

UNDERSTANDING THE **SOMALI** CHURCH



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Aweis A. Ali

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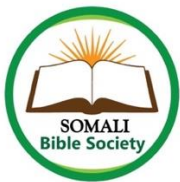
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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Dr. Al and Kitty Jones, my spiritual parents, who have invested in me and my family.

What others said about this book, 1/2

This work is an excellent source of authentic information, not only on the Somali Church history but also on the belief system of the pre-Islamic Somalis. This book would also be a handy tool for present and future researchers interested in the Somali history, culture, and religious beliefs in the Horn of Africa. Many thanks to Rev. Dr. Aweis A. Ali for his tireless and inspiring efforts to write, compile, record and preserve the development of Christianity and related topics among the Somalis in the Horn of Africa.

Quule M. Egal
Somali Christian Elder

Jesus said, “I will build my church and the powers of hell will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). What a promise and how relevant as we read the history of the Somali Church and become aware of the fierce efforts of the powers of hell to challenge every forward step. But with the promise of the Lord Jesus we know He will prevail. In his book, *Understanding the Somali Church*, Aweis has provided us with a detailed history of how God has been working over the years to call a people to Himself from among these precious people; what a privilege to read this story. Thank you, Aweis.

Ruth Myors
Author of *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia*.

I would highly recommend this remarkable book to all Somali Christians and the expatriate believers who are interested in the Somali Church. Dr. Aweis has done a remarkable job and the Somali community of faith is forever grateful to him.

Rev. Omar Ali Gaab
Evangelist

This book is a treasure trove. Dr. Aweis Ali traces the history of the Somali faith through Waaqism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and highlights the voices of a marginalized group within the Somali context: Christians. This is a valuable resource for people of any faith interested in Somali spirituality and history.

Rachel Jones
Author of *Stronger than Death: How Annalena Tonelli Defied Terror and Tuberculosis in the Horn of Africa*

I am delighted with this in-depth research about the Somali Church. Brother Aweis’ book, *Understanding the Somali Church*, will benefit the Somali Christians and the expatriate believers involved in the Somali mission work. I highly recommend this seminal work.

Kawser Omar
Evangelist

Foreword

Somalia is often described as the most homogenous country in Africa.¹ They are said to be homogenous ethnically, religiously, culturally, and linguistically. Somalis take great pride in their heritage and identity as Somalis. An average Somali is expected to know and be concerned for his *'tol'* (immediate and extended family members), to adhere to *'xeer'* (contractual clan obligations), to participate in *'qaaraan'* (communal socio-welfare), to aspire to be *'baarri'* (honoring and respectful to the elders), to preserve the *'sharaf'* (honor) of the family, among other obligations.

The religious identity that is prevalent among Somalis today is being a Muslim. If you are a Somali, then the assumption is you are a Muslim. This assumption is so deeply ingrained that the law assumes all Somalis are Muslims; if one claims not to be a Muslim, then their nationality and ethnicity are questioned. In reflection of their Islamic convictions, the Provisional Federal Constitution and the Federal Member State administrations have legislated Islam as the state religion and bar the propagation of any religion other than Islam.² This has allowed Islam to be the dominant religious voice for many centuries. As a result of this, the history of Somalis has been told mainly from the perspective of Islam.

The prevailing missiological philosophy of engaging Somalis with the gospel has been primarily influenced by the Somalis' Muslim heritage. The Islamic worldview is the value-system that an evangelist or a missionary is trained to engage as they prepare to serve among Somalis. The prevailing assumption is that Islam forms the core of who Somalis are, and therefore addressing the Islamic worldview is engaging the Somalis at their core level.

At a time when the 'buzz word' in missiological circles is 'movements,' a thorough history of God's work among Somalis, one of the least-reached people groups, is needed and appropriate. Dr. Aweis took it upon himself to document the history of the Somali church, and I must say there are very few that are qualified to provide us with this history. His experiences as an indigenous believer from southern Somalia, his discipleship and training under the tutelage of SIM and the Church of the Nazarene, and his academic training in missiology make him an authoritative voice on this subject.

In this book, he takes us on a quest to understand the Somali church. He gives voice to the internal tension of wanting to be entirely in Christ and be completely Somali.

In this book, Aweis opens our eyes and enlightens us on the pre-Islamic Somali heritage. He informs us of the pre-Islamic Somali worldview of God. He introduces us to Waaq, a pre-Islamic deity primarily worshipped by the Cushitic people, and Waaqism, the worship of Waaq. He traces and highlights aspects of this ideology among modern-day Somalis and other Cushitic groups. Aweis' discoveries challenge us to re-evaluate our assumptions about the socio-religious identity of Somalis. For instance, training missionaries to competently engage the Somali people must factor in the pre-Islamic Somali legacy and Somalis' Judeo-Christian heritage.

¹ Abdirashid A. Ismail, "Somali State Failure: Players, Incentives, and Institutions." PhD Thesis. Hanken School of Economics, Department of Economics, Economics, Helsinki, 9, 2010. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10227/607/212-978-952-232-081-0.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y> (accessed 06 August 2021)

² "2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Somalia." (12 May 2021). <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2051588.html> (accessed 06 August 2021)

In this book, the author adds his voice, and it echoes the voices of other scholars such as Mbiti³ and Mazrui,⁴ that indigenous Africans had indigenous worldviews that pre-existed the cross's religion and the crescent's religion.

The historical research detailed in this book will challenge us to dig deeper beyond the thick layer of Islam to discover the Judeo-Christian heritage of the Somalis and aspects of African traditional religion. These discoveries enhance our understanding of the Somali people and will consequently impact our missiological engagement with the Somali people.

The Somali church, the body of believers in Christ who are ethnically Somali, is part and parcel of the Somali community. Their affective and evaluative cultural dimension is mainly identical to that of other Somalis. Understanding the Somali church in the context of being a Somali is critical for evangelism, discipleship, and the formation of a visible ecclesia.

This book will help us take a giant leap towards understanding the Somali church.

Pastor Abdikamil Mahmoud (Abdi Walalo)
Elder, Fellowship Baptist Church, Mombasa

³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, 1969.

⁴ Ali A. Mazrui, Patrick M. Dikirr et al. (eds), *Africa's Islam Experience: History, Culture, and Politics*, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2009.

Preface

The Somali Church is not only prone to bewilder people but many foreigners do not even know the existence of this resilient church – and those who know about it have a hard time describing it because of its creative access nature. Somali Muslims are also equally confused by the very reality of this church whose existence they deny. This book shines a light on this tiny but growing church in Islamic Somalia. It also helps readers understand the Somali people (both Christian and Muslim), their pre-Islamic belief systems and culture. Remnants of these beliefs are still visible in the Somali language, culture and landscape. Expatriates who work among Somalis will benefit from understanding the knowledge deposited in this informative book.

This book describes the communal nature of the Somalis. The wish of the community supersedes the wish of the individual. Therefore, the community comes before the individual. The old Somali clan system best illuminates this fact. The Somali proverb, “the clan can do without one man but no one man can do without the clan,” exemplifies this philosophy.⁵ This book argues that Somali believers remain respected members of their respective clans. Therefore, a Somali Christian without a clan base is like a tree without roots. The sooner expatriate missionaries comprehend this notion, the better it is for everybody.

While much of the book focuses on the Somali Church, the Somali Muslim readers will not feel left out. The chapters on Islam and pre-Islamic religions will help them know the history of their faith’s arrival and propagation in Somalia, as well as their pre-Islamic spiritual roots. The book also includes a chapter on the Somali clan system and how the Somalis still utilize this age-old institution to flourish in the Somali peninsula. The chapters in this book cover such a wide range of topics that even secular expatriates who work with Somalis will immensely benefit from it

While this book does not claim to be a silver bullet, I am very confident it has the potential to become a game-changing guide for Somalis and expatriates alike. Here we have an honest assessment of the Somali Church, its history, successes and challenges. The book reflects the author’s trademark penchant for infinite optimism, divine courage and unassailable faith in the Somali community of faith. This work belongs to the bookshelf of everyone with a global view of the Church. Any student of world religions, sociology and anthropology, will also benefit from this important book. I sincerely believe that God will use this work to enrich the Somali Church and the rest of the global community of faith.

Rev. Ali M. Adawe
Evangelist

⁵ The proverb says in Somali, “*tolku nin waa ka maarmaa balse ninku tolka kama maarmo.*”

Introduction

Writing about the Somali Church has been both challenging and rewarding at the same time. I found the whole process to be surreal since this church is little known compared to the churches in Ethiopia and Kenya. This is strange since the history of the modern Somali Church goes back to 1881 when the first Western missionaries settled near Berbera, British Somaliland. Hence, this is a book like no other. Despite its 140 years history, very little has been written about the Somali Church. Subjects covered include the religious heritage of the Somalis (Waaqism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), mission work, missionaries and their fruits, the benefits of denominationally based ministries, challenges and blessings of persecution, the relationship between persecution and church growth, utilizing the Somali clan system for the glory of God, and the role of poetry in the Somali ministry. The following chapters were previously published as papers by three different publications and are now included as book chapters. Some of the papers, in repurposing them as book chapters, have been slightly edited for space and clarity.

These book chapters are: “A Brief History of Judaism in the Somali Peninsula” (SBS Journal, Volume II, Issue 1, June 2021), “A Brief History of Christianity in the Somali Peninsula” (SBS Journal, Volume II, Issue 1, June 2021), “A Brief History of Christian Missions in Somalia” (ARJESS, Volume 7, Issue 1, 2020), “The Greatest Missionaries to the Somalis: The Heroes of 1881-1981” (SBS Journal, Volume II, Issue 1, June 2021), “The Case for Denominationally Based Ministries among Somalis” (EMQ, Volume 57, Issue 1, January-March 2021), “Thriving Under the Sword: How the Somali Church Overcomes the Challenges of Persecution” (SBS Journal, Volume I, Issue 1, December 2020), “The Blood of Christians is Seed: The Fifth Gospel and the Growth of the Church” (SBS Journal, Volume II, Issue 1, June 2021), “Courage in Our Conviction: A Conversation with Pastor Shaafi’i Ibraahim Faarah” (SBS Journal, Volume I, Issue 1, December 2020) and “An Overview of Persecution of Christians” (adapted from the author’s PhD thesis).⁶ All other chapters are brand new and were exclusively written for this book.

It is my sincere prayer that this book will become a valuable resource for Somali Christians and for those who love these little-known members of the global community of faith. The Somali Church is growing despite the challenges it faces daily. The Lord built the Somali Church using courageous local Christians and intrepid expatriate missionaries. Many local Christians and some expatriate missionaries were martyred for their faith in the Somali peninsula. These martyrdoms have only propelled the Somali Church to a spectacular growth not expected by the persecutors. According to *Operation World*, the Somali Church is the 7th fastest growing evangelical church in the world.⁷ The Somali Church is today a global phenomenon ministering not only in the Somali peninsula but also in every continent where the Somali diaspora is present.

Rev. Aweis A. Ali, PhD

⁶ Aweis Abukar Ali, “Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia.” PhD Thesis, Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya, May 2021.

⁷ Evangelical Growth, *Operation World*, 2021. <https://www.operationworld.org/hidden/evangelical-growth> (accessed 29 March 2021).



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Special thanks to all the people who helped me with the editing, proofreading and factchecking of this book. You gave the gift of your time. This book would have looked very different without your sacrificial assistance. I am taking this opportunity to recognize and thank you all in alphabetical order: Dr. Al Jones, Rev. David Johnson, David Yunuba, Galen Reed, Dr. Greg Crofford, Dr. Howie Shute, Ruth Myors, Rev. Ryan Wolford and Stephen Thompson. I am also giving a shout out to Bishop Giorgio Bertin, O.F.M., and Rev. Mohamed Gurhan for their constant encouragement and prayers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	IV
FOREWORD.....	VI
PREFACE	VIII
INTRODUCTION.....	IX
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	X
TABLE OF CONTENTS	XI
GLOSSARY	XIV
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS.....	XV
CHAPTER ONE	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF WAAQISM IN THE SOMALI PENINSULA.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CREATOR WAAQ	2
ANIMAL-HUMAN PROGENIES	2
SHAPESHIFTING	3
WAAQ AND HIS ANGELS.....	4
WAAQISM IN THE HORN OF AFRICA.....	5
CONCLUSION.....	7
CHAPTER TWO	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF JUDAISM IN THE SOMALI PENINSULA.....	8
INTRODUCTION.....	8
THE GREATER ETHIOPIA INFLUENCE	8
THE JEWS OF DJIBOUTI	9
THE JEWS OF SOMALIA	11
THE YIBIR CLAN	13
CONCLUSION.....	14
CHAPTER THREE	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE SOMALI PENINSULA.....	16
INTRODUCTION.....	16
CHRISTIAN ROOTS.....	17
SOCOTRA CHRISTIANITY.....	19
WESTERN MISSIONARY EFFORT	21
SOMALIS AND CROSSES	22
CONCLUSION.....	23
CHAPTER FOUR	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISLAM IN THE SOMALI PENINSULA.....	25
INTRODUCTION.....	25
THE ARRIVAL OF ISLAM.....	25
THE SPREAD OF ISLAM.....	27
MUSLIM CITY STATES	29
THE ARABIZATION OF THE SOMALIS.....	30
THE RADICALIZATION OF THE SOMALIS.....	31
CONCLUSION.....	32
CHAPTER FIVE	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN SOMALIA	33
INTRODUCTION.....	33

THE MISSIONARY WORK	33
THE REBIRTH OF THE PROTESTANT MISSION WORK.....	36
CONCLUSION.....	39

CHAPTER SIX

THE GREATEST MISSIONARIES TO THE SOMALIS: THE HEROES OF 1881-198140

INTRODUCTION.....	40
THE GREATEST MISSIONARIES	41
THE FRUITS OF THE GREATEST MISSIONARIES	43
<i>Somaliland</i>	43
<i>Somalia</i>	45
<i>Djibouti</i>	46
<i>Somali Region of Ethiopia</i>	47
<i>Somali Region of Kenya</i>	48
<i>Exclusive List</i>	48
<i>The SYL Flag</i>	48
SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES	49
CONCLUSION.....	49

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CASE FOR DENOMINATIONALLY BASED MINISTRIES AMONG SOMALIS51

INTRODUCTION.....	51
ABOUT DENOMINATIONS	52
THE REASONING.....	53
GENERIC VERSUS DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANS	53
CONCLUSION.....	55

CHAPTER EIGHT

AN OVERVIEW OF PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS56

INTRODUCTION.....	56
THE EARLY CHURCH	56
ISLAMIC PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS.....	58
CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IN SOMALIA	62
CHALLENGES PERSECUTION POSES TO THE CHURCH IN SOMALIA	63
CHURCH AND LOCALLY DEVELOPED DISTINCTIVE THEOLOGY OF PERSECUTION.....	64
THE IMMORTAL GOD	65
SATAN’S CHAMBER.....	66
WHEN WE ARE WEAK.....	66
CONCLUSION.....	67

CHAPTER NINE

THRIVING UNDER THE SWORD: HOW THE SOMALI CHURCH OVERCOMES THE CHALLENGES OF PERSECUTION68

INTRODUCTION.....	68
PERSECUTION IN CONTEXT	69
PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD	70
TERTULLIAN WAS RIGHT.....	71
OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF PERSECUTION.....	72
USING THE CHALLENGES TO GROW THE CHURCH	73
CONCLUSION.....	74

CHAPTER TEN

THE BLOOD OF CHRISTIANS IS SEED: THE FIFTH GOSPEL AND THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH75

INTRODUCTION.....	75
PERSECUTION – AN OVERVIEW.....	75
PERSECUTION – A BRIEF HISTORICAL SEQUENCE.....	78

THE BLOOD OF CHRISTIANS IS THE SEED OF THE CHURCH	81
CONCLUSION.....	82

CHAPTER ELEVEN

YOUR CLAN AND YOUR SHOES: HOW THE SOMALI CHURCH HARNESSSES A TIME-TESTED SOCIAL SAFETY NET	83
---	-----------

INTRODUCTION.....	83
CLAN PROVISIONS	83
THE POWER OF THE CLAN SYSTEM.....	84
IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT	85
THE CLAN IN POETRY AND IN PROVERBS	85
THE CLAN AND THE CHURCH	86
CONCLUSION.....	87

CHAPTER TWELVE

COURAGE IN OUR CONVICTION: CONVERSATION WITH PASTOR SHAAFI'I IBRAAHIM FAARAH	89
---	-----------

INTRODUCTION.....	89
THE INTERVIEW.....	91
CONCLUSION.....	94

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AHMED ALI HAILE IN POETRY	95
--	-----------

CONCLUSION.....	99
------------------------	-----------

BIBLIOGRAPHY	102
---------------------------	------------


ABOUT THE AUTHOR	110
-------------------------------	------------

INDEX.....	111
-------------------	------------

OTHER BOOKS BY DR. AWEIS A. ALI AS AN AUTHOR, EDITOR, OR TRANSLATOR	115
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Glossary

1. **Aliyah:** Modern meaning encompasses the idea of Jewish immigrants from other lands “going up” to Israel to settle in their ancestral homeland.
2. **Caliph:** The most senior Muslim civil, military and spiritual leader among Muslims. The Caliph is the head of the legislative (*shura*), executive and judicial as well.
3. **Creative access:** This phrase embodies the strategic approach in Christian ministry in which persecuted Christian’s minister and are ministered to.
4. **Crypto-Jews:** Jews who secretly practice Judaism for fear of persecution
5. **Dervish:** A member of the Sufi Muslim community who takes a vow of poverty to worship without any worldly distractions.
6. **Fatwa:** A binding Muslim religious decree.
7. **Hahamim:** Plural of *haham*. Wise and skillful Jewish man. An accomplished Torah scholar.
8. **Halakhic:** Of *Halakha*. The collection of Jewish religious laws as exegeted from the Torah and other oral and written sources like Talmudic and rabbinic laws.
9. **Hazzan:** A Jewish prayer leader of the congregation. A cantor trained in vocal arts.
10. **Jama’at:** Sufi assembly or congregation of Muslims under the leadership of a revered religious leader.
11. **Kosher:** Foods that comply with the Jewish dietary laws.
12. **Laws of Umar:** Rules imposed on religious minorities in Muslim lands. These laws specify the rights and restrictions of the non-Muslims under the banner of Islam.
13. **Madrassa:** A Muslim religious school
14. **Minhag:** An accepted body of Jewish tradition or traditions in Judaism.
15. **Mohel:** A religious specialist in the Jewish rite of circumcision.
16. **Murtad fitri:** An apostate of Muslim parentage.
17. **Murtad milli:** An apostate of non-Muslim parentage.
18. **Posek:** A Jewish legal scholar
19. **Qaaraan:** A Somali financial contribution system to help those in need in the clan.
20. **Sofer:** A trained Jewish scribe.
21. **Sufi:** A Muslim who practices a traditional form of Islamic mysticism.
22. **Tariqas:** Religious ways, paths, spiritual learning.
23. **Ulema:** Trained and credentialed Muslim clerics
24. **Waaq:** A Cushitic word for God
25. **Waaq Nation:** A Somali nationalist group that advocates for the revival of Waaqism and pre-Islamic Somali cultural and spiritual values.



Abbreviations and acronyms

1. **CNC:** Codka Nolosha Cusub
2. **FCM:** French Catholic Mission
3. **ICC:** International Christian Concern
4. **ISIS:** Islamic State Group
5. **JTA:** Jewish Telegraphic Agency
6. **MM:** Mennonite Mission
7. **RCC:** Roman Catholic Church
8. **SIM:** Sudan Interior Mission

CHAPTER ONE

A Brief History of Waaqism in the Somali Peninsula

Introduction

Waaqism is the worship of Waaq, a pre-Islamic deity primarily worshiped by the Cushitic people and their neighbors in the Horn of Africa. Waaq was a monotheistic God in the Horn of Africa who some Arabs borrowed and worshipped him as one of their pantheistic gods until the advent of Islam.⁸ The Oromos and Somalis, two distant cousins, were the most dominant worshippers of this monotheistic God, Waaq, whom the Oromos still call “Waaqa.” The etymology of the word, Waaq, is challenging to trace but the claim that it comes from the shrieking and raspy sound crows make is gaining currency. The crow was a sacred bird in the Horn of Africa and some Cushitic peoples there still admire or fear it in the Horn of Africa. The caw (the sound of crows) and the kraa (the sound of ravens) were seen as a message from Waaq making the crow Waaq’s warning messenger.

The Somali word for crow or raven is “*tuke*” and the word for pray is “*tuko*.” The sound crows make in Somali is vocalized as “*waaq, waaq*.” No wonder then that ancient Somalis who worshipped Waaq thought the crow was a divine messenger reminding them to pray to Waaq. Crows still fascinate Somalis who fear its perceived bad omen. Somalis traditionally equated the dark black color of the crow with power and prestige. For this reason, Somalis who first encountered Europeans thought they were lepers. Therefore, “*Saan’addaale*”, the white skin, was considered as a sign of ill health and death.

Almost all Somalis are Muslim today apart from a tiny growing Christian minority. Despite the success of Islam which subdued the term “Waaq” among Somalis, “we discover traces or residues of their indigenous religion and cosmology.”⁹ Somalis, like the majority of their fellow Africans, practiced an indigenous form of monotheism long before the introduction of the Abrahamic faiths to Africa.¹⁰ This monotheistic tradition in the African traditional religions is also affirmed by the celebrated Kenyan theologian, John Mbiti.¹¹ The Somali belief in Waaq acknowledged this deity as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent.¹²

Waaqism is neither “*áwaan*” as Islamists claim or “primitive” as Westerners think.¹³ While Somalis believed Waaq to be the Supreme Being, they also believed he had hosts of spirits

⁸ “*Thus We revealed it an Arabic code of law. Were you to follow their desires, after the knowledge that has come to you, you would have neither ally nor defender against Allah.*” Qur’an 13:37, Talal Itani translation. “Defender” is “waaqin” in Arabic “*واقٍ*”. See also Qur’an 40:21 where the verse threatens that no Waaq can protect people from Allah. Arabs traded with the Horn of Africa from time immemorial so it is not a surprise that not only goods were exchanged but also religious ideas and terminologies.

⁹ Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 138.

¹⁰ Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations*. 138

¹¹ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, 1970, 37

¹² For more information, see: J. S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*. London: SPCK, 1969, and, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, 1970.

¹³ “*Áwaan*” is a derogatory Arabic term for none-Abrahamic faiths presumed to be polytheistic.

who served him in different capacities. According to Sada Mire, “Waaq worship emphasizes peace and harmony within the group, as well as between nature and people.”¹⁴

Creator Waaq

According to legend, Waaq had created man before he finished creating the heavens and earth. Since the earth was not still suitable to sustain life, Waaq temporarily placed the man in a life sustaining coffinlike unit. Having provided the first man for all he needed to be safe, Waaq completed the creation of the heavens and the earth using fire and brimstone. These finishing touches took seven years. The man looked very bored when he was finally removed from the life-sustaining unit. Waaq created a woman for the man to keep him company and to make his life more exciting. The union of the man and the women resulted in thirty children. The man was embarrassed by this, so and hid some of his children from Waaq. Waaq was displeased with this maneuver so he turned the hidden children into animals.¹⁵

The dividing line between people and animals is a very thin one in Waaqism. People and animals are related in so many ways and some people and animals can shapeshift at will. This metamorphosis of a person into an animal or an animal into a person is a widely reported occurrence among Somalis. There are legends in the Somali culture of women delivering twins, a human child and an animal, which is usually a snake. There are also several Somali clan ancestors who were born between the union of a lioness, or a large lizard, and a man.

Animal-Human Progenies

Garmayre Hussein was the offspring of a lioness and a human father.¹⁶ The legend goes on to say that Garmayre’s father could not sire any children even after marrying several wives. A fortune teller told the father that the only way he could have offspring was to try his luck with a lioness. The father did this and Garmayre was born of that union. The legend continues to say that a lion would never attack the descendants of Garmayre since they are related by blood. The legend teaches that lions can tell the Garmayre’s descendants by their scent. Similarly, the Somali sub-clans who descended from human-snake ancestors do not kill snakes to this day since they are relatives. Many Somali clans believe that the spittle of these descendants cures snake bites.

The exact same legend is found in the Ali Gaaf sub-clan of the Abgaal clan. This time the man who could not sire children with human females is named Aadam Ali.¹⁷ The Baadi Adde clan also believes that one of their accessors, Fiqi Wardhere, was born as a snake but transformed into an adult man a few years later. The shrine of Fiqi Wardhere is located in Bulo Burde, central Somalia. Baadi Adde pilgrims and other devotees visit the shrine every year. Fiqi Wardhere sometimes appears to the devotees as a large snake.¹⁸ The Makane clan

¹⁴ S. Mire. *Wagar, Fertility and Phallic Stelae: Cushitic Sky-God Belief and the Site of Saint Aw-Barkhadle, Somaliland*. *Afr Archaeol Rev* 32. 2015, 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-015-9181-z> (accessed 13 March 2021).

¹⁵ “Waaq: Oromo and Somali Supreme God.” *African Mythology. The Gods and Spirits of Africa*. Nd. <https://www.godchecker.com/african-mythology/WAAQ/touches> (accessed 15 March 2021).

¹⁶ Garmayre Hussein is a member of the Reer Mataan sub-clan which belongs to the Abgaal clan. The more complete genealogy of Garmayre is: Reer Mataan, Reer Diinle, Reer Garmayre Hussein.

¹⁷ The genealogy of Aadam Ali is: Wa’aysle, Ali Gaaf, Aadam Ali.

¹⁸ The genealogy of Fiqi Wardhere is: Baadi Adde, Maamiye, Fiqi Wardhere.

of central Somalia also believes their ancestor was born of a lioness. According to the Makane tradition, lions do not bother the Makane livestock.

The ancestor of the Isaaq Daa'uud sub-clan of the Abgaal clan was born of the union between a large lizard and a human father.¹⁹ The legend teaches that a fortune teller told the man that he could not sire children with human females. There is a true story that happened in the early years of the 19th century. A poet from the Wa'aysle sub-clan attacked a man from the Isaaq Daa'uud sub-clan with a poem. The Wa'aysle poet said, "you crawled out of the reproductive organ of a lizard." The poet from the Isaaq Daa'uud shot back in a poem that shows he was skeptical of the possibility of a lizard-human progeny, "There is a lizard under that bush; now show us if you can have a baby with it."²⁰ There are many degrading Wa'aysle poems against the Isaaq Daa'uud's alleged lizard-human ancestry.

Other Somali clans with snake ancestry include: the Reer Dini sub clan of the Marehan, the Bartire, and the Reer Aw Hassan of the Sheekhaal clan. One of the members of the Shanta Saleebaan sub clan of the Majerten clan is also said to be the offspring of a *genie* woman. Interestingly enough, Abdi'asis Muse Magan (b. 1956) of the Marehan clan, of the Wagardhac sub clan, was allegedly born as a twin. However, his twin sibling was not human but a snake.²¹

Shapeshifting

The most prominent Somali freedom fighter and a Muslim scholar, Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan (7 April 1856 - 21 December 1920),²² organized powerful armed dervishes to expel the British colonizers from Somaliland. Sayid, without a doubt, is the most prolific poet in the Somali people's history. However, while Sayid was still a young man and not particularly gifted to compose any poetry to speak of, he experienced an incident that changed his life and the course of history in the Somali peninsula and beyond.

¹⁹ The full genealogy is: Wacbuudhan, Daa'uud, Isaaq Daa'uud.

²⁰ The poem says in Somali: "*Qandhuur mas aad ka qulqusheen.*" "*Qabxadkay ku hoos jirtaa, haddaan qabsee qof nool ka keen.*"

²¹ Abdirahman Yusuf Burhan, Interview. 04 April 2011. By Aweis A. Ali. Telephone interview.

²² "Sayid", also spelt as *Sayyid*, Saiyed, Seyit, Seyd, Syed, Sayed, Sayyed, Saiyid, Seyed and Seyyed, is from the Arabic: سيد pronounced as ['sæj.jɪd]. The term is earned honorific name which means Master, Lord, or Chief.

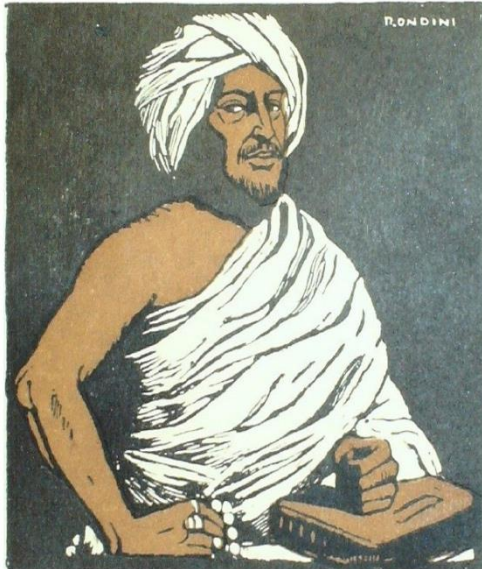


Illustration of Mohamed Abdullah Hassan by da Rondini, from cover of *Il Mullah Del Paese Dei Somali* by Douglas Jardine. Source: Wikipedia

The legend states that the young Sayid saw two snakes fighting to the death by a roadside; he promptly separated the snakes with a stick and gave some water to the vanquished one since the stronger one had already slithered away to safety. A few months later Sayid met a beautiful woman who asked him if he recognized her; Sayid replied he did not. The woman told him she was the overpowered and thirsty snake he saved that fateful day. The legend continues to say that the woman gave Sayid a secret book that helped him become a warrior and the most eloquent Somali poet ever. It was then that Sayid began reciting powerful poetry and organizing an army of dervishes that made life difficult for the British colonizers and their local sympathizers.

Waaq and His Angels

Somalis worshipped Waaq as the Supreme Creator until they were completely Islamized in the first part of the 16th century.²³ Somalis prayed to this Creator for rain during droughts and for children (especially sons) when one struggled with infertility. Somalis still describe it as “*barwaaqo*” when rains rejuvenate the dry land and both people and animals have plenty of food and water. “*Barwaaqo*” means Waaq’s dwelling place, an abode of plenty, where there is no lacking. Two Somali proverbs describe the significance of children for Somalis even to this day. The first one is: children are the shield against death. The second one is: a person who left behind children did not die; he is only hiding.”²⁴

In Waaqism, Waaq creates people to serve and worship him, a concept that is similar to that of the Abrahamic faiths. The dwelling place of Waaq is in the heavens which is the reason some describe Waaq as a Sky God. Waaq sends forth benevolent spirit mediators known as “*ayaan*” as his envoys to his creatures. “*Ayaan*,” a popular name for Somali girls, also means good luck. *Ayaanleh*, an admired traditional Somali name for boys means “the lucky one” or “strengthened with *ayaan*,” the benevolent spirits from Waaq. “*Ayaan*” in this context is therefore akin to “angels” in the Abrahamic faiths. Another spirit in Waaqism is “*Xuur or Huur*” who serves as an angel of death.²⁵ This Waaqism angel of death resembles the ancient Egyptian deity of *Horus*. *Horus*, a falcon headed man, was a national tutelary deity who exercised authority in the entire country of ancient Egypt. The physical and name similarities of *Huur* and *Horus* are significant.

“*Nidar*” is another spirit in Waaqism who serves as the angel of divine retribution. The “*nidar*” spirit is always on the side of the oppressed and strikes the exploiter with an unmistakable vengeance. The “*nidar*” spirit is alive and well among Somali Muslims today.

²³ Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 15

²⁴ First Somali proverb is, “*caruurtu waa gaashaanka geerida*.” The second one is, “*nin wax dhalay ma dhimane wuu dhuuntay*.”

²⁵ *Xuur or Huur*, the messenger of death and destruction appeared in the form of a large bird

The threat, “*nidar baa ku heli,*” *nidar* will find you, is often hurled at oppressors.²⁶ Anyone who knows how important poetry is to the Somalis would not be surprised that there is a spirit that facilitates the composition, recitation, and the understanding of poetry. Richard Burton once described the Somalis as “a nation of bards.”²⁷ This angel of poetry and traditional dance is called *hubaal*, *hoobal*, or *hoyaal*, depending on the region in the Somali peninsula. Somali Muslims still venerate *hubaal* and many poems are started with his name or used as a refrain.

Following age-old work song is sung in regions that include Somaliland when women are making mats:

*You this mat, unfit for the poor
By Waaq, not suitable for the market
Not to be bargained by thirty (rupees)
Not to be questioned ‘who made you?’
And hooyalaayow, hooyee (refrain)
Hoyalley.*²⁸

Somalis worshipped Waaq and gathered at *xeero*, a regular place of worship. *Xeero* was usually a round house with a low ceiling. Prominent rituals were held at *taallo*, a round house of worship with very high ceiling. *Taallo* literally means a “tower.” Worship services and other rituals were led by a *wadaad*, one of the dedicated priests of the mighty Waaq.²⁹ The ruins of these *taallo* are plentiful primarily in Somaliland but are also seen in southern Somalia. In Waaqism, the world is divided into two camps. The camp where Waaq is worshipped is called, *barwaaqo*, the dwelling place of Waaq. *Barwaaqo* also means, prosperity or wholeness. The camp where Waaq is not worshipped is called *Cidla Waaqla* which means desolate and without Waaq.

Waaqism in the Horn of Africa

While spelling of “Waaq” is slightly different among some people groups in the Horn of Africa, their words for Waaq are unmissably close: The Arbore, Waka; the Burji, Wak; the Bayso, Waa or Waah; the Dahalo, Waaka; the Dasenech, Waaq; the Elmolo, Waak; the Hadiya, Waa’a; the Konso, Waka; the Oromo, Waaqa, Waqaayo, or Waqaa; the Rendille, Wakh; the Somali, Waaq.

Unlike the Oromo and some other Cushitic people groups, the Somalis do not longer use the word “Waaq” for the Abrahamic God they worship. However, so many Somali names, usually ancestral clan names and places, use “Waaq” as a proper name or simply as suffix or prefix. Such clan and sub-clan names include: Jid-Waaq (the path of Waaq), Tagaal-Waaq (followers of Waaq), Bidde-Waaq (servants of Waaq), Bar-Waaq (the dwelling place of

²⁶ For more about Waaq in ancient Somalia, please watch: ILM Flim, “Ancient Somali History Before Islam: From Waaq to Islam.” Youtube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ft6un7AqTWI> (accessed 14 March 2021).

²⁷ Burton, Richard, *First Footsteps in Somalia*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1854, 91.

²⁸ Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 142.

