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NEW DALKA

Your Somali current affairs and culture monthly

Contents

Editor:
Haroon Mohamoud
www.dalka-magazine.com
editor@dalka-magazine.com

Letter from the Editor

Another month, another issue of *Dalka.* The overwhelmingly positive response to the inaugural issue has left us in no doubt as to the potential this publication will enjoy. Letters to the Editor—some published in these pages—found their way to our mailbox from around the world.

While the correspondence received was full of praise, we would have liked to see more (constructive) criticism directed our way. What do you, our readers, want to see more of in future issues? What worked well last time—and perhaps more importantly, what didn't?

That said, some readers did take to certain websites to make their views heard. Some of these however were deemed so digressive as to not even warrant a response, delving as they did into scurrilous diatribes.

In *Dalka,* as opposed to other quarters, it is **ideas**, not personalities, which concern us most. We are therefore extending an olive branch to all those who wish to mend their ways and begin to challenge us on the plain of ideas. If they wish to engage with ideas, our pages will serve as their canvas. Unlike practically anywhere else, even if someone wants to criticise our articles or features, we will give them a spot in the Letters page or even their own page spread. The Editor dearly hopes they will avail themselves of this opportunity.

But all clouds have a silver lining. Some of these comments made us realise the need for a clarification, which at the time we last went to press, seemed so obvious as to not need any mention. At no point did this publication make any pretension to representing the views of its predecessor, the *Dalka* of the 1960s. It was, and remains, editorially independent from it. In order to make this distinction crystal clear and to avoid any ambiguity, this publication will henceforth be known as *New Dalka*. The prefix of 'New' is particularly apt since the *Dalka* of the 1960s was modelled on the British weekly magazine of the left, the *New Statesman.*

The only (modest) claim we *do* make is to revive the spirit of the free press—brave, bold and fearless—in which *Dalka* thrived. This spirit of course was not limited to *Dalka;* competition for readers and space on the shelves of Somalia's bookshops came, in those days, from the Italian-language *La Tribuna,* which stayed the course, and other more short-lived publications. So far, we have not heard of any rival publications yet but in the interest of vitality, we would heartily welcome this.

It's worth repeating the usual disclaimer. *New Dalka* does not subscribe to any political or ideological positions. We address each issue, in turn, on its own merits. All articles represent the views, not of the publication, but its respective contributors. Nor is each contributor necessarily an affiliate of the publication: they are simply using our pages to reach our wide audience and equally, to contribute to something which they feel is worthwhile and exciting. For that, the Editor thanks them. If anything, the Editor, the contributors and (hopefully!) you, our readers, share in at least one conviction: the importance of free and fair debate, a free press and the conduct of discussions within the boundaries of respect and common decency.

Aren't we sick of experts?

Two events in world politics, which took place last year, served as a warning sign to the political elite. The first—the referendum verdict delivered in June for Britain to leave the EU—was most unexpected.

The reputation of pollsters was yet again delivered a striking blow, when Donald Trump beat clear favourite and former First Lady Hillary Clinton to the Oval Office chair, in November's presidential election.

Some have read both these events as the rebellion of the marginalised against an increasingly distant "elite". British politician Michael Gove, campaigning for a Leave vote in the referendum campaign, famously said in a live audience television interview that "people in this country have had enough of experts".

But this derided specie may well have found a new lease of life.

Earlier this month, Radio Dalsan, a Mogadishu-based broadcaster, reported that the current administration in Somalia has appointed the highest number of advisors in Somali history. At present, Villa Somalia—the president's office—and the Office of the Prime have at forty advisors between them. Former Mogadishu mayor, known by his childhood sobriquet 'Tarsan', former NISA chief Bashir Jama and former presidential candidate, Mohamed Abdirizak, count themselves among them.

Interestingly, in its report on these "experts", Radio Dalsan consulted "protocol experts", who suggested that most appointments were done to settle political scores or reward political allegiance.

Are these appointments a reflection of the short-lived terms of politicians? After all, most politicians serve in stints of a few years before finding themselves replaced by yet another generation. Are the 'corridors of power' saturated with quasi-retirees, looking to make themselves 'useful'?

The need to recruit the old guard might also be driven by practical considerations. Not so long ago, I heard a well-placed source lament how very little is methodically documented for each generation of civil servants to pass onto the next. Does governance rely, not on the files inherited and passed on, but the on-hand oral recollection of "elder statesmen", those politicians who formerly ruled those hallowed corridors in which they now serve as advisors?

On Youth Development

AbdiWahab M. Ali

We are doing "Youth Development" wrong: The culture of focusing on the symptoms.

If you travel across Somalia, you will realise that the most common approach of youth development or fighting against unemployment used by many NGOs or development agencies are: skills development, vocational training, awareness-raising or civic engagement etc. These ALONE—even if properly delivered—wouldn't solve the many problems faced by young people across the country.

This, because we have allowed the symptom—unemployment or *tahriib* to be mistaken for the underlying systemic problems: injustice, corruption, exclusion etc.

Symptom management will not tackle the source of the problems. Building stronger institutions that are capable of executing its mandates would help us come over the many problems faced by this great nation.

And this should be done by none other than Somalis.

Letters to the Editor

Every issue, we will try to publish a selection of letters and emails received over the last month. Here, readers from around the world react to the magazine's inaugural issue (July 2017).

Dear Editor,

Congratulations for reviving the legacy of the magazine after 48 years, one of the pioneering magazines after independence. Keep up the spirit of addressing all issues concerning Somalis.

M. D., Mogadishu

Dear Editor,

As someone who read the original, having been in Somalia when it was published, it has given me great pleasure to see this relaunch of a forum that was once at the very forefront of its times. May it signal a return to the optimism and unity of purpose that characterized the first years of Somali independence. Somalia hanoolato!

