' (Interview #267).

Despite these similarities, what separates the reality of the Social Covenant from these anarchist models of voluntary association is the role played by compulsion and the threat of violence, which haunts Covenantal consent at every turn. Here, the example of the *Gadabuursi*, detailed in Chapter 4, is instructive. Their participation in the Somaliland project was certainly not fated or imposed, but nor would their refusal to participate have been without consequence. Consenting to the Covenant in the shadow of internecine retaliation was merely the least bad option amongst several unappealing options, in which it was better to accede to a temporary arrangement proposed by their former adversaries than to return to conflict (Interview #275). Under such conditions, the *Gadabuursi*'s negotiators made the best out of a difficult situation by leveraging their own power to destabilise, to extract certain important concessions.

That peace arrangements are generally forged under circumstances of duress, where past wounds are still fresh, will come as no surprise to scholars of conflict resolution (see Menkhaus (1990), for a Somali example). As Tellez (2019) argues, willingness to support peace settlements and accept concessions is shaped by many competing calculations, from ideological posture to exposure to risk. However, anarchist thought, in its valorisation of voluntarism and spontaneity, finds it difficult to countenance peacebuilding's focus on reining in society from succumbing to its demons, rather than striving to unleash the "possibilities,

latent in [hu]mankind's communal life, of a 'right' order" (Milstein 2012, 19). But it would be wrong to reduce Somaliland's Social Covenant to just another example of 'political settlement', and its logics to those of 'risk mitigation'. For, in the case of the Somaliland experiment, necessity and fear did not resign political agents to cling to the protective embrace of top-down domination, as in the case of an elite compact, but instead sparked invention: actors had no choice but to leave their comfort zone and embark on something experimental and unknown.

What enabled Somaliland's founders to convert fear and necessity into something productive was the role of history and memory in making practical sense of the violence they endured. Indeed, as Phillip's (2020) work convincingly argues, experiences of mass atrocity and warfare have etched the value of peace and security into the minds of all Somaliland citizens, ingraining in them the duty to do whatever is in their power to heal divisions before they fester. In other words, rational calculations and ethical considerations, while derived from logic, circumstance and tradition, became oriented around a positive programme of societal recovery as a result of lessons learned experientially over the course of a painful trial by fire: 'the 1994 to 1996 conflict was bad enough to reunite the *Isaaq*. Because when they killed so many [people] between them, they…said "enough is enough, we need to cooperate, we need to demilitarise our militias, our people"' (Interview #220). Nevertheless, as my three case studies make clear, while the mechanisms of the Social Covenant are activated at moments of crisis to prevent the worst, once in motion, these mechanisms open up space for more constructive relations to be established between communities. This might include unsettling unfavourable power dynamics or shining a light on deep-seated injustices, whether in terms of addressing power-sharing disparities or correcting lopsided ceasefire agreements.

In historicising the dynamics of mutuality in this manner, new layers of richness and complexity are added to understandings of horizontal association, more attuned to the contextual baggage that societies bring to their experiments in coexistence. This means attending to the forces endogenous to a society that divide (even once out from under the influence of the State), rather than simply fortifying those forces that unite. As such, what we find in the Social Covenant, alongside those more voluntaristic, spirited mechanisms of cooperation such as deliberation, consensus, mutual aid and direct democracy, are certain more agonistic, combative methods for ensuring participatory inclusion, such as the methods of 'veto' and 'exit' identified throughout this study. These political tools function not by

appealing to a shared set of ideals, but through exercising a power, the power to opt out of a truly unsatisfactory deal. In short, whereas the 'voluntary association' of anarchism involves a maximalist, ambitious approach to agency, the Covenant merely sets out a raft of baseline conditions—red lines not to be crossed—for participation in the association, in which consent is often to be fought over viciously, on pain of societal collapse, rather than collaborated on enthusiastically.

7.2.2   Participatory decision-making: voluntary and spontaneous social ordering

Within the State, the individual's participation and inclusion in the collective is mandatory, total and unbroken—once recognised as a citizen, you become legally embedded in the web of rules, duties and expectations prevailing across the national territory. This is not true of anarchist voluntary, spontaneous associations, in which, by definition, communal participation is constantly renegotiated, as parties engage in 'on-going adjustments to one another' (Johnson & Ferguson 2019, 708). In 'regarding the individual and the community as mutually dependent', anarchic social arrangements necessarily take on a 'pluralistic and contested character', as the social whole is continuously required to cultivate a state of general agreement among diverse stakeholders—whether through consensus, or some other manner of collective consent—lest group bonds weaken or collapse (Davis 2019, 47-8). Anarchism as a living praxis, however, has often been accused of faltering in the implementation of these participatory, inclusive ideals of deliberation and consensus-building, whether as a result of the sometimes 'sluggish and alienating' nature of direct democracy or the emergence of factional schisms and hierarchies within the collective (Chou 2015, 55).

Somaliland's practices of negotiation, deliberation and consensus-building have proven more successful than those of, say, Occupy Wall Street, although this has come at the cost of several notable pragmatic concessions (*ibid*). This is in large part due to the fact that communalist social orders much more readily take root where they are able to grow out of 'anarchic elements' inherited from the past (Mbah & Igariwey 1997, 27-8). As Chapters 3 and 5 both show, intimate bonds reproduced through lineage, history and shared immersion in Islam and *xeer*, reawakened through everyday forms of re-familiarisation, such as through chewing sessions or family reunions, are a powerful force in overcoming divisions and inequalities. At the same time, while benefitting from the trust and accountability that such

customary bonds foster, Somaliland society has been forced to put up with some of the excesses and failures that traditional leaders, as the glue holding these customary relations together, sometimes succumb to. These include, but are not limited to, a reliance on pragmatic solutions and, at times, collective punishment; a willingness to quantify human life by using money and property as compensation for killings; the unequal valuation of certain types of victims over others; and the flexing of muscles of various influential older men, who increasingly have built a comfortable life through the perks of conflict mediation (Le Sage 2005, 36; Interview #33; Interview #2). At the same time, Covenantal arrangements contain provisions for limiting the impunity of traditional leaders, through norms that both encourage distance from power and make authority conditional on context and performance (Interview #95).

The Somaliland Covenantal mediation system, rather than leaving fate up to the righteousness and genius of its participants, instead deals with humans in all their messiness. In many ways this is one of its great advantages—in fact, Somali conflict resolution involves great leniency, patience and good faith, not *despite* Somalilanders' pessimistic views of their brethren, but precisely *because of* it. Furthermore, it is for this reason that the mechanisms for resolving conflict are so widely accepted despite being flawed: pragmatism in the name of protecting the collective from immediate harm often outweighs the uncertainty of idealism and moral perfection. The upshot of this acceptance of pragmatism over idealism is not the abandonment of justice for stability, but the imperfect concession that justice claims will be worked out in and through the preservation of stability. In other words, if your justice claim or self-interest stands on the side of communal stability, it is likely to be served; if it stands against it, it is likely to be thwarted. As such, on the one hand, we have complicated actors such as Ahmed Geelle exploiting the desire for social stability to his advantage; on the other hand, we have politicians such as Muse Bihi and the former minister of presidency losing out in their bids to politicise the El Af-weyn conflict to their own advantage, precisely because it would undermine social stability. It is within these parameters that we must judge the Social Covenant: not as a cure-all for social ills and contradictions, but rather an alternative mechanism for grappling with them, one that is more participatory, flexible and trustworthy than the State alternative.

7.2.3 Freedom from the State

One major difference between the Social Covenant and anarchism is that the former stands in ambivalent relation to the State, even though it operates in ways that often resists it, whereas the latter is ideologically opposed to it (Kinna 2019, 179; Ward 2004, 26). Within conventional anarchist thought, because the State, as a 'wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary' social artifice (Goldman 1975), must ultimately be abandoned, it equally must not be temporarily accommodated. As such, when it comes to dispensations and strategies in the present, the emphasis is on either, from a maximalist position, demolishing the State, or, less ambitiously, avoiding the State through a prefigurative politics of performed non-State autonomy, rather than attempting to contend and engage with it. This does not mean imagining away the State, acting as though it doesn't exist, but it means maintaining a position of ever-present defensiveness against the State's oppressive presence: 'The development of non-hierarchical structures in which domination is constantly challenged is, for most anarchists, an end in itself' (Gordon 2007, 60).

The Social Covenant, while forged in advance of and without dependence upon the State, and while being increasingly weakened through the expansion of the State, has also adapted, albeit imperfectly, to functioning alongside the State. Indeed, when it came to the El Af-weyn dispute, those stakeholders most invested in bringing an end to the violence through the use of traditional means, while often criticising the part played by specific administrations and actors, rarely rejected the participation of the State *a priori*. For example, several interviewees saw the State as sharing the rest of the country's interest in maintaining stability—'the president wants the country to remain peaceful' as one opposition MP put it (Interview #150). Or, as a young commentator remarked more ambiguously, 'peace works for those who are leading, those who are governing the people…The problem is sometimes they need to divide their people in order to lead' (Interview #210). For this reason, mediators involved in the El Af-weyn issue generally saw a role for the government in both establishing a ceasefire and overseeing the execution of the agreement, whether by demolishing divisive infrastructure, supporting the payment of compensation or punishing those violating agreement protocols (Interview #205; Interview #28).

The Covenant and the State interact most symbiotically, then, when the purveyors of the Covenant (in this case traditional leaders) serve as the brains and the face of the

operation, and the State serves as the muscle. I call this version of the State the 'conditional state', and will explore it further in my Conclusion. Such pragmatic adjustments are in part the result of the Social Covenant's non-ideological nature, in that it emerged over time as a practical solution to a series of interlocking conflicts without any prior blueprint (Interview #66). This thus distinguishes it from anarchism, a political project, in which the negation of the State is arguably its most incontrovertible tenet (Woodcock 2004, 14). This flexibility might be to Somaliland's advantage vis-à-vis the anarchists, in that, according to Frazer 2019, the latter's categorical aversion to formal authority can at times produce a caricatured picture of the State, reducing its features to *only* violence and domination, rather than *ultimately* violence and domination, thus ruling out opportunities to engage with State power strategically (559-560).

