

**DRAFT ONLY**

**THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN POLITICAL  
RECONSTRUCTION**

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## 1

**INTRODUCTION**

The struggle for democracy has been a central element in the history of Somaliland's liberation and its subsequent reconstruction. Peace and government have been built from the ground up, retaining power in diffuse and decentralized institutions. Popular aspirations for participatory democracy do daily battle with entrenched attitudes and habits formed under the authoritarian and highly centralized military dictatorship that ruled Somalia for 21 years. With peace still fragile and war a recent memory, the desire for freedom of thought, speech and act must be weighed against the need to preserve political stability and social harmony. No where are these contradictions so clearly evident as in the evolution of Somaliland's media.

Somalis are accustomed to such a well-preserved pattern of freedoms. Liberty of speech and movement were inherent in their traditional nomadic livelihood, and their egalitarian political culture was famously described as a "pastoral democracy." Even the colonial powers were careful not to antagonize the Somalis by excessively restricting their free expression and movement. It was firmly and repeatedly drummed into serving colonial officers in Somaliland that nothing should be done that might seriously antagonize the local population. (Lewis, 94)

Under the dictatorial regime of Siyaad Barre the Somalis suffered two decades of brutal repression. Freedom of speech, association, and movement was denied. In Somaliland, these abuses gave rise to popular rebellion in the form of the guerrilla movement, the SNM, that eventually liberated the northwest and contributed to the overthrow of the Barre regime.

The establishment of the Republic of Somaliland on May 18, 1991 offered an opportunity to restore basic freedoms and to embark on a new chapter in democratisation. Successive community peace conferences have since served to broaden the participation of the people in the process of decision-making. Community elders, religious and literary leaders, businessmen, poets, women's groups, and the press have made strenuous efforts to put an end to armed conflict and consolidate peace in Somaliland. These early efforts culminated the 1993 Grand Boorame Conference that oversaw the peaceful transfer of power from the SNM to the present civilian administration – no mean achievement, as one analyst notes:

“As the political organ that gave birth to democratic experimentation in Somaliland, and is still guiding it in more ways than one, it has learned how to forgive, how to compromise and accommodate, and how to relinquish state power when this is dictated by the principles for which it was struggling, even at the temporary cost of its own internal unity....The SNM did not find it difficult to transfer state power even prior to the disarmament of its liberation forces and the armed militia of other clans who opposed it during its guerilla warfare against the military dictatorship.” (Samatar, 1997)

Since then, conflict has resurfaced and further conference and peace-building efforts have been required. Peaceful, democratic discourse broke down over representation and power-sharing arrangements in 1994, ushering in nearly two years of civil strife. At a national conference in 1996 at which Maxamed Xaaji Ibraahin Cigaal was nominated President for a second term, political concessions were offered to the former opposition. The Parliament, comprising the House of Elders and the House of Representatives, was expanded to accommodate previously underrepresented clans and communities. A referendum on the Somaliland Constitution in May 2001 attracted over one million voters to the polls – the largest exercise in democracy Somaliland has ever experienced. A programme of municipal and general elections that was supposed to take place before the term of the government, 23 February 2002 has been postponed as the mandate of the government has been extended for a year by the Council of Elders. The gradual process of democratisation in Somaliland is not seen as a luxury or an import, but rather as an integral – and indeed essential – part of the peace-building process.

### Democracy

There is no single definition of democracy. The American creed summarizes that country's ideal democracy as "government of the people, by the people and for the people." More cynical pundits have described democracy as the worst possible system of government except for all the other systems. A more conventional definition of democracy is that of

...a political system, which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials. It is a social mechanism for the resolution of the problems of societal decision-making among conflicting interest groups which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence these decisions through their ability to choose among alternative contenders for political office (Lipset, 1959).

Some have qualified the definition of democracy as a political system in which the people exercise power to the extent that they are able to change their governors, but not to the extent of governing themselves (Sartori, 1965). By implication, the governors in a democratic system do not enjoy unlimited powers.

Some contemporary analysts contend that in order to be considered democratic, a system of government "must combine three essential conditions: meaningful *competition* of power amongst individuals and organized groups; inclusive *participation* in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through free and fair elections; and a level of *civil and political liberties* sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation." (Bloomfield and Reilly, 1998).

Additionally, democratic regimes tend to describe themselves in terms of a system of beliefs i.e. liberty, equality, justice, the separation of powers (executive, legislative and judicial), preferred governance practices (accountability, transparency), and freedom of the press.

## The Media and Democratisation

While press freedom is only one among many civil and political liberties, the historical contribution of the press to democracy merits special attention. Around the world, the media has historically played a vital role in social transformation and political liberalisation through the exercise of two principal functions: informing the public of matters of public interest and serving as a watchdog of government. Access to information enables the public to make informed choices, to actively participate in decision-making processes and to assess the performance of their leaders: essential elements of a functioning democracy. So critical are these functions to the healthy functioning of the body politic that freedom of opinion and expression including the right to “receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and further guaranteed by the constitutions of most democratic states.

In recent decades, the concept of “press” freedom – which has historically referred to the print media - has increasingly become redefined in terms of ‘mass media’: institutions which use increasingly sophisticated technology “for the communication of ideas, for the purposes of information, entertainment and persuasion, to large-scale audiences” (Bilton et al.,1981). Radio, television and the Internet have dramatically expanded their influence across the globe, underpinned by the dramatic expansion of satellite communications. So important has the influence of the media become that contemporary analysts generally acknowledge importance of the “CNN” effect on national and international policymaking.

Given the media’s formidable power to influence social and political attitudes, it is not surprising that many governments exert strict control over licensing and content. Under authoritarian regimes, legislation, regulation and intimidation of the independent media may be employed to restrict press freedom. More open governments may seek an informal “understanding” with the independent media to restrict political content or to limit criticism of the government.

Where government controls are relatively relaxed, the media is freer to define its own role. But with such freedom comes awesome social and political responsibility. This is especially true in the context of divided societies and politically fragile states. Most modern wars are intra-state conflicts, involving issues related to state structure and function. In such conflicts, perceptions may acquire greater force than objectivity. The role that media actors assign themselves in such situations can be central to how a conflict evolves. Bosnia and Rwanda provide two recent examples of how the media can become a powerful instrument of division and violence.

Alternatively, the media can contribute to reconciliation and the consolidation of peace. The media may encourage tolerance of social and political heterogeneity within a society, or to communicate symbols of national identity by providing coverage of national leaders and institutions, national news items and sporting events (although such programming can easily slide towards propaganda). The media may also play an educational role, enhancing public

awareness about how democracy functions, and about individual rights, responsibilities, and roles with respect to the political process.

In most cases, however, the choices faced by the media are more mundane, such as editorial policy, relationships with government, and the degree to which content should be determined by commercial considerations. Such choices, nuanced as they may be, help to shape public discourse within society. Individual journalists typically exert less influence over such decisions than their employers. In the words of a veteran journalist: “A more responsible press depends not upon individual journalists but upon more responsible owners” (Cronkite, 96).

Fortunately, “the media” is not monolithic: just as different journalists will portray the same events in different ways, so will different publishers and broadcasters naturally make different policy choices. The proliferation of media actors in a democratic society can therefore help to give expression to social diversity and political pluralism.

### **The media and political reconstruction in Somaliland**

Somaliland’s attempt to replace dictatorship with a more open, democratic system includes a commitment to freedom of expression. The collapse of the Barre regime in 1991 was followed by a proliferation of the independent media in Somaliland, beginning with mimeographed newsletters in the major towns. Letterpress printers were installed in Hargeysa and Berbera in 1993, and the first broadsheet newspapers in Somaliland for nearly a quarter of a century gradually began to appear when offset printing presses were installed in November 1995. Radio Hargeysa was rehabilitated in 1999 and private television introduced in 1997. Internet services have been available in Hargeysa since 2001.

But, the evolution towards a responsible independent media has been neither straight nor smooth. Somaliland’s existing media actors are few, representing only a narrow section of public opinion and reaching an equally narrow audience: only a small minority of Somalilanders have any access to the local media at all. Political discourse in Somaliland is still heavily characterized by rhetoric, rumour and innuendo, to which the media often contributes. Professor Saleebaan Axmed Guuleed, president of Camuud University, has described the Somaliland media as “a double-edged knife,” capable of both instigating and mitigating conflict. Cali Xasan Sheekhdoon, a member of the House of Representatives, argues similarly: “The media could be a constructive element as well as a destructive one. It depends on the policies and objectives it serves.”

The findings of this study suggest that Somalilanders are well aware of the importance of the media and its potential impact on the political process. “*Dhawaaq meel dbeer buu ku dhacaa, dhagax na meel dhow,*” states one proverb, meaning that a statement travels far, while a stone thrown falls only a short distance away. Equally of concern is the danger that may arise if the media becomes a hostage to certain groups, or amplifies particular issues while at the same time neglecting others that are of paramount importance for the public and state. As one informant argued, unless the media broadens its coverage to include previously neglected issues and social groups, “our reconstruction and democratisation process will always remain incomplete”.



The contents of this chapter represent one year of research conducted in order to better understand the role of the media in Somaliland's political evolution, as well as the opportunities for its future contribution to the democratisation process. While the findings of the research potentially, raise more questions than answers, they underscore the Somaliland public's recognition of the media's vital role, and its growing demand for reliable information.

## METHODOLOGY

The National Project Group Meeting in November 1999 held in Hargeysa chose The Role of the Media and Oral Culture in Political Rebuilding as one of the four Entry Points to be further researched. Successive Working Group meetings further elaborated the entry point, breaking it down into three main sections, further divided into sub themes.

The Working Groups consisted of knowledgeable volunteers who closely worked with the Academy in the in-depth research of the Entry Point. The Working Group consisted of 12-15 members representing the social and professional groups of the society. Among them were legislators of the Houses of Representatives and Elders, government officials mostly from the Ministry of Information, media people, artists and experts in the field of communication. Eight Working Group meetings were held in connection to the workshops and research process, in which the following issues were addressed:

- Focussing the Entry Point
- Identification of the categories and selection of participants
- Preparation of the agenda and concept papers of the workshops
- Scheduling and planning of the workshops
- Evaluation and assessment of the workshops
- Selection of the venue

### The workshops

The main research phase involved three workshops concentrating on different topics, held in different parts of Somaliland. Workshop participants included representatives of government and private media, members of both Houses of Parliament, ministries, law enforcement agencies, civil society, elders and members of the public whose professional engagement warranted their contributions and recommendations to the workshop. An average of ten members of the Working Group attended each of the workshops and helped to guide discussion; working group members also played a lead role in the opening and closing of each workshop.

Workshops: The Role of the Media in Political Reconstruction		
Modern media: role, responsibilities and ethics	20-22 June 2000	Camuud
Traditional channels of information	15-17 October 2000	Burco

The Media Environment	15-17 January 2001	Hargeysa
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The workshops were enlivened by the topical contributions of poets, whose verses both delighted and provoked the participants, stimulating the exchange of ideas. Two poems depicting the flora and fauna of this country by the outspoken young poet Cali Mooge were especially fascinating in the way they encompassed the names of all the animals and plants of the land without losing the alliteration and meter fundamental to the Somali poetry.

The first workshop, on the role of the modern media in Somaliland, took place on 20-22 June 2000 at Camuud University, the first institute of higher learning to be established in the country since the civil war. In addition to the workshop participants, lecturers and students from the University participated in the workshop and were active in its proceedings. The workshop examined such issues as objectivity, responsibility, ethics, ownership, and audience.

The second workshop was held in Burco from 15-17 October 2000. Since Burco lies beyond the reach of most modern media, the workshop focussed on traditional channels of information, particularly such gathering places as teashops, markets, and “mefrishes”. The roles of religious leaders and poets, who have historically played important roles in shaping social attitudes, were also discussed.

The third workshop, on the media environment in Somaliland, took place in the Ministry of Information, Hargeysa, on 15-17 January 2001. Specific topics of discussion included the legal context (constitution, interim legislation and press laws); personnel and resource constraints; professional conduct and standards; and the role of the media in political reconstruction.

Venues of the workshops were chosen according to the three chapters. Camuud University was chosen because of the fact that it was the pioneer of the higher education institutions in the country. Burco was chosen for the informal media as it is one of the main literary centres and the main livestock market. The third workshop took place in Hargeysa of the presence of the legal institutions, the legislative bodies and the headquarters of all the media sectors.

### **The report**

This report is organized in three main sections. The first presents an overview of the pre-war media, beginning with traditional channels of information and their evolution during the modern period. The section provides the historical and cultural background, describing the special importance attached to news in Somali nomadic society, and the relative decline of traditional methods of communication vis-à-vis the modern media in recent decades. The section continues with a review of traditional channels of information such as the *madal* (tree) in the rural areas and the *masaajid* (mosque), marketplaces, teashops, and *mefrishes* in the urban centres, as well as the crucial roles of religious leaders and poets.

The second section of the paper deals with the media in Somaliland since 1991, with particular reference to the links between the media, reconciliation and process of

democratisation. The section treats issues such as the revival of the media in the post war period, the media's contribution to peace conferences, objectivity and accuracy of reporting. Another issue of general concern is the neglect by the media of the rural community. Public perceptions and expectation of the role of the media is also examined.

The third section tackles the contemporary media environment, notably the legal context, government attitudes, as well as other opportunities and constraints faced by the modern media.

The fourth and final section sets forth the recommendations and conclusions reached by participants in the research process.

## 2

**NEWS AND COMMUNICATION IN SOMALILAND****TRADITIONAL AND INFORMAL MEDIA**

For centuries Somalis have been pastoralists, practicing free ranging animal husbandry and renowned for their oral culture and rich poetry. In the absence of a written script, Somali oral communication has evolved in elaborate and sophisticated ways. Most Somalis are illiterate, but the word is passed orally by travelling relatives. The Somali way of life and social habits provide alternative avenues of communication, the effectiveness of which is indeed surprising (Touval, 1963).

The traditional Somali life-style is a continuous quest for news, whether from near or far. Whether it was a question of war or peace, good pasture or drought, nomads in transhumance needed certain essential information. Vital news items were known as either *tigaad* or *keboof* meaning, respectively, intelligence about pasture or the imminent outbreak of war.

Indeed, the prevalence of war or peace among Somalis has often been attributed to the power of language. Numerous Somali maxims attest to the destructive potential of the spoken word. The famous classical poet, Salaan Carrabey, said in one of his poems:

*Afku wuxu la xoog yahay magliga, xawda kaa jara e'.*  
 "The spoken word has the force of a dagger,"

While a common Somali proverb observes:

*Uli way qabowdaa erey se ma qaboobo.*  
 "The pain of a stick passes away, but the pain of a word lingers."

Other proverbs that show the importance of news or the word include:

*Isha iyo dbegta, dbegtaa da' weyn.*  
 "Word of mouth is more valuable than eyesight."

*Hadal waa bankaaga-tuse.*  
 "By talking one shows his aspirations."

*Ma bal geed baan kuu idhaa mise bal geel baan ku siiyaa?*  
 "Should I tell you something under the tree or should I give you a she-camel"? (The correct answer to this rhetorical question is naturally the news, not the camel).

*Nimaan la hadlin booyadii qadisay.*  
 "A mother pays less attention to a silent child."

Conversely, verbal moderation contributes to a state of peace:

*Haddii aan afku xumaan, gacantu ma xumaato.*  
 “If words do not turn sour, violence can be avoided.”

The power of language is also manifested in the importance Somalis attach to news. Numerous proverbs and poetic verses bear testimony to the premium that Somalis assign to accurate information. Nothing is so highly prized as a firm grasp of the situation:

*Hubsiiimo hal baa la siistaa.*  
 “Certainty is worth a she-camel.”

Conversely, the following adage reveals the nomad’s aversion to uncertainty:

*War la’aani werwer bay kugu dishaa,  
 Wehel la’aan na waddadaa kugu dheeraata,  
 Waddan aqoon la’aan na waabashaa, kugu disha.*

Lack of news begets worry,  
 Loneliness makes the road longer,  
 And unfamiliarity with the land makes you cautious.

Since life may depend on the correct evaluation of the situation, intelligence is further categorized according to the immediacy of its source: *weris* is the account of a first-hand observer, while *tebis* referred to second-hand relation of the original version. In the Somali norms of news transmission it is the comer who gives his account first. While telling his story he is treated as a guest of honour, according to the Somali verse: *Sooryada nin yimid baa leh, sagootis na nin tegayaa leh* (“Good treatment is offered to the guest who arrives, but only farewell is paid to he who departs”).

Convention requires that only an eyewitness to an event be considered ‘qualified’ to speak authoritatively of what transpired, while those who have had the news relayed to them by word of mouth are obliged to use the qualifying phrase “I heard”. In recent times, however, such customs have become weakened and it is less common for newsbearers to make such distinctions, facilitating the transmission of rumour and hearsay.

In Somali tradition, equal, if not greater, importance is attached to the bearer of information as to the information itself. A reliable messenger could attain high social standing and exercise influence over decision-making because of his authentic sources of reference. The prestige assigned to a reputable messenger, known as *war-galeen* or *looga-qaateen*, is captured in the following poetic verse:

*Warka looga-qaateen sidaa, loo wanqali laaye,*  
 News brought by a trustworthy messenger would be feasted upon.

