



**CODAD
KA YIMI
SOOMAALIYA**

**VOICES
FROM
SOMALIA**

VOICES FROM SOMALIA

Edited by Rachel Warner, Education Officer, Minority Rights Group

Rachel Warner has a degree in Psychology and a Diploma in Education (Language in Education in a Multicultural Society). She has taught English in India, and English as a Second Language to bilingual students in secondary schools in Leicester and High Wycombe. She was Head of the ESL Department of an inner London comprehensive school before becoming MRG's Education Officer in February 1990. She is the author of seven multicultural books for young children.

The Minority Rights Group was founded in the 1960s. Its principal aim is to secure justice for minority (and non-dominant majority) groups suffering discrimination by:

- *Researching, publishing and distributing the facts as widely as possible to raise public knowledge and awareness of minority issues worldwide;*
- *Advocating and publicising all aspects of the human rights of minorities to draw attention to violations and to aid the prevention of dangerous and destructive conflicts;*
- *Educating, through its research, publications and schools programme, on issues relating to prejudice, discrimination and group conflicts.*

The Minority Rights Group has been concerned about the human rights situation in Somalia for many years. In 1988 it made representations to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. It published its Report 'Somalia: a Nation in Turmoil' in 1991.

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MARKS & SPENCER



NOTE TO TEACHERS

These autobiographical accounts were collected in both English and Somali by English as a Second Language teachers in London schools and by Ahmed Jama of the Somali Education Project. Most of the stories were written but a few, including Kalton Daud's, were oral accounts. After being written in English, all were then translated into Somali. An editorial decision was made to correct the English of the stories where necessary, without losing the flavour of the original account. Some of the participants have written several accounts which appear in different sections of the book. If there are any minor factual inaccuracies in the testimonies they have been left unaltered.

Suggested uses of Voices from Somalia

The book will be a valuable resource for English teachers encouraging autobiographical writing (National Curriculum English AT3) at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. The variation in complexity and length of the accounts makes the book very suitable for use at different Key Stages. Some of the accounts would support teaching about migration for National Curriculum Geography AT4. The book raises issues of human rights, being a refugee, prejudice and discrimination, and living in a multi-cultural society, and so is a useful resource for the Cross-Curricular theme of Education for Citizenship, particularly to support the components 'A Pluralist Society' and 'Being a Citizen'. This dual-text book will meet a pressing need for relevant materials to use with Somali students and as such will be invaluable for English as a Second Language teachers, Somali language teachers and adult education tutors.

INTRODUCTION FOR TEACHERS

There are approximately 50,000 Somalis in Britain. Some are members of an old-established Somali community, based on the Somali sailors who worked on British ships and who later brought their families to Britain. These communities are concentrated in ports such as London, Cardiff, Liverpool, Hull and Manchester. The other group of Somalis are recently arrived asylum-seekers and refugees. It is the voices of these recently arrived Somalis, the vast majority from the north of Somalia, that are heard in this book. Who are the Somalis and why have so many recently fled from Somalia?

Somalia is a country in the Horn of Africa, with a long coastline bordering the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. The capital is Mogadishu. There are approximately six to seven million Somalis, of whom about four million live within the borders of Somalia, some two million in Ethiopia's Ogaden desert, 240,000 in Kenya and 100,000 in Djibouti. Somalis are traditionally a nomadic pastoral people, moving across frontiers with their herds of animals. In addition, over the last two decades, wars and drought have produced massive dislocations of population in the entire Horn of Africa.

Somalia has one of the most homogeneous populations of any African state: more than 95% of its population is composed of a single ethnic group, the Somalis, who are united by a common language, culture and religion – Islam.

Somali is the national language, and is the first language of the majority of the population. Somali is a Cushitic language of the Afro-Asiatic family. Standard Somali is universally understood in the country. Up until 1972 the Somali language had no written form. However, traditionally the language has provided Somalis with a rich means of communication through oral epic poetry, which records their victories, defeats, sorrows, and the joys and hardships of daily life. In 1972 it was decided to give the Somali language a written form, and the Roman alphabet was adopted. Written Somali replaced English and Italian as the administrative language of the country. A national literacy campaign was launched in 1973 and by the late 1980s Somalia claimed to have a literacy rate of over 60%. Arabic is the second official language of the country but it is used mainly in religious circles.

SOMALI SOCIETY

The Somalis have occupied the Horn of Africa for over a thousand years. There they came into contact with Arab and Persian traders and migrants, who later brought Islam to the area. Somali society is a nomadic pastoral society dependent on the fragile ecological relationship between people and their animals – camels, cattle, sheep and goats – and the land. The camel forms the mainstay of Somali pastoralism, because of its ability to survive without water for weeks and its capacity to produce milk, meat and transport for the pastoralists. Camels and feuds about them form one of the chief themes of Somali oral poetry.

The chief division within Somali society is into clan-families. There are six major clan-families: the Daarood, the Hawiye (who are the most numerous and predominate in the south, particularly in and around Mogadishu), the Isaaq (who predominate in northern Somalia), the Dir, the Digil and the Rahanwayn. The clan-family system is the basis of Somali society. It provides individual security, but for society as a whole it is an unstable system, characterised at all levels by shifting allegiances. For example, two clan-families A and B, descendants of X, are normally in opposition to each other and compete for economic and political rights. On the other hand, in relation to an outside group, Y, A and B would unite to safeguard their common interests against Y. This system has been vulnerable to external manipulation by unscrupulous politicians.

Over 300,000 Isaaq refugees fled to Ethiopia and some of these refugees have subsequently sought asylum in Britain.

