THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

One Nation, Two Paths:

Colonial Legacies and the Divergent Statehoods of Somalia and Somaliland

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates how late British colonial governance in Somaliland shaped the region's relative post-independence stability. In contrast to Somalia's state collapse and prolonged insecurity, Somaliland has developed a functioning, albeit unrecognized, state since its declaration of independence in 1991, with limited international aid. Drawing on extensive archival research conducted at the British National Archives, this study examines how colonial administrative practices, particularly the establishment of Advisory, Executive, and Local Government Councils between 1946 and 1960, introduced hybrid structures of governance that blended centralized colonial control with selective local participation. Drawing on extensive archival research, the study challenges existing literature by arguing that British colonial governance in Somaliland was neither wholly indirect and benevolent nor purely authoritarian, but rather a hybrid model that leaned more toward direct rule.

While these reforms were embedded in a paternalistic framework and fell short of granting genuine autonomy, they offered a formative space for Somali political apprenticeship, inter-clan negotiation, and administrative experience. By incorporating clan elders and educated elites into local councils, the British colonial state laid a foundation for Somaliland's grassroots, locally driven peacebuilding process after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. The thesis argues that these late colonial institutions, not simply post-1991 initiatives, help explain Somaliland's ability to forge stability from fragmentation. Employing a historical institutionalist approach, the research challenges binary classifications of British indirect rule and instead conceptualizes Somaliland's colonial governance as a hybrid system that maintained centralized authority while seeding localized political capacity. It concludes that Somaliland's relative stability cannot be understood apart from its colonial past, which, though exclusionary and top-down in design, fostered localized political experience and institutional mechanisms that brought dispersed clans into dialogue and promoted collective governance.

Keywords: Somaliland, Somalia, colonial legacy, state failure, state formation ,

peacebuilding, historical institutionalism

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction:

Somalia is a country of two distinct realities, the internationally recognized federal republic of Somalia and the unrecognised self-declared Republic of Somaliland. Somalia and Somaliland are both located in Eastern Africa, specifically in the Horn of Africa region. Somalia is situated along the Eastern Coast of Africa, while Somaliland is located in the northern part of Somalia (Ibrahim 2015; Ferragamo and Klobucista 2024). Although Somalis share a common ancestry, they did not form a unified state prior to colonialism. Instead, political identity and organization were rooted in kinship ties, with governance structured around clan affiliations. The Somali population was traditionally divided into six major clan families: Dir, Isaaq, Darod, Hawiye, Digil, and Rahanweyn. Like many other African regions, Somalia fell victim to colonial partition in 1885. Its territory, once governed by clans, was divided among European powers: Britain took control of the north, Italy occupied the south, and France claimed the area now known as Djibouti (formerly French Somaliland) (Atalay 2019, 88).

The British controlled British Somaliland, located in the northwestern part of present-day Somalia (Somaliland), from 1884 to 1960. The Italians ruled Italian Somaliland, which comprised the southern and central regions of present-day Somalia, from 1889 to 1941 and again from 1950 to 1960 as the Trust Territory of Somaliland under Italian administration (McPherson-Smith 2021). Italian Somaliland was governed temporarily by the British Military Administration from 1941 to 1950, following the defeat of Italian forces in World War II (Urbano 2016). Although Somalia and Somaliland share a history of colonialism, the nature of their colonial administrations was different. British Somaliland's colonial rule was

nominally extractive, governed with minimal intervention focusing on trade, and denying rival empires control, while Italian Somaliland's rule was intensively extractive, and its violent colonization aimed at establishing a plantation economy (McPherson-Smith 2021; Renders 2012).

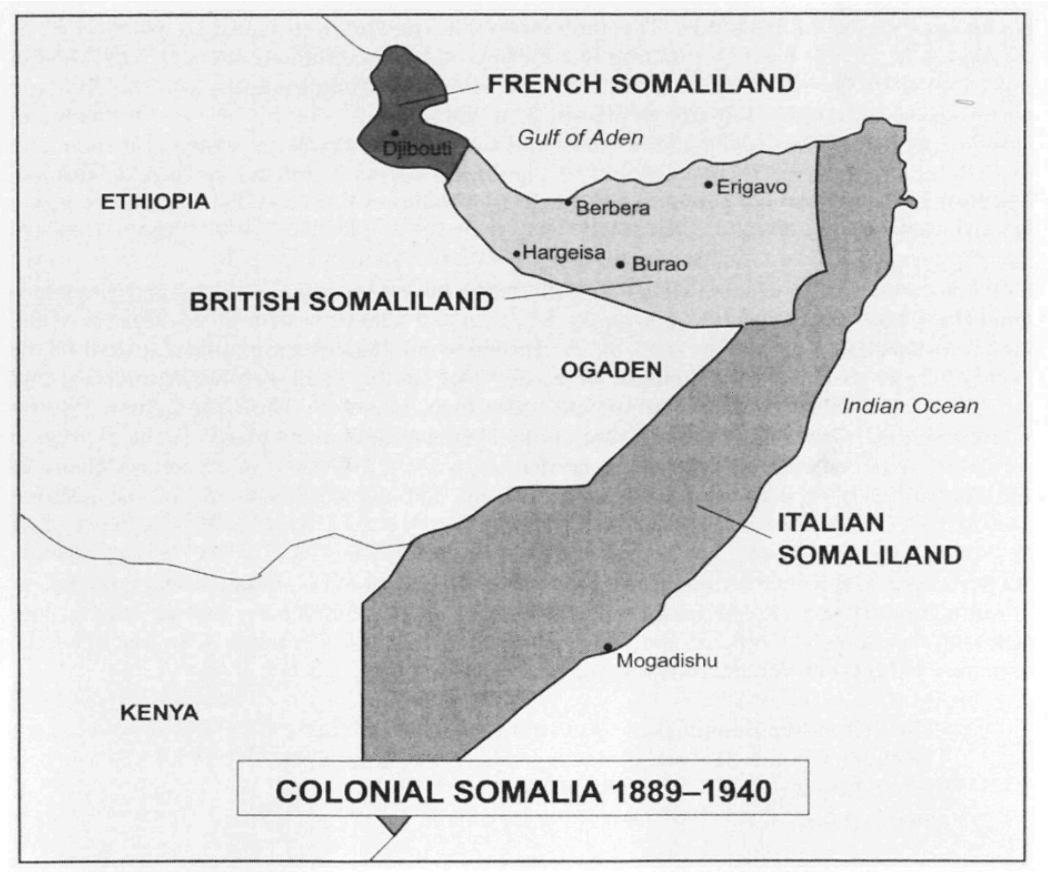

Figure 1: Map of British, Italian and French Somaliland, 1889–1940.
Source: Ricciuti, Edward R., *Somalia: A Crisis of Famine and War* (1995), 14, as cited in Mohamoud, *State Collapse and Post-Conflict Development in Africa: The Case of Somalia (1960–2001)*, 2002.

Figure 2: Map of Somalia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland, 2025. Puntland is a region that declared itself "autonomous" in 1998.
Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica 2024.

However, despite their independence and unification of British and Italian Somaliland on July 1st 1960, the central government of Somalia collapsed in 1991 after a brutal civil war (1988-1991) which claimed more than three hundred thousand dead and wounded and displaced about four fifths of its population (Issa-Salwe 1996). The civil war and the collapse of the Somalia state have their roots in 1969, when Major General Siyad Barre led a bloodless coup to overthrow the ruling democratic government, establishing an oppressive military dictatorship (Ali 2019, 27). The civil war is also widely seen as a result of colonial legacy of partition, neoliberal agendas, clan differences, competition for resources or power and availability of weapons, elite manipulation, ancient clan rivalry and antagonism,

economic crisis in the 1980s, the statebuilding and modernization process (Mudane 2018, 42).

After the collapse, Somaliland declared independence, claimed the borders of the former British Somaliland Protectorate and both regions embarked in different directions for the search for peace and stability. Although citizens in both regions shared a common language, culture, ethnicity, and religion, their post-conflict trajectories diverged sharply. Somalia descended into state collapse, anarchy, and lawlessness, while Somaliland preserved peace and stability for over twenty-five years after restoring its sovereignty, despite limited international aid and a lack of political recognition (Njeri 2019; Abdi Sh. Ahmed 2011).

During the 1990s, Somaliland, unlike Somalia, was largely ignored by foreign donors, lenders, development agencies, arms suppliers, and military actors. The United States and the United Nations spent $4 billion on military and peacebuilding operations in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, while billions more in food aid were directed toward famine relief in southern Somalia. In contrast, Somaliland's civil wars received no foreign military or diplomatic intervention, and external financial support for its peace process was minimal. Between 1991 and 1997, Somaliland received only about $100,000 in international funding, primarily for the 1993 Boorama Conference, funded by one Swedish and one American organization. This amount represents only about 0.0025% of what Somalia received. The absence of international involvement has since been reframed by Somalilanders as a source of self-reliance and a foundation for the resilience of their locally driven peace (Phillips 2020, 15). Therefore, Somaliland emerged as a model of stable governance and bottom-up, hybrid peacebuilding, demonstrating that externally driven, liberal-democratic state-building is not the only path to establishing social order.

1.1 Research Questions:

My thesis explores why Somaliland and Somalia followed divergent political trajectories after independence, with a particular focus on the legacy and role of colonial governance in Somaliland. It examines how the legacy of British colonial institutions could have shaped Somaliland's relatively successful peacebuilding process outcomes. The analysis centers on British Somaliland due to the extensive archival material that I collected and also due to page constraints. Italian Somaliland serves as a comparative reference point, discussed more briefly. By investigating the institutional and administrative legacies of British Somaliland, this study challenges simplistic narratives that characterize British colonialism as inherently more indirect, "benevolent" or effective than its Italian counterpart. It argues that the long-term impact of colonial rule on state formation is more complex and context-specific than often assumed. In particular, the thesis asks: How did British colonial governance in Somaliland combine elements of both direct and indirect rule, and what roles did traditional authorities and local elites play within this hybrid system? Also, how might these colonial structures have shaped Somaliland's more successful post-independence state-building trajectory?

1.2 Thesis Argument:

While British colonial rule in Somaliland is often portrayed as benevolent and grounded in indirect governance through traditional Somali structures and clan elders, with minimal intervention (McPherson-Smith 2021, 203, 210; Touval 1963, 52; Simmons 2014, 11; Heinze 2021;Lalos 2011), other scholars argue it was in fact a form of direct, authoritarian and despotic rule, with concentrated power in the hands of colonial officials (Millman 2014, 268). This thesis reconciles these opposing views by arguing that British rule in Somaliland was neither wholly benevolent nor overtly despotic, but rather a hybrid system. It leaned more

toward direct rule, yet incorporated selective elements of indirect governance that provided important, though limited, opportunities for local political experience.

Archival evidence reveals a paternalistic system of control in which British officials held primary decision-making power while Somali participation was restricted to a small, educated elite within institutions such as the Executive, Legislative, and Local Government Councils. These bodies were structured to preserve British oversight through official majorities and veto powers (CO 1015/1374). Nevertheless, these reforms, though limited and highly controlled, enabled some Somali elites to gain exposure to administration, negotiation, and representative politics. They brought together diverse and previously isolated clans from distant regions, many of whom had never previously interacted politically and introduced a formalized space for inter-clan negotiation. The late colonial period also witnessed the formation of the first Somali political parties, marking a significant step in the development of representative politics (CO 830/27; Mohamoud 2002, 73).