7.2.4   Summary

The Somaliland Social Covenant thus resonates with many fundamental assumptions of anarchist theory, with its notion of freedom and equality as co-constituted and its reliance on deliberation and consensus, while challenging or problematising others. What separates the associationalism of the anarchist imagination and that of the Covenantal reality goes beyond the former's application as a deliberate political ideology, compared to the latter's existence as an ad hoc, pragmatic experiment. Instead, these divergences speak to an underlying difference in epistemological understanding of the relationship between structure and agency. Whereas the anarchist intellectual tradition, with its focus on immanence, finds, in the incompleteness and impermanence of the State, openings to evade and overcome its artificial power structures (Cohn 2006, 73-6), Somalilanders operating within the Social Covenant generally have to make peace with prevailing (and seemingly immovable) rules of the game, utilising the power and invention at their disposal to carve out autonomous space within it.

This can be seen in Somaliland's approach to foreign affairs since its early days, which, despite being realistic about the extent of Somaliland's reliance on foreign powers regarding its diplomatic and developmental fate, equally appreciates the room for manoeuvre that its self-sufficiency has afforded. This is summed up by one influential former political activist: 'we have to be aware that we won't die for lack of [international aid] money. We did our first election without any sponsorship from the outside. And the international community

involvement is a must to us in a way, because we are seeking international recognition. But I think if we are an independent government of our own, I would have sent them all out' (Interview #23). In the next section, I will argue that this outlook, rather than being a mere cultural idiosyncrasy, in fact represents a more general ontological disposition, what I call a 'tragic understanding of politics', which undergirds the Social Covenant.

7.3 Recalibrating political horizons: a tragic understanding of social reality

In this chapter, and in this study more generally, 'pragmatism' has been used as a descriptor for distinguishing the kinds of political outcomes seen as either reasonable or out of reach within Somaliland popular consciousness. While the term might be seen to gesture towards the robust post-foundationalist epistemology of the likes of John Dewey, in which all actions are judged by their contextual means and ends rather than by an independent yardstick (Bartenberger 2015), a pejorative aura lingers over it, a sense of surrender to circumstance. In this, Somaliland's particular brand of political pragmatism, its willingness to lean on imperfect but available governance models rather than seek their fundamental reimagining, seems to fly in the face of the more radical visions of a post-State Africa, such as those of Mbembe and Ndlovu-Gatsheni described in Chapter 2. For them, as for many Marxists and anarchists, the horizons of action are world-historical and transformative, not merely seeking to carve out space to live peacefully and act purposefully within global structures beyond one's control, but instead to 'dismantle' colonial structures of oppression and strive for the 'radical metamorphosis of relations' through a 'praxis of springing forth, of emergence' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2014, 910; Mbembe 2021,224-5). Seen in the light of these ambitions, the Social Covenant looks more like a last-ditch coping mechanism than a desired end in its own right.

Would it be fair, then, to characterise the Social Covenant as simply representing a conservative avoidance of the worst, an 'Afropessimist' resignation to one's subordinated social status within the global hierarchy of power, too wounded and demoralised to reach for hopeful utopianism? This, I contend, fails to do justice to what the Somaliland Social Covenant offers. As shown throughout this study, the Covenant entails a very specific relation to power, which recognises the wantonness, unpredictability and immensity of global structures of power, especially as they are unleashed during times of war, but which places faith in the agency of the individual, clan and Somaliland experiment to adapt accordingly and persevere

nonetheless. This disposition of agility in the face of political chaos and uncertainty was typified in the foundation of the Somaliland experiment and its Covenant in the early 1990s, which saw Somaliland's clans harness and reorganise power, rather than allow such power to be let loose to consume them all. Reminiscing on this conjuncture of fate and initiative, one former SNM officer recounts:

> There was nothing to wait for. The decision was made at the beginning of May, when it dawned on people that there was nothing coming from Mogadishu…[And we asked ourselves:] are we going back to the people who [just massacred us], and are now involved in [fratricidal war]? No. It hasn't been easy for Somaliland, because of the way the world is set-up. But *c'est la vie*, we are still here. (Interview #49)

Somaliland's assertive response to such a precarious situation, in which partial agency was snatched from the clutches of an onslaught of violence and disorder, is better seen not as reactive survivalism, but as a proactive politics attuned to the tragic nature of social reality, or what could be called a 'tragic politics'. In this assessment, I extend the thinking of Srinivasan (2021), for whom a 'tragic understanding of peacemaking' requires us to move beyond the twin poles of idealism and necessity, and instead recalibrate our sensibilities around agents' social power, of their 'irrepressible and unpredictable potentialities' to successfully navigate the 'messy actual realities of politics' (286-292). Here, whereas the liberal statebuilding paradigm has generally dealt with larger structural forces and powers by 'simplifying, distorting, deferring and denying' their constraints and complexities, a tragic understanding responds by paying serious heed and due respect to these forces and brutalities, while at the same time identifying the 'motley mix of ideas, interests and urgencies' that local actors nonetheless pursue, despite such constraints, towards their aim of a 'non-violent civil politics' (291-2).

Moving from the analytical to the philosophical, what we find in 'the tragic'—as ontological condition rather than an experienced circumstance—is a cautionary warning for those navigating political action under conditions of unpredictability, where, as a result of human frailty and the inevitability of unintended consequences, we often end up complicit in our own misfortune (Critchley 2020). It thus demonstrates 'respect for cosmic necessity' without resigning itself fully to it, painting a view of sociality in which 'humans are neither the mere playthings of external forces, nor…freestanding and supremely self-responsible', but instead trapped in the precarious entanglement of 'human affliction' and 'that which

transcends it', in which each is shaped 'in terms of the other' (Eagleton 2020, 8-12). What such a tragic understanding means for politics is a recognition of its unedifying and disorienting nature, in which one is forced to act through, with and against power, without any guarantees of the repercussions of those actions or of how righteous they are. It involves contending with what is 'contradictory', 'constructed', 'precarious' and 'limited' about us, and of being 'grimly reminded of the limits of [our] powers', and then acting nonetheless (Critchley 2020, 9; Eagleton 2020, 16).

These tragic sensibilities were often detectable in the ways that Somalilanders interviewed for this study reflected upon and interpreted their country's three-decade journey. As agents in peacebuilding and social reconstruction, Somaliland's founders faced messiness and unpredictability from the beginning: '27 years ago, it was very difficult to know where to start, where to go, because everything was mixed up' (Interview #66). And yet, they found ways of gradually 'moving towards a democratic form, despite our lack of experience,' through 'learn[ing] from our mistakes' (Interview #68). As described above, this translation of political potential into something tangible involved Somaliland's stakeholders contending with their own particular 'motley mix of ideas, interests and urgencies', in which consent and common purpose were forged through a combination of traditional wisdom and nous, shrewd political coercion and horse-trading, and the banal desire of communities to get back to living a peaceful life. Yet, while slow, muddled and often ugly, this process produced outcomes in terms of democratic self-governance that transcended the bounds of what had been seen as politically possible up to that point, especially by a small, divided society without the support of international donors and statebuilders (Moscovici 2021; Kaplan 2008). It even surprised the Somalilanders themselves, with one prominent politician during that time reflecting: 'Teaching and introducing the democratic process itself was a huge challenge… We put the package together and sold it to the people. It's a miracle it happened' (Quoted in Richards 2015, 14).

This 'miracle' is kept alive not by a collective utopian desire to transcend earthly constraints and undo historic violence, but through a solemn and clear-eyed recognition that such mortal afflictions are never too far away—what Phillips (2019) describes as a visceral, historically-inherited 'sensitivity to the ease with which peace gives way to war' (680). At the same time, such awareness of the violent excesses of political life has not inculcated a sense of passivity; rather, it has galvanised Somaliland citizens to take an active role in the

maintenance of security and stability: 'Because of our history, we have a better understanding of what clan conflicts can lead to and so that in itself inspires us to work to prevent conflicts' (Interview #39). In fact, this sober awareness of the fragility and uncertainty of the world has, as Phillips (2012) argues elsewhere, has been granted a positive spin, through being woven into Somaliland's national mythos of exceptionality and legitimacy, which sees Somaliland's ability to defy the odds as inspirational, as expanding 'perceptions of what is politically possible' (210).

The tensions this narrative involves, including its juxtaposition of freedom and fate, is summed up well by one intellectual:

> This specialness [of Somaliland] relies on the foundation of "if we want to get recognised, we should feel special about ourselves"…So it is kinda self-reinforcing, right? And we have to be special to explain why we achieved peace and were able to emerge out of conflict intact. But a lot of people realise that history has its own twists and turns. And sometimes you get lucky, and lucky breaks usually don't last forever. (Interview #7)

In sum, pragmatic recognition of worldly limits and the seizing of one's human agency are not antithetical, but complementary, involving the sacrifices and pain that come with protecting something of value: 'Somaliland has worked very hard to reach where it is today and so its people have no intentions of destroying the fruits of that labour' (Interview #37). Or, as Eagleton (2020) puts it, 'men and women must be hauled through hell in order to be redeemed, without guarantee that this trial by fire will leave the person in better shape' (17).

7.4   Shortcomings of the Social Covenant?

There is a recognition of social reality's tragic nature, and then there is an honest reckoning with one's faults, even taking into account such structural constraints. In this section, I will look at the tensions and shortcomings of Somaliland's version of the Social Covenant model. Some of these deficiencies are fundamentally disconcerting, although hopefully not disqualifying, while others represent larger trade-offs that any political system would be forced to deal with. As the abovementioned account of the Covenant has demonstrated, this model was constructed to address a certain set of pressing issues—such as constraining looming violence and inter-clan enmity—and these choices continue to shape its predispositions, even if the logics of horizontality, consensus politics and anti-alienation have political significance that goes far beyond these narrow concerns. But there is much

social and cultural baggage inherited by Somaliland's Covenantal parties that the Covenant itself has not (and cannot) directly overcome, especially given its reliance on many of the same authorities perpetuating such baggage. In what follows, we will briefly overview four major issues: exclusion of certain social actors; failure to address class inequalities; the development-security paradox; and questions over sustainability.