In 1989 the persecution shifted to the Hawiye, of the south-central region. Again Barre's Red Hats subjected civilians to ruthless and violent assault, killings and torture. But because of their strategic position near the capital, the Hawiye opposition movement, the United Somali Congress, was in a better position to challenge Barre. In January 1991, Mogadishu fell to USC forces and Barre fled. The cycle of violence started once more, this time with the Daarood as victims.

In May 1991 the SNM coalition in the north chose secession from the rest of the country by declaring independence as the Republic of Somaliland. Obviously the south of the country feels that northern independence is untenable, and the future is uncertain. Visitors to the north have reported that the area is relatively calm and many northern Somalis are returning to their homes. There are huge problems of reconstruction – some cities have been almost entirely destroyed as have water supplies, education and hospitals. Another acute problem is the hundreds of thousands of land mines dotted over the countryside, which need to be de-activated. In the south the chaos is much worse. Fighting continues with different groups pitted against each other, and a major food crisis. A new anti-terrorist law was introduced in August 1991 to attempt to rectify the chaotic situation but unless the underlying causes are tackled, positive change appears unlikely.

Barre has left behind a country in ruins, a capital looted, widespread fighting between clans and armies, hundreds of thousands of refugees and a people on the verge of starvation. A country once praised for its unity has been disunited and possibly permanently dismembered. It will take many years and a great deal of trust before Somalis of different clans can overcome the suspicion and hatred engendered by the Barre years.

This book contains the voices of Somali refugees who are students at schools in London. All but one are Isaacs who fled from Siyaad Barre's destruction of the north of Somalia in 1988. These students have witnessed deeply traumatic events, and it is to their credit that they feel able to share some of their experiences with readers in Britain, through this book. They, like other Somali refugees, long for a rebuilt country that is safe to return to.

Rachel Warner *August 1991*

MEMORIES OF SOMALIA

EVENINGS IN SOMALIA

Some nights my friends and their families would come to our house and play drums. We would sing and dance and tell stories. I enjoyed those evenings – they were wonderful and exciting. Everyone would take turns doing something different. I would sing songs about Somalia or love songs or songs about fighting. I miss those evenings very much. It makes me sad now when I remember the countryside in Somalia. I sometimes wish I was in the quiet of my home in Somalia. It is very noisy where I live now – the traffic and people make a lot of noise and it is very dirty.

Mohammed Warsame, 13 years old
Hackney Downs School, London

MEMORIES

I remember our home in Hargeisa. It had a nice garden and we grew oranges, mangos and other fruits. I used to play in the shade of this big mango tree in the garden with my friend Feriyo. She was nice and we used to have a lot of fun.

We had a car and we used to go to Berbera and go swimming or go on a boat trip.

