together the social fabric. This was thought to be particularly true of religious values.

This was not a moral argument, but a practical one: society would collapse into open violence without the cohesion provided by common values. Thus, those in authority needed to centrally plan and rigorously enforce the values that should be taught to and should be practiced by the masses. After all, if people were allowed to choose their own religious values, if values became a commodity open to competition, then civil chaos and conflict would inevitably ensue.

Voltaire argued that precisely the opposite was true. The process of imposing homogeneous values led only to conflict and religious wars. The result was a society intellectually stagnant and morally corrupt, because doubt or dissent was suppressed. It was diversity and freedom that created a thriving and peaceful society. Voltaire ended his most-quoted letter, "On the Presbyterians," by observing: "If there were only one religion in England, there would be danger of tyranny; if there were two, they would cut each other's throats; but there are thirty, and they live happily together in peace."

Perhaps one reason that Voltaire's *Philosophical Letters* created such a backlash from the French leviathan was that the book's logic, if carried beyond religion, would strike at any government attempt to impose common values or practices on the people. Indeed, Voltaire's argument against homogeneity continues to have deep implications for the centralized policies of all governments. Those citizens who reject imposed homogeneity in religion might well be prompted to question the wisdom of many other government institutions, including public schools, which are often justified by the declared need for common values. The freedom of individuals to decide matters of value for themselves could easily prompt them to demand the right to live according to those values and to teach them to their children. Thus could the system of centralized control unravel. □

1. The number of letters included varies slightly from edition to edition. The one used as a source for this article, *Philosophical Letters,* trans. Ernest Dilworth (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1961), contains 25.

2. Among the political barriers for non-Anglicans was the Test Act of 1673, which required the holders of public office to receive the sacrament in the Church of England.

3. Will and Ariel Durant in *The Story of Civilization: Part IX, The Age of Voltaire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 370.

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THE FREEMAN
IDEAS ON LIBERTY

A Peaceful Ferment in Somalia

by Spencer Heath MacCallum

A social experiment with far-reaching implications for human freedom is shaping up in Somalia. I had known that something was afoot but learned the details only last summer on meeting a Somali tribeswoman traveling in the United States with her European husband. She was an elegant, educated lady who would have been at home in any of the great cities of the world. When her husband introduced me as an anthropologist with classical liberal leanings, conversation turned toward her tribe, an independent, nomadic people who control and move over a large area on both sides of the Somalo-Ethiopian border. Hers is one of a constellation of tribes sharing similar language, culture, and customary law that for countless centuries lived together in relative harmony in that easternmost jut of the continent known as the Horn of Africa. The Somali nation by tradition, she said, is a stateless society; they have never accepted the authority of any central government, their own or any other.

Then she asked a question that took me by surprise: "Do you think it possible that my people could come into full participation in the modern world—culturally, scientifically, economically—without becoming a part of any state?" I told her I'd thought about that possibility with respect to tribal peoples for many years, but had never expected that anyone would ask the question. I said I thought it was theoretically possible, but that it would take extraordinary patience, careful planning, great flexibility. The way was untraveled.

As we talked, she explained an approach that Somalis from several tribes had discussed. It involves capitalizing on their statelessness by opening areas within their tribal lands for development, inviting businessmen and professionals the world over to come to take advantage of the absence of a central government or other coercive authority. In this way Somalia's statelessness might prove to be a uniquely valuable asset in the modern world.

Specifically, they were considering offering suitable tracts within their tribal lands on long-term lease for private development. Such development would take the pattern of large multiple-tenant income properties—"estates," as the British would call them—where the land would be leased but the improvements would be privately owned. An attractive site under consideration by my friend's tribe was a sparsely populated upland valley, which because of its elevation enjoyed a temperate climate yet also had access to the sea.

An industrious population, the tribespeople reasoned, attracted from all quarters of the globe by the promise of unprecedented personal and business freedom, could make such areas productive enterprise zones. Some of the more successful zones might eventually become bustling cities not unlike the free

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