The song in Somali says, “*Cawskanow sabool diidow, Waaq aan suuqa lagu dhigin oon, sodon lagugu baayicin oon, yaa sameeyay lagu odhanney, ey hooyalaayow, hooyey, ey hooyalaayow, hooyey, hoyalley.*”

²⁹ Wadaads were traditionally considered as master astrologists, fortune-tellers, mind-readers, spiritual healers, and ritualists. Wadaads still enjoy tremendous respect among Somalis.

Waaq), Waaq-bare (those who teach about Waaq), Gallad-Waaq (the blessing of Waaq), Diinti-Waaq (the religion of Waaq). These clan names belong to the 41 most well-known names which still retain the name, “Waaq.”³⁰ Names of places include: Ceelwaaq (the water well of Waaq), and Caabudwaaq (worship Waaq).

The use of the term “Waaq” in everyday language is more common today in southern Somalia. Common southern expressions include, “*Waligay iyo Waaqaay ma arag, mana maqlin*” (never before and by my God’s name have I ever seen or heard it.” “*Waaqay oon wiilkay waayo*” (by my God’s name and the loss of my son.”³¹

The Somali word for animal sacrifice is *Waaqdhaa’in* (sacrificing for Waaq). *Waaqal* which is a derivative of *waaq-qal* means a lamb sacrifice. The word “Waaq” is also found in everyday Somali terms like *garwaaqsi* (to present grievances for redress).

Waaqism, the pre-Islamic traditional religion of the Somalis, has been largely replaced by Islam as of 500 years ago.³² However, studying this Somali traditional religion is facilitated by two important factors:

1. Powerful remnants of Waaqism among Somalis
2. The existence of less Islamized “Somali” clans in northern Kenya

The Gabbra, the Rendille, and the Sakuye of northern Kenya separated from the Somalis “by the Oromo expansion around 1540” before most Somalis converted to Islam.³³ The Gabbra, the Rendille, and the Sakuye peoples largely practice Waaqism. The Garre is another Somali clan has not been fully Islamized, especially those in northern Kenya. In fact, many members of the Gabbra, the Rendille, and the Sakuye are offshoots of the Garre clan. Ben I. Aram postulates that since they were “separated from the rest of the Somalis by the Borana section of the Oromo from 1550 until the 19th century, these three ethnic groups did not cross the line into full conversion to Islam.”³⁴ A close scrutiny of the religious beliefs of the Gabbra, the Rendille, and the Sakuye sheds light on the pre-Islamic traditional religion of the Somalis. It is therefore very much possible to reconstruct the Somali Waaqism by studying the beliefs and practices of these three offshoot Somali clans.

The Gabbra, the Rendille, and the Sakuye view their traditional religion, not as a pagan faith, but as redemptive and equal in value to the Abrahamic faiths.³⁵ It is safe to assume that all the

³⁰ These 41 sub-clans are: Aar-Waaq, Amarti-Waaq, At-Waaq, Bar-Waaq, Bidde-Waaq, Caabud-Waaq, Ciq-Waaq, Dal-Waaq, Diinti-Waaq, Guddoon-Waaq, Gumar-Waaq, Guud-Waaq, Ibraahim-Waaq, Jid-Waaq, Lixda-Waaqle, Magan-Waaq, Mahad-Waaq, Miyir-Waaq, Naxariis-Waaq, Siin-Waaq, Si-Waaq-Roon, Tagaal-Waaq, Tala-Waaq, Tashiil-Waaq, Waaq-Bari, Waaq-Biyo, Waaq-Dhaacin, Waaq-Dheew, Waaq-Doorre, Waaq-Jire, Waaq-Le, Waaq-Maade, Waaq-Mahadle, Waaq-Mahadshe, Waaq-Nuur-Qabe, Waaq-Roone, Waaq-Sheen, War-Waaq, War-Waaq-Jecle, War-Waaq-Same, Yuusuf-Waaq. For more information, please see: Kaasho Maanka, “Waa Kuma Waaq?” Youtube.com (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S30gLIJmxI8>, (accessed 14 March 2021).

³¹ These two examples were adapted from: Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 140

³² Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 15.

³³ Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey, 15.

³⁴ Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey, 16.

³⁵ G. Schlee, *Identities on the move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya*. Nairobi, Kenya: Gideon S. Were Press, 1994, 3,134

Judeo-Christian elements found in the Waaqism of these clans were acquired via Islam.³⁶ Similarly, it cannot be ruled out that these Abrahamic beliefs and practices either predate the Abrahamic faiths or emerged locally independent of any external contribution. The Gabbra, the Rendille, the Sakuye, and the Garre beliefs and practices which have Abrahamic faith parallels include: the Sunday rest for camels, ritual use of animal blood, the Rendille Great Exodus narrative which took place 500 years ago, the Gabbra legend that corresponds to the Solomon's astute judgment (1Kings 3:16-27), and the use of cruciform to brand cattle and camels.³⁷

Conclusion

Waaqism appears alive and well in the Somali peninsula despite the dominance of Islam in this region. Islam is many times just a thin veneer concealing a resilient and sometimes resurgent Waaqism that refuses to die.³⁸ Traditional religious beliefs hardly completely die. However, an obvious success of Islam is that it had driven Waaqism underground. This suppressed status of Waaqism among Somalis might be a blessing in disguise for this once powerful belief system. Now Waaqism is gathering momentum shielded from the gaze of the often-intolerant guardians of Islam, the radical *ulema* and their sympathizers.³⁹

Close cousins of the Somalis including Gabbra, the Rendille, and the Sakuye still practice Waaqism in varying degrees. Some Oromos, a distant cousin of the Somalis, actively practice Waaqism today. It is therefore safe to assume that the Somali attempt of reclaiming Waaqism as their heritage will succeed sooner or later. The name "Waaq" still permeates in the Somali language and culture so its rehabilitation as an integral part of the Somali heritage would not be too hard. Many Somali proponents of the *Waaq Nation* movement have no intention of abandoning Islam for Waaqism; they just want their pre-Islamic faith of Waaqism to be recognized for its contribution to the Somali culture.

If Waaqism can survive so well among Somalis, the most Islamized Cushitic people group, it appears to have a bright future among the less Islamized groups like the Oromo, Gabbra, the Rendille, and the Sakuye. A more recent lifeline for Waaqism in the Somali peninsula is radical Islam. Many Somali Muslims are averse to the endless violence perpetrated in the name of Islam. For these disappointed Somalis, peaceful Waaqism is an attractive alternative to the bloodletting committed in the name of Islam. There is evidence that some Somalis embrace Waaqism as a form of protest against Islamic fundamentalism, not because they see it as a viable alternative to Islam.

³⁶ G. Schlee, *Identities on the move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya*. Nairobi, Kenya: Gideon S. Were Press, 1994, 92

³⁷ G. Schlee, *Identities on the move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya*. 3, 55, 65, 92, 193, 255.

³⁸ The best organized Somali attempt to acknowledge their Waaqism heritage is the *Waaq Nation* movement. This indigenous movement is spearheaded by Somalis in the diaspora.

³⁹ The *ulema* are the recognized Islamic scholars known for their knowledge of the Islamic faith and its propagation.

CHAPTER TWO

A Brief History of Judaism in the Somali Peninsula

Introduction

While Christianity in the Somali peninsula was in the past marginally examined, Judaism in this world area received far less attention. This negligence is surprising given the recorded history of Jews peacefully living among Somalis for centuries. Some of the Jewry in question were open about their faith, while others were crypto-Jews who practiced their faith in covert ways for fear of persecution. Many of the Jews who lived or simply traversed in the Somali peninsula as merchants and religious service providers, like circumcision and kosher slaughter of animals, were Adenite and Yemenite Jews. Some other Jews came from the Iberian Peninsula or even directly from modern-day Israel. The purpose of this chapter is to document the often-ignored deep roots of Judaism in the Somali peninsula.

Ethiopian Judaism entered the Somali peninsula through Somaliland while southern Arabia Judaism entered the peninsula primarily through southern Somalia and also through Somaliland albeit with limited arrivals. While there is no strong evidence of any Somali clans embracing Judaism during the pre-Islamic era, the conversion of individuals and families cannot be ruled out. The Hebrew heritage of the marginalized Somali clans including the Yibir is an ancient one which goes back to the Beta-Israel, Ethiopian Jews. Somalis were, at least nominally, entirely Islamized by the beginning of the 16th century.⁴⁰ Islam remained very shallow in the interiors of the Somali peninsula until the 1800s.⁴¹ Since 1500, no large scale of indigenous Somalis practicing a religion other than Islam has been reported.

The Greater Ethiopia Influence

One of the five Somali inhabited regions in the Somali peninsula is part of modern-day Ethiopia. While the population of this Somali region is a negligible 6,000,000 people compared to the overall Ethiopian population of 110,000,000, the landmass of this Somali region is about 1/3rd of the total Ethiopian landmass. It should be noted however, under its old name of Abyssinia, Ethiopia had ruled much of modern-day Somaliland, including sections of the semi-autonomous region of Puntland.⁴² Zeila town in Somaliland was ruled by the Axumite Kingdom as early as the 900s before losing the strategic town to local Muslims and their Arab co-religionists. The Axumite Kingdom reconquered Zeila in the early 15th century.⁴³ The Ethiopian rule in most of Somaliland seems to have concluded by the 13th century.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 141.

⁴¹ Abdi Mohamed Kusow, *The Genesis of the Somali Civil War: A New Perspective*. In *Proceedings of the Sixth Michigan State University Conference on Northeast Africa*. Edited by John Hinnant & B. Fine. East Lansing, MI, USA: (Michigan State University, 1992), 189.

⁴² Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History*. 117.

⁴³ David Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1974), 71

⁴⁴ Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

Ethiopia, with its famous indigenous Jewish community, Beta-Israel,⁴⁵ took with it its brand of Orthodox Christianity and elements of Judaism wherever it ruled, including Somaliland.⁴⁶ Ethiopia, which was traditionally ruled by the northern Orthodox clans of the Amhara and the Tigray, was also once ruled with an iron fist by Queen Gudit, who was an Ethiopian Jew.⁴⁷ The Jewish faith of the Queen is affirmed by ancient Ge'ez manuscripts.⁴⁸ This Damot Kingdom, which laid the southwest of Axumite Kingdom, targeted the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with a vengeance.⁴⁹ The Queen eventually ransacked Axum in 979.⁵⁰ While the exact seat of the Damot Kingdom may be disputed, its reach and rule are not. For example, Paul Balisky is of the opinion that the seat of the Damot Kingdom was near the Gibe River Valley, currently inhabited by the Gurage and the Oromo people groups.⁵¹

It is not surprising that the Somali peninsula, especially areas still ruled or once ruled by Ethiopia, is littered with Jewish archeological evidence. The Dhubato village in the Hargeisa region, Somaliland, has ancient cemeteries embossed with the Star of David.⁵² Dire Dawa, part of the Somali peninsula in Ethiopia, also has a long history of a thriving Jewish community of Adenite and Yemenite extraction.⁵³ Some of the Jews reportedly hailed from India and Greece. However, their ancestry could still have been Adenite or Yemenite. With its metal door embossed with the Star of David, one of the city's synagogues now operates as a cafeteria. This ex-synagogue is located in the Dire Dawa neighborhood of Dechatu.

The Jews of Djibouti

The Jews of Djibouti belong to the influential Adenite and Yemenite Jewish diaspora, just like the Jewish communities in the rest of the Somali peninsula and Eritrea. While Jews initially settled in Obock, a small port town in the northern part of the Gulf of Tadjoura, they later moved to Djibouti City after the British handed the Gulf of Tadjoura over to the French in 1884.⁵⁴

The first documented significant Jewish presence in Djibouti was in the 1800s, which coincides with the French development of Djibouti's port city in the latter years of the 19th

⁴⁵ The Ethiopian Jewish community calls itself as Beta-Israel. Some outsiders call them Falasha, which is a derogatory term.

⁴⁶ Sada Mire, *Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire*. Afr Archaeol Rev 32, 111–136, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-015-9184-9> (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁴⁷ J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*. (London: Oxford University Press 1952), 52

⁴⁸ Sergew Hable Selassie. *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*. Addis Abeba. (Haile Selassie I University, 1972), 225-232.

⁴⁹ Belaynesh Michael, "The decline of Aksumite Empire and the Rise of Warrior Queen Yodit (□□□) The Fire." Addis Herald, 24 July 2019.

<https://www.addis Herald.com/the-decline-of-aksumite-empire-and-the-rise-of-warrior-queen-yodit-%E1%8A%A5%E1%88%B3%E1%89%B6-the-fire/> (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁵⁰ Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia*. In *Oxford Studies in African Affairs*. General Editors John D. Hargreaves and George Shepperson. Oxford. (Clarendon Press, 1972), 40-43.

⁵¹ Paul E. Balisky, *Wolaitta Evangelists: A Study of Religious Innovations in Southern Ethiopia, 1937-1975*. PhD. Thesis, Scotland. (University of Aberdeen, 1997), 8-9.

⁵² Sada Mire, *Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland*, 124.

⁵³ Oxford African American Studies Center. "Isaac, Ephraim." 31 May 2013.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.38569> (accessed 11 March 2021).

⁵⁴ Alain Rouaud, "Pour une histoire des Arabes de Djibouti, 1896-1977". *Cahiers d'études africaines*. 1997, 37: 319–334.

century. Djibouti was at this time known as the *Côte Française des Somalis*.⁵⁵ The Jewish community played a significant role in the development of Djibouti City. These professional Jews immigrated from Aden. However, it is unknown whether these Jews were indeed from the Adenite community or were Baladi (from the north) who simply passed through Aden. Both communities share *minhag*.⁵⁶

There were 50 Jewish families in Djibouti in 1901 and 111 in 1921.⁵⁷ Many of the Jews were traders, craftsmen, and jewelers. The several synagogues they frequented included the grand synagogue in the heart of the city in Rue de Rome. The Jews of Djibouti were known as expert *Hahamim*,⁵⁸ they were renowned for their superior *halakhic* knowledge.⁵⁹ The most prominent of the last few Rabbis of Djibouti was the prominent Haham Yoseph Moshe, who also ministered to the Jews of Asmara and Addis Ababa as a skilled *mohel* performing Jewish rituals, including circumcisions.⁶⁰

As the number of Jews in Djibouti dwindled in the 20th century, two phenomena were evident: increased intermarriage between the Jews and natives and the latter's conversion to Judaism. Both anomalies vanished from 1948 -1950 when the majority of the Jews made *aliyah* to Israel. Operation Magic Carpet, which the new State of Israel organized in 1949, evacuated 45,000 Yemenite Jews to Israel. This group included 200 Jews from Djibouti who were also threatened by political unrest. A member of the Jews of Djibouti, Moshe Sion, later recalled, "a plane came from Aden, and we all got on and flew to Israel."⁶¹ While in Djibouti, Moshe's father ministered as a *mohel*, *hazzan*, *posek*, and *sofer*.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency report nonchalantly states, "All but three Jews of the Jewish community in French Somaliland [Djibouti] have emigrated to Israel, ... according to information received here by the organization department of the World Jewish Congress."⁶² The report adds, "A letter written by one of the three Jews remaining in French Somaliland to Dr. I. Schwarzbart, director of the W.J.C. organization department, reveals that the three have stayed in Djibouti in order to liquidate the affairs of their co-religionists after all other

⁵⁵ "French Coast of the Somalis" Somali: *Dhulka Soomaaliyeed ee Faransiiska*. France later renamed this territory the French Somaliland.

⁵⁶ Hebrew: מנהג "custom", pl. מנהגים, is an accepted Jewish tradition or group of traditions.

⁵⁷ Gabriel Angoulvant and Sylvain Vignéras, *Djibouti, Mer Rouge, Abyssinie*. Paris. 1902, 415.

⁵⁸ Hahamim, pl of Hakham is a term in Judaism, meaning a sage or skillful, wise man; it is often used for gifted Torah scholars.

⁵⁹ *Halakha* is the collective body of Jewish religious laws, practices, and piety.

⁶⁰ ZivotofskyAri and Ari Greenspan, "No Vital Signs In Djibouti" (PDF). *Mishpacha*. 391: 56–62. January 2012.

<http://halachicadventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/djibouti-mishpacha.pdf> (accessed 07 March 2021).

⁶¹ Zivotofsky; Ari Greenspan. "Out Of Africa." *Jewish Action*, 2011. https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/travel/out_of_africa/ (accessed 07 March 2021)

⁶² Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Only Three Jews Remain in Somaliland; All Other Members of Community Went to Israel." 15 August 1949.

<https://www.jta.org/1949/08/15/archive/only-three-jews-remain-in-somaliland-all-other-members-of-community-went-to-israel> (accessed 07 March 2021).

members of the community left for Israel.”⁶³ The Jews living in Djibouti today are expatriates with Jewish roots as well as “just a few isolated, unaffiliated Jews.”⁶⁴

The Jews of Somalia

There are records which indicate that 100-200 Jews moved to Somalia as traders around 1900.⁶⁵ Some of these entrepreneurial Jews may have settled the port town of Berbera “where Arab, Indian and Jewish trading communities once lived.”⁶⁶ Other Somali coastal towns of Yemenite Jewish presence included Zeila, Mogadishu, and Brava. Hussein A. Bulhan asserts that “there are indications that Jewish merchants traded in seaports along the Red Sea and established pockets of small communities wherever commerce and peace prevailed.”⁶⁷ Oral tradition has it that the “last Jewish family left Berbera in 1951 and headed for Djibouti.”⁶⁸ A debilitated synagogue still defies anti-Semitism in Berbera.⁶⁹ The Jewish neighborhood of Berbera still retains its name, *Sakatul Yuhuud*.⁷⁰ Apparently, Somalia’s current hateful anti-Semitism is a new phenomenon that came to Somalia with the mother of radical Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 1970s.

A report by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) published in 1949 states, “...there are no Jews left in Italian and British Somaliland, according to information received here by the organization department of the World Jewish Congress.”⁷¹ Italian Somali Somaliland and British Somaliland united in 1960 to form the Republic of Somalia. Despite the JTA’s pessimistic view of the existence of Somalia Jewry post-1949, there is indisputable evidence that both traditional (publicly known) and crypto-Jews resided in Somalia well after 1949. Up until the 19th century, “Somalia was home to a diverse trading network, which extended from New York to Yemen to Somalia and continued all the way to Indonesia.”⁷² However, a

⁶³ Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Only Three Jews Remain in Somaliland; All Other Members of Community Went to Israel.” 15 August 1949.

<https://www.jta.org/1949/08/15/archive/only-three-jews-remain-in-somaliland-all-other-members-of-community-went-to-israel> (accessed 07 March 2021).

⁶⁴ Zivotofsky, Ari; Greenspan, Ari, “No Vital Signs In Djibouti.” *Mishpacha*. January 2012, 391: 56–62.

<http://halachicadventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/djibouti-mishpacha.pdf> (accessed 07 March 2021).

⁶⁵ Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, *The Last Two Jews of Mogadishu: Living Under Al Shabaab’s Fire*. New Rochelle, NY. (MultiEducator, 2017), 17.

⁶⁶ “In Pictures: Berbera Builds Future from Crumbling Past.” BBC, 04 June 2015
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32978845> (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁶⁷ Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. Bethesda, Maryland. (Tayosan International Publishing, 2013), 159.

⁶⁸ “The Berbera Synagogue and the Jewish Presence in Somalia.” *Somalipost*, 11 February 2018.
<https://www.somalipost.com/threads/the-berbera-synagogue-and-the-jewish-presence-in-somalia.37613/> (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁶⁹ “The Berbera Synagogue and the Jewish Presence in Somalia.” *Somalipost*, 11 February 2018.
<https://www.somalipost.com/threads/the-berbera-synagogue-and-the-jewish-presence-in-somalia.37613/> (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁷⁰ Abdirahman M. Diriye, “Jews’ Historic Presence in Somaliland.” *The Times of Israel*. 26 April 2019
<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/jews-historic-presence-in-somaliland/> (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁷¹ Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Only Three Jews Remain in Somaliland; All Other Members of Community Went to Israel.” 15 August 1949.
<https://www.jta.org/1949/08/15/archive/only-three-jews-remain-in-somaliland-all-other-members-of-community-went-to-israel> (accessed 07 March 2021).

⁷² Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, “Ilhan Omar Controversy: Where Does She Get Her Views?” *Clarion Project*, 18 November 2018.

significant Somalia Jewish community resided in Somalia until shortly before Somalia's independence in 1960. Interestingly enough, Israel was the first country to recognize Somalia's independence from Great Britain and Italy. Somalia did not return that favor but instead dispossessed and deported Jews from Somalia in 1967 in response to the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War.⁷³

While people know about the traditional (publicly known) Jewry in Somalia, little is known of the crypto-Jews who appear like any other Somali Muslim but practice their faith discreetly. Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin corresponded with two crypto-Jews of Yemenite descent in Mogadishu from 2007-2010. Kobrin exchanged more than 300 emails with the mom, Ashira Haybi, and her adult son, Rami. Rami's dad, Shamul, was killed in the civil war that toppled the Somali government in 1991. This Jewish family has roots in Somalia that exceed a century. Rami's dad traces his ancestry to Aden, and his mom to Ta'iz, both in Yemen. Ashira was a successful textile businesswoman before the civil war. "She kept a kosher home, was Shabbat observant and raised Rami to continue the tradition. They fought vigorously to preserve their Judaism under extreme duress."⁷⁴ Kobrin received the last email in 2010 and has no idea what happened to the mother and her son.

The most challenging group of the Somalia Jews to document is the crypto-Jews, most of whom are of Adenite or Yemenite origin. These are Jews who practice Judaism discreetly but outwardly appear to be practicing Muslims. A prominent wealthy business family from Mogadishu is often rumored to be "Yemeni Jews," but the family denies this by claiming to be Ashraaf, descendants of Prophet Muhammad. The home of the late patriarch of this family was looted in 1991 after the collapse of Somalia's central government. According to multiple sources, the looted goods, including "Jewish scriptures and other religious books hidden away in a secret basement."⁷⁵ According to Nancy Kobrin, it "was common for Yemenite Jews for families to own their own Torah scroll. Rami talked about how they had such an old Torah that they could no longer read the letters but they knew it was sacrilegious to write or fill in the faded inked letters."⁷⁶ This "crypto-Jewish" family cannot be named in this chapter for their own safety.

https://www.academia.edu/37798893/Ilhan_Omar_Controversy_Where_Does_She_Get_Her_VIEWS_Clarion_Project (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁷³ Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, "Ilhan Omar Controversy: Where Does She Get Her Views?" Clarion Project, 18 November 2018.

https://www.academia.edu/37798893/Ilhan_Omar_Controversy_Where_Does_She_Get_Her_VIEWS_Clarion_Project (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁷⁴ Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, "What? There Were Jews in Somalia?!" The Jerusalem Post, 28 January 2018.

<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/what-there-were-jews-in-somalia-540076> (accessed 08 March 2021).

⁷⁵ Abdul Mohamed, phone conversation with the author, 08 March 2021.

⁷⁶ Nancy Kobrin, "Wonderful Article." Message to Aweis A. Ali. 12 March 2021. Email.

The Yibir Clan

The Yibir, the most loathed among the despised Somali minority clans, is probably of an Ethiopian Jewish heritage.⁷⁷ The Yibir clan's ancestral home appears to be either Harar or Jigjiga.⁷⁸ Both cities are located in eastern Ethiopia and are in close proximity. Xantaale, the wife of a powerful Yibir King, Bu'ur Ba'ayr, who ruled parts of northern Somalia around the 12th century, is buried in Harar. However, some think her actual resting place might be in Jigjiga. Xantaale's alleged tomb in Harar attracts a steady stream of Yibir pilgrims.⁷⁹ The Yibir are known as ritual specialists with mighty magical powers, thus the fear and suspicion most Somalis harbor against them.⁸⁰ It is noteworthy that the Iibire clan of the Rendille in North-East Kenya, close cousins of the Somalis, are also ritual specialists with alleged powerful curses. However, the Iibire are honored among the Rendille and are not thus despised. "Iibire" and "Yibir" belong to the same etymological root. In fact, F.L. James, a 19th-century British explorer who visited Somaliland, spelled "Yibir" as "Ebir" in his book, *The Unknown Horn of Africa*.⁸¹

King Bu'ur Ba'ayr, who also served as the High Priest, was eventually dethroned by a Somali Muslim preacher, Sheikh Aw-Barkhadle, also known as Sheikh Yusuf Ahmad Kawneyn. Sheikh Aw-Barkhadle was a prominent Somali Muslim scholar,⁸² whose native pedigree has been confirmed by competent authorities, including H. Altenmüller,⁸³ Richard Bulliet,⁸⁴ and the Royal Geographical Society.⁸⁵ The power encounter between the two men is immortalized in the Somali psyche.⁸⁶ The King and his subjects practiced at the time a pre-Islamic religion.⁸⁷ The Yibir seem to have practiced a syncretic form of Judaism and traditional religion. The Yibir to this day harbor persistent resentment against Islam.⁸⁸ The Yibir today are between a rock and a hard place. The fact that fellow Somalis marginalize them because of their supposed clan inferiority is bad enough. However, their Hebraic

⁷⁷ "Yibir" is a Somali corruption of "Hebrew."

⁷⁸ Ben I. Aram, "Somalia's Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey." *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 18-19.

⁷⁹ I. M. Lewis. *Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar, and Saho*. Ethnographic Survey of Africa, North-Eastern Africa. Part I. ed. D. Ford. London: (International African Institute, 1969), 54-55.

⁸⁰ G. Schlee. *Identities on the Move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya*. Nairobi, Kenya: (Gideon S. Were Press, 1994), 10-11, 241-242.

⁸¹ F.L. James. *The Unknown Horn of Africa*. (London: G. Philip & Son. 1888), 70.

⁸² I. M. Lewis, *Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-based Society*. (Red Sea Press. 1998), 89.

⁸³ H. Altenmüller, J. O., Hunwick, R.S. O'Fahey, and B. Spuler. *The Writings of the Muslim Peoples of Northeastern Africa*, Part 1, Volume 13. Leiden [u.a.]: (Brill, 2003), 174.

⁸⁴ Richard Bulliet, *History of the World to 1500 CE* (Session 22). Tropical Africa and Asia. Youtube.com. 23 November 2010. Retrieved 23 September 2013.

⁸⁵ Royal Geographical Society. "The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society." Volume 19, 1849, 61.

⁸⁶ Sada Mire, Wagar, Fertility and Phallic Stelae: Cushitic Sky-God Belief and the Site of Saint Aw-Barkhadle, Somaliland. 22 March 2015, 103.

file:///Users/nomadmac/Downloads/Wagar_Fertility_and_Phhallic_Stelae_Cushitic_Sky-Go.pdf (accessed 21 January 2021).

⁸⁷ The King-High Priest was later given the Muslim name, Mohamed Hanif after his death by the Yibir, who later converted to Islam. The name change was probably an attempt by the Yibir to remove their clan from the stigma of the anti-Islam Jewish King.

⁸⁸ Ben I. Aram, "Somalia's Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey." *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 19.

heritage is also used against them by some Somali Muslims.⁸⁹ Some members of the Yibir clan coined various names for their clan to get rid of the name Yibir because of its Hebrew origin. The alternative names minted include “Anaas.” No Somali would call a Yibir “Anaas.” The Yibir to this day collect payments, known as “samanyo” from dominant clans during weddings or when a baby boy is born.⁹⁰ If they are denied the age-old payment, they supposedly use their magical powers to harm those who denied them the traditional payment.⁹¹

During the power encounter between the Muslim preacher and the King-High Priest, Bu’ur Ba’ayr, the King went through a mountain multiple times until Kawneyn begged Allah to imprison the King in the mountain. In one version of the legend, the King’s sons later demanded from Kawneyn the blood money of their murdered dad. Kawneyn “asked them whether they wanted an immediate payment or preferred to be paid in the future for every newborn boy and for every marriage; they opted for the second, and this is the explanation for the “samanyo” paid by the Somalis to the Yibir.”⁹²

The New York Times published in 2000 a widely circulated article titled, “Djibouti Journal; Somalia’s ‘Hebrews’ See a Better Day.”⁹³ The author eloquently puts the challenges the Hebraic Yibir clan faces:

The sultan of the Jews in Somalia is a handsome, silver-haired man named Ahmed Jama Hersi who does not know the first thing about Judaism. He is a Muslim, as were his ancestors back at least 800 years. But he and his people are treated badly, cursed as descendants of Israelites. The name of the tribe is Yibir, or Hebrew.⁹⁴

While the Yibir clan’s Jewish origin is a widely accepted view among Somalis, there are few other marginalized Somali clans with alleged Jewish ancestry. The Tumaal, for example, is another ostracized Somali clan “thought to have a Hebrew origin.”⁹⁵ The Tumaal are traditionally known as a talented blacksmith. Other minority clans of alleged Jewish ancestry include the Madhiban and the Gaboye,

Conclusion

Historically, there were Jews in the Somali peninsula and therefore the likelihood of practicing Jews residing today in this strategic Horn of Africa is very high. Throughout time Jews have shown great tenacity to survive or even thrive in hostile environments. The Jews suffered pain, discrimination, and dispossession throughout history. The very fact that throughout the world there are practicing Jews speaking Hebrew defies human logic. Not

⁸⁹ Elia Vitturini, *The Gaboye of Somaliland: Legacies of Marginality, Trajectories of Emancipation*. University of Milan-Bicocca. “Riccardo Massa” Department of Human Sciences for Education. Doctoral Programme in Cultural and Social Anthropology. PhD Thesis, 2017, 53.

⁹⁰ The Yibir term for “samanyo” is “anasnimo.”

⁹¹ Elia Vitturini, *The Gaboye of Somaliland: Legacies of Marginality*, 25.

⁹² J.W.C. Kirk, “The Yibirs and Midgans of Somaliland, Their Traditions and Dialects.” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 4 (13), 98-99.

⁹³ Ian Fisher, “Djibouti Journal; Somalia ‘Hebrews’ See a Better Day.” *New York Times*. 15 August 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/15/world/djibouti-journal-somalia-s-hebrews-see-a-better-day.html> (accessed 21 January 2021).

⁹⁴ Ian Fisher, “Djibouti Journal; Somalia ‘Hebrews’ See a Better Day.”

⁹⁵ Sada Mire, “Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire.” *African Archaeological Review*. 32, March 2015, 124.

even the Holocaust, in which 6,000,000 Jews were exterminated, could rob them of their dignity, faith, and language.

Most of the Jews who lived in the Somali peninsula, including Somalia and Somaliland, were of Adenite and Yemenite ancestry. There were undoubtedly other Jews from far-flung areas like India and Greece. Some Jews were also from Palestine before the rebirth of the State of Israel, but it seems these none-Adenite and none-Yemenite Jews were in the minority. In fact, most of the Jews Somalis know about are from these two latter groups.

The Yibir Somali clan is not the only “native” people group with Hebrew ancestry. There are other despised minority clans, including the Tumul, Madhiban, and the Gaboye, which some Somalis view suspiciously because of their rumored Hebrew roots. All these clans are today practicing Muslims. The Yibir is the last Islamized clan of these cohorts of minority clans. Unlike any other Somali clan, these minority clans reside in the five regions of the Somali peninsula: Somalia, Somaliland, Djibouti, Eastern Ethiopia, and Northeast Kenya.

CHAPTER THREE

A Brief History of Christianity in the Somali Peninsula

Introduction

Unbeknownst to many, Christianity reached “at least the coastal areas of the land Somalis inhabit” by the 7th century as attested to ancient graves and other traces.⁹⁶ This fact alone should put to rest the famous Somali Muslim mantra that to be a Somali is to be a Muslim. Ali Abdirahman Hersi, a Somali scholar, wrote in 1977 that “it is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity.”⁹⁷ Somalis are about 99% Muslim, and the tiny Christian minority in their midst faces intense persecution because of their Christian faith. Somali Muslims also fight over power, and resources and the collapse of Somalia’s central government in 1991 unleashed carnage and bloodbath. According to the Center for American Progress, up to “1.5 million people have died in Somalia’s conflict or directly due to hunger since 1991.”⁹⁸



Michael Mariano Ali. Photo Credit: Twitter

While attending a cabinet meeting in 1974, a prominent Somali Christian and a statesman, Michael Mariano Ali, said to Mohamed Siyad Barre, the President of the Republic, that Somalia would never experience peace until it returned to its Christian roots.⁹⁹ The Somali government was violently overthrown 16 years later by a consortium of armed groups. Siyad Barre, as he was locally known, knew well the indispensable role Somali Christians played in the struggle for Somalia’s independence. Somali Christians were represented in the cabinets of the two presidents prior to Siyad Barre. For example, Michael once served as the Minister of Economic Planning under the Premiership of Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal. Another Somali Christian, Awil Haji Abdillahi, better known as Anthony James, served as the Minister of Finance under the Premiership of Abdirisak Haji Hussein.

Somali Christians also played a disproportionate role in the struggle for independence. The first President and the primary founder of the Somali Youth League (SYL), Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudiin (d. June 1951), was a Roman Catholic Christian.¹⁰⁰ The SYL was the first Somali political party, and its struggle led to Somalia’s independence.

⁹⁶ Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 218

⁹⁷ Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 109.

⁹⁸ John Norris and Bronwyn Bruton, “Twenty Years of Collapse and Counting: The Cost of Failure in Somalia.” Center for American Progress. September 2011, 10
<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/09/pdf/somalia.pdf> (accessed 31 December 2020).

⁹⁹ Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Mohamed A. Gurhan, “The Persecuted Disciples of Jesus Christ: A Research Article on Somali Ecclesiology.” *Somali Christian Mission*, December 2012, 15.

Lewis Clement Salool (alternative spelling, Salole), a Somali Christian, designed the SYL flag with its cross, crescent, and five stars. He was also a key legal advisor to the SYL. Alex Qolqoole, another Somali Christian, supported the SYL financially and served as its primary policy advisor. The SYL's struggle could have faltered without the selfless support and leadership of Michael, Anthony, Lewis, and Abdulkhadir who is better known as *Sakhawudiin*.

Coat of arms of Somalia



Photo credit: Wikipedia.org

golden heads, with two lateral ones halved. The shield is borne from the sides by two leopards facing each other under the lower point of the shield, along with two palm leaves, which are interlaced with a white ribbon.”¹⁰²

The coat of arms of Somalia portrays three full crosses and two partial ones at the top of the shield. The coat of arms was designed in 1953 by one of the key leaders of the Somali Youth League.¹⁰¹ The coat of arms was adopted on 10 October 1956. The Somali Constitution is silent about the crosses when describing the nation's top symbol:

“The emblem of the Federal Republic of Somalia, as shown in section B of Schedule One, is a blue shield with a gold frame, in the center of which is a silver-coated, five-pointed star. The shield is surmounted by a decorated emblem with five

Osman Geedi Raage was a Muslim albeit a secular one. It is possible he chose the cross as a mere decoration. Osman may have also chosen the cross for its spiritual prowess, consciously or subconsciously, as many Somali Muslims still do it today. It is a matter of great significance that a transnational people group that is about 99% Muslim uses the cross, the most recognizable Christian symbol, in so many ways, including as a sign of blessing and protection.