7.4.1   Exclusions: Women and Youth

Prevailing gender roles and relations among the people of Somaliland have undergone numerous permutations since the region's tight-knit transhumant communities were upended over time by colonialism and modernisation. Centralised statehood and economic dislocation not only imposed new types of political alienation upon women, some borrowed from British Victorianism, but served to rigidify certain cultural and religious gender divisions into a much more hierarchical system of strict male dominance. As Ingiriis & Hoehne (2013) have argued, the collapse of the Somali state, while causing intense humanitarian misery with inevitable gendered dimensions, in certain ways opened up new avenues for women's participation in society, such as achieving marginally better representation in peace dialogues and governments, and a more prominent role in economic life. However, they go on to reference Fatima Ali's more general observation that a period of stark social change equally 'rearranges, readapts or reinforces patriarchal ideologies, rather than fundamentally changing them', something which Somaliland's trajectory seems to bear out (327). As of 31 May, 2021, women occupy only 2% of Somaliland's 552 top decision-making positions, and such exclusion from 'security and justice decision-making' has meant that 'women's voice and perspective has traditionally not been valued in areas of security and justice', something that has led to weak protection against widespread sexual and gender-based violence, among other issues (Gaheir, Raage & Daud 2021; Carter 2021, 3).

Viewed on the whole, then, the Social Covenant has done little to address the gender inequalities it inherited, and has even further entrenched certain patriarchal elements. While women have been credited for their roles in facilitating conflict resolution—whether large-scale reconciliation conferences or everyday matters of dispute—it is undoubtedly still men who run the show. Within the clan system, only men are allowed to assume the role of traditional authority with any credibility, and most legal claims brought forward on behalf of women require a male guardian. In this way, the clan system reproduces gendered

oppression, particularly on issues such as gender-based violence and inheritance (Carter 2021). More subtly, the absence of women from crucial spaces of dialogue and decision-making, such as khat-chewing sessions, effectively secures their exclusion. Public discourse, while providing a space for elders to express their clan grievances, equally manipulates religious and cultural proscriptions to silence the grievances of women (Interview #179). For one female businesswoman and activist, for example, the very same informal networks that facilitate horizontal, inter-clan negotiation equally provided a platform through which resistance to campaigns of female empowerment were staged:

> There are some sort of unseen connections, whether it is self-interest, family connections, a connection from years ago; these are networks that you can't see and maybe operate without being aware of themselves…[These are] people who protect the president, [even though] I'm talking about a legitimate thing which is women not being represented…They can isolate you from whatever event…These are the unwritten rules. (Interview #86)

Among men themselves, disparities of power exist between the young and the more senior. In fact, Somaliland can credibly be characterised as a gerontocracy, with State politics dominated by former SNM officials and clan politics dominated by elders and established religious leaders. One young activist described this structural division in the following stark terms: 'I honestly feel like a small needle thrown into an ocean, and that I'm drowning. All these noisy traditional leaders and government officials are linked and we're separate from them' (Interview #189). Here, too, the clan system adopted in 1991, with its conflation of age and authority, is seen as a major part of the problem, with many youth particularly frustrated by the ways in which collusion between traditional leaders and political class has institutionalised 'clannism' at the heart of electoral politics and State governance (Interview #189; Interview #79). As a result of this collusion, which includes traditional leaders compelling youth from their clan on which way to vote, leaves youth as a fairly irrelevant, if numerous, political constituency (Abdirahman 2020, 6). The lack of government effort to tackle youth unemployment, quality of education opportunities and vulnerability to human trafficking reflects this disempowerment (SONYO 2021).

It is thus no surprise that, amongst the younger generation, there is an overarching impatience with the clan system, and a desire to move beyond it altogether, through the adoption of State governance modelled on the West (albeit with sensitivity to cultural, and especially religious, dimensions of Somali life) (Interview #92; Interview #189). And, indeed,

the State system has made progress towards youth inclusivity, especially under President Bihi, who has drawn a considerable part of his cabinet and inner circle from a younger generation. A law lowering the age of candidacy in municipal elections has added some fresh blood in local councils since 2011, while an emerging (if small) class of young businesspeople, diaspora returnees, political activists, journalists and INGO workers have established themselves within formal politics as well (Abdirahman 2020; Interview #200). Meanwhile, when it comes to the politics of Covenantal dispute resolution, as in the case of El Af-weyn, observers continue to criticise such processes for failing to include youth at the table (Interview #254; Interview #255). That said, most youth interviewed seemed to understand the difference between 'clan' and 'clannism', and merely wished for a separation between elders and conflict resolution, on the one hand, and professionals and the State on the other, with this response summing up the median view: 'Elders are indeed the ones that brought Somaliland to where it's today. However, I believe that the elders should know their place. We need to protect the youth and shield them from tribalism and instead teach them nationalism…The traditional system should only called upon when there is an important gathering for the clan or issue concerning the whole nation' (Interview #185).

There is not much that can be said to redeem these features of Somaliland political life. One caveat, however, is that, as the statistics above indicate, it is not merely the inter-clan system that has failed women and the young, but likewise the State system, which been adept at adapting elderly male supremacy within liberal institutions, while all the while appealing to cultural precedent in doing so. Moreover, it should also be noted that, in theory, one could fathom a version of the Social Covenant that maintains its desirable attributes while shedding its parochialism—especially as the current young generation begins its rise to political prominence—based on the assumption that there is nothing structurally necessary about patriarchy or gerontocracy for the Covenant's functioning. But whatever might be possible in theory seems highly unlikely in practice, as there is little evidence of the established crop of older males within either the Covenantal or State system loosening their grip on power.

7.4.2   Blind Spots: Class Inequalities

As the Ahmed Geelle affair demonstrates, the economic elite holds great sway within not just State politics, but the Social Covenant system as well. Indeed, one key source of

leverage that Somaliland's clans have in their sometimes adversarial relation with the State is the presence of a small but powerful economic oligopoly whose economic resources dwarf that of the government (Elder 2021). As a result, despite Somaliland having what the World Bank considers one of the highest levels of inequality in the region (World Bank 2015), such disparities in wealth are often overlooked, with attention drawn instead towards the horizontal inequalities that the Social Covenant is so vigilant in exposing (Focus Group, 08/06/2019). This is the case even as economic inequalities are increasingly defining not just material lifestyles, in which malls and hotels catering to one segment of society reside adjacent to informal shanty towns catering to the vast urban poor, but also matters of justice, with the rich able to buy favourable decisions from the formal courts (*ibid*). As one youth activist describes it, 'there is a very high disparity between the rich and poor here. There are filthy rich overnight millionaires benefiting from their connections with the government. And there are so many people going down on the poverty slope' (Interview #200).

In this atmosphere of increased financial stratification, the Covenant plays an ambiguous role, softening its impact while inuring the masses to its continuation. In one focus group of intellectuals held on the topic, there was agreement that kin-based obligations placed limits on inequalities, with, as argued in Chapter 6, the reliance of the economic elite on their clan for protection and insurance inculcating certain relations of reciprocity. As one of the discussants argued: 'Even if you have wealth, status or knowledge, you are always paying *diya*, compensation…From rich to the poor, you are part of that system, you will pay a fair share. In traditional society, you cannot discriminate against someone for being poor. You can't say, you cannot come to this meeting…[And] even if you are rich, you always require your clan' (Focus Group, Intellectuals, 08/06/2019). In fact, despite the overwhelming desire of these NGO workers and civil servants to leave the clan system behind, there was a near-unanimous concern that doing so would unleash class inequality in a more unencumbered form.

Yet the positive trickle-down effects of elite prosperity, in which individual wealth can indeed translate partially into clan wealth, undoubtedly has created a dependence of the masses on their businesspeople benefactors. And this dependence, while providing the poor with a minimum safety net at times of distress, equally entails low expectations of public services and economic vibrancy, as negligible taxes and oligopolistic markets are an inflexible part of the bargain (Interview #74). All told, while heightened inequality has emerged in

tandem with the consolidation of the State and it impact on investment, consumption and economic speculation, the Social Covenant has been largely helpless in combatting it, instead opting to harness it for its own ends, while also attempting to resist its spill-over into inter-clan inequalities, to mixed results.

7.4.3   Tensions: The Development-Security Paradox

The Covenant, as argued above, prioritises peace and stability as its foundational concerns. This emphasis, while helpful in securing social cohesion, entails knock-on effects that are in certain cases at odds with developmental concerns and economic necessity. For example, in prioritising consensus over decisiveness, governments have found it more difficult to enact painful economic reforms or implement development projects that might help the nation but exact a short-term cost on a community. Similarly, the expectation of mutual concessions for all parties in a dispute at times contravenes the principles of exclusivity and indivisibility inherent to private property rights, while reliance on traditional authorities to enforce such rights leaves potential foreign investors feeling insecure (Mohamoud 2018; Ahmed 2017, 83). More generally, the preservation of multiple centres of horizontal power not only complicates the unidirectionality needed to mobilise resource and enact modernising developmental change, but fails to provide the governance simplicity to attract outside investment (World Bank/IFC 2012; Interview #61). Lastly, in affording the 'traditional' sector a stake in governance, a generation of modernising, entrepreneurial technocrats have found their voices drowned out by more conservative interests, who often lack formal education or experience when it comes to issues of macroeconomy (Interview #134).

Much domestic support for Somaliland's statebuilding project thus views it as a way out of this economic quagmire, in which the reproduction of externally-approved governance benchmarks will place the country on the road to economic transformation. Whether such beliefs are well-founded is beyond the scope of this research. However, a cursory analysis of the record thus far seems to indicate that, even if the correct State institutions were developed locally, Somaliland's integration into regional and global economies from a position of weakness would at best leave it as a resource spigot (for oil, minerals, etc.) and logistical node, creating a highly segregated economy of tightly concentrated wealth with little spillover into the broader society. That said, the Social Covenant, apart from its role in

containing the social effects of certain economic disparities, as of yet seems to offer no alternative model of development, while actively undercutting both liberal capitalist development and the developmental State model. Any long-term, sustainable adoption of Social Covenant models of political association would have to grapple with this economic dimension, potentially by merging it with ongoing efforts to devise and apply 'alternative development paradigms', despite the mixed results in substantiating such efforts in the Global South (Wai 2007; Nnaemeka 2009; Rodríguez-Labajos *et al.* 2019).