Sado Muse Ali, 8 years old
Interviewed by the Somali Education Project

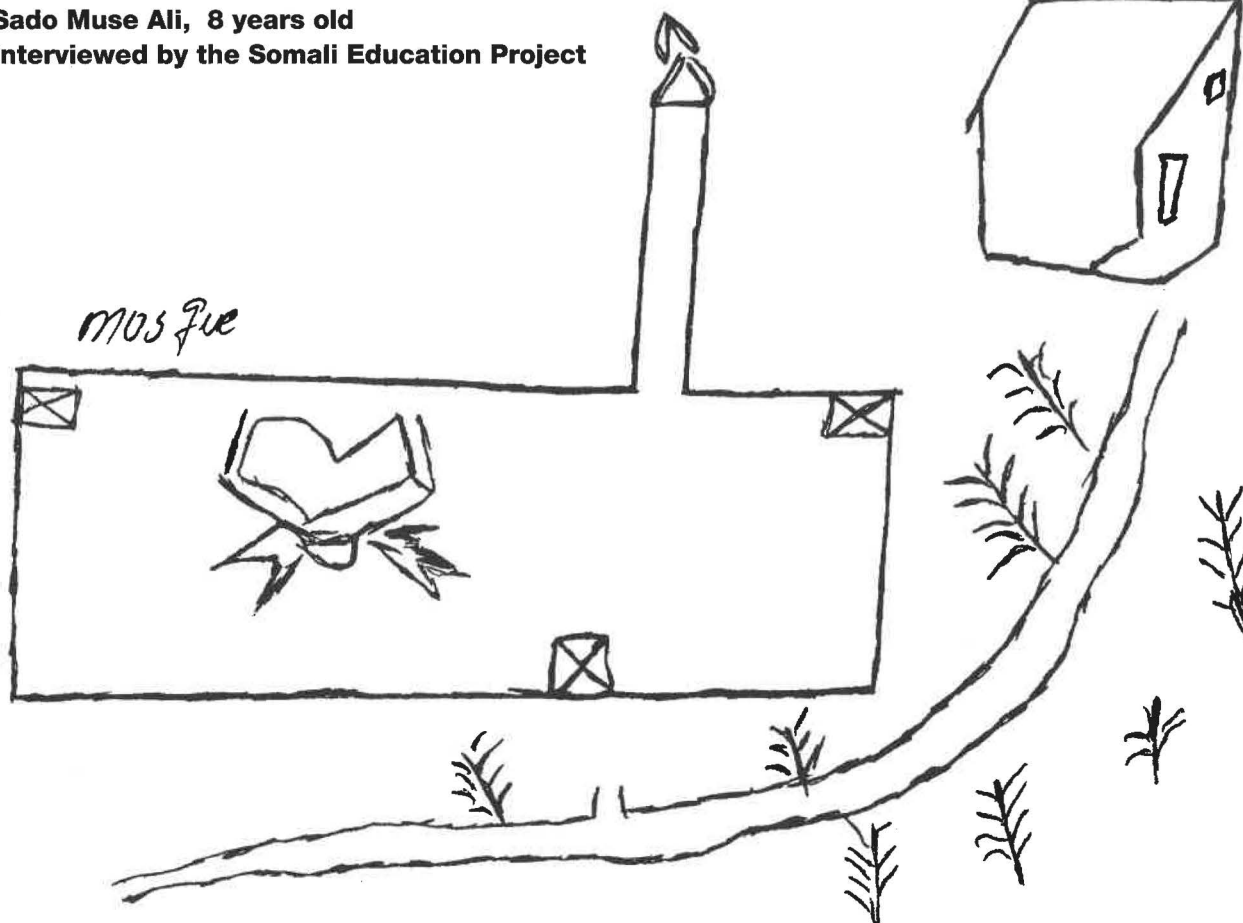
IN THE VILLAGE

Once, when I was a little girl, my aunt and I went to stay in the village where my grandmother lived. Before the visit we went to the shop and bought some food and drink. Then we went to the village by bus. It was the summer, and a lovely day with birds singing and lots of flowers everywhere. I was very happy staying in the village because my grandmother had a lot of animals – for example, cows, sheep, camels and goats. One day everyone was out looking after the animals, and my aunt had gone to the shop to buy some food. I was left alone in the house. Suddenly, two monkeys came into the house. I was really terrified. They wanted something to eat but there was nothing in the house. The only thing I could think of was to take off my dress! I gave it to the monkeys and I said, "Please take my dress, don't eat me, please don't eat me!" The monkeys went off happily and when my aunt came home she was surprised to see me sleeping without a dress!

Nura Yusef, 16 years old
Hurlingham and Chelsea School, London

Tuulo Soomaaliyeed
Somali village - Nura Yusef

shop



LIFE IN SOMALIA

FARMING

I grew up in Bur'o in Somalia and I lived there until I came to England in January 1990. I lived in the country in a big house. I didn't go to school – I looked after the animals we kept. I looked after camels and sheep and goats all day – that was my job. I would get up at about eight o'clock in the morning. My first task was to water and feed the animals. All day I would sit out in the hills watching the animals, making sure they did not wander off. I would also milk the goats, camels and sheep. My mother and brother also helped with the milking. Our family used the milk for drinking and we made butter and cheese and yogurt too. I can get some of those things here in Hackney from Sainsbury's and Tesco's. My mum would sell the milk and cheese in the market in Erigavo. Then she would buy fruit and vegetables and anything else we could not grow or make ourselves. It was the same every day – everyone was very busy working in the house or with the animals or fixing fences or repairing the buildings. The work was hard but time passed quickly.

Mohammed Warsame, 13 years old
Hackney Downs School, London

MY LIFE

My name is Kalton Daud. I was born in Hargeisa in Somalia. Mogadishu is the capital of Somalia and Hargeisa is the second town in Somalia. The weather is nice in Hargeisa, and life used to be good there. I've got five sisters and three brothers. My father owned land outside Hargeisa. He didn't stay at home – he used to go and see how the fields were. I don't know the names of the crops he grew in English. He used to grow something a bit like wheat which we call *harur* in Somali. We use it to make *lahoh*, our bread. He also used to grow watermelons, and some other things. He also kept a lot of sheep.

SCHOOL

I went to school in Hargeisa. I enjoyed school very much. We played football after school, and lots of other games. At school we did Maths and English. If the teacher asked you a question and you couldn't answer it, you got the cane.

Kalid Galib, 16 years old
Hurlingham and Chelsea School, London



Awr
Camel

Lila Taylor/Christian Aid

School

I am a Muslim – nearly everyone in Somalia is Muslim, so they learn the Koran. Children start primary school when they are six or seven but they go to Koran school first. The Koran school is called a *madrassah*. You go to Koran school when you're three. You don't learn anything at first, you just sit and listen. Then when you're four you start learning a little bit of the Koran. I learnt the Koran until I was eight. I can read the Koran, and here in England I help my cousin's brother teach some little children the Koran in our house. I started primary school in Hargeisa when I was seven. We studied Somali,

Maths, Science, Geography, History, everything. But we didn't study art, and my drawings are bad because I didn't learn those things in my country. I left school when I was 10. I really didn't like it, and the teachers didn't like me because I was too noisy. So after I was 10 I didn't go to school until I came to England, apart from the *madrassah*. It was my decision to leave school, not my parents'. My mum said, "OK, if you don't like school, stay at home and help me." If you're a girl in my country it doesn't matter if you go to school or not. You have to help your mum. The boys don't do anything in the house, just eat and go out.

In the House

I liked working in the house. No one said do this, do that, like at school. We had a servant who worked in our house. Usually people in Somalia have someone to help in the house – maybe a woman who is alone with children to look after. I used to go to the market every day with our servant or with my mum. At the market we bought meat – Somali people eat meat every day, with rice. We also sometimes eat fish, and also spaghetti. We eat a big lunch at about one or two o'clock, and then in the evening and the morning we make special bread out of flour. We call it *lahoh* – it's a bit like chapati. I learnt how to cook when I was at home. When I was 13 I knew everything about cooking. It's not the mum who does everything, it's the daughters. I have three older sisters and we took it in turns to do the housework. If you start in the morning you keep going until night. I made the *lahoh* for breakfast, and I had to serve the food. After everyone had gone out, I cleaned the house. We don't use hoovers, I used a brush to clean with. I washed up and I cooked lunch. In Somalia we used a clay oven called a *girgire*, and we used charcoal to cook with. We also used paraffin lamps because the electricity sometimes used to go off in the evenings.

