

DALKA

YOUR SOMALI CURRENT AFFAIRS AND CULTURE MONTHLY

VOL 1, ISSUE 1

1 JULY 2017

"It is with great pleasure that we announce the revival of Dalka, a monthly current affairs magazine which ran in Somalia between 1965 and 1969. Relaunched after a hiatus of almost 50 years, this incarnation is bound to differ from the original. But to stay true to the reputation of Yousuf Duhul's trailblazing publication, we feel duty-bound to preserve two things: the clinical analysis of the news stories that matter to you and the iconic lucid, readable style."

IN THIS ISSUE:
THE
HISTORY OF
DALKA

SOMALI
SOCIETY
IN TRANSITION
SOMALIA
TURNS 57

Veteran Journalist

ABDULKADIR ALI BOLLAY

PERIPATETIC
PRESIDENT,
PRESIDING
PREMIER?

BOOK REVIEW:
SOMALIA
THE UNTOLD
HISTORY
IN THE
ARCHIVES



WWW.DALKA-MAGAZINE.COM



[/DALKA.MAGAZINE](https://www.facebook.com/DALKA.MAGAZINE)



[@DALKA_MAGAZINE](https://twitter.com/DALKA_MAGAZINE)



[/DALKA](https://www.youtube.com/DALKA)

Vol. I, Issue I Contents



5 Dalka's history



7 A nation in transition



10 Somalia turns 57



12 In the archives



14 Book review: History

This publication is a revival of Dalka, an English-language, Somali current affairs magazine which was first published in Mogadishu in 1965. It hopes to cater for a worldwide audience of Somalis and those who take an interest in the country's history, politics and society. Readers are encouraged to send in their submissions for publication (for more information see the editorial). Articles will be published on the magazine's website on a rolling basis; a selection of these will make it into the monthly edition.

Editorial

‘There has been a natural curiosity about the “DALKA”’. So began the editorial of the first issue in 1965. ‘What journal is it going to be? Who is behind it? What line is it going to take in the various urgent problems facing us?’

As the present writer went about reviving the publication after a hiatus of some 48 years (the last edition was published on 15 October 1969), the same exact questions were asked. ‘Would it be pro or against the Government? Right or Left? Extreme or moderate?’ This editorial will hopefully illuminate the answers to these and other timely questions.

The desire to memorialise significant dates in one’s national history seems primordial. The emperors of ancient Rome, for instance, fond of pomp and pageantry, would often inaugurate festivals to mark milestones such as victories on the battlefield against their foes. In 60 AD, Emperor Nero set up the *Quinquennial Neronia*—a three-part festival involving music, oratory, poetry and games—to mark the anniversary of his reign. It was no coincidence that the first of July was chosen both now and back in 1965 for the launch of the magazine.

Since 1960, the first of July has occupied a particular prominence in the Somali imaginary, marking the date both in which the former Italian colony gained independence and also united with the ex-British Protectorate, which was freed from colonial rule just days earlier on 26 June.

But in 1965, alongside the usual display of ceremony and jubilation, independence day celebrations were accompanied by a novel occurrence, which for the nation’s politicians would have been more a cause for concern than celebration.

On that day, Yousuf Jama Ali Duhul, a British-educated Somali lawyer, published the first issue of his current affairs magazine, *Dalka*, publishing many articles under the pseudonym ‘DAJY’, the initials of his full name spelt backwards. A young lawyer in private practice—he had been called to the Bar just five years earlier in 1960—Duhul had modelled the journal on the *New Statesman*, which had left

its mark on him and some of his fellow Somalis during their studies in the UK.

The publication, as one of those ‘peripherally’ involved recently reminded me, proved ‘a storm in the side’ of the government, because it was those in power in the nascent nation-state who were the subject of Duhul and his fellows’ censure.

A brainchild of Duhul’s, whose pioneering enthusiasm not only brought about the publication but more importantly, ensured its maintenance, the journal rapidly took after the high profile of its editor. At the time, he was gaining a reputation in the new republic, having served as the defence of the junior, Sandhurst-trained army officers who staged the failed coup in north Somalia in 1961.

In a reprint of *Dalka* published in 1997—twenty years ago this year—Duhul recalled gratifyingly how ‘so widely remembered, and remembered with fondness’ the publication was, almost three decades after it was last published. Commenting on the fact he had been urged to revive the journal, he found this ‘a most impossible and impractical suggestion’ since it had been a ‘child of its time’ and ‘you cannot recreate the past’. He concluded his preface, however, with the hope that the reprint would allow ‘a new generation to see, to read, to laugh at or to criticise, maybe even to be inspired by’.

It is on these last words that this revival hangs. Despite the proliferation, especially in the last decade or so, of Somali-related content on the World Wide Web, the present author identified a void where *Dalka* once stood. It is here, then, that the publication’s mission statement can be easily found. The first is to inject some of the cautious optimism that the *Dalka* brand was so well-known; ‘cautious’ in the sense that although on the face of the publication criticised sitting politicians, it did so with the hope this scrutiny would encourage (or goad!) them into aspiring to the high standards of the fledgling parliamentary democracy in which they served.

The last few decades too have seen to the coarsening of public opinion against the ruling establishment (and rightly so) but in the media coverage, this is rarely tempered by even the

faintest expectation that things can get better. We hope to change this.