G.T.W.,
Oakland, California

Dear Sir,

I'm extremely delighted to see the DALKA Magazine revived digitally after so many years. I would like to congratulate the DALKA Team for this great work. I look forward to reading many interesting stories and refreshing articles about the history, politics and people of our great nation.

Sincerely,
Abdihakim M., Riyadh

It is great to see this magazine re-emerge. I'm sure the team will work to offer in-depth analysis on current issues but also hold firmly to its history.

Abshir, London

It is with a glad heart that I read the first re-issue of Dalka Magazine, a Somali cultural institution. With its revival, I am hopeful for the future of Somali culture. Keep up the good work.

A.S., Hargeisa

Editor,

It is gratifying to see *Dalka* returning to the public after so long.

As a regular reader who enjoyed the magazine in the 60s, I cannot wait to get my copy.

M. T., Rome

Dear Sir,

I am congratulating you for reviving Dalka magazine. I remember very well when it was first published and my English language teacher (who was an Englishman) was very proud to see Somalis writing perfect English.

I just know from your editorial that the old issues had been republished in 1997. I did not know this before. I would be glad to know where I can get a copy.

Warsame Dahir, Dubai

It was good to see that Dalka had been revived after so long. The new generation need to rediscover the intellectual fire that made this magazine relevant during the 1960s. The timing could not have been more appropriate.

All the best,
S.A.S., Nairobi

Do you have words of praise or (criticism!) for the magazine? Or do you want to tell us what you want to see more of in future issues? Direct all correspondence to:
letters@dalka-magazine.com

Around the world

Kenya: A profitable election season?

As the results of Kenya's general elections came in, elements of continuity could be discerned. The presidential election saw Kenyatta, the incumbent, elected for a second term. His auspicious prospects had been well-advertised since last summer when an IPSOS poll (conducted between 4 and 18 June) gave him approval ratings of over sixty percent.

The opposition leader Odinga refuses to accept the election results, alleging a case of 'massive fraud'. That aside, the election also saw something of a novelty, which may bode well for the reputation of African democracy. Election period on the continent is usually seen as a profitable season, with accusations of corruption and vote-rigging. This time however, one business-minded African turned the narrative around for the better.

Hoping to cash in on the high turnout, he set up a stall selling cups of tea and *bur,* Somali-style, triangle puff pastries, around polling stations.

With a number of elections due on the continent before the end of the year, will other Africans fall suit? Whether or not they do, this could be a much-needed paradigm shift and antidote to claims that elections in Africa can only be profitable through illicit practices such as vote-buying.

Photo: BBC Somali Service

ITALY: Somali archives restored

Somalists and other researchers will be glad to hear that the resources from the Library and archives of IsIAO (*Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*) in Rome have again be made available to the public. The Institute, established in 1995, was liquidated in 2011.

Since then, the material—including documents from throughout the Italian colonial period and decolonisation in Somalia—have been sadly unavailable. They are now being transferred to the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma [the National Central Library].

Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Angelino Alfano, remarked that 'the reopening of one of Europe's most complete collections on the history and culture of African and Asian civilisations', made possible by the cooperation of both Italy's Foreign Ministry and the Ministry for Cultural Heritage, Activities and Tourism, would 'safeguard the valuable legacy of the IsIAO'.

A friend in Rome reports that transition of material to the Biblioteca is ongoing. In short, this development is heartily welcomed by us at *New Dalka* and hope our readers will be gladdened by this too.

What's in a name?

This article was prompted by the request of one of our readers asking about the name Somalia.

Readers may well recall the memorable scenes of *Alice in the Wonderland.* I refer of course to the encounter between the young Alice and the Caterpillar. Reasonably enough—or unreasonably, as the reader may judge moments into the conversation—they begin by identifying each other. 'Who are you?' asks the Caterpillar of Alice. Rather shyly, she responds, 'I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must changed several times since then'.

The Caterpillar persisted. 'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. 'Who are you?' Unhelpfully, the conversation has gone full circle to where we began. Deflecting the question—displaying true signs of being clueless at a seemingly straightforward query, in this tale in the literary nonsense genre—Alice quipped, 'I think you ought to tell me who you are first'.

That feeling—of waking from a stupor—and feeling a bit *different* is perhaps not unique to Alice. Whole nations and societies can feel this too. Indeed, in his sequel *Through the Looking-Glass*, Lewis Carroll this time detailed the confrontation between the young girl and a rather large Egg. Exasperated after so much apparent prevarication on the part of the Egg, she objected: 'The question is', said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things'. 'The answer is', responds Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all'. In other words, it is the master—the more powerful party—who defines the terms and sets the boundaries.

This fact is all to familiar for the Somali people. In the late-nineteenth century, their home on the eastern Horn of the African continent was, as is well-known, divided into five at the behest of the European colonial powers meeting at the Berlin Conference. As Somali people would lament, then just as well as now, these boundaries were little more than haphazard: dividing people who, generally speaking, shared (almost if not entirely) a common language and a cultural heritage.

When in the next century, the Continent would be graced by 'Winds of Change', inaugurating self-governing states in the place of colonies, in 1960, it would be only two out of these five Somali territories which would unite to form the new Somali Republic. As ever, it was the decisions of the master—the departed coloniser nations—which would mean, as Somali premier Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke lamented in 1962 that Somalis in the Republic would have as their neighbours their fellow Somalis, differentiated from them by little else but lines on the map.

Now, when so many years have passed since those events, many attempts have been made to write a history of the Somali people. The state of the field certainly feels a far cry from October 1965. In that month's issue of *Dalka*, the young Sulleman Mohamoud Aden, a history graduate then working as a civil servant in Mogadishu, in a book review of I. M. Lewis' *The Modern History of Somaliland,* commended it for being “probably the most complete to date”, fulfilling a “great need”.

Artwork on page 7: 'Advice from a Caterpillar' by Arthur Rackham.