The messenger (or traveller) introduces his news with the traditional disclaimer: *Warramay oo war badan sheegi maayo* (“I will deliver the news to you, but will be brief). When the messenger

has given his full account, his audience may bless him and admonish him to deliver news, but not to become himself a news item:

*Warran oo lagugu ma warramo,  
wiilkaaga mooyee walaalkaa ku ma dbaxlo,  
la waari maayee waayo joog,  
waran cadow iyo waayo cudurba la'ow,  
wax xun iyo cadaab la'ow,*

Remain the one who delivers news, not the one whose news [death] is delivered,  
Leave your inheritance for your children, not to your brother,  
We will not live forever, but live long,  
Be safe from the enemy's spear and from disease,  
Be safe from evil and hell.

Although most news is communicated in the form of ordinary talk (*badal*) it can also be communicated in the form of ordinary speech (*tiraab*) and a much more respected medium of communication is poetry (*hawraar*). Ordinary speech is easily understood; poetry, by contrast, may be subject to multiple interpretations due the metaphors, symbolism and the allegory used in its composition.<sup>1</sup> Of the two, *hawraar* is held in far greater esteem in Somali society and is the more powerful medium.

### The poetic tradition

Somalis have often been described as ‘a nation of poets’<sup>2</sup> and there is no doubt in the centrality of the poet and poetry in Somali society.

Poetry occupies a large and important place in Somali culture, interest in it is universal, and skill in it something, which every one covets, and many possess. The Somali poetic heritage is a living force intimately connected with the vicissitudes of every day life (Andrzejewski & Lewis, 1964).

Somali poetry has been described as a running commentary on the latest news, lobbying device for social and political debates, a record of historical events, a revered form of aesthetic enjoyment, and an expression of deep feelings about love (Johnson, 96). Another observer contends: “The poet in Somali society is the innovator of new styles of speech. He is the critic of despotic chiefs and he is the artist whose verse gives pleasure to the mind. He is also the agitator and he is the newscaster who informs his listeners what is going on in the outside” (Adan, 1989). Participants in the research process tended to affirm the vital role of poetry in traditional Somali society. Because of the higher standards and sophistication of

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<sup>1</sup> A Somali proverb states: *Hadalow ninba si kuu yidhi, hawraaray na ninba si' kuu qaaday* (“Prose is the way each man tells it; poetry is the way each man takes (interprets) it.”)

<sup>2</sup> Richard Burton, the 19th century British explorer, lavishly labeled the Somalis a nation of poets, poetasters, poetitos, poetaccios” in his *First Footsteps in Africa, Volume I*. (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1894), p. 82.

poetry, sensitive issues that were to be secretly handled were addressed using the most sophisticated tools of poetry: allegories, symbolism and metaphors.

A classic example of the way sensitive issues may be addressed in a metaphoric poetic duel is the story of ‘Wiilwaal’<sup>3</sup> in which he challenged his nephew:

*Wiilwaal:*

*“Wanaagsane walaalkay dhalyon, wiilkayon Maxamed,  
Sac wanaagsanoo weyl wato, meel wabdiya jooga,  
Oo yara bee waalwaalanoo, wiilasha eryooda,  
Inaanad weli naaskeeda qaban, ii mar wacad Eebbe.”*

Wiilwaal:

Blessed Maxamed, a dear brother’s boy,  
And close kin at that, consider a while  
A well bred cow with her little calf in tow,  
And grazing in lush, well-guarded land,  
Yet slightly flirtatious and determined to chase young lads,  
An oath is surely in order that you have never laid hand on her.

*Wiilki:*

*“Adeer aniga waad I waanisee, hal an ku weydiyo,  
Hal Waraabe dilayoo hadda na, Weli xalaaleeyay,  
Waax qalo haddii lagu yidhaa, oon wax kugu raacin,  
Inaanad weel u soo qaadateen, ii mar wacad Eebbe.”*

The son:

Oh! Uncle the warning is apt and perfectly in order,  
I pose though the case of hefty handsome she-camel,  
Certain prey of a killer hyena,  
Yet spared by a true saint well known,  
That portion on offer to you, which surpassed your need  
Wouldn’t the oath be then have been honoured

---

<sup>3</sup> According to Caaqib Cabdillaahi Jaamac (1977) a collector and editor of his poems, Wiilwaal lived in 1801-1864. He was a Garaad, or chief, who inherited his office early in life and became well known for his hot temper and authoritative tendencies, at the same time being much admired for his courage and cunning as a war leader. His wit and wisdom and his penchant for spectacular practical jokes gave rise to many tales about him.

If you left the portion whole, there and then?

Almost every activity or profession in Somali society developed its own poetic genre, reflecting the diverse aspects of life of the nomadic community. Ismaaciil Aw Aadan, a poet and a workshop participant, has categorized poetry (oral literature) into three types, based on the assertions of the prominent poet Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame:

- *Suugaan Gole*: Dance poetry
- *Suugaan Guri*: Household poetry
- *Suugaan Geed*: Tree poetry

The first type of poetry is self-explanatory, finding expression in song and dance; *suugaan gole* typically addresses itself to themes such as the beauty of women, pride and status of the clan, manhood, chivalry and the ethics and norms of dancing. The second category is the type of poetry associated with the home, such as children's songs, songs for weaving, knitting, carving, pottery and so on. The third category is the type of oral literature recited "under the tree", which serves wider social and political purposes:

The most important poetic form of *Suugaan* is the *Gabay*, which is practiced exclusively by men; other genres include the *Dhaanto*, *Geeraar*, *Jiifto*, *Masafo* and others. In recent years, another shorter genre, the *Jiifto*, has been gaining ground over the *Gabay* due to its simpler composition and the shortness of its metre. The *Buraanbur*, which has the longest meter, is the exclusive domain of women. Several genres, mainly work songs, are common to both men and women.

Distinctions between different genre are made principally on the basis of form and style and to a lesser extent in content. In the words of Andrzejewski (1993):

Somali poetry alliteration, not rhyme, is used for structural bonding and ornamentation, following matching rules similar to those applied by English poets before the Norman Conquest: consonants alliterate with each other, irrespective of their quality. Alliteration is maintained through out the poem no matter how long it may be... In addition to the formal constraint of alliteration, Somali poetry has a system of quantitative scansion reminiscent of that used in ancient Greek. Its prosodic units are morae, i.e. time units measured by syllabic length; a short syllable counts as one mora and a long one as two.

The poetic tradition has been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, although in modern times it has increasingly been recorded in texts, audio and visual cassettes. In the 1980s, the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Science made pioneering efforts in printing some collections of Somali poetry. Notable among these were Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciise's *Diimaankii Gabayadii Sayidka* (Collected Poems of the Sayid) and *Maansadii Timacadde* (Timcadde's Poetry), collected by Boobe Yuusuf Ducaale. In the last days of the struggle of the SNM against the regime of Siyaad Barre, *Halkaraan*, a collection of Maxamed Ibraahin Warsame's (Hadraawi) poetry was also published.



Women have their own poetic specialisation: the lullaby, the *buraanbur* and the diverse genres of work songs are all within the domain of women's poetry. There also exist proverbs, religious songs, and children's riddles, all composed and taught by women (Amina, 89). In her book, "Women and Words", A. Amina describes a mother's torment at her infant's hungry cries:

*Sidaan Qummanow ku qadiyay,*  
*Sidaan qolo kale wax siiyay,*  
*Sidaan keligay wax quntay,*  
*Qalbiga maygala collowday.*

"As if I have fed others,  
 As if I deprived you,  
 As if I have eaten alone,  
 My beloved son, you seem to despise me."

Qadiija Ciye Dharaar is remembered for her contribution in the development of the modern Somali songs because of the active part she played in the advancement of the *Belwo* in the 1940s. Qadiija Ciye Dharaar (who was later nicknamed Qadiija "Belwo") was one of the few artists who supported the work of Cabdi Deeqsi (Sinimo), another pioneer of the *Belwo*.

In the national liberation struggle of the fifties against the colonial powers, women played a decisive role in denouncing colonial occupation. The late Faadumo Xirsi Cabbane was among the leaders of the literary struggle against the British and Italian rule in the Somali territories. Faadumo Xirsi Cabbane started her struggle in Muqdisho when she joined the ranks of the Somali Youth League (SYL) in the 1940s, and was internally exiled by the Italian authorities to Gaalkacayo in 1947. Faadumo eventually joined the Somali National League (SNL) and became a cherished voice of the party and the public at large. In one of her verses she had this to say:

<i>Maanta waa madal weyn oo,</i>	It is a magnificent day,
<i>Waa na maalin tilmaan laboo,</i>	A day of significance,
<i>Taariikhaa la maraaye,</i>	Proceeding towards the dawn of history,
<i>Dhiisayгаа I maqlaayow,</i>	The District Commissioner is hearing my
<i>In kasta oy miino dhacaysoo,</i>	voice,
<i>Madaxaa iga goyso,</i>	In spite of threats and torture,
<i>Geeraarkaan marinaayo,</i>	An in spite of my head injury,
<i>In aanan ka murmaynin,</i>	I'm reciting my pomes,
<i>Taasi waa mid caddaatay,</i>	And t is crystal clear,
<i>Ee wixii aad I la maagtiyo,</i>	That I will never contradict,
<i>Malabaaga caddeeyoo,</i>	Announce your verdict,
<i>Jeelku na waa madal weynoo,</i>	And the sentence on my case,
<i>Muslimiin iyo Gaalaba,</i>	The prison I a nice place,
<i>Nin xaqiisii u muuqda oo,</i>	Regardless of the imprisoned,
<i>Laga maadin karayn baa,</i>	A muslim or a non-muslim,
<i>Lagu sii melmelaa,</i>	It is a home for the freedom fighter,
<i>Haddii aanu muunad labayn na,</i>	For the one who stands up for his rights,
<i>Madaxweynibii Gaandi,</i>	If it were not a respectable place,

<i>Iyo Nakruuma maad mariseene, Wixii aad I la maagtiyo, Malabaaga caddeeyoo, Jeelka uun igu moos.</i>	The great presidents Ghandi And Nkrumah would not have dwelled therein, Be courageous in announcing the verdict, And I am eager to go behind the bars.
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### *War poetry*

Somali poetry has a long and established political tradition in the service of both war and peace. History bears witness to the power of poets to settle an armed dispute or to rouse men to combat.

The greatest of the Somali warrior-poets was undoubtedly Maxamed Cabdille Xasan who led the “Dervish” uprising against the British in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A political, military and spiritual leader, the Sayid (or “Lord”, as he was known to his followers), was also renowned for his eloquence and brilliance of poetic composition. The power of his verse cannot be overemphasized: his success in mobilizing a formidable army and broad base of committed followers depended above all on his oratorical skills and his charisma as a leader. The example of the ‘Sayid’s’ unprecedented challenge to colonial forces and his majestic poetry have left an enduring mark on the collective Somali psyche that continues to influence literature, politics and national identity to the present day.

Following Maxamed Cabdille Xasan’s example, other poets later followed suit in denouncing colonialism through their poetic verse. If the loss of the ‘Hawd’<sup>4</sup> is remembered in Somalia as the political event of 1955, then the composition of a particular poem entitled *Jowhariyo Luula* must be also remembered as the artistic event of 1955 (Johnson, 1996). Named for two girls, the song’s theme is in fact deeply political, lamenting the cession of the *Hand* grazing lands to the Ethiopia by the British. The song’s potent symbolism and catchy melody has ensured its popularity through the years.

*Illeyn jaabil jin iyo xoog ma laboo,  
Intaan jifay waax ma la I jarayoo,  
Jabayoo jilbis jeebka la ii geliyoo,  
Jidhkaygii is-galay jidhiidhicadii,  
Jibboodayoo dood jid dheer u maroo,  
Jirdahaan magansaday I ma ay jalinoo,  
Afkay iga soo jufeyeen,  
Jowhariyo Luulaay,  
Jiidhka igu yaalleey,  
Alla ma joogee,  
Jeex dhan baa I maqan.*

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<sup>4</sup> Grazing land ceded to the Ethiopian Emperor by the British colonialists in 1954.

*Soodaan iyo kol ay Sawaaxili tahay,  
 Dadkii silci jiray bore u socayoo,  
 Siday doonayeen la wada siiye,  
 Miyeynaan la sinnayn dadkaa sugayoo,  
 Saagaanku ku ool sideennaayoon,  
 Sagaal lagu dhalin Soomaalida,  
 Jowhariyo Luulaay,  
 Jiidhka igu yaalleey,  
 Alla ma joogee,  
 Jeex dhan baa I maqan.*

To be sure, an ignorant man has no strength,  
 Whilst I slept, was a portion of my flesh [not] sliced from me,  
 I was shattered; someone put a snake in my pocket, and  
 My flesh shrank in a shiver, and  
 I swooned. I travelled a great distance to dispute [my case],  
 The tree trunks behind which I sought protection gave me no solace,  
 They struck me on the mouth, [humiliated me] with the butt of a spear,  
 O ‘Jowhara’ and ‘Luula’,  
 Who are the flesh [of my body],  
 O God, I am not completely here,  
 [For] part of me is missing.

Even the Sudanese and the Swahilis,  
 Who were tormented, have progressed,  
 They were granted all that they wished,  
 Are we not equal to these people who reached [their goal],  
 And who possess full manhood, like us,  
 And have we not been born in nine months, O ye Somalis,  
 O ‘Jowhara’ and ‘Luula’,  
 Who are the flesh [of my body],  
 O God, I am not completely here,  
 [For] part of me is missing.

(from Johnson, 1996)

On the eve of independence and the union of North and South to form the Somali Republic, artists portrayed the event artistically in poetry and song. Maxamed Ibraahin Warsame “Hadraawi”, a prominent poet and playwright, celebrated the role played by poetry in the national struggle by saying in one of his compositions:

*Xamar iyo Hargeysaba,  
 Heellaa xoreysoo,*

Both Muqdisho and Hargeysa,  
 Were liberated through the *Heello*

During the nine-year democratic interlude that followed independence, the widely anticipated benefits of independence never materialized. Poetry reflected the growing popular disillusionment with official incompetence and widespread corruption. The new actors on the government stage imitated their colonial predecessors in virtually every way; even in their dress and the way they behaved towards the citizens, they were reminiscent of the “white infidels” (Riiraash, 1998). A contemporary poet, Xaaji Aadan Af-qallooc, described the situation thus:

*Tallaabada mid gaalkii shabbaha, tegay ma-liibaane,  
Adigoo wuxuun tabanayoo, tegay balkuu joogay,  
Markuu sida libaax raqi u taal, qoorta kor u taago,  
Uu ‘tayga’ luquntiisa sudhan, taabto faraqiisa,  
Oo inaad addoonkiisa tabay, taa na la abaatay,  
Iya na waa tabaalaha adduun, taynu aragnaa.*

One who even walking imitates the departed infidel,  
May he never be blessed,  
While in need of assistance, you go where he was,  
And then as if he were a lion at his kill,  
He raises up his neck in haughtiness,  
Touches the tip of the tie around his neck,  
And behaves as if you were his slave.  
These are the misfortunes of the times that we are witnessing.

Following Siyaad Barre’s 1969 coup, Somali poetry reached its zenith as an instrument of defiance against the dictatorial regime. Compositions circulated clandestinely in cassette recordings and by word of mouth, eventually finding public expression through opposition radio stations and publications, and through extraordinary events like the *Deelley*.

In December 1979, the reknowned poet and researcher Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac, better known as “Gaarriye” launched a challenge to the government in the form of a poem entitled *Dugsi ma leh Qabyaaladi* (“Tribalism is Worthless”). Maxamed Ibraahin Warsame “Hadraawi” followed with a poem of his own, and for more than six months a furious poetic duel that came to be known as the *Deelley* swept the Somali territories, involving over fifty poets from all of the Somali territories and the diaspora.

While many of those who took part were government critics, others defended the regime. The government itself could not resist the challenge and threatened its outspoken poetic critics with jail sentences. One of them, Cabdi Iidaan Faarax, who attacked the government in two powerful poems by the names of *Anrka doob ma lagu yidbi* (“Was he [the dictator] ever challenged?”) and *Daad-wararac* (“The Lush”), was covertly assassinated in August 1980.

The *Deelley* was by no means the first such poetic exchange. Prior duels included the *Guba* of the 1940’s and the *Siinley* of the 1970’s, but none of them has matched the *Deelley* in terms of scope, substance or purpose: the *Deelley* remains the largest and most diverse ‘anthology’ of poetry in Somali literary heritage. But the *Deelley* will also be remembered for another, more ominous feature: in a very real way it foreshadowed the armed struggle against the Barre regime, demonstrating with finality the futility of non-violent resistance.

*Peace poetry*

Possibly the most renowned example of poetic peacemaking involved the efforts of Salaan Carabay, a classical poet of the last century. Two lineages of the *Habar Jeclo* clan, the *Reer Daahir* and the *Reer Axmed Faarax* were embroiled in a longstanding feud and were preparing themselves to fight. Last minute efforts to mediate between them had been in vain.