In the planning stages, contemplating what title to use for this incarnation of the publication, the editor initially toyed with *Dhulka* to try and capture some of the dislocation effected on the Somali condition in the last few decades and the resulting polycentrism. The response from those who had been familiar with the original was that it was a dull shadow of the optimism encapsulated by the original name. In this way then, the publication will seek to marry the past, the present and the future—what was, what is and what can be. Along the way, the reader can be sure of one thing: incisive analysis is our trade and wit, our currency.

Secondly, *New Dalka* will showcase the best of Somali long-form journalism. Just as the original *Dalka* ran everything from book reviews to musings on pressing existential questions such as the fate of the young Intellectual, our pages will bring to life some of the key cultural and social questions facing the Somali people.

Occasionally, we will also take a leaf out of the history books. It is with great pleasure then to have in this, the first issue, an article by Abdulkadir Ali Bollay, about the fifty-seventh anniversary of Somalia's independence. Contributions like these will strengthen our link to the past. Although not himself involved with *Dalka*, Bollay is a veteran journalist, who had written for and edited newspapers such as the government-owned, Italian-language daily *Corriere della Somalia* from the 1950s and its Somali successor, *Xiddigta Oktoobar* from 1972.

Naturally, when such a long time has passed since the original was first published, this publication will be different in its own way. Coming in the 'Internet Age', it will begin life as an online publication, being able to effortlessly reach farther audiences. Engaging with a readership, scattered through the world, our content will adopt a suitably international outlook, integrating fresh perspectives and insights drawn from across the globe.

But still, some things haven't changed. As before, this 'journal of the people' will be

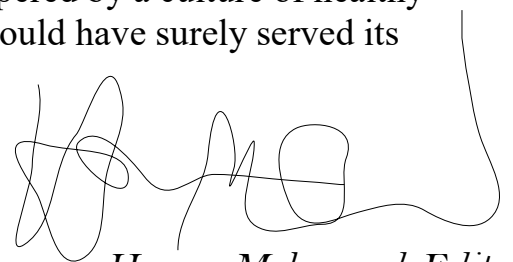
neutral in so far as we are not 'for or against' anyone. 'Our approach', as Duhul wrote in the first editorial, 'will be empirical. We will examine each issue, problem or situation on its own merit'. But neutrality will not—and should not—absolve us of speaking the truth and saying what needs to be said. As ever, 'We believe that the cause of the man who cannot defend himself, the weak, should be espoused'.

This reincarnation, as with the original *Dalka*, will rely on 'the cooperation of all those who believe that our effort is worthwhile'. Readers are warmly encouraged to send in their submissions—either as written pieces or proposals, or simply Emails to the Editor. The former should be directed to editor@dalka-magazine.com and the latter to letters@dalka-magazine.com. The words of the first editorial that 'We want to discover those with unexplored literary talent' still hold true as does the promise that 'We will certainly publish any material, *provided* only it is of the acceptable standard'.

Like the *Quinquennial Neronia*, which was celebrated only twice at an interval of four years, by its fifth anniversary, *Dalka* was no longer in print. But like this publication, Nero's Games would be revived, decades later, in their case by a later Roman emperor, Domitian.

From the start, *Dalka* was actively seen by the political class as an inconvenience, finding themselves—both as a category and in some cases, individually—reprimanded in its pages.

Whatever they may have thought of *Dalka* back then, it is our sincere belief that that first generation of Somali politicians would—had they been alive—welcomed its reappearance (even simply for the nostalgia). For it represented much of what was good and memorable of that now-bygone era, 1960s Somalia, where 'every Somali [was] his own political party, with an opinion to express on every issue', all expressed without fearing arrest or worse, for his or her life. If this reincarnation goes some way to revitalising that optimism tempered by a culture of healthy cynicism, it would have surely served its purpose.



Haroon Mohamoud, Editor

The history of Dalka

Dalka was launched on the fifth anniversary of Somalia's independence on 1 July 1965, as a current affairs magazine in the Somali capital, Mogadishu. Owned and edited by Yousuf Duhul—a UK-trained Somali lawyer in private practice—the monthly (later bi-monthly) proved popular with the educated and literate classes.

The publication, as the editor recalled decades later, was in all respects ‘a child of its time’ (1). This fact was reflected no less in its very name which, to the Somali ear, evokes positive connotations of ‘the homeland’ (2) and which, to the generation who still recall flicking through its pages almost half a century ago, is synonymous with “the good old days!” By its very existence, the journal epitomised the euphoria which swept across the Africa in the 1960s, in which the continent's newly-independent citizens (the editor and contributors no less) placed high hopes on the grand possibilities self-government would hold for their people.

Within that context then, the journal's *raison d'être* seemed simple enough: ‘Our aim is to make it a journal of ideas, lively, fearless, and above all, fair... We will examine each issue, problem or situation on its own merit’ (3), read the editorial of the first ever edition.

Many of the contributors were drawn from a group of like-minded young men in their twenties and thirties, many of whom—like the editor—had studied in the UK or less far commonly, elsewhere in the Anglophone world, such as in the United States.