Subsequent histories, however, have enjoyed varying levels of success, often written by non-historians (perhaps taking after Lewis' own lead, himself an anthropologist!), in consequence, often putting into circulation or even pedalling popular misconceptions. Although, as the phrase goes, the facts do speak for themselves, this is only the case when the exponent has the necessary grasp and presents the information in a coherent and lucid way. (On a side note, it was pleasing to hear, in a recent conversation with a Somali politician, who was a member of the opposition in the 1960s, that he is working on a memoir.)

One significant misconception, now in wide circulation, is around the name Somalia. Who coined it? When and how was it first used? Which boundaries marked it on the map?
The name Somalia—as signifying a geographical space—was in popular use in Italian, Somali and Arabic in colonial times and subsequently. It was only the British, perhaps because they called their territorial holding British Somaliland, who referred to the Italian-controlled south as Italian Somaliland.

To appreciate how the name Somalia came to be popularised, in that exact form, we need to briefly look back into history. In 1899, Rudyard Kipling published a poem titled 'The White Man's Burden', which was understood as morally justifying imperialist expansion. A whole philosophy arose around this 'Burden', exhorting Europeans to spread 'The Three Cs of Colonialism', namely, civilisation, Christianity and commerce.
Before making advances on a territory to colonise it, explorers would be sent to survey it, collecting valuable ethnographic and topographic information.
(Interestingly, these 'discoverers' or 'explorers' played a role comparable to the "sahan", the scout sent forth by the *reer* [the camp] to explore better grazing areas before any relocation is undertaken by a party of nomads.)

Readers may also be interested to note that in 1325, when the fabled jurist and traveller Ibn Battuta visited Mogadishu, a large, thriving town, he was dazzled by the show of opulence and hospitality. He noted how, besides serving 'side-dishes, stews of chicken, meat, fish and vegetables', the locals 'cook unripe bananas in fresh milk, and serve them as a sauce'. (Almost eight centuries on, little appears to have changed, with the Somali's partiality for the tropical fruit well-known.)

The documents they produced as part of their travels helps us date the early uses of the name Somalia and its precursor, Somali. Somali—being a demonym, that is, the name used for the inhabitants of a particular area—was in use before Somalia. The European explorers then labelled the eastern Horn of the African continent on their maps, with slight variations, as Somali or Somal, after the people they came across there. The Arabs had been using the name 'Soomaal' for even longer than their European counterparts, going back many centuries, a notable example being in a sixteenth century war chronicle.

From there, it was a small leap from labelling a territory on a map by the name of the people who lived there to that name 'sticking'. On the explorer's map, then, the eastern Horn went from 'Somal' or 'Somali' to Somalia.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the name 'Somalia' was in popular use, at least among European travellers and colonial officers. One extant document from 1908, an official decree produced by the Italians, is a good example of how early Somalia was being used.


Arthur Rackham '07

A map produced by the Italian Foreign Ministry from four years later, in 1912, is labelled L'amministrazione Italiana nella SOMALIA [The Italian Administration in Somalia]; its depiction stretching from Kismayo [Chisimaio] to Hobyo [Obbia]. It is clear then that although the name Somalia was in use at this time, officially designating an Italian colony, the Italians had not made their advance further north, beyond what is now central Somalia.

In the colonial era, differences in language mattered. With the start of European colonisation of the region in the late-nineteenth century and subsequently, the British used the names Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland, whereas the Italians used the corresponding names, Somalia italiana and Somalia inglese. Variations on the same names were also prevalent: to the French, for instance, they were known as Somalie anglaise and Somalie italienne.

Fast forward to 1960. The ten years set for the Italian tutelary administration in the south had drawn to a close. Thus, the Somali Republic was formed out of the Union of both Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland. The name, the Somali Republic, then was inaugurated in 1960, with independence, becoming the official name of the newly-unified country. But for all intents and purposes, the country was more popularly known as Somalia. Between 1912 and 1960, the same name now came to represent a much greater geographical expanse. This reflected two developments: the Italians' northerly advances, which took in more and more of the Horn and secondly, the union between the two former colonial territories in 1960. By July 1960, then, the name Somalia denoted the territory from Ras Kamboni to Aluula and Bereeda, the two towns on the northeasternmost tip of the newborn republic, to Hargeisa, Berbera and Zeila. The common misunderstanding is to think that in 1960, the country formed out of the union, was not called Somalia. For as the linguist and scholar, Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, pointed out Somalia is quite simply 'a popular name for the Somali Republic'.

And while the popular name has remained unchanged for all that time, the official name has been refashioned a number of times. After the civilian administration was overthrown in 1969, reflecting the socialist inclinations of the new government, the official name was altered to the Somali Democratic Republic. Now, with federation on the books, it has become the Somali Federal Republic. All the while, the country has been called Somalia.

In other words, the official name points to the form of government in a country while its popular name is a geographic signifier, its proper name. The official name of a country—the longer version--is only ever invoked to remove any possible ambiguity. A good example would be the Congos. One—the Democratic Republic of Congo, known for short as the DRC—was formerly a Belgian colony; the other, the Republic of Congo, a French one. Of course, here, one can appreciate the purpose of calling a spade a spade for one would otherwise risk confusing one's audience as to which republic they were referring.

In all other cases, the one-word name suffices. By analogy, there's little need, upon first meeting someone, in listing one's *abtirsi* when first names seem to do the job well enough.

So France, instead of the French Republic; Iran, instead of the Islamic Republic of Iran; China and only ever rarely, the People's Republic of China (PRC); Russia, rather than the Russian Federation; Ethiopia, rather than the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

So, to return to the question of the headline: what *really* is in a name? It was Juliet, in Shakespeare's play, who, love-struck, claimed it mattered little that Romeo was from her family's rival household, the

Montagues. From a window overlooking the family orchard, she calls out: 'What's in a name? That which we call a rose, / By any other word would smell as sweet'. The names of things, in Juliet's eyes, did not change their essence: Romeo, by any other name, would still be the object of her adoration. Love is, as they say, truly blind.