Following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, former Somali National Movement (SNM) leaders and clan elders led a grassroots peace process that culminated in Somaliland's declaration of independence, the formation of a hybrid negotiated state, and the adoption of a constitution in 2001. This hybrid system blends modern state institutions with traditional clan-based structures, enabling a model of governance rooted in local legitimacy and compromise (Kitungu 2019, 28–29; Renders 2012, 115). British colonial rule, though centralized and paternalistic, may have inadvertently laid the groundwork for this outcome. By bringing together previously disconnected clans through councils such as the Town, Advisory, Executive, and Legislative Councils, the British fostered early experiences of inter-clan dialogue, political negotiation, and limited administrative participation. These historical precedents equipped post-1991 local actors with the institutional familiarity and

political tools necessary to navigate compromise, representation and power-sharing within a negotiated, indigenous political framework.

1.3 Significance:

This research offers a critical reassessment of colonial legacies in state formation by advancing a nuanced understanding of British rule in Somaliland as a hybrid system-one that leaned toward direct, paternalistic control but incorporated selective elements of indirect governance. By moving beyond the binary of benevolent indirect rule versus authoritarian despotism, this study demonstrates how the British administration's combination of centralized authority and limited local participation created early, if constrained, opportunities for Somali elites to engage in political negotiation, inter-clan dialogue, and representative politics (McPherson-Smith 2021; Touval 1963; Millman 2014; CO 1015/1374; CO 830/27; Mohamoud 2002).

The significance of this research lies in tracing how these colonial-era councils and administrative experiences-though tightly controlled-brought together diverse clans and fostered the skills and institutional familiarity necessary for later collaboration. This historical groundwork proved crucial after 1991, when former SNM leaders and elders, drawing on both colonial administrative experience and traditional authority, led a grassroots peace process that culminated in Somaliland's hybrid negotiated state and constitution (Kitungu 2019; Renders 2012). By situating Somaliland's relative stability in the context of its unique colonial and post-colonial trajectory, this study challenges dominant international development narratives that privilege externally led state-building over indigenous models. It highlights the enduring influence of colonial administrative frameworks-both their limitations and their unintended contributions to local capacity for negotiation and governance. This approach enriches theoretical debates on state failure, institutional persistence, and

peacebuilding by demonstrating that the roots of resilience or fragility are deeply embedded in historical institutional design.

For scholars of African politics, post-colonial studies, and international peacebuilding, this research underscores the importance of early political experience and hybrid governance structures in shaping long-term outcomes. It calls for a reassessment of colonial legacies, showing that even paternalistic and centralized systems can, under certain conditions, foster the skills and networks that later enable indigenous, negotiated state-building. For policymakers and practitioners, the study advocates for historically informed interventions that support local institutions and political realities, rather than imposing external models ill-suited to context. Ultimately, by reevaluating the hybrid legacy of British colonial rule in Somaliland, this research contributes to broader debates on decolonization, governance, and the foundations of sustainable peace in post-colonial states

1.4 Scope and Limitations:

This study focuses primarily on the period from 1945 to 1960, a critical phase of institutional development and native administration reforms in British Somaliland. While this temporal scope allows for a detailed examination of late colonial governance, it limits analysis of earlier colonial policies or post-independence dynamics that might further contextualize Somaliland's trajectory.

Conceptually, the research confronts the methodological challenge of establishing direct causal links between colonial-era experiences and Somaliland's post-1991 peacebuilding success. While archival evidence highlights colonial councils as early spaces for inter-clan negotiation (CO 1015/1374), it is difficult to conclusively prove that these might have directly enabled later grassroots peacebuilding processes. Other factors, such as the legacy of

the Somali National Movement (SNM), the nature of the civil war, regional dynamics, and international disengagement, also played significant roles in Somaliland's post-conflict trajectory. Additionally, the selective nature of colonial records may overstate institutional coherence while underrepresenting clan agency. British documents emphasize formal councils and elite participation but offer limited insight into how these experiences were perceived or adapted by Somalis themselves. Post-1991 peacebuilding drew heavily on indigenous practices, such as the Guurti system, which evolved independently of colonial frameworks (Renders 2012, 100).

Another limitation of this analysis is that it is based on a limited set of archival materials accessed during a short research trip. Due to time constraints, I was unable to review or access a broader range of potentially relevant documents, many of which remain uncatalogued or inaccessible. A further limitation relates to the availability of archival material on Italian Somaliland. As my field research was conducted in the British Isles, archival access was largely limited to sources on British Somaliland. Consequently, my analysis of Italian colonial administration is based predominantly on secondary literature and is very limited. Given the constraints of time and access, I prioritized gathering as much material as possible on British Somaliland to ensure a robust foundation for that case study.

1.5 Literature Review:

1.5.1 Direct and Indirect Rule:

Scholars have long distinguished between direct and indirect rule as two primary modes of imperial governance. According to Doyle (1986), direct rule involves centralized administration by colonial authorities, often accompanied by annexation, governance by European officials, and the use of metropolitan troops to enforce order. This approach was

common in so-called “tribal peripheries,” where no stable indigenous elite could be co-opted. In such settings, colonial powers imposed new bureaucratic institutions and legal systems aimed at assimilation and transformation. Direct rule, Doyle argues, prioritizes administrative control and institutional replacement (Doyle 1986, 135, 195, 342). Mamdani (1996) characterizes this model as “centralized despotism,” where indigenous populations were denied meaningful citizenship and excluded from governance.

In contrast, indirect rule refers to a system in which colonial powers maintained overall control but delegated routine administrative functions to indigenous elites. Doyle (1986) describes this model as suited to “patrimonial peripheries,” where established hierarchies could be manipulated in service of imperial objectives. Through the supervision and symbolic elevation of traditional leaders, empires exercised power without full bureaucratic penetration. Oxford Reference (2025) similarly defines indirect rule as a form of imperial control exercised through indigenous political institutions. Gerring et al. (2011), as cited by Lawrence (2016), add that indirect rule involves a decentralized framework where important decision-making powers are delegated, though ultimate sovereignty remains with the colonial power. In addition, Mamdani (1996) refers to this configuration as “decentralized despotism,” noting that while traditional leaders appeared powerful, they were instruments of colonial authority.

These two categories, however, often fail to capture the blurred lines between both rules and the complexity of late colonial governance. In the case of British Somaliland, this thesis argues that the governance model was hybrid: formally consultative but substantively hierarchical. Unlike purely indirect rule, which relies on autonomous traditional leaders to govern under loose oversight, hybrid rule institutionalizes local participation in a tightly managed and hierarchical framework. And unlike direct rule, which excludes indigenous

authority altogether, it maintains a façade of inclusion to legitimize imperial governance and facilitate compliance. In the case of British Somaliland, this meant that while clan elders and Somali politicians were included in Advisory and Legislative Councils, real power remained with British officials who controlled budgets, lawmaking, and executive functions. Thus, hybrid governance reflects both the appearance of participatory government and the reality of colonial dominance.

1.5.2 Colonial Legacy:

Post-Colonial State Formation Theory examines how the political, economic, and institutional legacies of colonialism continue to shape post-independence governance outcomes. Scholars have argued that the structures established during colonial rule, whether extractive, centralized, or exclusionary, left enduring institutional footprints that constrain contemporary state-building and development.

Crawford Young's *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (1994) offers a foundational analysis, contending that African colonial states were structurally distinct from their European progenitors. Rather than building inclusive, developmental institutions, colonial regimes prioritized extraction and control. These extractive frameworks, Young argues, persisted long after independence and undermined efforts to construct autonomous, legitimate, and capable postcolonial states.

This argument aligns with and is expanded by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson in *Why Nations Fail* (2012), who propose a broader theory of institutional persistence. They distinguish between inclusive institutions, which foster pluralism, secure property rights, and innovation, and extractive institutions, which concentrate power and wealth among elites. Colonialism, they argue, typically entrenched extractive systems, particularly in regions with high settler mortality where European powers imposed coercive regimes aimed at

maximizing resource extraction, such as in the Congo or India. In contrast, settler colonies like the United States or Australia inherited more inclusive institutions. After independence, these extractive systems created self-reinforcing "vicious cycles" of elite dominance, policy stagnation, and economic exclusion. Examples include Zimbabwe's persistent land monopolies or Nigeria's restrictive land tenure laws.

Applying these frameworks to the Somali context, McPherson-Smith (2021) argues that Italy's extractive plantation economy in southern Somalia exacerbated clan fragmentation and suppressed indigenous governance, whereas British rule in the north, though still authoritarian, was relatively less exploitative and allowed for the preservation of customary clan structures. This divergence in colonial strategy laid the groundwork for the post-1991 contrast between Somalia's collapse and Somaliland's relative stability.

Paolo Tripodi's *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia* (1999) and Abdisalam Issa-Salwe's (1996) analysis of state failure offer empirical support for these theoretical claims. Tripodi argues that Italy's trusteeship administration from 1950 to 1960 failed to establish meaningful political institutions and instead reinforced a fragile, elite-dependent governance model. This mirrors Acemoglu and Robinson's concept of extractive institutions creating long-term developmental traps. Issa-Salwe, in turn, emphasizes how colonial fragmentation, particularly the division of Somali-inhabited territories into five different jurisdictions, undermined the coherence of the Somali nation and sowed seeds of distrust and disorder that exploded in 1991. He links colonial disruption directly to the disintegration of Somali civil society, where normative systems collapsed and individuals were left in a state of moral disorientation.

Further insight is provided by Luigi Goglia (as cited in Tripodi 1999), who identifies three defining features of Italian colonialism: direct rule, racial hierarchies, and demographic colonialism. These intensified the dislocation of Somali society. Addow (2016) reinforces

this view, highlighting how European colonialism fractured the previously homogeneous Somali population and left a legacy of regional mistrust. Bufalini (2017) adds another dimension by showing that, despite official prohibitions, coerced labor persisted throughout much of the Italian colonial period, reflecting the broader exploitative logics that Acemoglu and Robinson describe. These practices entrenched deep socioeconomic inequalities and delegitimized the colonial state in the eyes of the population.

Salih Noor's (2024) comparative-historical study, *Late Colonialism and Postcolonial Development in Africa*, provides further evidence of the damaging legacies of extractive colonialism, especially in Italian Somaliland. He demonstrates that the colony's monocrop plantation economy, centered on export crops like bananas and sugar, was capital-intensive, weakly integrated, and dependent on Italian markets. Unlike Eritrea or Libya, Italian Somaliland received minimal infrastructural investment or industrial development, resulting in an enclave economy with few connections to the broader Somali society. Noor identifies two core mechanisms that stunted postcolonial development: the persistence of weak, patrimonial institutions and the legacy of a narrow economic base. At independence, Italian Somaliland had the lowest economic and human development indicators among Italy's African colonies, in stark contrast to the comparatively more functional institutions in the north.