That these writers devoted so many lines to the censure, not only of the government and the Parliament but also their individual members, could only have been welcomed. Unsurprisingly, as one of those ‘peripherally’ involved in the publication recently told me, *Dalka* soon proved to be a ‘thorn in their [i.e. politicians'] side’, scrutinising their activities—and more often than not, lacking dutifulness in discharging

their responsibilities. Although it often made very uncomfortable reading for the nation's politicians, it was perhaps to their credit that despite having the power to inhibit it, it was only much later that the powers that be pursued such a course.

Still, since Somali democracy was still a largely untested creature by the mid-1960s, most contributors wrote from behind the veil of pseudonyms. This was perhaps a decision largely driven by pragmatism: since many of them worked for the government and wrote their criticisms of it by night, the authors quite naturally did not want their articles to imperil their employment.



The original logo (above)

Apart from the main political articles, *Dalka* also carried short stories as well as pieces on subjects as varied as literature and foreign relations, from prolific contributors. Letters from readers, showcased on the Correspondence pages, were a nod to the publication's wide-ranging readership with messages finding their way onto the pages from as far afield as Washington D.C., Geneva, the Hague, Aberdeen and Bremen in West Germany.

Writing in the era before the pimple outbreak of military coups and regimes would afflict the continent, Duhul and co enjoyed the liberty of a free press, a luxury to which they and many of their African counterparts would soon wave goodbye. The magazine was in continual publication for two years, between 1965 and 1967, before it became increasingly difficult to produce any non-government publications, with the Government of the day slowly but surely buying out the small independent press

DALKA

No. 1
Vol. I

The Homeland

Price
So. Sh. 1.00

Published in Mogadishu on the first day of each month

AN INDEPENDENT ENGLISH MONTHLY OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

IN THIS ISSUE.

Editorial	3
Dalka Diary	4
by Dadka	
Chaos in Educa- tion	5
by Dajy	
The intellectual and the Power Structure	7
by Abdillahi Ali Dualeh	
The Banana Cri- sis	8
by Geeddii	
Literature	10
by Our Literary Editor	
In Parliament ...	12
by a Special Cor- respondent	
Our Foreign Po- licy	14
by Observer	
Story	17
by Mahmoud Sheikh Ahmed	

1^{ST.}

J
U
L
Y

1
9
6
5

BEST
WISHES

Where We Stand

by YOUSUF DUHUL

There has been natural curiosity about the "DALKA". What journal is it going to be? Who is behind it? What line is it going to take in the various urgent problems facing us? Would it be pro or against the Government? Right or left? Extreme or moderate?

Well, even we do not know the exact type of journal it is going to be. Our aim is to make it a journal of ideas, lively, fearless and above all fair. It has nobody, absolutely nobody behind it (except the editor).

Our approach will be empirical. We will examine each issue, problem or situation on its own merit. But we will be on the left to this extent: We believe that the cause of the man who cannot defend himself, the weak should be espoused. While, therefore, always keeping an open mind, we will always be prejudiced in favour of the under-dog.

We are not for or against the Government as such. We are definitely against one thing. The System. We believe the present set-up has failed to fulfil our aspirations of five years ago. We believe that it lost us golden opportunities in our endeavour for re-unification and the struggle for better conditions for the common man. We believe that it has proved inefficient, ignorant, selfish and corrupt. We believe that a radical change is an absolute necessity. We do not pretend to know the best direction that such change should take. But we are convinced of the necessity of the change.

One piece of warning. We will try to be as accurate and fair as we can. But we will make mistakes. Our resources are not such as to minimise the inevitable mistakes. But we will rectify them as much as possible.

One final point must be emphasized. This, we hope, is the journal of the people. We need the co-operation of all those who believe that our effort is worth-while. We want to discover those with unexplored literary talent. We will certainly publish any material, provided only it is of the acceptable standard.

It was briefly revived in no less a pivotal month in modern Somali history than October 1969, in which not only the incumbent President was assassinated but the military coup d'état was staged.

Two editions—issued on the first and fifteenth of the month—were to be the last, with the incoming military regime 'putting paid to any notion of free speech' (4).

The first of its kind, as an independent journal, it spawned other similar publications such as the Italian-language competitor, *La Tribuna* under the able editorship of Ismail Jemale Ossoble, who like Duhul was also a lawyer by profession. Ossoble also later served briefly as a parliamentarian and minister between the elections of 1969 and the coup of the same year.

(1) Yousuf Duhul, 'Preface', *Dalka: 'The Homeland': Documents from a Free Somalia Press, Facsimile Edition*, vol. I, 1965 (London: HAAN Publishing, 1997), p. vii.

(2) 'The homeland' is the literal, and conveniently idiomatic, translation of 'Dalka', since it conveys similar impressions to its Somali opposite number.

(3) *Dalka*, vol. I, no. 1, 1 July 1965, p. 1.

(4) A.S.A., 'Foreword', *Dalka: 'The Homeland': Documents from a Free Somalia Press, Facsimile Edition*, vol. I, 1965 (London: HAAN Publishing, 1997), p. vi. In preparing this history, I have made extensive use of this Foreword.

A society in transition

It's oft-repeated, perhaps ad nauseam, that traditionally most Somalis are nomads. Nomads, by nature, pass their days itinerant. This journeying is guided not necessarily by the pursuit of a given destination, but circumstance—the search for pasture, for a well or other sources of water, for fresh arable land.