7.4.4   Future Prospects: Sustainability

Lastly, we come to the issue of the sustainability of the Social Covenant model. On the one hand, the case studies analysed here have shown that, despite over 25 years of political change, including considerable statebuilding progress, the Covenant remains operational, if no longer dominant. Compared to the other examples of postcolonial alterity and radicality, from the Haitian Revolution, the Algerian resistance and the Arab Spring, in which the moment of hope flamed out as quickly as it flickered up, the Somaliland model has demonstrated remarkable longevity, while equally avoiding much of the violence entailed by these other examples. At the same time, the forward march of the State in Somaliland remains ongoing, consolidating into authoritarian tendencies with extraversionary backing fundamentally at odds with the Covenantal model (Elder 2021). Even the period of relative balance between Covenant and State captured in these case studies is giving way to a larger political upheaval, in which Somaliland's successes are increasingly exploited by foreign governments such as the UAE and US, for whom the territory offers potential as a military offshoot (Kennard & Einashe 2019; Phillips 2022). With so many new avenues for coercive power and wealth to enter the political scene, there is only so much longer that traditional authorities and other mediating forces will be able to contain them.

Seen from this angle, future prospects for the Somaliland Social Covenant look bleak. However, among the lessons of anarchist theory is that any social arrangement, if it is to be amenable and responsive to its constituents, is necessarily temporary, innovative and dynamic. As such, rather than ensnare the Somaliland project into a narrative of either triumphalism or demise, we might instead absorb the lesson that any successful political arrangement, including the Social Covenant, requires periodic rejuvenation and reformulation if it is to survive changing conditions. Somalilanders have taken this on board,

demonstrating a willingness to use consensus-building to correct mistakes and make improvements, in which things as consequential as term extensions, the number of political parties, the possibilities of a prime ministerial system, the future of recognition, the value of a government of national unity all deemed open for review (Interview #126; Interview #66; Interview #220; Interview #36). For one justice sector official, such political flexibility 'is the hallmark of what Somaliland is all about. And this political flexibility was led by the others, not only by the *Isaaq*. It was informed, shaped by the other clans. If we want to build a democratic nation-state, we need to be flexible, responsive enough that we answer to the grievances and the needs of the day…And make changes as necessary' (Interview #187).

7.5   Conclusion

Actors operating within both the Social Covenant and the State, while clearly appreciating the seriousness of the Social Covenant's shortcomings, have offered few convincing solutions for addressing them. Indeed, the most common responses seem to be to either excuse them as necessary or preferable to change, or to see them as disqualifying enough to call into question clan-based politics altogether. This deadlock speaks to a growing malaise within Somaliland politics more generally, observable over the course of this study, in which a growing sense of economic, political, social and diplomatic stagnation had begun to close down faith in the openness and promise of the future that had characterised society since the beginning of Somalilanders' self-determined and hard-won journey out of conflict. The final chapter of this study seeks to better apprehend what, amidst this simultaneous possibility and melancholy, the historical trajectory of the Social Covenant may offer as lessons for a wider audience, whether they be statebuilders, scholars or just those with a stake in Somaliland's future.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

As this study drew to a close, Somaliland saw its prospects for recognition reach new heights. In June of 2022, in the aftermath of a trip by President Bihi to Washington, D.C., the US Congress passed the Somaliland Partnership Act, a historic step forward which called for expanding policy space for American engagement with Somaliland (US Congress 2022). In July, the legislature folded these directives into the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, suggesting scope for cooperation with Somaliland in the areas of 'port access, military training, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing' in the service of 'maritime and border security, and…in deterring the trafficking of humans, wildlife, weapons, and illicit goods' (Haroldson 2022). In a press statement, Somaliland's Foreign Ministry hailed these developments as a 'new precedent in acknowledging Somaliland's strategic role' (*ibid*). Within the social media discourse among Somaliland's most vociferous defenders of statehood and patriotism, there was a pronounced, almost militant, sense of triumph and validation.

One could almost forget that only a few months earlier, domestic and foreign observers had watched as the country's main marketplace, Suuqa Waaheen in Hargeisa, burned to the ground, with the government ill-prepared to deal with the tragedy (Farah 2022). Or that, around the same time, the 'iconic' Gaacidh forest in Somaliland's eastern Sanaag region had also suffered once of its worst fires on record, a result of the same persistent drought that, for months, placed much of Somaliland territory in a prolonged state of humanitarian emergency (Mukami 2022). This juxtaposition of State aggrandisement and social turmoil, while particularly dramatic, speaks to the disconnect between Statist and social processes that has come to define present-day Somaliland. This is notable, given that the primary concern among Somalilanders for much of the country's development had traditionally been the opposite: that the country's isolation and lack of international respect flew in the face of the Somaliland people's record in keeping their members safe and cared for.[2]

It is this disconnect that my study has in large part sought to highlight. Seen from back to front, it presents a narrative not of the rise and fall of the Somaliland statebuilding

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[2] The words of one official exemplified this common position: 'Our community did everything for their country and built it from the ground up…[Yet] the international community has failed to appreciate what Somaliland has achieved' (Interview #185).

project—as others have implicitly presented it (see Elder 2021; Renders 2007; Hoehne 2013)—but of the eventual abandonment of the Social Covenant by the country's most powerful political and business leaders, in favour of a statebuilding project that has increasingly alienated political power and agency from those who had previously kept the country relatively inclusive, equal and orderly. However, beyond this tale of social development spun out of control in pursuit of national self-determination, we should not lose sight of either the original promise of the Social Covenant, or its adaptability in the face of challenges from both the State and international actors. In particular, the Social Covenant has pointed to the potential promise of a political system in which a plurality of autonomous power absent a dominant authority does not necessarily spell disorder or conflict, but might—if social actors take advantage of the opportunities for horizontal, intimate and conditional cooperation—promote conditions for free and equal association.

An obvious set of related questions present themselves at this point: what are the larger implications of the Somaliland Social Covenant for our understanding of African politics specifically, and theories of the State more generally? Does the Somaliland State's eventual eclipse of the Covenant represent a reversion to type, in which Somaliland's brief unconventional political opening eventually succumbed to the inevitable triumph of rentierism, dependency and patronage that all post-conflict African States seemingly arrive at? Does it speak to the singularity, eccentricity and ephemerality of all radical experiments, their brief but glorious period of enthusiasm eventually arrested by a confrontation with cold, hard reality? Or, despite the Somaliland Social Covenant's shortcomings, are there practical lessons that can be absorbed and translated into different contexts, in the realms of both scholarship and policymaking, which can avoid the excesses of the statebuilding paradigm, through offering up schemas of grassroots social relationality that empower people by way of horizontality, intimacy and conditionality? In the rest of this concluding chapter, I explore these questions.

8.1 Replicability: is the Somaliland Covenant a singular or generalisable phenomenon?

For those acquainted with Somaliland, two opposing tendencies simultaneously present themselves: both the impression that Somaliland is unique, and the inverse feeling that its history speaks to something common to all postcolonial societies. Indeed, it is not

hard to find resonances between the Somaliland experiment and other communities that resisted hegemonic Western expectations, from Haiti and Ethiopia, for their embrace of modernity on their own terms (Younis 2018), to the steadfast adherence of many indigenous communities to inherited governance practices (Johnson & Ferguson 2019). Equally, there are populations for whom the disruption instigated by warfare and State failure have similarly opened up space for political experimentation, such as the Kurdish Syrian communities of Rojava, who have trialled 'democratic confederalism', a brand of anarchist-inspired governance that 'seeks to empower local, libertarian and crucially communalist modes of association that secure direct participation of citizens in policy-making' (Cemgil 2016, 424).

Beyond these select thematic analogies, one could easily point to more pervasive, constitutive similarities between Somaliland and African societies on the whole. With few exceptions, customary authority, localised dispute resolution, informal authority, kin-based reciprocity and inter-ethnic political exchange serve as the main engines of political dynamism in African polities across the board (von Trotha 1996; Lund 2006). Furthermore, as focus shifts from Africa's State politics to the continent's 'ungoverned spaces', previously undiagnosed forms of spontaneous self-organisation are coming into view, blurring distinctions between the vertical and the horizontal in the process (Raleigh & Dowd 2013; Leonard 2013, 3). As such, while only further scrutiny of specific alternative cases could determine whether the analytical framework and/or political model of the Social Covenant could be transported beyond Somaliland, it would be fair to say that many of the Covenant's component parts are already operative in other parts of the continent. Indeed, scholars such as Nugent (2010), Leonard (2013) and Lund (2006) have increasingly come to view the State as a raft of interlocking, multilevel 'social contracts' that stitch local communities, mediating authorities and national agencies together to form a whole, gesturing to the ubiquity of intercommunal contract and negotiation within African political life.

At the same time, it is worth recognising the rarity of the conditions in which Somaliland came of age. Most societies have little say in whether or not the world's global powers decide to intervene in them, or whether those local actors who are given a chance to shape the political settlement derive their power from local legitimacy or from personal wealth and power. Fanon famously warned of the tendency for moments of postcolonial political freedom to be co-opted by national bourgeoisie (Lazarus 1993, 71), while Africanists such as de Waal (2014) credibly note the advantages held by self-interested powerbrokers in

determining the course of moments of upheaval. That Somaliland, in its early days, ultimately avoided such eventualities was fortunate. Indeed, for Somaliland's balance of power to coincide so harmoniously with the renaissance of traditional leadership seems, in retrospect, nothing short of a miracle.

While recognising both its commonplace and unique features, there is no need to lapse into a view of the Somaliland Social Covenant as either a *sui generis* singularity or an over-stylised take on a common African phenomenon. While it is true that one inevitably finds many, if not all, of the constituent parts of the Covenant (be they institutions, customs or communal networks) throughout the continent, this study is concerned with the Covenant *as an entire assemblage*—i.e. as a coherent and self-reproducing system made up of distinct but interlocking political logics, one that transforms existing features of social life into something greater than the sum of its parts. Indeed, this study's argument hinges on the premise that Somaliland's distinct evolution, and in particular its unexpected embrace of workable horizontalist practices, owes little to any uniqueness of institutions, eccentricity of culture or even unprecedented social milieu, and far more to humanly-designed political artifice (with much help from historical circumstance). At the same time, by demonstrating the specific power arrangements that exist at the heart of the Covenantal model, I present a universally applicable metric with which to distinguish it both in itself and from the State, thereby inviting points of comparison epistemologically and ontologically with similar phenomena in other contexts.