Girgire



Isaaq and Daarood

I would have preferred to stay in my country. It's no good if you're a foreigner in another country. I was happy in my country. But it wasn't free for everyone – especially Isaaq people. We are Isaaq and Hargeisa is an Isaaq area. From about 1982 a

curfew started in Hargeisa. If you went out after eight o'clock the army would catch you. Lots of Isaaq people were put in prison. The government of Somalia is run by the Daarood clan. The president, Mohamed Siyaad Barre, is Daarood. The Daarood people have all the important jobs. All the headmasters in Hargeisa were Daarood. If two people apply for a job and one is Isaaq and one is Daarood the Daarood person would definitely get it – even in Hargeisa which is Isaaq. Even during the curfew in Hargeisa, the Daarood people could drive their cars around, and go out. We used to have our weddings at night, starting at six o'clock and going on until one or two o'clock in the morning, but we couldn't do that any more because of the curfew. We had to have them in the daytime but it was very hot, much too hot. We couldn't go to the cinema any more either. The Isaaq students got angry and started throwing stones. The army started shooting people, just like in South Africa. A lot of people died. There was a curfew every night, and sometimes at 11 o'clock in the morning when people were at work or at school. They came with microphones, saying, 'It's curfew, it's curfew, go home.' Mothers had to run to get their children from school or they would have been caught. In 1987 that happened almost every day and night.

I used to be really happy in Somalia, before the fighting. Isaaq and Daarood people used to be friends, they used to marry each other even. Before I had some friends who were Daarood, I didn't know or care whether they were Isaaq or Daarood. But now I've left Somalia I know they were Daarood. Now if I meet someone from Somalia, I ask if they are Isaaq or Daarood and if they are Daarood I don't want to see them. They say, "We're not the government, we didn't do anything," but I don't care. I hate Daaroods now, because of what they've done to our people. Siyaad Barre's government made people feel different like that.

Fighting in Hargeisa

The SNM (Somali National Movement) started to fight against the government because of the bad way they treated Isaacs. Before, the SNM had been in Ethiopia and the Ethiopians had helped them. As more and more Isaacs were put in prison and treated badly, many people joined the SNM. The fighting started in May 1988. The SNM attacked a town called Bur'o because they wanted to take it from the government's control. We heard about it on the news – lots of people were hurt. I remember that day because I was in the market with some friends and there was a curfew and everyone ran for the bus. If you didn't go home the army would

catch you. The next night, on 31st May 1988, at one o'clock everyone was asleep and we heard bombing – boom, boom, like that. Everyone said the SNM was coming and everyone was happy. The SNM attacked Hargeisa. Lots of people joined the SNM. The army was waiting for them and there was a lot of fighting. The SNM wanted to control Hargeisa. We saw a lot of people with the SNM that we hadn't seen for about 10 years – they had been in hiding in the countryside and if they had come out the army would have caught them or killed them.

When the fighting started all of my family ran into a back room in our house. Our servant cooked food for us but nobody could eat it – we were just waiting for the bombs to fall on our house. I was really shocked and afraid. My mum couldn't get any milk for the baby – fresh milk used to be brought into Hargeisa every day before the fighting but the war stopped that. The fighting went on all day. We heard the noise but we couldn't go out. The house was shaking, and the army was really near our house. We were really afraid.

The government army had tanks and they dropped bombs on Hargeisa but the SNM were afraid to drop bombs on their own people. The SNM had fewer tanks and guns than the army but they controlled Hargeisa. We saw soldiers and Isaaq people lying dead in the street. It was the first time I had seen fighting and people dying.

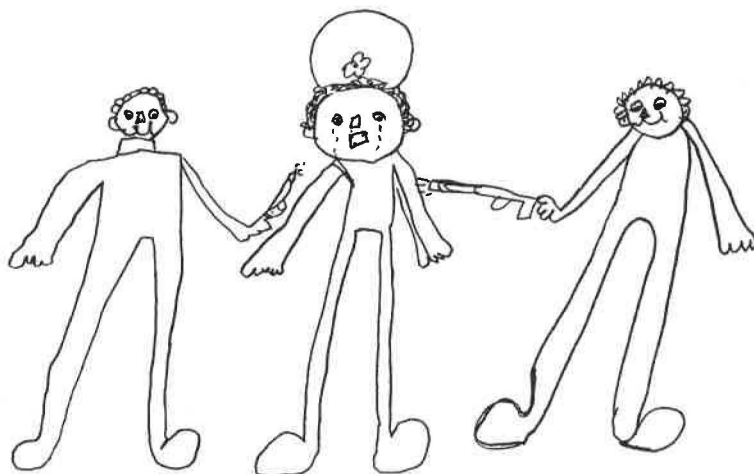
It was dangerous to go out to see how your relatives were but one day (it was the fifth day of the fighting) I heard that my grandma's house had been half destroyed. I heard that the army had burnt four rooms of her house. I just wanted to go and check that my grandma was still alive. I went with my aunt. We could hear the bombs dropping, and we just hurried as much as we could. We looked round corners before we went on to the next bit. We found my grandma in the ruins of her house. We said, 'Come with us.' But she said, 'No, I want to stay in my own home.' So I said goodbye and that's the last time I ever saw her. That was two and a half years ago, but I've heard she's alive and my uncle took her to Abu Dhabi. The fighting stopped at night, when the sun went down and then they started fighting again when the sun came up. So at four in the morning my aunt and I ran back to our house. When we got back, people said, 'Oh we were worrying about you, we thought you were dead.'

Usually in Somalia when people die we dig a grave for the body, but we couldn't do that in the war. If a house is blown up and some people are killed, the others can't bury them; they have to just leave the

bodies and look after themselves. It would be too dangerous to try to bury the bodies.

After nine days the fighting was terrible. It was really close to our house. It was very dangerous. We couldn't get any food. We couldn't sleep in our beds because we thought the bullets might come through the windows. We had to sleep on the floor, under our beds. We had to sleep with our clothes and shoes on so we could run if we needed to. We had to be ready. It was very difficult to sleep, and even if we were asleep our minds were still worrying. We got no news on the radio, we had no electricity and no running water. But luckily it was raining and we had a tank on the roof to catch rainwater, so we had water to drink. People who didn't have tanks had to ask their neighbours for water.