It is clear that the legacy of colonialism casts its shadow over the Somali people. This can be seen most starkly in the colonial language inherited in different parts of the Horn. In the Protectorate, formerly administered by the British and where English was the colonial language in use, the names British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland are most familiar. Head due south, into the former Italian colony where Italian was the main colonial language in use, and the names Somalia italiana and Somalia inglese were in circulation.

There is a Somali adage which declares, 'Magac bilaash uma baxo'—in other words, a name carries meaning, in pointing to and capturing the essence of that which it denotes. Now, in the twenty-first century, alongside the many pressing questions of the age, people are increasingly asking: 'Are we postcolonial yet?' After all, what does self-governance (autonomy) amount to, if not accompanied by the sharpening of one's critical and intellectual faculties and the ability to appreciate the nuance of each and every word they deploy?

For, now, when one writes about contemporary history and politics using the names Somalia and Somaliland, they run the risk of falling into a sort of tautology. These names, by their very nature, carry history, pointing as they do to the different colonial legacies and colonial languages which bequeathed them.

Fifty-seven years on from independence, perhaps we're still lost in translation.

NEW DALKA
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New Dalka, now in its second month, is a monthly magazine with an international readership. It covers Somali current affairs and culture as well as carrying features on history, politics and comment.

Readers are encouraged to send feedback and all other correspondence to **letters@dalka-magazine.com**.

Article submissions and pitches should be directed to the Editor at **editor@dalka-magazine.com**.

BBC Somali: 'Codka cabiran' or just competing with Cairo?

By Haaruun

'Gathering round the speakers'—the act of family members at home or customers at a local teashop huddling over a radio set—to catch the latest news was, for much of the twentieth century, a uniquely memorable Somali pastime. In his memoir, the seasoned diplomat Mohamed Osman Omar noted how even in the depths of the nomadic areas, herdsmen would carry small transistor radios on their shoulders.

It was hardly surprising then—in spite of the limited educational opportunities afforded to him—that, almost unlike his peers on the continent, a Somali nomad or farmer could speak about world politics with self-assuredness and verve, skills sharpened in group conversation, discussing items of news in the earlier broadcast. This summer, the BBC Somali Service—first broadcast on 18 July 1957—celebrated its sixtieth. For long, the Service had an inimitable reputation as a reliable source. As the saying went, if the BBC hasn't reported it, it can't be true!

As the Service marks sixty years of its existence—spanning three years of colonial rule, three decades of an independent Somalia and now, almost three decades since the civil war broke out—it seems an ideal time to take stock.

The headline points to the age-old question about the Service and how it was has been 'received' by its target audience. Is it fair, as some have done, to dismiss the Service as simply being the British Colonial Office--the or later, Foreign Office grinning from behind a micro-phone?

Photo: witnessesofwords.com

Readers may, of course, recall that a Somali president, in a pithy wordsplay on the Corporation's initials, is alleged to have sardonically labelled it 'Been Been Sheeg'.

Delving into the archives and utilising previously unseen broadcast reports, this article explores the early beginnings of the Service and how its emergence reflected the wider regional and global political forces trying to make themselves heard in the Horn.

The **Suez Crisis** of 1956 has been seen as an key moment in the British involvement in the Middle East, read b y many as the end of British predominance in the region. Besides its geopolitical significance, it served as an important trigger in the world of broadcasting.

War of words

Almost since the birth of radio, the airwaves have been used as a political weapon. The Germans and the Russians had been pioneers in this area. Soon after the Russian Revolution of 1917, messages were being directed abroad by the new administration to explain the motivation behind the event.

Within two decades, broadcasting to the Arab world was undertaken on behalf of the Axis with the Fascist government in Italy, from 1935, using a radio station in Bari, southern Italy, to carry out a bitter campaign against British “imperialism”.

After Suez, in order to counter what the British to be the anti-British, inflammatory broadcasts,

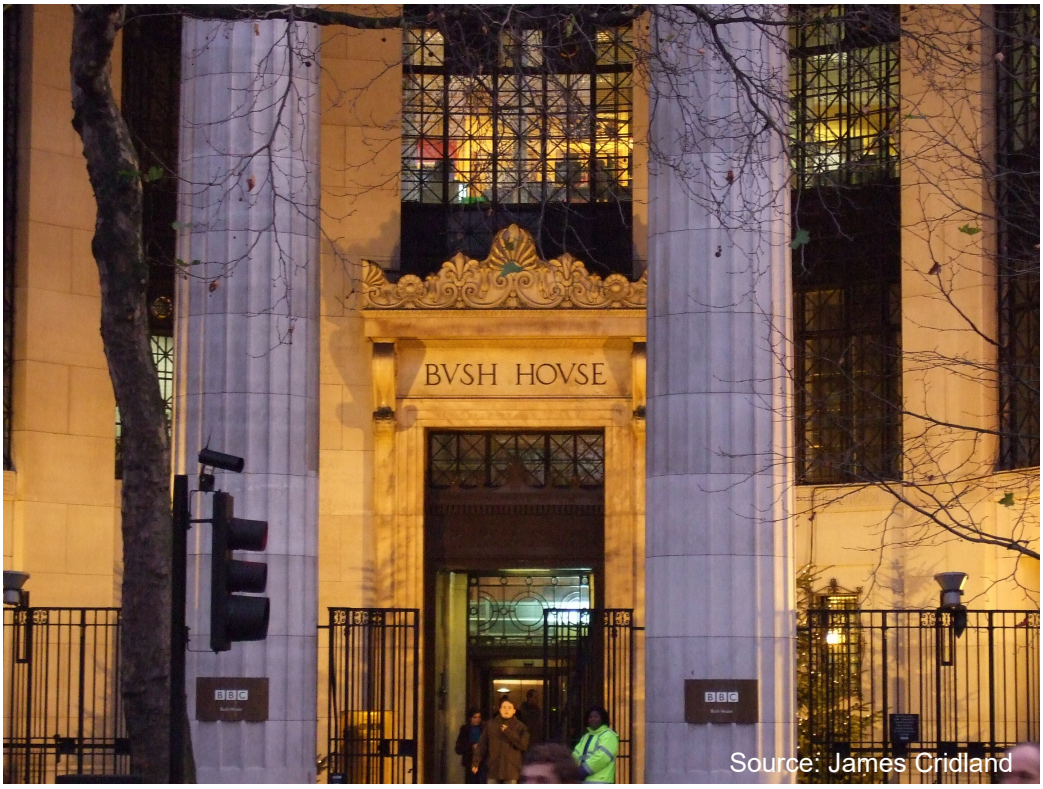
the hours of the BBC Arabic Service were increased and the Corporation began broadcasting in three African languages: Hausa (for West Africa), Swahili for East Africa and Somali. And so the Somali Service was born.