As the warriors came together at the field of battle, a respected religious man by the name of Fiqi Xasan stepped between them to remind them of the disastrous effects of war between relatives, reading from the Qu’ran and simultaneously translating verses for his audience. The warriors paid him no heed, and a fighter named Ducaale Koore from the *Reer Daahir* seized Fiqi Xasan’s Qu’ran and threw it away, impatient for the battle to begin.

Instead, Salaan Carabay took Fiqi Xasan’s place between the two forces, inviting the religious elder to step aside so that he might address the warring factions in a language that they would better understand. Holding the warriors’ attention, Salaan first delivered his now-famous poem in the *Geeraar* style, *Waar Tolow Colka Jooja* (“Oh! Kinsmen Stop the War”). Impressed by their kinsman’s appeal, the forces disengaged and violence was averted.

A similar episode, involving the classical poet Faarax Nuur, has also been recorded in the annals of Somali lyrical appeals for peace. But more recent illustrations of powerful pacific poetry also exist. In 1984 the Barre government’s tactics of divide and rule had fuelled numerous inter-clan feuds across the Somali Republic. In an effort to restore calm and pave the way to reconciliation, Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac “Gaariye” composed one of the most celebrated poems on the theme of reconciliation: *Hagar-laawe* (“The Charitable”). The poem has remained in common use up to the present.

*Poetry since 1991*

Since the overthrow of the Barre regime, poets in Somaliland have continued to promote the cause of peace. Together with drama and song, poetry has helped to heal the wounds opened by the successive rounds of civil strife (1992 and 1994-1996) that have wracked Somaliland in the aftermath of liberation. Participants in the research process recalled the impact of poetry at reconciliation conferences. According to the poet Yuusuf Xiito: “After the Quran and religious speeches, we poets took the forum and recited our poetry making the audience shed tears and bringing them closer to the reconciliatory purpose of the meeting”. The emotional verse of the female poet Saado Cabdi Amarre lamented the senselessness of the successive civil wars that wracked Somaliland in the aftermath of liberation:

*Intaan dacar leefay,  
Waabay durduurtayey,  
Dabbaasha anigoon aqoon,  
Daad I qaadayey,  
Dagaalkii hore bikh,  
Kani iiga sii daryey,  
Naa baddaba Deeqay,  
Dagaalkani muxuu abaa?*

*Oo maxay daantaasi daantaa,  
Ku diiddan tabay?*

“I drank poison by tasting the bitterness of war,  
Taken by the flood without knowing how to swim,  
Previous wars were nothing in comparison to this,  
O Deeqa! What is the meaning of this war?  
And why is this part of the town fighting against that one?”

There was general agreement among participants in the research process that the role of the poet remains as vital today as in the past; according to the majority view, the poet remains a prominent public figure who commands a following and his prestige corresponds to his poetic abilities.

But a dissenting opinion holds that poets and their art are in decline. According to the young poet Yuusuf Xiito:

Poetry once played the role of the media; it was a popular tool for discussion and critical analysis of political, philosophical, economical and social issues. That role has since been taken by other media sectors and the poets have gone without the least recognition.

Yuusuf Xiito illustrated his point with a poem, an excerpt of which follows:

<p><i>Bulshada na war baa u sed ah, Waxa dhacay bayaanshoo, Baallaha Adduunkiiyo, Cilmi baaqday laga belo, Asaan badbax dulsariyo, Buunbuunis lagu darin, Beentu na ka madhan tabay. Iyo baaqa nabadeed, Iyo baarax lagu ledo, Iyo beesha samo-doon, Baaweynta badalkiiyo, Wacyi-gelin la baabshaa, Biligeeda weeyaan, Barkhad bay ku gaadhaa, Bilicdeedu waa maqal. War baxnaanadiisaa, Beryo lagu nagaadaa, Ballankiiyo xusuustu na, Ka ma bixin halkoodii, Bobolyow na la ma deyn. Buuraha dushoosiiyo, Wixii Badaha hoos yiil, Baallaha Adduunkiiyo, Inta Bari u gobol yahay,</i></p>	<p>For the society news is like food, Yes, it is the media that should stand for clarity, Media is the source of unexpected knowledge, Unexaggerated and not fake, When it has no place for a lie, Then prosperity is within the reach, Oh! That is beauty by fidelity, A sign of peace, A means to prosperity, An item of news that for a time soothes, And a family/clan of peace, Makes hope for a good news, And yet promise and memory, Do not loose their place, Nor is nostalgia forsaken, And at times longing for the good old days, On top of the mountains, On the waters of the rivers and sea, And in all over the world, From the east to the west, In Latin America and Europe,</p>
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*Baariis u shilis tabay,*  
*Baraasiil dusbeediyo,*  
*Marka Boon na lagu daro,*  
*Ama badiba reer Yurub,*  
*Barashada aqoontaa,*  
*Lagu baabi beeloo,*  
*Bogga bore Wargeyskiyo,*  
*Internet-ka baahshaa,*  
*Waa baab fajicisoo,*  
*Bidhaan la isu muuqdiyo,*  
*Dunidaba badh soo gelin,*  
*Bulshada na markii sii.*

Where knowledge and education is a  
 priority,  
 And where the first pages of the  
 newspapers,  
 And in the world of the Internet,  
 Where countries are interconnected,  
 Yes amazed you will be,  
 In this audio-visual world,  
 After all it is a world that feeds the  
 public.

While most participants in the research process were more optimistic about the continuing relevance of the poet in modern Somali society, they agreed that the livelihood of the poet, like that of other artists, is in jeopardy. Competition with the mass media, lack of intellectual property protection and absence of government support together threaten the existence of poetry as a profession.

Although contemporary poets continue to create and innovate, workshop participants noted that their audience is less receptive than in the past. Ignorance of poetry among the younger generations, and the attraction of more accessible, less demanding forms of news and entertainment mean that the poet must adapt if his or her message is to be heard.

Another problem is the absence of a legal framework protecting copyright. The obstacles here are twofold: first, the current government lacks the capacity to either promulgate or enforce such laws. Second, Somali poetry has traditionally been perceived as a public good, to be freely reproduced. Indeed, the very notion of copyright would seem to contradict the nature of Somali poetry as a means of mass communication. Without some degree of protection, however, it is virtually impossible for contemporary poets to make a living from their compositions.

An obvious answer, as in many other countries, would be for the government to establish programmes in support of poets and other artists. Before the civil war, such support was available, although it was selectively dispensed, principally according to political criteria. The National Academy of Science and Arts, the National Theatres of Muqdisho and Hargeysa and other institutions led the way in supporting poets and other artists in general. Somaliland's current government, however, lacks the resources to establish such programmes; the multifarious needs of the post-war situation mean that support for the arts is unlikely to receive a high priority in the foreseeable future.

### **The tree**

Before the establishment of the major towns and the onset of urbanization in the latter half of the twentieth century, nomadic encampments were the focal points for the interaction of the pastoral community. Gatherings of any significance typically took place at the *madal* –

usually the cool shade of a large tree. The *madal* served as the venue for two of the nomadic communities most important institutions: the *shir* (deliberations of the adult men of the lineage on matters of common concern) and the *xeer-beegti* (meetings of judicial experts on matters of customary law). Information on matters of war, peace and livestock was exchanged and examined in the shade of the tree, and members of younger generations were educated in their religion, culture, and traditions.

The *madal* also provided the setting for ceremonial occasions, where distinguished guests were accommodated and entertained. The resolution of conflicts, marriage arrangements, formalization of conflicts was all celebrated under the shade of the tree.

As urbanization accelerated in the post-independence period and following the civil war, the relative importance of the *madal* as a medium of communication has declined vis-à-vis other types of meeting places. Nevertheless, the tree retains significance in both rural and urban affairs. Even in the urban centers, there are occasions when a critical issue may be discussed in the shade of a tree in order to underscore its gravity.

### **Water wells**

Whereas the *madal* fulfils a formal function with respect to meeting and communication, water wells serve as informal meeting places where people meet and exchange news and views.

Wells and grazing areas are not under exclusive ownership or control of individual tribes, but are normally shared by clans from different tribes. They provide convenient meeting places and an opportunity for exchange of news and gossip for people who during certain seasons live hundreds of miles apart (Touval, 1963).

Wells are vital places linked with the life of the nomad community since disputes over water and grazing can be serious and may instigate war. Their significance is amplified during *jiilaal* (the long, dry season) because of the number of people and livestock who gather at watering places.

The social importance of wells has been in steady decline in recent years as the proliferation of 'berkeds'<sup>5</sup> provides communities with alternative sources of water.

### **Market**

Even more so than water wells, markets are meeting places for people of great diversity. Members of different clans, inhabitants of different regions, men and women, people of all ages and walks of life come together in the market. The market is also notable as a place where urban and rural people meet.

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<sup>5</sup> Cemented water resevoirs used by the nomads,



Participants in the research process considered markets to be a particularly rich and important medium of communication, since much of the information exchanged in markets concerns the lives of ordinary people and to the development of the country as a whole. One poet observed:

News disseminated or exchanged in the market is directly connected with the life of the people. It is the prices of livestock and commodities. It is the prevalence of peace and the weather conditions. Marketgoers never talk of things beyond their reach, which they term *Gaalo iyo camalkeed* - in other words “the white man and his alien affairs”.

The nomad who frequently goes to the town to obtain essential supplies thus becomes an important source of information for his community. One workshop participant, Maxamed Yuusuf Keyse, depicted how he finds and shares information:

A nomad comes to the town in the morning and stays for the whole day. He first goes to the animal market to learn the livestock prices. In the afternoon he leaves for the countryside once he has collected enough information and bought his supplies. In the evening he disseminates his news to his people. The way he relays the news is different from the way the townspeople do: he starts with the good news. Our ears are receptive to polemic news - that is why we do not buy papers unless they carry polemic news. When he is asked to give his report, he starts with the market, the price of livestock, the price of the hides and skins and the price of foodstuff. He ends his account by saying: “And peace was eminent”.

### **Transport**

The role of transportation in spreading news and ideas in Somali society is historically well established. In the mid-nineteenth century, Somali seamen were renowned as conveyors of news from distant lands. In the 1950s, truck drivers played a central role in the composition and the transmission of a new type of love song: the *beello*. Through the medium of overland transport, the *beello* quickly spread from Somaliland to become a popular art form throughout the Somali territories.

In contemporary Somali society, like the marketplace, transportation links men and women of diverse professions, geographical areas and generations. News of conditions in distant rural areas, districts and regions is brought to the capital, and vice-versa. Passengers share information and debate current issues, according to the time available. Within the major towns passengers on public buses tend to keep debate brief and superficial; on longer journeys between regions and districts, conversations naturally become more elaborate as each topic receives ample time. Such debates are informal and engaging, and it is not unknown that fights break out inside a bus or taxi. Typically, with the intervention of the other passengers, calm is restored and discussion continues

### **The mosque and religious leadership**

In settled communities, the mosque (*masajid*) has long performed a central function akin to that of the *madal* in rural areas. People come together at the mosque for worship five times a day, and religious sermons are held there on Fridays and other religious festivals. Mosques have historically played both a formal role in the education and guidance of the community, as well as an informal social role.

At Friday noon prayers the Imam of the mosque addresses the congregation on an issue of concern to the community. As people leave the mosque they continue the discussion of the issue addressed by the ‘Imam’ and may spread the word within the broader community. Outside the mosque after prayers, people typically exchange views on current affairs.

As a community’s most important gathering place, the mosque provides a venue for many other types of social interaction as well. The mosque’s considerable influence in this respect derives in part from its status as a holy place and a forum for religious teaching; as such, it is a widely held belief that only the truth can be told in Mosques, and that lies and evil are forbidden.

In recent years, as religious observance has increased, the construction and rehabilitation of mosques is moving with unprecedented speed. Some of these mosques are built with donations from certain religious groups, who subsequently run the mosques. Growing attendance at Mosques has been accompanied by proliferation of religious sects. Although, most of the topics addressed in the Mosque are of a broader religious, ethical, or social nature, there has been a noticeable growth of prayer circles comprising religious activists who share the same religious and political outlook. Workshop participants agreed that in light of such trends, the Mosque is acquiring unprecedented political influence in society.

Somaliland society is entirely Muslim. Islam has been practiced in the territory for over one thousand years, and is deeply ingrained in cultural traditions and social norms. The role of religious leaders in Somali society is well established, but went into eclipse during the putatively “Socialist” regime of Siyaad Barre, which accepted only limited expression of the Islamic faith. In the post war period, a religious revival has been taking place throughout Somali society, and religious leadership of varying orientations has returned to prominence.

There is no doubt of the importance of religious leadership in matters of reconciliation and peace, which is due in part to their perceived impartiality. When the warring groups are brought together to make peace, religious leaders may advise them on the Quran and the principles of Islam for days before substantive discussions are engaged. When a peace agreement is ultimately formalized, religious leaders typically provide the final blessing. A practice still in place in the solution of conflicts in the Republic of Somaliland. In the words of one workshop participant:

No peace effort was realized or a conflict settled without the intervention of the religious elders. They are the first to go to the site of the conflict and create the necessary atmosphere for a settlement.

Other participants underscored the point, noting how the religious leaders are the first to attend to conflicts before politicians, militiamen and elders. Some participants took the argument a step further, speaking critically of the absence of religious leadership from the political life of the country and advocating that seats be reserved for them in one or both legislative Houses: “The first article in our constitution says that the basis of our constitution is the Islamic law. In the selection of our legislative and executive bodies we depend on Harvard and Oxford graduates. We do not give room to our religious leaders. How could we expect them to be active in our political life?” questioned one traditional elder.

Whether or not religious leadership is indeed lacking from the legislature is open to dispute. Members of the *Guurti* in particular are expected to be well-versed in religious matters, and ensuring official respect of the Islamic faith is one of the *Guurti*'s constitutional duties.

Furthermore, some participants in the research process noted that religious leaders have not served exclusively as a force for peace and unity. Islamic religious sects and organizations have proliferated in Somaliland in recent years, often competing with one another or with the influential *Qadiriya*<sup>6</sup> sect which has traditionally commanded the greatest loyalty in Somaliland. One participant, Ugaaso Maxamed Cabdiraxmaan, blamed Islamic leaders for their lack of influence in the political process: “Religious leaders are politically passive. They are divided on the basis of narrow religious tendencies and depend on the sect they follow. Certain groups may be interested in the seizure of the political power”.

The suggestion that some religious groups may pursue narrow self-interest or political agenda is based on experience. In the early 1990's, armed members of religious organizations took part in various armed conflicts throughout Somaliland and also in Somalia. More recently, religious groups have shown themselves eager to form their own political parties and to take part in the elections, although the Constitution does not permit parties to be established on the basis of region, clan and or religion.

Religious leadership has played a less controversial role in non-political domains such as campaigning against the moral degradation among Somaliland's youth and the negative influence of foreign cultures. According to one participant: “The religious leaders have spared no effort in raising the consciousness of the people and regenerating the decadent ethical and moral values. They have addressed the people in all forums: the mosque, the radio, mass rallies and other public gatherings”. Other participants acknowledged their own experiences of spiritual enrichment through religious awareness campaigns. Despite the absence of quantitative data, there is no denying the increasing number of people who observe prayers and attend mosques. The construction of mosques has also accelerated dramatically through the personal contributions of members of the public towards the advancement of their faith.

Religious influence extends to the domain of private enterprise. A younger generation of religiously observant entrepreneurs is actively involved in the management of the bigger companies in the fields of telecommunications, money transfer and currency exchange.

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<sup>6</sup> An Islamic Suufi sect,

Likewise, they have taken a leading role in establishing schools around the country, ranging from kindergartens to intermediate schools with a total student population that is estimated at a little less than half of the population of the primary public school system.<sup>7</sup> Islamic studies and Arabic language are typically the main subjects at these schools, which use the curricula of various Arab countries instead of the national curriculum developed by the Somaliland government. Finally, Islamic charities have taken part in providing services and support to people in need.

The contribution of religious leadership to reconstruction has been most productive outside the political sphere. Participants in the research process acknowledged the value of direct contributions in the form of public education, moral and spiritual renewal and the direct provision of aid and services to the needy. Indirect contributions like those made through development of the private sector may be less evident, but they nevertheless represent an important element in Somaliland's long-term growth and stability.

### **The mefrish**

The term *mefrish* may be used to describe both a venue for chewing *qaad* and a circle of acquaintances who routinely meet to chew *qaad* in the same place. *Mefrishes* may be divided into two categories: those where simple social gatherings take place, and those more politicized *mefrishes* where the attendants share a common political view.

As *qaad* consumption has dramatically increased since the civil war, so have *mefrishes* been growing in number. The rapid growth of the *mefrish* in the post-war period has been matched by an extension of its influence as a political forum. Since 1996, participants in this study estimate the number of *mefrishes* to have nearly tripled – an increase that chiefly reflects a growing number of young chewers. According to workshop participants, the *mefrish* has become the most important forum for communication among urban males. Virtually all *mefrishes* serve a political function: information is exchanged, arguments are presented and debated, and opinions formed. According to the findings of one Somali psychologist, *mefrishes* can help to minimize frustration as many people come together to discuss and solve issues and those who feel lonely can find company.