Some people left Hargeisa on the first night of the fighting - they said they couldn't stay. They went to the countryside and took their food and clothes – they were lucky. Other people, like us, stayed because we thought the fighting would soon be over. My father left on the first day of the fighting to join the SNM forces.



Dirirtii Hargeysa
Fighting in Hargeisa - Sado Musi Ali

I remember the ninth day of the fighting clearly. My mum and I were in the sitting room when a bullet came through the window and hit the wall, and part of the wall broke off and hit me. That day I said, 'I'm afraid, I can't stay here any more.' The neighbours had all left. We heard someone crying near our house. They died but we couldn't do anything. If we'd gone out we'd have got hurt or killed. The bullets were flying around like bees, all over the place. You could hear the whirring noise of the bullets all the time. You just prayed and waited for your turn to be bombed yourself. I thought I would die, definitely.

Leaving Hargeisa

That night we couldn't sleep at all and we knew we had to leave. We'd heard that some people had gone one way and some had gone another – we had to go where other people were going. We packed bags. We took a change of clothes. We took dried milk and some water and some rice. We couldn't take much. We thought we'd come back in a week so we didn't take anything like photos or any of our belongings. We just wanted to leave. We left at 2.30 in the morning. The moon was out and there was no fighting. Everything was quiet. There were seven of us, including a neighbour who was a Somali on holiday from America. Everyone carried a bag except my mum who carried Asha, the baby, who was only two months old. My sister, Fatima, was five and even she carried a bag.

We had seen neighbours who had come back during the nine days and we asked them where they had gone. We decided to go to Sheenaa. There was water there, in the reservoir, and lots of people had gone there and to Geddeble, an oasis. Everyone said they were good places to go because the fighting was some distance from those places. We walked and walked, and as we got further away from Hargeisa we felt calmer. There were lots of other people leaving Hargeisa and most were going to Sheenaa and Geddeble. They were all walking. A few were going back to Hargeisa to collect food and clothes. They had to go back because they didn't have anything to eat and there were no shops – just countryside. We stayed in Sheenaa for one day and then we went to Geddeble. We made a little hut from branches and we put mud on the floor. We slept on the floor with our blankets. Most people lived like that. After five days we ran out of food so my brother Hassan and I walked back to Hargeisa. We had to go or we knew the children would die. In Hargeisa we took rice and sugar and tea from our house and put it in pillow cases to carry. I saw a woman holding bags of food and a bullet came and hit her. She died but we couldn't do anything. We just prayed. When we had left the others that day we had said goodbye to them in case we were killed in Hargeisa and didn't come back. We had brought a torch so we could see where to go in our house. Part of the house had fallen down from the bombing and there were no doors. Most of Hargeisa had been destroyed – it was much worse than when we had left. People said that the army wanted to destroy every house in Hargeisa because if there was even a little house left the SNM would use it to hide in.

I went back another time to Hargeisa to get my mum's passport because we heard people were

going to Ethiopia. Her passport and her certificates from college and university were in a little safe in her house but I couldn't find the key. I found some SNM soldiers and asked them to break the safe for me. There were gold earrings there too but I didn't take them – what use would they be? I heard afterwards that the army just took everything from people's houses so they probably have my mum's gold earrings too. They also used people's furniture for firewood, I heard. Most people's passports were burnt when their houses were burnt – thank God the soldiers didn't burn down our house or I'm sure I would never have come here with my family. We were really lucky, but I risked my life to get that passport.

Walking to Ethiopia

We stayed for three months in Geddeble. It was better than Hargeisa, and we could get water out of the ground by making a hole with a stick – the water just came out. But we could still hear the planes and the noise of the bombs. We weren't safe from the bombs. We had to hide in the day in the trees so the planes wouldn't see us. We knew by this time that we couldn't go back to Hargeisa, and we decided to go to Ethiopia. There were refugee camps in Ethiopia for people from the war in Somalia. Lots of people were walking to Ethiopia. Even if people had cars they couldn't use them because there was no petrol and it wasn't safe anyway, so they just hid them in the trees and left them. Cars were useless. We had to walk by night as it was safer – they didn't bomb at night. Also it was very hot for walking in the day. People told us which way to go. You had to make a map in your mind.

We walked miles and miles and miles. It was very hard. It took days and days. It was a very long way to Ethiopia. I can't remember how many days it took. Sometimes our legs hurt so much we had to stay in the same place for a few days. If Fatima got too tired different people took it in turns to carry her. My mum carried the baby all the time. We didn't have good food to eat on the way.

When we got to the border with Ethiopia, the Ethiopian soldiers let us across with no problem. Ethiopia supported the SNM so we were OK. We saw people we knew from Hargeisa in Ethiopia. We made another little hut to live in. We didn't stay in a refugee camp like many people did, and I'm glad. I heard later that my best friend from Hargeisa died in one of the camps in Ethiopia. She got sick and they didn't have good medicine in the camp. I think of her all the time, but I don't even have her photo because we left all those things behind. Our

relatives who lived outside Somalia thought we'd probably died. We phoned them from Ethiopia and they sent us some money. We went to Dire Dawa in Ethiopia and used the money to rent a house. We were OK – I was a bit thin, and the baby had a skin disease but apart from that we were all right. We were lucky.

Coming to England

We stayed six months in Ethiopia altogether, and then we went by train to Djibouti. In Djibouti it was the first time I'd seen a good life for ages – we had been living outside, and cooking outside all the time since leaving Hargeisa. My mum had a visa for Holland but she couldn't speak the language. She could speak a little English, though. So in Djibouti she asked for an English visa, and they gave her one. She didn't say we were refugees, she said we wanted to come for a holiday. Now it's very hard to get a visa for England.