Some commentators, reflecting on the various paths emigrating Somalis have pursued around the world have merely brought this characterisation up-to-date with the post-1990 reality through the apt descriptor, 'international'. The argument goes: Somalis, as nomads, used to travel within the confines of a certain geographical space but in this age of the global village, they traverse the globe with the same nomadic instinct—this time, in pursuit of safety and security—as they previously trekked in search of pastures for their livestock.

This notion of constant travel might be a useful prism through which to understand Somali history from a *longue durée* perspective. The French historian, Fernand Braudel, wrote about different types of 'histories': the

ephemeral and contingent on the one hand and the decisive and structural on the other.

The resultant task is to take these two histories (literally, narratives) 'in the same grasp: the history that moves from one moment to the next, riveting to the eye of the beholder by the mere fact of its shifts and dramas and an underlying history, saying little, almost unsuspected by its actors or observers, but a history which nonetheless persists, no matter what may happen against all the wear and tear of time' (1). As such, there is a transition from the merely event-driven, short-term histories, the *courte durée* to the *longue durée*. The latter, characterised not by change but continuity, gives rise to a *mentalité*, a self-contained characteristic way of thinking, feeling and living.

Interviewing oral informants as part of research for my undergraduate dissertation, I found these sentiments—the *mentalité* of modernity acting alongside and interacting with the *mentalité* of tradition—ever-present in their recollections. Although historians and social scientists are increasingly wary of sharply

delineating terms such as tradition and modernity, the use of first-hand historical information can help to highlight instances where such a contradistinction is meaningful.

Tradition is understood, for instance, as customs, practices or beliefs which have been passed down from generation to generation. 'Modernity', on the other hand, is understood in two interrelated ways: firstly, as the departure from the 'traditional' and secondly and related to that, 'modernity' is represented by certain norms and institutions replacing or eliding previous ones such individualism (over communalism) and the rise of the nation-state where imperialism once ruled.

As Anthony Giddens observed, 'modernity' is used as a shorthand term for modern society, which itself has three main characteristics. Of concern to us here are two out of the three: a) a set of economic institutions that relate to industrial production and a market economy and b) a range of political institutions that support the nation-state and mass democracy (2). Charles Baudelaire, who coined the term *modernité* in one of his essays, used it to represent 'the fleeting, ephemeral experience of life in an urban metropolis' (3).

To capture the dynamic symbiosis between the two, therefore, it is more helpful to treat tradition and modernity less as stagnant absolutes and more as abstract, wide-ranging worldviews and perspectives, whose constituent parts—at times, understood as clan/kinship networks, communalism, agrarianism in the case of the former; urbanisation, mass democracy and industrialisation—can exist to varying extents in different places, even at the exclusion of its sister components.

Modernity meant different things to different people. In late-/post-colonial Somalia, to some it meant speaking a foreign language—even those with the most minimal Italian would drop the odd Italian word into their conversations to identify

themselves as part of the elite while to others it meant adopting a new culture: sitting down in coffee shops reading English-language publications such as *Dalka* or *War Somali Sidihi*, a cup of coffee at hand. As John Drysdale recalled, 'the elegance of a collar and tie'—thoroughly European forms of dress—'persisted' in postcolonial Mogadishu (4). Kinship networks were not totally overwritten and the shifts in how people identified themselves and others were more subtle. With the commercialisation of the economy and the opportunities for capital accumulation (as opposed to the old limited household and livestock economy), people began to see themselves in new but not entirely alien ways.

Seen in this way, a level of nuance can be brought to the more conventional periodisation of twentieth-century Somali history. The noteworthy dates and events of 1943 and 1960, for instance—the former seen as an important date in political awakening, with the founding of the Somali Youth League (SYL) and the latter, the dawn of independence—can be understood within this wider framework of a 'transitional society', moving from old norms to new forms. New histories that place the concept of transition and travel at the heart of the inquiry are bound to yield more interesting insights.

In order to endow his Somali audience with an appreciation for the value of the anti-colonial independence movement, the iconic bard Timadde ('Timacadde') characterised the nation-state as a milch-camel, the animal reared by the majority of Somalis.

Deploying the image of the camel—symbolic in the nomad's mind of prosperity—effectively twinned independence with the promise of plenty. Just a few years after the end of colonialism and the start of self-rule, this same trope was adopted to signify dissatisfaction, when the (occasionally wild) expectations placed upon

independence were to remain unmet. One such rendition came through the words of another poet in c.1962, who giving vent to particular regional grievances, lamented how 'Of all worldly possessions, [he] owned only a she-camel' [Maandeeq, importantly, the name given to the she-camel by 'Timacadde'] which had now become lost to him (5). High expectations, like his camel, disappeared into thin air.

Perhaps in hindsight, rather than focusing on the camel as symbolic of plenty, poets and public alike should begin to extol the virtues of this beast as a trusty mount, able to brave the arid country and to survive for prolonged periods with little drink or grazing. Like the Somali people, traversing the divide between colonialism and independence, subjugation and self-rule, the camel is on a journey. In three years, Somalia will mark sixty years since the two regions—one formerly under the Italian, the other the British—became free from the imperialist yoke and united as a republic. Then, as now, one can only be sure that everyone—both in Somalia and beyond—are very interested in where and how Maandeeq will go next.

