

# LANGUAGE, POLITICS AND UNIVERSITY TEACHING IN SOMALIA

Charles L. Gesheker

"The Somalis are practicing what we in Tanzania preach"

Julius Nyerere

*The first part of this article is an evaluation of David D. Laitin's Politics, Language and Thought: The Somali Experience.<sup>1</sup> Laitin, a political scientist at the University of California (San Diego), has produced a richly detailed analysis demonstrating the historical importance of language use and language change in the development of social equality, political participation, and cultural identity among Somali communities. His timely account, based on extensive investigations, also explains how the revolutionary Somali government finally resolved the longstanding political, cultural, and technical disputes that had prevented the adoption of a standard orthography for the previously unwritten Somali language. On October 21, 1972, the government introduced a new Somali script and established it as the official state language.*

*Part two records some impressions of Somalia gathered in 1976 while I was a visiting Professor at the National University, near Muqdisho.\**

## Politics and Language in Somalia

The eastern Horn of Africa is an arid semi-desert region of coarse grass, thorn trees, giant anthills, meager resources, and scant rainfall; the only relief from this bleak landscape is found in the southern agricultural region between the Jubba and Shabelle Rivers and in part of the extreme northwestern zone on an elevated grain-producing plateau. Whether the Somali inhabitants of this vast area live inside the Somali Democratic Republic or not, they share an ethnic homogeneity rare in Africa. They speak the same language and live a communal life organized around similar egalitarian institutions. Three-fourths practice a pastoral economy, and they distinguish themselves from their Bantu and Nilotic neighbors through their devotion to Islam and by tracing their genealogy back to an original ancestor, purportedly from the Quraysh lineage of the Prophet Mohammed.

Somalis have generally ignored or repelled attempts by aliens to exercise authority over their part of Africa. But in the late 19th century, the imperialist powers, Italy, Britain, France, plus Ethiopia, partitioned the Somali lands into five separate political

units, a bitter historical experience that forms the basis for the powerful sense of Somali nationalism and a passionate contemporary yearning to re-unite these culturally and linguistically uniform peoples.<sup>1</sup>

In his book, Prof. Laitin argues that the Somalis under the colonial regimes established by Italy and Britain were never subjected to the social and educational acculturation process found elsewhere in colonial Africa. The Italian administrators fumbled with a "confused and non-directed policy towards a desert area and its rebellious people" characterized by inconsistent goals, having a minimal cultural impact, producing a limited colonial legacy, and leaving little in the way of a "colonial mentality" among Somalis. The Somalis often perceived the Italians as enemies, but seldom as masters. Therefore, says Laitin, "the love-hate relationship so often present between colonizer and colonized seemed not to occur in the Somali case—in part because of the incompetence of the colonizers and in part because of the vitality and resiliency of the colonized society" (p. 68). In British Somaliland the colonial budgets "aimed not at transforming life in the Somali desert but merely keeping order in a few outposts" (p. 76). As a result, there too it was "to Somaliland's benefit that little effort was made to transform Somali culture, religion, language, or economy and that the Somali people emerged from the British colonial experience barely subjugated" (p. 81).

Laitin then says that in colonial Somali society, class stratification remained undeveloped as an emergent Somali political elite became neither markedly westernized nor enamored of colonial values. "In dress, in manners, and in preferences those Somalis who had been exposed to education were not manifestly

But gradually literacy in a foreign language did become the exclusive property of this small but articulate bourgeoisie. After independence in 1960, when Italian Somalia and British Somaliland united to form the Somali Republic, this nationalist elite attempted to govern the country by a reliance on foreign languages that few Somalis could speak or alienated from their own people . . . neither obsequious to Europeans nor scornful of their illiterate brothers" (p. 83).

1. Somali Government, *The Somali Peninsula: New Light on Imperial Motives* (Muqdisho, 1962); I.M. Lewis, "Pan Africanism and Pan-Somalism," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, I, #2 (June, 1963), pp. 147-61; Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism*, (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1963); Lewis, *Modern History of Somaliland*, chapter 3; and David D. Laitin, "Somali Territorial Claims in International Perspective," *Africa Today*, XXIII, #2 (April-June 1976), pp. 29-38.