In other words, Somaliland presents a more pronounced and actualised version of postcolonial societies' latent potentials, expanding upon and transforming the collective resources present in any postcolonial polity with pre-State inheritances, by taking advantage of the opportunity to let these resources blossom. This involved, as a precondition, the temporary absence of any State authority to extinguish these potentialities before they were given a chance to grow. As a result, among those inspired to apply the lessons of the Somaliland Social Covenant elsewhere, the task is to identify the potential within all political cultures for horizontality, intimacy and conditional association—what Graeber, with his own ideological proclivities, referred to as 'every communism' (Graeber 2010)—and then to nurture them. As we shall see in the next section, policy and programmatic implications for international peacebuilding also follow; namely, that rather than developing policy interventions that target civil society, public servants or any other fixed social category, an

alternative approach would first identify the actually existing tendencies of non-hierarchical mutuality, and then ensure them the political space to bloom.

8.2   What can be done about the Somali territories? Charting a way forward

As a former development practitioner, I can hopefully be excused for risking the integrity of my theoretical outputs by delving into the messiness of real-world policy recommendations – though this study's unorthodox approach to the analysis of the Somaliland case does not lend itself easily to practical suggestions. One of the advantages that granted Somaliland's founders the latitude to succeed was the very lack of programmatic intentionality or ideological blueprint, thereby enabling them space for innovation and pragmatism (Phillips 2013). Within anarchist theory, such 'spontaneity' is held in very high regard, precisely because it breaks free from and outmanoeuvres stable patterns of practice and consciousness (Bookchin 1975). Nevertheless, the critical distance afforded by the craft of academic writing, as opposed to the vocation of direct social organising, surely provides space to reflect on such generally-applicable lessons.

8.2.1   Policy Guidance 1: Developing a relational view of social contexts

My first proposed policy prescription follows quite logically from this study's main argument: that interventions must be based on a much more robust conception of 'the social' if they are to nurture, rather than, undercut, pockets of social power.[3] While 'conflict sensitivity' mapping, training and monitoring are expected to fill these gaps, there are several reasons to be sceptical of their impact. First, in viewing the world through the narrow metrics of tension and conflict, conflict sensitivity mechanisms offer a minimalist, reactive picture of social relations, identifying 'drivers' and 'root causes' of particular instances of political tumult without any framework for understanding their place within a broader constellation of social phenomena (McClintock & Brachet 2020, 275). This picture is clouded even further as the demands of counter-terrorism create new obstacles to conflict sensitivity, instilling certain instrumental logics and hierarchies of friend and enemy that abstract from the intimate, specific and horizontal relations constituting local politics (Karlsrud 2019).

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[3] For an outline of the evolution of 'the social' in the interventionist's consciousness, see Owens (2015).

To take one example of what is at stake, we find governments such as the UK attempting to promote stability and security in Somaliland by strengthening government counter-terrorism, anti-piracy and policing capabilities, through numerous legal, capacity-building and training projects (HC Deb 2018; Interview #36; Interview #252). These interventions, while enhancing State responsiveness to certain threats in the short term, come with the trade-off of enabling 'the Somaliland government elite to acquire new coercive resources to pursue its own political and security agendas' (Moe 2018, 340)—a concession that the UK government is quite aware of (Bryant 2014). What the UK government would have fewer analytical resources for comprehending is the way in which such strengthening of the central State contributes to the further unbalancing of the horizontal power dynamic that the Social Covenant relies on, thus making order and stability more precarious in the long term. As Richmond and Tellidis (2012) suggest, such predisposition to treat power as the preserve of the State within counter-terrorism and statebuilding frameworks takes off the table precisely the issues most necessary to ensure autonomy and equality between segments of society (139).

Another shortcoming of this approach to conflict analysis is that it generally reduces the social field to categories of influential actors, interest groups and identity groups (such as political parties, the business class and clans, respectively), and then applies common-sense causal logics to their presumed interactions (such as self-interest, inter-group competition, affiliation-based loyalty or historical rivalry) (UK Stabilisation Unit 2016). But one cannot understand the distinct, contextualised operation of social logics in this manner, any more than one can grasp the workings of a particular African State armed with only an organisational chart and a theory of neopatrimonialism. For example, in one assessment of the El Af-weyn controversy by the International Crisis Group, we find the conflict described as a 'long-running...['inter-clan'] feud that intensified during the 2017 elections,' fundamentally missing the distinct struggles between the State and various influential traditional authorities which unsettled existing mechanisms for addressing these inter-clan concerns, and which lay behind the conflict's prolongation (ICG 2018, 3). In short, for peacebuilding and social reconstruction to work, social contexts cannot be reduced to a collection of individuals or an amalgamation of interest groups, but instead must be seen as a set of *relations*—i.e. multiple, shifting patterns of cooperation and divergence that respond to contextual 'fields of action' as they develop over time.

Would developing such a complex relation-based understanding of the intervention setting be too much for the bureaucratic, remote, cumbersome development industry to absorb, however (Paffenholz 2016)? While it would be easy to be pessimistic, advances have been made in developing practice-oriented conflict analysis models that consider diverse, interlinking relationships. Most promising has been the 'political marketplace' framework and toolkit, which, as described earlier, surveys the particular arrangements of power and finance distribution in a specific context, and then draws larger conclusions on the nature of the State and society based on the relations of dependency, bargaining and power created by these relationships (Spatz, Sarkar & de Waal 2021). However, the methodology and findings of this study suggest the need to expand beyond power and wealth, as important as these factors are, to consider the broad spectrum of relations which constitute social power. This would include everything from the more mundane bedrocks of inter-social intimacy and agency, such as reciprocity, hospitality, mutual aid and kindness, to more large-scale patterns of intra-group contract and compromise.

8.2.2 Policy Guidance 2: Peace as governance, local ownership as collective stakes

Another shift of perspective involves how we think about peacebuilding. In the introduction, I highlighted the tendency to treat Somaliland's reconciliation arrangements, and the clan-based associationalism that accompanied them, as a distinct peacebuilding phase, a temporary prelude to statebuilding. As Goodhand & Sedra (2013) note, while in liberal interventionism, the lines between peacebuilding and statebuilding have begun to blur, out of a recognition that peace itself must contain seeds of the governance architecture that will come after (240), what has remained constant is the idea that every peacebuilding needs a complementary statebuilding to become whole—whether before, after or concurrently (see also Sabaratnam 2011, 23-5). As the Somaliland Social Covenant experience demonstrates, however, elements of peace arrangements that seem to serve as mere precursors or building blocks to more formalised (State-based) ends, can in fact serve as political arrangements in their own right. In other words, inter-group ceasefire conditionalities and trust-building reciprocities might indeed have value beyond stabilisation and ending violence, and instead serve productive functions in and of themselves, providing lasting means to adjudicate intercommunal transgressions or promote reciprocity during periods of crisis.

While this claim might be seen as identical with that of those calling for a 'positive peace', it is in fact precisely the opposite. Aspirations for a 'positive peace', as it is conceived within the interventionist literature and practice, have involved tying peace even more to the fortunes of the State, by seeking to address matters of positive justice, such as service delivery, protection and resource distribution, through strengthening the State, or at least 'stabilizing state-society relations' (Roberts 2008, 551; Sharp 2020, 132-5). Not only does such top-down manipulation of peacebuilding's trajectory negate the benefits of spontaneous, grass roots, self-initiated development that this study and those of Phillips (2013/2020) and Richards (2014) have highlighted as fundamental, but, when viewed in the light of the Somaliland experience, it also puts the cart before the horse. It was the Somaliland's clan associationalism, developed during the reconciliation process, that endowed the resulting political system its content—the ways in which clan actors are interpreted, absorbed and responded to within the system—and the Somaliland state has continued to rely on such 'rules of the game' to survive. Any statebuilding that comes after the consolidation of peace must justify how it can fit into, and be of benefit to, such existing peace dynamics, rather than merely being imposed incongruously on top of them, as statebuilding blueprints often are (Richards 2014, 39).

This lesson ties in with another: 'local ownership' in a peacebuilding or statebuilding setting is forged not through solely through the process—through participation, inclusion or legitimation—but through the outcome: the creation of a true 'stake' in the political system (Bargués-Pedreny 2016). In other words, regardless of how many 'stakeholders' are brought into negotiations or consultations, and regardless of the extent to which stakeholders' views are reflected in institutional designs, such expenditures of time and energy are meaningless if the resulting political arrangement ultimately alienates all that time and energy to a decision-making body that is granted disproportionate or unrivalled power and agency at the expense of broader society. As demonstrated in prior chapters, local buy-in for the Somaliland experiment came about through the cultivation of a feeling of moral and political stake in the project and its fruits, borne through substantive investment in and construction of a nation by individuals and groups. It is as a result of this *earned* right to participation, rather than any abstract assertion of the need for inclusivity, that Somaliland's clans are able to frame their justice-claims, and have those claims recognised as authoritative and politically meaningful. In other words, whereas a moral economy of citizen's rights, to the extent that it is dependent

upon the transcendental compulsion of a powerful State to grant those rights, has little meaning (Boggs 1979), the mutual recognition of stakeholders in a collective project, each with their own power to grant and deny rights, has force.

8.2.3   Policy Guidance 3: Beyond conditional sovereignty

The Somaliland case also has something to offer debates regarding sovereignty and international recognition. Thanks in part to the work of scholars such as Herbst (1996) and Englebert (2009), global governance mechanisms have increasingly become concerned about the perceived gap between *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty in many countries across the African continent. In response, alongside efforts to fill this gap through statebuilding, there have been diplomatic manoeuvres to make sovereignty conditional—either by abrogating an existing government's right to sovereign recognition under circumstances of State 'failure', as in the case of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), or through withholding recognition from emerging governance arrangements until certain performance requirements are met (Welsh *et al.* 2002, 493-5). In Somalia's case, both dynamics can be observed. While not directly linked to R2P, the current African peacebuilding mission in Somalia, AMISOM, traces its roots to various foreign interventions by neighbours, backed by UN Security Council members, in which the right to intervene to protect one's territory from disorder trumped the jurisdiction of the existing Somali authorities (Cocodia 2021). At the same time, the Federal Government that currently administers Somalia emerged through a 'transition process' that tied its recognition by various bilateral and multilateral counterparts to governance reforms and legitimacy benchmarks, such as holding nominal election and constitutional ratification processes in 2012, and meeting IMF and World Bank financial reform conditionalities in 2020 (Bryden 2013, 1; Shalal 2020).