We all flew to England. I felt strange – I was relieved but also worried because I didn't know what I was going to and I was leaving most of my relatives and friends behind. They are all in refugee camps in Ethiopia. We arrived at Heathrow on 15th January 1988. We said we were visitors, and it was OK because it was before lots of Somalis came so they let us in. We stayed with my mum's cousin, and she went to the council and the Home Office. She told

them we were really refugees, not visitors. They gave us refugee status after six months – now it takes ages to get refugee status.

We were given two rooms in a hotel to live in and we all started at school. At first it was very hard in England – I didn't know much English and the school system was different to the one I was used to. I didn't have any friends and we lived in a hotel. Now it's not so bad. We've got a council house and I'm learning English at college. But I want to go back to my country. I will go back when the fighting is over, but I don't think that will be for years. London isn't my place, even if I stay here for years. We get news of Somalia because sometimes people in Djibouti send us cassettes of the BBC World Service in Somali. They record it in Djibouti because we can't hear it here.

People in England cry at films and videos but when you see real things you can't cry, you're just shocked. When you see dead people you just walk away. Some people in Somalia went mad at what they'd seen. I survived, though. In my English class at college, a woman said she had survived a fire in her house. I couldn't help smiling and the teacher asked me why. I said, 'She is a survivor, it's true, but I survived much more.'

Kalton Daud, 16 years old

Xerada qaxootiga ee Soomaalida
Somali Refugee Camp



Lita Taylor/Christian Aid

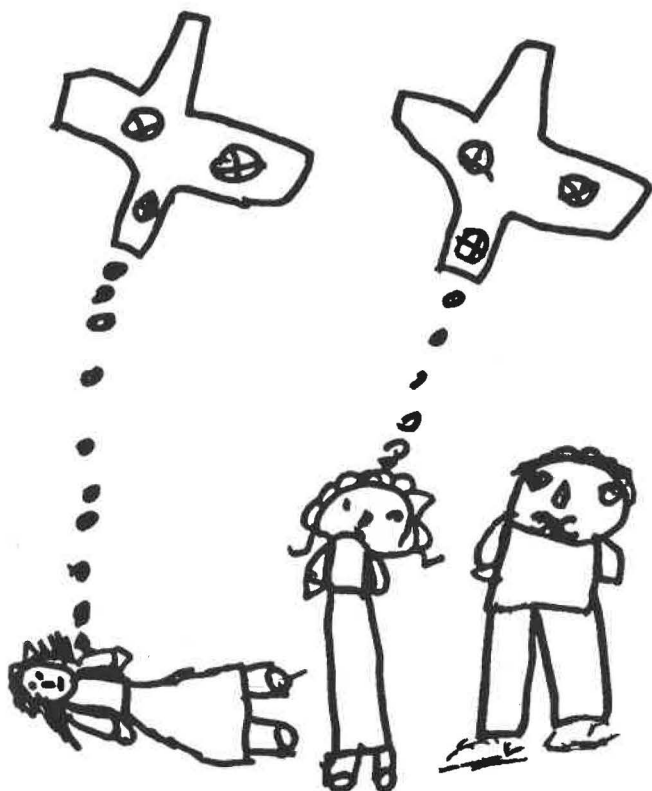
THE WAR IN SOMALIA

THE START OF THE WAR

I went to school one day, as always. I do not remember anything different that particular day except that it was cloudy and there was a slight drizzle on my way to school. At lunch-time, we heard the sound of gunfire coming from the direction of Dami and all the pupils in my school went home. When I reached home, there was panic and chaos everywhere; our neighbours were standing outside or running about trying to bring their kids inside. I asked our neighbour, Feriyo's mother, what was going on and she told me that fighting had started between the government and the SNM. I then rushed to our house to make sure that my mother and my younger sister were all right, and then I remember changing and rushing out with my mother trying to stop me. I took my sister and we went towards the town centre to see what was going on there. My mother tried to catch us but she couldn't. There were a lot of my schoolmates and other people there throwing stones and shouting slogans at the government troops. I do not remember what happened next very well, but I remember that soldiers opened fire on the kids and other people. There was a lot screaming and crying. Pupils were falling down all around me. It was like being in a nightmare.

Sahra Muse Ali, 9 years old
Interviewed by the Somali Education Project

Diyaarado rusheenaya Hargeysa
Planes bombing Hargeisa - Sahra Muse Ali



THE WAR IN MY COUNTRY

I was born in Hargeisa in Somalia in 1974. There is a war in my country. The Isaaq people don't like the government of Somalia. My house was bombed. There was no water and electricity. I was very unhappy because many people died. I left Somalia on a lorry and went to Djibouti.

Khalid Galib, 16 years old
Hurlingham and Chelsea School, London

FIGHTING

There was a lot of trouble starting in Somalia. People started fighting each other. Different people living in different parts of Somalia want to be free to govern their own land. So many arguments broke out with the government and soon troops were sent in with guns.

Government soldiers came into my house with guns and shot my grandmother and my little sister Rahma. She was only two years old. I was shot in the leg but it is only a little scar now.

Mustafa Ibrahim, 14 years old
Hackney Downs school, London

MY FRIEND, FERIYO

I came back from Sunday School and I remember seeing that our living-room as well as our kitchen had collapsed. Then I saw tanks in front of our house and they began firing. It was terrible.

We ran as fast as we could, my mother holding my hand. There was also Feriyo, my friend, as well as her granny who was running behind us because she could not catch up with us. She was old. Siyaad Barre's portrait was almost everywhere. I used not to look at it, but while we were running I saw this huge portrait of him and I was scared. He kept staring at me and I cried because I thought he would eat me.