References:

- (1) Davidson, B., *Africa in Modern History: The Search for a New Society* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 23.
- (2) Giddens, A., *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 94.
- (3) Baudelaire, C., ed. and trans. J. Mayne, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, London: Phaidon Press, p. 13.
- (4) Drysdale, J., 'Reflections, 1943-1963' in *Milk and Peace, Drought and War: Somali Culture, Society and Politics: Essays in Honour of I. M. Lewis*, ed. M. V. Hoehne and V. Luling, London: Hurst, 2010, p. 27.
- (5) Johnson, J. W., *Heelloy: Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somalia*, London: Haan, 1998, p. 131.

An earlier draft of this paper was delivered at the Anglo-Somali Society AGM held in London on February 22, 2017, under the title 'Maku xusuusiya waxaad xusuusan tahay?: A reconstruction of the Somali peninsula in the late-/post-colonial era through oral sources'. The contents of the address drew upon the author's findings during research for his dissertation.



Do you remember reading Dalka in the 1960s? Or is the first time you have heard of it? Have your say and email your comments to letters@dalka-magazine.com

Submissions also welcome and should be directed to the Editor at editor@dalka-magazine.com

Somalia turns 57

Veteran journalist

Abdulkadir Ali

*Bollay looks back at
the importance of
26 June and 1 July in
Somali history*



It gives me immeasurable joy to congratulate my Somali compatriots around the world, on the fifty-seventh anniversary of both 26 June 1960—when the former Protectorate gained independence from the British—and the first of July of the same year, when also becoming independent, the ex-Italian colony united with the former to form the new republic.

The first of July is a noteworthy date, of considerable historical significance. On this day, the flag of the Italian colonial power was lowered in the south and the Somali flag ceremonially hoisted in its place.

This date's prominence of place in the Somali psyche is in no

way diminished by the many divisions that have afflicted the body politic since and which sadly hamstring the worthy cause of Pan-Somalism.

We ask God that He grant peace and serenity to the heroes and heroines, who having devoted both toil and wealth to the independence struggle, have gone before and that He grants health and prosperity to those who remain. We pray that the hardship be alleviated from those who suffer it and that enmity and discord is replaced by peace.

The independence struggle was a long and arduous journey, with many precious souls dedicating themselves to the cause. *Gobanimaddu waa geed ku baxa dhiiga dadweynaha*—Sovereignty was like a tree, whose founding seed was the blood of the people. It is therefore unfortunate that that legacy should be harmed by

the misguided efforts of those who do not value and appreciate peace.

By good fortune, now we see indications that suggest there is light at the end of the tunnel and that recovery from the events of the civil war will be possible soon enough. The clearest sign that the Somali people are looking to the future full of hope came with the recent election of Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmaajo' [in February 2017], on the back of widespread popular support.

Source:
Instagram/Vintage_Somalia

This new administration is exerting great effort in trying to secure reconciliation among the people. To this end, I suggest that they appoint an expert committee, tasked with steering the ship out of the enmity and disunity that currently prevails.

True unity is central to preserving the viability of Somali statehood. It endows the polity with capability and legitimacy to act while its opposite, disunity, brings only ignominy and disarray. It is for that reason that the government should pool all its power in achieving genuine reconciliation, which will allow the Somali people—who are brothers and sisters—to overcome the suspicions that have crept up between them and keep them divided. If the government succeeds in achieving this noble aim, it is my belief that they will be commemorated in the annals of history.

As we know, 26 June 1960 was the day on which the Protectorate achieved independence from the British, before it was followed days later in this transition from imperial domination by the former Italian colony to the south. On 1 July 1960, north and south joined to form the republic.

Somalis, at home and abroad, should give this day its due and commemorate it. This is made all the more urgent by the fact that the Somali youth, who were born and raised in the diaspora, have little appreciation for the great worth of this date.

The people of the Protectorate had decided to unite with their brethren in the south. Historically, the northerners always desired and strove for pan-Somalism. Testament to this was the demand of the northerner elders in 1946, asking that the British unite all five of the Somali territories. They repeated the same demand the following year, calling on the British to play a leading role in uniting the Somali lands and to grant them independence.