It is widely believed that the international community continues to dangle the carrot of deferred recognition over Somaliland precisely to encourage good governance behaviour, and certain policymakers have sought to apply this non-recognition logic to Somalia as well—to use 'earned engagement' as an 'instrument' to compel governance effectiveness—even if the cat is already out of the bag (Pham 2014). While there is something in the idea of treating sovereign legitimacy as something conditional to be earned, rather than something unconditionally endowed, the current international approach is misguided because it places all the power in the hands of centres of global power, and because, during the period of

transition, it merely replaces one (ineffective) alienated power with an even more remote, unaccountable power—the international community. Instead, what is needed is a creative rethinking of sovereignty itself, dethroning and stripping it down to the essential, practical humanistic attributes that we as societies want our governance mechanisms to play. In this, Kennedy imagines a practical future for the State worthy of consideration alongside Somaliland's pragmatic politics: 'If one focused on the actual activity of people making choices in institutions – whether it be economists or political scientists and so forth – rather than what the diplomats do, we might downgrade diplomacy and being the President to just being one of a whole bunch of different expert professions – probably not the most important one, and not the most important site for political activity' (Der Derian *et al.* 2007, 188). In other words, the State could be treated as merely one actor amongst many, with a clear division of responsibilities between itself and other centres of power and agency.

8.3   The worst-case scenario: extreme nationalism

In Chapter 7, I looked at the major flaws that have dogged the Somaliland Social Covenant, problems to which it has proven least likely to offer readymade solutions. In particular, the traditional leadership stratum, in addition to perpetuating structural barriers to political inclusivity across age and gender, has generally made itself a willing and active partner in creating a 'clannified' political elite, even if then working diligently to rein in its excesses (APD-IPP 2021, 12-7). While this study has largely shown the Social Covenant at its best—highlighting its promise and utility in the face of academic tendencies to both see the African State as the only viable game in town, and to see only power struggle, wealth extraction and local dependency behind all organised power relations on the continent—my detailed picture of its operation in the case studies has also highlighted its limitations. Though the Covenant provides Somaliland's constituent parts with regulated and collectively-accepted mechanisms both for pushing back against concentrations of power, and for preserving their own autonomous power, without having to resort to sustained rebellion, this is not all that a fulfilling political and ethical life requires. On those other matters, whether of economic development, cultural emancipation or ideological inspiration, the Social Covenant has proved no more capable—and sometimes less so—than alternative systems.

When it comes to covenants more generally, there is no guarantee that their adoption offers a viable or desirable way forward, even as States have increasingly proven incapable of

addressing present-day challenges. While the original, biblical covenant between the Israelite people and the god that freed them from bondage continues to provide spiritual inspiration, its modern-day inheritors across the globe, including that of present-day Israel, Afrikaner South Africa and the Scots of Ulster, present a more checkered record. For instance, among Zionists and Afrikaners, we find communities whose narratives of embattled 'chosen-ness'— i.e., their ingrained historical mission of survival-at-all-costs in a world deemed hostile—has fermented into a politics of friend and enemy taken to the extreme, spilling over into the externalised oppression, as well as internal suppression, of those whose existence or resistance stands in the way of the covenantal mission (Akenson 1992; Haddad 1974; Ehlers 2004). As Akenson (1992) writes in regard to the Afrikaner covenant, 'within the *volk*, unity and amity, not fracture and friction, must be the divinely ordered nature of things', while, in relation to other communities, racial supremacy was the earthly manifestation of civilisational progress (90, 205).

While the apartheid example obviously stands at the extreme (negative) end of the covenantal spectrum, Somaliland has not been immune from elements of this uncompromising posture towards 'otherness'. While omitting a racial character, and generally avoiding clan supremacism as such, there are elements within the State and society for whom any ideological betrayal of the Somaliland nationalist cause is nothing short of treachery. One needs only to search for a term like '*faqash*' on social media to see the epithet's resurgence amongst a brand of Somaliland hardliners increasingly demonising and dehumanising partisans of Somali unity. Such discourse increasingly finds expression in the policies of the Somaliland government, whether by the punishment of non-*Isaaq* voices attempting to challenge the SNM-centric independence narrative, as seen in Chapter 4, or in arresting politicians, journalists and artists on charges of treason, as a result of alleged links to and sympathy towards Somalia (*Somali Dispatch* 2021; NUSOJ 2021). As one intellectual from the *Dhulbahante* described these political logics: 'I think the very justification of the Somaliland government is that we are having a conspiracy against us from Mogadishu [of turning non-*Isaaq* clans against us]…So, to tackle that conspiracy, to defeat it, we need to defend ourselves [against these internal enemies]' (Interview #99). Thus, as in Israel, we find a situation where the previously victimised population, in this case the *Isaaq*, are accused of violently inflicting their past trauma upon others in the present, through becoming perpetrators of hierarchies, exclusions and divisions between majority and minority: 'Back in

the day, Mogadishu was the place where all important decisions were made, and unfortunately, we are just following the same suit, right? It seems that we learned some lessons, but we didn't learn the real lessons that had to be learned' (Interview #7).

While learning from these other examples, we should stop short of collapsing the Somaliland Social Covenant into a homologous typology of covenants, as, in many ways, it is an outlier. First, unlike these divinely-inspired covenants, the Somaliland Covenant lacks a supreme historical mission alongside its lack of supreme authority, and instead operates within much of everyday consciousness as a practical governmental compromise. This is evidenced by the modest ambition expressed by those founders of the Somaliland experiment, who, shorn of ideology or even a sense of the inevitability of secession, merely desired 'to create something that is worthwhile' (Interview #134; Interview #217; Interview #23). Furthermore, while the relations sustaining the Somaliland Covenant have maintained considerable autonomy from State control, what we find amongst the Zionists and Afrikaners is the covenant raised to the level of territorialised, nationalised, militarised State project, creating imperatives to purify land and population not present in the Somaliland context. Finally, and most importantly, whereas the Zionist and Afrikaner covenants are more than anything else metaphors used at the level of ideology to unite a population behind a common national-political mission, the Somaliland Covenant is the opposite: it is the practical, subterranean structure of organised power relations which keeps the Somaliland people united despite the absence of unifying narrative. As such, there are ameliorative limits to the externalisation, subordination and elimination of 'the other' within the Somaliland case.

8.4 Can the State and the Social Covenant coexist? Dual systems and the 'Conditional State'

What [is it that] they [the state] could do? All they could do is they have the coercive power. When the elders decide whom to arrest, it is the government who will arrest them. But they have to be certified by the elders. But if a soldier goes [in] with technicals, then they will all resist...[If the state says] "Arrest this man!", they will fight back. It is [a matter of] honour and dignity to defend their man. So, you augment the two things, [they] work together. The elders don't have a coercive police force—even the suldaans don't. So, you need [the state]. (Interview #220)

As argued in Chapter 7 and demonstrated throughout this study, there are moments where actors operating in the Covenantal and the State systems, respectively, not only coexist in humdrum congruity, but even actively collaborate in pursuit of overlapping interests. Nowhere is this more evident than in matters of inter-clan conflict resolution, as demonstrated concretely with regard to El Af-weyn, and described as a more general practice above. Indeed, in theory, it would be reasonable to surmise that while the logics of the State and the Covenant oppose each other, such clashes between, say, verticality and horizontality need not destabilise the social equilibrium, but rather could produce an equilibrium of their own. While the Somaliland State has often sought to tame, exploit and dismantle features of the Covenant, such as the customary actors it relies on, this outcome is not predestined; under different circumstances, a balance might be struck. In this final section of the study, I explore what that might look like.

One possible means of securing the balance of Statist and Covenantal logics would be to institutionalise these parallel systems, which have thus far evolved together in an ad hoc and reactive manner, into a deliberate dual systems model. This should not be confused with a hybrid political order, a project of formalising institutional plurality, which is already well appreciated within the African politics literature, and already exists within Somaliland's State structures. Rather, it would involve creating the conditions for the Social Covenant model to flourish alongside the State, through appreciating, protecting and building upon its explicitly horizontal, conditional and intimate logics. Some practical interventions might involve supporting the transmission of traditional leadership skills and wisdoms to a new generation of activists and intellectuals (rather than merely focusing on reforms to institutionalised elders, such as the proposed election of *Guurti* members [Fadal 2018]), as well as establishing clearer consensus around where the State should and should not intervene in society, something possibly achievable through constitutional reforms and a subsequent referendum.

To harken back to the critique of institutionalist responses to Statist overreach in Chapter 2, this dual systems approach, while appealing in theory, has its limits. If the current tendency of the State to crowd out the operation of the Social Covenant has been created by its growing power vis-à-vis clan constituencies, then this power imbalance needs to be addressed first, and a long-term solution must be found to help mitigate against concentrations of power in the future. Simply granting formal protections to a Social Covenant sphere without enhancing its power to limit the State's colonisation of its political

territory will likely not be enough. What is required is a new understanding of what the State is, that makes it a practical appendage or tool of the political system, rather than a valorised personification of political agency and authority, as the current 'sovereign' State purports itself to be.

For this, we can find inspiration from existing dynamics in how the State relates to the Social Covenant. As this study has already demonstrated on several occasions, during times of conflict, when the State finds itself forced to step back in the name of achieving peace, it does not retreat fully, but merely concedes leadership, authority and power to local mediators, and takes on the role of technical implementing agent, using its financial resources, organisational capacity and coercive potential to carry out what all parties have agreed to. Here, the Somaliland State is treated less as a permanent and unconditional purveyor of security, but instead more of a 'break-in-case-of-emergency' force that is awakened and activated during times of crisis to play a partial and subordinate role in solving conflict. In these cases, the immediate and specific actions of the State are *conditional upon* prior assent by the constitutive parties of the Covenant, with the ability of the State to perform its mandated functions dependent upon the voluntary consent of various clan actors with disruptive capabilities, to whom the State must make concessions in return for compliance. To make this work, developing the State would cease to entail *strengthening* the State above all else, but would instead prioritise *equipping* the State.