Workshop participants disagreed on the role played by the *mefrish*, in part because of its transformation in recent years. Historically, *mefrishes* used to be rooms rented by groups of friends who enjoyed chewing *qaad* together. The discussions that took place there had little political content. Men from different clans and political outlooks shared the *qaad* sessions, identifying themselves more with their towns of residence than with their clans.

Since the civil war, however, *mefrishes* have acquired a less benign, more political character – a topic that will be addressed further below. Workshop participants described contemporary *mefrishes* as forums for distorted and disruptive information, in contrast with the *masaajid* and the *madal*. In the words of the poet Maxamed Jaamac Keyd, a workshop participant: “Under

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<sup>7</sup> The public primary school population in the scholastic year 2000-2001 was 52,925 students, while the private primary school population was 21,521 (Ministry of Education, 2001).

the tree the official news was disseminated. Authentic, truthful and objective news was exchanged. But in the *mefrish* of the town news of every kind is spread.”

In particular, *mefrishes* serve as hothouses of clan politics, and are often manipulated to political ends. Only a small proportion of *mefrishes*, mainly concentrated in the urban centers, may be said to have significant impact upon public affairs. The more influential *mefrishes* typically bring together members of the male urban “elite” - government officials, business leaders, clan elders and other opinion leaders – who share similar views and interests. Such *mefrishes* function as pressure groups and political clubs and can exert considerable pressure on the governmental decision-making process, as well as on public opinion.

Government and opposition alike may discreetly establish *mefrishes* intended to influence public opinion or to counter the influence of similar, *mefrish*-based political pressure groups. On the other hand, some *mefrishes* serve as bridges between different political tendencies, inviting prominent personalities from different parts of the political spectrum to hear opposing views in a relaxed and informal atmosphere, to float ideas and positions, and even to argue points of view without the risks of full public exposure. Unfortunately, participants agreed that such positive features of the *mefrish* are outweighed by its more destructive purposes.

Consequently, many participants in the research process were of the opinion that the *mefrish* is little more than a vehicle for rumour mongering. In the opinion of one woman participant:

*Mefrishes* are not frequented by ordinary people. Baseless rumours are generated in the *mefrish*. They argue on news that has no source. Its impact is rather negative rather than being constructive.

Despite the controversy over their role, *mefrishes* are likely to remain important features of the political scene for the foreseeable future.

### Teashops

Another traditional gathering place common to both urban and rural communities is the teashop (*makbaayad*), where men meet to exchange news and views. Teashops provide venues for making appointments, for chewing *qaad* (mainly in rural areas) and for listening to the radio. As one workshop participant observed:

The teashop is a vital source of news and a meeting place of value. People come together and exchange views about life. What have the papers written? What about the radio - especially the BBC? Is there any one who has the latest news from Hargeysa? These are the ordinary questions people ask themselves.

In many villages the *makbaayad* (teashop) serves the dual purpose of teashop and *mefrish*. Customers may drink tea, chew *qaad*, or both. In urban areas, the youth and the unemployed typically gather in teashops in the morning to read newspapers, exchange views and share commentary on events. In the afternoon, men who do not chew *qaad* and members of the

older generation frequent teashops, starting their discussions before they tune to the BBC Somali Service at 5.30 PM.

Interestingly, the social significance of teashops appears to vary from region to region. Since the *makhaayad* must compete with the *mefrish* for the patronage of adult males, they appear to be better attended in areas where *qaad* is scarcer, more expensive, or more stigmatised. Workshop participants thus noted the comparative advantage of teashops in eastern Somaliland where the *qaad* supply decreases, where household incomes are lower, and where religious revival is stronger.

### **The *Kheyriya***

The *Kheyriya* (town square) has long political tradition, dating from the early 1950s when the SNL organized weekly mass rallies to address the public on the ways and means of national liberation. The Hargeysa *Kheyriya* in particular served as the headquarters of the Somali National League (SNL), the party that led the struggle against the British colonialism. The other political parties organized weekly mass rallies at their respective premises, where speeches were read and nationalistic poems and songs were sung.

The *Kheyriya* has since become a customary place of public assembly not only in Hargeysa, but also in other regional capitals, towns and villages around the country. At the *Kheyriya*, government leaders or other prominent personalities address the public from the podium, often in the presence of the mass media. Unlike other traditional channels of communication, discussions and debates do not take place at the *Kheyriya*.

Public events at the *Kheyriya* typically generate a “ripple effect” as elements of speeches are rebroadcast by traditional means and through the mass media. Members of the audience may carry the highlights of a speech by word by mouth, often verbatim (although as news is repeatedly retold it may lose its accuracy and authenticity). The print media often carries speeches by the President and senior government figures intact while the radio and television may broadcast excerpts. Unsurprisingly, the *Kheyriya* has witnessed a revival in recent years as a key medium of public communication.

### **Channels of information among women**

Most public meeting places – notably the *madal*, the *makhaayad* and the *mefrish* – are frequently exclusively by men.<sup>8</sup> Only marketplaces and public transportation offer mixed venues of exchange of news and views. Women have consequently developed separate modes of communication on social and political issues. These include the following:

- *Sitaad*: a weekly religious gathering where women sing and recite religious songs in praise of prophet Mohamed
- Meetings of women’s organizations

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<sup>8</sup> There is also a small but growing number of women’s *mefrishes* in major towns. Given the very limited scope of this phenomenon and the high level of discretion that surrounds it, it has not been dealt with in this paper.

- Weddings and other festivities
- Marketplaces

The *sitaad* usually brings together a group of friends and acquaintances who share similar views. Likewise, most weddings and festivals involve women from a relatively narrow social base. Women's organizations, however, particularly in the larger towns, have begun to bring together people from diverse social backgrounds.

Although typically focussed on social and domestic affairs, women's groups may also share views on issues of an economic or political nature. Since women do not hold senior positions in government, much of the information they share is second-hand, earning it the classification of *gambada dumarka* (a woman's shawl). Information whose source is unknown is also commonly referred to as *gambadii dumarka*, implying that it is unreliable.

## FORMAL AND MASS MEDIA

### Radio Hargeysa

Radio is widely considered to be the most powerful medium of communication in Somali society, in view of its compatibility with Somali oral culture. Consequently, the history of radio in Somaliland is inseparable from the political history of the territory, as this section clearly illustrates.

The first experimental radio broadcasts in Somaliland began in 1941, under the British Military Administration. Testing continued until December 1942 when Radio Kudu was established with a 100-watt transmitter, subsequently strengthened to 600-watts (Johnson, 1966). Radio Kudu was the first Somali language radio worldwide and served primarily to consolidate colonial rule in Somaliland. Government announcements, policies and regulations were disseminated over the radio, and the Somali audience was exposed to British norms and values.

In 1944 Radio Kudu was renamed Hargeysa, Radio Somali and transmission power was gradually increased from 1 kilowatt in 1945 to 5 kilowatts in 1957. With the invention of the transistor, radios spread to Somali owned teashops and private individuals (Johnson, 96).

The secession of the 'Hawd' and Reserved Area in 1954 to the Ethiopian Emperor by the British colonial authorities stirred deep public resentment and provoked demonstrations throughout the Somali territories, especially in the British Somaliland Protectorate. Radio Cairo, the voice of the Egyptian government led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, seized the opportunity to introduce its own broadcasts in Somali, injecting further impetus into the Somali struggle for independence. The British Colonial Office attached much attention to Radio Cairo, which broadcast influential programs in support of the national liberation movement in the British Protectorate of Somaliland and elsewhere in the other Somali territories.

The British responded to the Egyptian challenge by installing new equipment for receiving British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) transmissions in 1955, transforming the Radio

Hargeysa transmitter into a relay station, and by launching the BBC Somali Service together with the Hausa and Swahili Services in 1957 (BBC,1997). Immediately prior to independence, the British upgraded the Radio Hargeysa transmitter to 10 kilowatts and 18 years later, the Somalis themselves installed a 25 KW transmitting facility. After independence, the government of the new Somali Republic naturally placed more emphasis on the nation-wide Radio Muqdisho than on Radio Hargeysa (UNESCO, 1998).

Since its inception in the colonial days and even long after the independence, Radio Hargeysa had served as a broader institution than a mere radio station. Multiple activities were performed under the auspices of Radio Hargeysa. It served as an organizing institution for the artists as most of the musicians, actors and singers of the time survived under it while feeding the radio with songs and short plays. In addition to this there was a photography unit that was run by the management of the radio. The photography unit was responsible in filming and documenting most of the events and had rich historical archives of photographs that were unfortunately destroyed through the civil war. The radio management also ran the "*War-Soomaali-side*" (Somali news carrier) a weekly English paper published by the colonial administration. The management of Radio Hargeysa carried out all these activities and in essence it served as the information department of the colonial administration, a function it had run for years. In later years of Siyaad Barre's regime, the Ministry of Information assumed most of these activities.

Under the military regime of Mohamed Siyaad Barre, radio reached full maturity as an instrument of political propaganda. Radio Muqdisho operated from 6:00-8:00 am in the mornings and from 12:00 noon to 12:00 midnight, while radio Hargeysa operated between 1:00– 3:00pm in the afternoon and 6:00–9.00 pm in the evenings..

Radio played a key part in sustaining Barre's dictatorship for twenty-one years. It was thus a logical step for the guerrilla movements that emerged to wage war against his regime to include radio in their own arsenals. The Somali Salvation Front (SSF) - which later evolved to become the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) – was the first of the armed fronts; from 1980 the SSF operated a broadcasting facility in Addis-Ababa known as Radio Kulmis. When the SNM joined the armed struggle, its leaders signed an accord with the SSDF at Addis Ababa in October 1982, in which they agreed to co-operate in the field of information. Radio Kulmis was subsequently renamed Radio Halgan and operated until 5 April, 1988, when its existence was terminated under the terms of a peace accord signed in Djibouti by Siyaad Barre and the Ethiopian military leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam.

Following a hiatus of nearly one year, the SNM inaugurated a new radio station on 5 May 1989 at its headquarters in Almis (Balli-Gubadle). Radio SNM went on the air every night from 8:00pm – 9:00pm.<sup>9</sup> In the meantime, government-controlled Radio Hargeysa was destroyed in heavy fighting and was replaced by an ancient mobile radio mounted on three trucks. Just after the first week of February 1991, as government forces were routed and the SNM took power in the northwest and proclaimed the Republic of Somaliland, Radio SNM was symbolically renamed Radio Hargeysa in June 1991.

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<sup>9</sup> The Radio went into air every night except for the night of 12 April 1990 when the staff went on strike.



While the premises of Radio Hargeysa were entirely destroyed during the course of the war, its archives were rescued and survived largely intact. Being the oldest Somali radio, Radio Hargeysa has acquired one of the richest recording archives, and has long served as a source of songs, literary works and music for other Somali radio stations.<sup>10</sup> Rehabilitation of the Radio Hargeysa premises, begun in 1991, received a major boost in 1998 through a publicly supported self-help programme, and broadcasting activities resumed there on 9 November 1999.

Since 1999 Radio Hargeysa has operated on the 41-meter short wave band and the 639 medium wave, using a transmitter donated by the government of Yemen. An FM transmitter, supplied by the BBC, was installed on 12 July, 2001 so as to enhance the reception of the BBC programs in Hargeysa. At the same time, Radio Hargeysa began broadcasting on the Internet ([www.radiohargeysa.com](http://www.radiohargeysa.com).) for one hour and a half each day for the Somaliland community in the diaspora.

Improvement in the quality of programs has kept pace with the improved infrastructure and broadcasting capacity. Radio Hargeysa's recording library, an unrivalled asset, has help to attract a broader audience through entertainment programs. English, Arabic and Amharic news programs have been added, and technical standards have been enhanced thanks to successive training courses offered by the BBC. However, the radio's audience remains relatively limited: the AM broadcasts can be heard only in the immediate vicinity of Hargeysa; short-wave broadcasts can occasionally be heard further afield but most Somalilanders lack the equipment to receive them.

### **Print media and newspapers**

The first weekly newspaper in Somaliland hit the streets of Hargeysa in 1950. It was Arabic weekly prepared in Hargeysa and printed in Aden (South Yemen), called *Al-Umma* (The Nation). The Editor-in-Chief was the late Maxamuud Jaamac Uurdoox. It did not live long. After only four issues, the paper folded, mainly because of the lack of printing facilities.

Three other Arabic weeklies followed: *Al-Liwa* (The Banner) on 24 October 1958; *Qarni-Ifriiqiya* (Horn of Africa), in December 1958; and *Al-Saraaha* (The Truth), which appeared in 1959. Each newspaper served as the official mouthpiece of an existing political party: *Al-Liwa* reflected the views of the NUF while the other two weeklies were the official mouthpieces of the SNL and USP respectively.<sup>11</sup> *Horseed* Printing Press owned by Cabdillaahi

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<sup>10</sup> The famous signature music of the BBC Somali Service, *Socodkii Arrawelo* (the steps of the legendary Queen Arrawelo) originated with Radio Hargeysa and was composed by the late Cabdillaahi Qarshe.

<sup>11</sup> The SNL was founded in 1954 with Xaaji Cumar Askar as its President and Maxamed Xaaji Ibraahin Cigaal as its Secretary General. The SNL united with the USP in 1959 to form the SNL-USP. Initially, the NUF was formed to negotiate with the British authorities over the *Hand* and Reserved Area, but in 1958 it became a political party under the leadership of Axmed Xasan Ibraahin as President and Michael Mariano as Secretary General. In the general elections of 1960 SNL-USP won 32 out of the 33 Parliamentary seats and the remaining one went to the NUF.

Oomaar printed *Al-Lima* while a press owned by Aadan Furre Samatar printed *Qarni-Ifriiqiya*. With the exception of the first issues of *Qarni-Ifriiqiya*, which were printed in Aden, all papers were printed in Hargeysa. With the union of the two Somali regions, British Somaliland Protectorate and the former Italian Trusteeship Territory in 1st July 1960 and the formation of the Somali Republic, a new capital was established at Muqdisho. Hargeysa's status was reduced to that of a regional capital and most of the press joined the migration southwards to Muqdisho. *Al-Lima* survived the longest of the three, closing its doors in October 1963.

For a short while, Hargeysa continued to enjoy local publications like the English weekly, the *Hargeysa Herald Tribune*, and the Arabic weekly *Al-Jamahir*. These papers tended to represent the disillusionment of northerners with the union, but by the end of 1967 they had ceased to exist.

Following the outbreak of civil war in the early 1980's, the SNM took to publishing its own periodicals in support of the liberation struggle. Inside SNM-controlled zones, the newsletters *Ufo* and *Dhanbaal* were locally printed and distributed on an irregular basis. In the diaspora, SNM supporters produced the English language monthlies *Somalia Uncensored* and *Liberty*, and the Arabic journal *Al-Soomaal Al-Jadiid* in London; the quarterly *Somali Horizon* was printed in North America. *Horn of Africa*, an independent journal published in the United States, was also outspoken in its condemnation of the Barre regime.

Following the SNM victory in 1991, those newssheets devoted to the struggle soon faded away. The euphoria that attended liberation and newfound freedom of expression was manifested in the mushrooming of three-page cyclostyled newsletters throughout the country. The post-liberation newssheets were pioneered by the short-lived fortnightly *Ileys* (Light), published by the Information Department of the SNM, whose first issue appeared on 6th April 1991 to commemorate the movement's 10th anniversary. Other independent newsletters, including *Codka Hargeysa* (Voice of Hargeysa), *Xorriyo* (Freedom) and *Jambhuriya* (The Republic) rapidly proliferated. Most of these newsletters quickly disappeared because of the shortage of human and material resources.

The first printing presses were introduced to Somaliland in 1993 by Sandoon Letterpress in Hargeysa and another private company in Berbera. The National Printing Press (NPP) was installed in Hargeysa in 1995, and on 2 November 1995 printed the first offset version of *Jambhuriya*. *Xorriyo*, printed by Sandoon Printing Press, soon followed on August 13 1997, but ceased publication in July 1998. In early 1997 the government purchased the Berbera printing press and began publishing *Maandeeq* on 1 January 1997. *Jambhuriya* was joined by its English language sister publication, the weekly *Republican*, on 20 November 1997. The independent newspaper, *Himilo*, first appeared at the end of 1998 and continued for nine months. It reappeared again in May 2001, followed by the women's broadsheet *Codka Haweenka*, but both rapidly disappeared. At the end of 2001, a group of former *Jambhuriya* journalists started printing the Somali language *Haatuf*, a weekly Arabic version called *al-Haatif*. In January 2002 they added the English language *Somaliland Times* to their repertoire. *Maandeeq*, the government's official paper, soon responded to these opposition by printing Arabic and English weeklies by the names of *Qarni Ifriiqiya* ("Horn of Africa") and the Hargeysa Tribune. *Codka Shacabka* ("The Voice of the People), another independent Somali

paper that comes out every other day also appeared in early 2002, bringing the total number of newspapers in Somaliland to nine.