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write. Laitin contends that this "fact alone has had vast consequences for the relationship of the Somali citizen to his government" (p. 131), because acceptance of foreign languages after political independence "may have been more threatening to the maintenance and development of Somali political structure and values than a century of direct colonial rule" (p. 221). Laitin quotes one Somali who captured his countrymen's growing indignation at this development by warning acidly that "he who is not proud of speaking Somali is not fit to live in Somalia" (p. 107).

In other words, it was perhaps ironic that during nine years of putative "parliamentary democracy" (1960-69) a privileged Somali elite of townsmen was first able to seize and consolidate power, while shamefully ignoring the needs of the nomadic majority. The succession of governments formed between 1960 and 1969 achieved a reputation for irresponsibility, folly, incompetence, and indolence as Somalis frequently complained about bureaucrats who "sat around making their chairs tired." Such behavior insulted and offended Somalis who coined the term "musuq masaq" to describe the intolerable body of grievances, from corruption to injustice, that finally precipitated the armed forces' revolt on October 21, 1969 and swept away the corrupt post-colonial administration.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout their colonial and pre-colonial history, the absence of a standard orthography for their language never prevented the Somalis—that "nation of bards," poets, and orators—from developing extraordinarily rich literary genres and a thriving oral literature.<sup>3</sup> In the twentieth century there were creative attempts by Somalis to devise an acceptable script for their language; among the most imaginative was "Cismaaniya," a script developed by Yaassiin Cismaan Yuusuf Keenadiid. As Muslims, Somalis of course say prayers and often greet one another in Arabic, but it is not their mother tongue. Somali itself is, in fact, a Cushitic language, and although an Arabic script for Somali might have been politically acceptable in town and desert and among all economic groups, Arabic terms (mostly commercial and religious ones) represented less than ten percent of the modern Somali vocabulary. In a manner really not much different from the use of a Latin script, therefore, the Arabic script remained incomprehensible to the majority of Somalis. Moreover, the Somalis have had a long, but ambivalent, relationship with Arab culture and the Somali language remains a

vital force sustaining the separateness and integrity of Somali culture.<sup>4</sup>

There were also technical problems. Whenever it is written, a Semitic language like Hebrew or Arabic may omit vowels (which have only grammatical functions) and the remaining consonant-structure of a word usually suffices for identification. Whereas Arabic is vowel-poor, Somali is vowel-rich. Elimination of vowels renders Cushitic consonants, alone, senseless and meaningless. Conversely, Latin characters could easily accommodate the Somali vowel system since the ten basic Somali vowel sounds can be handled by the five Latin vowels standing alone or doubled, an impossible function for the six vowel sounds of Arabic. The strongest opposition to the adoption of Latin characters came from Somali religious leaders who associated the script with "infidel" Christian colonizers. The controversy over orthography clearly involved technical, religious, and political questions. In Chapter 4, entitled "Language Politics in Somalia: The Politics of Nondecision," Laitin succinctly explains how, despite the establishment of committees and debating forums, fundamental conflicts over principles and between personalities effectively prolonged the "orthographic chaos" or "alphabet wars" and prevented the establishment of a national orthography suitable for use in the modern Somali state.

Before 1960, the language debates often raged "between those who favored the Somali script and those who favored the Arabic language" (p. 100). As these futile debates continued on after independence, doing little but postponing action, "intellectuals began to see that this non-decision was very much a decision" (p. 114). The inability and unwillingness of an ostensibly "parliamentary" government to reach an agreement on a national script assisted the entrenchment of foreign languages, while Somali itself remained unwritten. This process in turn

2. For background information, see Basil Davidson "Somalia: Towards Socialism," *Race and Class*, XVII, #1 (1975), and "Somalia in 1975: Some Notes and Impressions," *Issue: A Quarterly Journal of Africanist Opinion*, V, #1 (Spring, 1975). See also David D. Laitin, "The Political Economy of Military Rule in Somalia," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, XIV, #3 (1976), pp. 449-68.