Feriyo fell down while we were still running and there was this deafening noise. I let go of my mother's hand and ran back to help Feriyo but she wouldn't stand up. I shook her, saying, 'Feriyo, stand up.' I begged her to stand up but she wouldn't.

I have a lot of friends here in England and they are all nice but I still remember Feriyo. She was so nice.

Sado Muse Ali, 8 years old
Interviewed by the Somali Education Project

WAR AGAINST THE ISAAQS

I grew up in Hargeisa, northern Somalia. Hargeisa has such good weather that it's said you never need to visit a doctor because of the healthy air. At four I went to the Koranic school and then went on to school. It was a good school and I remember not having a wink of sleep during my first night after coming back from school.



Ralph Hoyle/MRG

Xasan Da'uud oo jooga London
Hassan Daud in London

After four years I moved on to Hussein Gure Intermediate School and then to Gan Libah High. I was in my third year in this school when the following events occurred.

When the current president of Somalia, Siyaad Barre, came to power in a military coup in 1969, many people were expecting a change for the better. But as it turned out, they were to be disappointed, as things began to deteriorate day by day.

When the people revolted against his rule, he used the policy of the colonialists, "Divide and Rule", to tame the Somali masses by singling out different groups for oppression.

The turn of the Isaaqs came in 1978-79. Hundreds of Isaaqs were sacked from the Government, without being accused of anything.

Many of those newly unemployed people emigrated abroad, but for those who stayed behind the regime continued to harass them; there were daily arrests and even executions. This forced many Isaaqs to

cross the border into the neighbouring country of Ethiopia, and form an opposition movement called the Somali National Movement. The Somali regime then decided to pursue a policy of mass extinction of the Isaaq people.

To make this policy happen, from 1980 to 1988 the army was given a free hand in the north where most of the Isaaqs live. There were daily executions, looting, arrests and rape.

The young people then began to flee the country; some went to Europe and America while others went across the border to Ethiopia. Things became really bad in 1985-88. There were many massacres. The Government then started to bring in hundreds of thousands of so-called Ethiopian refugees, in order to replace the Isaaq population of the region. Properties and businesses owned by the Isaaqs were confiscated and handed over to the newcomers. This forced many people to join the SNM. (In the meantime, the nomads who roam the deserts of the region and who were adversely affected by the crises in the cities also joined the now-armed SNM.)

On the 27th of May 1988 the rebel troops of the Somali National Movement attacked the town of Bur'o which is the second largest town in the North. The Somali army was caught unawares, and was immediately defeated by the SNM forces.

The tricolour flag of the SNM was raised and the people began rejoicing and dancing. When the government forces in Hargeisa heard what had happened in Bur'o they began confiscating anything they could lay their hands on. I remember that day because I was walking in the town centre with my little brother Mohamed, when we saw a convoy full of soldiers speeding down the main street and Mohamed asked me what this was all about and I told him that I didn't know either. On the second day (the 28th) everybody in Hargeisa knew what had happened in Bur'o. On the same day a curfew was imposed on Hargeisa. The people began stocking fuel and food; there was panic and chaos everywhere. Government troops started arresting the important people in Hargeisa. Around 60 people were arrested that night.

On the 29th of May, the population went on a panic buying – everybody bought anything and everything they could see in anticipation of the bad days ahead. I bought large quantities of flour, rice and sugar for my family.

On the 30th of May we woke up to find soldiers in full battle gear patrolling the streets; there were tanks and armoured personnel carriers in literally

every road junction. We all remained indoors out of fear.

On the night of the 31st May at 2 am I was woken up by the sound of gunfire and artillery shells. I then opened the window to see where all the noise was coming from. What I saw shocked and frightened me. The night sky was alight with criss-crossing gunfire.

I immediately shut the window and we all huddled into a corner of one of the bedrooms. We were not able to sleep that night, of course. Early in the morning I climbed on the roof of our house to see exactly where the fighting was going on. I realised that the fighting was concentrated on the Fagash (Government) forces's main garrison. I saw many people running towards the area in which the fighting was going on. I asked someone where they were running to and he told me that he wanted to collect arms from the dead government troops.

Many other people did that and joined in the fighting on the side of the SNM. At around six o'clock, the fighters of the liberation forces crossed into the town centre of Hargeisa, the heartland of the Isaaq population.

At around 11 am the army started shelling the residential areas of the town, and the SNM leaders ordered the civilian population to flee the city for their own safety.

Most of the able-bodied people of both sexes joined the liberation forces while the rest of the people started to flee the town. Both the electricity supply and water were cut off by the government.

The army was given a shoot-on-sight order. They began shooting anyone they could see, whatever he or she was doing.

Rusheentii Hargeysa dabadeed
After the bombing of Hargeisa



After three days of persistent fighting, the government minister of defence came to visit his troops and he gave an order of mass, indiscriminate shelling and artillery and aerial bombardment of Hargeisa.

The majority of the civilian population began leaving their homes early in the morning when there was a lull in the fighting.

After eight days, the fighting reached the area in which we lived which was called Gol-Channo (it means 'paradise pond').

It was then that we decided to leave our home. We took with us some food and water, blankets, and we were joined by many people who were also fleeing the town. We had no idea of where we were going since we had never left our home before. We were all scared to death not knowing whether we would fall into the hands of the government soldiers or not.

We came across many dead bodies on the outskirts of the town. After a few hours' walk we reached a forest where we met SNM troops who informed us that the whole surrounding area was in their hands and therefore safe. We took a rest and had a drink of water and we proceeded on to a place called Sheenaa (a water reservoir).

There were around 20,000 families in that area alone. After half a day's rest we continued on our journey and reached a place called Anayo.