*Jambuuriya* leads in circulation figures, selling 2,000-2,500 copies of each edition in Somaliland, and a further 1,000 copies in London. The *Republican* reaches approximately 1,500 readers. *Maandeeq* has a much more limited circulation of approximately 500 copies. Despite this relatively limited leadership, the newspapers dominate political commentary in Hargeysa, and have considerable influence within the Somaliland community as a whole.

### The Performing Arts

The history of the performing arts in Somaliland dates from the early 1950s. As the deadline for independence approached, the theatre tackled a range of themes from social, moral and cultural issues to the struggle against British domination. The dramatists of the period drew their inspiration from two historically important phenomena: the rise of the *Heello* (a prototype of Somali pop music which was in turn derived from the *Belwo*) and the introduction of children's drama in schools, staged mostly in Arabic. The artful combination of these two ingredients gave birth to the *Hargeysawi* school of drama, which came to be practiced throughout the Somali-inhabited territories. Another school, the *Banaadiri* theatre, later originated in Muqdisho but favoured use of the local *Xamari* dialect which limited its attraction to non-*Xamari* speakers.

School dramas were typically staged during the opening and closing ceremonies of the academic year, directed by teachers and acted by pupils. In the 1950's, as the *Heello* grew in popularity, it gradually became an essential component of theatre productions. One of the pioneers in the new art form was Yuusuf Xaaji Aadan, an early architect of Somaliland's education system and a distinguished poet and artist with tremendous capabilities and creativity. Later in life he would play a major political role in the national liberation movement.

In 1956, the first drama by a professional group by the name of *Cantar iyo Cabla* was staged in Hargeysa. The play is based on a legendary Arabic love story and was composed by Xuseen Aw Faarax, with music and production by Cabdillaahi Qarshe - widely considered to be the founding father of modern Somali music. The same production team went on to produce a second musical drama entitled *Isa-seeg* (meaning "Misunderstanding"), a love story performed by Maxamed Axmed and Axmed Cali Haruun. Two men, Cumar Dhuulle and Xasan Gidhin, played the female roles since it was considered taboo to put women on stage in that period.

The emergence of *Hargeysawi* theatre in the mid-1950's coincided with another important development in the performing arts more closely linked to the political undercurrents of the late colonial period: the formation of the *Walaalo Hargeysa* (Hargeysa Brothers). The *Walaalo Hargeysa* played a significant role in the development of modern Somali verse, and their lyrics encompassed political as well as social themes of the day. The quest for independence figured large in their literary achievement.

The '*Walaalo Hargeysa*' are important for their part in popularizing the drive for independence and for composing many varied poems. They are

remembered because of their potency of verse and not for acts of terror or violence which they in no way perpetrated (Johnson, 96).

One of the leaders of *Walaalo Hargeysa* was Maxamed Ismaaciil Baa-sarce “Barkhad-Cas” a famous nationalist composer who died in his thirties in January 1963. At the burial ceremony of “Barkhad-cas” Cabdillaahi Qarshe sung his famous tribute *Waa ayaanba ayaan* (“Everyone has his Day”). Likewise, at the burial ceremony of Cabdillaahi Qarshe in November 1997, artists in Hargeysa performed the song “Cabdillaahi Waayeel” (Cabdillaahi the Great), paying tribute to his contribution to the development of music and Somali arts. Singing in a burial ceremony is a very unusual thing in Somali culture and these two tributes appear to be the only incidents of this nature on historical record.

Following independence in June 1960, theatre captured the mood of the democratic period, fostering the patriotic spirit of the people as Somali nationalism has reached its peak. But when the military seized power in 1969, the theatre, like all the performing arts, was co-opted in the service of the Barre regime.

The military government established a number of theatrical groups whose purpose was to carry the message of the putative “Revolution” to every village. Travelling theatre troupes composed a seemingly endless repertoire of songs in praise of the revolution and of its great helmsman, Maxamed Siyaad Barre. Chief among these troupes were the following:

- *Waaberi*: (The Dawn): The largest and most influential artist troupe, Waaberi consisted of the most high profile artists. Their complement of more than one hundred composers, musicians, actors, singers, folklore dancers and other professionals was divided between the National Theatres of Muqdisho and Hargeysa, under the direction of the Ministry of Information and National Guidance:
- *Heegan* (Vigilance) of the Police Force
- *Horseed* (Vanguard) of the Armed Forces
- *Onkod* (Thunder) of the Custodial Corps
- *Halgan* (Struggle) of the Pioneers of the Revolution

In addition, regional and district troupes operated on behalf of the ruling Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party and related administrative organs. The remaining independent artists were generally considered potential enemies of Revolution and were compelled to leave the country or face harsh prison sentences handed out by the security courts.

Despite tight government control of theatre troupes, artists occasionally managed to compose and perform subversive theatrical works whose finely veiled messages slipped past government censors undetected. The vast majority of theatrical production, however, served simply as government propaganda.

... Great stress was placed on propaganda and thought control. Even the smallest permanent settlement in the countryside was expected to have its orientation with, ideally, a suitable complement of Marxist-Leninist literature and portraits of the reigning trinity: *Jaalle* Siyaad, *Jaalle* Markis (Marx), and

*Jaalle* Lenin (Lewis, 94).

One of the rare contributions to the performing arts of the Barre period was the construction of the National theatre of Hargeysa during the 1970's as a self-help project. The government and the people joined efforts in realizing the project. People contributed with money and their physical labour. Designed by national architects, the theatre was located in the east-central part of the city of Hargeysa, with the Museum to the northwest and the City Council to the west. To the south, the Hargeysa Public Library faced the theatre across a broad tarmac square. The seating capacity of the theatre was 2,500 fixed seats and 500 mobile chairs; there was also an elegant garden and a spacious parking area. There was recreation centre with refreshments, a cafeteria and three stereo audio shops for the duplication of cassettes and their marketing. Fifteen adjacent houses were built to accommodate the artists and their families. In sum, the theatre offered a sophisticated and attractive environment for artists and audience alike. In 1988, at the height of the civil war, the National Theatre was deliberately and totally razed to the ground by government forces. Its reconstruction and revival remains an outstanding challenge to the people and authorities of Somaliland.

#### *Post-war theatre in Somaliland*

The performing arts have been slow to recover from the civil war. The absence of the theatre at this crucial stage of reconstruction and development has deprived artists of an important professional asset and a hub of creativity. Dependency on government, fostered under the Barre regime, has continued in the post-war period: many prominent artists are on the payroll of either the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or the Ministry of Information. Since neither Ministry has the funds to mount major productions, artists are under-employed and have suffered a concomitant decline in morale, creativity and prestige.

Conversely, Somali artists in the diaspora (especially in Europe and North America) have become increasingly dynamic. New bands have brought innovations to Somali music, and often address such issues like conditions of life as refugees and nostalgia for their homeland. One such popular drama is Maxamuud Cabdillaahi "Singub's" *Qabyo*, produced and staged in Canada in the mid-1990s, whose main theme addresses the pressures of life in the diaspora on family values and relationships.

Artistic innovation in the diaspora has not been wholly positive. New recording technologies have facilitated unauthorized "covers" of old songs by new bands, and pirate reproductions of existing recordings have become a lucrative business. Somali radios such as Radio Hargeysa, BBC, and Radio Addis-Ababa have helped to legitimise such practices by playing the new versions, while the originals may be gathering dust in their libraries. Only the original authors and performers seem to have been excluded from cashing in on the new industry.

Little can be done to curb piracy in the diaspora, but Somaliland's artists receive at least nominal protection under Article 16 of the new Constitution, which reads:

The government will develop knowledge and culture and will encourage creativity and research. A law will govern copyright. The government will

promote positive aspects of the national culture while considering at the same time what could be taken from the world cultural heritage, The government will resist all social evils that contradict religious and moral values.

Relevant laws, however, have yet to be drafted and come into effect, meaning that artists will remain without effective protection for some time to come.

Despite the constraints described above, drama and music have played an important role in the process of Somaliland's reconstruction, notably with respect to peace initiatives and other major political gatherings.

*Grand Reconciliation and Peace Conference of Northern Elders, Burco 1991*

Two artist troupes performed at the Grand Reconciliation and Peace Conference of Northern Elders, which opened in Burco on 5 May 1991. This Conference consolidated peace among the clans, and served as the prelude to the restoration of the sovereignty of the Republic of Somaliland.

One musical band from the SNM fighting units and another from Awdal region took part. Despite their common bond as artists, the bands represented opposite sides in the civil war. Laying down their arms to perform together onstage with appeals for repentance and brotherhood, they set a moving example for the other delegates and help to shape the mood of the gathering. Both bands gave special performances in the Elder's Conference, and also in the subsequent SNM Central Committee meeting, illustrating the agony of war and calling for a genuine and lasting peace.

*Grand Elders' Peace Conferences, Sheekh 1992 and Boorame 1993*

The theatre again took an active part in the Grand Elders' Peace Conference in October 1992 at Sheekh. The conference put an end to nearly a year of fighting between rival militias in Somaliland. The town of Sheekh itself had been severely affected by the fighting.

The success of the Sheekh Conference paved the way for the Boorame Elders' Conference of 1993, which managed the peaceful transfer of power from the SNM to a civilian administration led by President M. I. Cigaal. The Conference also produced the new Peace Charter and National Charter that would frame Somaliland's political life for the next three years.

During the course of both conferences, theatrical troupes presented plays, songs and poetry of relevance. In their shows and performances the artists depicted the difficulties of the war and the refugee camps and the sweetness of peace. Songs and short comic shows were also staged, both to convey a conciliatory message and for entertainment.

*Gerissa Peace Conference, 1993*

The Gerissa Peace Conference of 1993 restored calm to the communities of Awdal region, after a prolonged period of low-key conflict between the two main clans of Awdal. A delegation led by the then Minister of Interior, supported by some elders, handled the

mediation efforts, which took a several months. Despite the remote location of the gathering, the Awdal musical band took part in the conference and contributed directly to its success. The band performed reconciliatory shows and songs denouncing war and encouraging the peacemakers.

*Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration:*

The talents of performing artists have also been applied to less formal episodes of the peace process. The playwrights Xasan Xaaji Cabdillaahi Ganey and Yuusuf Aadan have contributed to national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts with their popular drama *Abaal-guud waa la bayaaye, ammaankaa ka horreeya* (“We will have our reward, but peace should be realized first”). The play was originally commissioned by the National Demobilization Commission (NDC) with assistance from GTZ, and first staged in Hargeysa in late 1995 with a cast including some of Somaliland’s best-known actors, singers and musicians. It has since been shown in most of the regions and districts of Somaliland.

Other dramas and musical plays have addressed the same subject, sometimes to dramatic effect. It is not unknown for militiamen to approach the stage, hang their weapons on the performers’ shoulders and return to their seats unarmed, offering a symbolic<sup>12</sup> endorsement of the play’s message.

### **Television and video**

Somaliland TV (initially known as Hargeysa TV) was inaugurated in July 1997 and is the youngest member of Somaliland’s media community. Prior to 1997, Somaliland had never experienced television (under Siyaad Barre, Muqdisho TV had been limited to the capital city and it’s surroundings). Over 2,000 houses in Hargeysa subscribe to the television (with an average of 6 to 7 persons per household) at a monthly cost of US\$10 per month plus a US\$45 installation fee. In addition, estimated 400 pirate TV viewers do not pay the installation fees and subscriptions. The Burco branch of the television, established in 2001 is reported to have attracted almost 100 customers. As early 2002, the total television audience was therefore estimated at 15,000 viewers. At the end of 2001 the television has been extended to Boorame town where a new channel was inaugurated.

The television broadcasts for five hours daily (6:30 pm-11.30 pm) with extra time on Fridays and other festive days. The BBC and UNICEF have offered training programs to television personnel, and technicians have travelled for training to Mauritius and Zimbabwe.

With an employment capacity of 35 employees the television is able to cover its own operating costs. According to the station management, subscriptions cover eighty per cent of the television expenses while the advertisements and programs cover the remaining twenty per cent. The investors are still required to cover new expenditure related to equipment upgrades and extension programs.

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<sup>12</sup> But only symbolic: in keeping with Somali tradition, militiamen would typically reclaim their “gifts” to the performers – in this case weapons – after the show.

While the television's technical standards are sufficient for its task, programming is its salient defect. According to the TV management, most programmes are produced locally, while a small percentage are "borrowed" from satellite TV stations and translated into Somali. These latter are mainly foreign news programmes and episodes of popular weekly series. Although local programming accommodates the views of the different political actors in Somaliland, the television is generally perceived to be sympathetic to opposition than to the government.

In addition to the local television, Somalilanders have access to satellite television and imported videos. Satellite programming currently offers a blend of international news channels and domestic programmes from mainly Arab states. Videos can be rented privately or viewed in numerous small "cinemas" equipped with televisions and video-cassette players. The latter are commonly accused of showing films with inappropriate scenes of sex and violence. However, since neither the satellite television nor the video shops exert meaningful influence on domestic political issues, they are not dealt with further in this paper.

### **Telecommunications and the Internet**

Access to telephones in Somaliland has grown at an unprecedented rate since the civil war. While pre-war access was extremely limited and access inefficient, new telecommunication technology has permitted the proliferation of telephone companies employing both land-lines and cellular networks, as well as offering Internet services. In 2001, five telecommunications companies were active in Somaliland, with a total clientele of approximately 23,550. Secondary towns and remote villages that have never previously enjoyed access to telephones can now use the latest equipment at comparatively low rates: the average cost of local calls is Soltelco 0.10 US\$, STC 0.07 US\$ and Barakaat Globetel is free. While the average cost of international calls is US\$ 1.3 on business hours and 1 US\$ per minute on weekends, national holidays and after 9.00 PM on weekdays. The rapid, affordable expansion of the telecommunications sector has vastly enhanced the exchange of information both internally and externally.

The Internet is a comparatively new medium in Somaliland, and its accessibility remains limited by expense and by the relatively low number of computers in the country. The first commercial Internet services were introduced in Boorame by Aerolite Telecommunications, and in Hargeysa by Aerolite and Barakaat GlobeTel Company in the year 2000 and 2001. Somaliland Telecommunications Company (STC) introduced Internet services in following the installation of local servers in May 2001. Between late 2000 and July 2002, Internet connection rates dropped from US\$6/hour to US\$1.50/hour. The total number of Internet users in October 2001 was estimated at close to 500 (approx. 300 customers with Barakaat and 12 with Aerolite). Following the collapse of the Al-Barakaat consortium in November 2001, STC and Aerolite moved quickly to upgrade their systems and fill the gap in the market and numbers of subscribers continued to grow.

Internet service providers appear to recognize that their business involves social responsibility. Barakaat and Aerolite provide subsidized services to local training institutions such as the African Institute of Administration and Development (AIDAM), the Business Facility Center, and the Business Service Center. The companies offer software training and have considered supporting the start up of local "cybercafés" to improve public access.



Despite the relatively limited audience for Internet services in Somaliland, the communications potential of the Internet is already being felt. The dramatic proliferation of Somali-oriented website – most of them managed by members of the diaspora – allows virtually instantaneous transmission of news, views, rumor and polemic from across the social and political spectrum.

### **Synthesis of the informal and traditional media**

The various traditional and modern media channels are intimately inter-woven. Local events and perspectives may be picked up by the mass media and communicated to a broad audience. Conversely, news disseminated by the mass media is relayed – faithfully or otherwise – through a multitude of informal channels. Articles in local newspapers are routinely posted to websites and may be cited in the international media as authoritative sources; reports in foreign newspapers may be picked up from the World Wide Web, sent by email or fax to recipients in Somaliland, and relayed to listeners in the bus, *mefrish*, marketplace or teashop.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> One illustrative example involved the reported deployment of German forces to Somaliland in support of the American-led campaign against terrorism, in November 2001. A freelance reporter based in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), produced an article for a German newspaper in which he cited unidentified sources “close” to the Somaliland President who alleged that German and US forces would be based at the port of Berbera. The news, posted to various sites on the Internet, was picked up by the Hargeysa newspapers and spread like wildfire, creating significant political agitation and speculation. The velocity of the rumour reached such a level that the German Chancellor felt obliged to intervene personally to quash it.

## 3

**POLITICAL TRANSITION IN SOMALILAND**

Somaliland's prolonged political transition has featured a number of critical milestones: the overthrow of Barre's dictatorship in January 1991, the declaration of independence in May the same year, the national conferences at Boorame and Hargeysa in 1993 and 1997 respectively, and the ratification of a new constitution by referendum in 2001. This long and difficult process is expected to move forward in 2002-3, with the then holding of Somaliland's local, parliamentary and Presidential elections. The main feature of the transitional period is the replacement of the *beel* (clan) system with a multi-party electoral system - a definitive step away from traditional leadership arrangements and towards a more modern form of participatory democracy.

Responsibility for managing the transition lies mainly with the three branches of government: the Executive (the President and his cabinet), the legislative (a two chamber parliament) and the judiciary. Independent commissions were assigned specific responsibility for the conduct of the May 2001 constitutional referendum and the electoral process.