Christian Roots

The Arab and Persian historians, scholars, and geographers who wrote about Christianity in the Somali peninsula include: *Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali al-Mas'udi* (896–956), Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973-1050), and Muhammad al-Idrisi (1100-1165). Al-Mas'udi, al-Biruni, and al-Idrisi all described the Somali port city of Zeila as a Christian city with a few Muslim merchants.¹⁰³ Zeila is near the border with Djibouti in northwestern Somalia. Zeila

¹⁰¹ The Somali Youth League (SYL) (Somali: Ururka Dhalinyarada Soomaaliyeed, Italian: Lega dei Giovani Somali or Lega Somala della Gioventù), was initially established as the Somali Youth Club (SYC) to disguise its political ambitions from the Italian colonial authority. The SYL was the first political party in Somalia. It fought for Somalia's independence in the Somali Peninsula and in the international arenas in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The SYL demanded the unification of the five Somali territories in the Somali Peninsula to form the Somali Republic.

¹⁰² “The Federal Republic of Somalia: Provisional Constitution.” Adopted 01 August 2012, Mogadishu, Somalia. University of Minnesota, Human Rights Library, n.d., 2

<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf> (accessed 09 January 2021).

¹⁰³ Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History*, 117.

was at the time ruled by Abyssinian Christians, thus the powerful Christian community in the city.

However, Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi (1213–1286) described Zeila as a wealthy city in which its inhabitants were completely Muslim around (1214-17). Zeila must have reverted to Muslim control by the early 13th century, according to Ibn Sa'id. Zeila's Muslim population, by this time, is also affirmed by the famed Moroccan explorer, geographer, and scholar, Ibn Battuta (1304 –1369).¹⁰⁴ Zeila, once staunchly Christian city, played a significant role in bringing Islam to the Oromos as well as the other Ethiopian ethnic groups.¹⁰⁵

While the Christianity practiced in the Somali peninsula as early as the 7th century disappeared; its once prominent presence in northwestern and northeastern regions of Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland) is visible in rich archeology. The British explorer, Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890), visited the Sanaag Region of eastern Somaliland supported by the Royal Geographical Society. Members of the Warsangeli clan explained to him that certain ruins in the area were the remains of a derelict local church.¹⁰⁶ Burton also learnt of similar ruins in what seemed like replicas of the Warsangeli ruins, among the Dhulbahante clan in Sool, the southeastern of Sanaag. The Dhulbahante clan members explained the ruins as the mosques of their forefathers. Burton understood the latter ruins to be a former church converted to a mosque before it became derelict. Burton noted that the Dhulbahante clan, like the Warsangali, “a *Mala*, or cross of stone or wood covered with plaster, at the head and foot of every tomb.”¹⁰⁷ When asked about the crosses, the Dhulbahante clan members said it was their custom which they learnt from their parents and grandparents.¹⁰⁸ Burton concluded this finding by stating that this “again would argue that a Christian people once inhabited these now benighted lands.”¹⁰⁹

Burton also reports a ruined structure, converted by the Somalis into a cemetery that resembled “a convent or a monastery.”¹¹⁰ To the west of this ruin, Burton reports another derelict structure of white mortar from burnt limestone rock, fifty yards away from what appeared a convent or a monastery. The local Somalis described this ruin as “a Christian house of worship.”¹¹¹ Burton stated that some of the walls of the derelict Christian building were still ten feet high which “show an extent of civilization now completely beyond the Warsangali.”¹¹² The local “people assert these ruins to be those of Nazarenes.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

¹⁰⁵ Henry A. Rayne, *Sun, Sand and Somals: Leaves from the Note-book of a District Commissioner in British Somaliland*. (London: Witherby, 1921).

https://archive.org/stream/sunsandsomalslea00raynuoft/sunsandsomalslea00raynuoft_djvu.txt (accessed 27 December 2020).

¹⁰⁶ Richard F. Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*. (London & Toronto: Published by J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. & in New York by E. P. Dutton & Co. First Edition 1910. Reprinted 1924, 317

¹⁰⁷ Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 318.

¹⁰⁸ Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 318.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 317.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. Nazarene, *Nasaara* in Somalized Arabic, is a positive term Somalis use for all Christians.

Socotra Christianity

Socotra Island, while a Yemeni territory, is off the coast of Somalia and has close Somali links. The Island is closer to mainland Somalia than mainland Yemen. There is also a Somali clan, Arab Mohamud Saalah, in Puntland regions of northeastern Somalia, who claim Socotra as their ancestral homeland. Socotra is located between the Arabian Sea and Guardufai Channel. The Island is the largest of the four islands known as the Socotra Archipelago.¹¹⁴ The Island lies 380 kilometers (240 miles) south of the Arabian peninsula. While mainland Yemen is in Western Asia, Socotra and the rest of its archipelago are geographically part of Africa.¹¹⁵ Minority groups in Socotra include south Arabians, Indians, and Somalis.¹¹⁶

Church tradition states that Thomas the Apostle, on his way to India, was shipwrecked by the Socotra Island. Thomas used the debris of the shipwreck to build a church. According to the *Endeavors of Saint Thomas*, the Apostle visited a mysterious island on his way to India.¹¹⁷ G. W. B. Huntingford notes that:

The inhabitants seem always to have been mixed people. Some of them at one period were Christians, converted it was said by St. Thomas in AD 52 while on his way to India. Abu Zaid al-Hassan, an Arab geographer of the 10th century, said that in his time, most of the inhabitants of Socotra were Christian... but by the beginning of the 16th century, Christianity had almost disappeared. leaving little trace but stone crosses at which Alvares (d. July 8, 1521) said the people worshipped... However, a group of people was found here by St. Francis Xavier in 1542, claiming to be descended from the converts made by St. Thomas....¹¹⁸

St. Francis (1506 –1552), a Navarrese Catholic missionary, described the people he met in Socotra:

The natives esteem themselves to be Christians and are very proud of it. They can neither read nor write, possess no books nor other sources of information and are very ignorant. But they have churches, crosses, and ritual lamps, and in each village, there is a *caciz*, who corresponds to a priest among us. Having no bells, they summon the people to services with wooden clappers, such as we have during Lent.¹¹⁹

It is hard to tell how much of the ignorance St. Francis, co-founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), attributed to the Christians in Socotra is accurate and how much of it is based on misunderstanding exacerbated by the cultural and language barriers. For example, the famous Venetian explorer, Marco Polo (1254-1324), wrote of the people of Socotra:

The inhabitants [of Socotra] are baptized Christians and have an archbishop...I should explain that the archbishop of Socotra has nothing to do with the Pope at Rome, but is

¹¹⁴ A. G. Miller and T. A., Cope. *Flora of the Arabian Peninsula and Socotra*. Volume I Edinburg University Press in association with Royal Botanic Gardin Edinburg, Royal Botnaic Gardens, Kew, 1996, 7,11

¹¹⁵ “Paradise Has an Address: Socotra – Geography.” <http://www.socotra.cz/about-us-2.html?lang=en> (accessed 28 December 2020).

¹¹⁶ Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times: India, 1541–1544*. (Jesuit Historical Institute, 1982), 122.

¹¹⁷ J. K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 488-454.

¹¹⁸ G. W. B. Huntingform, ed. Trans. *The Periplus of the Eryphraean Sea* (The Hakluyt Society, London, 1980), 103.

¹¹⁹ S. G. Pothan. *The Syrian Christians of Kerala* (Asia Publishing Company: New York 1963), 29.

subject to an archbishop who lives at Baghdad. The archbishop of Baghdad sends out the archbishop of this Island.¹²⁰

Douglas Botting wrote of the Christians in Socotra, “On this outpost of the Arab world a race of people impervious to the great tide of Islam, who had retained some remnants of the Christian faith for nearly a thousand years after the birth of Mohamet....They were all strictly monogamous.”¹²¹ Any trace of a visible Christianity disappeared from Socotra by 1680 due to Muslim occupation and lack of support from the nearby Christians in the Middle East.¹²²

While the Christians in Socotra were most likely of the Assyrian confession with a Syriac liturgy, there is a strong probability that the Christians in Socotra were also influenced by the Abyssinian Orthodox Church. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville (1918 – 2005) wrote of the observation of St. Francis Xavier about the Christians in Socotra. St. Francis observed that their Lenten fasts paralleled those of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church, including length and strictness.¹²³ This is not a surprise since Christian Abyssinia once ruled Yemen. Hussein A. Bulhan, a Somali scholar, writes:

In the early sixth century, Christian Arabs on the opposite side of the Red Sea asked the Axum King to help them fend off religious persecution they experienced from a Jewish Himyar King. In response, the Abyssinians crossed to Arabia and conquered Yemen in about 525 and continued to rule them for fifty years....¹²⁴

Glen Bowersock describes the massacre perpetrated against Yemeni Christians in 516 by a Jewish King, Yousef Asa’ar.¹²⁵ This Jewish King of Arabs massacred more than 20,000 Christians in the cities of Zafran and Najran after they had refused to convert to Judaism.¹²⁶ The King himself took great joy in describing the atrocities he committed against the Yemeni Christians who chose to die martyrs rather than convert to Judaism.¹²⁷ Abyssinians killed the King and liberated the Yemeni Christians. Some of the descendants of the Abyssinians who gave a helping hand to the Yemeni Christians still live in Yemen as a marginalized minority group.

¹²⁰ Ronald Latham, Trans. *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Penguin books, London, 1958), 296-298.

¹²¹ Douglas Botting, *Island of the Dragon’s Blood* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1958) 215

¹²² “The Socotran of Yemen” http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code3/891.html (accessed 11 February 2021).

¹²³ Freeman-Grenville, G.S.P. *The East African Coast: Select Documents From The First to The Early Nineteenth Century*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 135-137.

¹²⁴ Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations*, 218.

¹²⁵ Joseph Dhu Nuwas, also known as Yousef Asa’ar was a self-styled Jewish king-warlord who ruled several Yemeni tribes AD 517 – 525 and possibly until 527.

¹²⁶ Glen Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam*. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

¹²⁷ Jacques Ryckmans, “La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle,” (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Inst. in *het Nabije Oosten*, 1956), 1–24.

Western Missionary Effort

The French Catholic Mission (FCM) opened an orphanage in Daymoole village, near Berbera, British Somaliland, in 1881.¹²⁸ This orphanage became the target of Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, (7 April 1856 - 21 December 1920);¹²⁹ he objected to the efforts of introducing (or reviving to be more accurate) Christianity among the Somali Muslims. One well-known incident reports that Sayid's "wrath intensified when he met Somali boys converted to Christianity by missionaries who came and collaborated with the colonial administration."¹³⁰ Sayid, whom the British colonial authority called the "Mad Mullah", fought the British and their supporters for twenty years. Sayid and his dervish warriors were finally defeated with superior military assets, including warplanes.¹³¹

The British colonial authority was finally forced to expel the FCM in 1910 to appease Sayid and the local *ulama* supporting him.¹³² The twenty-nine years the FCM spent around Berbera was not wasted; a significant number of local people became disciples of Christ. The FCM moved to the Somali town of Jigjiga, Eastern Ethiopia, 367 kilometers from Daymoole.¹³³ This Catholic mission in Jigjiga, which eventually expanded to other areas in the region, produced some prominent ethnic Somali Catholics who are widely respected among Somali people in the Horn of Africa.

The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) arrived in the southern coastal town of Kismayo in 1896. The mission eventually expanded to Jilib, Jamaame, and Mogambo, all in the Jubaland regions of southern Somalia. In addition to traditional evangelistic ministry, SOLC operated schools and clinics.¹³⁴ SOLC facilitated the planting of a number of Somali-led house-churches in southern Somalia. The Italian colonial authority expelled SOLC in 1935.¹³⁵

The Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953, setting up a base in Mogadishu.¹³⁶ The MM also operated schools and clinics. The MM expanded its work to Mahaddaay, Jowhar, Jamaame in addition to two other mission stations. The Somali government eventually expelled the MM in 1976. The MM continued its Somali ministry from Nairobi, Kenya.

¹²⁸ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 121.

¹²⁹ "Sayid", also spelt as *Sayyid*, Saiyed, Seyit, Seyd, Syed, Sayed, Sayyed, Saiyid, Seyed and Seyyed, is from the Arabic: *سييد* pronounced as [ˈsæj.jid]. The term is earned honorific name which means Master, Lord, or Chief.

¹³⁰ Bulhan. *In-Between Three Civilizations*, 263

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 172, 263.

¹³² Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*. (Guardian Books, 2006), 76.

¹³³ Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 77.

¹³⁴ Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

¹³⁵ Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)." (PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011), 116.

¹³⁶ The Mennonite Mission registered in Somalia as Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM). See David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) entered Somalia in 1954 under the leadership of Warren and Dorothy Modricker.¹³⁷ The SIM also ran schools and clinics.¹³⁸ The Somali government also expelled the SIM in 1976. The SIM continued the Somali ministry from Nairobi, Kenya.

The RCC, the SOLC, the MM, and the SIM comprise the Magnificent Four because of their ministry success among the Somalis. The progress of the Somali Church is directly linked to the missionary work of the Magnificent Four.

Somalis and Crosses

Somalis are a transnational ethnic group that lives in their ancestral homes in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Regardless of where Somalis reside, the cross, to this day, has a hallowed place among Somali Muslims.¹³⁹ The crosses observed by Richard Burton during his visit to the Sool and the Sanaag regions of British Somaliland appear more Greek than Latin.¹⁴⁰ The Abyssinian Church which influenced the most in British Somaliland, uses a variety of crosses including the Greek and the Latin.¹⁴¹ This Church also has selections of elaborate indigenous crosses.

Sada Mire, a Somali archeologist, describes the annual Aw-Barkhadle Muslim religious celebrations in present-day Somaliland, “People come to the site and paint a cross on their foreheads.”¹⁴² Sada describes in Aw-Barkhadle “where there is at least one burial with stelae decorated with a Christian Orthodox cross in situ.”¹⁴³ Sada adds “Other Christian burials also exist across the country.”¹⁴⁴ Aw-Barkhadle is a Muslim shrine near Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Sada Mire, again describes Christian burial sites in Somaliland which demonstrate clear Abyssinian Christianity. This is not a surprise since ancient Abyssinia sometimes included areas currently deep into Somaliland including Hargeisa and Berbera:

There are also megalithic burials where the stones are arranged in a cross. The area of Dhuxun (62), in Saahil region, has many cruciform burials.... There are many isolated, single Christian burials, massive in their design.... Dhubato in the Hargeysa region and the Saahil area have many ancient Christian burials which are aligned as a cross. Sites such as Suuqsade...contain ancient Christian burials. There are also finds of Christian codices in Somaliland.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ More about the Modrickers, please see: Helen Miller. *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006).

¹³⁸ Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*. 2015, 21.

¹³⁹ The cross very often used by Somali Muslims is a hybrid of the Greek, and the Latin crosses. The Greek cross has arms of equal length while Latin cross has a vertical beam that sticks above the crossbeam.

¹⁴⁰ Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 318.

¹⁴¹ The official name of this Monophysite Church is the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church (Amharic: ቅርባኑስ ቅርባኑስ ቅርባኑስ ቅርባኑስ ቅርባኑስ).

¹⁴² Sada Mire, *Divine Fertility: The Continuity in Transformation of an Ideology of Sacred Kinship in Northeast Africa*. 1st Edition. UCL Institute of Archeology Publication. (Routledge, 2020), 26 - 30

¹⁴³ Ibid. 26.

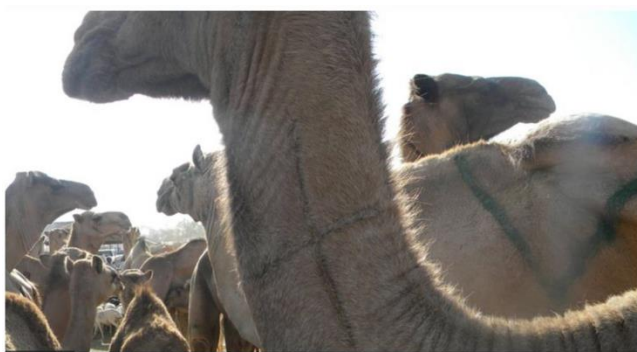
¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 30.

¹⁴⁵ Sada Mire, “Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire.” *Afr Archaeol Rev* 32, 111–136 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-015-9184-9> (accessed 30 December 2020).

Madrassa students in certain regions in the Somali peninsula traditionally receive a temporary cross on their foreheads or on both cheeks by their teacher as a symbol of blessing. The teacher uses a black ink, the same ink students use to write the Qur'an on their wooden tablets. This practice has been in decline in southern Somalia since the last twenty years because of radical Islam which objects to all practices it considers non-Islamic.

A bad episode of cholera hit Somalia in the early years of the 1970s. Many people lost their lives as the country was not equipped enough to handle such a huge medical emergency. Victims of cholera often died of dehydration. One ominous sign that a patient could die was when they developed pruned feet (*cago miin* in Somali). Muslim traditional healers would then burn a cruciform on the soles of the feet as that was believed to have a medicinal value. Many Somali Muslims who survived the cholera epidemic walk around today with cruciform on the sole of their feet. The era of this deadly cholera is known in Somalia as *Daacuunkii* (the cholera era) or *salaan diid* (the no handshake era).

It was very common in pre-civil war Somalia for metal gates to have crosses embedded in them for decoration. Another common practice in the Somali peninsula is that people who cannot read use a cross symbol to mark any possession they own so they can claim theirs when mixed with others. Crosses are therefore used for five different purposes: decoration, blessing, protection, healing, and identification. Identification crosses are like signatures; everyone has a unique way to draw their own cross. Sometimes what makes the difference is where the cross is placed or how many crosses are placed on one's possession like a sack of millet.




A Somali camel with a cruciform branding
Photo credit: BBC Somali/Dr. Jaamac

Some Somali Muslim clans brand their livestock, especially camels and cattle, using the cross symbol. These clans include: The Hawiye sub clans of Murusade, Harti Abgaal, Isaaq Daa'uud, Sheekhaal, and Gaal Je'el. The Isaaq sub-clans of Ciida Gale, Habar Yonis, and Habar Je'lo, especially the sub-clans on the Haud Reserve area of the Somaliland-Ethiopia border. Some members of the Abdalla and Mohammed Subeyr of the

Ogaden sub-clan and few members of the Marehan sub clan, all of whom belong to the Darod clan, brand their camels and cattle using a cruciform.

Conclusion

Christianity is not a stranger in the Somali peninsula. While Somali Muslims may have forgotten their Christian heritage, they still cling to Christian symbolisms in which the cross is of paramount importance. Somalis seem to have a subconscious awareness of their Christian roots and this may explain their excessive use of the cross for decoration, blessing, healing and identification purposes. The cross, the most recognizable symbol of the Christian faith, has shown resilience among Somali Muslims. Archeology has also demonstrated time and again that Christianity was once widely practiced in much of Somaliland, the only area in the Somali peninsula in which its archeology has been studied to some extent.



While Abyssinian Christianity left indelible footprints in the Somali peninsula, there are hardly any Somalis today who identify themselves as belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the biggest Christian denomination in Africa. Somali Christians have traditionally been either Roman Catholic or Protestant. The most prominent ethnic Somali Christians have historically been Roman Catholic. Why this is the case is open to debate. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) had only fifteen years of a head start before the first Protestant mission arrived. This negligible head start cannot explain the enviable fruits of the RCC in the Somali peninsula.

The Western missionary effort in the Somali peninsula revived the long-dormant Christianity among Somalis. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant mission organizations led many Somalis to the Lord, thus breaching the perceived hegemony of Islam on the Somalis. Four ministries will forever be remembered for their courage and sacrifice in bringing the Gospel to the Somali peninsula. These giants are: The Roman Catholic Church, Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church, the Mennonite Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) which comprise the Magnificent Four in the Somali peninsula.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Brief History of Islam in the Somali Peninsula

Introduction

Islam spread in the Somali peninsula like a bushfire even far away from the coastal regions to the interiors of the arid inland. The Somalis were completely Islamized by the beginning of the 16th century “and from that time on became culturally and, especially, emotionally tied to the Arab world.”¹⁴⁶ The defenses of Waaqism, the pre-Islamic religion Somalis practiced, quickly collapsed under the pressure of the fast spreading new religion. While it cannot be ruled out, there is no evidence of any Somali clans practicing any religion other than Waaqism before the advent of Islam in the Somali peninsula.¹⁴⁷ Ali Abdirahman Hersi describes in his 1977 PhD thesis the comprehensive Islamization Somalis underwent that “Islam as a religion and a system of values so thoroughly permeates all aspects of Somali life that it is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity.”¹⁴⁸ Hersi has simply detailed the well-known Somali Muslim mantra, “to be a Somali is to be a Muslim.” After eight hundred years of Islamization, the Somalis were completely converted to Islam by the beginning of the 16th century.

Sunni Islam of the Shafi’i school is today the single most important glue that holds the Somali people together. Various Somali Muslim leaders rallied Somalis against a common enemy (Abyssinia and European colonizers). The military success of Ahmed Ibrahim Gurey (better known in Ethiopia as Ahmed Gragn), c. 1506 -1543, and Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, 1856 – 1920, illustrates the unifying ability of Islam among Somalis.¹⁴⁹ Many of the clans Ahmed Gurey and Sayid united to fight external foes have a long history of enmity among themselves.¹⁵⁰ While Islam has helped Somalis to rally against external threats, it has not aided them to live peacefully with one another. There is sufficient evidence that Islam was introduced to the Somalis in a peaceful manner, usually through Arab traders and local itinerant preachers. Islam first spread to the coastal areas of Somalia. The Red Sea and the Indian Ocean communities were the first to be Islamized. Islam then spread inland into the inhospitable arid interiors of the Somali peninsula.

The Arrival of Islam

Islam reached Somalia, at least in the Indian Ocean coastal towns, within the first century of its advent in Arabia. Ali Abdirahman Hersi quotes a source that documents the tombstones in

¹⁴⁶ Ali Abdirahman Hersi, “The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula.” University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 141

¹⁴⁷ Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Ali Abdirahman Hersi, “The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula.” University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 109.

¹⁴⁹ “Sayid”, also spelt as *Sayyid*, Saiyed, Seyit, Seyd, Syed, Sayed, Sayyed, Saiyid, Seyed and Seyyed, is from the Arabic: سييد pronounced as [ˈsæj.jid]. The term is earned honorific name which means Master, Lord, or Chief.

¹⁵⁰ Ali Abdirahman Hersi, “The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula.” University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 109.

Mogadishu of two Muslim women, Fatima bint Abd as-Samad Ya'qub (d. AD 723/ A.H. 101) and al-Hajjiya bint Muhammad Muqqaddam (d. AD 760/A.H. 138).¹⁵¹ The inscriptions on the cited tombstones were discovered by chance but an even earlier presence of Islam in the coastal towns of Somalia cannot be ruled out without a proper archeological study throughout the Somali coastal towns. However, it took seven hundred years of Islamization to convert virtually all Somalis in the Somali peninsula. Islamization was therefore a slow process.¹⁵²

Because of the long established Shafi'i Sunni character of the Somalis, it is noteworthy that "In the year 739-40 there came to the Banadir coast the Shi'ite Zaidis (the Emozaidij of the Portuguese), who for almost two centuries dominated the coast...."¹⁵³ Similarly, "Ibn Battuta specifically maintained that the majority of the population in Zaila were Rafida (Zaidi Shi'is)."¹⁵⁴ Ad-Dimashqi reported a century earlier than Ibn Battuta that the residents of northern coastal town of Berbera, Somaliland, "were partly Zaidite and partly Shafi'i."¹⁵⁵

There are historically two competing hypotheses of how Islam arrived in the Somali peninsula. The first hypothesis assumes that Islam came to the Somalis through Abyssinia after the first Muslim *Hijra*.¹⁵⁶ A group of twelve Muslim men and four women migrated from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, to Axum, Abyssinia, in AD 614/14.¹⁵⁷ The second group of Muslims, 83 men and 18 women, left Mecca for Axum, Abyssinia, in AD 615/16.¹⁵⁸ Some of the Muslims settled in Abyssinia while others later returned to Mecca in AD 622 and joined Muhammad in his hijra to Medina.¹⁵⁹ The second group returned to Medina in 628.¹⁶⁰ The

¹⁵¹ Sheikh Ahmed Abdullahi Rirash, "Kashf as-Sudul An Tarikh as-Somali: wa Mamalikahum as-Sab'a." (Mogadishu: Wakkalat ad-Dawla li-Taba'a), 1974, 12. Cited in Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula." University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 113.

¹⁵² Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula." University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 120.

¹⁵³ Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula." University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 114.

¹⁵⁴ Abu Abdalla Muhammad inb Abdalla ibn Muhammad Ibrhaim ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn Battuta*, (Beiru: Dar Beirut, 1960), 252. Cited in Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula." University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 115.

¹⁵⁵ Shams ad-Din Abu Abdalla Muhammad ad-Dimashqi, *Nukhbat ad-Dahr fi Aja'ib al-Barr wa-al-Bahr*, edited by M. A. F. Mehran (Amsterdam, 1964), 218. Cited in Ali Abdurahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula." University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 115

¹⁵⁶ The names of the first migrants are: Sa'd ibn Abi Waqas, Jahsh ibn Riyab, Abd-Allah ibn Jahash, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib (leader of the migrant group), Uthman, son-in-law and companion of Prophet Muhammad. Husband of Ruqayah. Ruqayah bint Muhammad, the wife of Uthman and daughter of Prophet Muhammad. Abu Hudhayfa ibn 'Utba, Sahla bint Suhail, wife of Abu Hudhayfa. Zubayr ibn al-Awam, Mus'ab ibn Umair, Abdur Rahman bin Awf. Abu Salama Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Asad, Umm Salama, wife of Abu Salama, Uthman bin Maz'oon, Amir bin Rabiha, Layla bint Abi Asmah – wife of Amir.

¹⁵⁷ "Authentic History of King Negash of Abyssinia (Currently Ethiopia)." tripod.com. Archived from the original on 2018-01-18, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180118233450/http://dcbun.tripod.com/id17.html> (accessed 02 May 2021).

¹⁵⁸ "The Two Migrations of Muslims to Abyssinia." Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project. <https://www.al-islam.org/restatement-history-islam-and-muslims-sayyid-ali-ashgar-razwy/two-migrations-muslims-abyssinia> (accessed 02 May 2021).

¹⁵⁹ William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*. (Oxford University Press. 1961),

¹⁶⁰ Timothy Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate: AD 500 - 1000*, I.B. Tauris, 2012, 8

Abyssinian hypothesis is appealing to some since modern-day Ethiopia and the Somali peninsula share a 2,385 kilometers of land border.

The second more realistic hypothesis is that Islam was brought to the Somali coast towns by seafaring Muslim Arab and Persian traders from 7th -10th century.¹⁶¹ Both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean facilitated profitable commerce between Araba and the Horn of Africa. I. M. Lewis postulates, “The Muslim merchant doubled wherever he went as a peddler of both divine and profane merchandise. If he was himself too busy, not well learned, or not very much inclined to preaching, he always brought a learned brother to teach his children and, in time, the non-Muslim hosts among whom the merchant settled.”¹⁶² Neither invading soldiers nor Arab missionaries spread Islam to the Somali peninsula but humbler and less imposing Arab merchants.

The Spread of Islam

Local Sufi clerics spread Islam throughout the Somali peninsula.¹⁶³ These Somali preachers organized themselves under various religious orders (*tariqa*): Qadiriya,¹⁶⁴ Ahmadiya¹⁶⁵ and Salihya.¹⁶⁶ These *tariqas* used two innovative strategies to propagate Islam in the Somali peninsula. One strategy was the traditional Qur’anic schools locally known as *dugsi* or *madrassa*. Children of both sexes enroll in these affordable Qur’anic schools which often met under trees or in makeshift huts. The second strategy was the *jama’at*, settled congregations. These two institutions spread Islam throughout the Somali peninsula. Islam is today an integral part of the Somali identity. I.M. Lewis elucidates:

It is not too much to say that in many respects Islam has become one of the mainsprings of Somali culture; and to nomad and cultivator alike, the profession of the faith has the force almost of an initiation rite into their society.¹⁶⁷

No country in Sub-Saharan Africa has been so thoroughly Islamized like Somalia and no ethnic group in this region has been so completely Islamized like the Somali people. The success of Islam among Somalis is legendary in every aspect of it. What is equally fascinating is that Somalis peacefully embraced Islam without any coercion. Islamic theologians divide Muslims into two camps: those who embraced Islam willingly and those who were converted by the sword.¹⁶⁸ Somalis rightfully place themselves in the first category and take great pride in it. How an African ethnic group surrounded by Christian countries like Ethiopia and Kenya could wholeheartedly adopt Islam so readily is a discussion for another day.

One powerful tool Muslim preachers use to this day for the transmission of Islamic knowledge is Somali poetry. There are countless Somali poems that teach subjects as basic as

¹⁶¹ Ira M. Lapidus (2014). *A History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 480–481.

¹⁶² I. M. Lewis, (ed.), “Islam in Tropical Africa.” (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 20.

¹⁶³ I. M. Lewis (1998). *Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-based Society*. The Red Sea Press. pp. 11–16.

¹⁶⁴ Founded by Abdulqadir Jilani, a Baghdadi, (1077-1166)

¹⁶⁵ Ahmadiya, a subset of Salihiy, founded by Ahmed B. Idris al-Fasi (1760-1837), a Meccan, See: Hess, Robert L. (1964). “The ‘Mad Mullah’ and Northern Somalia”. *The Journal of African History*. 5 (3): 415–433

¹⁶⁶ Founded by Sayid Muhammad Salih (1854-1919). Salihya was established in British Somaliland in 1890 by Ismail Urwayni, thus shaping the social fabric of the Somali Muslim community.

¹⁶⁷ I. M. Lewis, *Modern History*, 16

¹⁶⁸ In Somali, “*afka Islaam iyo seef ku islaam.*”

Islamic catechism and manners and as deep as jurisprudence and eschatology. Such poems are memorized and recited throughout the Somali peninsula.¹⁶⁹ Abdissalam Yassin Mohamed, a Somali scholar, states:

Inspired by the desire to communicate their spiritual fervor and their knowledge of Islamic doctrines to everyone, Somali Sufis have composed oral poetry in their mother tongue and used it as a form of religious instruction and prayer.¹⁷⁰

Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, 1856 – 1920,¹⁷¹ composed this powerful poem for the sole purpose of religious instruction. Here is the first stanza of the long poem about God:

Ilaaheenna Jaliilka Ahaa ¹⁷²	Our Great God ¹⁷³
<i>Ilaaheennii jaliilka ahaa labaan sifaa, u waajibtayoo</i>	<i>There are twenty things which are true of our great God</i>
<i>Inuu jiro baa u waajibtayoo, hadduusan jirin ma joogneen</i>	<i>It is true that He exists otherwise we would not have existed</i>
<i>Hadduu ina joojiyaad aragtaan, inuusan jirin ma suurowdo</i>	<i>You see that He created us to say He does not exist is impossible</i>
<i>Inuu jiri jiraa u waajibtayoo, haddii kale yaa jirreysiyo</i>	<i>It is true that He always existed otherwise who brought Him into existence?</i>
<i>Inuu jiri doonaa u waajibtayoo, haddii kale yeyna jaaseynoo</i>	<i>It is true that He will always exist otherwise who will judge us?</i>
<i>Jinni iyo insiba waa khilaafsanyahoo, haddii kale waaba jayshkoodoo</i>	<i>He is neither like people nor like jinni otherwise He would be like them</i>
<i>Sidii dadka jiir iyo dhiig ma lehoo, sidii axad meel ma joogsado</i>	<i>He does not have blood and flesh like people He is beyond geographic limitation</i>
<i>Jinaad iyo feero dhinaciyo, calool iyo bariyo joof ma laho</i>	<i>He has no body like ribs, sides, stomach buttocks and hair</i>

¹⁶⁹ It is interesting that Christian missionaries rarely attempt to propagate the Gospel using Somali poetry. The fact that God filled the Bible with poetry illustrates the role of poems in propagating the Gospel.

¹⁷⁰ Abdissalam Yassin Mohamed, *Sufi Poetry in Somali: Its Themes and Imagery*. PhD Thesis, University of London, 1977, 2.

¹⁷¹ “Sayid”, also spelt as *Sayyid*, Saiyed, Seyit, Seyd, Syed, Sayed, Sayyed, Saiyid, Seyed and Seyyed, is from the Arabic: سيّد pronounced as [ˈsæj.jid]. The term is earned honorific name which means Master, Lord, or Chief.

¹⁷² Sh. Jaamac Cumar Ciise (editor), *Diiwaanka Gabayadii Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xassan*. Ururuntii Koowaad. Wasaaradda Hiddaha iyo Tacliinta Sare, Muqdisho, Wakaaladda Madbacadda Qaranka, 1974, 67.

¹⁷³ English translation by Aweis A. Ali

Another poem about God was composed by the celebrated Somali poet and Sufi saint from Barawa, southern Somalia. Mana Siti Habib Jamaluddin, popularly known as Dada Masiti, was born in Barawa in c. 1810 and died in the same town on 15 July 1919. Dada Masiti composed her poetry in her native mother tongue, the Bravanese dialect, which is widely spoken in Barawa. Here is the third stanza of her 43-stanza poem.

Ya Rabbi Ya Muta'ali ¹⁷⁴	O My Exalted Lord
<i>Rabbi Rahmani Rahiimu</i>	<i>Our Lord is most Merciful,</i>
<i>Veeshelho nti na kuzimu</i>	<i>most Forgiving</i>
<i>Dhekheerho ka ukariimu</i>	<i>He, who has created the earth</i>
<i>Nicmaze ha zi marhi</i>	<i>and the sky</i>
	<i>And sustained them with</i>
	<i>generosity</i>
	<i>His abundant grace is never-ending</i>

It is apparent in the expansion of Islam in the Somali peninsula that messages, whether secular or sacred, are better spread, decoded and retained when communicated both in prose and poetry. No wonder that Muslims got this concept right for two related main reasons. First, Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, is known for its love for poetry. Second, the entire Qur'an is written poetically which makes its memorization much easier even when one does not speak Arabic.