Complementing these material and institutional critiques are theoretical contributions by Mahmood Mamdani and Jeffrey Herbst. Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) introduces the concept of the bifurcated colonial state, in which urban areas were governed directly while rural populations were subjected to "decentralized despotism" through traditional leaders. This structure, Mamdani argues, entrenched ethnic divisions and excluded rural populations from full citizenship, leaving postcolonial governments with a fractured civic

landscape. Jeffrey Herbst's *States and Power in Africa* (2000) offers a geographic and demographic explanation, noting that low population densities and expansive territories made it difficult for colonial states to project authority. Colonial borders, often drawn arbitrarily, ignored existing political and social geographies, creating states that lacked internal cohesion and administrative reach.

These scholarly works collectively demonstrate how colonial policies and institutions can have lasting impacts on governance, state capacity, and development trajectories in post-colonial African states. They highlight the importance of understanding historical legacies when analyzing contemporary challenges in African governance. The scholars collectively demonstrate that colonial legacies are not deterministic but interact with pre-existing structures.

Acemoglu and Robinson's extractive-inclusive spectrum, Young's institutional critique, and Mamdani's bifurcated state model converge to explain Somalia's collapse. Somalia's post-independence fragility thus reflects a union of extractive economics, social fragmentation, and weak state capacity, a contrast to Somaliland's resilience, rooted in colonial-era institutional hybridity.

1.5.2 British Somaliland Colonial Rule:

The debate in the literature over the nature of British administration in Somaliland centers on whether it was fundamentally a system of indirect or direct rule. Scholars such as McPherson-Smith (2021), Touval (1963), and Simmons (2014) emphasize its features of indirect rule. Oliver McPherson-Smith (2021) argues that British administration in Somaliland was a form of indirect rule primarily because the British authorities were largely uninterested and unwilling to expend significant resources or manpower to develop or impose new institutions. Instead, they focused on maintaining nominal sovereignty and facilitating

livestock trade, leaving most governance to existing Somali traditional institutions and leaders. If Somalilanders did not challenge British authority, they were largely left to govern themselves, and traditional mechanisms for conflict management and economic regulation continued to operate with minimal interference.As a result, the British presence was characterized by a light-touch, minimalist approach that preserved the existing Somali social structure, which the author identifies as the hallmark of indirect rule (McPherson-Smith 2021, 204–215).

Similarly, Mohamed Hersi (2018) emphasizes that British Somaliland's status as a protectorate meant that British authority was often more symbolic than substantive. In practice, this resulted in limited colonial interference and allowed traditional institutions to remain functional and largely intact. In contrast, Italian colonialism in the south was more intrusive and transformative. The Italians implemented a centralized, direct-rule administration that sought to assimilate Somalis into Italian political and cultural systems, displacing traditional authority structures in the process. Hersi argues that this legacy of imposed centralization continued into the post-independence era, producing a governance model in Somalia that was fundamentally misaligned with indigenous norms. This disconnect contributed to the fragility of the Somali state, while British Somaliland's relatively restrained colonial approach allowed for greater continuity of local governance practices.

Simmons (2014) also reinforces this prevailing view in the literature. She notes that the northern region of Somaliland, "drawing on the British approach of indirect rule, was able to reestablish stability by fostering cooperation between clan elders and the colonial authorities," emphasizing the reliance on traditional governance structures rather than direct colonial administration. This legacy, she argues, enabled post-conflict stability by promoting cooperation between clan leaders and emerging state institutions. In contrast, southern

Somalia, shaped by the authoritarian and centralized governance model imposed by Italian colonial rule, struggled to reconcile clan-based social organization with a rigid state structure. This disconnect, Simmons contends, has contributed to the south's repeated failures in post-conflict reconstruction (Simmons 2014).

In contrast, Brock Millman (2014) presents a strong case for *direct rule* in his comprehensive administrative history of the Protectorate. Millman describes the British regime in Somaliland as "a very direct and authoritarian, if benign despotism,"emphasizing that British officials retained centralized authority and exercised direct control over governance throughout the territory (Millman 2014, 268). This dynamic became especially entrenched after the defeat of Sayyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassan's local resistance, which marked the transition from a nominal protectorate-where British presence was limited to a few coastal towns-to an effective, centralized administration extending into the interior.

Millman details how the British established a bureaucratic and hierarchical structure, with district commissioners and a small cadre of expatriate officials wielding significant power over law, order, and administration. The regime's autocratic nature was evident in its ability to impose policy, maintain security, and intervene directly in local affairs, even as it operated on a modest budget and with limited personnel. Although the administration was generally stable and, at times, benign, Millman notes it could also be predatory or repressive when imperial interests were threatened. He argues that the Protectorate's governmental style was uniquely tailored to its conditions: highly centralized, cautious about development, and focused on maintaining order rather than fostering local autonomy or preparing for self-government.

1.5.3 Contribution to Debates:

Building on Millman's (2014) critique of the direct-indirect rule binary, this thesis moves beyond the binary distinction between direct and indirect rule by arguing that British Somaliland's colonial governance was *hybrid leaning to direct*, blending symbolic inclusion with substantive exclusion. While Somali elites were nominally incorporated into Advisory and Legislative Councils (CO 830/27) and local governance structures, their participation was constrained within a hierarchical, British-dominated bureaucratic apparatus. This system defies simplistic categorization: though less overtly extractive than Italian colonialism in southern Somalia, British administration in Somaliland was more centralized and directive than indirect rule frameworks suggest. Colonial archives reveal a governance model that was consultative in appearance-leveraging clan elders (*akils*) for local mediation-but authoritarian in practice, with District Commissioners retaining ultimate authority over taxation, security, and law (Millman 2014; CO 535/152/2).

This hybridity fostered a political culture that combined state-centered authority with clan-based negotiation-a duality that later informed Somaliland's post-1991 reconstruction. As Renders (2012) note, the British legacy of "indirect indirect rule" -minimal intervention paired with selective co-optation of clan structures-enabled Somaliland to organically integrate traditional institutions (*guurti*) with modern governance after independence. The Borama Conference (1993), which revived British-era clan conferences to design a hybrid constitution, exemplifies this continuity. Conversely, southern Somalia's Italian-imposed centralized bureaucracy collapsed precisely because it lacked such adaptive, locally rooted mechanisms (Tripodi 1999; Noor 2024).

Current scholarship often reduces British Somaliland's governance to either indirect rule (McPherson-Smith 2021) or direct authoritarianism (Millman 2014), neglecting its hybrid complexity. Similarly, Mamdani's (1996) "decentralized despotism" underplays the nuanced interplay of coercion and consultation evident in British correspondences (CO 535/140/7). This thesis addresses these gaps by demonstrating how late colonial hybridity-simultaneously inclusive and exclusionary-created institutional and cultural foundations for Somaliland's hybrid political order, which balances clan-based consensus (*beel*) with formal democracy.

By reframing British Somaliland's governance as hybrid, this thesis challenges state formation theories that privilege Western institutional templates. It aligns with Acemoglu and Robinson's (2012) emphasis on inclusive institutions but argues that "inclusion" in Somaliland was strategically limited to maintain colonial control-a paradox that nonetheless enabled post-colonial innovation. The findings also complicate Herbst's (2000) geographical determinism, showing how agency and institutional hybridity mitigated the challenges of low population density and arid terrain.

In sum, British Somaliland's legacy was neither wholly direct nor indirect but a negotiated hybridity that embedded state authority within clan networks. This legacy, often oversimplified, crucially enabled Somaliland's post-1991 stability-a testament to the enduring, if contingent, utility of hybrid governance in fragmented states.

1.6 Research Plan and Methodology:

This thesis employs a qualitative, historical-institutionalist methodology centered on archival research to investigate the nature of British colonial governance in Somaliland and its long-term effects on political development. The analysis is grounded in primary sources from the National Archives in Kew, United Kingdom, particularly the Colonial Office records series CO 830, CO 1015, and CO 535, which contain correspondence, reports, ordinances,

and council minutes relating to the administration of the Somaliland Protectorate between 1945 and 1960.

Rather than treating British colonial rule as either wholly indirect and benevolent or entirely authoritarian, this study conceptualizes it as a hybrid system, one that combined direct administrative control with selective incorporation of local elites and clan structures. The research focuses on how this hybrid model manifested in institutional arrangements such as the Executive Council, Legislative Council, Advisory Council, and Local Government Councils, and how these bodies facilitated limited Somali political participation under British oversight.

Archival documents will be analyzed to trace how colonial reforms, the creation of local councils, and the appointment of Somali unofficial members enabled a narrow class of Western-educated elites to gain exposure to representative politics. These reforms, while constrained by official majorities and British veto powers, provided a controlled space for inter-clan negotiation and bureaucratic experience that could have contributed to Somaliland's post-1991 grassroots peace process.

While this study references Somalia for comparative context, the analysis primarily concentrates on British Somaliland, where rich archival evidence allows for a detailed reconstruction of governance practices. Drawing on administrative correspondence, council debates, constitutional memoranda, and policy directives, the research challenges the binary view that British rule was either wholly benevolent and indirect or entirely authoritarian and despotic. Moreover, it examines how colonial institutions, though paternalistic, fostered early forms of political socialization. I argue that this experience may have contributed to the development of Somaliland’s post-conflict negotiated state, which successfully blended modern institutions with traditional governance structures.

CHAPTER TWO

DIVERGENT TRAJECTORIES: COLLAPSE IN SOMALIA, STABILITY IN SOMALILAND

2.0 Introduction: One Nation, Two Fates:

Since 1991, Somaliland and Somalia have followed sharply divergent paths in state-building. Somaliland has developed a relatively stable and peaceful democratic order through a bottom-up, culturally embedded process of peacebuilding and governance formation that was both locally initiated and financed. Although its government remains institutionally limited, it enjoys broad legitimacy among its population. The region has held regular elections, with multiple peaceful transfers of power between political rivals. Nevertheless, despite these achievements, Somaliland has yet to gain formal recognition as an independent state by the international community (Ridout 2012; Hersi 2018).

In contrast, Somalia has undergone numerous internationally led stabilization efforts aimed at reestablishing a centralized government, but these initiatives have largely failed. The central government remains fragile, with limited legitimacy and minimal control over large parts of the country.This prolonged vacuum of authority has enabled widespread lawlessness, creating fertile ground for terrorism, smuggling, piracy, and other illicit economies, many of which are sustained by actors who profit from continued instability (Menkhaus 2003, 407;Hersi 2018, 4).

By comparing these two trajectories, this study seeks to explore how British colonial administration in Somaliland may have contributed, even if in a limited way, to the region's relative stability following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991.

2.1 The Collapse of Somalia: A Fragmented and Failing State:

Since 1991, Somalia's central government has remained largely non-functional, with state institutions weak, fragmented, and chronically under-resourced. The labels *failed state* and *collapsed state* are often applied to contexts where governments have lost territorial control or the capacity to govern. Yet Somalia stands out for having lacked even a minimally effective central administration for over a decade. Its persistent inability to broker even a self-serving power-sharing arrangement among elites places it among the most extreme cases of state collapse (Menkhaus 2003, 407).