While the leadership of the respective government organs has been widely credited for its contribution to Somaliland's peace and stability, its democratic credentials have been the objects of criticism. For most of the transitional period, the Executive has dominated the machinery of the state, to the extent that both the legislature and the judiciary at times seems like little more than outgrowths of executive power. Latterly, however, the Parliament has become more assertive, discussing and resolving issues in an apparently independent manner. In one dramatic example, a motion to impeach the President on charges of high treason and violation of the Constitution was narrowly defeated in August 2001 by a vote of 37 in favour and 38 against.

In contrast with the Parliament, the judicial branch remains weak, and its contribution to the process of democratisation has been negligible. Whereas the Parliament and government Ministries have generally been refurbished and supplied with computers and other office equipment, the premises of the Judiciary department remain run-down and ill equipped. The post of Chief Justice, which wields the power to hand down constitutional rulings, has been left unfilled for long periods. Lower court justices often lack training or experience, and many are holdovers from the previous regime, whose record in judicial matters was abysmal. The judiciary as a whole is widely perceived to be thoroughly corrupt. A purge of the judiciary in June 2002 by Presidential order was publicly welcomed, but in the absence of a dynamic legal establishment, there seemed to be little hope that a new crop of justice officials would be better equipped to serve than their predecessors.

Influence on the transitional process from beyond the sphere of government is essentially limited to nascent political organizations and loose political pressure groups. The emerging opposition parties have proven to be vocal and persistent in their determination to influence the process - mainly in counterbalancing the perceived domination of the transition by the incumbent administration. However, the scope for participation of opposition groups in the

process has been limited, and in their formative period, they lack the type of organized, popular support base required to bring pressure to bear.

The clan affiliations represented by traditional leaders and clan elders are also important levers on public opinion. Well-organized religious circles also exert some influence on the political process.

Civic organizations have shown little enthusiasm for involvement in transitional politics. Somaliland's civil society has generally become associated with foreign assistance programmes and developmental, rather than political agenda. With some notable exceptions, civic leaders have appeared reluctant to provide leadership in the democratisation process.

### **The media and political transition**

The most vocal non-governmental actors on the political scene have been from the media. The Somaliland media enjoy an extraordinary degree of freedom in comparison with many other countries on the African continent. Newspapers, radio and television have each provided platforms for the expression of differing political views, for presentation and debate of critical issues, for engagement of public opinion, and for educative and informative purposes. In this context, participants in the research process unanimously described the media as an indispensable component of democratisation.

However, the role of the media in the political transition has not been without controversy. The contradictory forces that have historically shaped the contemporary media in Somaliland can largely explain this: dictatorship on the one hand and the liberation struggle on the other. Somaliland's long experience of dictatorship has engendered public resentment of government control and deep-seated mistrust of "official" information and propaganda. The liberation struggle has served to establish freedom of expression as a fundamental right, beyond the prerogative of government to permit or deny. Together, these experiences have left competing legacies of propaganda, dictatorial control, manipulation of information, and self-censorship.

The values espoused by the SNM during the civil war have contributed directly to this legacy. Since its inception on 6 April 1981 in London, the SNM sought the establishment of a democratic regime and by-and-large respected democratic principles in the management of its internal affairs. The SNM leadership's practice of collective decision-making and its dependence on popular participation in mobilizing the war effort paved the way for subsequent Somaliland administrations to govern by consent.<sup>14</sup>

If self-reliance, internal democracy and resolution of problems through dialogue and compromise are the characteristics that today differentiate Somaliland from Somalia, it is because these qualities were learned and practiced by the SNM in the heat of the struggle for liberation (Samatar,

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<sup>14</sup> The institutionalization of the Guurti as an organ of leadership – an innovation often cited as having underpinned stability in Somaliland – was introduced by the SNM during the war in order to augment the popular nature of the Movement and the struggle.

1997).

The SNM's campaign against the Barre regime enlisted not only political and military means: poetry, songs and literary works banned by the government were applied as an effective and influential weapon in the battle for public opinion and popular support. Radio Halgan (Radio "Struggle"), which later became Radio SNM, provided an alternative version of events to that supplied by state propaganda, while promoting the SNM's ultimate objective of democratic rule. Pro-SNM publications extended the information campaign both within liberated areas and beyond them, reaching Somalis in the diaspora as well as an international audience. The SNM enshrined the principle of the freedom of expression in both its Political Program and Constitution. The seeds of an independent media had been sown.

Since 1991, the value of the media enjoys growing recognition throughout Somaliland. Members of the public from all walks of life contributed to the reconstruction of Radio Hargeysa, furnishing labour, construction material, and money. Opinion columns in newspapers and call-in radio shows are among the most popular items, indicating a significant level of public engagement. Arrest and detention of journalists in recent years has met with widespread public condemnation, members of the Somaliland community in the diaspora have mobilized to put pressure on the authorities for the release of such prominent detainees such Xasan Siciid, the Chief Editor of *Jambhuriya* and the late Maxamuud Cabdi Shide the proprietor of the National Printing Press. Since 1997-8, arbitrary detention of journalists had become less common, but was still occasionally practised in early 2002.

A free independent media has become the hallmark of Somaliland's democratisation process, and an indispensable feature of the political landscape from which there appears to be no turning back. The question thus remains: how are the journalists of Somaliland exercising their hard-won freedoms and responsibilities?

## Radio

Given the power of radio as a broadcast medium in Somali society, workshop participants agreed that radio in Somaliland is still seriously underdeveloped. Through controls on licensing of independent radio stations, the government has maintained an effective monopoly over radio broadcasting: there are no independent radios currently functioning. The Ministry of Information indicated in June 2002 that it intends to withhold licenses for all new radio stations until appropriate legislation is in place – a process of indeterminate duration.

Despite the progress towards physical rehabilitation of the radio and improvement of technical standards at the government's own station, Radio Hargeysa, programming is limited and geographical coverage is poor. Workshop participants were particularly critical of the reception of radio Hargeysa, which is very poor except in Hargeysa and the immediate vicinity. In the opinion of one participant:

It is the media that should reach the public, while what is said in the *mefrish* is limited to those who attend. But you cannot easily tune in to Radio Hargeysa: you have to use a very long and highly elevated antenna. Since the radio was destroyed by the former regime our mass media has failed to meet the

expectations of the people.

The Ministry of Information plans to install a new 25 kilowatt transmitter expected to resolve this problem if put into effect. But some workshop participants remain skeptical that the government is seriously committed to the development of the official media: “While we were struggling in the bush we had a radio,” argued one participant. “The government is capable of establishing a functioning radio but is unfortunately reluctant to realize such an important task”.

Workshop participants were less critical of Radio Hargeysa’s programming, which many referring to it as their primary source of information. Many described Radio Hargeysa’s programmes as being relatively rich in content, and expressed the belief that it reaches a wide audience within the limitations of its geographical coverage. In the absence of scientific listener surveys, it is not possible to assess the radio audience with any real accuracy; but Radio Hargeysa staff claim to receive and respond to feedback from their listeners.

The most meaningful measure of the state of radio broadcasting in Somaliland is the continuing popularity of the BBC, which remains the most influential radio with the widest audience and coverage. According to workshop participants, the BBC’s popularity can be attributed to a number of factors:

- The long history of the Somali Service
- The BBC’s reputation for news, current affairs and feature programming in the Somali language is unrivalled by other radio stations
- Perceived accuracy, credibility and objectiveness in contrast with other Somali language radio stations
- Accessibility throughout Somaliland

Many participants noted that in recent years the credibility of the Somali Service has been in decline, and that its Somaliland audience is becoming disillusioned. But for lack of alternatives, it continues to attract by far the largest audience of listeners. The broadcasting gap is thus waiting to be filled, either by a credible government radio station, by responsible independent stations, or by a variety of public and private broadcasters.

### **The press**

The evolution of the print media in Somaliland since 1991 has not been easy. Published criticism was unknown under military rule, and in early years, journalists were routinely threatened or beaten up by those who were angered by their stories. In 1992 nine journalists of the print media were imprisoned for one month; in subsequent years *Jambhuriya’s* editor and other members of the staff were briefly detained on a number of occasions. Such practices were common in 1997 and 1998. Although such detentions were typically effected without due process, the government claimed – not entirely without foundation – that journalists routinely printed damaging rumours and falsehoods.

Since 2001, the relationship between the government and the independent press appears to have been on the mend. Nevertheless, the printed press in Somaliland continues to reflect a diversity of political opinion, several of them vocally anti-government. During the course of

this study, discussions concentrated primarily on the government-sponsored *Maandeeq*, which is widely perceived as defending government interests, and the privately owned sister-papers *Jambhuriya* and *The Republican*, which present opposition perspectives. The independents *Haatuf* and *Himilo* had not been in circulation long enough for them to be considered in depth.

Somewhat surprisingly, representatives of the newspapers stated that they do not agree with these labels. On the contrary, they consider themselves to be neutral and impartial, soliciting and publishing all opinions. Instead, they accuse the readership of perpetuating government and opposition stereotypes. Such assertions notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the papers differ significantly in their editorial policies. In 2001, for example, they diverged noticeably in their reporting on the new Constitution, the laws governing formation of the political parties, the existence and conduct of security committees, issues related to human rights, and the application of emergency laws.

Public perceptions of the press are probably more important than how the press perceive themselves. On this score, workshop participants generally agreed that independent newspapers enjoy greater credibility on the street than the government-sponsored press: a belief borne out by a comparison of circulation figures. Criticism of the government in the independent press is widely perceived as legitimate, while *Maandeeq's* support for government policies is understood to be peddling propaganda. An editor of *Maandeeq* acknowledged and deplored these public perceptions:

A paper reflecting the views of a political party is seen [by the public] as objective and independent, while a paper owned by the government is seen as non-objective and not independent. The fact remains that every paper simply represents the interests of a certain group of people, no matter whether they constitute a political party or run by the government.

The independent press did not escape criticism. Some workshop participants found its criticism of government policies to be excessive. One participant particularly condemned the satirical weekly *Jambhuriya* column *Radio Ma-galloocshe* and the caustic, two-faced cartoon character *Dhanxiir* who comments daily on current events. *Jambhuriya*, however, is unlikely to abandon these items: according to its own readership surveys, 66% of its readers enjoy *Dhanxiir* and its circulation figures attest to the popularity of its editorial outlook.

Such arguments appear to indicate that bias in newspaper reporting is partly a function of market forces. Some workshop participants accused the print media as functioning like any other commodity, to be bought and sold in the market without a corresponding sense of social responsibility. Newspapers may therefore be tempted to print sensational stories with the assurance that they will find buyers, without necessarily checking the facts. Likewise, they may cater to political interests in some regions but not in others. “*Jambhuriya* is not liable to be sold in east Burco because heavyweight politicians from east Burco are not on the front page,” affirmed one of the workshop participants. But other participants from Burco emphasized the importance of issues rather than personalities in determining whether the press will find a readership: “The papers neither cover our distress with government negligence, nor our priorities in the reconstruction and development of our region.”

Another source of bias in press reporting is the influence of individual journalists. Workshop participants noted that many are young, inexperienced and lacking proper training. It is tempting for them to add their opinions, feelings and enthusiasms to their stories, without fully understanding the consequences – the most pervasive of which is loss of public trust. Years of propaganda and partisan reporting have served to enhance public appreciation for impartial journalism that speaks for the general interest.

### **Control of the media**

The most important source of bias in media perspectives is ownership, which tends to express itself through the political orientation of the various media actors. Radio Hargeysa is owned and run by the Ministry of Information. The government owns *Maandeeq*, its premises are situated within the compound of the government's printing press, it is printed by the state printing press, and the government pays the salaries of the staff. *Maandeeq's* management nevertheless claims that the newspaper exercises editorial independence. Some participants accused the government-owned media of lavishing exaggerated praise on the administration and reporting uncritically on its performance – a practice they attributed to legacies from the dictatorial regime. Despite *Maandeeq's* protests, participants in the study generally credited Radio Hargeysa with a greater independence in its content than *Maandeeq*.

With the exception of Somaliland Television, the owners and managers of the private media tend to be associated with opposition political tendencies. *Jambuurriya*, *The Republican*, *Haatuf* and *Somaliland Times* are critical of the government and dedicate considerable space to the activities and platforms of opposition leaders.

As a result, Somaliland's media landscape is described by most participants in the research process as highly polarized, with no one holding the middle ground. This is perceived by some as a proof of independent thought and expression: cherished freedoms to be nurtured and valued in the aftermath of Siyaad Barre's stifling dictatorship. In the words of one female participant:

[These days,] Somalis by nature prefer to be on the side of the opposition than being pro government. This does not mean that we abhor the establishment; it is simply a legacy of the former regime that still remains ingrained in the minds of the people.

Another participant defended press criticism of the government as an essential corrective mechanism in the process of democratisation:

If we all become conservative and pro-government then we will be lost, and incapable of putting the administration on the right track. Destructive criticism should be unwelcome; criticism should rather be constructive, and *Jambuurriya* should aspire to that.

Other participants in the research process believe that polarization of the Somaliland media is evidence of its parochialism and failure to uphold the public interest. Ruun Xaddi, a pre-eminent female artist, accused the contemporary media as showing a "lack of responsibility," a position supported by Faadumo Maxamed Cumar, an active member of a women's social

organisation in Burco : “Sometimes the media becomes a source of conflict and chaos in disseminating contradictory news items and coverage... As consumers of the media we became victims of manipulation by the different newspapers.”

Many participants endorsed these views, observing that major national issues often being subordinated in the news to petty intrigues and feuds between the establishments who own the media. It is not uncommon for a political declaration drafted by an unknown or unimportant group of individuals to find itself on the front page of one newspaper or the other because of successful lobbying with like-minded editorial staff, while more pressing political and economic issues are assigned secondary importance.

Media representatives defended themselves from such allegations in various ways, often employing a degree of relativism. Truth, some argued, is in the eye of the beholder: “The more the government- owned media reflect government policies, the more the government sees them as being reliable and accurate” offered one participant. Likewise, criticism means different things to different people, with some reacting to the slightest sign of media disapproval as though it was a form of defamation or character assassination. Rooda Axmed Yuusuf, a nurse by profession and an active working group member argued that the behaviour of the media is simply a reflection of the broader society in which they live: “The way they handle their responsibilities reflects the way the community at large conducts itself.” Some media representatives lamented the futility of change, arguing that there is little point in striving for objectivity as long as most of the parties concerned have no desire to see accurate news.

A minority of participants felt that the media is performing well. “Our media is relatively truthful if that is not the case we would neither buy the papers nor tune to the radio. Yes, there is a degree of reliability, and a little bit of exaggeration which is just the flavour intended for marketing.” Overall, however, workshop participants urged the media to be more balanced, impartial and objective, and not to confine themselves to the partisan outlooks of the owners.

### **Content bias**

While the media demonstrate different political biases, they were accused by workshop participants of sharing some common biases as well: namely their interest in politics, their focus on the trivial rather than the consequential, and their emphasis on the urban at the expense of the rural.

Media content reflects only a limited part of the population. Radio Hargeysa and Somaliland Television are confined to Hargeysa, though the radio can be sometimes heard in more distant places. The newspapers are the only sections of the media that reach different regions in Somaliland and beyond, but – like the radio and television - their stories tend to emphasize life in the major towns of Somaliland, where less than half of the population lives.

Some workshop participants, however, raised the example of the 1998 Saudi livestock ban on exports from Somaliland to demonstrate that the media’s neglect of the rural population was nothing more than a reflection of a broader public bias. When the ban was imposed there was great concern within Somaliland and a public outcry:



Petitions were dispatched to all the concerned authorities from the UN agencies to the governing authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Delegations were sent to many capitals of the world. Why all that energy and effort? Because of the possible financial losses [to major livestock traders and the government] the ban might cause. Nobody cared about the detrimental effect the ban would have on the lives of the rural population whose precarious livelihoods are sustained by the animals they bring to the market.

Likewise, participants criticized the media's coverage of frivolous events or international news at the expense of local developments: "The results of a Brazilian soccer match are received here before we hear news about events taking place in the neighbouring village," complained one traditional elder.

To a certain extent, workshop participants were prepared to accept that the media's urban bias reflected prevailing values in the urban population. "I think the problem has its root causes in our political culture which denies the value of the rural people," offered one participant. Others ascribed the bias to market forces, which militate against coverage not only of rural concerns, but also those of other social groups. Participants complained that women, minorities, occupational groups, the handicapped, and youth are all marginalized by the media.

The media representatives challenged these allegations. Most of the media have a wide coverage on topics such as rural development, production, health, water sanitation and issues linked with the environment. Naturally they differ in their coverage. The papers tackle such issues more substantially while the radio and television are more superficial.

Others defended their content choices with reference to market forces: "We know the tastes and concerns of our readership. People are more interested in political issues than other issues. Are you telling us to maintain a balance that lowers our market share?" challenged one newspaper editor.

Most participants seemed prepared to accept that coverage of diverse social groups and issues is more an obligation of the government-owned media than of private enterprises, who are constrained by their financial calculus to give limited space to such issues.