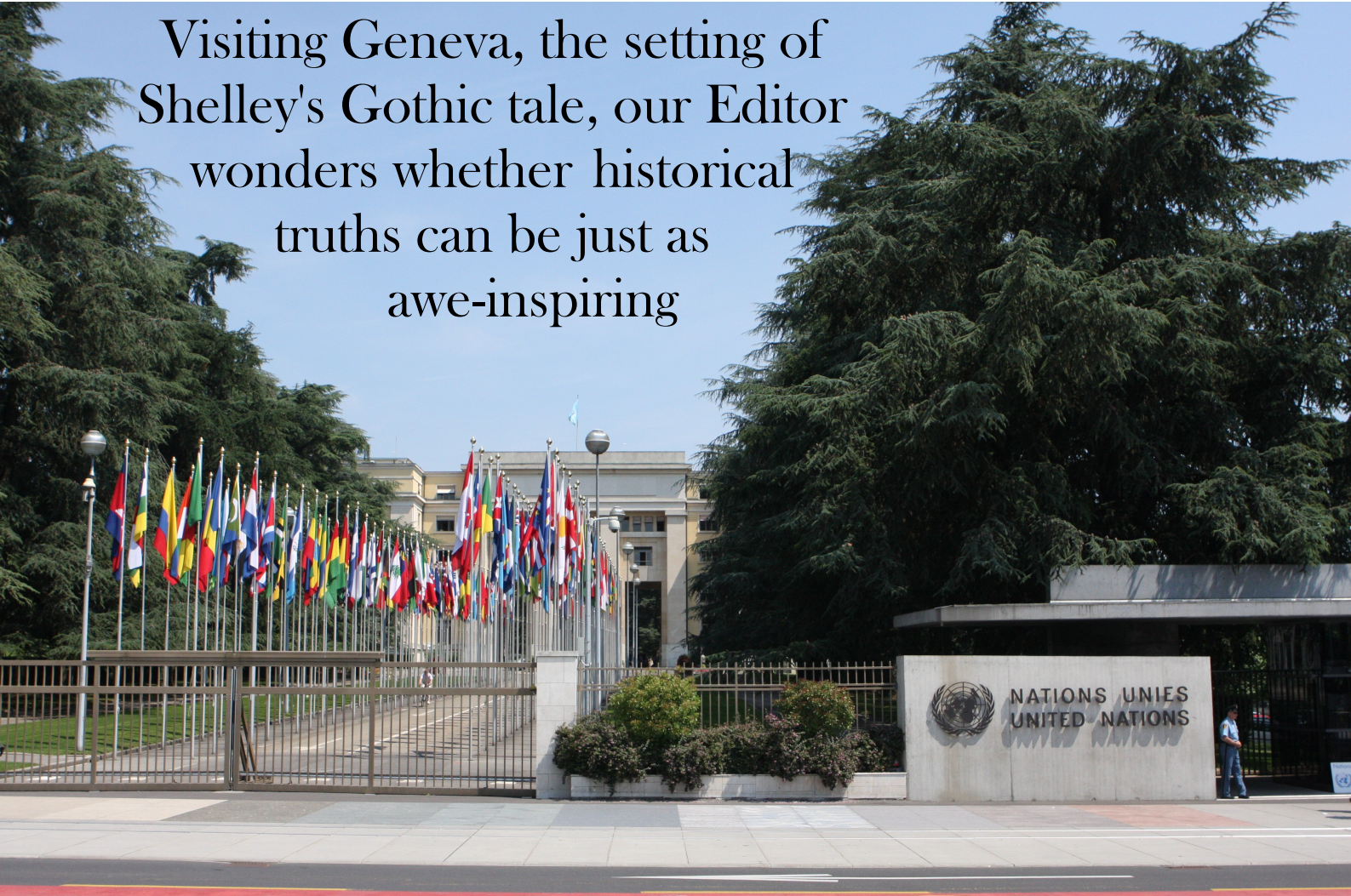
One can call to mind the petition submitted by the journalist Uurdooh (“Uurdoox”), stating that 90 percent of Somalis were in agreement that they should be granted independence and that the five Somali territories be united. This demand seemed logical at the time, since, for much of the 1940s, the British controlled four of these territories and could have negotiated with the French about the territory under their possession with the hope of uniting it with the others.

Once again, I congratulate all the Somali people, wherever they may be in the world, on this auspicious day, wishing them felicity and prosperity. I pray that God will restore the honour and dignity of the Somali nation and allow us to celebrate yet another first of July next year, in all good health and happiness.

This article was originally prepared in Somali and was translated by the Editor.

Abdulkadir Ali Bollay (above) was born in Mogadishu in 1933. In 1952, he went to Italy on a scholarship, where he studied for a degree in social affairs and journalism. From 1956 to 1959, he was Somalia's representative to the International Labour Organisation in Geneva. In 1961, he joined the newly-established Ministry of Information where he edited the official government papers, firstly the Italian-language daily Corriere della Somalia until 1969 and later its successor, the Somali-language Xiddigta Oktoobar between 1969 and 1979. Between 1980 and 1990, he was the deputy mayor of Mogadishu. He now resides in London and can be reached at bollay@hotmail.com.

Visiting Geneva, the setting of Shelley's Gothic tale, our Editor wonders whether historical truths can be just as awe-inspiring



In the archives

I arrived in Geneva, on the two hundredth anniversary of the tryst between the Shelleys (Perchy Bysshe and Mary Wollstonecraft) and Lord Bryon in the very same city. It was during that sojourn, staying in houses on the shores of Lake Geneva, passing their time reading German ghost stories aloud that Lord Byron challenged the party to present their own ghostly tale. It was from this encounter that Wollstonecraft's novel *Frankenstein* was born, whose striking narrative—replete with gothic motifs—nonetheless presents the Swiss city as the site of Victor Frankenstein's upbringing, a temperate and welcoming *ville*.

Arriving, unlike the Shelleys, in the winter

(December 2016), I was met with bitter cold. I quickly found my bearings and acclimatised myself to the weather. My stay was marked by the occasional misty fog. The biting hibernal conditions would, I was later told, only beset the country after I'd departed. There have been reports of temperatures below zero and plentiful snow, particularly in Zurich at the start of the new year.