Muslim City States

There are several cities and towns in the Somali peninsula which contributed to the learning and the propagation of the Islamic faith. Some of these towns are coastal cities like Mogadishu, Barawe (Brava) and Zeila while others, like Bardhere, Gedo, Bay, Bakol and Harar, are in the hinterland of the peninsula. All these cities are still known for their fervent *jama'at* (singular, *jama'a*), established religious communities. In the early years of Islam in the peninsula, Mogadishu was known as the City of Islam.¹⁷⁵ This city has a long history of hosting prominent Islamic centers and local Muslim religious scholars.

One of the oldest mosques in the Somali peninsula is located in Zeila, in present day Somaliland. Masjid al-Qiblatayn was reportedly built in the 7th century, probably by AD 632 according to some Muslim sources.¹⁷⁶ The mosque's "edifice features two *mihrrabs*: one oriented to the north toward Mecca, and the other oriented to the northwest toward Jerusalem."¹⁷⁷ Muslims initially prayed towards Jerusalem before Prophet Muhammed

¹⁷⁴ Mohamed Kassim, "Dhikr will Echo from All Corners: "Dada Masiti and the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge. Bildhaan, Vol. 2, January 2008, 111.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239827817_Dhikr_will_Echo_from_all_Corners_Dada_Masiti_and_the_Transmission_of_Islamic_Knowledge (accessed 19 May 2021).

¹⁷⁵ Society, Security, Sovereignty and the State in Somalia: From Statelessness to Statelessness? (International Boos, 2001), 116.

¹⁷⁶ I. M. Lewis, "The Somali Conquest of the Horn of Africa." The Journal of African History 1.2 (1960), 213-230.

¹⁷⁷ , François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar, "Le port de Zeyla et son arrière-pays au Moyen Âge: Investigations archéologiques et retour aux sources écrites". Livre Islam. 28 April 2011.

https://www.academia.edu/1202629/Le_port_de_Zeyla_et_son_arriere_pays_au_Moyen_Age_382ge_Investigations_archeologiques_et_retour_aux_sources_9crites

switched the direction to Mecca, his birth city, in AD 624 (Quran 2:144). Given the architectural design of the mosque and Christian Abyssinia's long rule of Zeila, the often touted "oldest" mosque in Somalia is simply an ancient Abyssinian Orthodox Church converted to a mosque by the beginning of the 13th century. Muslim explorers who wrote about the Abyssinian Christianity in Zeila include: Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Ali al-Mas'udi (896–956), Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973-1050), and Muhammad al-Idrisi (1100-1165). Al-Mas'udi, al-Biruni, and al-Idrisi. They all described the Somali port city of Zeila as a Christian city with a few Muslim merchants.¹⁷⁸

The Arabization of the Somalis

The first phase of the Arabization of the Somalis started with the conversion to Islam.¹⁷⁹ Islam is by nature an Arabization mechanism since all Muslims have to pray in Arabic, a language 75% of Muslims do not speak. Only a tiny minority of non-Arab Muslims learn to speak Arabic in any enviable fluency. The second phase commenced by the 15th century when some Somali clans started tweaking their Cushitic genealogy to claim descent from Muhammed's progeny in the Arabian Peninsula. This claim of Arab posterity is driven by piety and affinity for Prophet Muhammed. Today, the vast majority of Somali clans, including the Somali Jareer-Bantus, claim Arab ancestry. In this self-imposed Arabization, long deceased Somali clan founders were relieved of their Somali names for Arabic ones. For example, Abgaal became Sheikh Osman and Bu'ur Ba'ayr became Mohammed Hanif though he never converted to Islam! The third phase of the Arabization of the Somalis was finalized in 1974 when Somalia joined the Arab League even though Somalis do not speak Arabic but Somali, a Cushitic language.

Egypt engineered Somalia's membership, and later Djibouti's (formerly, French Somaliland), to isolate Ethiopia. The only reason these two non-Arab and Cushitic countries which do not speak Arabic were made members of the Arab League was their close proximity to Christian Ethiopia. Egypt always received the lion's share of the Nile water which has its origins in the Ethiopian highlands. The Blue Nile begins in Lake Tana in Ethiopia.¹⁸⁰ The river then flows into Sudan. The Nile that nourished Egypt for millennia flows from Ethiopia through Sudan before emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. Egypt, always fearful that Ethiopia could one day demand its fair share of the Nile water, admitted Somalia and Djibouti into the Arab League. Both countries share a land border with Ethiopia. Until quite recently, the only non-Arab country that bordered Ethiopia was Kenya.

The secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1991 and the secession of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011 gave Ethiopia temporary breathing room. However, Egypt again outsmarted Ethiopia by convincing Eritrea to join the Arab League in 2003 as an Observer and could become a full member in the future. South Sudan applied to become full a member of the Arab League in 2014.¹⁸¹ Egypt's determination to weaken Ethiopia is therefore the only reason Somalia is a card-carrying member of the Arab League. The Ethio-Egypt Nile rivalry has Arabicized the Somalis even more.

(accessed 03 May 2021).

¹⁷⁸ Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History*, 117.

¹⁷⁹ Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History*, 110.

¹⁸⁰ The river's outflow from Lake Tana occurs at [12°02'09"N37°15'53"E](#).

¹⁸¹ "South Sudan and Chad apply to join the Arab League". 25 March 2014. Archived from the original on 4 March 2016. Retrieved 13 May 2014.

The Radicalization of the Somalis

Several Somali Islamist groups, inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, paved the way for the armed radical Islamist groups like al Shabab. These Islamist organizations and the year of their founding in Somalia are: al Rabidah al Islamiyah (1950), Munadamah al Nahdah al Islamiyah (1967), Ahl al Islam (1969), Wahdah al Shabab al Islami (1969), Jama'at al Islah al Islamiyah (1978), al Jama'at al Islamiyah (1979), al Itihad al Islami (1983), al Ikhwan "Aala Sheikh" (1983).¹⁸² All these Islamist groups have slowly transformed the peaceful Somali Sufi Islam into an intolerant fundamentalist one in the last 80 years. Sufi Muslims are the silent majority in the Somali peninsula today.

The peaceful and pragmatic Islam of the Somalis was infiltrated by the mother of radical Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun. The Muslim Brotherhood is a transnational Sunni fundamentalist group founded in which all radical Islamists trace their roots. The Brotherhood was founded by the Egyptian Muslim cleric, Hassan al-Banna (14 October 1906 – 12 February 1949), in 1928. The Brotherhood and its more radical offshoots are still fueled by Gulf petrodollars. The Brotherhood and the Islamists it birthed considered Sufi Islam as syncretistic. The onslaught of radical Islam on the Somali Sufi Islam started in the 1970s. The most well-known offspring of the Muslim Brotherhood are the Islamic State group (ISIS), al Qaeda and their various affiliates including al Shabab.

The fall of Somalia's central government in 1991 gave radical Islam and its proponents a space to flourish without any competition. Al Shabab today controls much of southern Somalia, a territory that helps it generate much revenue by means of tax collections and extortions. In fact, al Shabab collects revenues from major cities under the rule of the Federal or regional governments.¹⁸³ According to the BBC, al Shabab collects more tax money than the Federal and regional governments.¹⁸⁴ Reuters suggests the militant Islamist group rakes in an estimated revenue of USD 15 million per month.¹⁸⁵ However, while al Shabab is known for its brutal justice system, it is seen as less corrupt than the Western backed Federal and regional governments. Many Somalis living in government-controlled regions prefer the al Shabab Sharia based justice system since the secular justice system of the Somali government is very corrupt. Next to the Taliban, al Shabab is the most resilient Islamism group in the world.

Radical Islam is here to stay in the Somali peninsula at least for a few decades. If it took 30 years to flourish, it could take another 30 years to uproot it so Somalis could once again

¹⁸² Abdurahman Abdullahi "Baadiyow", "Phases of the Islamic Movement in Somalia. Unpublished paper, n.d. 19-20. https://www.academia.edu/13227041/Phases_of_the_Islamic_Movement_in_Somalia (accessed 22 May 2021).

¹⁸³ Omar Faruk and Max Bearak, "'If I don't pay, they kill me': Al-Shabab tightens grip on Somalia with growing tax racket." The Washington Post, 31 August 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/if-i-dont-pay-they-kill-me-al-shabab-tightens-its-grip-on-somalia-with-growing-tax-racket/2019/08/30/81472b38-beac-11e9-a8b0-7ed8a0d5dc5d_story.html (accessed 22 May 2021).

¹⁸⁴ Mary Harper, "Somalia conflict: Al-Shabab 'collects more revenue than government.'" BBC, 26 October 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54690561> (accessed 22 May 2021).

¹⁸⁵ Katharine Houreld, "Elaborate Somali insurgent tax system collects almost as much as government." Reuters, 27 October 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/somalia-security/elaborate-somali-insurgent-tax-system-collects-almost-as-much-as-government-idUSKBN27C1P0> (accessed on 22 May 2021).

freely practice their preferred popular Islam. A prerequisite for the replacement of radical Islam is a strong but fair Somali central government. Achieving this precondition has proven very elusive for decades. Radical Islam, like the mafia, flourishes in areas where law and order are compromised and where corruption thrives. Somalia in particular and the Somali peninsula in general are prime fertile ground for radical Islam and other mafia style criminal enterprises.

The complexity of radical Islamist groups like al Shabab and ISIS often evades foreign pundits. These armed Islamist groups operate like mini states with efficient secret service and justice systems that are far more effective than the secular governments they are at war with. These radical groups sometimes provide services that local governments are either unwilling or unable to deliver. No wonder then that Islamist political candidates often beat their secular opponents in free and fair elections as we witnessed in Egypt (2012), Tunisia (2011), Turkey (2003- present “2021”) and Palestine (2006).

Conclusion

Islam is an important component of the Somali identity so much so that meeting a non-Muslim Somali is the exception rather than the rule. The claim that to be a Somali is to be a Muslim enjoys a wide acceptance in the Somali peninsula. While Islam is a unifying force for the Somalis, it is also a bone of contention because of the vocal radical Islamist minorities who discredit the faith of the silent Sufi majority Muslims among Somalis. Too much Muslim blood has been shed in the name of Islam in the Somali peninsula.

While Islam arrived in the Somali peninsula around the beginning of the 8th century, it was mostly limited in coastal areas of the Somali peninsula and in a few cities. These cities became centers for Islamic learning which helped with the Islamization of the interiors of the peninsula. The Somalis have therefore been completely Islamized by the 15th century. Local Sheikhs successfully spread the message of Islam to the deep and often inhospitable interiors of the peninsula. These Sufi Sheikhs used open air sermons, indoor preaching and Somali poetry to communicate the message of Islam.

Islam is never a stand-alone religion; with it comes an inbuilt Arabization program. The only language for formal prayers is Arabic. All Muslims must face Mecca to pray. The Sunnah, the imitation of Prophet Muhammad, is to emulate how Muhammad behaved, spoke, ate, dressed and even fixed his hair. Many Somali clans now claim descent from Muhammad’s family. While this claim has no literal ancestral merit, its spiritual power cannot be understated. The name “Muhammad” is the most popular name among Muslims wherever they live. Every first-born son is supposed to be given this name. Muhammad, including its various spellings, was the most popular name in 2017 for boys born in the UK.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Jennifer Meierhans and Rob England. “Baby names: Is Muhammad the most popular?” 26 September 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-45638806> (accessed 22 May 2021).

CHAPTER FIVE

A Brief History of Christian Missions in Somalia

Introduction

For many people, “Somali” and “Christian” are oxymorons but history is littered with enough evidence that this assumed paradox is one big fallacy. The purpose of this brief history is to highlight the long and consistent engagement of Christian missions among the Somali people in the Horn of Africa. This chapter will review a few of the most prominent mission organizations among Somalis and their challenges and successes in Islamic Somalia. This review will also elaborate on the rebirth of the Protestant mission work in Somalia in the 1950s and the impact the collapse of Somalia’s central government in 1991 still has on the church in Somalia. Somalia has 128 years of continuous Christian presence, beginning in 1881. Unbeknownst to many, there are numerous established house-churches in Somalia today. While the exact number of these Somali Christian congregations in Somalia is hard to know, estimates range from a few to several dozens. There are also growing Somali Christian groups in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Sustained missionary work among Somalis started in northern Somalia in 1881 when Roman Catholic fathers opened an orphanage in what was then British Somaliland. The first Protestant mission work was established in southern Somalia in 1896 when Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) opened mission work in what was then Italian Somaliland. SOLC established its first mission in the southern port town of Kismayo, Somalia, and expanded its ministry in the south to Jilib, Jamaame, and Mugaambo establishing successful schools, clinics, and churches.¹⁸⁷ SOLC experienced early success in Somalia.

While the Roman Catholic mission quickly faced intense objections from the local Somalis, the SOLC encountered much less oppositions from the local people. Through their orphanage ministry, the Roman Catholics witnessed the conversion of many children while the ministry of SOLC produced numerous adult believers in a short span of time.

Both mission organizations were eventually expelled from the Somali lands by the colonial powers but some of the local Christian communities they left behind hung onto the faith despite the intense persecutions they faced from the Somali Muslims.¹⁸⁸

The Missionary Work

This chapter intends to document the remarkable success of some selected mission organizations to the Somali people and the resilience of the local Christians in Somalia. Islamic Somalia has an estimated population of about 14 million with the longest coastline of any African country.¹⁸⁹ The country is predominantly Muslim, located in the Horn of Africa.

¹⁸⁷ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

¹⁸⁸ The British expelled the Roman Catholic mission from British Somaliland to appease the local Muslims. The Italians expelled SOLC from the Italian Somaliland because of Second World War politics; while Italy sided with Germany, Sweden sided with the US and its allies. Swedes thus became personae non gratae in Italian Somaliland.

¹⁸⁹“World Population Prospects 2017,” *United Nations Population Division*, Esa.un.org, (nd). <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/> (accessed 14 August 2018).

Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti border it. The northern part of Somalia is a former British colony known then as British Somaliland which has a direct maritime border with the Red Sea. The southern part was a former Italian colony known then as Italian Somaliland which has a maritime border with the Indian Ocean. Both territories united to form one country on 1 July 1960, the Republic of Somalia.¹⁹⁰ While Somalia is a founding member of the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union), it is also a member of the Arab League. Somalia thus straddles the African continent and the Arabian Peninsula both politically and religiously.

Somalis first encountered Christianity in a significant manner through the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in 1881.¹⁹¹ The Mogadishu Cathedral was built in 1928 and remained the biggest Cathedral in Africa until 1930's.¹⁹² Venanzio Francesco Filippini, the RCC Bishop of Mogadishu, reported in 1940 a membership of 40,000 Somali Catholics in the southern Bantu regions of Juba and Shebelle.¹⁹³ The Italian colonial government estimated the Somalia proper population in 1940 to be around 1,150,000 and updated it to 1,200,000 in 1950.¹⁹⁴ This report puts the Somali Christian population in 1940s around 3.5%. This percentage makes the well-known Somali mantra, "to be a Somali is to be a Muslim" a hollow claim.¹⁹⁵

The RCC declined in times of intolerance but proliferated in times of religious tolerance. The composition of the RCC is traditionally expatriate, diaspora and upper-middle-class; the RCC in Somalia derives much of its power and prestige from Italy.¹⁹⁶ Other members of this denomination are the local Bantus, who are not among the dominant Somali clans. Thus, formal membership in the RCC in Somalia collapses in times of instability as many non-Somali Catholics and dual-citizen Somalis evacuate.

The Protestant churches in Somalia often grow in times of adversity and plateau in times of stability.¹⁹⁷ These churches have a tiny expatriate community and even fewer upper-middle-class members. Thus, few would have the means to flee the country when they become the target of severe persecution. Most Protestants are from dominant Somali clans and thus more

See also: "Turning the Tide for Africa's largest Coastline," *The Goldman Environmental Prize* (16 March 2016). <https://www.goldmanprize.org/blog/turning-the-tide-africas-largest-coastline/> (accessed 09 May 2018).

¹⁹⁰ Greystone Press Staff, *The Illustrated Library of The World and Its Peoples: Africa, North and East* (Greystone Press, 1967), 338.

¹⁹¹ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity, volume 1* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publisher, 1991) 120.

¹⁹² "A Surprising History of Christianity in Somalia," *Alex of Esther Project* (16 April 2017). <http://theestherproject.com/surprising-history-christianity-somalia/> (accessed 30 September 2017).

¹⁹³ Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia, Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 66. Tripodi refers to the Bishop as Franco Filippini. The Bishop's legal name is Venanzio Filippini.

¹⁹⁴ "Diocese of Mogadiscio," *Catholic Hierarchy*, (nd). <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmgds.html> (accessed 26 April 2018).

¹⁹⁵ Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 22.

¹⁹⁶ Ray Cavanaugh, "Catholicism in Somalia: The Brave Few," *Catholic World Report*, (20 March 2016). <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2016/03/20/catholicism-in-somalia-the-brave-few/> (accessed 19 September 2018).

¹⁹⁷ M.M.M. (Somalia coordinator for an international denomination), in a telephone discussion with Aweis Ali, 24 November 2017.

often from a lower economic class than middle-class Catholics.¹⁹⁸ Therefore they can tap into Somalia's traditional clan and familial protection system when needed.¹⁹⁹

The RCC has, also, in the past responded to the humanitarian needs of the Somali people by opening high-quality schools, hospitals, and clinics.²⁰⁰ The RCC also pioneered orphanages, one of which was opened in 1891 in Daymoole, near Berbera, then British Somaliland, by the French Catholic Mission.²⁰¹

The Daymoole orphanage is best known for angering the famous Somali mullah and freedom fighter, Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, who waged a relentless *jihad* against the British colonizers of Somaliland.²⁰² One of the most significant triggers of Sayid's hatred of the British colonizers was when he met kids from the Daymoole Catholic orphanage.²⁰³ He considered these kids misled and assimilated into the religion and the culture of the Christian occupiers of Somaliland.²⁰⁴

The British had finally expelled the Catholics from Somaliland in the 1900s when Sayid succeeded in enticing hatred against the British in part because of the missionary work of the Catholics.²⁰⁵ The Catholics did not go very far; they moved to Jigjiga, a Somali town in the Somali region of Ethiopia.²⁰⁶ Despite the Muslim opposition, many Somalis turned to Christ because of the ministry of the RCC. Even many of those who did not convert developed an RCC-friendly outlook on life, politics, and culture.²⁰⁷ The RCC education system was so successful that the Italian colonial government in Somalia gave the church a subsidy by 1939 to manage 12 elementary schools with 1,776 students.²⁰⁸

¹⁹⁸ Dominant Somali clans belong to the nomadic background and are often hawkish with violent tendencies when crossed. These powerful clans include the Daarood, Hawiye and Isaaq.

¹⁹⁹ "Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture" by Joakim Gundel, *Austrian Red Cross*, COI Workshop Vienna, Accord, Revised Edition, (15 May 2009), 21 – 23. See also: Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 42.

²⁰⁰ Hassan Abukar, *Mogadishu Memoir*, (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse 2015), 71.

²⁰¹ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*, 121.

²⁰² Said S. Samatar (editor), *In the Shadow of Conquest: Islam in Colonial Northeast Africa*, (Red Sea Press, 1992), 39.

²⁰³ "Sayid", also spelt as *Sayyid*, Saiyed, Seyit, Seyd, Syed, Sayed, Sayyed, Saiyid, Seyed and Seyyed, is from the Arabic: *سييد* pronounced as [ˈsæj.jid]. The term is earned honorific name which means Master, Lord, or Chief.

²⁰⁴ Sayid is said to have met the orphans and inquired of their clan affiliation to see if he knew their families or clansmen; the kids could not recite their clan lineage (a taboo in the Somali culture) and said they belonged to the clan of the [Catholic] Fathers. In another encounter with the Daymoole orphans, Sayid asked the boys their names, one said his name was "John Abdullah!" See also: Said S. Samatar, *In the Shadow of Conquest*, 39

²⁰⁵ Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006), 76.

²⁰⁶ Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 77.

²⁰⁷ The British colonized northern Somalia (British Somaliland), the Italians colonized southern Somaliland.

²⁰⁸ Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1st edition, 1963), 77.

The Rebirth of the Protestant Mission Work



Merlin R. Grove
Photo Credit: GAMEO

There was a vacuum of Protestant missionary work in Somalia after the Italian colonial rulers expelled SOLC in 1935. However, this changed when the Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953;²⁰⁹ the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) followed suit in 1954, and they both started high-quality schools, clinics, and hospitals in addition to their traditional missionary witness.²¹⁰ After the Daymoole orphanage challenges, the RCC adapted a more culturally sensitive ministry strategy but the SIM and MM demonstrated the axiomatic missionary zeal which probably contributed to the deep suspicions some local Muslims harbored against the SIM and the MM.²¹¹ The MM had its first martyr in 1962 when a fanatical Muslim man stabbed a 33 year old Canadian born missionary, Merlin Grove, to death in Mogadishu.²¹²

The SIM and the MM had a formal agreement among themselves not to establish a denominationally based Somali church.²¹³ This arrangement also meant by default to neither support nor allow such a denominational Somali church. The SIM took this thought-provoking agreement more seriously than the more pragmatic MM.²¹⁴ The united front of these two mission organizations was compromised in 1966 when diverse groups of Somali Christians in Mogadishu, Bulo Burde and Belet Weyne decided to join the Mennonite church.²¹⁵ This development of denominational affiliation immensely distressed the SIM.²¹⁶ Despite some occasional setbacks in their relationships, the SIM and MM are the best examples of Christian mission organizations cooperating in bringing the Gospel to Islamic Somalia.²¹⁷ This Christian spirit of cooperation has facilitated the conversion of many Somalis throughout southern Somalia.

When the Somali government nationalized the property of these two mission organizations, the RCC allowed the SIM, MM, and the Somali Christians associated with them to worship at the RCC Cathedral in the Somali capital. This Christ-like gesture has positively contributed to the ministries of the SIM, MM, and RCC.²¹⁸

²⁰⁹ The Mennonite Mission registered in Somalia as Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM). See: David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (PhD Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

²¹⁰ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*, 21.

²¹¹ Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)." (PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011), 111.

²¹² Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia, 129.

²¹³ Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 196.

²¹⁴ Ibid. 195.

²¹⁵ Ibid. 196.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 196-197.

²¹⁷ Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 114.

²¹⁸ Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu*, 71

French Catholic Mission arrived in British Somaliland in 1891 and was expelled in 1910.²¹⁹ Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church entered southern Somalia in 1896 and was expelled in 1935.²²⁰ The Roman Catholic Church established its presence in Mogadishu in 1904 and closed its ministry in Somalia in 1991 because of the collapse of Somalia's central government.²²¹ The Mennonite Mission entered southern Somalia in 1953 and was expelled in 1976; the SIM faced the same fate in 1976 after entering the country in 1954.²²² The ministries of these leading organizations have been hampered by different circumstances beyond their control; despite this setback, these mission bodies are still formidable forces in the Somali ministry.

The 1991 Calamity

The collapse of the Somali government in 1991 ushered in decades of ruthless civil war; the Somali state is still trying to recover from the brutal conflict with very limited success because of the armed radical Islamist group, al-Shabab. While all Somalis have suffered in the lawlessness that came with this strife, the Somali Christians have paid an enormous price as they became the target of a Muslim holy war that includes discrimination, dispossession, and murder.

While clan protection in Somalia is still common, persecution of Christians in Somalia mainly occurs outside one's clan turf. For instance, the death of Professor Haji Mohamed Hussein Ahmed best illustrates this. While Haji is from a dominant clan in northern Somalia, he was martyred outside this vicinity in Mogadishu.²²³ The most dominant Somali clans are of nomadic background and are known for their combative predispositions. Christians from non-nomadic clans (artisans, traders, fishers, and farmers, etc) lack significant clan protection and may be killed with impunity by Muslim fanatics and clan-based militias.²²⁴ These non-nomadic background Somalis are derogatively referred to as "*looma ooyaan*" which means "no one cries for them," and thus no one seeks revenge for them.²²⁵ The Somali clan protection system with its documented revenge killings is extended to all clan members whether they are saints or sinners.²²⁶ In the absence of a functioning Somali government, the clan protection system to this day often saves the lives of Christians despite their minority faith.

²¹⁹ Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)." (PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011), 116.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ "Shahiid Maxamed Xuseen Axmed," *Noloshu Cusub*, (nd).

<http://noloshacusub.org/Literature/History/XXM.aspx> (accessed 15 August 2019).

²²⁴ "Country Policy and Information Note Somalia: Majority Clans and Minority Groups in the South and Central Somalia", Version 2.0, *Home Office*, Refworld.org, (June 2017), 8.

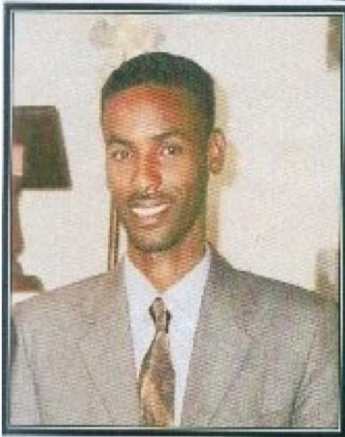
<https://www.refworld.org/docid/59422bdc4.html> (accessed 4 September 2019).

²²⁵ "Looma Ooyaan – No One Cries for Them: The Situation Facing Somalia's Minority Women," *Minority Rights International*, (30 January 2015).

<https://minorityrights.org/publications/looma-ooyaan-no-one-cries-for-them-the-situation-facing-somalias-minority-women-january-2015/> (accessed 18 September 2019).

²²⁶ "Clans in Somalia: Report, 21." *Austrian Red Cross*. <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4b29f5e82.pdf> (accessed 26 August 2019).

To add insult to injury, the Somali parliament adopted *Sharia law* nationwide in 2009.²²⁷ Such a move has made the life of Christians more perilous. Several Western Christians representing various faith organizations have been killed in Somalia since 1991, including Sister Leonella Sgorbati,²²⁸ and other religious workers.²²⁹ The list of expatriate mission workers martyred for their faith since 1991 include Verena Karer, Annalena Tonelli, Dick and Enid Eyeington, Martin Jutzi, Leonella Sgorbita, Gilford Koech and Andrew Kibet.²³⁰ No wonder that Ruth Myers, a veteran missionary to the Somalis states, “Currently for Christians, Somalia is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world, second only to North Korea.”²³¹



David Abdulwahab Mohamed Ali
Photo Credit: Somalis For Jesus

The al-Shabab Islamist group has in the past declared that it wants “Somalia free of all Christians.”²³² This al-Qaeda affiliated group confiscated farms owned by Somali Christians in 2011; also in that same year, prominent “moderate” Somali Muslim scholars and preachers publicly advocated in press releases for the killing of Somali Christians.²³³ The Somali government’s official National Television Network broadcast the *fatwa* press release showing beyond reasonable doubt its complicity in the anti-Christian *fatwa*. In an earlier *fatwa* release of 2003, Sheikh Nur Barud and members of the *Kulanka Culimada* (now *Majma’a Culimada*) said, “All Somali Christians must be killed according to the Islamic law.”²³⁴ Sheikh Nur Barud and his group also threatened Somali Christians in Europe.²³⁵

²²⁷ “Somalia,” *The Voice of the Martyrs Canada*, (nd). <https://www.vomcanada.com/somalia.htm> (accessed 30 September 2019).

See also: “Somalia,” *US Department of State*, (13 September 2011). https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168430.htm (accessed 18 September 2019).

²²⁸ “Slain nun ‘was willing to die,” *News 24 Archives*, (21 September 2006). <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Slain-nun-was-willing-to-die-20060921> (accessed 15 August 2019).

²²⁹ “Ten years since the murder of Annalena Tonelli,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, (02 November 2013). <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/ten-years-since-the-murder-of-annalena-tonelli#.U7BrEMJeHIU> (accessed 15 August 2019).

²³⁰ *Somalis For Jesus: The Martyrs’ Corner*, October 2012. <https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2008/11/martyrs-corner.html> (accessed 08 June 2019).

²³¹ Ruth Myers, Ruth. *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia*. (Moreland City, Victoria, Australia: Acorn Press, 2016), Author’s Note, Kindle Edition, 171.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ “Islamic militants confiscate Christian farms,” *The Voice of the Martyrs Canada*, (10 February 2011). <https://www.vomcanada.com/so-2011-02-10.htm> (accessed 06 September 2019).

Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians*, (Thomas Nelson, 2013), 253.

See also: Stephen Mbogo, “Somalia’s Tiny Christian Community Reportedly Under Fire,” *CNSN*, (07 July 2008). <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/somalias-tiny-christian-community-reportedly-under-fire> (accessed 06 September 2019).

²³⁴ Sheik Nur Barud was at the time the vice chairman of the powerful Somali Islamist group, *Kulanka Culimada*. “*Kulanka*” is Somali and “*Majma’a*” is Arabic and they both mean “council.” “Somali Christians and Missionaries Murdered,” *Worthy News*, 19 January 2003. <https://www.worthynews.com/378-somali-christians-and-missionaries-murdered> (accessed 13 August 2019).

²³⁵ Shania-Shino Gabo, “Fatwa against Somali Christians in Europe,” *YouTube*, 2017 <https://youtu.be/ygIcwlW9qz4> (accessed 06 September 2019).

No wonder then that marauding radical Islamists kill Somali Christians with impunity according to the Washington DC-based International Christian Concern.²³⁶ Such Christians include David Abdulwahab Mohamed Ali whom the ICC described in 2008 as the “fourth Christian martyred in Somalia in the last six months.”²³⁷

Conclusion

Since the late 1990s, a denomination from the holiness tradition has mobilized its personnel and resources to take the Gospel to the Somalis in Somalia and in other Somali regions in the Horn of Africa. The missionary endeavor of this denomination has changed the landscape of the Somali ministry by providing theological training to its mainly Somali ministers, placing resources at their disposal and believing in them. This Somali-led mission effort resulted in dozens of Somali house-churches.

The RCC and some Protestant churches and mission organizations are still active in Somalia today. The RCC is mainly focused on the humanitarian needs of the Somali people who are recovering from decades of ruthless civil war. While a very few Protestant denominations and mission organizations are also involved in the relief work in Somalia, most are focusing on church planting, social media ministry and discipleship trainings.

While this chapter illustrates the little-known church in Somalia, it underscores the dedication of Christian mission workers and the fact that no soil is too hard for the seed of the Gospel to take root and grow. Despite the relentless persecution Christians endure in Somalia, there is no evidence it has slowed down the numerical growth of the church. Tertullian may have been right when he said, “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”²³⁸ The belief that persecution stimulates church growth finds basis in the Acts of the Apostles where the church grew after the intense persecution in Jerusalem, a growth that started with Peter’s preaching at Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus has also made clear in the Gospel of John (12:24) that martyrdom and church growth are related using the example of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, only to produce much fruit.

²³⁶ “Crossing the Bridge: Strengthening the Underground Church in Somalia,” *International Christian Concern*, (2013). <http://info.persecution.org/blog/bid/266812/Strengthening-the-Underground-Church-in-Somalia> (accessed 30 September 2019).

²³⁷ “Islamic Extremists Kill another Christian in Somalia: Fourth Christian Martyred in Somalia in the Last Six Months,” *International Christian Concern*, (29 April 2008). <https://www.persecution.org/2008/04/29/islamic-extremists-kill-another-christian-in-somalia/> (accessed 08 September 2019).

²³⁸ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Tertullian’s Apology, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, (Oregon, Books for the Ages, 1997), 102. http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF_0_03.PDF (accessed 12 September 2019).

CHAPTER SIX

The Greatest Missionaries to the Somalis: The Heroes of 1881-1981

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to acknowledge the sacrifices, challenges, and successes of the greatest missionaries to the Somalis. The one hundred years from 1881 to 1981 encompass the golden years of the Somali Church in terms of the quality and quantity of the converts who came to the Lord under the ministries of the Magnificent Four: The Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC),²³⁹ the Mennonite Mission (MM), and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM).²⁴⁰ Any Somali Christian whose name became well-known, even outside Christian circles, was saved under the ministries of these four organizations within the one hundred years stated above.

The French Catholic Mission (FCM), under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), opened a famous orphanage in Daymoole village, British Somaliland, in 1881.²⁴¹ This orphanage, which was located near Berbera, is best remembered for contributing to the anger of the Somali Muslim scholar and freedom fighter, Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, (7 April 1856 - 21 December 1920),²⁴² who waged a relentless jihad against the British colonizers and their sympathizers. Hussein A. Bulhan writes that Sayid's "wrath intensified when he met Somali boys converted to Christianity by missionaries who came and collaborated with the colonial administration."²⁴³

The British finally expelled the FCM in 1910 to appease Sayid and his followers.²⁴⁴ By then, the FCM had won numerous Somalis to the Lord before moving to the Somali town of Jigjiga, Eastern Ethiopia, 367 kilometers from Daymoole.²⁴⁵

The RCC was known not only for its top-quality orphanages but also the high standards of its schools. By 1939, the Italian Colonial Authority had given the Church a subsidy to oversee 12 elementary schools with 1,776 students.²⁴⁶

²³⁹ The Swedish name of this mission organization is Evangelisk Fosterlands-Stiftelsen (EF-S); the closest English translation is "Evangelical Homeland Foundation," better known today as "Swedish Evangelical Mission." See also: David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

²⁴⁰ The work of the SIM was never intended to be limited to the modern country of Sudan. Sudan is a regional geographical area that stretches from the Senegal border to southern Mali (once known as French Sudan), Burkina Faso, southern Niger, northern Nigeria, northern Ghana, southern Chad, western Darfur (in modern-day Sudan), and present-day South Sudan.

²⁴¹ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 121.

²⁴² "Sayid", also spelt as *Sayyid*, Saiyed, Seyit, Seyd, Syed, Sayed, Sayyed, Saiyid, Seyed and Seyyed, is from the Arabic: سييد pronounced as [ˈsæj.jid]. The term is earned honorific name which means Master, Lord, or Chief.

²⁴³ Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somalis*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 263.

²⁴⁴ Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006), 76.

²⁴⁵ Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 77.

²⁴⁶ Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1st edition, 1963), 77.

The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) established its first mission in the coastal town of Kismayo in 1896, quickly expanding to Jilib, Jamaame and Mogaambo, all located in the Jubaland regions of southern Somalia.²⁴⁷ SOLC opened schools, clinics and churches just like the RCC.²⁴⁸ SOLC planted a number of Somali-led house-churches in southern Somalia before the Italian Colonial Authority expelled it in 1935.²⁴⁹ SOLC is arguably the most effective Protestant mission organization in the Magnificent Four.

The Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953, setting up a mission base in Mogadishu.²⁵⁰ In addition to evangelistic ministry, the MM opened much-needed schools and clinics. The MM eventually expanded its work to Mahaddaay, Jowhar and Jamaame while also opening two other mission stations. The Mennonites were very successful in their ministry. The Somali government expelled the MM in 1976.