The federal government struggles to pay civil servant salaries and lacks the financial means to build durable institutions or provide essential public services. As in Somaliland, the private sector has filled some gaps, particularly in telecommunications, healthcare, and banking, offering a degree of economic resilience and employment. However, unlike in Somaliland, the state has failed to secure peace or reassert consistent authority. The central government lacks domestic legitimacy and relies heavily on foreign military backing for its survival, which in turn undermines its accountability to the population (Hersi 2018, 12). Moreover, militant groups such as al-Shabaab continue to expand their presence, gaining traction by imposing a semblance of order in areas long plagued by lawlessness. This appeals to communities exhausted by ongoing instability (Hersi 2018, 15).

Recent developments suggest incremental progress. The Somali National Armed Forces have assumed control of key forward operating bases from the African Union mission, and there are ongoing efforts to train and integrate security personnel. However, the government still faces major hurdles. Al-Shabaab remains a formidable threat, frequently reclaiming territory and exploiting governance vacuums. Security incidents remain high, with an average of 290 incidents reported monthly in early 2025. The federal government is under mounting pressure

to improve coordination with federal member states and traditional leaders to consolidate fragile gains.

At the same time, humanitarian needs are severe. Nearly six million people require assistance, with widespread food insecurity and acute malnutrition, particularly among children. Humanitarian operations are frequently obstructed by violence, bureaucratic delays, and interference by local actors, further complicating response efforts (Security Council Report 2025; Amani Africa 2025).

2.2 Somaliland's Emergence: A Model of Localized Stability:

Since its self-declared independence in 1991, Somaliland has developed a unique hybrid governance model that blends traditional clan-based structures with modern state institutions. Central to this model is the *Beel* framework, which emphasizes power-sharing among major clans and consensus-based decision-making. A series of locally funded and organized inter-clan reconciliation conferences in the 1990s laid the foundation for this system. These forums aimed to resolve conflict, negotiate political settlements, and engage in national dialogue over Somaliland's future political structure (Kaplan 2008). With limited $100 k foreign aid of 4 billion Somalia received between 1991 and 1997 (0.0025%), local businessmen and communities financed the process, ensuring that no single source dominated and that the outcomes remained broadly legitimate and participatory (Philipps 2020, 15). This locally owned and culturally grounded approach fostered social cohesion, encouraged self-reliance, and strengthened a distinct national identity (Kaplan 2008).

A key institutional outcome of these efforts was the establishment of a bicameral legislature: the elected House of Representatives and the *Guurti* (House of Elders), which formally integrated clan elders into the state apparatus (Renders 2012). The *Guurti*, drawing on customary law (*xeer*), continues to play a vital role in mediating disputes and reinforcing

stability at the community level. In 2001, Somaliland adopted a new democratic constitution through a constitutional referendum, formally establishing a multiparty system and reaffirming its independence. The constitution mandates regular elections for the presidency, parliament, and local councils, and limits the number of political parties to three. (Kaplan 2008). Since 2003, Somaliland has conducted six peaceful elections, including a landmark presidential election in 2024 that resulted in a smooth transfer of power to an opposition candidate (International Crisis Group 2024).

While the hybrid model has delivered relative stability and earned domestic legitimacy, it is not without challenges. The persistence of clan dominance in politics has hindered efforts to modernize governance structures and expand political inclusion. The *Guurti*, for example, has faced criticism for its lack of accountability and outdated membership, with many of its original appointees from the 1990s still in power (Geeska 2024; International Crisis Group 2024). Moreover, gender representation remains extremely limited, and the influence of business elites over national politics raises concerns about transparency and equity.

Institutionally, the state remains fragile. Although Somaliland's government has successfully maintained peace and security within its borders, one of the primary sources of its enduring legitimacy, it continues to struggle with service delivery and institutional development. significant gaps remain in technical, political, and financial capacity, and the enduring influence of clan leaders often impedes the emergence of a meritocratic governance culture.

2.3 Socioeconomic Indicators of Divergence:

Somalia's adult literacy rate was approximately 41% in 2022, with a stark gender disparity: around 54% of men are literate compared to only 22% of women (Macrotrends 2025). The education system remains critically underdeveloped, with nearly 85% of children not enrolled in school, and only 19.5% completing lower secondary education (USAID 2023). Ongoing

civil conflict has severely disrupted public service delivery, including education, leaving most essential services to be provided by private actors or NGOs (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2022; World Bank 2022; IFC 2024). Access to basic infrastructure is also limited; only about 75% of households have improved water sources, and water management remains fragmented and poorly regulated.

In contrast, data on Somaliland's education and service delivery are more limited but suggest modestly better outcomes in some areas. The most recent figures indicate that 42% of children aged 6 to 13 are enrolled in school, and the adult literacy rate stands at approximately 31%, with a gender gap of 36% for males and 26% for females (HALI Access Network 2023).

Corruption remains a major obstacle in Somalia, which ranked as the second most corrupt country in the world in the 2024 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (Somali Guardian 2025). While Somaliland also faces governance challenges, corruption is generally perceived as less severe, due in part to stronger local accountability mechanisms and hybrid governance structures. Nonetheless, transparency and judicial effectiveness remain ongoing concerns (ICED Facility 2019).

Somalia's estimated GDP in 2024 stands at approximately $12.1 billion (Ministry of Finance, Federal Government of Somalia 2024). By comparison, Somaliland's GDP is estimated at $7.58 billion, with a per capita GDP of $1,361, although these figures remain unofficial due to limited international recognition (FAF 2025).

Table A1. Select average survey responses about living conditions in Somalia and Somaliland, December 2017.

Indicator	Somalia	Somaliland	Better Off
Access to internet	19.9%	16.1%	-
Access to public transport	45.2%	44.1%	-
Shares toilet with other households	25.7%	7.4%	Somaliland
Walking distance to education (mins)	37.1	45.9	Somalia
Walking distance to health (mins)	45.8	48.0	-
Access to electricity grid	54.7%	56.4%	-
Number of blackouts in a typical day	60.5%	36.3%	Somaliland
Has written formal tenancy	19.5%	41.8%	Somaliland
Enjoys equal rights	59.8%	71.3%	Somaliland
Enjoys free speech	60.8%	73.2%	Somaliland
Enjoys freedom of association	63.2%	77.4%	Somaliland
Wants to leave current location in the future	35.0%	60.0%	Somalia
Access to a bank account	10.4%	12.9%	-
Access to a mobile money account	69.4%	49.5%	Somalia

Note. Calculations are the author's own, using the World Bank's December 2017 survey of households across Somalia and Somaliland, Utz J. Pape, "Somali High Frequency Survey, Wave 2. Ref. SOM_2017_SHFS-W2_v02_M" (World Bank, December 2017), https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/3181. This is the most recent and robust data source on living conditions in both Somalia and Somaliland. To merit the designation of being "Better Off," the average response must be at least 5 percentage points higher than the other territory.

Table 1

Select average survey responses about living conditions in Somalia and Somaliland, December 2017. **Source: McPherson-Smith, O. (2021). Better off alone: Somaliland, institutional legacy, and prosperity. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 12(2), 203–224. *https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2021.1915649***

This table, compiled by McPherson-Smith (2021) using data from a 2017 World Bank survey comparing household conditions, further illustrates key differences in governance and public service delivery. Somaliland outperforms Somalia in several governance and rights-based indicators: a higher proportion of respondents reported enjoying equal rights (71.3% vs. 59.8%), freedom of association (77.4% vs. 63.8%), and free speech (73.2% vs. 63.2%). More Somalilanders also reported having formal land tenure (41.8% vs. 19.5%) and experiencing fewer daily blackouts (36.3% vs. 60.5%), indicating better-managed local infrastructure. These differences likely reflect the functionality of Somaliland's hybrid governance model, which incorporates customary authority structures with modern administrative frameworks.

That said, Somalia scored higher on financial inclusion and technology: a greater proportion of respondents had access to mobile money (69.4% vs. 49.5%) and bank accounts (10.4% vs. 12.9%). Access to education and health facilities (measured in average walking time) was

also marginally better in Somalia, suggesting that urban infrastructure in major Somali cities like Mogadishu may outpace that in Somaliland, even as governance remains weaker.

2.4 Divergent Post-war Peacebuilding and State-Building Process:

Following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, Somaliland and Somalia pursued markedly different paths in reconstructing political authority and social order. While Somalia's trajectory has been shaped by externally led, top-down interventions aimed at rebuilding a centralized state, Somaliland's process was driven from within, grounded in traditional norms and locally negotiated consensus.

Phillips (2020) and Eubank (2010) attribute Somaliland's relative success in achieving peace and political stability to its minimal exposure to foreign aid and international interference during its formative years. Freed from externally imposed models or timelines, Somalilanders were able to craft governance institutions at their own pace, drawing selectively from both local customs and global practices. This autonomy allowed them to build institutions perceived as legitimate by their communities, rooted in dialogue, flexibility, and internal incentives rather than donor conditions (Phillips 2016, 640–641).

Eubank (2010) adds that the absence of foreign aid fostered political accountability by forcing the emerging state to rely on domestic revenue, particularly taxation negotiated with the business sector. This dependency on internal support incentivized greater transparency and inclusiveness. With no dominant external backers, political groups had to negotiate power-sharing arrangements and co-opt opposition actors, encouraging broader participation.

Somaliland's approach also aligns with what scholars like Mac Ginty (2014), Richmond (2012), and Donais (2012) describe as "hybrid peacebuilding." This model critiques conventional liberal peacebuilding for neglecting local dynamics and promotes adaptive, context-specific processes that integrate customary and formal governance structures. Rather

than imposing uniform institutional designs, hybrid peacebuilding encourages local ownership and flexibility, principles that defined Somaliland's reconciliation conferences and institutional formation throughout the 1990s.

CHAPTER THREE

COLONIAL AND NATIVE ADMINISTRATION IN BRITISH SOMALILAND

3.0 Introduction:

The British approach in Somaliland was characterized by reliance on local customs and a focus on maintaining order rather than promoting development or self-government. Unlike settler colonies in East Africa, British Somaliland was strategically important but economically peripheral. The establishment of the Protectorate in 1887 served primarily to provision British garrisons in Aden with meat, rather than to serve as a site for major economic extraction or white settlement (Millman 2014; Renders 2012, 35; Mohamoud 2002, 57; McPherson-Smith 2021).

Ultimately, the typical model of indirect rule used elsewhere in the British Empire was not feasible in Somaliland at first due to the absence of centralized native authorities to associate with the task of government and the nomadic, segmentary nature of Somali society (Millman 2014; CO 535/92). Thus, British Somaliland was administered directly by British officials. The administrative backbone of the colonial state consisted of Administrative Officers, originally styled District Commissioners (DCs) and later District Officers (DOs). These officers were stationed individually in major towns such as Berbera, Burao, Hargeisa, Erigavo, and Borama, each overseeing vast and often difficult-to-reach territories. By 1927, most districts were staffed with a senior officer and a junior cadet in training to ensure continuity and reduce isolation. British consuls stationed in Harrar and Jigjigga monitored

Somali nomads crossing into Abyssinian territory, handling inter-clan disputes and cross-border issues. In many remote posts, DCs worked with minimal European staff, sometimes relying only on Somali political agents who also served as interpreters (Millman 2014, 34).