Despite its international reputation, the Genevese landscape proved rather unexciting; a welcome fact for any researcher who fears distraction by interesting touristic sites. But I was sure to visit the Reformation Wall—quite timely since 2017 marks the five-hundredth anniversary of that event of such seismic

proportions in European history—which lies on the grounds of Université de Genève and commemorates numerous Protestant figures, the most well-known of whom include John Calvin and John Knox.

Having made my way through the security gates at the Palais des Nations, I entered the Library.

In 1948, a Four Power Commission—composed of the UK, the USA, the USSR and France—descended on Mogadishu to hear the wishes of the Somali people as to their future and then decide on the fate of the former Italian colony. The Commission's deliberations proved inconclusive; the Somalis consulted were divided largely between the Somali Youth League (SYL), who were against

the return of the Italians as the tutelary administrator and a pro-Italian coalition called La Conferenza Somalia. The case was thus referred to the UN General Assembly, which duly decided to place the country under a trusteeship. For the ten years of the trusteeship's duration, a Advisory Council visited Italian Somaliland to survey the progress towards independence. An annual report was produced and sent to the General Assembly; it was these documents which proved most useful.

Flicking through these files, one could be excused for sensing a Wollstonecraft-esque tale unfolding. The protagonist in her novel, *Victor Frankenstein*, is a young scientist whose endeavours to fashion a creature from composite body parts and animate it using electricity, turns into a living nightmare.

The beginning of Victor's endeavours in no way foretold the monstrosity that would come of his 'Adam'. 'His limbs', after all, 'were in proportion, his selected features beautiful', consisting of 'hair of a lustrous black and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness'.

Tasking with preparing Somalia for independence, the tutelary Italian administration went about shaping the incipient nation-state from what, at the time, were becoming the agreed-upon structures necessary for good governance, namely, parliamentary democracy (the Second World War constituting no less the nail in the coffin of colonial rule) and representative governance.

Like Victor, it could be argued that in the build-up to independence, little consideration was given to how all the composite body parts (or forms of governance) would interact. The Italian administrators, who almost without exception looked



Above: Voters queue outside a polling station, in the first local elections held in 35 municipalities on 28 March 1954

down upon the kinship networks that were the foundation of Somali society, failed to take them into account when imposing their own post-WWII Constitution and parliamentary system on the east African country.

This attitude could not have been more evident than in the proportional representation electoral system, which although well-suited to post-fascist Italy—being seen, by the mass-based parties, as a safeguard against totalitarianism—proved counterproductive in the Somali context. There, after independence, instead of checking the entrenchment of power, it allowed political aspirants—who had failed to achieve a high enough position on the 'closed lists' of the mainstream parties—to set up their own 'independent' parties, which almost always appealed to the politician's old clan. This trend continued unabated; by the late 1960s, there were a thousand candidates, representing 64 'personal' parties, competing for 123 parliamentary seats.

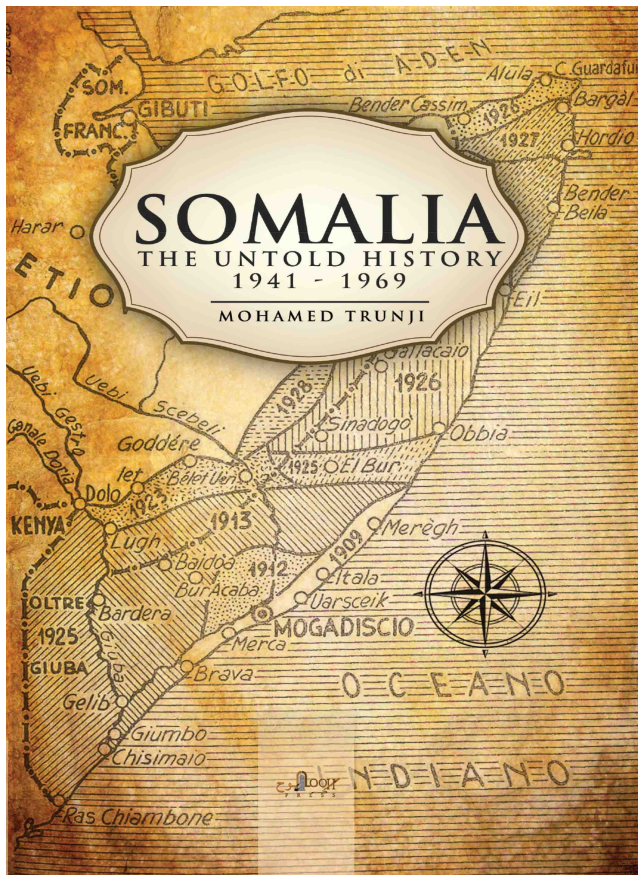
Indubitably, there were

many other factors also at play that led to the fallout in the late-twentieth century. But as with *Frankenstein*, one can surely ask if the foundations of Somali democracy laid in the 1950s, could have more judiciously reflected the realities of Somali society, no less the prominence of clan-based relations.

This is not a controversial statement. It is a discussion which requires a suitable level of nuance and subtlety somewhere between the utter disregard of clan structure, which most Italian administrators bar a few such as Mario D'Antonio had, and the rigidity of the consociational power-sharing formula currently being used.

As Somalia tries to rise again, after almost three decades of instability, the current and subsequent governments should give these questions the philosophical consideration and nuance they so deserve, but which hitherto they have not been given.