The SIM entered Somalia in 1954 under the leadership of the legendary missionary couple, Warren and Dorothy Modricker.²⁵¹ Like the MM, the SIM operated schools and clinics in addition to their traditional ministry.²⁵² The Somali government expelled the SIM in 1976. Like the MM, the SIM was very successful in Somalia.

John Ethelstan Cheese (1877-1959), a Church of England member and an independent mystic missionary, invited the Modrickers to Somalia.²⁵³ Cheese, who was known as the poor man of God, and the holiest man in Somalia, paved the way for the SIM work in Somalia.²⁵⁴ He served thirty-three years among the Somalis.

The Greatest Missionaries

The missionaries who served among Somalis from 1881 – 1981 are indeed the greatest missionaries because of the holistic ministries they pioneered among Somali Muslims and the determination they demonstrated in the face of intense persecution. These heroes thrived in the inhospitable terrains of the Somali peninsula.

Some of these heroes were martyred in the Horn of Africa and others lost their minor children because of illnesses that could have been treated in their home countries. In fact, some wondered in the early years of the 20th century if there were more missionary graves in the Somali peninsula than Somali Christians.

²⁴⁷ These regions were known at the time as *Oltre Giuba*, Greater Juba, and Trans-Juba of British Kenya.

²⁴⁸ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

²⁴⁹ Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)." (PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011), 116.

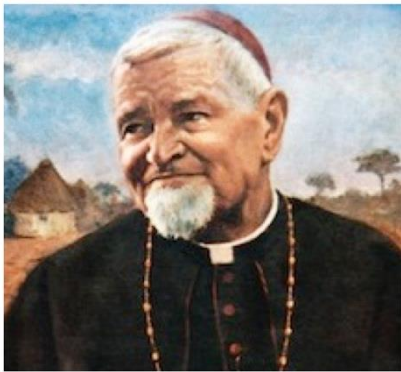
²⁵⁰ The Mennonite Mission registered in Somalia as Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM). See David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

²⁵¹ To learn more about the Modrickers, please see: Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006).

²⁵² Abdullahi, Abdurahman M., *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*. (Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2015), 21.

²⁵³ To learn more about this saint, please read: Philip Cousins. *Ethelstan Cheese: A Saint of no Fixed Abode*. (Churchman Publishing, 1986).

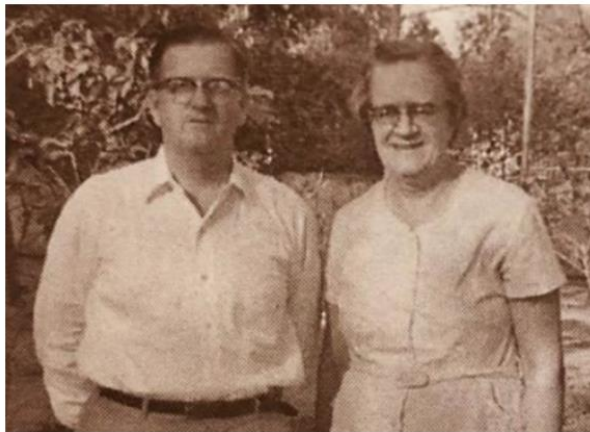
²⁵⁴ David A. Kerr, "Cheese, John Ethelstan." *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. <https://dacb.org/stories/somalia/cheese-johne/> (accessed 01 January 2021).



Venanzio Francesco Filippini
Photo Credit: Velar.it

The greatest Roman Catholic missionary is arguably Monsignor Venanzio Francesco Filippini, O.F.M, the RCC Bishop to Somalia (23 May 1933 - 19 October 1970). Filippini reported 40,000 Somali Catholics in 1940, mainly among the Somali Bantus of Juba and Shebelle.²⁵⁵ According to the Italian Colonial Authority, the population of Somalia in 1940 was around 1,150,000, and was updated to 1,200,000 in 1950 according to *Catholic Hierarchy*.²⁵⁶ This RCC report puts the Somali Christian population in the 1940s at about 3.5%. If this report of Somali Catholics is accurate, then the often-repeated Somali Muslim mantra, “To be a Somali is to be a Muslim”, becomes a hollow

claim. Ali Abdirahman Hersi, a Somali scholar, paraphrased this maxim in 1977 by asserting, “It is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity.”²⁵⁷



Warren and Dorothy Modricker
Photo Credit: Helen Miller/The Hardest Place

The greatest Protestant missionary couple is Warren and Dorothy Modricker. The Modrickers pioneered the Somali Protestant ministry in Somalia.²⁵⁸ They arrived in British Somaliland in 1933 and temporarily relocated to Yemen after the British Colonial Authority had denied them entry to Somaliland. The Modrickers lived in a number of countries so they could better minister to the Somalis. These countries include Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. Even after retiring to the United States, the Modrickers continued ministering to the Somalis in the US. Almost every

Protestant Somali Christian in the Somali peninsula directly or indirectly traces their salvation to the ministry of the Modrickers. The Modrickers likewise helped Aadan Jim’aale Faarah and his Somali team translate the Bible into Somali. The Modrickers also started the most well-known and the most effective Somali radio ministry in 1972. Many Somalis first heard the Gospel because of this ministry, *Codka Noloshu Cusub* (Voice of New Life).²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia, Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 66. Tripodi refers to the Bishop as Franco Filippini. The Bishop’s legal name is Venanzio Filippini.

²⁵⁶ “Diocese of Mogadiscio,” Catholic Hierarchy, (nd).

<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmgds.html> (accessed 21 December 2020).

²⁵⁷ Hersi, Ali Abdirahman. *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977,109

²⁵⁸ The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) pioneered the Somali ministry in the Jubaland regions which were known at the time as *Oltre Giuba*, Greater Juba, and Trans-Juba of British Kenya. This region was technically part of British Kenya at the time.

²⁵⁹ The author of this book came to the Lord through this radio ministry in 1986.

The Fruits of the Greatest Missionaries

Somaliland

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) wins when it comes to the quality of Somali Christian converts. This Church produced first, second and even third-generation Somali Christians of very high caliber. The Protestant Somali Christians often struggle to gain acceptance in Somalia but not the Somali Roman Catholic ones. No Somali Protestant Christian ever won a national election in Somalia. However, a number of Somali Roman Catholics beat Muslim challengers in Somali elections. The high-profile Somali Christians from Somaliland include:

1. Michael Mariano Ali (1914 –1987), a Roman Catholic, was a freedom fighter, statesman, diplomat and politician. Michael Mariano, as he is better known, was a diligent lawyer and a businessman; Michael was the most prominent voice in the Somali Youth League (SYL).²⁶⁰ He established the powerful Somali political party, National United Front (NUF), in 1958 and became its chairman. Michael was elected as a Member of the Somaliland Parliament (MP) in 1954. He was elected again in 1960 as an MP for the Somali Parliament after Somaliland and Somalia united to form the Somali Republic. Michael also served in the Somali cabinet as Minister of Economic Planning under the Premiership of Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal. Michael also served his country as an ambassador to Zambia and southern Africa from 1974-1986. He received a state funeral when he died in Mogadishu in 1987.

During one of these Parliamentary elections, Michael’s political challenger circulated an infamous anti-Michael poem in which the refrain was “*Michael iska eeg iyo maska daba yaal.*” “Be careful of Michael and the snake behind him.” The snake was Michael’s Christian faith. The fear-mongering failed, and Michael was elected in a landslide.

Michael, a man of great courage and wisdom, once said to President Mohamed Siyad Barre that Somalia would never enjoy peace until it returned to its Christian roots. Michael made this prophetic pronouncement during a cabinet meeting in 1974.²⁶¹ Sixteen years later, in 1991, the central government collapsed and ushered in a bloodbath and destruction the likes of which the nation had never seen before.

2. Lewis Clement Salool (1919 -1997), a Roman Catholic, had a Somali father and an Indian mother. Lewis was “a native of British Somaliland and of a missionary Catholic family. Educated in Bombay where he graduated [with] M.A., LL.B., practiced as a lawyer in Addis Ababa under [the] Italian regime, later in British

²⁶⁰ The Somali Youth League (SYL) (Somali: Ururka Dhalinyarada Soomaaliyeed, Italian: Lega dei Giovani Somali or Lega Somala della Gioventù), was initially established as the Somali Youth Club (SYC) to disguise its political ambitions from the Italian Colonial Authority. The SYL was the first political party in Somalia. It fought for Somalia’s independence in the Somali Peninsula and in international arenas in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The SYL demanded the unification of the five Somali territories in the Somali Peninsula to form the Somali Republic.

²⁶¹ Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 7.

Somaliland. He came to Mogadishu in 1945 as Legal Advisor to SYL.”²⁶² Lewis also designed the SYL flag in 1942.

Lewis Clement Salool (alternative spelling, Salole) and Michael Mariano Ali, both SYL stalwarts, crafted the Somali Youth League’s core message in its pursuit of Somalia’s independence and unification. Lewis and Michael also “wrote all the party petitions.”²⁶³

3. Alex Qolqoole, a Roman Catholic, was “unequaled in the history of modern Somali nationalism.”²⁶⁴ Alex was a businessman and a patriot who worked closely with Michael and Lewis. Alex supported the SYL financially and advised other key leaders of the movement. He was a brilliant statesman.
4. Awil Haji Abdillahi, a Roman Catholic, is better known as Anthony James. He was a member of the 1964 cabinet and served as the Minister of Finance under the Premiership of Abdirisak Haji Hussein. Anthony significantly contributed to the independence of Somalia and Somaliland and their unification in 1960.
5. Ahmed Ali Kootali, a Roman Catholic, is a second-generation Christian, a businessman and a senior leader of the Somali National Movement (SNM). The most well-known of Ahmed’s children is probably Layla Kootali, a singer and entertainer.



Dr. Omar Elmi Dihod
Photo Credit: Afthannews.com

6. Dr. Omar Elmi Dihod (1947 – 2016), a Protestant, is one of only two Protestant Christians in this Somaliland list. Omar was a medical doctor and a colonel in the Somali Defense Forces. Omar later defected to the Somali National Movement (SNM) and became one of its vital early leaders. The SNM fought against the government of President Mohamed Siyad Barre until its collapse in 1991. Omar returned to Hargeisa victoriously and became the Minister of Health and later the Somaliland Envoy for International Recognition. Omar was later appointed as a presidential advisor by three consecutive Somaliland Presidents.

7. Prof. Haji Muhammed Hussein Ahmed (1951 – 1996), a Protestant, was educated in Somalia (Lafoole University) and Canada (University of Saskatchewan). He returned to Somalia and taught at the Somali National University. He stayed in Mogadishu during the early years of the Somali civil war to rebuild the education system in the country. Ahmed was kidnapped in Mogadishu and martyred because of his Christian faith on 3 April 1996.

²⁶² “Personalities in Somalia,” 7 December 1948, FO 1015/51, UK National Archives. Cited in Abdi Ismail Samatar. *Africa’s First Democrats: Somalia’s Aden A. Osman and Abdirizak H. Hussen.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 235.

²⁶³ Abdi Ismail Samatar, *Africa’s First Democrats: Somalia’s Aden A. Osman and Abdirizak H. Hussen.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 45.

²⁶⁴ Cited in Mohamed Haji Abdulahi Ingiriis, “Reframing Narratives of Statebuilding and Peacebuilding in Africa. Integrated Field Research Report.” A paper presented in the African Leadership Centre Research Project, 18-19 April 2016, in Nairobi, Kenya, 10.

Somalia

Despite southern Somalia's (Italian Somaliland) long history of Italian occupation and colonization, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) did not attract or produce any prominent local Christians except for one. It is a topic for another chapter why the RCC could not replicate its success in Somaliland, Djibouti, and the Somali region of Ethiopia. Following are five prominent Somali Christians from Somalia. The first two are Roman Catholic and the remaining three are Protestant.

1. Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudiin (d. June 1951), a Roman Catholic, was the founder and the first President of the SYL. Sakhawudiin, as he is known, recruited the first twelve key leaders of the SYL;²⁶⁵ he contracted tuberculosis as a younger man and



Elman Ali Ahmed. Photo Credit: Twitter

was treated in Forlanini (also known as Laansareeti) Hospital in Mogadishu. Sakhawudiin became a Christian during his hospitalization.²⁶⁶

2. Elman Ali Ahmed (d. 09 March 1996), a Roman Catholic, is a national hero. He was an Italian and German-educated electrical engineer, entrepreneur, peace activist and human rights advocate. Elman was murdered in Mogadishu by unknown gunmen suspected to be bankrolled by the late Somali warlord, General Muhammed Faarah

Aideed. Elman was known for his motto, "*qoriga dhig, qalinka qaado.*" "*Put down the gun, pick up the pen.*"

Elman managed his football club, Elman FC, spearheaded a literacy campaign, created income-generating projects for thousands of poor and disadvantaged children. Elman rescued homeless children and found safe havens for them. He also founded Elman Peace in 1990 which "is dedicated to promoting peace, cultivating leadership and empowering the marginalized brackets of society to be decision-makers in the processes that ensure their wellbeing."²⁶⁷ Elman Peace is an award-winning human rights organization.

3. Professor Ahmed Ali Haile (1953 – 2011), a Protestant, is the highest-profile Somali Christian from Somalia (Italian Somaliland). Ahmed was an American-educated peace-maker and educator. President Ali Mahdi Muhammed appointed Ahmed in 1991 to become the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Ahmed declined to accept the official appointment.
4. Professor Da'ud Hassan Ali (1944 - 2008), a Protestant, was educated in Somalia, Lebanon and the United Kingdom. Da'ud moved to Britain in 1967 after completing

²⁶⁵ The thirteen SYL leaders are: Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudiin (who was the actual founder), Yasin Haji Osman Sharmarke, Mohamed Hirsi Nur (Seyedin), Haji Mahamed Hussein Mahad, Osman Geedi Raage, Dhere Haji Dhere, Dahir Haji Osman (Dhegaweyne), Ali Hasan Maslah, Mohamed Ali Nur, Mohamed Farah Hilowle, H. Mohamed Abdullahi Hayesi, Hudow Malin Abdullahi Salah, and Mohamed Osman Barbe Bardhere.

²⁶⁶ Mohamed A. Gurhan, "The Persecuted Disciples of Jesus Christ: A Research Article on Somali Ecclesiology." (Somali Christian Mission, December 2012), 15.

²⁶⁷ Elman Peace: "Our Story," <http://elmanpeace.org/about/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

his course of study in Beirut, Lebanon. He worked for the Birmingham City Council as an educational psychologist. He returned to Somalia in 2004 after early retirement to rebuild the educational system of the country. He was martyred for his Christian faith in Beledweyn alongside Rehana Ahmed (1975-2008) and two Kenyan colleagues.

5. Aadan Jim'aale Faarah, a Protestant, was an influential Lieutenant Colonel in the National Security Service (NSS Somali: *Hay'ada Nabadsugidda Qaranka*, HNQ), Somalia's powerful secret service. He used his position to defend the rights of Christian organizations who were often targeted by unscrupulous elements in the NSS. Aadan was also a Bible translator, hymnologist and a prominent church leader. Aadan composed some of the most famous Somali Christian hymns of the *degrie* genre and translated the Somali Bible with the help of the celebrated SIM missionaries, Warren and Dorothy Modricker.

Djibouti



William J. F. Syad
Photo Credit: Lubimyczytać.pl

Despite its small population, Djibouti produced the biggest number of high-profile ethnic Somali Roman Catholics. Many of these eminent Christians have ancestral roots in Somaliland. These renowned ethnic Somali Christians include:

1. Jean Paul Noel Abdi, (c. 1946 - 13 April 2012), a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament, President of the League of Human Rights and a fierce critic of President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh. Jean Paul was a fearless defender of the rights of his fellow Djiboutians.
2. Maitre Luc Abdi Aden, a Roman Catholic, was a highly acclaimed lawyer and former Governor of the Central Bank
3. Antoine Michel Barthelemy, a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament
4. Vincent Omar Ahmed Youssouf (1938 – 2017), a Russian educated Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament and an active member of the *Front de Libération de Côte des Somalis* (English: Front for the Liberation of the Somali Coast), a liberation-focused guerrilla organization in French Somaliland (known today as Djibouti). Vincent was often self-exiled in Hargeisa and Mogadishu to better fight for the liberation of Djibouti.
5. Alain David, a Roman Catholic, is a prominent medical doctor who never turned away any patient because they could not afford his services.
6. Chantal Lelong, a Roman Catholic, was an Inspector General of the Ministry of Education, University of Djibouti adjunct professor and senior advisor for USAID.
7. Robert Carton Dibet, a Roman Catholic, was a Caritas Director and humanitarian worker.

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8. Wahib Issa Ali, a Roman Catholic, better known as Jean Pierre Issa, was a Member of Parliament.
 9. Edouard Shamis, a Roman Catholic, was a Secretary at the Presidential Palace known for her humility and professionalism.
 10. Thomas Ahmed Aden Youssouf, a Roman Catholic, was a Minister of Finance who strengthened the economy of his country.
 11. Michel Dirieh, a Roman Catholic, was a Director General of the Ministry of Labor who was an advocate for the interests of the Djiboutian workers.
 12. William J. F. Syad (1930 - 1993), a Roman Catholic, is the most celebrated Djiboutian author and novelist. William was the pioneer of the French language literature in his country. He wrote both in French and in English.

Somali Region of Ethiopia

The most prominent ethnic Somali Christians include:

1. Dr. Peter Gabriel Robleh, a Roman Catholic, is a former Brussels-based Ethiopian ambassador to the Benelux.²⁶⁸ Peter also represented his country in the European Union. During this assignment, Peter was often interviewed by the international media on issues pertaining to the Horn of Africa.
2. Arteh Mo'alim Muhumed Ali Omar (d. 2002), a Protestant, led a Somali militia that fought against the British Military Administration in the Somali region of Ethiopia, known then as British Ogaden (1941-1955). The British derogatively called him *Arteh Shuftay* (Arteh the highway robber). He later reconciled with the British colonial authority and ended his rebellion. Arteh later converted to Christianity and the local Muslims in the region nicknamed him *Arteh Gaal* (Arteh the Christian).²⁶⁹ Arteh's Muslim sub-clan subsequently anointed him as their Chief Elder in the region. The sub-clan christened him as *Arteh Mo'alim* to emphasize that his dad was a Muslim preacher and madrassa teacher.

Arteh was the founder and the CEO of Ecumenical Development Group for Somalia (EDGS). Arguably the biggest and most effective non-governmental organization (NGO) in Somalia for decades. EDGS implemented hundreds of projects all over Somalia. They dug hundreds of ponds, shallow and deep-water wells, supported livestock and agricultural projects, equipped technical schools, installed windmills in Lower Shabelle, etc. In 1991 when Somalia's central government collapsed, EDGS had several thousand employees in Somalia.

3. Ali Ibrahim Ahmed (d. 29 June 2005), a Protestant, was an Egyptian-trained Somali military officer who studied the Bible in India. Ali was a renowned hymnologist and a humanitarian worker. He served as the Minister of Agriculture in the Ethiopian Somali Regional State before he died in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

²⁶⁸ The Benelux Union, or simply Benelux, is a politico-economic union of three neighboring countries of western Europe: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

²⁶⁹ *Gaal* is a derogatory Somali term which Muslims use for all non-Muslims

Somali Region of Kenya

1. Shaafi'i Ibraahim Faarah (b.1932), a Protestant, is a retired longtime minister of the Gospel. Shaafi'i is known as a fearless witness, expert on the Somali culture, language and poetry. Shaafi'i came to the Lord in 1969 and ministered both in Somalia and Kenya for decades. Shaafi'i was once asked why his Muslim clan protected him from harm. He answered, "In popular Islam, the clan is more important than Islam! If a man from a different clan kills me, my clan would see that as humiliation because they could not protect one of their own from a rival clan. My clan is not protecting me as an individual; they are also protecting their honor."²⁷⁰

Exclusive List

The fruits of the greatest missionaries chronicled above are those whose names are well-known, not only among Somali Christians but also among the Somali Muslims. The list is, therefore, very exclusive. For example, Dominic Colhaye (d. 1991) was born in Gabiley, British Somaliland, and moved to Djibouti (then French Somaliland) in the 1940s with his Muslim mother when he was a baby. The Catholic Church in Djibouti raised Dominic as a Roman Catholic Christian. He later became a Djiboutian citizen, Bible study leader and humanitarian worker before he died in a motorcycle accident. While Dominic was well-known among the ethnic Somali Christians in Djibouti, he lacked name recognition among ethnic Somali Muslims in his country. Dominic will, therefore, not be featured in the Djiboutian list of the prominent Somali Christians who came to the Lord under the ministry of the greatest missionaries to the Somalis.

Another Roman Catholic Somali Christian of a similar caliber was Gregory Fidel who died in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in 2008). Unlike Dominic, Fidel Gidhi Gidhi, as he was locally known, was a second-generation Christian. His father, who was from Bur'oo, British Somaliland, became a disciple of Christ in the early 1900s. Also, not included in the list are the Christian children and grandchildren of these famed Somali Christians. Many of the children and grandchildren are lawyers, medical doctors, academicians and entrepreneurs but they lack the name recognition their parents enjoyed in the Somali peninsula.

The SYL Flag



SYL flag surrounded by the organization's founders

Lewis Clement Salool (alternative spelling, Salole) designed the Somali Youth League (SYL) flag in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1942. He later presented the flag in Jigjiga, eastern Ethiopia, during a meeting organized by some of the early supporters of the SYL. Lewis included in the flag a prominent cross, a crescent and five stars representing the five Somali territories the SYL wanted to be united under one republic: British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, French Somaliland, the Ogaden-Haud region of Ethiopia and the Northern Frontier District (NFD), Kenya.

²⁷⁰ "Courage in Our Conviction: A Conversation with Pastor Shaafi'i Ibraahim Faarah." Somali Bible Society Journal, Volume 1, Issue 1, Version 2, December 2020, 60.
https://www.academia.edu/44571287/Courage_in_Our_Conviction_A_Conversation_with_Pastor_Shafii_Ibraahim_Faarah (accessed 28 December 2020).

The thirteen SYL founders, twelve of whom were Muslim, recognized that their struggle for independence could fail without the support of the educated Somali Christians from British Somaliland. This may explain why Lewis' SYL flag with a Christian symbol was accepted without much ado. The SYL flag colors are red, white and blue. Given the inclusion of a cross in the flag design, the first two colors were probably chosen because of their Christian symbolism. Lewis, Michael and Alex are indeed the unsung heroes of the SYL struggle.

Successes and Challenges

The Roman Catholic Church dominated Somali ministry during the colonial era in the Somali peninsula until 1981. While the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and the Mennonite Mission (MM) witnessed the establishment of several Somali house-churches, fellowships and Bible study groups, the caliber of these Protestant converts was much lower than their Roman Catholic Church (RCC) counterparts. The faith of the RCC converts was also more deeply rooted than their Protestant counterparts. Exactly how the RCC accomplished this feat among Somalis remains


elusive. The successes of the years from 1881 to 1981 soon faced challenges in the form of Islamic fundamentalism. The challenges started in the early years of the 1970s when radical Islam began to slowly infiltrate the otherwise popular Islam of the Somalis with its emphasis on piety and pragmatism.

Fundamentalist Islam, fueled by Gulf petrodollars, considered Sufi Islam as diluted and radicalized the Somali youth of both genders. This intolerant Islam spread among Somalis like a bushfire despite the Somali government's crackdown. The most significant force that propelled radical Islam was the Muslim Brotherhood (الإخوان المسلمون al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn), a transnational Sunni fundamentalist group founded by the Egyptian Muslim cleric, Hassan al-Banna (14 October 1906 – 12 February 1949) in 1928. All Jihadi groups have their roots in the Muslim Brotherhood.

Conclusion

The greatest missionaries ministered to the Somalis from 1881 to 1981. These missionaries broke down barriers and built bridges to win the trust of the Somali Muslims to whom they were ministering. The missionaries did not have smooth sailing. Some were martyred, including Merlin R. Grove (9 February 1929 – 16 July 1962), William Donald McClure (28 April 1906 – 27 March 1977) and Bishop Pietro Salvatore Colombo, OFM (28 October 1922 - 9 July 1989). Some missionaries lost their children to diseases that could have been easily treated in their home countries. A number of female missionaries also experienced sexual violence.

Despite all these seemingly insurmountable challenges, the greatest missionaries from 1881 to 1981 overcame the challenges and led many Somalis to the Lord. Many of these converts, as detailed in this chapter, contributed to the independence and developments of their countries, including Somaliland, Somalia and Djibouti. Other Somali Christians in the Somali regions of Ethiopia and Kenya positively contributed to the progress of their communities. These greatest missionaries left behind shoes too big to fill, but modern missionaries (from 1981 to the present) should not despair. The same Lord who used the greatest missionaries is the same One using the modern missionaries.



Several missionaries and local church leaders fact-checked this chapter. Special thanks to Monsignor Giorgio Bertin, the Bishop of Djibouti and the apostolic administrator of Somalia, who fact-checked the Roman Catholic section of this chapter.²⁷¹ I am also grateful to Rev. Mohamed Gurhan who fact-checked the Protestant section of this chapter.²⁷² Despite their arduous effort to assure the accuracy and the integrity of the claims made in this chapter, any shortcomings in this chapter are entirely mine alone.

²⁷¹ Bishop Giorgio Bertin, “Re: I Need Your Help.” Message to Aweis A. Ali. 16 January 2021. Email.

²⁷² Mohamed Gurhan, “Re: Request.” Message to Aweis A. Ali. 08 March 2021. Email.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Case for Denominationally Based Ministries Among Somalis

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the benefits of denominational ministries among Somali people. There has been a trendy policy among some mission organizations since 1950s that insists on not planting denominational churches among Somalis but to encourage only generic Christianity with no denominational labels and foundation. Such mission organizations very rarely attempted even to call the fruits of their labor “churches” identifying them instead as “fellowships.” Missionaries avoided calling the organized, regular gathering of Somali Christians “church” since recognizing the gathering as such could result in a community of faith with its own unified doctrinal and theological persuasions.

While the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) had only thirty-nine years of ministry (1896–1935) in Somalia, it planted Lutheran local churches in the Jubaland regions of Somalia, especially in Jamaame, Mugaambo, and Jilib.²⁷³ The SOLC ministry of starting Lutheran local churches was so effective that all the regions of Jubaland were on the verge of a church planting movement before the Italian colonial authority expelled SOLC. Likewise, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) was never in the business of generic Christianity; Roman Catholic ministries produced influential Somali Roman Catholics who won the admiration of Somali Muslims in the Somali peninsula because of their education, ethics, and patriotism.

A prominent Somali Roman Catholic political leader won multiple national parliamentary elections, once for the Somaliland parliament in Hargeisa and again for the united Somali parliament in Mogadishu. This trained lawyer also became a cabinet minister and a Somali ambassador to Zambia. He died in Mogadishu in 1985 and received a state funeral. Also, ethnic Somali Roman Catholics held prominent government positions in Djibouti and Ethiopia serving as parliamentarians, ambassadors, and cabinet ministers. The first governor of Djibouti’s Central Bank was an ethnic Somali Roman Catholic.

The Anglican and the Mennonite churches have each produced one prominent Somali Christian. One was a colonel in the Somali National Army and a medical doctor. This well-known Somali Christian also served as an ambassador and an advisor to two Somaliland presidents. He died in Hargeisa in 2016 and received a state funeral. The other Christian was an academician and a peacemaker who was appointed by the Somali government to a cabinet position in 1991; he declined the nomination. This Christian leader and university professor died in 2011.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, Illustrated Edition (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2015), 110.

²⁷⁴ David W. Shenk and Ahmed Ali Haile, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 94.

While the Protestant mission organizations have led many Somalis to the Lord, the RCC ministries have historically been the most successful among Somali people. Somali Muslims even acknowledge the quality of their Muslim converts. The moniker “Catholic” remains a badge of honor among some Somali Muslims who include it in their names. The late Mogadishu-based Somali militia leader, Ciise Catholic, is a relevant example here. Ciise Catholic lived as a practicing Muslim and died as one; neither he nor his birth family had any Christian background though he deeply cherished his Catholic nickname.

The clear majority of Somali Christians belong to the Protestant wing of the church, but that is as far as their denominational identity goes. This vague “Protestant” label often promoted by some missionaries with interdenominational para-church organizations keeps the Somali Christians weak and disorganized. Some church-based para-church organizations buy into this generic Christianity strategy when they could have planted Somali churches with a solid denominational identity. The generic Christianity phenomenon has disadvantaged the Somali Christians for decades.

About Denominations

While denominations are not found in the Bible, they are a practical way to express Christian faith and heritage and hold one another accountable, lest we stray from the right path. There were no denominations prior to the Great Schism that divided the one universal Church into two: The Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox church in AD 1054. For the first time in history, Christians had a choice of which church and denomination to belong to and remain a true disciple of Christ. In 1517 the Protestant Reformation further introduced a third wing to the church. This third denomination further splintered into other denominations while they all stayed true to the five solae of the Protestant Reformation: *Sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria.*

Seeing Bible believing denominations as different but valid ways to express our Christian faith and identity is perfectly fine, but what is not acceptable is to consider your own denomination as the only legitimate one and the rest as distractions from the true historical and traditional Christian faith. No membership in any denomination makes one born again; what makes one a disciple of Christ is their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Denominations are a badge of honor in Christian communities in the Somali peninsula, which is one more incentive for advocating for denominational identity. Denominations in this world area are known as a force for good and an incubator that promotes a high view of Scripture and the transformative authority of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Denominations are not unique to Christianity. Muslims have their own denominations as well. There is no generic Muslim among Somalis. Every Somali Muslim is a member of a Muslim denomination (madhab), and even possibly a religious order (*dariqa*). Somali Muslims take these Islamic denominations very seriously to the extent that leaving one’s Muslim denomination is somewhat akin to denying their Islamic faith. Almost all Somali Muslims adhere to the *Shafi’i madhab* (denomination) and jealously guard it. Somali Christians are therefore in their element when they too belong to a Christian denomination.

The Reasoning

The interdenominational para-church organizations give an interesting reason as to why Somalis should not belong to denominational based churches. One central claim is that Somalis do not understand denominational loyalty and are not yet ready for such commitments. The Somali Roman Catholics have disproven this theory because their loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church is as deep as their clan identity.²⁷⁵ The fallacy that Somalis are neither ready nor can comprehend a denominational loyalty became a self-fulfilling prophesy. Fifty-five years ago when the SIM and the Mennonite Mission (MM) agreed in Mogadishu not to support or establish a denominationally based Somali church, the Somali Christians were not impressed with this pact and most of them mobilized very quickly to join the Mennonite church on 02 May 1966.²⁷⁶ This decision distressed the SIM director²⁷⁷ and the relationship between the MM and SIM deteriorated so much that the director “required that all contacts between Mennonites and SIM missionaries terminate, even on the social level.”²⁷⁸ The MM and the SIM rift eventually healed to the demise of the nascent Somali Mennonite church.

The SIM disapproval of the union between the Somali Christians and the Mennonite church took its toll on the new church, which eventually disintegrated within a few years. There are of course other factors that may have contributed to the collapse of the nascent Somali Mennonite church other than the sustained SIM opposition. The early demise of one of the most promising denominationally based Somali churches brought discouragement to the Somali Christians who considered generic Christianity a dead-end cause.

An international denomination from the holiness tradition joined the Somali ministry in 1996 with the intention of planting denominationally based Somali local churches in the Somali peninsula. The success of this denomination attests to the fact that Somali Christians are both ready to and understand the benefits of belonging to a denomination which they liken to a large Christian clan. This denomination trained and mobilized Somali Christian ministers who facilitated the planting of creative access house-churches among Somalis in the Horn of Africa. During the first several years of ministry, this denomination ordained 7 Somali Christians as ministers of the Gospel. This denomination understands that if a Christian ministry is to succeed among Somalis, trained and trustworthy Somali Christians must lead the ecclesiastical effort.

Generic versus Denominational Christians

The benefits of a denominational identity include impeccable accountability and assured orthodoxy since all main Christian denominations adhere to the basic tenets of the Christian faith. While Somalis are known for their independent and sometimes sectarian spirit, they

²⁷⁵ The Somali clan system provides its members essential services that the state is either unable or unwilling to provide. Such services include, protection, visitations, financial assistance for medical care and marriages. Such finances are collected from other clan members in the form of *qaaraan*, clan wide contributions. As the Somali proverb says, *tolkaaga iyo kobtaada dhexdaa looga jiraa* (stay in your shoes and stay in your clan. As shoes protect your feet, your clan protects all of you.)

²⁷⁶ Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker* (Canada: Essence Publishing, 2006), 196.

²⁷⁷ Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 196.

²⁷⁸ David W. Shenk, “A Study of Mennonite Presence and the Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970” (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 281.

remain communal to the core as demonstrated by their age-old clan system. The Somali clan structure is the only time-tested social safety net Somalis have. A denominationally based church is the closest thing to the Somali clan system with additional spiritual benefits.

The most committed and the most successful Somali Christians are those who have denominational roots. Such Christians understand the importance of belonging to a local church and the privileges and the responsibilities that come with a denominational relationship. Denominational Somali Christians also have a high level of biblical literacy and are better informed about the necessity of ecumenical relationships between Bible believing churches.

The generic Somali Christians are often less committed, freewheeling, and more prone to heretical teachings because they lack a denominational heritage to guide them. Such unfortunate Somali Christians hop from one missionary to another to attend a fellowship or a Bible study when they feel like it; their Bible knowledge is often insubstantial.²⁷⁹ Such Christians are often less Christ-like and are more susceptible to becoming rice Christians. Interdenominational para-church organizations which create and sustain generic Christianity recognize the pitfalls but lack the determination and the sacrificial commitment to change the impotent status quo.

Somali Christians have the capacity to understand and appreciate denominational allegiance. It is the responsibility of interdenominational para-church organizations not to sabotage when Somali Christians decide to belong to a Bible believing denomination as happened in Mogadishu in 1966.²⁸⁰ Such sabotages did not end in 1966, they still rear their ugly heads each time a denominationally based Somali church seems viable or generic Christians decide to belong to a denominational church. Some interdenominational para-church organizations that minister among Somalis are privy to the reality that they are not churches and thus cannot start denominationally based churches but they will still object to other churches or denominationally based para-church organizations to establish their own churches among Somalis.