In diversifying its language output, the Service then was reaching newer audiences. In so doing, it presented an antidote to some of the inflammatory and politicised broadcasts from Cairo. If Britain could be accused of having certain aims it wanted to see fulfilled in Africa, then Egypt, itself a regional power, was little different.

The Service's main rival, Radio Cairo's *Sawt al-Arab* [The Voice of the Arabs] preceded it by four years, having also—incidentally—first broadcast in July. *Sawt* soon found its Somali voice, when its Somali section was established.

It was a product of its time, the era of decolonisation, and as a result, its anchors (perhaps inadvertently) spread the message of Nasserism, which often hid behind an admixture of pan-Arabism, socialism and anti-colonialism. (We shall leave the debate of whether Somalis are Arabs for another issue but suffice it to say that, at the time, Somalis were considered Arabs particularly by the Egyptians.)

The British were rightly concerned. One *Sawt*



Source: James Cridland

broadcast (19 June 1957), for instance, claimed to its Somali listeners that the proposed Legislative Assembly in British Somaliland would be 'inconsistent with democratic procedures' since the very formation of the assembly would be 'under the thumb of the British governor'.

A later Cairene broadcast (14 November 1957) reminded the 'esteemed listeners' of how Europeans had hindered Somalis' progress, before recalling—not without some misplaced self-congratulation—that the Somali peninsula had, prior to Partition, been ruled by Egypt, 'which was primarily responsible for [its] progress [and] for the establishment of a good government'.

One anecdote might help put one at ease, illustrating as it does the premium the BBC placed on impartiality. A young man applying for a job in Bush House (not necessarily the Somali Service) was asked how he would treat a news item which reflected badly on Britain. 'I would judge it only on its news value', he said, adding after a seemingly long ominous pause: 'That may be the wrong answer, but that's what I should do'. He duly got the job.

On *Sawt*, there continued talk of "conspiracies" by "colonial consulates" against the Somali people and their impending independence; the presence of imperialist lackeys and even allegations that there was a fifth column at work in the nationalist movement, supported by funds from the "colonial powers".

This may all seem fanciful but for the British, Cairo's coverage prompted it

to act and establish a rival broadcaster.

Both Somali Services of *Sawt* and the BBC shared similarities. For example, as noted before, both were first broadcast in July—in 1953 and 1957 respectively and both, in their first decade at least were staffed by Somali students in Cairo and London respectively.

But between them, there are also stark differences.

While *Sawt* appears to have disappeared into a mist, the BBC Somali Service lives on. To the present author—having not only surveyed written records of radio broadcasts but also interacted both with former broadcasters and loyal listeners of the BBC Somali Service—there is little doubt that the Service has survived, where *Sawt* has not, because it discovered the magic formula. Unlike *Sawt,* which focused almost exclusively on politics, colonialism and intrigue, its BBC opposite number diversified its output.

Programmes such as 'Todobaadka iyo Afrika', 'Qubanaha' and 'Fanka' became iconic in their celebration of Somali culture and music.

And so, to return to that image of 'gathering around the speakers' with which I begin. Sitting around the family radio set at home, or a loudspeaker at a local cafe, Somalis not only use the opportunity to discuss current affairs and politics. They also delve into music, poetry and culture.

(*Gathering round the speakers* is the title of Suleiman Mohamoud Adam's book on the history of Somali broadcasting, 1941-1966.)

On writing in English—and not Somali

AbdiWahab M. Ali

First they would ask “Why do you always post & write in English not your mother-tongue, Somali?" And I keep saying "That is my choice".

Then, I post a few stories in Somali, every now & then—just by my own will. And you know what they say? “That Somali you are writing is damn broken”. Some will even go so far and declare “Soomaliga budka kadaa, ninyahow” [Stop beating the Somali language with your stick!—or idiomatically, your language skills are horrendous]. As if they're the self-appointed custodians of Somali language, trying to religiously carry out this role.

And guess who am I talking about? SOMALIS. They keep reminding me of Nurrudin Farah's words when a journalist asked him about the witty, proud and sometimes rude Somali characters in his stories. He smiled widely and started the response with, “You're talking about my good Somali people”. Yes! That ‘*good*' is of course meant with heavy sarcasm!

Would you like to review books relating to Somali politics, culture and society?
Contact the Editor at
editor@dalka-magazine.com

"Workers of Somaliweyn: Unite! Unite! Unite!"

By AbdulKadir Ali Bollay

Bollay, in the 1950s, giving an interview about the Somali trade unions

The Somali trade unions have a long history, having been founded in 1949, in the colonial period. Their role in securing workers' rights in Somalia is undeniable, despite the fact Somalis were still under colonial rule. As historians have illustrated, trade union movements in the Global South played a formative role in anti-colonial nationalism, particularly in mid-twentieth century Africa, as it was graced with winds of change.