3. Muuse Galaal and B.W. Andrzejewski, *Hikmad Somali* (London, 1956); B.W. Andrzejewski and I.M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry* (London, 1964); John William Johnson, *Heellooy Heelleellooy: The Development of the Genre Heellooy in Modern Somali Poetry* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1974); and B.W. Andrzejewski, *The Rise of Written Somali Literature* (Muqdisho, 1975).

4. For a brilliant comprehensive analysis of this subject, see: Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1977.

strengthened colonial-inspired inequalities and further eroded the traditional social basis of Somali democracy. Class division and friction increased as membership in the post-colonial ruling elite was restricted to Somalis literate in a foreign language, governing in a tongue that few citizens could speak, let alone read.

Within one year of the 1969 "bloodless" revolution led by General Maxamad Siyaad Barre, the new Somali government began to capitalize on its immense popular support and started to implement a remarkably broad and progressive program of social reconstruction. In 1971, as part of these efforts, the Supreme Revolutionary Council organized a language commission that included most of the protagonists from the parliamentary era. On October 21, 1972, the third anniversary of the Revolution, Siyaad Barre ended the years of acrimonious debate by announcing the introduction of a new national orthography as the sole official language of the state, the bureaucracy, and eventually in different states, all schools.

The final decision to use Latin characters (with slight modifications)<sup>5</sup> was based on technical criteria, because as Laitin explains, "it was the only script that could have been legislated into existence in a matter of months" (p. 120). Written Somali was thereafter consciously promoted nation-wide by means of mass literacy campaigns (October 1972 to January 1973 and July 1974 to February 1975), when the last two years of primary school and the first three of secondary school were suspended to enable students to spread systematically throughout the country to teach the new script. The motto of the campaign was:

"If you don't know, learn it; if you do know, teach it."

There was also a shrewd political calculation behind this effort. The resultant expansion of written Somali would serve as a vehicle for bringing political consciousness to the nomadic majority—"taking the state to the nomads"—a process that was facilitated by the unfortunate coincidence in 1973-74 of a crippling drought and famine which drew the nomads to state agencies for aid as never before.<sup>6</sup>

The spirit of initiative, purposefulness, and confidence amidst a condition of internal peace and stability, that I found so evident in Somalia, has been undeniably advanced by the establishment and popularization of the national orthography, the

campaigns against illiteracy, and the striking proliferation of schools. Given the overwhelming demands of simultaneously unifying their language, implementing mass literacy, and caring for tens of thousands of drought victims, it is a remarkable testimony to the government's resourcefulness and dedication that it has been so successful in continuing to train and supply teachers, producing over 3500 secondary school graduates in 1975.

With the introduction of the national orthography, a daily newspaper *Xiddigta Oktobaar* (October Star), periodicals such as *Waaga Cusub* (New Era) and *Codka Macallinka* (Teacher's Voice) and other pamphlets and magazines in the new script have been widely distributed, thereby reinforcing common loyalties, encouraging tremendous pride in the nation's accomplishments, and promoting public participation in the semantic debates necessary to refine and rearticulate revolutionary theory and practice.

On July 1, 1976 the Supreme Revolutionary Council was dissolved, replaced by the 5700-member Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) whose membership (currently in excess of 16,000) includes labor representatives, government bureaucrats, intellectuals, artisans, nomadic leaders, bank officials, farmers, and spokesmen from the commercial sector. The Somali revolution is inspired through the Central Committee of the SRSP and a nation-wide network of sub-committees throughout the sixteen regions and eighty-two districts. Any listing of its concrete achievements would include the following: mass mobilization for public works activities; government salary equalization; promotion of agricultural cooperatives; establishment of a fisheries industry; sand-dune stabilization schemes; concentration on labor-intensive production of rice, banana, and cotton; rehabilitation camps for criminals; expanded acreage under cultivation for sorghum, maize, and vegetables for internal consumption; job development centers for orphans and destitute town-

5. In the new Somali orthography, X = emphatic H (the Arabic ح), c = 'ain (the Arabic ع), and Q = qaf (the Arabic ق). As Laitin explains it in an introductory note (p. xi): "Three letters, however, might create problems: c is comparable to the Arabic ع and is the voiced pharyngeal fricative . . . x is comparable to the Arabic ح and is the unvoiced pharyngeal fricative . . . and q is comparable to the Arabic ق and is the uvular plosive." See also, B.W. Andrzejewski, "The Introduction of a National Orthography for Somali," *African Language Studies*, XV, (1974), pp. 199-203.