Generic Christianity has taken a toll on the Somali Christians who were led to believe it was a viable alternative to historical Christianity. Somali Muslims are by nature generous to their Muslim religious leaders and to their mosques. No mosque pays Muslims a bus fare to attend prayers, yet mosques are often full of worshippers. When these Somali Muslims become followers of Christ, a sense of entitlement often develops and it becomes very hard to convince them to financially support their ministers and their places of worship. In fact, many generic Somali Christians will not regularly attend worship unless the missionaries pay them bus fares, rent subsidy, scholarship, or an employment.²⁸¹ Where did this mind-set come from? Somalis in the RCC and others who belong to denominational local churches do not have this entitlement problem. Generic Christianity is the problem, not the solution.

²⁷⁹ Shenk and Haile, *Teatime*, 71.

²⁸⁰ Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 196.

²⁸¹ Shenk, *Mennonite Presence*, 368.

Conclusion

It is time to encourage Somali denominationally based Bible believing churches. Denominational labels are beneficial to Somalis because they are an expression of the genuine revelation of God that protects people from perishing. Since the clear majority of Somali Christians are from a Muslim background, they are at home when they are denominationally connected. It is therefore imprudent to expect Somali Christian converts to be generic Christians, without a denominational base, and at the same time expect them to be grounded in their new Christian faith. For the benefit of the Somali Christians, interdenominational para-church organizations should assist existing denominationally based churches to be a better witness to their communities.

It is counterproductive for interdenominational para-church organizations to perpetuate the debunked myth that Somali Christians are not ready for denominationally based identity. It is also morally indefensible when expatriate para-church organizations collaborate to thwart the emergence of a denominationally based Somali church even when such emergence is the will of the Somali Christians. The expatriate Protestant mission organizations must learn from the Roman Catholic Church and acknowledge the reality that the Somali Christians are very comfortable with denominational identity like other Christian people groups in Africa. After all, the Somali people were exposed to the Gospel much earlier than some other Sub-Saharan countries. Christianity among Somalis predates both Islam and the modern missionary witness by centuries.²⁸² This fact undercuts the Somali Muslims' claim that to be a Somali is to be a Muslim.²⁸³

Sectarianism has no place in the church. Despite differences in denominational emphasis, Christians are united by one Lord, and one baptism. Disciples of Christ are one people called out by God to worship him and be His witness; they cannot afford to fracture. A poignant example is when America's founding fathers were to sign the Declaration of the Independence in 1776, Benjamin Franklin is attributed to have said, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." The same admonition should be heeded by Bible believing Christians of different denominations. They must sustain the ecumenical spirit at any cost or they will fall prey to the father of lies.

²⁸² Ben I. Aram, "Somalia's Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey" in *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 4 (2003): 3.

²⁸³ Ali Abdirahman Hersi, "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1977), 109.

CHAPTER EIGHT

An Overview of Persecution of Christians

Introduction

Persecution of Christians and the Christian faith are inseparable as 2 Timothy 3:12, among other verses, makes it crystal clear.²⁸⁴ The only precondition for the persecution is that Christians live a godly life. Nominal Christians may not be persecuted since they resemble the ungodly and it is hard to tell them apart. In other words, persecution is not free; it must be earned. Living a Christ-like life gains the disciple of Christ the opportunity to be persecuted for Christ's sake. Persecution often contributes to the growth of the church. Tertullian popularized the concept that the blood of Christians is the seed of the church. It is the Book of Acts that best illustrates the relationship between persecution and church growth. Passages that chronicle the growth of the community of faith in the face of persecution include Acts 2:41-42, 2: 47 and 5:14. The church also showed divine unity by remaining in one accord, Acts 4:5-5:12. Persecution was a factor that contributed to this unity of the church.

The sporadic persecution of the Roman Empire against the church was brutal starting with the 1st century and ending with the Diocletianic persecution by Emperor Augustus Diocletian (ruled 283–305). The spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire threatened the cult of emperor worship, thus the backlash. Christians who refused to offer sacrifices publicly to the Roman gods were severely punished. These pious Christians faced arrests and torture. Many also became martyrs as they were fed alive to hungry beasts including lions and tigers. The Edict of Milan (313) established toleration for all religions including Christianity. However, the Edict of Thessalonica (380) made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. This change of fortune for the church helped the Christian faith spread even more throughout the Roman Empire without any restrictions. However, without tangible persecution, some Christians slowly became less Christ-like as they embraced the Roman way of life.

The Early Church

North African theologian, Tertullian, was a fervent believer that persecution helps church growth. He says, “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is a seed.”²⁸⁵ This is the conviction Tertullian asserts, and he was not alone in this rationale even as early as the middle of the 2nd century. Ippolito Romano, a contemporary of Tertullian, wrote during lethal persecution, “that large numbers of men, attracted to the faith by martyrs, also became God’s martyrs.”²⁸⁶ A letter written by an anonymous 2nd-century Christian apologist affirms Tertullian’s conviction. The letter addressed to “most excellent Diognetus”, apparently a well-connected pagan man, reasons, “Do you not see that [the Christians] thrown to the wild beasts - that they may recant the Lord - do not allow themselves to be beaten? Do you not see that the more they are punished, the more the others increase in numbers?”²⁸⁷ Antonio Miralles writes, “The martyrs gain through

²⁸⁴ “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” 2 Timothy 3:12, NIV.

²⁸⁵ *The Apology of Tertullian*, translation and annotation by WM. Reeve, A.M, 50, s. 13, initially printed in London in 1709 and Reprinted in a second edition in 1716/1717.
http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm (accessed 03 May 2018).

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Antonio Miralles, “The blood of martyrs, the seed of Christians,” *Clerus.org*, (2004).

losing their lives in bearing witness to Jesus – they gain eternal life. But this is also positive for the Church, that receives new believers, encouraged to convert thanks to the example set by the martyrs, and she also sees a renewal in existing believers.”²⁸⁸ The above writers agree that Christian persecution and church growth are intertwined.

The second and third centuries ‘persecution profoundly impacted the young faith. This resulted in theology that venerated martyrs.’²⁸⁹ The exact number of martyrs in the early church is impossible to know. Many of the persecution by the Roman Empire were local and sporadic, but some were empire wide. Contemporary scholars estimate that of 54 of the Roman emperors who ruled from 30-311, about 30 of them persistently targeted Christians.²⁹⁰ Several known scholars concur that from the first government-sanctioned persecution under Nero in 64 to the Edict of Milan in 313, which established a government-sanctioned Empire-wide religious toleration for Christianity, the church faced 129 years of severe persecution and 120 years of peace or tolerance.²⁹¹ While many Roman Empire persecutions against the church were brutal, the persecutors often targeted the Scriptures, other Christian materials, clergy, church property and influential sympathizers of Christians. The non-prominent lay Christians often escaped direct persecution.²⁹² The strength and significance of the works cited above are remarkable. Collectively, these severe incidents of persecution did not slow down or destroy the church.

After winning the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, in 313, Emperor Constantine I, with his eastern counterpart, Licinius, issued the Edict of Milan, which officially recognized Christianity as a legal religion as opposed to a harmful superstition, thus ending the official persecution of the church.²⁹³ This decriminalization of Christianity proved to be a turning point for the church as the references below, the Constantinian shift, the triumph of the church and the peace of the church, indicate. Christianity became the authorized and official religion of the Roman Empire on 27 February 380 AD when Emperor Theodosius I with Gratian, and Valentinian II issued the Edict of Thessalonica. The once brutally persecuted faith had become the state religion. Some scholars allege the church was healthier when the rulers considered it an enemy than an ally.²⁹⁴ Regardless, materials on early persecution of the church and martyrdom are critical for this study.

<http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2004-05/31-13/12MarIn.html> (accessed 03 May 2018).

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ “The tradition of martyrdom has entered deep into the Christian consciousness.” Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Volume I: *Beginnings to 1500*, rev. ed. (Prince Press, 2000), 81.

²⁹⁰ Mark Galli, “The Persecuting Emperors,” Issue 27, Vol. XI, No. 3, *Christian History*, (1990), 20. See also, “Persecution in the Early Church,” Religious Facts, nd.

<http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-early-church> (accessed 03 May 2018).

²⁹¹ Maurice M. Hassatt, “Martyr.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IX, Robert Appleton Company, (1910).

See also, “Persecution in the Early Church.” *Religious Fact*. <http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-early-church> (accessed 03 May 2018).

²⁹² Ibid. See also: Everett Ferguson, “Did You Know?” *Christian History*, Issue 27, Vol. XI, No. 3, inside cover, (North American Patristics Society, 1987), 20.

²⁹³ W. H. C. Frend *The Early Church*, (SPCK 1965), 137.

²⁹⁴ “Constantine’s Impact on Christianity,” Beyond Today, (05 June 2006). <https://www.ucg.org/the-good-news/constantines-impact-on-christianity> (accessed 06 September 2018).

Islamic Persecution of Christians

Sunni and Shia schools of jurisprudence have a consensus that the punishment for apostasy is death by the sword.²⁹⁵ Bernard Lewis affirms that both schools of thought consider abandoning Islam as treason, thus explaining the harsh verdict.²⁹⁶ Apostates are sometimes given time to repent and return to Islam.²⁹⁷ Apostates who decline to “repent” and return to the fold of Islam face the Muslim sword.²⁹⁸ The short “grace period” is sometimes given to apostates simply to entice them back to Islam to save their lives.²⁹⁹ The number of Muslim majority countries criminalizing apostasy has been on the rise over the last few decades.³⁰⁰ The prescribed punishments range from imprisonment to death.³⁰¹ The countries that have a history of governments executing apostates include Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.³⁰² No Somali government ever executed a Somali Christian. However, many Somali Christians have been detained for their faith since the 1980s and some were tortured. One of the tortured believers later died of his injuries after he had been released.³⁰³ Somali Christians are often killed by radical Islamists and their sympathizers.

²⁹⁵ Prominent Somali Muslim preachers trash the faith and credibility of a popular Somali Muslim theologian, scholar and writer, Cabdisaciid Cabdi Ismaaciil, who penned the eye-opening book, *Xadka Riddada Maxaa Ka Run Ah [Is there a Punishment for Apostasy in Islam?]* The Muslim preachers who attacked the author and called him an apostate include Sheikhh Umal,

<https://youtu.be/y63aHwCub20>, Sheikh Hussein Muhumed Omar, <https://youtu.be/i9sR396-EAo>, Sheikh Mohamed Dirir, <https://youtu.be/KiCIm5KHP80> (all accessed 06 May 2018).

²⁹⁶ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East, a Brief History of the Last 2000 Years*, (Touchstone Books, 2017), 229.

²⁹⁷ Abdul Rashied Omar, *The Right to religious conversion: Between apostasy and proselytization, in Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburg, Peace-Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, (Lexington Books, 2009), 179–94.

Books.google.com. <https://books.google.com/books?id=HvrDWka4iRgC&pg=186> (accessed 06 July 2017).

²⁹⁸ Kecia Ali and Oliver Leaman. *Islam: The Key Concepts*, (Routledge, 2008), 10.

²⁹⁹ John Bukhari, L.Esposito. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), 22. <https://books.google.com/books?id=6VeCWQfVNjkC&pg=PA22#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed 06 July 2017).

³⁰⁰ The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center, *Laws Criminalizing Apostasy*, (Library of Congress, 2014), 1. <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/apostasy/apostasy.pdf> (accessed 10 September 2018).

³⁰¹ The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center. *Apostasy. Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e174> (accessed 06 July 2017).

³⁰² Andrea Elliott. “In Kabul, a Test for Shariah,” *New York Times*, (March 26, 2006). <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/26/weekinreview/in-kabul-a-test-for-shariah.html> (accessed 06 July 2017).

³⁰³ “Initial Tribute: The Martyrdom of Pastor Hussein Adan Ahmed,” Somalis For Jesus, (23 April 2006). <https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2006/04/initial-tribute-martyrdom-of-pastor.html> (26 July 2021)



Description: English: This Fatwa describes how an Egyptian man turned apostate and the subsequent punishment prescribed for him by the Al-Azhar Fatwas Council. The following translation is a rough guide:
 In the Name of Allah the Most Beneficent the Most Merciful.
 Al-Azhar Council of Fatwas.
 This question was presented by Mr. Ahmed Darwish and brought forward by [name obscured] who is of German nationality.
 A man whose religion was Islam and his nationality is Egyptian married a German Christian and the couple agreed that the husband would join the Christian faith and doctrine.
 1) What is the Islamic ruling in relation to this man? What are the punishments prescribed for this act?
 2) Are his children considered Muslim or Christian?
 The Answer:
 All praise is to Allah, the Lord of the Universe and salutations on the leader of the righteous, our master Muhammad, his family and all of his companions.
 Translation:
 This man has committed apostasy; he must be given a chance to repent and if he does not then he must be killed according to Shariah.
 As far as his children are concerned, as long as they are children they are considered Muslim, but after they reach the age of puberty, then if they remain with Islam they are Muslim, but if they leave Islam and they do not report they must be killed and Allah knows best.
 Head of Al-Azhar
 Head of the Fatwas Council of Al-Azhar
 Abdullah al-Mohaddi (عبدالله المحمدي)
 29th September 1978.

Image from Wikipedia, creative commons attribution non-commercial license

Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, is the oldest degree-granting university in the Muslim world; it is recognized as the most prestigious Islamic university in Sunni Islam; the *fatwas* (religious decrees) issued by this Islamic university are considered binding in Sunni Islam.³⁰⁴ The *Fatwa* Council of this university which is centered on al-Azhar Mosque issued a *fatwa* in 1978 against an Egyptian Muslim who converted to Christianity. The fatwa instructed that the man should be killed if he did not return to Islam.³⁰⁵ This *fatwa* was widely reported in Muslim and Christian annals.³⁰⁶

Many of these countries also use common law to dissolve the apostate's marriage to their Muslim spouse, and they are also denied child custody rights and inheritance from Muslim family members.³⁰⁷ The four dominant Sunni schools of

jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali, and Hanafi) agree that any male apostate of sound mind who willingly abandons Islam must be put to death. The Hanafi and Shia scholars teach that a female apostate should not be executed but only imprisoned in solitary confinement until she reverts to Islam. This jurisprudence also teaches the female apostate must be beaten every three days until she repents and returns to the fold of Islam.³⁰⁸ Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali scholars disagree on this line of thought; they teach that all apostates, regardless of their gender, should be put to death.³⁰⁹ The study interrogated further the integrity of such schools of thought and whether their *fatwas* affect church growth in any way.

Abu Dawud declares that it is the *ijma* (consensus) of the classical Muslim jurists that an apostate must be executed if they refuse to return to Islam.³¹⁰ According to this school of

³⁰⁴ Al-Azhar University is centered on the historic al-Azhar Mosque.

See also: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Al-Azhar University," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (nd). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Azhar-University> (accessed 18 September 2018).

³⁰⁵ Al-Azhar Council of Fatwa, "Mr Ahmed Darwish," (1978).

"Al-Azhar Fatwa," Former Muslims United, (nd.) <http://formermuslimsunited.org/apostasy-from-islam/al-azhar-fatwa/> (accessed 4 February 2019). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rechtsgutachten_betr_Apostasie_im_Islam.jpg (accessed 07 July 2017).

³⁰⁶ Edward Hendrie, *The Beast Revealed*, (Garrisonville, Virginia: Great Mountain Publishing, 2015), 242-243.

³⁰⁷ Samuel M. Zwemer, "The Law of Apostasy," 14 (4): Chapter 2, *The Muslim World*, (Hartford, Connecticut, Hartford Seminary Foundation, First published in 1924), 41-43.

³⁰⁸ Rudolph Peters, *Crime and punishment in Islamic law*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64-65.

³⁰⁹ W. Heffening, "Murtadd," in C.E. Bosworth; E. van Donzel; W.P. Heinrichs; et al. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 7. (Brill Academic Publishers, 1993), 635-636.

Duane Miller, "Your Swords do not Concern me at all: The Liberation Theology of Islamic Christianity," *St Francis Magazine* Vol 7, No 2, Interserve and Arab Vision, Academia.edu, (April 2011). http://www.academia.edu/3870725/Your_Swords_do_not_Concern_me_at_all_The_Liberation_Theology_of_Islamic_Christianity, (accessed 07 July 2017).

³¹⁰ *Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 2. (Stuttgart: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, 2000), 726.

thought, enslaved males and females and freed slaves of both sexes receive the same punishment if they apostatize and refuse to re-embrace Islam;³¹¹ this is one difference between Abu Hanifa and Abu Dawud. Proponents of executing apostates cite the first Caliph of Muslims and a successor of the Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr, (d. 634) who put apostates to death with the consent of other companions of the Prophet.³¹² The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said:

Abdullah narrated that Allah's Apostle said, "The blood of a Muslim, who confesses that there is no God but Allah and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: In *Qisas* for murder, a married person who commits adultery and the one who reverts from Islam (apostates) and leaves the [Muslim] community."³¹³

A Sahih Bukhari hadith describes how Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), Islam's 4th rightly guided Caliph, dealt with some former Muslims who abandoned the faith:

Ali burnt some people and this news reached Ibn 'Abbas, who said, "Had I been in his place I would not have burnt them, as the Prophet said, 'Don't punish (anybody) with Allah's Punishment.' No doubt, I would have killed them, for the Prophet said, 'If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.'³¹⁴

Another Sahih Bukhari hadith describes another former Muslim's fate:

A man embraced Islam and then reverted to Judaism. Mu'adh bin Jabal came and saw the man with Abu Musa. Mu'adh asked, "What is wrong with this (man)?" Abu Musa replied, "He embraced Islam and then reverted to Judaism." Mu'adh said, "I will not sit down unless you kill him (as it is) the verdict of Allah and His Apostle."³¹⁵

Muslim scholars who hold the view of persecuting apostates to the degree of execution make up the vast majority of the *ulama*. These scholars can trace back their teaching to the era when the Prophet Muhammad was the head of the Muslim community or shortly after that. The four caliphs who succeeded the Prophet also taught that those who apostatized from

³¹¹ Al-Husayn al-Baghawi, *Al-Tahdhib fi fiqh al-Imam al-Shafi'i*, vol. 7, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1997), 288; *Muwaffaq al-Din*, Abū Muḥammad Abdullah Ibn Qudama, Al-Mughni, vol.12, (Cairo, Hijr, 1990), 264.

³¹² Wael Hallaq, *Apostasy*, Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, vol. 1, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 119.

³¹³ Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalaani, *Fat-h Al-Bari Bisharh Sahih Al-Bukhari*, edited by M. Abdul Baaqi and M. Al-Khateeb, 2nd Printing, (Dar Al-Rayyan Lilturaath, Cairo, 1987), 2019; Baab Al-Diyaat, Hadeeth # 6878, Vol.12, translated by Dr Jamal Badawi.

³¹⁴ Abdallah ibn Abbas (d. 687), also known simply as Ibn Abbas, was a cousin of the Prophet considered by early Islamic tradition as one of the first *mufassir* (masters of Qur'anic interpretation.) He was the son of Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, an uncle of the Prophet and a nephew of Maymunah bin al-Harith, who was later married by the Prophet. In this hadith, Ibn Abbas derides the Caliph Ali for his failure to correctly follow the model of the Prophet Muhammad in his treatment of an apostate because Ali burned the apostates instead of executing them by other means.

Sahih al-Bukhari, translated by M. Muhsin Khan 4:52:260, (Kazi Pubns Inc1995).

<http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/052-sbt.php#004.052.260> (accessed 09 May 2018).

³¹⁵ Mu'adh bin Jabal (d. 639) was one of the five companions of the Prophet Muhammad who compiled the Qur'an. He was known as a man of great knowledge. Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (d. 662 or 672) was a companion of the Prophet who was at various times governor of both Basra and Kufa. Abu Musa was also a key figure in the early Muslim conquest of Persia.

Sahih al-Bukhari, 9:89:27. <http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/089-sbt.php#009.089.271> (accessed 09 May 2018).

Islam should be punished. The literature mentioned above assumes that persecuting ex-Muslim Christians could suppress the growth of such Christians. This thesis examined what is true of this postulation.

Modernist Muslim scholars consider punishing of apostates as an innovation that came to light after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.³¹⁶ These reformers reject what they consider post-Qur'an invention; their position relies on the Qur'an's lack of a clear stand on the punishment that apostates should receive in this life.³¹⁷ These modernists are bothered by the fact that apostasy law is often used by totalitarian Islamic political leaders to silence Muslim dissenters. The most well-known verse in the Qur'an moderates usually quote reads: "There is no compulsion in religion — the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error." Qur'an 2:256a.³¹⁸ Another moderate Muslim scholar is Khaled Abou El Fadl who believes that the Qur'an accommodates non-Muslims, including apostates.³¹⁹ The following is one of the most powerful hadiths that indicate apostates could leave Islam during the Prophet Muhammad's time without any reprisals from him:

Jabir Bin Abdullah narrated that a *bedouin* pledged allegiance to the Apostle of Allah for Islam [i.e. accepted Islam] and then the *bedouin* got fever whereupon he said to the Prophet [P] "cancel my pledge."³²⁰ But the Prophet [P] refused. He [the bedouin came to him [again] saying, "Cancel my pledge." But the Prophet [P] refused. Then he [the Bedouin] left [Medina]. Allah's Apostle said, "Madinah is like a pair of bellows [furnace]: it expels its impurities...."³²¹

The request to be relieved from the pledge can be understood to be a request to apostatize. Others disagree and say the request was merely to leave Medina, a Muslim city-state, for Mecca, a city administered by polytheistic Arabs.³²² The understanding of this hadith depends on one's position on apostasy.

³¹⁶ Arab Law Quarterly, vol. 13. No. 3, Brill, (1998), 213-4.

<https://www.jstor.org/sTable/i276475> (accessed 11 May 2019)

³¹⁷ Mohamed S. El-Awa, *Punishment in Islamic Law: A Comparative Study*, (Indianapolis, American Trust Publication, 1982), 56. See also: Mohammad Kamali, "Punishment in Islamic Law: A Critique of the Hudud Bill of Kelantan, Malaysia," *Arab Law Quarterly*, vol. 13. No. 3 (1998), 213-4; *Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrour*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Andreas Christmann, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 337-8.

³¹⁸ A commentary on this verse in the Yusuf Ali translation of the Qur'an states: "To all the nonsense which is being talked about the Prophet offering Islam or the sword as alternatives to the pagan Arabs, this verse is a sufficient answer. Being assured of success, the Muslims are told that when they hold power in their hand, their guiding principle should be that there should be no compulsion in the matter of religion. The presumption that this passage was directed to the early converts and that it was abrogated later on is utterly baseless." *Muslim.org*. <http://www.muslim.org/english-quran/quran.htm> (accessed 12 July 2017).

³¹⁹ Abou El Fadl Khaled, 'The Place of Tolerance in Islam' in *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*.

Joshua Cohen and Ian Lague, eds., (Boston, Beacon, 2002), 3-26.

³²⁰ Jabir bin Abdullah (d.691) was a companion of the Prophet who became an early Hadith specialist. Jabir is said to have narrated 1,547 hadiths according to some historians.

³²¹ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Vol.9, Hadeeth # 316, (Maktabat Al-Riyadh Al-Hadeethah, Riyadh, 1982), 241. Similar hadiths by different narrators, see: # 318, page. 242; #323, page. 246.

³²² Jamal Badawi, Is Apostasy a Capital Crime in Islam? Islamic City, 01 June 2015.

<https://www.islamicity.org/8307/is-apostasy-a-capital-crime-in-islam/> (accessed 29 March 2021)

Taha Jabir Al-Alwani takes a minority view in Islam about the punishment for apostasy.³²³ In traditional Islam, the price of apostasy is death, but the Muslim scholar Al-Alwani, argues that merely leaving Islam is not a crime deserving of the death penalty unless the apostate wages war on Muslims. Al-Alwani heavily depends on the Qur'an to justify his moderate understanding of Islam and Apostasy. However, the hadiths, the sayings, and deeds of Muhammad, which are an authoritative source of Islamic jurisprudence, overwhelmingly favor capital punishment for apostasy. Al-Alwani belongs to a small but growing number of Muslim religious scholars who believe that no ex-Muslim deserves the death penalty for only deserting Islam. Any orthodox Muslim who rejects that the punishment for apostasy is the death penalty is himself accused of apostasy.³²⁴ In religious debates, the religious scholars who claim they want to preserve or return to the orthodox faith often beat the scholars who advocate for religious modernization. The latter are frequently accused of *bid'a*, a religious innovation. The cited modernist Muslim scholars are determined to present Islam as a peaceful religion that respects freedom of religion or no religion at all. This aspect of religious tolerance was revisited in this study. These tolerant Muslim entrepreneurs face the full weight of Islamic Orthodoxy which favors harsh treatments of apostates.

Christian Persecution in Somalia

Persecution starts once a Somali Muslim becomes a seeker and begins to study the Christian faith. The Somali military regime (1969-1991), only a little less tolerant than the preceding civilian government (1960-1969), instituted in 1970 a law that prohibited teaching any Somali religion other than Islam.³²⁵ Local Christians and expatriate missionaries incurred the Somali government's wrath each time they handed out Bible study materials or verbally witnessed to a Muslim seeker. The Somali military government also targeted Somali Christian elders' meetings and threw some of them in jail in a cruel extrajudicial manner.³²⁶ The past Somali civilian government adopted a constitution in 1961 which declared Somalia to be an Islamic State which respected a limited degree of religious freedom.³²⁷ Nine years later, in 1970, General Mohamed Siyad Barre, the president of the Republic, announced to the nation that he became aware of the existence of Somali Christians and threatened that they would be shot if they took their Christian faith too seriously!³²⁸ The Somali Christians were delighted that their government finally acknowledged their existence even in the context of a criminal threat.³²⁹

³²³ Taha Jabir Al-Alwani. *Apostasy in Islam: A Historical and Scriptural Analysis*, 1st Edition, (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011), 5.

³²⁴ Prominent Somali Muslim preachers trash the faith and credibility of a popular Somali Muslim theologian, scholar and writer, Cabdisaciid Cabdi Ismaaciil who penned the eye-opening book, *Xadka Riddada Maxaa Ka Run Ah [Is there a Punishment for Apostasy in Islam?]* The Muslim preachers who attacked the author include Sheikh Umal, <https://youtu.be/y63aHwCub20>, Sheikh Hussein Muhumed Omar, <https://youtu.be/i9sR396-EAo>, Sheikh Mohamed Dirir, <https://youtu.be/KiClm5KHP80> (all accessed 06 May 2018).

³²⁵ Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 32.

³²⁶ Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 80-81.

³²⁷ Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 120-121.

³²⁸ David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (PhD Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 323.

³²⁹ David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (PhD Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 323.

Somali tribal elders also use the powerful clan system to isolate and humiliate those who dare to leave the fold of Islam and embrace Christianity, a faith Muslims see as an alien threat.³³⁰ The Somali clan system grants its members multifaceted protection that may include a financial safety net when needed; when one feels that both their government and their clan are against them for simply following Christ, the Disciples of Christ can face immense pain and suffering. Frank-Ole Thoresen, a competent Norwegian scholar whose PhD thesis is about the Somali Church, describes the “persistent oppression and persecution” the Somali Church has been facing for decades in the hands of the Somali Muslims.³³¹ Some of these persecutions led to martyrdom, especially in Southern Somalia.³³² Thoresen provides multiple verifiable accounts of Muslim intolerance towards the tiny Somali Christian community; his scholarly work informed this research since it is arguably the most comprehensive modern academic study on the Somali Church.

Persecutors of the Somali Church do target not only local Christians but also expatriate missionaries. When a prominent expatriate missionary was getting ready to deploy to Somalia in the 1990s, one veteran missionary in Kenya counseled him, “Be careful, Nik, those Somalis are 99.9 percent Muslim and they eat little Christians like you for lunch!”³³³ Nik witnessed very quickly the brutality of the persecution the Somali Church was facing when four Somali Christians he was associated with were martyred.³³⁴ Several expatriate career and short-term mission workers have been martyred for their faith in Somalia since 1991. Such martyrs include Verena Karer, Annalena Tonelli (d. 2003), Dick and Enid Eyeington (d.2003), Martin Jutzi, Leonella Sgorbita, Gilford Koech and Andrew Kibet.³³⁵ No wonder that Ruth Myers, a veteran missionary to the Somalis states, “Currently for Christians, Somalia is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world, second only to North Korea.”³³⁶ Despite Myers’ ominous statement, the Somali Church remains resilient.

Challenges Persecution Poses to the Church in Somalia

Somalia is known for its relentless persecution against Somali Christians.³³⁷ Frank-Ole Thoresen says, “...Somalis who have turned to the church often have been subjected to stark persecution from the Muslim majority.”³³⁸ Meeting in a traditional church building is impossible for Somali Christians in Somalia. In his thesis, he notes that in some areas of

³³⁰ Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 77.

³³¹ Frank-Ole Thoresen, *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples: Aspects of a Contextual Somali Ecclesiology*, 1st edition, (Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2014), 132.

³³² Frank-Ole Thoresen, *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples: Aspects of a Contextual Somali Ecclesiology*, 1st edition, (Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2014), 146.

³³³ Nik Ripken and Gregg Lewis, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), *Why Didn't I Just Keep My Mouth Shut?*, Kindle Edition, 78.

³³⁴ Nik Ripken and Gregg Lewis, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), *Why Didn't I Just Keep My Mouth Shut?*, Kindle Edition, 118-119.

³³⁵ *Somalis For Jesus: the Martyrs' Corner*, October 2012.
<https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2008/11/martyrs-corner.html> (accessed 08 June 2019).

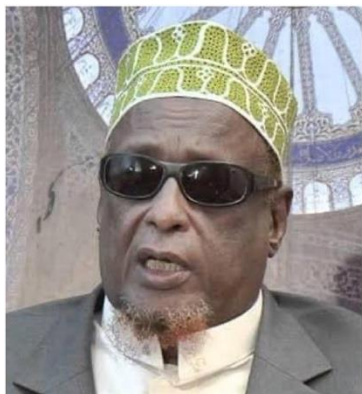
³³⁶ Ruth Myers, Ruth. *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia*. (Moreland City, Victoria, Australia: Acorn Press, 2016), Author's Note, Kindle Edition, 171.

³³⁷ ‘Somalia’, *The Voice of the Martyrs Canada*, nd.

<https://www.vomcanada.com/somalia.htm> (accessed 06 September 2018).

³³⁸ Frank-Ole Thoresen, *A Reconciled Community of Suffering Disciples: Aspects of a Contextual Somali Ecclesiology*, 1st edition, (Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2014), 1.

Somalia even the suspicion of being Disciples of Christ can trigger persecution. Therefore, believers meet secretly in different residential homes for worship.³³⁹



Sheikh Nur Barud Gurhan
Photo Credit: Twitter

Al-Shabaab Islamist group has in the past declared that it wants “Somalia free of all Christians.”³⁴⁰ This al-Qaeda affiliate group confiscated farms owned by Somali Christians in 2011; also in that same year, prominent “moderate” Somali Muslim scholars and preachers publicly advocated for the killing of Somali Christians in press releases.³⁴¹ Shania and Shino quote a *fatwa* press release by a prominent Somali Muslim scholar, Sheikh Nur Barud.³⁴² The Somali government’s official National Television Network broadcast the *fatwa* press release showing beyond reasonable doubt its complicity in the anti-Christian *fatwa*. Similarly, in an earlier *fatwa* release of 2003, Sheikh Nur Barud and members of the *Kulanka Culimada* (now *Majma’a Culimada*) said, “All Somali Christians must be killed according to the Islamic law.”³⁴³ The role of this Muslim organization in the persecution and martyrdom against the Somali Church was further studied in this research.

Church and Locally Developed Distinctive Theology of Persecution

Burton, a 19th-century British explorer, argues, “...the country [Somalia] teems with poets.”³⁴⁴ Contemporary scholars, like Margaret Laurence, describe Somalis as a “nation of poets” and a “nation of bards.”³⁴⁵ Like the broader Somali community, the Church in Somalia is known for its rich poetry. The church’s theology of persecution is often expressed in hymns and songs as shown on Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 which are sung to help the community of faith not only survive but also thrive amid persecution whether the persecution is real or perceived.

³³⁹ “Persecution in Somalia,” *Open Doors USA*, nd.

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/somalia/> (accessed 06 September 2018).

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ “Islamic militants confiscate Christian farms,” *The Voice of the Martyrs Canada*, (10 February 2011). <https://www.vomcanada.com/so-2011-02-10.htm> (accessed 06 September 2018).

Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians*, (Thomas Nelson, 2013), 253.

See also: Stephen Mbogo, “Somalia’s Tiny Christian Community Reportedly Under Fire,” *CNSN*, (07 July 2008). <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/somalias-tiny-christian-community-reportedly-under-fire> (accessed 06 September 2018).

³⁴² Shania-Shino Gabo, “Fatwa against Somali Christians in Europe,” *YouTube*, 2017 <https://youtu.be/ygIcwlW9qz4> (accessed 06 September 2018).

³⁴³ Sheikh Nur Barud was at the time the vice-chairman of the powerful Somali Islamist group, *Kulanka Culimada*. “*Kulanka*” is Somali and “*Majma’a*” is Arabic and they both mean “council.” “Somali Christians and Missionaries Murdered,” *Worthy News*, 19 January 2003.

<https://www.worthynews.com/378-somali-christians-and-missionaries-murdered> (accessed 13 January 2019).

³⁴⁴ Burton, Richard, *First Footsteps in Somalia*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1854, 91.

³⁴⁵ Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 75.

The immortal God

BAAQIGA EEBBOW ³⁴⁶	THE IMMORTAL GOD
<i>Baaqiga Eebbow, Dunida beeray Ballan ku sheegay Ka baaqan maayo</i>	The immortal God, who created the world, gave you a covenant that will never fail.
<i>Buuraha korkooda Haddaan bil joogo Barafku i garaacana Beenbeenin mayo Badbaadshahayga</i>	On top of the mountains, if I am confined for a month with snow assailing me, I will not deny my Saviour.
<i>Baaqiga Eebbo...</i>	The immortal God ...
<i>Boqol sano Haddaan ban joogo Beer iyo xooliyo Bilcanba waayana Beenbeenin maayo Badbaadshahayga</i>	For a hundred years, if I am held in the desert, without a farm, livestock, and spouse, I will not deny my Saviour.
<i>Baaqiga Eebbow ...</i>	The immortal God ...
<i>Haddii lay bireeyo Badna laygu tuuro Budh layla dhacana Beenbeenin maayo Badbaadshahayga</i>	If I am decapitated, thrown into the sea and beaten with a club, I will not deny my Saviour.
<i>Baaqiga Eebbow ...</i>	The immortal God ...
<i>Haddii an baahdo Beeso aan waayana Beenbeenin maayo Badbaadshahayga</i>	If I am starving and I have no money, I will never deny my Saviour.
<i>Baaqiga Eebbow ...</i>	The immortal God ...
<i>Bugta i haysa Beerka i xanuunjin Isaga i baanto Iga bogsiiya Beenbeenin maayo Badbaadshahayga</i>	When I am sick and have pain in my liver, He treats me and heals me from it. I will never deny my Saviour.
<i>Baaqiga Eebbow ... (2x)</i>	The immortal God ... (2x)

A stanza from the hymn, *Gacmahaaga Noo Fidi*, (Stretch Out Your Helping Hands to us)³⁴⁷ declares

³⁴⁶ *Qasiidooyin Ilaah Ammaan Ah*. (Codka Nolosha Cusub, 1993), 18. English translation by Aweis A. Ali.