In July 1955, The Somali Trade Unions (hereafter, STU) —known then by its Italian name of Sindicato di Lavoratori Somalo—held free and fair elections to elect its leadership. Ahmed Gurre Maamun was elected as the chairperson and I, Abdulkadir Ali Bollay, as the Secretary-General.

Following my appointment, I set out to work, to find solutions for the problems that faced Somali workers. Over the years, our organisation achieved tangible results. At the first ever meeting of the Somali Trade Unions, it was decided that a Labour Code should be established to guarantee workers' rights, at a time when such action was imperative. The reason for this being, Somali workers, still living under the colonial yoke, were mistreated, with no group or body to secure their rights.

Soon enough, the trade unions succeeded in implementing the Labour Code. It was also decided that henceforth both the government and the trade unions should work together to ensure that this legislation was implemented, it being recognised the importance these safeguards held for the interests and common good of the Somali people.

Later, trilateral negotiations were inaugurated, which brought together representatives of the government, the trade unions and employers, who agreed to work together to achieve these aims. These objectives were soon put into writing, including the expectation that employers—who at this time largely constituted Italians, it being the late-colonial period—should respect what had been agreed.

These provisions included that: a minimum wage should be set; workers should have statutory annual leave; health facilities should be made available for workers and that workers should have access to a pension upon their retirement.

In October 1955, the Somali trade unions entered its first agreement this time with the sugar factory in Jowhar, when the city was still known as Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi. It was famous for its agricultural fertility, in particular sugar cane.

At the time, the sugar factory was the largest in the whole country, having the highest number of employees. It was also agreed that the workers at the sugar factory at

Jowhar should receive a pay rise of 30%.

In the following month, the Somali trade unions took part in international conference organised by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). It was at this convention that the Somali unions became a member of the ICFTU. Through its membership, and with the support of the Confederation, the Somali trade union movement developed further, going from strength to strength. The Confederation provided indispensable support, particularly in the training and rallying of workers.

On 10 January 1956, as STU representative, I attended the founding meeting of the All-African Labour Organisations in Accra, Ghana, a conference which took place with the assistance of the ICFTU. This event can be rightly considered the first pan-African conference of sorts, having brought together—for the first time—the African trade unions. It also had the distinction of being presided over by Kwame Nkrumah, the pan-African visionary and later President of Ghana.

In the opening speech, Nkrumah urged the African trade unions to unite and work together. His incisive mantra was that unity is a force which cannot be vanquished and its antithesis, disunity, the precursor to failure.

The conference was duly concluded on 13 January, with the main points of agreement reached being that the African trade unions work together; that the regulations agreed by both employers and employees be enforced and that a Regional African Confederation (RAC) be established, tasked with addressing the difficulties facing African workers.

The ICFTU published articles and regulations by which the RAC was to be managed and it was agreed that the RAC should have its base in the Ghanaian capital, Accra.

In early June 1956, I was part of the Somali delegation to the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s annual meeting, the International Labour Conference, which, as ever, was held in the Swiss city of Geneva. Mr. Isse Elmoi (Cisse Ceymooy) was the government's representative to the Conference and Mr. Rafele, the delegate representing employers in Somalia.

Over the course of the Conference—held every year in June over two weeks—each of us had separate meetings with representatives from the ICFTU as well as the Italian Confederation of Free Workers' Unions (CISAL, Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Autonomi Lavoratori), discussing how to advance the cause of Somali workers. There, I delivered a detailed report of the many speedy changes taking place in Somalia at the time and the tangible successes the Somali trade unions had achieved in the short time since their inception. I also mentioned that God willing, soon the Somali people would achieve independence. At the Conference's conclusion, the Italian delegates from the CISAL extended to us an invitation to visit their headquarters in Rome, Italy and we accepted their gracious hospitality. At the CISAL's HQ, we met the Secretary-General of the organisation, Mr. Pastore, who congratulated us on the role played by the Somali trade unions in the development of our country and the opening up and expansion of the economy. The following year, Mr. Elmoi, Mr. Rafele and I once again attended the Conference. I reported on recent developments. One of the notable outcomes of the Conference was that the Italian representative agreed to the enactment of the Labour Code, which was a monumental piece of legislation. It brought Somalia in line with developed parts of the world in setting a national minimum wage for Somali workers as well as other measures to better workers' living and working conditions. There were also measures to try and encourage the country's productivity, an area where the Somali trade unions contributed a lot. Immediately after our return from the International Labour Conference, in July 1957, the heads of the Somali trade unions set up a summit known as Dopolavoro, which was held at the Theatre, opposite the Guglielmo Marconi primary and middle schools (later renamed Yassin Osman).

Part Two will appear in subsequent issues.

This article was translated from Somali by the Editor. A Somali version is available on our website.