6. Jack Shepard, *The Politics of Starvation* (Washington D.C., 1975); Umberto Di Giorgi, "Somalia: Learning From the Disaster," *Ceres*, VIII, #3 (May-June 1975), pp. 41-45; Lesley Garner, "Hunger and After," *The Guardian* (April 9, 1976); I.M. Lewis (ed.), *ABAAR: The Somali Drought* (London, 1975); and a review of the latter publication by Basil Davidson in *Review of African Political Economy*, #6 (May-August 1976), pp. 110-12.

dwellers; sedentarization projects to settle nomads as cultivators along the southern rivers; and implementation of a public health program that has sharply reduced the incidence of malaria and other endemic diseases. In all of these accomplishments the ability to communicate quickly and clearly to the Somali citizenry by means of the written Somali language has been a critical component in mobilizing the national support necessary to implement the projects.

The second part of Laitin's book is entitled "Somali: The Language of Politics." In essence, Laitin's task here is to take the concept of linguistic relativity—"that the language a person speaks to some extent influences the way that person perceives and acts in his world" (p. 162)—and then test its applicability to a Somali-speaking community. Because of difficulties he experienced in obtaining proper research clearance in Somalia in 1972, Laitin conducted his field research among the Somalis of northeastern Kenya, near Wajeer. Working in an area he considers one of the least influenced by European culture, he shows that in terms of identification with their Somali national culture, the use of the Somali language is for Somalis "more than an indicator of nationality, it is a *shaper* of nationality" (p. 194). Laitin ascertained that when his Somali students conversed in Somali they viewed themselves unambiguously as Somalis, but when they spoke English, ambiguities were introduced that prompted their acceptance of other notions of group or national membership.

Based on his data, primarily responses to oral and written questionnaires in English and Somali, Laitin believes that his subjects acted differently toward one another in the linguistic worlds of English and Somali: as adversaries in the former and as fellow Somalis in the latter. Although boundaries between speech and action overlap in traditional Somali culture, the use of English introduced a new dichotomy between speech and action. Considering the policy implications of his findings, Laitin predicts that in Somalia "the political process might well be taken more seriously, less hypocritically, now that the language of politics is Somali, a language in which speech is on the same plane 'coequal and coeval' with action" (p. 216). In a similar fashion, at least among the Wajeer Somalis, Islamic values held "more relevance, more poignance" because the "dichotomy between religious and secular values, so natural when they were speaking in English, did not emerge when they were speaking Somali" (p. 219). With this evidence in

mind, Laitin suggests that by speaking, and now writing, their own language rather than a foreign one, the Somali people, though still divided into four political units, will become even more conscious of the uniqueness of their cultural institutions, develop a clearer sense of the meaning of Somali identity, make fewer distinctions between secular and religious values, and be less likely to tolerate any new bases for social stratification.

The only disquieting aspect of the book is Laitin's failure to acknowledge more specifically how the process of colonial and post-colonial capital accumulation "from the outside" contributed to Somali class formation and differential language use. For instance, to what extent did the consolidation of the small bourgeoisie in independent Somalia coincide with the emergence of capitalist relations at the economic base of the new nation? While a capitalist mode of production could hardly be described as on its way to becoming the dominant mode in this peripheral economy, it had presumably begun to undermine, or at least distort, traditional Somali values and social structure. Mass illiteracy was allowed to co-exist with elitist literacy as long as this condition enabled a Somali elite to remain the political mainstay of a neo-colonial order, growing in proportion to its capacity to develop and extend linkages to world capitalism. Quite clearly, although it did produce Somalia's first millionaires, this pattern of capitalist development was short-lived. But where would the stratum of Somali petit-bourgeoisie, who also spoke and wrote in foreign languages, fit into Laitin's schema? Would it be accurate to include them as members of the political elite? If not, how is one to explain how this class, despite its literacy in foreign languages, remained outside of the post-colonial ruling elite? This becomes an important question when we realize that this class of shopkeepers, elementary school teachers, traders, lower level administrators, and many soldiers and policemen almost immediately became a reliable ally—and remains so today—in the government's program to establish a scientific socialist society in Somalia.