3.1 Experiments in Native Administration and Local Autonomy:

Although the British retained ultimate authority, they depended on native intermediaries, primarily akils[1] (local Somali administrators) and qadis (Islamic judges), to implement local administration and dispense justice. Akils were formally recognized from 1921 and qadis from 1937, with only minor roles for local intermediaries as akils or qadis. These actors were provided monthly stipends and entrusted with mediating disputes, collecting fines, and ensuring local compliance. They presided over subordinate courts addressing minor civil and religious disputes according to customary (xeer) and Islamic law (CO 535/140/6; CO 535/140/7). In 1939, akil courts were officially designated as Subordinate Civil Courts under the District Court system, handling civil cases below 1,000 rupees. However, their jurisdiction remained limited, and more significant legal matters required the involvement of British officers. Many akils lacked deep traditional legitimacy, as they were often government appointees, not autonomous native authorities elected by their communities (CO 535/92; CO 535/140/6; CO 535/140/7;CO 1015/264; Millman 2014). Real grassroots authority continued to reside in clan-based *jilib*[2] *shirs* [3] and sub-tribal *shirs*, where decisions were made collectively by male members. By this period, the traditional tribal structure above the

[1] Akil is a government-recognized Somali clan leader or headman, often appointed by British colonial authorities.
[2] Jilib is dia-paying group, typically a sub-clan unit within Somali society that shares collective responsibility for paying and receiving compensation in cases such as homicide or injury. It forms a crucial unit in Somali customary law (*xeer*).
[3] Shir is a traditional Somali council or assembly where male elders from a lineage, *jilib*, or sub-clan gather to deliberate and make decisions collectively. *Shirs* were the primary grassroots mechanisms for conflict resolution, governance, and consensus-building in Somali society.

sub-tribe level had largely broken down, leaving these *shirs* as the primary functioning indigenous institutions (CO 1015/560).

The second attempt to introduce a form of local self-governance occurred in 1925, when a native headman was appointed to oversee the small township of Adadleh (CO 535/92). This initiative was explicitly experimental, given that four different clans claimed equal rights to the area, and it was widely assumed that no local leader could maintain order without direct government intervention. To assist the headman, a local council composed of representatives from each clan was formed, and the headman was given an annual allowance of £90. Remarkably, the system functioned smoothly, largely due to the exceptional leadership of Aw Adan Elmi, who managed to maintain order and legitimacy without intervention from British authorities.

This example stood out as unique. Although several other small townships existed across the Protectorate, most required a permanent police presence to ensure stability. Adadleh alone was governed entirely by its local population under the stewardship of a trusted Somali headman.

The broader system of tribal representation, however, was far more fragmented. By the late 1920s, the colonial administration had registered 283 government-appointed akils across the Protectorate, reflecting the extreme subdivision of Somali society by both district and clan. These akils were paid a combined total of over £5,000 annually, with the ratio estimated at roughly one akil per 1,000 people. Despite this seemingly extensive representation, deeper structural issues remained unresolved (CO 535/92).

3.2 Policing, Security, and Colonial Control:

Policing and security were also central to colonial rule. The Somaliland Police functioned as a paramilitary force under the Governor's direct authority, performing both civil and military roles. After 1927, police and administrative roles were consolidated, and junior DCs assumed the responsibilities of District Police Officers. The bulk of the police force, around 500 men, was Somali, and policing in rural or nomadic areas was often carried out by *illaloes*, irregular contract-based local policemen. In parallel, the Somaliland Camel Corps (SCC), a mobile colonial military unit, enforced order across the Protectorate. Though led by British officers, the SCC relied heavily on Somali recruits and support staff and operated semi-independently. It trained literate Somalis and even supplied personnel to other branches of government, given the acute shortage of educated local manpower (Millman 2014).

In theory, British administrators favored a shift toward indirect rule, which they saw as more efficient, defensible, and conducive to future self-government. While Somali society had once possessed strong tribal organization, that system had "deteriorated" (CO 535/140/6; CO 535/140/7). The akils, described as unpopular and ineffective, no longer commanded the confidence of local communities. In response, colonial officials proposed reviving "traditional" tribal structures in an attempt to reestablish effective local governance and encourage Somali pastoralists to take "a proper interest" in administrative affairs (CO 535/140/6; CO 535/140/7).

3.3 Late Colonial Reform and the Foundations of Hybrid Governance:

After World War II, British colonial policy in Somaliland shifted in line with broader imperial reforms under the Colonial Development and Welfare Scheme. Governor Gerald Fisher's decision to relocate the administrative capital from Berbera to Hargeisa symbolized this shift, reflecting a new orientation toward governing the entire territory rather than focusing solely

on the coastal regions. During this period, the British established several key political institutions: the Protectorate Advisory Council (1946), Local Government Councils (1950–1954), the Legislative Council (1957), and the Executive Council (1959) (Renders 2012, 39). Under the British Military Administration (BMA), Somalis also started organising themselves as political parties for the first time. Political parties were permitted to campaign for Somali-wide political freedom and the peaceful unification of all Somali-inhabited territories. In this context, political independence and territorial unity emerged as the twin aspirations of the Somali nationalist movement, goals that the political elite actively pursued in the postwar period. In northern Somalia, the most prominent political party during this time was the Somaliland National Society (SNS), originally established in 1935. In 1947, the SNS was renamed the Somali National League (SNL), which would later play a leading role in the push for self-determination (Mohamoud 2002, 73).

Although these initiatives are often portrayed as benevolent efforts that reflected British indirect rule and the preservation of traditional Somali authority structures, my archival research reveals a more complex and controlled reality. (Simmons 2014; Lalos 2011; Heinze 2021). Rather than marking a genuine transfer of political power, these reforms were designed primarily to maintain British control while co-opting elite Somali participation. The councils were structured to preserve colonial authority through official majorities, strong administrative oversight, and British veto power over appointments and decisions (CO 1015/1374). Somali inclusion, limited to a small, educated elite, functioned less as empowerment and more as a mechanism to manage nationalist pressures and maintain political stability. However, while the system leaned toward direct rule, it was not purely despotic. The councils, limited as they were nonetheless allowed for cross-clan dialogue, exposure to legislative procedures and negotiation, and the emergence of a proto-political class that would later play a central role in post-1991 peacebuilding in Somaliland. Despite

their constrained nature, these institutions offered Somali elites a form of early political apprenticeship. Participation in the Local, Legislative, and Executive Councils exposed them to administrative procedures, inter-clan negotiation, and representative politics.

These councils brought together previously isolated clans and introduced a formalized setting for political deliberation, experiences that would later prove instrumental in the post-1991 peacebuilding process. After the collapse of the Somali state, former SNM leaders and clan elders in Somaliland drew on these precedents to craft a grassroots, negotiated state that blended modern institutions with customary authority (CO 830/27; Mohamoud 2002, 73; Kitungu 2019, 28–29; Renders 2012, 115).

Ultimately, I argue that the system was best understood as a hybrid model: one that incorporated selective elements of indirect rule but leaned decisively toward direct British control. Though traditional norms and local actors were utilized, they functioned within a rigid colonial framework that preserved British dominance over political, legal, and administrative decision-making. While the system remained fundamentally paternalistic, it also normalized practices of consultation, legal pluralism, and limited representation. These institutions constituted a meaningful site of political learning and adaptation. Unlike the Italian model in Somalia, which was marked by centralized authority and the disruption of indigenous governance, the institutions developed during this period offered a significant, if partial, inheritance for the postcolonial state. The legal system, an evolving blend of common law, Sharia, and *xeer*, was internalized and defended by Somalis themselves. As Millman (2014) notes, it could no longer be considered a foreign imposition: “It was the law of Somaliland. Somalis understood it, chose it, insisted on it, and denounced alternatives.”

This complex colonial legacy helps explain why Somaliland entered independence with a more resilient institutional foundation than its southern counterpart. Its later political stability

cannot be attributed solely to British benevolence or successful localization. Rather, it was shaped by the interplay of colonial control, elite co-optation, and indigenous adaptation, factors that enabled a distinctive political trajectory grounded in local legitimacy and negotiated governance.

CHAPTER FOUR

HYBRID GOVERNANCE AND THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION: ADVISORY, DISTRICT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS, 1946–1956

4.0 The Advisory Council For the Somaliland Protectorate (1946):

Governor Gerald Fisher introduced an Advisory Council as a first step toward political reform. The goal was to develop a group of Somalis with practical experience in governance who could eventually serve as administrators in a future self-governing system. An ordinance establishing the Council was issued in December 1945, and the body held its first meeting on July 2nd, 1946. It included the Governor as President, other colonial officials, and initially 32 Somali members, later expanded to 48, all appointed by the Governor. Members were drawn from each district (Hargeisa, Burao, Berbera, Zeilah, Erigavo, and Las Anod), the training community, and notable religious leaders. However, despite their prominence, members were not elected by the public and were often viewed by critics as government appointees rather than genuine representatives (Millman 2014, 130; CO 830/27; CO 1015/560).

4.0.1 Structural Constraints and the Limits of Somali Agency:

The proceedings of the Advisory Council's sessions, specifically those held from July 2nd to 9th, 1946 and the 17th session from October 22nd to 27th, 1956, documented in CO 830/27, provide rich archival evidence for a nuanced understanding of British colonial governance in Somaliland. On one hand, the design and operation of the Council were clearly intended to

preserve British political authority and administrative dominance. On the other hand, these same proceedings reveal that, under strict colonial supervision, meaningful foundations were being laid for Somali political participation and institutional development. This duality challenges any reductive interpretation of British rule as either wholly despotic or entirely benevolent. Instead, it reveals a governance system premised on a strategic fusion of control and selective empowerment (CO 830/27).

The first sessions of the Advisory Council were held from July 2nd to 9th, 1946. Despite being presented as consultative and experimental, the Council functioned as a carefully managed colonial apparatus. Its composition and procedures reflected a clear hierarchy of power. The Military Governor presided over the sessions, while senior British officials held the roles of vice presidents and secretaries. Although Somali representatives participated, the direction, tone, and procedural control of the Council remained firmly in British hands. As stated in the Preface, "all members (save those representing the Somali Officials Union) were nominated," and future elections were proposed only as a hypothetical goal dependent on undefined conditions. This structure ensured that Somali involvement occurred strictly within the parameters set by the colonial administration.

Institutionally, the Council held no legislative or executive authority. It was explicitly defined as an advisory body: "No resolutions were put to the vote after the discussion of items... the proceedings were confined to a discussion... from which Government will draw its own conclusions." This language is revealing, not only in the limits it imposed on Somali agency but also in how it positioned Somali contributions as observational rather than decision-making. Participation was permitted, but power remained out of reach.

In this sense, the Council functioned as a site of supervised political apprenticeship. The Military Governor described it as "the first step in the progress of associating you Somalis

with the Government of the country." This association was, in his words, justified by "the spread of education and your widening knowledge of affairs", implying that participation was a reward for civilizational advancement rather than a right. British officials also tightly controlled the Council's agenda and excluded any politically sensitive issues from debate. In his opening remarks, the Military Governor stated: "The questions that we have met to discuss in this room are those which are not controversial, and which most closely affect the life and progress of the Somali race." This framing reveals a strategic intent to project an image of inclusivity while maintaining full control over the boundaries of discourse. British authority was never up for negotiation. Consequently, the Council's agenda was limited to local administrative issues, such as agriculture, poor relief, dispensaries,destitutes and masterless boys, subordinate courts, and grazing rights, while questions of broader political autonomy or self-rule were systematically avoided.