## 4

**THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

The evolution of the media in Somaliland since 1991 has been determined not only by the inherent characteristics of the various media actors, but also by a variety of external factors. Popular attachment to fundamental rights and freedoms is not matched by constitutional and legal guarantees, nor by government practices. Public attitudes towards press freedom are sometimes ambiguous, and even within media establishments there is a degree of confusion about how to exercise newly acquired liberties and responsibilities.

The new Somaliland constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but qualifies that freedom with the application of a press law – a potentially arbitrary instrument of media regulation. The press law itself does not yet exist, but media representatives fear that it will serve to limit press freedoms rather than to protect them. No reference was made in the research process to alternative forms of legislation, such as libel laws, which might offer protection to members of the public from the press, without unnecessarily limiting press freedoms. Alternative forms of regulation are underdeveloped and – to the extent that they exist - ineffective: there is no functioning media association in Somaliland, no common codes of conduct or ethics, and only loosely applied internal rules and regulations within each establishment.

As a result the environment in which the media must operate in Somaliland is difficult and sometimes treacherous. Journalists can be arbitrarily detained under anachronistic detention laws, or by constitutionally questionable security committees who have the power to imprison people without taking them to court. The judicial system functions so poorly and erratically that it protects neither journalists accused by the authorities of alleged transgressions, nor members of the public (or government) from defamatory stories carried by the media.

The media appears to vascillate between excessive exercise of its freedom and self-censorship on certain sensitive issues: two faces of the same dictatorial legacy. At the same time, the media seem preoccupied with the politics of the urban elites, recording the trivia of often petty, personalized feuds in tedious detail, rather than addressing broader issues of national importance. Concerns of the rural majority, or of politically marginal groups rarely figure.

During the course of the research process, the government-owned and private media gradually harmonized their views on a number of issues. They called for the establishment of a common, professional association for journalists, for the development of a standard code of conduct, and for the government media in particular to give more space to economic and social issues. Above all they acknowledged the disturbing polarization of the media establishment between government and independent enterprises, and agreed that the process

of political transition and democratisation call for them to construct a less confrontational, more collegial relationship.

### **The Constitution**

Freedom of expression and the independence of the media have been explicit principles of the SNM's armed struggle and of the subsequent re-establishment of the state of Somaliland. Freedom of expression was enshrined in the General Principles of the SNM's political program as well as its Constitution. The National Charter established at the 1993 Boorame conference guaranteed the freedom of expression and media independence. This was replaced during the 1997 Hargeysa conference, which produced a provisional national Constitution which made the same guarantees. The Constitution officially came into force through a referendum which took place on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2001.

Specifically, Article 32 of the Constitution states:

Freedom of Public Demonstration, Expression of Opinion, Press and Other Media:

1. Every citizen shall have the freedom, in accordance with the law, to express his/her opinions orally, visually, artistically or in writing or in any other way.
2. Every citizen shall have the freedom, in accordance with the law, to organize or participate in any peaceful assembly or demonstration.
3. The press and other media are part of the fundamental freedoms of expression and are independent. All acts to subjugate them are prohibited and a law shall determine their regulation.

However, as one member of the House of Representatives, Mr. Cali Sheekhdoon, pointed out during the course of the research process, the incomplete nature of Article 32 (like nearly sixty other constitutional Articles which require that additional by-laws be drafted for further elucidation) is a cause for concern.

Some participants argued that traditional norms and values are far stronger than the laws, rendering constitutional guarantees unnecessary: "You can not walk naked in the street. Not only because it is forbidden by the law but because it is something unacceptable to the society," asserted Rashiid Sheekh Cabdillaahi, a literary critic and one of the workshop participants

But not all participants agreed with the basic principle of press freedom. "If the constitution guarantees us the freedom of thought and expression, some people can abuse such a right," argued one participant. "We need the free press and yet it violates our norms," stated another: "The constitution guarantees freedom to all citizens but this should not be interpreted that one is free to abuse others on the pretext that he is free to do whatever he wants."

## Legislation

Despite the coming into force of the new Constitution, existing legislation governing the conduct of the media is confusing and sometimes contradictory. Workshop participants noted that, until they are superseded by new legislation, elements of the Indian Penal Code and other laws prior to the military coup of 1969 remain in force unless they are found to be in contradiction with the present constitution.

In 1997, the enactment of Emergency Laws empowered district and regional Security Committees, nominated by the central government, to hear cases of diverse nature. The consequences for media freedom were potentially dramatic, however, after a public outcry the House of Representatives suspended implementation of this legislation. Since then, Security Committees appear to have become less active and are rarely in the public eye. Nevertheless, the Emergency Laws have yet to be repealed, suggesting that such Committees may not be gone for good.

Legislation governing the press remains incomplete at the time of writing. A representative of the ministry of information acknowledged to workshop participants that by-laws have yet to be drafted. The most controversial issue, however, concerned the proposed introduction of a press law.

The Director of Planning of the Ministry of Information, Maxamed Cali Qodax, provided the official justification for the proposed Press Law.

It is the Constitution that says there should be a law for the organization of the press. Such laws are intended for those who had no academic background for practicing journalism. The press is a double-edged blade. It could be either destructive or constructive.

Support for the government position also came from a member of the House of Representatives, Ali Sheikh-doon, who argued that the Press Law would provide an important legal framework and legal protection for the media:

Is it possible that the press would be better off with having a press law then without having one? If we debate it in the parliament, and then you add your own [journalists] contributions, such a law could be used as a guidance. If such laws are broken then they could be used as terms of reference by the parliament. If we say that there should not be any laws then there will be excuses for special laws and security committees to be formed.

To emphasize his point, he asserted that drafting of the press law had received considerable input from the media and public at large that led to delays in its completion.

Support for the Press Law also came from a former Minister of Interior, Muuse Biixi Cabdi.

By democracy we mean writing about all types of issues. But why should we be eager to adopt the type of media that advocates homosexuality as it does today in the Western countries? We cannot tell the press they have unlimited freedom and at the same time draft laws to conceal matters of public interest

from the public. The press law should strike a balance between the two.

Most participants, however, were either less positive about the proposed law or opposed it directly. One businessman categorically rejected the notion of a press law: “Such a law should not be approved. The deputies should not seek advice or support for it from the community. It has to be rejected”.

The Editor-in-Chief of *Jambhuriya* argued that the existence of a press law is in itself an affront to press freedom:

Press laws only exist in a few countries around the world. Earlier such laws were enforced in many countries, but nowadays as dictatorial regimes are vanishing one after the other, such laws are also disappearing. It is the civil law and the penal code that are applied to all citizens, irrespective of their vocations and professions.

This view was supported by most of the participants, who agreed that the penal and civil codes were sufficient for all purposes, and that there was therefore no need for a specific press law. Samsam Cabdi Aadan of the Committee for Concerned Somalis argued that the media must be free to comment on the political process during the critical period of nation-building, likening the body politic to a growing child: “A child cannot be left to do whatever comes into his mind. We are obliged to look after him and train him. The nation-building process is the same, and the free press plays the role of the corrective parent. No press laws should be drafted for the media. It is up to them to have their own codes of conduct in order to function and survive.”

Another participant, Sacdiya Muuse Axmed of the Pastoralist Environmental Network for the Horn of Africa (PENHA) cited the example of the United Kingdom as a country without a press law. Instead, she asserted that there are press associations as well as other professional organizations like the National Health Councils, which can withdraw licenses from members who violate their professional codes.

### **Self-regulation**

Workshop participants generally favoured types of self-regulation instead of a Press Law. Discussion covered a variety of relevant concepts, about which there appeared to be some confusion. These included:

- Codes of conduct
- Codes of ethics
- Editorial policy
- Internal regulations

In general, participants subscribed to the view that Codes of Conduct were preferable and more effective regulators of media conduct than press laws, for a variety of reasons. A staff member from Radio Hargeysa argued: “Codes of conduct guarantee the protection of the journalist, as well as the protection of the public and the authorities.” A representative of the police Criminal Investigation Department concurred, advocating internal codes of

conduct rather than prosecution under press laws for regulating most forms of media conduct.

But media professionals and observers were divided over the issue of whether or not such codes actually exist. Samsam Cabdi Aadan noted the absence of codes of conduct on the part of the state-owned media enterprises. “It is only Radio Hargeysa and *Maandeeq* that are run without codes of conduct. I would rather urge the government to mind the codes of ethics of its own media rather than devising press laws that are detrimental to the development of the free press in Somaliland.”

Muuse Faarax Jaambiir of the government-owned *Maandeeq* affirmed that his newspaper possesses codes of conduct, but that they are unevenly applied. A member of the *Maandeeq*, staff contradicted this assertion, denying that a clear-cut code is in place: “The state-owned media works on patterns similar to those of the former regime of Siyaad Barre. The problem is not the media staff but the policy makers. There are no written codes of conduct instead we work on the whims of the person in charge.”

Maxamed Cali Qodax, Director of Planning of the Ministry of Information, affirmed that the Ministry applies un-written general guidelines but denied the charge that they are restrictive or idiosyncratic: “Within the Ministry of Information no one is told to follow rules that violates his or her freedom of expression. There is no censorship of the works of the reporters”.

Saleebaan Ismaaciil Bullaale a human rights activist accused the independent media of lacking such internal regulations: “With respect to the private media there are no codes of conduct. Things are done impromptu, and there are no guidelines or codes of ethics.”

Yuusuf Cabdi Gaboobe denied the charge on behalf of The Republican: “We have codes of conduct and guidelines, which are consistent with international standards.” Specifically, he listed the following elements of his newspaper’s guidelines for journalists:

- Observance of professional ethics
- Freedom from bribery and corruption
- Objectivity, neutrality and freedom from bias
- Accuracy in reporting
- Apologetic and corrective when a mistake is made
- Concerned parties should be given equal space to address a given issue

Muuse Xaaji Maxamuud, manager of Hargeysa TV, acknowledged that his company did not yet possess a code of conduct in place, but was developing one that included the following elements:

- Programs should not defame any personality, party or institution
- Programs should be objective, truthful and neutral
- Every program should be subject to the control of a qualified producer

In view of the vague and generally unconvincing application of codes of conduct described by media representatives, participants in the research process agreed that more vigorous efforts are needed to be undertaken towards self-regulation. Here again, however, participants were unable to agree on how to approach the problem. While some workshop participants urged the media personnel to draft their own guidelines, some representatives of the private media felt it was for the proprietors to determine codes of conduct within their own establishments. Others advocated the establishment of editorial boards with specific responsibility for giving direction and oversight to media content.

Most of the people seemed to be ignorant of how newspaper's columns are organized. For example, some participants believe that articles that carry a journalist's by-line reflect the opinion of the author, while the unsigned articles reflect the views of the paper. "Hence one is the responsibility of the author while the other is the responsibility of the paper," noted a staff member of *Jamhuuriya*. While it may be true that a signed article reflects the views of its author, it is also generally accepted practice that the editorial board bears the responsibility for publishing it.

Another issue given considerable attentions was the existence of editorial boards for newspapers. Some participants questioned whether or not Somaliland's newspapers actually have editorial boards, since they do not carry the names of the people who compose them. They contended that it is a journalistic norm for publications to carry the names of their editors, managers and – in most cases, but by no means all – their contributors. In Somaliland, however, the editor's name may usually only be found in the registration documents filed with the Prosecutor General's office.

Workshop participants generally agreed that effective editorial boards would help strengthen the internal checks and balances essential for quality news reporting: sources have to be verified, facts checked and double-checked, and alternative versions of a story have to be explored. And ultimately, someone would be responsible – and accountable - for what the media is saying.

### **Press Association**

Another item on which participants in the study were in almost unanimous agreement was the role of the Press Association as an indispensable instrument of the journalistic profession. Functions attributed to a Press Association by workshop participants included:

- protection of media rights and freedoms
- protection of the public and the authorities from irresponsible reporting
- maintenance of professional and ethical standards
- ensuring respect for religion, tradition and peace
- mediating in conflicts between the media and the government or public

The movement for establishment of a Somaliland Press Association dates from 16 June 1992, when the editors and staff of *Codka Hargeysa*, *Xorriyo* and *Jamhuuriya* newspapers were arrested and subsequently imprisoned for twenty days. As a result, a convention of journalists from across Somaliland was held in Hargeysa, and the Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA) was established. Despite its strong start, the Association soon lapsed

into inactivity and is no longer effective. Only the date of its conception, 16 June, was celebrated as Somaliland Journalist's Day.

There is no question about the legal basis for the establishment of a Press Association: Article 23 of the Constitution guarantees the freedom to form occupational or employees' associations. However, the practical and political obstacles to revival of a Press Association are considerable. The role, organization, membership and leadership of an association are all sources of division, with the state-owned media typically taking one side and the private media taking the other. One young poet and an environmentalist, Saleebaan Khubaro, observed not only that the media are "divided and opposing one other," but also that "they are incapacitated by ignorance and financial constraints."

Divisions within the media over the issue are not without foundation. In government circles the formation of a Press Association may be perceived as a gesture of protest, associated with the political opposition. Representatives of the state-owned media have therefore tended to advocate an Association founded under the auspices of the Ministry of Information or otherwise controlled by the government. This arrangement is anathema to the independent media who see a Press Association as a means of preserving their freedom, rather than surrendering it. Some representatives of the private media would seek to exclude government journalists from membership in an independent Press Association in order to deny the government any influence over the Association's leadership or policies.

Circumstances would therefore appear to call for two more associations. But workshop participants generally favoured a single, independent Press Association with membership from all sections of the media –private and government-owned. Journalists were urged to focus on their common professional needs and interests, such as the development of a code of conduct and a training facility, rather than their differences. Participants also urged the government to facilitate the establishment of an Association as a critical step in the process in the process of democratisation.

### **Constraints on media performance**

Other factors also affect media performance in the transitional period. Above all, the financial constraints facing the sector appear to be the most acute handicap, pervading all other aspects of media performance. Since a global increase in the availability of funding for the media seems unlikely in the near term, participants in the research process chose to concentrate instead on those aspects in which improvement is not solely contingent on money. Among them:

- Human resources
- Programming
- Equipment and infrastructure

#### *Human resources*

Human resource deficiencies are among the most serious problems facing the development of the Somaliland media. There are no training institutions for new personnel or for the upgrading of skills for trained professionals. In a sector so dependent on technological



innovation, failure to keep abreast of recent developments is also a serious handicap, making the lack of trained technicians a particularly critical challenge to be overcome. The lack of trained personnel – particularly technicians – affects all media sectors: radio, television and print.

Most of the media personnel lack professional training and many even lack a basic education. There is little correlation between an employee's professional qualifications and the post he or she fills. In the words of one participant:

In the old days, candidates for radio Hargeysa were examined and each was sent to the department for which he was suited. There used to be a yearly evaluation done by the listeners and readership. Today things have changed. Any one can do the job he chooses to do and there is no distinction on the basis of profession or talent.

In the government media, this problem derives in part from the immediate aftermath of the civil war, when people occupied posts in vacant public institutions, regardless of merit or competence, in the hopes of winning gainful employment once government was restored. A decade later, it remains difficult to reorganize these institutions on the basis of merit, or to reassign employees to more appropriate posts. The Civil Service Commission has successfully applied qualifying examinations and professional grades to the Ministry of Information.

Although the private media have not inherited such problems and have enjoyed greater flexibility in their engagement of personnel, they have nevertheless failed to apply consistent standards with respect to merit and qualification. Many staff members are undertrained or underqualified and there are few opportunities for professional development. Training opportunities and seminars have occasionally been organized in partnership with external actors (i.e. the BBC) and local actors like the Institute for Practical Research and Training (IPRT) to upgrade media skills, but have tended emphasize producers, editors and broadcasters rather than technicians. The BBC, UNICEF and UNESCO are the main agencies engaged in supporting the media with training programmes.

#### *Programming and content*

Poor quality and variety of media content was another issue of concern to participants in the research process. In particular, the various media were accused of failing to verify the accuracy of their stories. While some mistakes cited have been innocent, others have been patently irresponsible and in some cases defamatory.

The overriding consideration in programming is described by media personnel as financial: although newspapers are able to afford reporters and stringers in the different regions of Somaliland, the radio lacks either the resources or the incentive to produce quality programs. Unlike the other media sectors the television, which is in a better financial condition, does not invest much in its program productions. Most of the television programs are of a low quality limited to mere interviews.

The programs of Radio Hargeysa are presently sub-divided as follows:

- Informational: 37%,
  - Educational: 40 %,
  - Entertainment: 23%
- (Source: Ministry of Information, 2002)

Despite the constraints, the radio has managed to maintain an audience. Entertainment programs are arguably of the highest quality because of Radio Hargeysa's impressive repertoire of songs, poetry and soap opera. The standard of educational programmes is more uneven, but there are some positive examples: *Subax wanaagsan* (Good Morning) combines educational and informational issues in an interesting and lively way. *Nolosha iyo Diinta* (Life and Religion) and the various cultural and literary programmes are also well conceived and popular, despite their erratic production quality. Certain health programs are subsidized by CARE International, which has made an appreciable difference to the quality of the programs.