Historical studies of Somali political economy still need empirical investigations that can identify more precisely the relationships between foreign capital and Somali class formation during the colonial and pre-revolutionary period. They should not only specify what enduring class continuities may still exist in Somalia but also, more importantly, assess the profound discontinuities in Somali history now that the

Somali revolutionaries have, as they put it, "taken charge of their history and resumed the task of making it,"<sup>7</sup> and are resolutely developing a viable socialist strategy for structural change.

This criticism should not, however, be allowed to detract in any way from the profound merits of this book. Laitin has used sound judgement in assembling a wealth of information from diffuse Somali sources and explaining the intricate set of problems connected with language and politics in Somalia. The University of Chicago Press is justified in its dust-cover claim that his study "is distinguished by its lucid prose, logical development of ideas, and complex conclusions." A pleasure to read with its crisp evocative style, packed with well-organized and extremely useful material, and conveyed with an exceptional intimacy, Laitin's indispensable book on Somalia also deserves the serious attention of all students of modern Africa.

### University Teaching in Somalia

In 1976, I accepted an invitation from the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education to teach African history in the social science program at Lafoole College of Education (formerly the National Teachers Education Center), a campus of the Somali National University located near Afgoy, a town west of Muqdisho. For six weeks in June and July, I worked closely with Xuseen Maxamad Adam, Lafoole's talented and energetic Dean of Social Sciences, preparing lectures on Somali history for delivery in a new course called "An Introduction to Somali Political Economy." Working from a Marxist perspective we attempted to ascertain the historical process whereby the Somali people were drawn into the periphery of international capitalism. The general education policy at Lafoole requires all students, regardless of their major, to take a minimum of six courses in Somali studies such as economics, sociology, Marxist philosophy, politics, and history.

The organization of the course reflected an "integrative systems approach" to learning in which the instructor takes a subject of importance, in this case political economy, and teaches about it, crossing traditional disciplines such as history, sociology, and economics at will, while avoiding narrow conceptualizations. A major responsibility throughout the course was to consistently apply the classroom information to the social needs, specific living conditions, and economic realities of Somalia: in other words, to

present a Somali-centered curriculum. A prime objective of the Somali government is to transform its citizens from mere supporters to active participants. The improvement of the basic social and economic infrastructure necessary for the growth of agriculture and livestock sectors, from which eighty percent of the population is expected to derive a livelihood, is integral to that developmental strategy. Education must likewise contribute to the productive and socializing process, so at this teacher-training institute Xuseen and I integrated classroom teaching, scientific research, and practical work experiences, blending ideological and scholarly lectures with talks by visiting representatives from the non-academic population.

It may seem paradoxical that the language of instruction at Lafoole was still English, given the previously-mentioned stress on the use of the Somali language. It is, however, the Ministry's plan to "Somalize" university instruction by 1981-82 when most Somali high school graduates would have received all their instruction in Somali. Meanwhile, a shortage of trained Somali staff persists, so as a temporary measure expatriates are still employed at the university. Because of this, the university has been criticized in some quarters for its laxity in adopting Somali as the medium of instruction. Although functionally illiterate in Somali, I deemed it essential to make every conceivable effort to incorporate Somali words into my lectures whenever possible, adhering strictly to the new national orthography when writing plain or technical terms on the blackboard.

The four-month-long course was divided into two parts. The first consisted of a series of classroom lectures and discussions that established a context for an analysis of twentieth century Somali political economy. Our purpose was to identify particular features and structural characteristics of Somali life to make students clearly aware of Somali geographical aspects, the internal and international inequities of wealth and power, and the manifest inter-relationships or conflicts during the development of Somalia as a peripheral society in the international economic system. We explained the timing, purpose, and nature of colonial rule, colonialist terms of trade, and colonial administrative practices in order to establish its contribution to the process of Somali underdevelopment. At the outset of the course we had the good fortune to hear Dr. Neville Chittick from