This imbalance was further reinforced through the summaries of discussions and the Chairman's interventions, which repeatedly emphasized that Somali input was advisory and non-binding. Closing remarks by British officials reiterated that the Council's purpose was to "advise and inform," not to govern. While Somali views were welcomed in form, they were structurally marginalized in substance (CO 830/27).

4.0.2 A Forum for Political Learning, Policy Deliberation and Cross-Clan Dialogue:

Yet even within these constraints, the Council became a site of significant political engagement for Somali elites. The Preface to the 1st session's proceedings outlines its formal aims: "(i) To help the members to learn something about the running of the country. (ii) To help make the people of the country fit to accept some responsibility for their own affairs." The Council's composition, intentionally diverse, reflected a British strategy of incorporating a cross-section of Somali society. "Its composition sought to strike a balance between the

town and country, sophisticated and simple." It included Sultans, Akils, Gerads, religious leaders, district representatives, merchants, and educated elites, offering a rare platform for cross-clan and cross-class political exchange.

Somali participants demonstrated not only fluency in administrative matters but also a keen ability to engage critically with broader questions of development, justice, and governance. Notably, Somali leaders actively engaged in negotiation and debate among themselves before the chairman offered his opinion. Although the chairman ultimately retained final authority, he nonetheless participated in discussions and responded to the views expressed, signaling a limited, but significant, space for political dialogue within the council proceedings. In debates on agriculture, for instance, Somali leaders showed concern for the relationship between pastoralism and land use, and for balancing food security with communal traditions. As Gerad Mahmoud Ali Shirreh observed, “The Somali people are nomadic and animals are their life; I suggest that… consultation between the elders of the area is necessary.” Haji Ibrahim Egal called for food sovereignty and economic self-reliance: “There is urgent necessity for agriculture in our country. We must, I say, grow our own food.”

Discussions on legal reform were similarly revealing. Egal’s call for legal autonomy, “We wish to rule and judge our own affairs. We wish the application of the Sheriat law in all cases” was echoed in debates about the composition of subordinate courts, the qualifications of judges, and the blending of customary, religious, and colonial legal codes. In areas such as healthcare and welfare, Somali participants demonstrated practical knowledge and policy initiative. Abdillahi Abby Farah highlighted logistical challenges: “At present the people of the interior find it difficult to proceed to the nearest district centre which is sometimes a distance of days away.” Haji Adan Elmi proposed a mixed funding model for dispensaries, combining voluntary contributions and sliding-scale fees. Such exchanges reveal that Somali

representatives were not passive observers but active contributors capable of tailoring policy to local realities. It demonstrates their attempts to assert cultural authority and institutional legitimacy within a colonial framework designed to contain them (CO 830/27).

Moreover, the 1956 session also revealed growing Somali agency within the colonial framework. The agenda included a range of substantive motions raised by Somali representatives, from the abolition of blood-money customs and the regulation of imported foodstuffs to calls for stronger action against Ethiopian aggression and improvements in education and healthcare. Debates also addressed caste discrimination, such as the status of the Midgan, and the reform of justice systems, illustrating the Council's role in internal political development and social critique. These exchanges marked the emergence of a proto-political class navigating both colonial constraints and indigenous responsibilities. Debates were often robust, with Somali members openly criticizing British inaction and defending national interests. Haji Hussein Warsama of Hargeisa denounced the government's failure to act decisively against Ethiopia: "Unless the Government does something about it now, I do not think anything will go right." Sultan Abdillahi Sultan Deria similarly expressed frustration over the handover of grazing lands, framing it as a historical betrayal.

Somali representatives also used the Council to demand deeper administrative reforms. They pressed for the creation of elected local government councils, the replacement of expatriate officials with Somalis, and a clear timeline for independence. As Haji Yusuf Iman of Berbera asked: "Would it be possible for us to give these officers training so that when Somalis get independence they can take over each other's jobs? I am expecting to get independence in 1960." The Acting Chief Secretary responded with caution, affirming the need for gradual development: "We have time to build firmly and strongly and we shall be… well ahead of Somalia by the time we are ready." Somali members also influenced decisions related to local

militia deployment (Illaloes), administrative staffing, and policy implementation. British officials acknowledged the need to expand Somali participation, citing training schemes and scholarships to prepare Somalis for future leadership. This reflected a policy of controlled empowerment: carefully staged political inclusion under continued British supervision (CO 830/27).

4.0.3 Constructing Unity from Fragmentation:

Equally significant was the British attempt to construct a Somali national identity from the fragmented, nomadic clan landscape. The Commissioner for Native Affairs emphasized this goal: "What one must work for is the day when an inhabitant of this country will say 'I am a Somali,' and not first of all 'I am a Dolbahanta,' 'Habr Yunis,' etc. It has been the policy of Government in its Education Department to foster this feeling of national unity." While this rhetoric was undoubtedly tied to colonial interests in cultivating a governable national unit and administrative efficiency, it nonetheless provided space for the emergence of pan-Somali political consciousness. Somali participants themselves echoed this sentiment. Akil Mah Duksiyeh reflected on the significance of the Council: "We have been given the chance to know each other, and I see here many notables of the country I have never met before."

Gerad Omar Ali's reflection that "I wish to express my thanks to this Shir, because very few of the Esa and Gadabursi were able to come to this part of the country before. We have been giving the chance of knowing each other." highlights the geographically fragmented nature of Somali society and underscores the Council's role in facilitating inter-clan interaction. The Council thus became a forum for political socialization, in which previously isolated clan leaders encountered one another in a common administrative setting.

Most strikingly, Haji Yasin Mohamed's comment, that the Shir represented "Today in this Shir we are witnessing the first complete understanding between Government and the people

for seventy years… the condition of the country in the past was a great shame both to the Somali people and Government." His statement suggests that the Council's significance lay not only in its consultative function but also in its performative aspect: it marked a visible recognition of Somali political capacity and dignity, however limited (CO 830/27).

These remarks reveal that while the Council was established within a framework of colonial control, it also functioned as a transformative political space in which a shared Somali identity began to take shape. By bringing together representatives from historically isolated clans and regions, the Council fostered a sense of collective belonging that transcended parochial loyalties. In this way, colonial efforts to centralize governance through national integration inadvertently facilitated Somali agency in imagining a post-clan, national political community. The Council thus operated as both an instrument of colonial administration and a catalyst for early expressions of national consciousness .

4.0.4 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the 1946 and 1956 Advisory Council proceedings reflect a system that was neither wholly despotic nor meaningfully inclusive, but rather a hybrid fusion of domination and managed dialogue. While the Council functioned primarily as an instrument of colonial control, through agenda setting, membership nomination, and veto powers, it also provided limited, yet significant, structural forums for Somali deliberation, political expression, inter-clan collaboration, and institutional learning. As the Acting Chief Secretary candidly noted, "We want to make a good job of this country so that when we leave, you won't get into any trouble… That is the reason why Her Majesty's Government will never give a date" for independence (CO 830/27). This statement encapsulates the dual legacy of British rule: a persistent reluctance to relinquish control, paired with the gradual cultivation of Somali political capacity.

4.1 Introduction of Local Government and District Councils (1950–1954):

British colonial correspondences (CO 535/152/2 and CO 535/152/3) indicate that, in the early 1950s, the British administration in Somaliland undertook a significant restructuring of its governance system, seeking to institutionalize indirect rule by integrating it more deeply into the existing social and tribal structures of Somali society. This initiative was guided by two interlinked objectives: first, to reduce the financial and logistical burden of direct rule, and second, to foster the appearance of participatory governance by reviving tribal authority systems. However, archival records reveal that this process was fraught with internal contradictions, administrative confusion, and resistance from Somali elites and rural populations alike (CO 535/152/2; CO 535/152/3).

4.1.1 Replacing the Akils: Towards a New Model of Tribal Governance:

Archival correspondence from 1950 reveals growing dissatisfaction within the British colonial administration regarding the effectiveness of **akils** (government-nominated tribal representatives) in Somaliland (CO 535/152/2). Once central to the system of indirect governance, akils were increasingly viewed as unpopular and ineffective, lacking legitimacy among the communities they were meant to represent. A 1950 memorandum by colonial officer Mr. Leyden highlighted this concern, recommending a shift away from salaried akils toward unpaid tribal councils of elders. Leyden warned that “some system of indirect rule should be introduced at a low level. Direct rule is very expensive and will soon lead to final breakdown of tribal organization... tribal authorities… will not retain the support and cooperation of the people unless there is a measure of popular representation at the lowest level” (CO 535/152/2).

Despite such proposals, Governor Gerald Reece acknowledged that the planned reforms to introduce district councils would not significantly alter the underlying structure of British authority. He observed that, although there would be consultation with the people before appointments, this had already been standard practice and “there will be no material change in the Agents’ status.” As such, the reorganization would retain colonial agents as instruments of direct, rather than indirect, rule. Another official similarly concluded that the local councils ordinance “does not associate the people any more closely with the management of their own affairs” (CO 535/152/2).

Governor Reece, however, presented the reforms in a more optimistic light, framing the local councils ordinance as delivering “exactly what the people have been asking for, namely a greater measure of responsibility for their own government” (CO 535/152/3). He emphasized the potential of District Councils to reduce inter-tribal conflict and build administrative capacity, stating, “The District Councils which will follow on will do a great deal to help abolish the perpetual feuds and strife which have always existed… and which have made all cooperation well nigh impossible” (CO 535/152/3). At the same time, it was acknowledged that these local authorities would have limited powers. While they could issue basic orders and help maintain law and order, they lacked treasuries and did not function as autonomous government bodies (CO 535/152/3).

Internal memoranda by colonial officers like J.E. Russell and J. Griffiths reiterated that a hybrid form of indirect rule was the most feasible approach. They envisioned councils combining customary authority with colonial supervision, rooted in kinship and geography rather than rigid tribal affiliation. One memorandum even suggested that the label "tribal authority" was misleading, as the newly appointed leaders did not inherit traditional

legitimacy but instead held roles created and sanctioned by the colonial state. The term "local authority" was recommended to better reflect this administrative shift (CO 535/152/2).

4.1.2 The Local Authority Ordinance and Its Functions:

The 1950–1951 Local Authorities Ordinance marked a formal shift in governance. It outlined a structure in which each group, organized on a geographic and kinship basis, selected its own authority (subject to government approval). These headmen, assisted by two to five sub-tribal representatives, formed the foundation for future District Councils. These councils were meant to include both traditional elders and emerging "progressive" Somali figures such as traders and civil servants. Officials also proposed appointing unpaid community advisors to increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of the councils (CO 535/152/3).

Significantly, the ordinance permitted the appointment of "any person" , not necessarily a Somali , as a local authority. This clause was intended to grant flexibility in cases where emergency governance by District Commissioners or other non-Somali residents might be required (CO 535/152/2). This clause illustrates how British authorities embedded loopholes into the reform process, enabling them to override local participation and reassert direct rule when deemed necessary. It underscores the limited and easily reversible nature of the claimed shift toward self-governance.