Eventually, after we realised that the war was not going to end and we ran out of rations and water we decided to go across the border to Ethiopia. We reached Dire Dawa in Ethiopia after four months. We stayed for another two months and then we went to Djibouti. We remained in Djibouti for another month and 20 days.

On the 14th January 1989 we left Djibouti for Paris and then we came to London where I've been staying for 20 months now.

My ambition is to study and eventually go back home one day.

My hope is to go back home free and safe.

Hassan Abdi Daud, 17 years old

LEAVING SOMALIA

LEAVING

When we left the airport my two aunts said goodbye to us. I wasn't nervous on the plane because I had been on a plane before. But the last night I had been very unhappy because I was leaving my friend Zaynab and my aunt. Zaynab and I had cried a lot. I slept on the plane and some people watched the video.

I thought England would be very cold. When we arrived at Heathrow airport it was eight o'clock in the morning and I hadn't slept. No one met us and I felt very unhappy. We went to a hotel.

Nura Yusef, 16 years old
Hurlingham and Chelsea School, London

LEAVING SOMALIA

We walked and walked. It seemed that we would walk forever. I don't know how long it took us to reach Djibouti, but it took ages. It must have been a month.

We saw SNM fighters now and then on the way and they were so helpful. That is why I love them so much. They gave us water and food and showed us the right way to safety.

Sahra Muse Ali, 9 years old
Interviewed by the Somali Education Project

SEPARATION

In Somalia it became difficult for Isaaq people to get jobs. My dad and mum thought it would be a good idea for my dad to leave Somalia and go to England. My dad chose England because he had friends and relations already living there. My dad was in England for a long time. He came home to visit us every couple of years but it was a very hard time for all of us.

After the fighting started it was too dangerous for us to stay in Somalia. So in 1989 my family joined my father in England. My two younger brothers are still in Somalia living with relatives. They will come to England when they are older. Sometimes I get very sad when I think about how long it will be before we are all together again.

Mustafa Ibrahim, 14 years old
Hackney Downs School, London

IT IS A VERY DIFFICULT THING TO HAVE TO LEAVE...

It is a very difficult thing to have to leave your home and family and go and live in a foreign place where people are different and speak differently and behave differently to you. We all had to do that. In 1979 because of the fighting my father was unable to get work and life became hard. So my parents decided that my father should come to England to look for work. The fighting got closer to our home so my father left for England hoping to find a home and a job. It was hard for my father at first but now he is a builder and he works in lots of different houses. All of my family are here in England now. It took a long time for my dad to save up but now we are together.

Mohammed Warsame, 13 years old
Hackney Downs School, London

SCHOOL IN BRITAIN

STARTING SCHOOL

When I first came to Fulham Cross School it was very big and strange to me. I didn't know English but my father took me to the school. We went to the office to see the headmistress, but I didn't understand what she said. My father explained that she asked what subjects I had liked in Somalia. I told my father in my language and my father told her.

When I started the lessons it was very hard for me because I didn't understand the language. I met Somali girls who had been a year longer than me at the school. They spoke better English than me and they helped me. Some girls laughed at me and at my clothes. One of them wanted to frighten me but my friend asked her, 'Why do you want to frighten her? She doesn't understand English and she doesn't know what you mean.' The other girls said, 'Sorry, we didn't know before.'

At lunchtime everybody queued for lunch but I didn't know what to do at first. One of my friends took me to lunch and she bought lunch for me. Now I know everything in our school.

Nura Yusuf, 16 years old
Hurlingham and Chelsea School, London

I LIKE MY SCHOOL

We live in a very small flat now and I really don't like it. But I like all the films and things on the TV. There are also many different sorts of sweets that weren't available in Hargeisa. Anyway I've made a lot of friends here and I like my school and my teacher and all the toys.

Sado Muse Ali, 8 years old
Interviewed by the Somali Education Project

SCHOOL IN LONDON

I now live in Hackney and attend Hackney Downs School. I am studying for my exams which I will take next year. I am not sure what to do when I leave school so I may go to college to improve my English and do general studies before I make a decision about what work I should do.

Mustafa Ibrahim, 14 years old
Hackney Downs School, London



Barre Shire

Lesley Douglas

LEARNING ENGLISH

We came to live in Hackney. My brother goes to Hackney College. He is studying computers. I attend Hackney Downs School. I like the school now but when I first came in September 1989 I was scared. The school seemed so big and sometimes I got lost. I didn't like going to the lessons because I couldn't speak English but it is better now. I can speak some English and I have made some friends. The other boys in my class help me. A new boy from Somalia has come into our class and I help him now.

I am worried about learning more English so that I can do well in my exams. I would like to go into banking when I leave school.

Barre Shire, 14 years old
Hackney Downs School, London

ADDRESSES

SOMALI EDUCATION PROJECT IN TOWER HAMLETS

**8 Newell Street
Limehouse
London E14**

071 987 8848

Identifies educational needs for the Somali community in Tower Hamlets, provides advice on education and organises language classes for the community.

SOMALI RELIEF ASSOCIATION (UK) (SOMRA)

**Oxford House
Derbyshire Street
London E2 6HG**

071 729 3351

SOMRA was established in response to the refugee crisis after the civil war in the north of Somalia. SOMRA raises funds for rehabilitation and development programmes in Somalia and raises public awareness in Britain of the situation of the refugees.

BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH PROJECT

**277 Bancroft Rd
Bancroft Library
London E1**

081 980 3503

Educates about health problems. They have several Somali workers who deal particularly with female circumcision.

SOMALI COUNSELLING PROJECT

**Black Prince Road
London SE1**

071 735 8171

Helps Somalis, mostly refugees, with emotional and social problems.

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"These stories will improve the understanding of teachers and students while also providing a means of valuing the experience of these students. They are particularly welcome as a resource for and about cultural groups for whom we have access to very few resources."

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