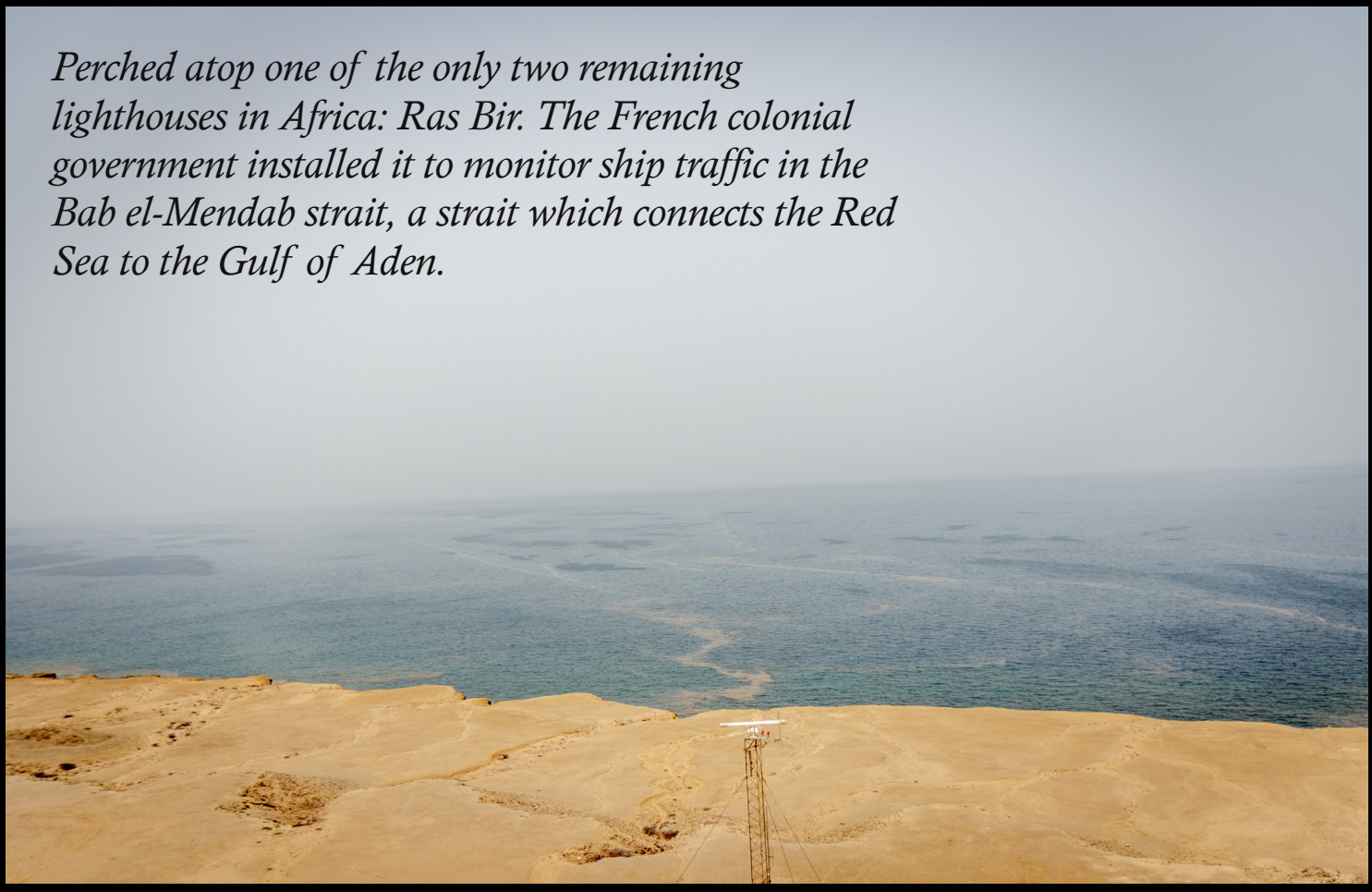
In this photo essay,
Mohammed Ibrahim Shire
captures some of the natural beauty found in
the Sanaag region and around Djibouti's
Goda mountains.

The famous Afro-Arabian Rift System which is a junction of three tectonic plates (Nubian, Arabian and Somali), two of which are moving apart at an average rate of 2cm a year, creating new land in the rift between them. It is the only place on Earth where the rift process is remarkably visible, as all other constructive plate margins are under the oceans.

Camping at Djibouti's Day National Forest. The oldest national park in Djibouti, it is quite isolated, surrounded by endless semi-deserts and the deserts of the Afar region. Close to 30 years ago, this forest used to be lush and filled with plants.

The Goda Mountains—part of the Day National Forest—rise to a height of 1750m and are a spectacular natural sight.

Perched atop one of the only two remaining lighthouses in Africa: Ras Bir. The French colonial government installed it to monitor ship traffic in the Bab el-Mendab strait, a strait which connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.



(Above) Untouched paradise: Gudmo Biyo-Cas. It's an unexplored area in the deep hinterland of Sanaag region. It boasts of pristine springs and cascading waterfalls.

Lac Assal is the lowest point on the African continent and the most saline body of water on earth. The lake experiences summer temperatures as high as 52 °C, so extremely hot!

Honouring Lee V. Cassanelli

Mohamed Haji Ingiriis pays tribute to Professor Lee V. Cassanelli, the historian who put Southern Somalia on the map.

Aside from festschriften, people rarely pay tribute to academicians before their passing. In a similar vein, there is a Somali dictum which advises, '*Haddii aad doonaysid ammaan, dhimo; laakiin haddii aad doonaysid caay, guurso*' [If it is a praise that you seek, you ought first to die, for only then will you get it; if on the other hand, you want to be dealt insults, you should get married!]. Indeed, in one of his journal articles, the subject of this tribute, Professor Lee V. Cassanelli, himself acknowledged a Somali aversion for praise-poems aimed at individuals.

Flouting such conventions, in this piece, I proceed to pay homage to the work of a living scholar. If there was a Somali state, able to devote more of its time and resources to scholarship, it would have to honour Professor Cassanelli. His seminal book, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900*, is unparalleled in terms of originality and argumentation, except one chapter on the history of drought incidence which is a bit boring and dull.

When Cassanelli was doing his field research in the early 1970s, there was unique, untapped archival material in Somalia at the time, such as those held in the Garessa [Fort] of Barqash bin Said, next to Al-Uruba hotel in Mogadishu. Rather than draw upon Italian archives to present the perspectives of the Italian colonial officials, Cassanelli instead chose to draw upon their published accounts and memoirs. Although he utilised them and ultimately presented his findings in a compelling way, I would have liked to see him doing at least archival work either in Italy, the United States or Somalia.

Fortunately, Cassanelli conducted extensive oral interviews with the then dying elders in Afgooye and around Bariire, Beledul Amiin and Buulo Mareer in the Lower Shabelle region in Somalia.