³⁴⁷ *Qasiidooyin Ilaah Ammaan Ah*, (Codadka Iftiinka, nd). English translation by Aweis A. Ali.

Satan's chamber

<i>Golihii Iblayskiyo</i> <i>Gudcurkii inaanan</i> <i>Ugu noqon gadaalbuu</i> <i>Naga yahay go'aanki</i>	Satan's chamber And darkness - we won't Go back into them, This is our decision.
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Somali Christians recite this hymn when Muslims attempt to pressure them to deny Christ and return to the fold of Islam.

Nuurkii Adduunkow (The Light of the World),³⁴⁸ is another favorite hymn often recited during pain and suffering caused by the persecution:

When we are weak

<i>Markii aan nuglaanee</i> <i>Niyadda naga xumaatee</i> <i>Qalbigu naafo gaadho</i> <i>Naxariistihiiyow</i> <i>Ciise nuurkii dunidow</i> <i>Naruuradaada qaaliga ah</i> <i>Nimcadaada wax naga sii</i>	When we are weak And discouraged Our hearts are wounded You are the One who has mercy upon us Jesus, the light of the world from your precious blessings and your grace, provide for us.
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Somali Christian hymns often express deep theological convictions; hymns that address persecution and martyrdom are cherished in the community of faith.

There is a humorous oral tradition in the Somali Church that Somali Church leaders do not need a retirement plan since persecutors often target church leaders. The clear majority of Somali Christians martyred since 1991 were house church leaders; many of the fallen leaders are recorded by *Somalis for Jesus* blog.³⁴⁹

The light-hearted way Somali Christians talk about persecution illustrates the confidence they have in their Lord as well as their mental vigor. To maintain a sense of humor during persecution helps the community of faith to remain optimistic and maintain a sense of normalcy. Nik Ripken describes humor as “a powerful indicator of psychological health.”³⁵⁰

Jurgen Moltmann popularized a theology of hope with an eschatological bent highlighting the hope that the resurrection brings.³⁵¹ This Christ-centered eschatology is also described as an eschatology of hope. Eschatology tends to be “otherworldly” and eschatology in times of persecution instills a divine hope in the hearts of maligned Christians. At the heart of the locally-developed Somali theology of persecution is an eschatology of hope; while this divine hope sustains the community of faith, it is also a defiant posture toward the oppressors of the

³⁴⁸ *Qasiidooyin Ilaah Ammaan Ah*, (Codadka Iftiinka, nd). English translation by Aweis A.Ali.

³⁴⁹ Somalis For Jesus: The Martyrs' Corner, October 2012.

<https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2008/11/martyrs-corner.html> (accessed 08 June 2019).

³⁵⁰ Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected*, (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, Kindle, 2014), 224.

³⁵¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology Of Hope: On The Ground And The Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. (SCM Press: London. First American edition, 1967).

church. In this regard, eschatology is not an end but a new beginning which comes with glad tidings for the community of faith. Kelly describes an eschatology of hope as an “incalculable fulfillment in terms of what can never be fully expressed.”³⁵² Kelly affirms that an eschatology of hope wins against the fear, pain, and uncertainty and suffering in general that persecution inflicts on the Disciples of Christ.³⁵³ O’Reill addressing a theology of hope notes that at the appointed time “...creation will emerge from its sorrow into the bliss of God’s manifest presence.”³⁵⁴

Conclusion

Tertullian’s description of persecution as the seed of the church has been proven true again and again. The violent opposition the church faced in the Book of Acts, including the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), made the nascent church resilient and resourceful which contributed to its growth. The Pharisees and the Roman Empire could not halt the proliferation of the church. The Muslim and the communist persecutions failed to stop the growth of the church. Islam could claim limited success of suppressing the church in North Africa and weakening it in the Middle East. However, Iran and Afghanistan still remain the two countries with the fastest-growing evangelical churches in the world. Even the little-known church in Islamic Somalia is the 7th fastest growing evangelical church in the world according to *Operation World*.



While the church has a fairly good record of thriving in the midst of violent persecutions, how it could handle genocide is unknown. The BBC reported in 2019 that “The persecution of Christians in parts of the world is at near “genocide” levels, according to a report ordered by Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt.”³⁵⁵ While the church may have faced limited and sporadic “genocide” in the past, there was never a systematic genocide of a

large scale that the church faced. The fact that the church could face such atrocities cannot be ruled out as the above BBC report indicates. Radical Islam appears to be the greatest threat to Christianity today in the Muslim world. The blood of Christians is shed today with impunity in the Middle East, Nigeria and Pakistan, for example. Radical Islam could ramp up its violence against the church as more Muslims abandon Islam to embrace Christ.

³⁵² Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 13.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵⁴ Matthew P. O’Reill, “Towards an Eschatology of Hope: The Disappearance of the Sea in Revelation 21:1 and its Significance for the Church.” *The Princeton Theological Review*. Volume XVII, No. 1. Issue 55. (Fall 2011), 52.

³⁵⁵ “Christian persecution ‘at near genocide levels’”, BBC, 03 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48146305> (accessed 01 July 2021).

CHAPTER NINE

Thriving Under the Sword: How the Somali Church Overcomes the Challenges of Persecution

Introduction

Open Doors describes the church in Somalia as the 3rd most persecuted church in the world after North Korea and Afghanistan.³⁵⁶ While the persecution against the Somali church has been on the rise since 1991, the church has proven its resilience by thriving during intense persecutions including dispossessions, shootings, beatings, poisonings, and beheadings.³⁵⁷ Christians being targeted for their faith is as old as the faith itself. Christians in Somalia meet in house-churches and keep a low profile because of the hostile environment in which they live. While these Christians are wise, diligent, and resilient, they sometimes lose lives and properties because of their faith. Somali Islamists have in the past confiscated Christian farms.³⁵⁸ Al-Shabab, an Islamist group, discovered and destroyed an underground Christian library which the church also used as a Bible school.³⁵⁹

In a homily he preached in 2014, Pope Francis reiterated that “[t]he Church grows thanks to the blood of the martyrs. This is the beauty of martyrdom. It begins with witness, day after day, and it can end like Jesus, the first martyr, the first witness, the faithful witness: with blood.”³⁶⁰ There is ever-increasing evidence that the Somali Church is growing despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges of the persecution it regularly faces. The oppression Somali Christians endure necessitates theological, missional and ecclesiastical reflection. Disciples of Christ suffering because of righteousness is ingrained in the Scriptures (Matthew 5:10). Biblically speaking, persecution is the rule and not the exception in the lives of Christ-like believers (2 Timothy 3:12).

The Bible considers it a blessing when the Disciples of Christ are persecuted for their faith (Luke 6:22). Early Christians praised and thanked God for considering them worthy to be persecuted because of Christ (Acts 5:41). Peter calls it commendable when Christians suffer unjustly because they are mindful of God (1 Peter 2:19). God enables Christians to endure and sometimes thrive in persecution because of His grace. The intimate relationship between the martyr and God is best illustrated by St. Ignatius when he wrote, “[y]et he that is near to

³⁵⁶ Jayson Casper, “The 50 Countries Where It’s Hardest to Follow Jesus,” ChristianityToday.Com, last modified January 15, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/january/top-christian-persecution-open-doors-2020-world-watch-list.html> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁵⁷ Martin Hill, *No Redress: Somalia’s Forgotten Minorities* (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2010), <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-912-Click-here-to-download-full-report.pdf>.

³⁵⁸ ³ Jennifer LeClaire, “Islamic Somali Militants Confiscate Christian Farms,” Charisma News, last modified March 2, 2011, <https://www.charismanews.com/world/36348-islamic-somali-militants-confiscate-christian-farms> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁵⁹ Stefan J. Bos, “Somalia Militants Destroy Largest Christian Library, Bible College,” BosNewsLife Africa Service, January 6, 2011, online edition, <https://www.bosnewslife.com/2011/01/06/somalia-militants-destroy-largest-christian-library-bible-college/> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁶⁰ Elise Harris, “Pope Francis: Church Grows from the Blood of the Martyrs,” Catholic News Agency, last modified June 30, 2014, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-church-grows-with-the-blood-of-the-martyrs-45498> (accessed November 17, 2020).

the sword is nearer to God.”³⁶¹ A proper theology of persecution, therefore, helps the targeted Somali Christians, not only survive but, flourish during severe persecutions. This may explain why the Church often grows in world areas, like Iran, Afghanistan and China, where persecution against Christians is the norm.

Persecution in Context

This chapter intends to examine how the persecuted church in Islamic Somalia overcomes the challenges of persecution and thrives in the face of unspeakable atrocities perpetrated by Muslims, both radicals and moderates. Radical Islam is the driving force behind the killings of Christians in Somalia. The most potent Islamist group in Somalia is the al-Qaeda affiliated al Shabab militant group, which claimed the killings of many Christians in Somalia. While al Shabab is a force for evil all the time, when it comes to their treatment of the Somali Christians, the Somali clan system is often beneficial to the church. Somali Christians who hail from major clans often receive the traditional clan protection bestowed upon all members in their home turf whether they are saints or sinners.

Radical Islamists in Somalia often target the leaders of the church with the assumption that once the leadership is eliminated, the church would collapse. Despite the enhanced persecution risks Somali Church leaders face, they continue serving the church with divine diligence. In John 10:11, Jesus is described as the good Shepherd because a shepherd never abandons his sheep. In Psalm 23, God is portrayed as a Shepherd who protects His people. The persecuted Somali Church leaders have consistently proven they are reliable shepherds for the community of faith. While shepherds are often the first ones to be targeted when persecution breaks out, the sheep are not spared either. Despite the calculated tactics radical Islamists employ, the Somali Church continues growing. While exegeting Acts 8:1–8, John Piper states, “that God rules over the sufferings of the church and causes them to spread spiritual power and the joy of faith in a lost world.”³⁶² The violence persecutors assume would eradicate the church is often its lifeline.

Islam, a monotheistic 7th-century religion, adapted much of its sacred scriptures from the Judeo-Christian faith. However, radical Muslims shed the blood of countless innocent Christians in the name of Allah. Sharia law is derived from multiple Islamic sources, including the Qur’an, Hadith, *ijma* (consensus) and *qiyas* (analogy based on legal reasoning). Islamic law directly derived from the Qur’an and the Hadith are considered the most reliable. Sharia laws are divided into five categories: *Fard* (something *required*), *Mandub* (something *recommended*), *Mubah* (something *permissible*), *Makruh* (something *despised*), and *Haram* (something *forbidden*).³⁶³ Sharia covers worship, dietary laws, slaughtering of animals, family life, crime and punishment. Sharia law, in its totality, inflicts so much harm on Christians whether they were born to Christian or Muslim parents. The *murtad*, an apostate

³⁶¹ Peter Kirby, “St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnaeans,” Early Christian Writings, last modified 2020, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-smyrnaeans-longer.html> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁶² John Piper, “Spreading Power through Persecution,” Desiring God, last modified May 5, 1991, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/spreading-power-through-persecution> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁶³ “Islam Question & Answer: Categories of Deeds and Examples Thereof,” last modified July 9, 2015, <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/180341/categories-of-deeds-and-examples-thereof> (accessed November 17, 2020).

who left Islam, is seen to have committed treason and Sharia law prescribes severe punishment for such a person.

Persecution of Christians in the Muslim World

The survival of an Islamic state and its application of Sharia law depends on its subjects remaining Muslims; otherwise, such a state is never viable. Islam divides apostates into two categories: *Murtad fitri*: an apostate who was born to Muslim parents and *Murtad milli*: an apostate who was born to non-Muslim parents but later embraced Islam. In Shia Islam, the first is not given a chance to return to Islam but is executed on the spot.³⁶⁴ However, the second is offered only one opportunity to re-embrace Islam; if he accepts, he lives, if he rejects, he dies by the sword.³⁶⁵ Generally speaking, in Sunni Islam, *murtad fitri* and *murtad milli* are not distinguished; they are both executed if their apostasy is confirmed. None of these would be given a chance to return to the fold of Islam. Female apostates, whether *fitri* or *milli*; face the same judgment, dying by the sword and without an invitation to return to Islam. Abu Hanifah, however, rejects the killing of a female apostate (whether *fitri* or *milli*) opting for imprisonment until she re-embraces Islam.³⁶⁶

When Prophet Muhammad conquered Mecca in the 8th year of Hijra, he extended general amnesty to all the non-Muslims in the city except 7-11 persons.³⁶⁷ The Prophet named and shamed these people by saying all “should be killed even if they are found holding on to the cover of the Ka’bah!”³⁶⁸ One of the people marked by the prophet to be executed is a *murtad milli* (former convert to Islam who later abandoned it) named Abdullah bin Sa’d bin Abi Sarah. Abdullah was the prophet’s Qur’an scribe and a foster brother of Uthman bin Affan, the son-in-law of the prophet and the third Caliph of the Muslim community.³⁶⁹ Abdullah visited the prophet in Medina, embraced Islam and then returned to Mecca and deserted the young fledging religion. However, Uthman defied the prophet’s order and sheltered his foster brother. Uthman later took Abdullah to the prophet and interceded for him. The prophet kept silent expecting one of his companions would strike Abdullah dead; when no one carried out his previous execution order, the prophet pardoned Abdullah and scolded the companions with him:

Was there not among you any intelligent man who, when he saw me not accepting his pledge, would get up and kill him? They said: “O Messenger of Allah, we do not know what is in your mind; why did you not hint to us with (a movement of) your eyes?” He said: “It is not appropriate for a Prophet to

³⁶⁴ Muhammad Sarwar, trans., Al-Kafi, e-book., vol. 7, Fru’ al-Kafi (New York: Islamic Seminary Publications, 2014), 257, [http://www.al-murtaza.org/Books/AL-KAFI%20VOLUME%207%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.al-murtaza.org/Books/AL-KAFI%20VOLUME%207%20(English).pdf) (accessed 15 June 2020).

³⁶⁵ Muhammad Sarwar, trans., Al-Kafi, e-book., vol. 7, Fru’ al-Kafi (New York: Islamic Seminary Publications, 2014), 257, [http://www.al-murtaza.org/Books/AL-KAFI%20VOLUME%207%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.al-murtaza.org/Books/AL-KAFI%20VOLUME%207%20(English).pdf) ((accessed 15 June 2020).

³⁶⁶ Abdullah Saeed, “Ridda and the Case for Decriminalization of Apostasy,” ed. Oliver Learman, The Qur’an: An Encyclopedia (London: Routledge, 2006), 551.

³⁶⁷ The Prophet of Islam considered these people as unforgivable; some betrayed the Prophet and others showed him intense hostility including composing and reciting poetry to demean him.

³⁶⁸ Abu Dawud Sunan, “Book of Battles (Kitab Al-Malahim),” last modified 2008, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/39> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁶⁹ Maulana-Wahiduddin Khan, Muhammad a Prophet for All Humanity (New Delhi: SOS Free Stock, 2016), 327.

have treacherous eyes.”³⁷⁰

This hadith describes the fate of a *murtad milli*. One would be hard-pressed to find an example of an adult *murtad fitri* during the prophet’s lifetime. Almost all adult Muslims during the prophet’s lifetime were from a non-Muslim background. Therefore, the vast majority of those born to Muslim parents would be minors at the conquest of Mecca or very young adults around the time of the prophet’s death. If Islam treats the *murtad milli* in such a violent fashion, imagine the fate of the *murtad fitri*. Almost all adult Somali Christians are from a Muslim background and fall under the despised Islamic category of the *murtad fitri*.

Tertullian Was Right

The most well-known of Tertullian’s works is the *Apologeticus* containing apologetic and polemic oratory to defend Christians from the religious persecution they were facing. This treatise was written in AD 197 and contained the most famous quote of Tertullian “The more we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed” or its poetic adaptation, “the blood of Christians is the seed of the Church.”³⁷¹

Some of the most publicized martyrdoms of the Somali Christians include the gruesome decapitation of Mansur Mohamed in 2008, a local church evangelist and humanitarian worker.³⁷² Mansur was paraded before militants’ cameras, his hands tied behind his back. One of the militants read from the Qur’an to justify the impending repugnant murder. After a lengthy Islamic sermon, the innocent Christian was slowly beheaded with a small blunt knife, perhaps to make the pain last a little bit longer. One of the militants mockingly sharpens the knife on Mansur’s head. The martyrdom video clip of this young man is still online.³⁷³

The Islamists distributed Mansur’s martyrdom video clip in much of southern Somalia for propaganda purposes. The cruelty of the martyrdom shook the community of faith. There is no evidence that many believers or seekers wavered in their resolve, contrary to the expectation of the Islamists. Scrutinizing the real impact this graphic martyrdom had on the Church is difficult now for security reasons. However, initial reports indicate that the community of faith experienced significant numerical growth in the first two years after the martyrdom.³⁷⁴ This growth reportedly took place within a five square kilometer radius of the martyr’s house-church in southern Somalia. The church in that area has never before experienced this kind of reported growth.

³⁷⁰ Abu Dawud Sunan, “Book of Battles (Kitab Al-Malahim),” last modified 2008, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/39> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁷¹ A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., “Tertullian’s Apology,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, American Edition.*, vol. 3 (Albany, Oregon: Books for the Ages, 1997), 102, http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF_0_03.PDF ((accessed 15 June 2020).

³⁷² CBN News and The Voice of the Martyrs, “Somalia: Terror Group Wants To Rid Country of Christians,” *Voice of the Martyrs Canada (VOMC)*, <https://www.vomcanada.com/malaysia-videos/video/somalia-rid-christians> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁷³ Somali for Jesus (SFJ), “Mansur Mohamed: SFJ Martyr of the Year (2008),” *Somalis For Jesus*, January 13, 2009, <https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2009/01/mansur-mohamed-sfj-martyr-of-year-2009.html>, (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁷⁴ M.M.M, “Personal Conversation with a Somali Church Leader in Somalia,” May 17, 2017.

The same Islamist group beheaded four Somali Christian orphanage workers in 2009 after they refused to return to Islam.³⁷⁵ Another beheaded martyr of the Islamist group is Guled Jama Muktar who was decapitated in 2011 because of his Christian faith.³⁷⁶ These are merely a few of the many Christians the Somali church lost at the hands of Islamists and their sympathizers. Giulio Albanese, Director at Catholic News Agency, reiterates, “[b]ut there is no doubt that the land where Christians have experienced the greatest suffering is Somalia.”³⁷⁷ However, the Somali Church has shown consistent numerical growth in all areas in Somalia where the martyrdoms took place since 1994.

Overcoming the Challenges of Persecution

The adage, necessity is the mother of invention, holds true here. The persecuted Somali community of faith often forsakes traditional church buildings for residential houses where Christians meet discreetly, thus the concept of house-churches. These house-churches are sometimes labeled as “underground” because they are hard to be found by the enemy. The number of Christians meeting in any house-church is small as not to attract unnecessary attention. In the Somali Church, for example, leadership development is taken very seriously. Despite radical Islamists killing so many Somali church leaders, there has never been a shortage of church leaders in Somalia. Many of these persecuted Christians prefer digital devices when it comes to Bible study materials and other church resources. Owning a physical Bible is both illegal and dangerous in Somalia, but many Somali Christians carry around passcode-protected smartphones loaded with Christian materials, including Bibles. Many of the phones have a security feature that deletes all the contents if the wrong passcode is put in too many times.

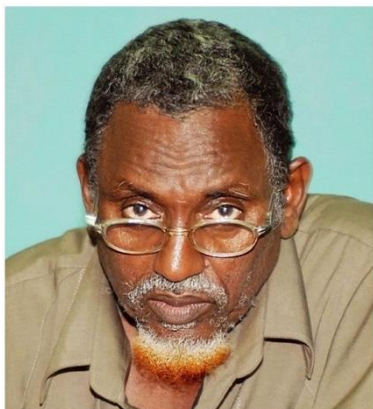
Somali Christians are often denied employment opportunities because of their faith. In response to this discrimination, some Somali Christians own their businesses and employ fellow Christians. Some Somali Christians have access to safe houses within Somalia. Somali Christians are also known for their locally developed theology of persecution often expressed in hymns. These hymns nourish the souls of the persecuted Christians.

³⁷⁵ Fox News, “Al Shabaab Reportedly Beheads 4 Christians, Rips Gold Teeth from Locals’ Mouths,” Text.Article, Fox News (Fox News, March 27, 2015), last modified March 27, 2015, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/al-shabaab-reportedly-beheads-4-christians-rips-gold-teeth-from-locals-mouths> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁷⁶ The Blaze, “Violent Islamic Extremists in Somalia Reportedly Beheaded a Christian Teen,” TheBlaze, last modified October 21, 2011, <https://www.theblaze.com/news/2011/10/21/violent-islamic-extremists-in-somalia-behead-christian-teen> (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁷⁷ Giulio Albanese, “Africa: Le Violenze Sui Cristiani Nascoste Dai Conflitti (Africa: Still a Land of Violence and Persecution for Many Christians),” last modified September 28, 2008, http://www.atma-o-jibon.org/italiano4/rit_albanese61.htm (accessed November 17, 2020).

Using the Challenges to Grow the Church



Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys
Photo Credit: Alchetron

The relationship between persecution and church growth is codified in church history, starting with the early church to the present day. Pope Francis' declaration in 2014 that "Church grows from the blood of the martyrs" has historical precedence.³⁷⁸ "The more Christians are persecuted, the more they increase in number" was a theme well known as early as the second century. The martyrdom of Stephen and the ten apostles did not impede the church growth but propelled it to spectacular growth by the 4th century. Tertullian believed that a martyr's willingness to die for Christ leads others to become disciples of Christ. The courage of martyrs and the pens of apologists have both given the Church historical and theological perspective that persecution helps with church growth.



Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan
Photo Credit: SFJ

The 1994 martyrdom of Pastor Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan set the stage for the bloodiest chapter the Somali Church has ever known. The Mogadishu-based legendary Somali church leader co-pastored a house-church of 14 members when 12 of them were martyred.³⁷⁹ When the dust settled, only two members survived the Islamist assassinations bankrolled by al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) Arabic: الإسلامى الاتحاد، literally, 'The Islamic Union'). Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a former army colonel and avowed Islamist, was at the time the AIAI leader. The two surviving members of the targeted house-church overcame the persecution challenges and, by 1999, started a new house-church in the same general neighborhood where the old one had been meeting. This new house-church led the effort to plant more house-churches within five years in Mogadishu and its environs.

Tertullian's conviction that the persecution of Christians contributes to the numerical growth of the church has been confirmed true in the Somali capital and beyond. It is noteworthy that no record exists of a Somali Christian ever killed for their faith in northern Somalia (present-day Somaliland). All the killings of Somali Christians took place in southern Somalia. Tertullian's belief again holds true here. More Somali Muslims come to the Lord in the south than in the north of Somalia.

³⁷⁸ Elise Harris, "Pope Francis: Church Grows from the Blood of the Martyrs," Catholic News Agency, last modified June 30, 2014, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-church-grows-with-the-blood-of-the-martyrs-45498> (accessed November 17 2020).

³⁷⁹ The names of the martyred believers are: Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan, Ahmed Ayntow Gobe, Saleban Mohamed Saleban, Isma'el Yusuf Mukhtar, Mohamed Aba Nur, Ali Kusow Mataan, Mohamed Abdullahi Yusuf, Nurani Madey Madka, Khalif Dayah Guled, Bashir Mo'alim Mohamud, Prof. Haji Mohamed Hussein, and Mohamed Sheikdon Jama. "Martyr's Corner", Somalis for Jesus, <https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2008/11/martyrs-corner.html> (accessed 15 June 2021).

Conclusion

This study illuminates the fact that the Church in Somalia is indeed growing while it is still facing intense persecution that includes martyrdoms. Persecution does not seem to be abating anytime soon since the Somali Christians belong to the two-thirds of Christians who live in hostile environments where they belong to minority groups.³⁸⁰ Given this fact, the Somali Church growth will most likely continue despite the antagonistic context in which it finds itself. It is a biblical principle that the persecution suffered by some Christians spurs others to be bolder in their faith and witness; this divine courage helps the communities, and beyond, even more than they did before the persecution. The Apostle Paul illustrates this fact that chains advance the Gospel in Philippians 1:12-14.

The early Church was birthed in a context of persecution and never ceased growing despite the hostilities it was facing. The persecution and church growth went hand in hand until the 4th century. Therefore, understanding how the Somali Church thrives under the sword could inspire other persecuted Christians all over the world. The characteristics that persecuted Christians demonstrate include resilience, resourcefulness, and street savviness. The survival tactics these persecuted Christians adopt include churches meeting in residential houses, developing a network of safe houses, and extensive use of technology for communication, teaching, training, and studying. Persecuted Somali Christians build extensive digital libraries and teach, and train their members in the safest way possible. Such strategies help the church defy the adverse effects of persecution and continue growing with minimum disruptions.

³⁸⁰ Pew Research Centre, “The Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” Pew Research Centre’s Religion & Public Life Project, December 19, 2011, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/> (accessed November 17, 2020).

CHAPTER TEN

The Blood of Christians is Seed: The Fifth Gospel and the Growth of the Church

Introduction

The belief that the persecution of Christians contributes to the numerical growth and spiritual invigoration of the Church is as old as the Church itself. The first major church growth movement, chronicled in the Acts of the Apostles, happened as the early Christians in Jerusalem were targeted for their faith. The persecutions throughout the Roman Empire also proved that the blood of Christians is indeed the seed of church growth, with pagan onlookers following Jesus after witnessing the heroic way Christians faced this unjust tribulation.

The fastest growing evangelical churches today are in Iran and Afghanistan, two Muslim countries ruled by Sharia Law with its ensuing high levels of persecution. The church in Somalia, effectively under Sharia Law, is also growing, with Somali Muslims regularly coming to the Lord despite the painful trials awaiting them on becoming disciples of Christ. Church historians and missiologists agree the North African prolific author and apologist, Tertullian³⁸¹ (155 –240), who popularized the belief that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.³⁸²

Not all persecuted Christians are martyred - most leave their persecutors bruised and bloodied. Christian tribulation may mean beating, imprisonment, denial of medical care, educational or vocational discrimination, family or community ostracization, or denial of food or essential basic needs – but is always a result of one’s identifying with Christ. Persecutors often target the leadership of a community of faith or its Christian materials, especially the Scriptures (the idea that the sheep will scatter when the shepherd is struck is a first century persecution strategy). In this chapter, persecution of Christians includes all these atrocities. The Church has sometimes described these trials and their resulting martyrdom as the “Fifth Gospel”³⁸³ – an unwanted “gospel” that despite its very high price, is without a doubt a priceless, eternal blessing! Jesus himself clearly linked martyrdom with church growth when he spoke of a grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies to produce much fruit (John12:24). This chapter attempts to illustrate the direct relationship between the tribulations of Christians and the growth of the Church.

Persecution – an Overview

The Acts of the Apostles records the earliest forms of persecution and the impact it had on the nascent Church. The Roman government accused Christians of antisocial behavior since they kept to themselves and refused to worship the pagan gods promoted by the Empire and

³⁸¹ Tertullian is the father of Latin Christianity and the founder of Western theology. Tertullian also coined the term Trinity (Latin: Trinitas).

³⁸² W. M. Reeve, Translator & Annotator, *The Apology of Tertullian*. 50, s. 13, 1709, initially printed in London in 1709 and Reprinted in a second edition in 1716/1717, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm (accessed 03 March 2020).

³⁸³ Courtney Grogan, For families of 21 Copts Killed by ISIS, Martyrdom is ‘Fifth Gospel.’” Catholic News Agency. Rome: Italy: 2009, March 19. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/for-families-of-21-copts-killed-by-isis-martyrdom-is-fifth-Gospel-56908> (accessed 27 February 2020).

its sympathizers. As a result, they were considered outcasts and enemies of the state.³⁸⁴ Christians were also accused of cannibalism and incest from their expressions of “eating the body of Christ” and “drinking his blood” at the Lord’s Table, and because of the practice of the “holy kiss.”³⁸⁵ Christians were thus misunderstood and considered dangerous to social harmony, and so were seen as a threat to the Empire.³⁸⁶

Initially, this persecution also elicited widespread support across the Roman Empire,³⁸⁷ and tended to be perpetrated on a localized and sporadic, *ad hoc* basis until AD 250. Church historian, Philip Schaff, comments that a “[Christian’s] Jewish origin, their indifference to politics and public affairs, and their abhorrence of heathen customs, were construed into an *odium generis humani* [hatred of the human race].”³⁸⁸

In Tertullian’s book, *The Apology* (AD 197), he addresses the Roman governor of the North African province where he lived: “[t]he oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”³⁸⁹ Tertullian also ridiculed in the same book the absurd accusations used to justify the tribulation of Christians:

The Christians are to blame for every public disaster and every misfortune that befalls the people. If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile fails to rise and flood the fields, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is earthquake or famine or plague, straightway the cry arises: “The Christians to the lions!”³⁹⁰

Schaff’s description of this suffering is noteworthy:

It was in this hate and fear-filled atmosphere that saw the bloodbath of persecution. Multitudes of Christians were crucified; some dressed in fresh animal skins were thrown to hungry beasts, and some were lit up on poles to be used as torches.³⁹¹

From the Acts of the Apostles and the Roman Empire on to the modern era, in addition to contributing to the numerical growth of the Church, persecution has also purified the Church. Rick Wade, in examining the early Christian’s experiences, writes:

[H]istory has shown that persecution ultimately strengthens the Church. It removes the nominal Christians, and it emboldens others to both stand firm when persecuted and become more aggressive in the proclamation. If persecution comes to us, the

³⁸⁴ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 86

³⁸⁵ See: Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12. Also, F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 169.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume I: Apostolic Christianity. A.D. 1-100. (CCEL Publisher, 1882), 381.

³⁸⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume I, 1882, 325.

³⁸⁹ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, (Editors), *Tertullian’s Apology*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, 1997, Oregon, Books for the Ages, 182 (OR 1-2).

http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF_0_03.PDF (accessed 22 March 2020).

³⁹⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1973), 169 (OR 165).

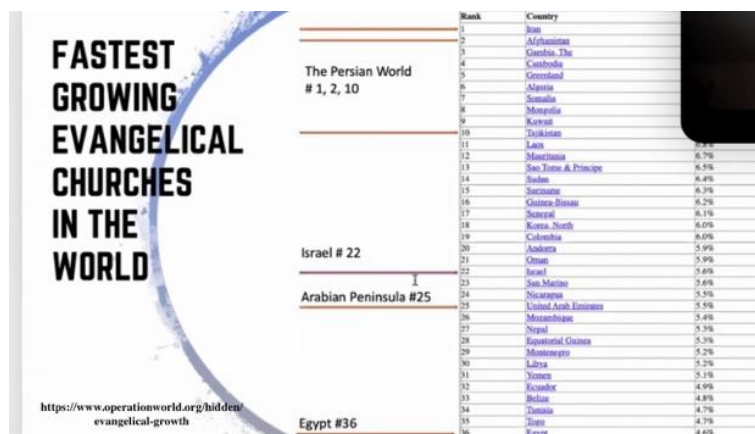
See also: *Aplogogeticum (The Apology)*, Tertullian.org, n.d.

<https://www.tertullian.org/works/apologeticum.htm> (accessed 29 July 2021)

³⁹¹ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume I, 1882, 381.

Church will remain, although church membership rolls will probably become shorter.³⁹²

For years Christian advocacy groups like the *Voice of the Martyrs* have been reporting many instances in which the Church has displayed numerical growth during suffering. According to *Christianity Today*, the Islamic Republic of Iran, a country governed by Sharia law and having serious persecution, has the fastest growing church in the world.³⁹³



An article by the *Voice of the Martyrs*, “Iran: Persecution Causes Church Growth,” chronicles how the church in this conservative Muslim country is proliferating despite the severe maltreatment by the Islamic regime.³⁹⁴ In 2016, *Operation World* reported Iran’s Christian population as having an annual growth of 19.6% - far more than any other country.³⁹⁵

Operation World lists Afghanistan as having the second most significant church growth globally, with Afghanis coming to the Lord in great multitudes.³⁹⁶ *Operation World* reported in 2010 that Christianity in Afghanistan was growing at 16.7% annually, while Iran has the fastest-growing evangelical church in the world. This is a significant achievement in such highly repressive and anti-Christian countries.³⁹⁷ Remarkably, it is primarily persecuted Iranian Christians, who themselves suffer state-sponsored persecution, who are reaching Afghanis Muslims. *Operation World* reported in 2021:

Massive numbers of Iranians have come to Jesus in recent years! From only 500 Muslim-background believers in 1979, many estimates suggest the number is even greater than 1 million just in Iran alone. Large numbers of Persian people have also encountered the risen Christ outside of Iran. The Church in Persia has not grown this fast since the 7th century. In Iran, a person can receive a death sentence for apostasy

³⁹² Rick Wade, “Persecution in the Early Church.” Compass Crusade for Christ, Cru.org. April 2012. <https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/04/wadepersucutionintheearlychurch.pdf> (accessed 22 September 2019).

³⁹³ Carey Lodge, “Which Country Has the Fastest-growing Church in the World?” *Christian Today*, 2016, September 20. <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/which.country.has.the.fastest.growing.church.in.the.world/95924.htm>, (accessed 27 March 2020).

³⁹⁴ *Voice of the Martyrs*, Iran: Persecution Causes Church Growth, 2017, May 24. <https://vom.com.au/iran-persecution-causing-church-growth/> (accessed 19 February 2020).

³⁹⁵ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World 7th Edition*, Biblical Publishing, 2010, 916. Also confirmed by Mission Network News.

³⁹⁶ Joe Carter, 9 Things You Should Know About Global Persecution of Christians. *The Gospel Coalition*, (2015, October 20). <https://www.theGospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-global-persecution-of-christians-2015-edition/> (accessed 25 March 2020).

³⁹⁷ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World 7th Edition* (Biblical Publishing.), 2010, 916.