Although appointments were officially made by colonial officers, the policy was to consult the Somali population in nominating suitable candidates. District Councils were explicitly designed to represent all sectors of society, balancing sub-tribes, professions, and emerging elites. The British administration recognized that genuine public acceptance would take time and emphasized gradual implementation tailored to each district's social makeup (CO 535/152/3).

The ordinance granted tribal authorities some administrative powers as maintaining public order, issuing environmental regulations, controlling livestock use, detaining offenders, and assisting with state logistics. However, these powers were strictly derivative. District Commissioners could override, direct, or cancel any order and had the authority to dismiss tribal authorities at will. Tribal leaders who disobeyed directives could face fines or imprisonment, underscoring their subordination within the colonial hierarchy (CO 535/152/2).

Efforts to implement this model varied by district. In more homogeneous areas like Las Anod, the Dolbahante could be governed through coherent tribal councils. But in mixed districts such as Hargeisa, Burao, or Erigavo, overlapping clan affiliations made clear-cut tribal governance unworkable. As one officer noted, "it is utterly impossible now to sort them all out and compel them to live again as separate tribes and sections" (CO 535/152/2).

Resistance came from various actors. Mullahs feared loss of religious authority; dismissed government officials resented the changes; and the Somali Youth League (SYL) opposed the tribal framework altogether, viewing it as antithetical to national unity. Ironically, the British presented these reforms as steps toward self-rule, while nationalists saw them as entrenching colonial control. While the introduction of the Local Authorities Ordinance initially met resistance, many elders accepted it, provided it did not excessively disrupt traditional life. The inclusion of unpaid community advisors and young educated elites into councils helped bridge tradition with modernization, giving a degree of legitimacy to these hybrid institutions(CO 535/152/3).

4.1.3 Town Councils and Their Duties (1953):

The 1953 establishment of town councils in Berbera and Hargeisa under the Local Authorities Ordinance represented a cautious step toward municipal reform within British Somaliland. These councils were composed of both elected and nominated members and chaired by the District Commissioner, who retained ultimate authority. Procedures varied by town, Berbera used ballot-based elections tied to tax records, while Hargeisa relied on clan-based public meetings (CO 1015/264).

While the councils were empowered to oversee minor local services (e.g. sanitation) and co-finance public works, their autonomy was minimal. All major decisions still required central approval, and the District Commissioner remained the executive authority. The ordinance's flexibility allowed the Governor to issue warrants individually for each council, enabling tailored governance without relinquishing control.

Although framed as participatory institutions, these councils primarily functioned as training grounds for Somali elites under the supervision of colonial administrators. As Millman (2014, 208–209) observes, officials believed townsmen were better suited for institutional governance due to their literacy and reduced tribal rigidity. However, the councils often lacked real influence, avoided responsibility for unpopular decisions, and were dependent on the presence of British officers. Officials admitted that without the District Commissioner, "the system collapsed."

Thus, the councils reflected a strategic balancing act of expanding administrative capacity without enabling full local authority. They also highlighted the broader limits of institutional transfer under late colonial rule.

4.1.4 Conclusion: Toward a Hybrid Model Leaning Toward Direct Rule

This section reinforces my argument that British colonial governance in Somaliland was not a straightforward application of indirect rule. While reforms such as the Local Authorities Ordinance and District Councils nominally built on traditional structures, they functioned primarily as extensions of colonial authority. Tribal leaders were answerable to the District Commissioners, who held the power to issue, revoke, or override orders. Local Councils lacked fiscal autonomy and legislative powers; they were advisory bodies reliant on grants and without control over revenue. Even when local voices were included, appointments and powers were tightly controlled by the administration. However, by institutionalizing clan representation within formal governance structures, the colonial state reinforced the logic of identity-based politics.

Thus, what emerged was not indirect rule in the classical sense, but a hybrid system leaning more towards direct, formally recognizing indigenous structures while embedding them within a colonial hierarchy. This allowed Britain to portray governance as participatory while retaining tight administrative control.

CHAPTER FIVE

REPRESENTATION WITHOUT AUTHORITY: THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE COUNCILS, 1957–1959

5.0 Constitutional Development and Reform:

(Based on CO 1015/560, *Constitutional and Financial Reform Including the Development of Local Government*) The constitutional reforms introduced in British Somaliland during the early 1950s were shaped by a complex interplay of political ambition, financial caution, and administrative pragmatism. Recognizing the need for political advancement, the British

colonial administration proposed the establishment of a Legislative Council, though its powers were deliberately limited to avoid destabilizing the existing colonial order.

The Council's legislative authority was initially restricted to "unaided services," such as social, economic, and local government functions, which were to be funded entirely through local revenues. By contrast, more sensitive "aided services," including administration, law and order, communications, and public works, would remain under direct colonial control, being financed 90 percent by British grant-in-aid and only 10 percent by local sources. Additionally, 5 percent of local revenue was to be allocated each year to the creation of a reserve fund, intended to support unaided services in the event of a serious decline in revenue.

This framework was closely tied to the introduction of a "divided budget" system, which aimed to incentivize local fiscal responsibility by linking improvements in public services directly to local revenue generation. The reserve fund, while nominally under local authority, remained subject to strict oversight. Any withdrawals required approval from the British Treasury, which also imposed limitations to prevent misuse or excessive accumulation.

Efforts were simultaneously made to incorporate traditional Somali governance structures into this new administrative framework. Councils of elders (shirs) were envisioned as a cultural foundation upon which local authorities could be built, not as wholly new colonial creations, but as instruments aligned with customary legitimacy. One proposal sought to reinforce the influence of tribal leaders by granting them limited judicial powers. Although these ideas received mixed reactions from both District Commissioners and Somali leaders, the correspondence expressed cautious optimism that meaningful adjustments and a workable compromise could be achieved by blending traditional governance practices with the administrative demands of a modern colonial state.

In the interim, the role of the Advisory Council was expanded to function more like a legislative body. Members were to be allowed to submit questions, debate and vote on motions, and consider draft legislation, thereby giving them "a fuller say in Government activities" and serving as "an excellent training ground" for future legislative responsibility (CO 1015/560).

This trajectory culminated in 1958 with the Governor's introduction of an electoral process for the first time, initiating elections to the Legislative Council. The reforms were publicly framed as a milestone in democratic progress and a key step toward Somali self-rule. However, Michael Mariano, a prominent Somali member of the Legislative Council, publicly challenged this narrative. He exposed how these reforms were, in reality, restrictive and served to maintain colonial control. He criticized the English literacy requirement, which mandated that candidates be able to read and write English well enough to participate in Council proceedings without an interpreter. Mariano argued that this excluded the vast majority of Somalis and amounted to de facto nomination, creating the illusion of elections while limiting real choice to a small English-educated elite.

He also opposed the residency requirement, which required candidates to reside in the district where they sought election. Mariano contended that this was incompatible with Somali society, where nomadism and frequent regional movement were common. He also condemned the property requirement, which disqualified many urban residents, particularly young people, from voting unless they owned property, even though rural voters of the same age could participate. This, he noted, unfairly disenfranchised a significant portion of the population.

Mariano's critique showed the contradictions of British colonial governance in Somaliland. While the administration promoted the appearance of inclusive and progressive reform, the

structural design of these reforms ensured that ultimate authority remained firmly in colonial hands. His speech revealed how the language of indirect rule and democratic transition was used to mask the reality of continued direct control, illustrating that colonial rule was more authoritarian than it claimed (CO 1015/1375).

5.1 The Legislative Council (1957):

5.1.1 Powers and Privileges:

The composition of the 1957 Legislative Council in the Somaliland Protectorate reflects the colonial administration's continued dominance despite apparent reforms. Of the fifteen total members, only six were Somalis (increased to fourteen in 1959), all serving as nominated unofficial members, while the remaining nine were British, including the Governor (who served as President), key ex officio officials, and heads of government departments. This 60% majority ensured that effective decision-making power remained in British hands. As such, even when Somali members proposed substantive reforms, they were frequently overruled, delayed, or met with procedural obstacles (CO 1015/1374;Somaliland Protectorate Government 1960).

For instance, from 1957 council proceedings, when Somali member Michael Mariano proposed a motion to allow individuals to opt out of the Herr (blood compensation) system, the Attorney General opposed it outright, stating that the amendment was "far too definite" and lacked adequate notice. Similarly, the Governor reminded the Council that any constitutional changes would require the approval of London, stating, "Until these proposals have been discussed with the Secretary of State and his agreement has been secured... it would be premature to comment in detail on any of the particular recommendations made by

the Commission." This underscores that ultimate power rested not with the Council, but with British authorities abroad (CO 1015/1374).

Although the 1959 Powers and Privileges Ordinance granted members of the Somaliland Legislative Council freedom of speech and legal immunity for official actions, aiming to introduce Westminster-style protections and encourage parliamentary debate, it remained embedded in a colonial framework. The ordinance also safeguarded witnesses, criminalized misconduct, and protected official publications. However, it reinforced British control while offering only limited space for Somali autonomy. More symbolic than transformative (CO 1015/1378).

Together, the Council's composition and legal structure illustrate the contradictions of late colonial governance, Somali elites were being trained in parliamentary norms, but without genuine power to shape governance. The reforms signaled political development while reinforcing the colonial state's control over the pace and substance of change.

5.1.2 Legislative Council Session Proceedings(1957-1958):

The proceedings of the Somaliland Protectorate Legislative Council in 1957 and 1958 provide further evidence of the hybrid nature of British colonial governance, a structure that leaned toward direct rule while selectively allowing for Somali political participation and institutional learning (CO 1015/1374; CO 1015/1375). Although these councils operated within the ultimate control of British authority, they also served as critical sites for political apprenticeship, exposing emerging Somali elites to the procedural and rhetorical tools of governance.

The British administration consistently emphasized caution and gradualism, often invoking the need for social cohesion and tribal consensus as justification for delaying reform. Officials regularly warned that fast modifications to customary institutions could provoke

unrest. For instance, in discussions surrounding reforms to the *Herr* (customary law) system, colonial authorities cautioned that "the process of change in customs must… be adjusted very carefully to the changing conditions of this country." Similarly, practical reform measures, such as increasing the number of clerical trainees, were constrained by logistical objections, with officials citing "accommodation difficulties" as a reason to reduce the number of trainees from 30 to 20. These patterns underscore the ways in which British officials retained effective control over the scope, pace, and implementation of reforms, often under the guise of technical limitations or the need for wider consultation (CO 1015/1374).

Yet despite these limitations, the Legislative Council offered Somali members valuable exposure to the operations of government. Through participation in legislation debates, drafting motions, and engaging in negotiations with colonial officials, Somali elites acquired practical experience in parliamentary procedure, administrative reasoning, and statecraft. Debates addressed a wide range of issues, from communications infrastructure and clerical training to the role of education in national development. Somali members demonstrated not only awareness of their communities' material needs but also an ability to navigate the formal language and structure of bureaucratic governance. Proposals for vocational training programs and Arabic-language scholarships in Beirut reflected their increasing bureaucratic and rhetorical tools of statecraft.