7. Davidson, "Somalia: Towards Socialism," p. 29.

the British Institute in Eastern Africa (Nairobi) report briefly on his important preliminary study of and 1975 visit to the pre-Islamic archeological sites north of Muqdisho.<sup>8</sup>

In my lectures, I used the methodology of historical materialism, suggesting the advantages and limitations of its explanatory power for understanding how the structural dynamics and requirements of late 19th century European capitalism prompted the imperial partition of Africa, particularly the Somali lands. I concentrated on the imperial factor in the diplomatic and economic history of the Horn before 1899, giving lectures on the following topics: the historical significance of the Ethiopian conquest of Harar in 1887, the object of the subsequent Ethiopian assaults on Somalis in the Ogaadeen, the decidedly coercive legal and military tactics used by the Anglo-Indian administration in northern Somaliland, and the role of Catholic missionaries in the initial socializing process of the early colonial administration.<sup>9</sup> It was these historical forces of an expressly *external* nature and the *internal* spread of a revitalized Islam through several Sufi orders that sparked the uprisings of the anti-colonialist Dervish movement of 1899-1921 led by the Somali hero, poet, and nationalist Sayid Maxamad Cabdulle Xasan.<sup>10</sup> Following my lectures, Xuseen described and analyzed the nature of colonial rule in the British, Italian, French, and Ethiopian areas, the growth and ideology of early Somali nationalist movements, the years of post-independence "parliamentary democracy," and this historical necessity for the October 21, 1969 Revolution.

The second part of the course departed considerably from the pedagogical technique used in the first. Xuseen sought to narrow any gap between the academic world of Lafoole and the world of Somalia by arranging to replace us with speakers from distinctly community organizations, based on the principle that local people, too, know something about their own situation! The College wants to tap the reservoir of knowledge among various citizens who also carry out "research" on their own, everyday, insisting that Somalia's future teachers must listen carefully to their countrymen. A variety of contributors including shopkeepers, banking officials, school teachers, craftsmen, government administrators, and representatives of women's and workers' organizations addressed the class of future teachers, describing for them the changes that had occurred in the organization, direction, and purpose of their respective occu-

pations since the 1969 Revolution. The necessity of my returning to California to prepare for the fall semester regrettably precludes any further commentary about this half of the course.

The classroom atmosphere at Lafoole was marked by extreme good will, camaraderie, and mutual respect—the essential conditions for the establishment and promotion of a cooperative educational approach. An open-mindedness toward criticism and self-criticism existed at all times between teacher and future teachers. One time, a student insisted that my use of the term "jihad" (Muslim holy war) tended to obscure the principles and motivations behind the Dervish movement. He then politely came forward and gave an extemporaneous but very persuasive talk, a lucid, witty, and informed Marxist analysis of the derivation and application of the term "jihad" in Islamic historiography that supported his original criticism.

On another occasion it was necessary for me to discuss the Egyptian attempts in the 1870's to establish control over the northern Somali littoral. The expansionist policy of Khedive Ismail (1863-79) coincided, of course, with the internationalization of control over the Egyptian economy, but in analyzing its specific manifestations in northern Somaliland the term "Egyptian imperialism" would have been perfectly justifiable. Remembering, however, that Somalia and Egypt were now brother Arab League states, with common interests, and were working to develop a closer association I deliberately paused to decide whether to deal candidly or euphemistically with Somali-Egyptian relations in the 19th century. I decided that evasion, timidity, or mystification about this or any other historical question, no matter how "sensitive," ran counter to our course objectives; so I proceeded to describe, analyze, and criticize the fact of Egyptian imperialism in Somaliland.

8. Neville Chittick, "An Archaeological Reconnaissance in the Horn: The British-Somali Expedition, 1975," *Azania*, XI (1976), pp. 117-33 is a report on the results of the survey.

9. These topics are examined in my unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "British Imperialism in the Horn of Africa and the Somali Response, 1884-99," UCLA, 1972.