Book review



SOMALIA: The Untold History 1941-1969 by Mohamed Issa Trunji, 2015, 608pp., ISBN-10: 0993431302, Hardcover £14.95, Looh Press

This book is a welcome addition to the shelves of those interested in the country's journey from colonialism to independence. Constituting over 500 pages, this gripping, lucid narrative sheds light on the detail of a period whose events arguably continue to have an impact on the nation's politics, awareness of which has understandably but unfortunately been eclipsed by the 'boom' in studies of the more tragic events of the last few decades.

The book is divided into 12 chapters, each varying in length anywhere between just under 20 pages to 85. Although the book surveys the period from 1941 to 1969, the bulk of the analysis is devoted to the events of pre-independence (i.e. before 1960) with only one part out of three covering what in Somali circles is

often characterised as the 'democratic decade'.

The main thesis lies in uncovering African, or more specifically Somali, agency in the decolonisation process, challenging the age-old assertion that most modern woes on the continent can be solely traced back to the role of the colonisers. The reputation of lesser-known parties, such as those of La Conferenza [The Conference, in Italian] coalition, is rehabilitated, from the retired trope of them simply as pro-Italian and therefore, as the depiction held, less patriotic than parties such as the Somali Youth League (more commonly known as the SYL or the Lega).

In this way, nationalism in pre-independence Somalia is presented as contested, broadened beyond the SYL which has characteristically dominated the literature and public conscience. This suggestion is underpinned by an exploration of the political ideology of these non-Lega parties, which is presented as detailed and thorough.

The focus on the non-Lega parties' ideological underpinnings could have been tempered however by an acknowledgement of the practical factors underlying the coalition's stances, which might reasonably be thought, even more than ideology, to have dictated

their agenda, no less their partiality to continued Italian presence. The Conferenza, as an alliance, had of course been constituted in September 1947 at the instigation of Italian propaganda agents, who were financed by Italy's Ministry of Colonies. The view then that the Conferenza's relationship with the Italian authorities should be read, at least partly in terms of intra-Somali competition for advantage and resources, is only further bolstered by the realisation that the coalition was funded, directly or indirectly, by settler Italians or even Italians formally tasked to run the Administration. Conversely, that these parties' proximity to the Italians was soon replaced by estrangement, particularly after the Lega's rapprochement with AFIS, could equally have been underlined as an illustration of the dynamism of the politics in the period.

The author's work has the unique distinction of being the first published work informed by the personal diary of Somalia's first president, Aden Abdulle Osman, kept throughout the decade from 1957. (Abdi I. Samatar's recent *Africa's First Democrats*, published in the autumn of last year, was the second.)

This allows the work to draw upon contemporary—rather than retrospective—accounts thereby removing some of the shortcomings of inaccuracy and 'mis-remembering' faced by those dealing with oral testimonies.

Working their way through the tome, readers are likely to be slightly inconvenienced by the variability in footnoting. Apart from a handful of instances, secondary material rarely receives acknowledgement 'below the line'. While primary sources are generally cited with more consistency, when this does not happen, the provenance of certain pieces of information is obscured. Thus, in certain instances, unable to decipher the source of details, the reader is left unsure in which vein to interpret them.

A glaring example relates to the circumstances in which a group of deputies gained (or regained in some instances) cabinet positions (pp. 507-8). The explanation proffered—that 'cabinet positions were given as a reward for supporting Abdirashid [Ali Sharmarke] in the [1967] presidential election'—is left unsubstantiated. Does this observation come—as is likely—from the diary of President Osman? Or is it the author's own assertion? In his recent, posthumous autobiography, for instance, Abdirizak Haji Hussein recalled how the whole episode of 'who had voted for whom' had been characterised by speculation (p. 261), which lasted, on the public's part, for two weeks. If the work under review, therefore, runs into subsequent editions, it is hoped that the author will utilise this publicly-available work alongside Osman's diary already in his possession. So doing would allow the mutual balancing, of the Osman and Hussein's writings, two equally-distinguished politicians, who despite their shared credentials (in Samatar's words) as Africa's first



The author of the book, Mohamed Isse Trunji (right) and Mohammed Abdullah Artan (left) of Looh Press, the UK-based publishing house and book distributor, which published the book. They are seen here at an event held by Akadeemiyada Goboleedka Af-Soomaaliga (the Regional Somali Language Academy) in London on 19 February 2017, on International Mother Language Day (21 February).

*Source:
YouTube/
Hanoolaato*

democrats, often found themselves—as in the 1959 parliamentary revolt—on opposite sides and therefore offer contrasting perspectives to the historian.

Finally, even if subsequent works challenge or dissent from the main thrust of Trunji's argument, this rich work would have surely served its purpose: indeed, the author begins the book, noting that 'Some may disagree with some aspects of my research. I make no apologies but rather submit my analysis as a challenge'. Thus, if the contents of this book have stimulated debate—as they already have—this addition has encouraged many Somalis to think about their past, encouraging them to evade the existential threat evoked by the profound warning that a people or nation without a history do not deserve to be characterised as such.

A longer review of this book will appear in the *Journal of Somali Studies* (JOSS), vol. 4, nos. 1 & 2 (2017).

Would you like to review books relating to Somali politics, culture and society?

Send in your reviews to
editor@dalka-magazine.com