Newspapers are dominated by political content – a choice determined by their readership and the market. For example, *Jambhuriya*, the leading daily newspaper, carries political news on both the first and second pages. Page four is sports news, and page seven includes weekly columns and the reader's corner. Pages three, six and eight contain advertisements. The reader's opinion is typically the most provocative page, frequently triggering quarrels with the government. *Jambhuriya* also covers, to a much lesser degree, entertainment, education and general information (environment, family issues, health, literature, women, youth etc.).

Many participants in the research process denounced this political emphasis and called for newspapers to devote greater coverage to developmental issues and other topics of general interest. However, participants were unable to suggest why the newspapers might absorb the greater costs implied by augmenting the number of reporters and writers required to cover these topics, nor why they should take the risk of losing a percentage of their readership who favour political coverage.

Surprisingly, research participants rated the quality and diversity of television coverage lower than either the print media or the radio, despite the television's comparatively greater income. Though television programming offers quite a wide variety, the production quality remains low and locally-produced programmes are mainly limited to interviews. One of the favourite locally produced television programmes is a nightly religious show presented by the respected Somaliland religious leader Sheekh Dirir. Entertainment and cultural shows are of low quality: mainly old Somali video cassettes and video recordings from the RTD of Djibouti. Despite the fact that there is a good repertoire here in Somaliland the TV management is unwilling to allocate the necessary expenditure for the production of new entertainment programmes.

One of the common inadequacies of the modern media in Somaliland is children's programming. Children have few alternatives but public video parlours, which often show films with violence and sexual content. Many students skip classes to view such videos and there are repeated appeals from parents for public viewing places to be closed. However, in the absence of alternative sources of children's entertainment, the video phenomenon is likely to remain pervasive.

Journalists, particularly in the print media, describe the management as another hindrance. Both the private and the government-owned media lack consistently applied codes of conduct. Private papers are run by a sole editor rather than an editorial board, and decision on content are often idiosyncratic; the government-owned paper is often guided by political the administration's political considerations rather than by more objective considerations, especially on controversial and critical issues.

Resource limitations also undermine the integrity of media content and programming. Journalists are easily swayed by bonuses paid by different 'clients' who want to see their views published. In this way, stories can be "purchased" and prepared in line with "customer" wishes. Although some research participants advocated the introduction of codes of conduct to correct such anomalies in publishing and broadcasting, others believed that only better remuneration for media personnel could eliminate the practice completely.

Another handicap to better programming is the absence of audience feedback. The BBC and some other external actors have conducted audience surveys in recent years, but surveys by local media enterprises of their own readership, listenership and viewers are almost non-existent.

#### *Equipment and infra-structure*

The state of equipment and infrastructure is a problem in all sectors of the media. Most lack adequate office space to accommodate their personnel and few enterprises possess modern equipment in sufficient quantities, such as computers, printers, scanners and photocopy machines.

Radio Hargeysa's transmitters are in a very poor state of repair, and the station has use of only one, poorly furnished studio (compared with four, well equipped and soundproof studios before the war). Reporters lack the basic equipment - tape recorders, cassettes and batteries - they need to produce their daily programs and there are no workshops for the repair and maintenance when equipment breaks down.

Somaliland Television also suffers from substandard equipment, despite its being privately owned. The enterprise lacks proper studios: those it uses are neither insulated nor equipped with essential items such as boom microphones or tie-clip microphones (the latter were finally purchased after more than a year of operation). Without such equipment, sound is poor quality and dialogue is often unintelligible. For the first year of operation, the studio lacked an editing suite.

Printing presses are in hardly better shape. Most newspapers employ second-hand offset machines, which function poorly if they function at all. Local technicians competent to maintain the machines are scarce, and some newspapers have therefore been obliged to employ more costly expatriate technicians. Even the government-owned National Printing Press occasionally hires expatriates to run and maintain their printing facilities.

Participants in the research process suggested that efforts be made to procure for the media quality equipment of international standard and the establishment of proper maintenance workshops with the adequate facilities. They did not indicate, however, where the resources

for this effort should come from. Since it seems unlikely that some external source of financing will appear, it might be appropriate for more the respective media enterprises to place greater emphasis on their own business plans, earning potential and institutional development.

## 5

**RECOMMENDATIONS****RECOMMENDATIONS**

Throughout the research process, participants were invited to present collective recommendations for the conduct of the media sector in the context of Somaliland's political reconstruction and development. Responses ranged from the practical and the technical to the abstract and the normative. A summary of recommendations is presented below:

**The media and society**

- The various media actors should balance their need for financial viability with their informative and educational responsibilities;
- The media should strive to be objective in their reporting and to represent the diversity of viewpoints and experiences from within the society;
- The media should respect cultural and religious norms and avoid anything that is offensive to the Islamic faith;
- The media must be sensitive in its treatment of issues that could instigate division and unrest among the communities of Somaliland;
- The media should promote public awareness of the laws of the land so as to nurture the rule of law in the country;
- The media should seek to reach a wider audience within the country and to reflect the diverse concerns of that wider audience. Radio broadcasting should be enhanced to reach the rural population; newspapers should examine ways to increase their circulation and to augment reporting from the various regions of Somaliland.

**The media and government**

- The various media actors should be aware of their importance during the democratisation process, and strive to play a constructive role;
- There should be a permanent consultative mechanism between the government and the media;
- The government should respect the independence and freedom of the media guaranteed by the constitution;

- The government should give equal treatment to the different sections of the media in its budgetary allocations;
- The government should offer material, financial and training support to the media, both public and private.

### **Press Association**

- Journalists should establish an independent association of the Somaliland media;
- The principal aim of such an Association should be to protect the interests of journalists and to work for their advancement;

### **Codes of Conduct**

- Each media enterprise should develop an internal Code of Conduct;
- The codes of conduct should be formulated in accordance with the religion and culture of the country and not contradict the laws of the country.

### **Issues of reconstruction and development**

- That the media should give special emphasis to the promotion of peace and development in the country;
- Media actors should explore ways of providing greater coverage of issues pertaining to health, education, economy, youth, women and rural affairs;
- The media should consider adopting a more educational role;
- The media should contribute to transparency, accountability and efficiency of government by monitoring the government's collection, management and expenditure of public funds;
- The media should keep abreast of foreign aid and monitor how it is used.

### **Media quality and performance**

- There should be policy guidelines for the media both by the government and respective media enterprises;
- Media establishments should introduce personnel policies that emphasize: recruitment and promotion on the basis of merit; adequate remuneration for work; a system of performance incentives; training and professional development;
- Media establishments should give consideration to upgrading of their equipment, and to the establishment of repair/workshop facilities.

### **Poetry and the performing arts**

- Parliament should draft and pass copyright and intellectual property legislation to protect the livelihoods of poets and other artists;
- The Ministry of Education should include Somaliland literature and poetry in the school curriculum;
- Poets and other literary figures should consider forming an association for the advancement of their profession;
- Poets and other artists should seek the support of government and wealthy private patrons.
- The Ministries of Information, Culture and Tourism should take responsibility for the promotion of Somaliland's literature, art and culture;
- The media should devote greater coverage to literature, art and culture;
- A committee should be appointed to monitor the suitability of foreign films for public viewing;

### **Conclusion:**

The future of the media in Somaliland remains uncertain. Despite its early vitality and the many challenges it has already overcome, the choices that lie ahead include those that will determine the pace and direction of Somaliland's democratic development. Interpretation of Constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression have yet to be practically tested; the nature of the Press Law stipulated in the Constitution could either protect or restrict media freedoms. In the absence of a constitutional court or other competent judicial body, the position of the judiciary on such matters remains an unknown quantity.

Somaliland's media establishments face these challenges seriously divided. Their approach to their profession remains deeply polarized between government-owned and private media establishments: so much that they differ in their understanding of the role of the media, as well as such fundamental journalistic principles such as objectivity, accuracy and the value of criticism.

While respecting the legitimate differences within the media establishment, the formation of one or more professional associations appears indispensable. At least in principle, Somaliland's journalists have understood their common mission, needs, and responsibilities, but it remains to be seen whether they possess the maturity and determination required to undertake a common endeavour, to set common standards and to jointly represent their common interests.

At the same time, participants in the research process from both the media and the wider public, agreed that journalists have a common responsibility to shift the focus of their efforts away from the parochial political discourse that has often dominated their reporting, towards

weightier national issues. Furthermore, given the delicacy of Somaliland's political transition to democracy, many participants urged the media to give greater emphasis to peace and reconstruction, than to divisive political, regional, and personal issues, in the spirit of collectivity and cooperation implied by the maxim: *Gacmo wadajir ayay wax ku gooyaan* ("Hands can cut something when they work together" i.e. together we can accomplish something).

However, it remains to be seen whether or not the media are willing to adopt such measures, or whether they are so influential that doing so would impact in a meaningful way upon Somaliland's political process.



## ANNEXES

### A. SOMALI RADIO STATIONS

Table: I - Somali Radio stations		
No.	Radio Station	Year Established
1.	Hargeysa, Radio Somali	1942
2.	Radio Muqdisho	1952
3.	Radio Djibouti	1954
4.	Radio Cairo	1956
5.	BBC	1957
6.	Radio Addis Ababa	1959
7.	RAI, Rome	1962
8.	Radio Moscow	1964
9.	Radio Kenya	1962
10.	Radio Harar	?
11.	Radio Kulmis	1980 – 1982
12.	Radio Halgan	1982 – 1988
13.	Radio SNM	1989 – 1991
14.	Radio Gaalkacayo	1993
15.	Radio Codka Nabadda	1994
16.	Radio Beledweyne	1994
17.	Radio Baydhaba	1994
18.	Radio Horn Afrique (Muqdisho)	1999
19.	Radio Benaadir (Muqdisho)	2000

\* Radio Jedda<sup>2</sup>





**C. LIST OF MEDIA WORKSHOPS PARTICIPANTS:****1st Media Workshop: Camuud University, 20-22 June 2000.***Awdal regional and Boorame district administrations:*

Xasan Nuur Axmed  
Raxma Cabdi Diiriye  
Maxamed Xasan Cumar  
Cabdillaahi Cabdisalaam Sheekh Cali

*Community Elders:*

Maxamed Rabbiile Good  
Maxamed Cismaan Xaddi  
Saleebaan Cali Kaahiye

*Rural community:*

Maxamuud Allaale  
Maxamuud Shirdoon

*Local NGOs:*

Cabdiraxmaan Maxamed Muuse  
Madiina Axmed Jagni  
Faadumo Yuusuf Xuseen

*University and intellectuals:*

Dr. Cabdi Weyrax  
Daahir Maxamuud Xaddi  
Axmed Madar Sii-arag  
Axmed Nuur Caalin

*Students:*

Daahir Ibraahin Cali  
Axmed Maxamed Cabdillaahi  
Cabdi-naasir Xuseen Xirsi

*Business people:*

Cabdi Cabdillaahi Siciid

Qumman Cabdillaahi Allaale  
Xasan Cumar Xaawa  
Cabdillaahi Cali Coofle

*Minorities:*

Suldaan Ibraahin Dacar  
Seynab Cabdi Yuusuf

*Religious leaders:*

Sheekh Maxamed Saaweer  
Sheekh Maxamed Dhawal

*Artists:*

Ruun Xaddi  
Aamina Cabdillaahi  
Maxamed Cismaan Mahade  
Maxamed Cabdillaahi

*Media:*

A. A. Dhammeeye  
Cali Jadiid

*House of Elders:*

Yuusuf Seekh Axmed Nuur

*House of Representatives:*

Cali Xasan Sheekhdoon  
Cabdillaahi CabdiSiciid

*Ministry of Information:*

Xasan Cumar Hoorri (DG)

*Media representatives:*

Haybe Cabdi Cumar: Jamhuuriya  
Muuse Faarax Jaambiir: Jamhuuriya  
Cabdillaahi Aadan Cumar: Maandeeq  
Feysal Cabdillaahi Cabdalla: Maandeeq  
Axmed Saleebaan Dhuxul: Hargeysa TV

*Horn Watch:*

Saleebaan Ismaaciil Bullaale

*Women:*

Safiya Cali Yuusuf

Rooda Axmed Yaasiin

Shukri Xariir

*Other working group members:*

Rashiid Sheekh Cabdillaahi: War crimes technical Committee

Ciise Curaagte: SOOYAAL, SNM war veteran's Association

Cali Mooge: Poet

Maxamed Yuusuf Keyd: Poet

Maxamed Xirsi Qalinle: University lecturer

**2<sup>nd</sup> Media Workshop: Burco: 15 – 17 October 2000***Togdheer Regional and Burco District Administration:*

Hodan Axmed Maxamed

Aadan Xaashi Ducaale

Cabdicasiss Cali Cilmi

Maxamed Cabdillaahi Xarbi

*Media Representatives:*

Keyse Axmed Digaale

Khadar Ibraahin Warsame

*Artists:*

Yuusuf Cismaan Cabdalle

Cali Aw Yuusuf Maxamed

Cabdi Maxamed Caaro-dhuub

*Women:*

Foosiya Xaaji Aadan

Faa'isa Cali Xayd

Cibaado Diiriye Yare

Gowhara Guumbe

*“Mejrib” representatives:*

Maxamed Maxamuud Warsame  
Maxamed Xuseen Good  
Deeq Cabdi Jaamac  
Cabdi Xuseen Dheere

*NPG Members:*

Aadan Cabdi Ismaaciil  
Suldaan Nadiif Saydh

*Religious Elders:*

Axmed Maxamed Aadan  
Axmed Maxamed Xaydle  
Siciid Xaaji Saalax

*Traditional Elders:*

Maxamed Daahir Cabdi  
Xasan Xaaji Maxamuud  
Cabdillaahi Warsame  
Axmed Caydiid  
Cabdi Xuseen Maxamed

*Intellectuals:*

Yuusuf Warsame  
Dr. Siciid Saalax Abokor  
Muuse Sheekh Maxamuud  
Xasan Ismaaciil

*Youth:*

Cabdi Maxamed Quluumbe  
Axmed Cumar Saqiiro  
Xasan Ismaaciil

**3rd Media Workshop: Hargeysa, 15-17 January 2001.***House of Elders:*

Maxamed Cismaan Guuleed

Cabdilqaadir Maxamed Xasan

*House of Representatives:*

Cali Xasan Sheekhdoon

Maxamed Ismaaciil Xasan

*Ministry of Information:*

Xasan Cumar Hoorri: Director General

Maxamed Cali Qodax: Director of the Planning Department

*Ministry of Interior:*

Maxamed Xasan Gargaare

*Police Force:*

Daahir Muuse Abraar: Criminal Investigation Department

*Prosecutor General:*

Aadan Axmed Muuse: Deputy Prosecutor General

*Horn Watch:*

Saleebaan Ismaaciil Bullaale

*Maandeeq:*

Cabdillaahi aadan Cumar

Muuse Faarax Jaambiir

*Jamburiya and Republican:*

Yuusuf Cabdi Gaboobe

Xasan Siciid Yuusuf

Cabdi Haybe Maxamed

*Hargeysa TV:*

Muuse Xaaji Maxamuud

Mubaarak Muxumed Maax

*Culimada:*

Sheekh Cabdi Oomaar

Sheekh Yuusuf Cabdi Xoorre

*Mefrisbyada:*

Saleebaan Yuusuf Cali



*Haweenka:*

Samsam Cabdi Aadan  
Amran Cali Xiis  
Caasha Maxamed Axmed

*Guurtida:*

Barre Xasan Shire  
Caydiid Cabdillaahi Diiriye

*Dhallinyarada:*

Keysar Xuseen Jaamac  
Mustafe Cabdillaahi Haaruun

*Halabuurka:*

Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac  
Saleebaan Carab Aw Siciid  
Cabdinaasir Macallin Caydiid  
Muuse Cali Faruur  
Maxamed Yuusuf Cabdi  
Maxamed Jaamac Keyd

*Working Group:*

Safiya Cali Yuusuf  
Shaadiya Maxamed Rooble  
Rooda Axmed Yaasiin  
Cali Mooge  
Maxamed Yuusuf Keyse  
Ugaaso Maxamed Cabdiraxmaan  
Shukri Xariir  
Rashiid Sheekh Cabdillaahi

*Media experts:*

Cabdikariim Xaaji Ducaale  
Cabdillaahi Qori  
Cabdiraxiim Maxamed  
Muuse

*Radio Hargeysa:*

Abiib Iimaan Xasan  
Cabdiraxmaan Sheekh Cilmi

*Intellectuals:*

Xasan Axmed  
Axmed Cali Aadan  
Muuse Biixi Cabdi  
Jaamac Ismaaciil Shabeel

*NGOs:*

Jacfar Maxamed Gaaddaweyne  
Maxamed Ciise Meygaag  
Cabdi Ismaaciil Sii-arag  
Mustafe xasan Nuur  
Nuur Maxamed Xirsi

*UNESCO:*

Faa'isa Cali Xuseen

*UNICEF:*

Xasan Aadan Cali

*Minorities:*

Xasan Maxamed Cali  
Mahad Gaaruf  
Hodan Maxamed Cali

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