10. A thorough analysis of Sayid Maxamad Cabdulle Xasan and the Dervish movement will require an exhaustive survey of extant Somali oral testimonies. Partial studies are already underway in Somalia. Among previously published works, the most useful are the following: Robert Hess, "The Poor Man of God - Muhammad Abdullah 'Hassan," in Norman Bennett (ed.), *Leadership in Eastern Africa* (Boston, 1968); Lewis, *Modern History of Somaliland*, chapter 3; E.R. Turton, "The Impact of Muhammad Abdille Hasan in the East African Protectorate," *Journal of African History*, X, #4 (1969), pp. 641-57. See also, Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History," chapter 8 for an analysis of Sufi orders in Somaliland and the Dervish movement.

Throughout each lecture, I avoided the presentation of abstract knowledge detached from the school environment and daily Somali life. This is not to imply that I encouraged some sort of intellectual isolation or provincialism. Indeed, as Ibraahiim Maxamad Abyan, the Director-General of Higher Education, recently observed: "Somalia is a developing country moving towards a very complicated, very complex lifestyle, and to understand that lifestyle we have to be in touch with information and ideas which are not at present part of our culture. Therefore, our people, for the sort of life that is ahead of them have to read."<sup>11</sup> When making analogies or illustrating a particular point, I tried first to draw upon Somali personalities, or features of Somali flora, fauna, or landscape for examples. My last class period was a three-hour discussion about techniques of library and field research where I emphasized various methods of note-taking, formulation of questions, and the cataloguing of written materials as constructive skills necessary for effective teaching and research.

I avoided giving the impression that I was an "expert" whose special knowledge made me an authority commanding absolute obedience and reliance from passive student-recipients. As stated above, Xuseen had already planned to establish a fruitful exchange between intellectual and manual workers in order to counteract any tendency to separate the intellectual work of students and teachers from that of other citizens. I simply hoped the Somali students would consider me an African historian from the United States who happened to be informed about some aspects of Somali history—while pathetically ignorant of others—and who wished to contribute his information to the preparation of Somali secondary school teachers. I never had any reason to doubt that was exactly how most Somalis perceived me.

Many African leaders and educators talk impatiently about the urgent need to develop an educational system specifically suited to their country's social needs. I cannot comment on their respective success in this endeavor, but I can say, without equivocation, that in Somalia this essential process is already well underway.

Before closing, one other key educational institution deserves mention: the Academy of Somali Cul-

ture. Established in 1973 as an autonomous agency of the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, the Academy was given the responsibility of developing the full potential of the Somali script. Under the leadership of Dahabo Faarax and Shire Jamaac Axmed it has become a principal advisory instrument within the Ministry. By 1976, its most immediate functions involved the preparation, writing, and publication of textbooks, documents, and pamphlets on revolutionary education, culture, history, mathematics, hygiene, and Somali traditional astronomy, folklore, and poetry—a truly astonishing variety—for use throughout the formal and informal educational system. The Academy works in close cooperation with the teacher-training colleges (including Lafoole) to insure that the results of its work are promptly and properly applied. All of the Academy's literature, whether for mass readership or study at academic institutions, emphasizes functional literacy, documentation of collected oral literature, and applied research in science, language, and culture. In 1976, the Academy produced two seminal works: a 400-page comprehensive African history text in Somali, and *Qaamuus Kooban ee Af Soomaaliga* (An Abbreviated Dictionary of the Somali Language), the first-ever indigenous Somali dictionary.

### Postscript

The theme of the 14th International African Seminar held in Kinshasa in 1976 was "African Languages in Education." Many participants complained that the enduring power of European languages continued to impede and retard the development of African languages in education. One contributor pointed out that with almost the sole exception of Professor Mateene's manual of Swahili and Lingala it was still necessary for an African to read a European language *first* before he could learn another African language from published sources. I hope someone told the distinguished delegates about the recent work of the Academy of Somali Culture and the Somali National Printing Agency. If so, it should temper their astonishment *if*, perhaps in the not too distant future, they learn that a new edition of that old primer "Teach Yourself Swahili" had just been published—in Somali.

\*In the text of this article, all Somali names and places are written in the new national orthography. Thus, the former Mogadishu is now Muqdisho, Ogaden is Ogaadeen, Hussein is Xuseen, and Abdulle is Cabdulle. See below, footnote 5.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Graham Hancock, "First the Script - Now the Library System," *New African Development* (February, 1977), p. 147.