Moreover, a recurring theme was the demand for expanded Somali representation and a more accelerated path toward constitutional reform. Michael Mariano and other unofficial Somali members pressed for elections and an increase in the number of Somali representatives. As Mariano argued, "This motion... is intended to serve two purposes: one, to increase the number of unofficial members in this House, and two, to give us a chance of having our elected members and gaining the necessary valuable experience before the Somaliland

political situation reaches the stage where we can assume a great deal of responsibility which we have not got now." However, despite their demands, the government responded with predictable caution. Instead of committing to immediate elections, the administration proposed the formation of a commission to study the question of representation, a familiar colonial tactic to defer substantive reform while maintaining procedural legitimacy. Thus, this shows that Somali participation was permissible only so long as it did not seriously challenge colonial control. Nevertheless, Somali members used the platform to push reformist agendas. Figures such as Mariano, Abdulla Haji Farah, and Haji Yusuf Iman consistently advocated for educational investment, criticized delays in the distribution of overseas scholarships, and pressed for more expansive domestic schooling(CO 1015/1374; CO 1015/1375).

The Council also became a venue for economic advocacy, particularly in relation to Somali traders and migrant laborers in Aden. Somali members proposed appointing a Protectorate representative in Aden to protect Somali interests in the livestock trade. They recounted instances where Somali livestock owners were cheated by butchers and emphasized the lack of recourse available to them in the absence of formal representation. Despite the practical importance of the issue, the motion was rejected on constitutional grounds, with colonial officials claiming that such representation lay outside the jurisdiction of the Protectorate government. The decision reflected the structural limits of Somali political agency under colonial rule that even where grievances were concrete and well-articulated, Somali voices could be easily sidelined (CO 1015/1374; CO 1015/1375).

Ultimately, the sessions of the Legislative Council in 1957-1958 encapsulates the hybrid nature of British rule in Somaliland. While the colonial administration retained firm control over the legislative process, it also provided a structured space for Somali political engagement. The Council was both a site of containment and of political development, a

controlled environment in which Somali elites could begin to act as proto-legislators and national leaders. It showed how colonial reforms in Somaliland functioned as instruments of both domination and empowerment, embedding within their constraints the very tools of future self-rule.

In sum, the Legislative Council proceedings offer a more nuanced portrait of British governance in Somaliland. They challenge portrayals of the British system as either purely benevolent or wholly despotic. Instead, the evidence reveals a layered system in which British officials maintained procedural supremacy and veto authority while allowing meaningful Somali participation.

5.2 Executive Council Proceedings and the Ministerial System(1959):

The Executive Council minutes from 1959 (CO 830/13) offer a valuable insight into the inner workings of British colonial governance in Somaliland during a pivotal period of constitutional transformation. This era marked the cautious implementation of a ministerial system as part of broader reforms aimed at preparing the Protectorate for independence. Alongside these institutional changes, the colonial administration began the gradual "Somalisation" of the civil service. However, these developments did not represent a straightforward path to decolonization. Rather, they reveal a strategic balancing act in which the British sought to appease Somali nationalist demands while retaining decisive control over the political transition.

The Executive Council, originally composed of the Governor, three ex officio officials, and two departmental heads, was central to this controlled reform process (Somaliland Protectorate Government 1960). On 9 February 1959, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, announced that elected Somali members of the Legislative

Council would be appointed to the Executive Council with real executive responsibilities, marking the formal introduction of a ministerial system (Hansard 1959; CO 830/13). This shift was prompted by the impending independence of the neighboring Trust Territory of Somalia and growing local pressure for political reform.

This announcement followed the March 1959 legislative elections, which resulted in a new Legislative Council composed of 14 unofficial Somali members and 15 British officials (Somaliland Protectorate Government 1960). A constitutional commission was subsequently established to examine electoral representation. It proposed a future Council consisting of 36 members, including 33 elected Somalis. Plans were also laid to expand the Executive Council to seven members, four of whom would be Somali ministers. Although these steps suggested greater autonomy, they remained framed and overseen by British officials, reflecting the limits of colonial willingness to relinquish real power.

The Executive Council minutes reflect this cautious approach. The Council approved draft portfolios for the new ministries and discussed how to restructure departments to fit the ministerial model. Yet significant challenges were acknowledged. The Acting Chief Secretary noted that full integration of departments, particularly those outside Hargeisa, would be difficult. The Accountant General was tasked with reviewing accounting systems to facilitate smoother administrative restructuring (CO 830/13). These technical preparations underscore that constitutional reform was not only a political process but also an exercise in bureaucratic adaptation, constrained by limited local capacity.

Meanwhile, the minutes also expose deep-seated anxieties about the growing politicization of Somali society and international influences. When Somali representatives expressed interest in attending the Afro-Asian Youth Conference in Cairo, the Executive Council resolved to "place every obstacle, short of forcible detention, in the way of their journey," including the

withdrawal of passports (CO 830/13). This reaction illustrates how British reforms were driven less by democratic principle than by Cold War imperatives and the desire to contain perceived radicalism. Domestically, the colonial administration continued to monitor and contemplate repressive actions against nationalist groups like the Somali National League (SNL), revealing a persistent reluctance to tolerate opposition.

Tensions were also evident in the implementation of Somalisation. While the Executive Council approved in principle the promotion of Somali civil servants, it was careful to insist that “no overseas officers should be superseded by Somalis merely to implement the programme” (CO 830/13). Officials drew comparisons to West Africa, where similar transitions had occurred only after governors relinquished executive power and financial arrangements had been revised. In Somaliland, the smaller size of the civil service and the example set by Italian Somalia's rapid localization made Somali advancement appear inevitable. Nonetheless, British officials retained authority over appointments and sought to ensure that merit, not political expediency, determined promotion.

The administration’s control extended to electoral reform and suffrage. While adult male suffrage without property qualifications was accepted as a necessity, the Council sought to limit its disruptive potential. A petition from elders in Hargeisa opposing educational qualifications for candidates highlighted growing unease. In response, the Council adopted a compromise: qualifications would be enforced only in “Type A” urban constituencies and waived in “Type B” rural areas (CO 830/13). This approach reflects the broader colonial strategy of using tribal authority and rural loyalty to manage political transition.

Similar caution characterized the expansion of local government. Although councils were established in towns such as Erigavo and Las Anod, the Executive Council warned that any expansion of services, such as road maintenance, water supplies, or veterinary programs,

must be closely evaluated to avoid financial strain (CO 830/13). Traditional leaders were involved in governance discussions but in clearly subordinate roles. As the minutes noted, they "may best be associated with the future working of the Constitution," signaling their instrumental, rather than authoritative, position in the political order (CO 830/13).

The concept of "shadow ministers," explored in CO 830/12, further illustrates the limits of Somali empowerment. These unofficial members were attached to ministries to gain experience but were denied voting powers in the Executive Council. British officials feared that participation in unpopular colonial policies would politically damage these individuals, leading them to "suffer political eclipse" (CO 830/12). Likewise, electoral representation remained carefully structured. In rural areas, indirect elections via tribal electoral colleges were favored to reinforce existing hierarchies, while direct elections were confined to urban centers with higher literacy and administrative capacity (CO 830/12).

Education policy mirrored this dual logic of inclusion and control. The renaming of the Hargeisa European School as the "English School" symbolized increased access for Somali and Indian students. However, barriers such as language requirements, age restrictions, and Christian religious instruction ensured the continued exclusion of most Somalis. Even maintenance grants for Somali students were quietly administered to avoid public backlash from the settler community (CO 830/12).

Ultimately, the 1959 Executive Council proceedings reveal a colonial governance model grounded in contradiction. While the introduction of a ministerial system and the expansion of Somali representation marked clear departures from earlier direct rule, these reforms remained tightly controlled. They were designed to train Somali elites in administration without transferring real power. By embedding new institutions within preexisting colonial

frameworks, the British preserved strategic authority while managing pressures for independence.

By the end of 1959, British officials had committed to completing the transition to responsible government by mid-1960. In April 1960, the Legislative Council unanimously passed a resolution calling for unification with Somalia upon independence. These developments culminated in Somaliland's declaration of independence on 26 June 1960 and its union with Somalia on 1 July 1960 to form the Somali Republic (Somaliland Protectorate Government 1960).

The constitutional reforms of 1959, particularly the transformation of the Executive Council into a ministerial body with elected Somali members, represented a critical juncture in Somaliland's political development. They reflected both Britain's strategy of managing imperial withdrawal and the emergence of Somali elites capable of navigating new political institutions. While these reforms laid important foundations for self-rule, they were also shaped by the limitations and logics of colonial power.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.0 Conclusion:

This thesis has shown that the political trajectory of Somaliland, marked by relative peace, institutional resilience, and negotiated state-building, cannot be fully understood without examining the legacies of British colonial governance. Through an in-depth analysis of late colonial reforms, including the establishment of Advisory, Executive, Legislative, Local Government Councils at both town and district levels, this study has argued that British rule in Somaliland constituted a hybrid system. It was neither purely indirect nor entirely

despotic/authoritarian, as often depicted in the literature, but rather a tightly controlled structure that selectively incorporated local elites and traditional authorities.

Far from a hands-off or purely consultative model, British administrators retained firm control over legislative, executive, and financial decision-making while simultaneously incorporating clan elders, district representatives, and Somali notables into councils that were deliberately structured to preserve colonial supremacy.

Through detailed analysis of archival materials, including the records of the Advisory Council, Executive and Legislative Councils, and Local Government Councils, this study has shown how the British administration institutionalized clan representation within formal governance structures between 1946 and 1960. While this inclusion was limited and tightly managed, it served as a formative political apprenticeship. Somali elites gained early exposure to parliamentary procedures, inter-clan negotiation, and bureaucratic administration within a framework that preserved traditional authority but conditioned it through the principles of modern governance. These reforms facilitated political engagement among diverse and previously disconnected clans from different regions, many of whom had no prior history of formal interaction. They also created structured forums for inter-clan dialogue and contributed to the emergence of the first Somali political parties, signaling an important milestone in the evolution of representative governance.

The post-1991 polity in Somaliland did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it revived and reinterpreted many of the political forms first established during the late colonial period. The council of elders (guurti), regional district councils, and the incorporation of customary norms into state institutions all bear the imprint of the British strategy to govern through modified local structures(Renders 2012). The result is a distinctly hybrid political order that

blends customary legitimacy with formal institutional design, enabling both social cohesion and state functionality in the absence of external support or international recognition.

This thesis moves beyond simplistic evaluations of colonialism as either wholly destructive or entirely benevolent, offering instead a nuanced account of how even constrained and paternalistic reforms can leave behind usable institutional legacies. It also challenges mainstream development and state-building paradigms that privilege top-down, externally imposed blueprints over indigenous, historically informed processes. Somaliland's example illustrates that localized legitimacy, nurtured through long-term engagement with hybrid governance institutions, can produce more stable and context-appropriate outcomes than donor-driven state-building efforts.

At the same time, this study acknowledges its methodological limitations. While archival evidence provides a robust foundation for analyzing colonial institutional design, tracing precise causal links to post-1991 developments remains complex. Other factors, including the nature of the civil war, and the absence of foreign intervention, also shaped Somaliland's trajectory. Nonetheless, the evidence strongly suggests that the colonial experience of structured, if limited, political participation and inter-clan governance provided an essential institutional repertoire upon which Somaliland's leaders were able to build.

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