Such a 'conditional State' is only possible where its survival, functionality and legitimacy are derived primarily from its domestic constituencies as a whole, rather than from outside or from reliance on powerful majorities or elite powerbrokers. As an unrecognised State forced to prove itself as territorially expansive, all-encompassing and coherent, Somaliland's claims to political viability as independently self-governing have largely been predicated on buy-in from all its constituent parts, meaning that, in a polity where clan settlement aligns with regional geographic divisions (i.e., each clan has their own associated territory, or *deegaan*), affirmation from non-*Isaaq* clans is a precondition of State viability. As one former minister from the *Isaaq* summarised it, in a discussion of the present-day threat of internal division on the prospects for international recognition: 'without those two [West and East] we cannot succeed, without reconciling with them. Because it will give you the purpose. Otherwise, what can you claim, if they are not with you?' (Interview #297).

One side-effect of this idea is that it places limits on the power of a majoritarian government of the *Isaaq*, as the more disproportionate the power balance between central and peripheral clans, the greater the illegitimacy of the entire project—and, with the dissipation of the legitimacy of the Somaliland project, so too vanishes the power and wealth which are being fought over, given how tied Somaliland's political economy is to its international legitimacy (Interview #170; Richards 2014, 11-5). As documented in Chapter 4, Somaliland's peripheral clans recognise and exploit this, as demonstrated by the *Gadabuursi*'s threat to boycott the upcoming parliamentary elections as a bloc. That such a boycott is related to a conditional view of State authority is summed up in the words of one elder from Borama, for whom: 'The only reason that the president can exist is to bring the people, Somaliland's elders and tribes to the peace table' (Interview #291). Even national ministers, to the extent that they derive their authority equally from their role as clan representatives, find their legitimacy and efficacy based on prior consent and endorsement, as, 'without a universal agreement between the involved members [of one's clan], he cannot take an action, a decision, of his own', and might instead be disowned as a 'traitor' or stooge (Interview #99).

To make these conditional dynamics of the State the norm rather than the exception would not spell the end of organised governance, or of agreed rules and means of coercion. Instead, it would entail merely their divorce from sites of major political decision-making, so as to grant intimate forms of negotiation and consensus-making space to operate more freely. As Bookchin (1978) argues, 'spontaneity does not preclude organisation and structure. To the contrary, spontaneity ordinarily yields non-hierarchical forms of organisation, forms that are truly organic, self-created, and based on voluntarism'. Thought of in more philosophical terms, this would involve turning means and ends on their head: no longer would it be the State organising society as a means towards its ends (of national security, State survival and/or the sanctity of the body politic), but society domesticating the state as an instrumental means towards its self-determined ends. In sum, it would enable the true promise of the Covenant to be realised, in which the political artifice works to 'bind' a community in 'reciprocal connection', rather than replace it (Brody 2018, 102).

List of Interviewees

No.	Date	Description of Interviewee	In-text citation
1	25 September 2018	Civil servant, Ministry of National Planning	Interview #1
2	26 September 2018	Human rights activist	Interview #2
3	27 September 2018	Civil society professional/journalist	Interview #3
4	27 September 2018	Civil servant, Ministry of Constitutional Affairs	Interview #4
5	28 September 2018	Former vice president	Interview #5
6	29 September 2018	Diplomat, Africa	Interview #6
7	29 September 2018	Intellectual and party activist	Interview #7
8	1 October 2018	Opposition party senior official	Interview #8
9	2 October 2018	Consultant, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Interview #9
10	2 October 2018	Civil society professional	Interview #10
11	3 October 2018	Civil society professional/businessman	Interview #11
12	6 October 2018	Journalist	Interview #12
13	6 October 2018	Civil society organisation director	Interview #13
14	7 October 2018	Civil servant, independent commission	Interview #14
15	7 October 2018	Lecturer at university	Interview #15
16	7 October 2018	Activist, social affairs	Interview #16
17	13 October 2018	Consultant, private consultancy	Interview #17
18	13 October 2018	Youth male	Interview #18
19	14 October 2018	Elder	Interview #19
20	14 October 2018	Journalist	Interview #20
21	14 October 2018	Intellectual/former opposition party official	Interview #21
22	15 October 2018	Diplomat, trade attaché	Interview #22
23	16 October 2018	Intellectual/former activist	Interview #23
24	17 October 2018	Diplomat, Europe	Interview #24
25	17 October 2018	Former minister/former diplomat, Africa	Interview #25
26	20 October 2018	Opposition party senior official	Interview #26

27	21 October 2018	Former minister/former civil society professional	Interview #27
28	23 October 2018	Senior civil servant, Ministry of Interior	Interview #28
29	23 October 2018	Three local activist youth	Interview #29
30	28 October 2018	Businessman	Interview #30
31	28 October 2018	Parliamentarian	Interview #31
32	29 October 2018	Parliamentarian	Interview #32
33	30 October 2018	Youth activist, female empowerment	Interview #33
34	30 October 2018	Group of activists, social affairs	Interview #34
35	31 October 2018	Group of elders	Interview #35
36	1 November 2018	Consultant, security sector	Interview #36
37	1 November 2018	Lawyer	Interview #37
38	2 November 2018	Former minister	Interview #38
39	3 November 2018	Journalist	Interview #39
40	4 November 2018	Minister	Interview #40
41	5 November 2018	Group of activists, local issues	Interview #41
42	5 November 2018	Parliamentarian	Interview #42
43	7 November 2018	Former minister*	Interview #43
44	19 November 2018	Group of activists, local issues	Interview #44
45	21 November 2018	Former civil servant, Ministry of Civil Aviation	Interview #45
46	24 November 2018	Former minister, former civil society professional	Interview #46
47	25 November 2018	Businessman	Interview #47
48	25 November 2018	Opposition party senior official	Interview #48
49	26 November 2018	Former SNM officer	Interview #49
50	27 November 2018	Former minister	Interview #50
51	28 November 2018	Youth form eastern regions	Interview #51
52	29 November 2018	Elder, eastern regions	Interview #52
53	4 December 2018	Senior civil servant, independent commission	Interview #53
54	4 December 2018	International NGO officer	Interview #54
55	4 December 2018	Former senior civil servant, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Interview #55
56	5 December 2018	Parliamentarian	Interview #56
57	5 December 2018	Former Governor	Interview #57
58	6 December 2018	Civil society senior professional, human rights	Interview #58

59	7 December 2018	Consultant, security sector	Interview #59
60	9 December 2018	Intellectual, former mayor	Interview #60
61	11 December 2018	Former opposition party senior official, international NGO officer	Interview #61
62	12 December 2018	Government official	Interview #62
63	7 January 2019	Parliamentarian	Interview #63
64	7 January 2019	Local rights activist	Interview #64
65	8 January 2019	Group of *Guurti* members	Interview #65
66	10 January 2019	Former minister	Interview #66
67	13 January 2019	Lecturer at university	Interview #67
68	13 January 2019	Former mayor	Interview #68
69	13 January 2019	Opposition party senior official	Interview #69
70	15 January 2019	Parliamentarian	Interview #70
71	15 January 2019	Former SNM senior official	Interview #71
72	17 January 2019	Businessman	Interview #72
73	19 January 2019	Opposition party politician	Interview #73
74	19 January 2019	Intellectual/Former SNM senior official	Interview #74
75	20 January 2019	Community security guard	Interview #75
76	20 January 2019	*Boqor*	Interview #76
77	22 January 2019	Civil society professional, human rights	Interview #77
78	23 January 2019	SNM veteran	Interview #78
79	24 January 2019	Writer	Interview #79
80	24 January 2019	Lawyer	Interview #80
81	26 January 2019	Kulmiye politician	Interview #81
82	26 January 2019	Journalist	Interview #82
83	26 January 2019	Community security guard	Interview #83
84	27 January 2019	Chairman of independent commission	Interview #84
85	27 January 2019	SNM veteran	Interview #85
86	29 January 2019	Human rights activist, female empowerment	Interview #86
87	29 January 2019	*Suldaan*	Interview #87
88	31 January 2019	*Caaqil*	Interview #88
89	31 January 2019	Poet	Interview #89
90	4 February 2019	Journalist/political activist	Interview #90
91	4 February 2019	Civil servant, independent commission	Interview #91
92	5 February 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #92
93	5 February 2019	Youth from eastern regions	Interview #93
94	6 February 2019	Civil society professional, peacebuilding	Interview #94
95	7 February 2019	*Caaqil*	Interview #95
96	10 February 2019	Local councillor, Burco	Interview #96

97	12 February 2019	Senior civil servant, Ministry of Constitutional Affairs	Interview #97
98	12 February 2019	Civil society professional, peacebuilding	Interview #98
99	13 February 2019	Intellectual/author	Interview #99
100	13 February 2019	Media outlet owner	Interview #100
101	14 February 2019	Former teacher	Interview #101
102	14 February 2019	Former minister*	Interview #102
103	16 February 2019	Civil servant, Ministry of Interior	Interview #103
104	17 February 2019	*Boqor*	Interview #104
105	18 February 2019	Former minister/opposition party senior official	Interview #105
106	20 February 2019	Youth male	Interview #106
107	23 February 2019	Lawyer	Interview #107
108	23 February 2019	Ruling party senior official	Interview #108
109	24 February 2019	*Guurti* member	Interview #109
110	25 February 2019	Elder	Interview #110
111	25 February 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #111
112	26 February 2019	Journalist	Interview #112
113	2 March 2019	Civil society professional, human rights	Interview #113
114	2 March 2019	Opposition party senior official	Interview #114
115	3 March 2019	Former civil society professional, peacebuilding/International NGO officer	Interview #115
116	3 March 2019	Intellectual/ruling party activist	Interview #116
117	4 March 2019	Civil society professional, peacebuilding	Interview #117
118	6 March 2019	Civil society professional, social affairs	Interview #118
119	23 March 2019	Doctor, female empowerment activist	Interview #119
120	23 March 2019	*Guurti* member	Interview #120
121	25 March 2019	Lawyer	Interview #121
122	26 March 2019	Group of youth males	Interview #122
123	27 March 2019	Political commentator	Interview #123
124	28 March 2019	Lecturer at university	Interview #124
125	2 April 2019	Youth male*	Interview #125
126	4 April 2019	*Boqor*	Interview #126
127	6 April 2019	Businessman	Interview #127
128	6 April 2019	Opposition party officer, women's wing	Interview #128
129	7 April 2019	Journalist	Interview #129
130	7 April 2019	Youth male	Interview #130
131	8 April 2019	*Suldaan*	Interview #131
132	9 April 2019	Security sector advisor, government	Interview #132