Rarely does distinction come without the necessary hard graft to precede it. Conducting fieldwork and interviews—that vital tool in the toolbox of a historian—under the watchful eye of the post-colonial African state could prove difficult. It was shocking for Cassanelli when attempts were made by the incumbent regime to induce him to stop his historical research on the Afgooye area and instead study the northern regions (1). He was bluntly told that this is where Somali history was born. He was even offered generous sums of money and a government vehicle to carry out his research. Nor were the limitations placed on academics and researchers the preserve of the military regime. After all, I. M. Lewis, the veteran doyen of Somali studies, admitted how his writings on Somalia were not free from the influence of the post-independence civilian administrations, recalling, as a consequence, that 'I have sometimes tended to be less critical and objective... about the policies and actions of successive independent Somali governments'. He also made the point that the post-colonial authorities tried hard to influence his work more than the Somali authorities under decolonisation process. However different to Lewis in

their methodology, and more importantly their conclusions, subsequent Somalists proved to be, they were working under similar, if not, identical constraints.

Critically, Cassanelli refused to accept all that and continued to investigate the history of southern Somalia in Afgooye and its environs. Ultimately, it is for this brave display of integrity and commitment to his subject for which we pay tribute to Cassanelli's work, particularly in distilling for posterity much of what may otherwise have been lost.

Overall, Cassanelli did a great job in his field of historical research. However, I would highlight at the same time that his doctoral thesis, when submitted, was very rough and needed major revisions. But Cassanelli would resolve this superbly when he later converted the thesis into his classic book, *The Shaping of Somali Society*. I always say to myself that Cassanelli would have been more prominent and powerful than Professor I. M. Lewis if he had at least written four more books on the massive data he had collected, bringing the total to five.

A natural consequence of his numerous field trips, Cassanelli's work is noticeably more nuanced and sensitive than most other non-Somali historians. Whenever Cassanelli writes something about Somali history, he presents his sharp analyses and shrewd insights in an fascinating way. Most of Cassanelli's wonderful contributions are buried in book chapters, such as his well-researched studies on the history of slavery in southern Somalia and the 1948 UN fact-finding mission to Mogadishu (2, 3). Above all, the most recent of Cassanelli's chapters provides an interesting interrogation of the concept of the Total Genealogy in the Somali clan system in the volume, *Milk and Peace, Drought and War: Somali Culture, Society and Politics*, edited by Markus Hoehne and Virginia Luling as a festschrift for Lewis (4). In this book chapter, Cassanelli shows how the Total Genealogy was not Lewis's new innovation, but rather was of Somali origin. I will briefly explore this theme.

To prove his point, Cassanelli cites a case of the Italian explorer Luigi Robecchi Bricchetti, an Italian traveller who toured the Horn of Africa in the 1890s and chronicled his reflections in almost two dozen books. When, in 1899, for instance, Brichetti visited Hobyo, he gathered important oral data at focus group discussions attended by knowledgeable elders who told him that all Somalis, wherever they lived, would finally come to one total genealogy in the all-encompassing *abtirsiga qabiilka* (clan genealogy).

Other scholars too have noted that the concept of the total genealogy, in the case of the Somali clans, originated with Somalis. The impression that Somalis, in their different clans, ultimately descended from a common ancestor could prove to be of inestimable utility in forging durable political alliances or entities. One could note, for instance, that in his unpublished dissertation, *The Arab Factor in Somali Society*, Ali Abdirahman Hersi contended that the sultan Yusuf Ali Keenidiid created the first non-clan-based state. Although the sultan's own sub-sub-clan had the upper hand in the polity, the role of other sub-clans and clans was not negligible. Here, too, we can turn to other examples. In so doing, I propose a caveat, originally of Cassanellian formation, found in the opening pages of his masterly *The Shaping.*

To illustrate a point about the Total Genealogy and 'for the sake of clarity and accuracy, I use clan names'.

If one considers the case of the Geledi Sultanate in 1843, the power rested with the eponymous clan, while other resident communities exercised considerable clout, such as the local Digil, Jareer-Bantu and Hawiye, who not only functioned as poets and partners but supplied the bulk of the polity's fighters. Certainly, without their backing and contribution, the Geledi Sultanate would not have succeeded in defeating the Baardheere Jameeca in 1843. Most notably, the Sultanate could have been something like a nation-state if it had consolidated its rule and seized the two most important adjacent economic hubs – that is, the port towns of Mogadishu and Merka.

Be that as it may, the concept of the Total Genealogy—that Somalis share one single fatherhood—is a total invention. This argument is further propped up by the fact the concept did not achieve widespread subscription; different clans and clan groups claim different origins. For example, (1) the Isaaq and the Daarood claim Arab ancestral heritage; (2) the Digil also claim the Arab ancestry (but I don't know what the Mirifle claim in their original ancestry); (3) most of the Hawiye claim they hailed from Oromo and (4) there is no need to mention the claims of the Reer Hamar, Reer Merka, Reer Barawe and Asharaaf since their names give them away (as Somalis say '*sadar muuqda su'aal ka dhan*' [an obvious sentence does not need explanation]).

In short, Cassanelli has bequeathed to Somalis and the academic community alike an enviable intellectual legacy, principal among his achievement of quite literally putting southern Somalia on the map through his framework which looked at Somali history and culture through a regional perspective.

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Prof Lee Cassanelli *is Associate Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania, USA. His book on the early history of Somalia, The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900 was published in 1982. He has published numerous articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Somali history, from a variety of perspectives, including the social, the cultural and the economic. He was a co-founder of the Somali Studies International Association, which celebrates its fortieth anniversary next year.*

An Oxford doctoral candidate, ***Mohamed Haji Ingiriis*** *was born in Mogadishu, where, in the thick of the civil war, he began working as a staff writer for the newspapers, Qaran (State) and Ayaamaha (The Daily). Later, after studying philosophy in Belgium, he settled in the UK, where he undertook postgraduate studies at Goldsmiths and London Met. He has published widely on Somalia and serves as the Book Review Editor for both the Anglo-Somali Society and the Journal of Somali Studies (JOSS). He specialises in Somali history, politics and society.*