133	11 April 2019	Elder	Interview #133
134	13 April 2019	Intellectual/scholar	Interview #134
135	13 April 2019	Senior civil servant, Ministry of Interior	Interview #135
136	14 April 2019	Parliamentarian	Interview #136
137	15 April 2019	*Guurti* member	Interview #137
138	15 April 2019	*Guurti* member	Interview #138
139	15 April 2019	Pan-Somali politician/intellectual	Interview #139
140	16 April 2019	*Suldaan*	Interview #140
141	16 April 2019	Civil servant, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Interview #141
142	20 April 2019	Parliamentarian	Interview #142
143	20 April 2019	Youth male	Interview #143
144	21 April 2019	Civil society professional, governance	Interview #144
145	21 April 2019	Former SNM officer	Interview #145
146	22 April 2019	Civil Servant, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Interview #146
147	22 April 2019	Former minister/ presidential advisor	Interview #147
148	22 April 2019	Senior justice sector official	Interview #148
149	23 April 2019	Parliamentarian	Interview #149
150	25 April 2019	Parliamentarian	Interview #150
151	27 April 2019	*Suldaan*	Interview #151
152	27 April 2019	Writer	Interview #152
153	28 April 2019	*Suldaan*	Interview #153
154	28 April 2019	Diplomat, Middle East	Interview #154
155	28 April 2019	Civil society professional, female empowerment	Interview #155
156	29 April 2019	Group of elders	Interview #156
157	29 April 2019	Civil society professional, human rights*	Interview #157
158	30 April 2019	Trade consultant, government	Interview #158
159	30 April 2019	*Suldaan*	Interview #159
160	12 May 2019	Civil society activist	Interview #160
161	14 May 2019	Businessman	Interview #161
162	14 May 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #162
163	14 May 2019	Diaspora businessman	Interview #163
164	16 May 2019	Minister	Interview #164
165	16 May 2019	Parliamentarian	Interview #165
166	20 May 2019	Lawyer*	Interview #166
167	21 May 2019	Political Commentator	Interview #167
168	22 May 2019	Civil servant, Ministry of Interior	Interview #168
169	23 May 2019	Civil society professional, human rights	Interview #169
170	23 May 2019	Opposition party senior official	Interview #170
171	25 May 2019	District commissioner/lawyer	Interview #171
172	26 May 2019	Youth male	Interview #172

173	26 May 2019	Civil society activist, youth and women's affairs	Interview #173
174	28 May 2019	Businessman	Interview #174
175	29 May 2019	Doctor/activist	Interview #175
176	29 May 2019	Intellectual/author	Interview #176
177	8 June 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #177
178	8 June 2019	Politician from eastern regions	Interview #178
179	9 June 2019	Two diaspora businesswomen	Interview #179
180	9 June 2019	Youth male	Interview #180
181	9 June 2019	Opposition party politician	Interview #181
182	10 June 2019	Administrator at university	Interview #182
183	10 June 2019	Businessman/civil society professional	Interview #183
184	27 June 2019	Pan-Somali student	Interview #184
185	29 June 2019	Opposition party official, youth wing	Interview #185
186	29 June 2019	Activist, Somaliland independence	Interview #186
187	30 June 2019	Senior civil servant, justice sector	Interview #187
188	30 June 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #188
189	30 June 2019	Group of activists, social affairs	Interview #189
190	1 July 2019	Opposition party senior official	Interview #190
191	1 July 2019	Senior civil servant, Ministry of Water	Interview #191
192	1 July 2019	Activist, female empowerment	Interview #192
193	2 July 2019	Journalist	Interview #193
194	2 July 2019	Chairman of civil society organisation, governance	Interview #194
195	3 July 2019	Political commentator	Interview #195
196	3 July 2019	Political commentator	Interview #196
197	3 July 2019	International NGO officer	Interview #197
198	4 July 2019	Senior official justice sector*	Interview #198
199	4 July 2019	Two elders	Interview #199
200	4 July 2019	Activist, youth empowerment	Interview #200
201	6 July 2019	Administrator at university	Interview #201
202	6 July 2019	Minister	Interview #202
203	6 July 2019	Journalist	Interview #203
204	7 July 2019	Caaqil	Interview #204
205	7 July 2019	Former Vice President*	Interview #205
206	8 July 2019	Journalist	Interview #206
207	8 July 2019	Caaqil	Interview #207
208	8 July 2019	Boqor	Interview #208
209	9 July 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #209
210	9 July 2019	Group of youth	Interview #210
211	10 July 2019	Former diplomat, Africa/Intellectual	Interview #211
212	10 July 2019	Civil Servant, Ministry of Interior	Interview #212
213	11 July 2019	Former minister/former SNM official	Interview #213

214	11 July 2019	Politician	Interview #214
215	11 July 2019	Chairman of civil society organisation, governance*	Interview #215
216	12 July 2019	Director at research organisation, peacebuilding	Interview #216
217	14 July 2019	Pan-Somali politician/intellectual	Interview #217
218	14 July 2019	Opposition party politician	Interview #218
219	16 July 2019	Diaspora commentator	Interview #219
220	16 July 2019	Opposition party senior official	Interview #220
221	17 July 2019	Media outlet director	Interview #221
222	17 July 2019	International NGO officer	Interview #222
223	17 July 2019	Soldier	Interview #223
224	18 July 2019	International NGO officer	Interview #224
225	18 July 2019	Deputy minister	Interview #225
226	18 July 2019	Former diplomat, Africa	Interview #226
227	21 July 2019	Former SNM officer	Interview #227
228	21 July 2019	Student female	Interview #228
229	22 July 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #229
230	23 July 2019	Opposition party politician, youth wing	Interview #230
231	23 July 2019	*Boqor**	Interview #231
232	23 July 2019	*Suldaan*	Interview #232
233	24 July 2019	Diaspora consultant, economic development	Interview #233
234	24 July 2019	Religious scholar	Interview #234
235	24 July 2019	*Caaqil*	Interview #235
236	24 July 2019	Student male	Interview #236
237	25 July 2019	Political commentator	Interview #237
238	27 July 2019	Youth from El Af-weyn	Interview #238
239	27 July 2019	Businessman	Interview #239
240	28 July 2019	*Suldaan* (phone conversation)	Interview #240
241	28 July 2019	*Caaqil*	Interview #241
242	28 July 2019	Civil servant	Interview #242
243	29 July 2019	Youth male	Interview #243
244	29 July 2019	Youth female	Interview #244
245	30 July 2019	International NGO officer	Interview #245
246	30 July 2019	Former National Electoral Commissioner	Interview #246
247	30 July 2019	Gadabuursi peacemaker	Interview #247
248	30 July 2019	Youth commentator	Interview #248
249	31 July 2019	Civil Society professional, governance	Interview #249
250	31 July 2019	Former minister/opposition party senior official	Interview #250
251	31 July 2019	Consultant, Ministry of Education	Interview #251
252	1 August 2019	Foreign security analyst	Interview #252
253	3 August 2019	Politician	Interview #253

254	4 August 2019	International NGO officer, peace researcher	Interview #254
255	4 August 2019	International NGO officer, peace researcher	Interview #255
256	5 August 2019	Ruling party politician	Interview #256
257	5 August 2019	Doctor	Interview #257
258	6 August 2019	Opposition party official	Interview #258
259	6 August 2019	Former governor	Interview #259
260	7 August 2019	Pan-Somali politician/intellectual*	Interview #260
261	8 August 2019	Intellectual/former opposition party official	Interview #261
262	8 August 2019	Former presidential spokesperson	Interview #262
263	9 August 2019	Former minister	Interview #263
264	10 August 2019	Youth commentator*	Interview #264
265	14 August 2019	Minister	Interview #265
266	16 August 2019	Opposition party senior official*	Interview #266
267	17 August 2019	Former minister	Interview #267
268	17 August 2019	Intellectual (Borama)	Interview #268
269	21 August 2019	Group of three female journalists (Borama)	Interview #269
270	21 August 2019	Former mayor (Borama)	Interview #270
271	21 August 2019	Local activist (Borama)	Interview #271
272	21 August 2019	Former aid worker (Borama)	Interview #272
273	22 August 2019	President of university (Borama)	Interview #273
274	22 August 2019	Youth political activist (Borama)	Interview #274
275	22 August 2019	Businessman and academic (Borama)	Interview #275
276	22 August 2019	Ruling party activist (Borama)	Interview #276
277	24 August 2019	Opposition party politician (Borama)	Interview #277
278	24 August 2019	*Suldaan* (Borama)	Interview #278
279	24 August 2019	Lecturer at university (Borama)	Interview #279
280	24 August 2019	Youth male (Borama)	Interview #280
281	25 August 2019	Former Minister (Borama)	Interview #281
282	25 August 2019	Student (Borama)	Interview #282
283	25 August 2019	Ruling party official (Borama)	Interview #283
284	26 August 2019	Local councillor (Borama)	Interview #284
285	26 August 2019	Elder/businessman (Borama)	Interview #285
286	26 August 2019	Pan-Somali student (Borama)	Interview #286
287	26 August 2019	Group of three youth males (Borama)	Interview #287
288	27 August 2019	Parliamentarian* (Borama)	Interview #288
289	27 August 2019	Civil society activist (Borama)	Interview #289
290	27 August 2019	Elder (Borama)	Interview #290
291	27 August 2019	Elder (Borama)	Interview #291
292	27 August 2019	Two youth males (Borama)	Interview #292
293	1 September 2019	Political Commentator	Interview #293

294	1 September 2019	Diaspora youth	Interview #294
295	2 September 2019	Elder	Interview #295
296	3 September 2019	*Guurti* member	Interview #296
297	4 September 2019	Former minister*	Interview #297
298	4 September 2019	Intellectual/President of university	Interview #298
299	29 March 2021	Independent peace researcher (phone conversation)	Interview #299

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