(abandoning religious faith). This growth is a remarkable move of the Holy Spirit, with many signs and wonders, dreams and visions.³⁹⁸

Similarly, *Operation World* recently described the Somali Church as the 7th fastest growing evangelical church in the world.³⁹⁹ This growth is a divine achievement for the little-known church in Somalia.

Ethiopia and Nigeria also have significant records of persecution of Christians. The church in Ethiopia faced intense persecution under the communist regime of 1974-1991.⁴⁰⁰ Expatriate missionaries were expelled, church properties confiscated, worship meetings prohibited, and Christ-likeness was considered a liability by the ruling military junta and their devotees.⁴⁰¹ Protestant Christians went underground and found ways to be the church without traditional buildings, meetings, or conventional leadership structures. One young denomination, officially shut down in 1982 with 5,000 members, re-emerged with 34,000 members in 1991 when the communist regime was overthrown.⁴⁰² As of 2017, this denomination had a membership that exceeded over 500,000.⁴⁰³

Persecution – a Brief Historical Sequence

Persecution of Christians started at the Church's inception. From Peter's preaching at Pentecost in Acts 2 on through the first three centuries of the Church, the Roman Empire inflicted systematic and sporadic persecution on the Church until AD 250 when the persecution became more systemic under Emperor Decius (249-251). Both the polytheistic Roman officials and the monotheistic Jewish religious leaders saw the nascent Church as a threat to the *status quo*. The local Roman authorities were suspicious of Christians because of their rejection of the official cult of Emperor worship,⁴⁰⁴ and the Jewish religious leaders felt that Jesus and his disciples challenged their age-old traditions and established religious system.⁴⁰⁵ Jesus despised the human traditions which were enshrined in the oral and written laws of the Jews, teaching that this human religious system distorted the Torah (Mark 7:1-

³⁹⁸ Iran: Monthly Prayer Calendar, *Operation World*, (14 July 2021).

<https://operationworld.org/locations/iran/> (accessed 28 July 2021).

See also: Caleb Parke, "Iran has world's 'fastest-growing church,' despite no buildings - and it's mostly led by women: documentary," Fox News, (27 September 2019). <https://www.foxnews.com/faith-values/worlds-fastest-growing-church-women-documentary-film> (accessed 28 July 2021).

³⁹⁹ Evangelical Growth, *Operation World*, 2021.

<https://www.operationworld.org/hidden/evangelical-growth> (accessed 29 March 2021).

⁴⁰⁰ Geoff Stamp, "Revival and Persecution in Ethiopia," *Charisma Magazine*, 2001.

<https://www.charismamag.com/site-archives/189-features/africa/530-revival-and-persecution-in-ethiopia> (accessed 21 March 2020).

⁴⁰¹ Jay Ross, "Ethiopia Seizes Headquarters Of Major Protestant Church. The Washington Post, (1981, November 17). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/11/17/ethiopia-seizes-headquarters-of-major-protestant-church/c2fd5ac0-c74d-4d9d-ad2e624ce89a7d82/?utmterm=.4f0daf5d146d> (accessed 23 March 2020).

⁴⁰² Dave Rogalsky, "Ethiopian Church Grows in Maturity: Meserete Kristos Church Follows the New Testament Pattern," *Canadian Mennonite*, (2012, October 10).

<http://www.canadianmennonite.org/articles/ethiopian-church-grows-maturity> (accessed 27 March 2020).

⁴⁰³ Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia Online (GAMEO), Meserete Kristos Church. 2017 Update, 1990, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Meserete_Kristos_Church (accessed 23 March 2020).

⁴⁰⁴ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 86.

⁴⁰⁵ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins And The Question Of God*, Volume 1, (Fortress Press, 1992), 451.

20). Jesus also criticized the legalistic and self-righteous Jewish religious leaders, rejecting their claim that they are the followers of Moses, David and the other prophets. Jesus called the Jewish leaders the “children of Satan” (John 8:37-44). No wonder many Pharisees and other religious authorities wanted him dead.

Church tradition has recognized ten major persecutions by the Roman period:⁴⁰⁶ the Nero persecution (c. 64-68), carried out under the pretext of Christians setting the great fire of Rome and which resulted in the martyrdom of Peter and Paul; the Domitian persecution (81-96); the Trajan persecution (112-117) - though Christianity was banned, there was not a dragnet hunting low profile Christians (only high profile Christians were pursued); the Marcus Aurelius persecution (161-180), in which Polycarp is the highest-profile martyr; and the Septimus Severus persecution (202-210), in which Perpetua, a fearless and overachieving young Christian, is among the most well-known martyrs. Systemic, empire-wide persecution began with the advent of Decius persecution (250-251),⁴⁰⁷ which targeted Christians who refused to offer pagan sacrifices or buy certificates (*libelli*) instead of sacrificing. The Bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch were the most prominent martyrs under the Decius persecution. Other persecutions were spearheaded by Maximinus (235-238) and Valerian (253-260) with eminent martyrs including Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus II of Rome; the Aurelian persecution (270-275); and the Diocletian and Galerius persecutions (303-324), which were unusually severe. None of these persecutions slowed down the growth of the Church.

Contemporary scholars estimate that of the 54 Roman emperors who ruled from AD 30-311, about 30 of them persistently targeted Christians.⁴⁰⁸ Some scholars estimate that from the first government-sanctioned persecution under Nero in AD 64 until the Edict of Milan in 313 (which provided government-sanctioned, Empire-wide religious toleration for Christianity), the church faced 129 years of severe persecution and 120 years of peace or toleration.⁴⁰⁹ In targeting the Church, many Roman persecutions also targeted the written Scriptures, other Christian materials, church property and influential sympathizers of Christians, while non-prominent lay Christians often escaped direct pursuit.⁴¹⁰

Looking past Roman times to other countries and later eras, persecution continued. During the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate in North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries, the Berber church was persecuted and many Christians were pressured to convert to Islam.⁴¹¹ Muslim crowds looted and destroyed properties owned by Egyptian Coptic Christians from AD 832 to 837. This open season on Christian properties happened during the leadership of the seventh Abbasid ruler, Caliph al-Mamun. Muslims looted churches and monasteries and

⁴⁰⁶ Religious Facts, Persecution in the Early Church. Last updated, November 19, 2016. 17 March 2005, <http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-early-church>, (accessed 22 March 2020).

⁴⁰⁷ Everett Ferguson, *Did You Know? Christian History*, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20, 1990, 1, inside cover.

⁴⁰⁸ Mark Galli, “The Persecuting Emperors.” *Christian History*, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 1990, 20

⁴⁰⁹ Maurice M. Hassatt, “Martyr.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IX, Robert Appleton Company, 1910.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹¹ C. J. Speel II, *The Disappearance of Christianity from North Africa in the Wake of the Rise of Islam: Church History*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Society of Church History, 1960), 379-397.

martyred many Christians, including monks.⁴¹² Similarly, under the draconian Laws of Umar,⁴¹³ Muslims targeted Egyptian Christians from the 1300s until 1517, and used violent subjugation, dispossession and discrimination. The oppressive Ayyubid sultanate (1250 - 1517) which ruled Egypt and Syria eventually collapsed;⁴¹⁴ this downfall gave the local Christians a limited freedom of belief they have not enjoyed for close to three centuries.⁴¹⁵ The Laws of Umar prohibited Christians from building new churches, monasteries or other places of worship, and made it illegal to rebuild or renovate damaged churches and other Christian places of worship. Like earlier Coptic Christians, many of these were also coerced to convert to Islam. The Mamluk Sultanate in Cairo (1250–1517) demolished most church buildings and massacred over 300,000 Christian Copts throughout the 13th century, including Maronite and Greek Christians who also suffered the destruction of their homes.⁴¹⁶ Ottoman and Kurdish soldiers persecuted the Assyrian Christians of the Ottoman Empire from 1843 to 1847, and more than 10,000 Assyrian Christians were massacred in the Hakkari region,⁴¹⁷ with many thousands more being sold into slavery by Muslim rulers.⁴¹⁸ In India, Christians were historically persecuted by various Muslim rulers such as Tipu Sultan,⁴¹⁹ while modern day persecutions, according to *Human Rights Watch*, are now spearheaded by Hindu nationalists.⁴²⁰

In modern Afghanistan, Abdul Rahman, an Afghani Christian, was arrested in 2006 for abandoning Islam.⁴²¹ According to the *Associated Press*, influential Afghani Muslims, including government officials, lobbied for him to receive the death penalty in accordance with the Sharia Law.⁴²² Initially, the Kabul judge rejected calls to end the trial and release the Christian convert,⁴²³ but Abdul Rahman was eventually released because of pressure from some Western governments according to the *Washington Post*.⁴²⁴

⁴¹² Robert Morgan, *History of the Coptic Orthodox People and the Church of Egypt*, (FriesenPress, 2016), 203-205.

⁴¹³ Also known as the Pact of Umar, Treaty of Umar or Covenant of Umar.

⁴¹⁴ Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Mamluk: Islamic Dynasty*, Britannica, n.d. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mamluk> (accessed 27 July 2021).

⁴¹⁵ The Ottoman Empire which replaced the Ayyubid sultanate was more benevolent than its predecessor. The Ottomans ruled Egypt until 1798. See “The Ottomans (1517-1798)” in Britannica.com <https://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt/The-Ottomans-1517-1798> (accessed 27 July 2021).

⁴¹⁶ Teule B. Herman G., Introduction: Constantinople and Granada, *Christian-Muslim Interaction 1350-1516*, in David Thomas and Alex Mallett, *Christian-Muslim Relations, A Bibliographical History, Volume 5 (1350-1500)*, (Brill, 2013), 11.

⁴¹⁷ The southeast corner of current day Turkey, bordering Iraq.

⁴¹⁸ David Gaunt, *Massacres, resistance, protectors: Muslim-Christian relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I*, (Piscataway, N.J. Gorgias Press, 2006), 32.

⁴¹⁹ James Scurry, *The captivity, sufferings, and escape of James Scurry, who was detained a prisoner during ten years, in the dominions of Hyder Ali and Tippoo Saib*, (London, H. Fisher, 1824), 1980, 103.

⁴²⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Anti-Christian Violence on the Rise in India: New Report Details the Politics Behind Extremist Hindu Attacks*, 1999, September 30. <https://www.hrw.org/news/1999/09/30/anti-christian-violence-rise-india> (accessed 17 March 2019).

⁴²¹ BBC, *Afghan on Trial for Christianity: Afghan Man is Being Tried in a Court in the Capital, Kabul, for Converting from Islam to Christianity*, 2006, March 20, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4823874.stm (accessed 26 September 2019).

⁴²² Associated Press, *Afghan Judge Resists Pressure In Convert Case*. *Washington Post*, 2006, March 25. www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on (accessed 27 February 2020).

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Associated Press, *Afghan Judge Resists Pressure In Convert Case*. *Washington Post*, 2006, March 25. www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on (accessed 27 February 2020).

The persecution against Somali Christians has been on the rise since the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991. Christians have been facing what has amounted to a religious genocide because of Islamic fundamentalism's rise in the vacuum of increased lawlessness and armed anarchy.⁴²⁵ Radical Islamists have beheaded several Somali Christians and, on at least one occasion in 2008, videotaped the gruesome decapitation of a local evangelist and a humanitarian worker, Mansur Mohamed.⁴²⁶

The Blood of Christians is the Seed of the Church

As already mentioned, Tertullian, was a fervent believer that the persecution of Christians emboldens the growth of the church. In his AD 197 seminal book, *Apologeticus* (The Apology), he wrote that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” a poetic adaptation of what he had literally penned - “the oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”⁴²⁷ Tertullian never doubted that persecution strengthens the community of faith and contributes to church growth, and he and many of his contemporaries testified how non-Christians embraced Christ on witnessing Christians heroically dying for their faith. The Epistle to Diognetus, a letter by an anonymous 2nd-century Christian apologist addressed to “most excellent Diognetus,” a well-connected pagan man, is another compelling testimony of the power of the early church's witness and life:

Do you not see [how the Christians] thrown to the wild beasts – [to make them] recant the Lord - do not allow themselves to be beaten? Do you not see that the more they are punished, the more [they] increase in numbers?⁴²⁸

Ippolito Romano, a contemporary of Tertullian, wrote of lethal persecution that “a large number of men, attracted to the faith by martyrs, also became God's martyrs.”⁴²⁹ Professor Antonio Miralles of Pontifical University of the Holy Cross writes:

The martyrs gain through losing their lives in bearing witness to Jesus – they gain eternal life. But this is also positive for the Church, that receives new believers, encouraged to convert thanks to the example set by the martyrs, and she also sees a renewal in existing believers.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁵ The Angelical Planet, Almost Expunged: Somalia's Embattled Christians, 2009, March 30. <http://anglicanplanet.net/international-news/2009/11/30/almost-expunged-somalias-embattledchristians.html> (accessed 11 September 2019).

⁴²⁶ Compass Direct News (CDN). Islamic Extremists Behead Another Convert in Somalia: Young Christian Man Murdered outside Mogadishu. Christian Post, 20102, February 9, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/islamic-extremists-behead-another-convert-in-somalia-69102/> (accessed 18 March 2020). The martyr is also known as Nur Hassan.

⁴²⁷ W. M. Reeve, Translator & Annotator, The Apology of Tertullian. 50, s. 13, 1709, initially printed in London in 1709 and Reprinted in a second edition in 1716/1717, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm (accessed 03 March 2020).

⁴²⁸ Antonio Miralles, The blood of martyrs, the seed of Christians. Clerus, 2004, May 31. <http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2004-05/31-13/12MarIn.html>, (accessed 13 March 2020).

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

Extreme persecution

- 1 North Korea
- 2 Afghanistan
- 3 Somalia
- 4 Libya
- 5 Pakistan
- 6 Eritrea
- 7 Sudan
- 8 Yemen
- 9 Iran
- 10 India

World Watch List 2020
Credit: Open Doors

The second and third century persecutions profoundly impacted the faith of the young church, and inspired a systematic theology of persecution that is still expressed today in compositions, both prose and poetry, which attest to the Church's continued growth through this tribulation. Theology of persecution is always formed in the fires of tyranny and bloodbath.⁴³¹

Some Church historians and missiologists estimate that more Christians have been martyred for their faith in the last 50 years than in the Church's first 300 years combined.⁴³² Sometimes the religio-political climates change in world areas where Christianity has already been established, resulting in negative effects on the Church - Chairman Mao Zedong's China and Islamic North Africa being two cases in point. However, Christians in North Korea have been the most persecuted believers in the world since the formation of the hermit nation in 1948.

Conclusion

The first meeting of the International Congress on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland (1974), popularly known as the Lausanne Movement, was about the global persecution of Christians. It was there that Billy Jang Hwan Kim, a Korean-born church leader stated: "persecution is a storm that is permitted to scatter the seed of the Word, and disperse the sower and reaper over many fields. It is God's way of extending his Kingdom."⁴³³ His conviction is widely shared by many Christians, including Pope Francis, who in 2014 declared that "[t]he Church grows thanks to the blood of the martyrs. This is the beauty of martyrdom."⁴³⁴

In *Evangelism in the Early Church*, Michael Green notes that Stephen's martyrdom did not hinder church growth but ushered in a new era of emboldened disciples whose ministry led many to the Lord.⁴³⁵ Just as the early church was emboldened and strengthened by its suffering, so too modern-day examples of persecution are producing thriving churches in countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and Somalia. All are further evidence of Tertullian's belief that the more Christians are "mown down," the more they grow in number because the blood of Christians is seed.

⁴³¹ For more information about this theology, see the chapter titled "An Overview of Persecution of Christians." The Section titled "Church and Locally Developed Distinctive Theology of Persecution" briefly delves into the concept of the theology of persecution.

⁴³² Everett Ferguson, *Did You Know? Christian History*, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20, 1, inside cover, 1990.

⁴³³ Billy Kim, "God at Work in Times of Persecution," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses*, ed. James D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications, 1975), 57. See also: Thomas Schirrmacher, *Persecution and Mission*, Lausanne World Pulse Archives, (Issue: 11-2008).
<https://lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/1048/11-2008> (accessed 27 July 2021).

⁴³⁴ Elise Harris, *Pope Francis: Church grows from the blood of the martyrs*. Catholic News Agency, 30 June 2014, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-church-grows-with-the-blood-of-the-martyrs-45498> (accessed on 12 March 2020).

⁴³⁵ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 172-173.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Your Clan and Your Shoes: How the Somali Church Harnesses a Time-Tested Social

Safety Net

Introduction

The Somali clan system operates as a mini-state to serve its members. The services provided by one's clan are vital to its members. Somalia gained its independence in 1960, but the country always struggled to provide essential services and social safety nets to its citizens. Somalia had not had a functioning central government since 1991, when armed groups overthrew the military government. The thirty-year civil war has spawned lawlessness, which further highlighted the importance of the Somali clan system, which bestows its members certain degrees of protection and other benefits. The clan system is the absolute lifeline on which all Somalis rely. The age-old clan system has, in fact, mitigated the worst excesses of the Somali civil war.

While members of the major clans most benefit from the provisions of the clan system, members of the minority clans also enjoy the peace of mind of knowing that their extended family members and relatives, distant or close, would step in should these members need help. The clan services are funded by clan-wide financial contributions known in Somali as *qaaraan*, clan dues. All reputable members of the clan pay the *qaaraan*. No member is too poor to pay their fair share of the clan dues since these mandatory contributions are based on one's revenue. No one can hide their income in clan-based societies like Somalis. Those who refuse to pay their fair share of the clan dues are ostracized.

Clan Provisions

The Somali clan system is the only time-tested social safety net Somalis have.⁴³⁶ This age-old traditional system offers services, provides protection, and grants privileges to its members. Some clan provisions are conditional, while others are not. The protection of one's life, honor, and property are unconditional. This protection is bestowed upon all people by virtue of being born into the clan. The paramount clan chief's recommendations and deputies are given only to the *qaaraan*, clan dues, paying members of the clan.⁴³⁷ Such recommendations are required when one needs to get prestigious government jobs like a cabinet, ambassadorial, or a parliamentary position. An often-quoted Somali proverb illustrates how the clan system is every Somali's lifeline, "your shoes protect only your feet, but your clan protects all of you."⁴³⁸ This chapter aims to highlight the importance of the Somali clan system to the Somali Church.

Coveted government positions were in the past informally shared by the various Somali clans. Paramount clan chiefs were the ones to recommend qualified candidates to the Somali President for his consideration. This clan-based informal power-sharing arrangement was

⁴³⁶ The Somali clan system provides its members essential services that the state is either unable or unwilling to provide. Such services are funded with finances collected from all clan members in the form of *qaaraan*, clan wide contributions.

⁴³⁷ A regular financial contribution paid by all reputable members of the clan to meet the extraordinary financial needs of clan members.

⁴³⁸ The proverb says in Somali, "*tolkaaga iyo kobtaada dhexdaa looga jiraa.*"

formalized into the current 4.5 formula in 2000. In this principle, the four main clans (Daarod, Dir, Hawiye, and Rahanweyn) each get an equal share in the political representation. However, the minority clans together share 0.5 stakes.⁴³⁹ While the minority clans' members lack a significant clan base to support them, they, like those from major clans, have an extended family system (*tol* in Somali) that can provide essential services to its members.

The Power of the Clan System

The Somali clan system, while ancient, still remains practical. However, while Islam is deeply rooted among Somalis, it is only second to the clan system in importance. Most Somali Muslims can imagine living a normal life without practicing Islam. After all, only a minority of the professing Muslims regularly observe all the basic tenets of Islam. However, they are well aware of the fact that they cannot lead a dignified life without a clan base. A colonial-era Italian official is attributed to have said, "Somalis do not practice Islam, they protect it." Furthermore, Islam recognizes the importance of clans and the vital purpose they serve as a system of identifying those who are related to you by blood. "We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other." (Qur'an 49:13a, Shakir translation). 1 Timothy 5:8 instructs Christians to provide, not only for their immediate family but also for their relatives, "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for the members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (ESV).

When the government wrongfully arrests or convicts someone, it is often the traditional elders and other influential members in the clan who advocate for the aggrieved individual and even take up arms against the government if their complaints are not adequately addressed. Sometimes the clan leaders accept their convicted member is guilty, but they may still fight for them if they perceive the punishment to be disproportionate. For example, the Somali government, in 1983, arrested an army colonel, a cabinet member, and a former mayor of the Somali capital. The Colonel's clan mobilized and coined the now-famous battle cry, *Jeelle ama jidka* (Jeelle or the road). Jeelle's clan members blocked a major highway that crosses through Hiiraan Region, their clan turf. The rebellion ended after two weeks because the government agreed to release Mr. Jeelle. In tribal societies, it is imperative for everyone to belong to a clan or risk to be mistreated or even killed with impunity.⁴⁴⁰

While the clan system is the only dependable lifeline for all Somalis, this age-old social safety net is also prone to misuse. The resources collected in the form of *qaaraan* are sometimes used for malevolent purposes like attacking other clans or sub-clans considered rivals. This conflict can spawn tit for tat killings, resulting in the slayings of innocent people for belonging to the "wrong clan." The clan system operates like a mini-state with its own "tax" collection system in the form of *qaaraan*, fearless clan warriors that can be mobilized in a moment's notice, a judicial system known as *xeer beegti*, and many other organs that sustain the clan mini-state. Governments in the developed countries do a lot of good for their citizens, but these governments can also divert tax money to controversial causes and even enact divisive domestic policies. Therefore, it is apparent that no form of government,

⁴³⁹ "Constitutional History of Somalia," International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. August 2018 Update. <https://constitutionnet.org/country/somalia> (accessed 08 January 2020).

⁴⁴⁰ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History*. New York: Modern Library. 2000, 13.

whether clan-based or not, is perfect, but without any form of authority results in perilous mayhem.

If it Ain't Broke, Don't Fix it

Some Western-educated Somalis and missionaries dismiss the Somali clan system as primitive if not outright harmful. These learned individuals associate the clan system with corruption, misrule, and nepotism. However, these social ills also abound in world areas where clan affiliation is a foreign concept. The said intellectuals, while some of their concerns are legitimate, appear to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Hussein A. Bulhan, American educated Somali professor, wonders why Somalis still cling to their clan “despite exposures to western education, Islam, or, urbanization.”⁴⁴¹ Clans provide their members essential services and only a fair and efficient Somali government would be able to render the clan system less important when such government can provide better services than the clan. Such a benevolent government has not materialized in Somalia since the country's independence in 1960.

Some Somali Christians from the Protestant confession of the Church reject their clan and try to replace it with a new clan, the Somali Church and the missionaries who minister with the church. No matter how hard these two entities try to take the mantle of the clan, they will fail. The Somali Church and the missionaries must advise the new Somali believers that they should remain active members of their clan; this is in their best interest. After all, no one can leave their clan as the Somali proverb declares, “you are sewn to your clan.”⁴⁴² Another proverb states, “the worst of people are those who reject their clan or a sound advice.”⁴⁴³ Since blood is thicker than belief among Somalis, even a Christian convert will still be accepted by the majority of the Muslim clan members as long as this new Christian continues paying the *qaaraan*, the clan dues. When this Christian convert needs help, they should first go to their clan, not the Church or the missionaries. As the Somali proverb says, “your clan will not fail you unless your mouth fails you.”⁴⁴⁴ This maxim encourages clan members who need help to ask their clan for help; in other words, if they keep their mouths shut, no one would know they need help.

The Clan in Poetry and in Proverbs

Mohamed Kahin Feedhoole, (b.1928), a young Somali nomad, was convinced during the colonial era that he could make a fortune if he migrated to Aden, Yemen. He sold four of his camels and arrived in Tawahi, Aden, in 1946. Mohamed quickly realized his lot in British Somaliland was much better than his humble life in Yemen.⁴⁴⁵ The once-proud camel herder considered all the jobs available to him, like washing dishes in restaurants, too humiliating. This distraught migrant met members of his clan who arrived in Yemen long before him and recited a now-famous, gut-wrenching poem. The refrain of the poem is, “I need the support of those who love me. My fellow clan members help me to go home.”⁴⁴⁶ The clan members

⁴⁴¹ Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing, 2013), 148

⁴⁴² The proverb says in Somali, “tol waa tolane.”

⁴⁴³ The proverb says in Somali, “dad waxaa ugu liita tol diid iyo talo diid.”

⁴⁴⁴ The proverb says in Somali, “tolkaa kuma gabee, yuusan afkaagu ku gebin.”

⁴⁴⁵ Suugaanta Dugsiga Sare. Fialka 2aad. (Muqdisho: Wasaaradda Waxbarashada iyo Barbaarinta. 1984), 17-19 [High School Poetry. Grade 10. Mogadishu: Ministry of Education Textbook Press. 1984, 17-19]

⁴⁴⁶ The refrain in Somali is, “*Tabantaabo gacal baan rabaa, tolow hallay dhoofsho.*”

quickly pooled their resources in the form of *qaaraan*, the clan dues, and raised enough money, thus helping their 18-year-old clan member return home with dignity.

The importance of the clan to the Somalis transcends the earthly days; even the deceased members still need their clan as one Somali proverb illustrates, “the grave too could not do without kinsmen.”⁴⁴⁷ This means that no burial is complete or dignified enough unless the kinsmen of the deceased participate in it. A common curse hurled at one’s enemies is, “may strangers bury you.”⁴⁴⁸ The living clan members immortalize the memories of the deceased in poetry and prose like stories. Without the concerted efforts of the living, the deceased clan members could be quickly forgotten. Another Somali proverb that highlights the importance of one’s clan states, “even the most learned Muslim man of religion will forsake paradise if his clan is excluded from it.”⁴⁴⁹ The moral of the proverb is that the devout Muslim clergyman would instead accompany his clansmen to hell and suffer together than enjoy the pleasures of paradise without them.

The Clan and the Church

Despite the influence of radical Islam in the Somali peninsula, *qaaraan* paying Somali Christians enjoy an enviable degree of clan protection. A longtime Somali minister of the Gospel was invited by his Muslim sub-clan in 2015 to be anointed as their chief clan elder. The minister declined the offer but thanked clan elders for considering him for such an important traditional leadership position despite his Christian faith.⁴⁵⁰

Every prominent Somali Christian is a *qaaraan* paying member of their clan. Such local Christians who successfully harnessed this time-tested social safety net include the late influential Lieutenant Colonel in the National Security Service (NSS), Somalia’s powerful secret service.⁴⁵¹ This pragmatic leader used his position in the NSS to defend the rights of Christian organizations, which were often targeted by unscrupulous elements in the secret service. This well-liked man was also a Bible translator and a hymnologist.

After following Jesus, a well-known Somali Christian convert, who continued being an integral part of his clan, was the late Italian and German-educated electrical engineer, entrepreneur, and activist. He died in Mogadishu in 1996. This gifted Christian became a peace activist in 1991 after the collapse of Somalia’s central government; he is best remembered for his motto, *qoriga dhig, qalinka qaado*. “Put down the gun, pick up the pen.”

An equally eminent Somali Christian is a fearless retired minister of the Gospel (b.1932), who is revered by his Muslim clan. This Christian elder who came to the Lord in 1969 pays the *qaaraan* faithfully and is generous to those in need regardless of their clan affiliation. This outspoken churchman was once asked why his Muslim clan protects him; he answered, “In popular Islam, the clan is more important than Islam! If a man from a different clan kills me, my clan would see that as humiliation because they could not protect one of their own

⁴⁴⁷ The proverb says in Somali, “xabaalina xigto ka maarmi wayday.”

⁴⁴⁸ The curse says in Somali, “shisheeye Ku duug.”

⁴⁴⁹ The proverb says in Somali, “Fiqi tolkii kama Janno tago.”

⁴⁵⁰ The sub-clan belongs to the larger Muddulood clan.

⁴⁵¹ The NSS is in Somali: *Hay'ada Nabadsugidda Qaranka*, HNQ.

from a rival clan. My clan is not protecting me as an individual; they are also protecting their honor.”⁴⁵² It certainly pays to be an active member of one’s clan.

Last but not least is the late civil engineer and hymnologist whom Muslim neighbors and co-workers nicknamed “the most trusted Somali man.” While this Christian was a respected *qaaraan* paying member in his clan, he was also a widely loved man by people who did not hail from his clan. In an era when many Somalis did not trust Somalia’s banking system, this saint was trusted to temporarily safeguard people’s hard-earned cash without charging them any fee. To be loved by one’s clan members is a desirable accomplishment, but being equally loved by members of other clans is another achievement level.

The success of the above widely esteemed five Somali Christians best illustrates that Somali Christian converts do not have to become outcasts from their Muslim clans once they become Disciples of Christ. It is the best of both worlds when a Somali Muslim can become a follower of Christ and remain a cherished member of their clan. This feat of following Christ without losing the support of one’s clan was in the past an exclusive privilege primarily enjoyed by Somali Roman Catholics. The Somali Protestants have been figuring out since the 1980s how to remain a faithful disciple of Christ without being rejected by their Muslim clan.

In tribal societies, blood is thicker than belief. This is why Muslim clan members would defend a Christian member of their clan. A Muslim relative recently harassed a Somali minister of the Gospel. The overzealous Muslim relative accused the Christian of inflicting shame on the clan by converting to Christianity. Another Muslim relative intervened and asked the harasser if the Christian relative pays the *qaaraan*. The harasser admitted that the Christian pays the *qaaraan* faithfully. The other relative exclaimed, “then leave him alone. Why are you bothering him?”⁴⁵³

Conclusion

Being born into a clan is not enough. One must be a reputable member of the clan who faithfully pays the *qaaraan*, the clan dues. The *qaaraan-diid*, those who refuse to pay the *qaaraan*, are ostracized. The Somali proverb, “the one who eats alone, dies alone,” best illustrates the fate of the despised *qaaraan-diid*.⁴⁵⁴ Freeloaders do not fare well in tribal cultures. Freewheelers thrive in anonymity. There is no secrecy in close-knit clans where everybody knows everyone else. No Somali government has ever been able to guarantee its subjects security, dependable social services, and safety nets. This is where one’s clan steps in to defend, give financial assistance for much needed medical care, honorable burial, weddings, restocking when one loses livestock or even higher education.

The Somali Church has long used the Somali clan system for the glory of God. This Church understands that neither she nor the missionaries should ever compete with or try to replace the clan system. It would be a substantial financial and logistical burden on the Church and the missionaries to ignore or defame a traditional system that has been working for the Somali people from time immemorial. After all, the Somali equivalence of “woe to me” is “I

⁴⁵² “Courage in Our Conviction: A Conversation with Pastor Shaafi’i Ibraahim Faarah.” Somali Bible Society Journal, Volume 1, Issue 1, Version 2, (Mogadishu, Somalia, December 2020), 60. <https://www.somalibiblesociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SBSJ-DEC-V2-2020.pdf> (accessed 17 January 2021).

⁴⁵³ Mohamed Gurhan, Personal Interview. Jiggiga, Ethiopia, 17 January 2021

⁴⁵⁴ The proverb says in Somali, “*keligii cune, keligii buu dhintaa.*”

am without a clan!”⁴⁵⁵ Apostle Paul used both his clan and his Roman citizenship for his personal protection and the propagation of the Gospel.⁴⁵⁶ The Somali Church is in good company when it utilizes the clan system to access a time-tested traditional social safety net without which she cannot do.

Somali Christians need to keep what is good in their culture and discard that which is harmful. This kind of discerning should be plentiful in the community of faith. Many people equate the clan system with revenge killings and nepotism. While these concerns are legitimate, the clan system is known for more than tit for tat killings and corruption. The benefits of the clan system far outweigh its disadvantages. The Somali Church is best equipped to redeem the Somali clan system and transform it into a system that benefits its members and glorifies God. Labeling the clan system primitive and equating it with backwardness is counterproductive. Somalis with formal education and missionaries should re-evaluate any prejudice they may hold against the Somali clan system. Somalis are better off with their age-old clan system than without it.

⁴⁵⁵ This lament is in Somali, “Tol beelayeey!”

⁴⁵⁶ Romans 11:1; Acts of the Apostles 22:22-29.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Courage in Our Conviction: Conversation with Pastor Shaafi'i Ibraahim Faarah

Introduction

The Somali people in the Horn of Africa have been exposed to the Gospel for over a century by different intrepid missionaries of various denominational persuasions. The most significant Big Three are the Roman Catholics, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM),⁴⁵⁷ and the Mennonite Mission. The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) is also one of the earliest pioneers in Somalia. The SOLC set up a mission base in Kismayo, southern Somalia, in 1896 and eventually expanded its mission work to Jilib, Mugaambo and Jamaame, all in southern Somalia. While evangelism was the primary focus, the SOLC's ministry was holistic, opening schools and clinics for the local people.⁴⁵⁸



Mogadishu Cathedral before it was destroyed by an Islamist group in 2008
Photo Credit: Pinterest

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) opened a mission station in Somalia in 1881 and started ministering to the Somali people.⁴⁵⁹ The Cathedral in Mogadishu, built in 1928, was the biggest in Africa up until the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁶⁰ According to Venanzio Francesco Filippini, the RCC Bishop of Mogadishu, there were 40,000 Somali Catholics in southern Somalia by 1940.⁴⁶¹ The entire Somali population in Somalia proper was estimated in 1940 to be about 1,150,000 according to the Italian colonial authority and 1,200,000 in 1950.⁴⁶² This makes the Somali Christians in 1940 to be about 3.5% of the population; this is a significant growth in a Muslim country where local Christians have not been statistically crucial in the last several decades.

French fathers from the RCC started a high-profile ministry in the northern Somali village of Daymoole, near the port town of Berbera, in 1891, opening an orphanage and a school.⁴⁶³ The RCC schools were expanded to southern Somalia with the financial support of the Italian colonial government in 1939.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁷ This mission organization changed its name a few times over the years but always kept is the acronym, SIM. It is known today as Serving In Mission.

⁴⁵⁸ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi "Baadiyow", *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islam Movement, 1950-2000*, (Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

⁴⁵⁹ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, volume 1 (Brill Academic Publisher, 1991) 120.

⁴⁶⁰ "A Surprising History of Christianity in Somalia," Alex of Esther Project (2017).
<http://theestherproject.com/surprising-history-christianity-somalia/> (accessed 30 September 2017).

⁴⁶¹ Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia, Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 66.

⁴⁶² "Catholic Hierarchy," Diocese of Mogadiscio, (nd).
<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmgds.html> (accessed 26 April 2018).

⁴⁶³ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi "Baadiyow", *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*, 121.

⁴⁶⁴ Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, (Harvard University Press, 1st edition, 1963), 77.



Pietro Salvatore Colombo, OFM
Photo Credit: RCMS

Cathedral in 1989.⁴⁶⁸

The Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953 and the SIM in 1954.⁴⁶⁵ Unlike the low-profile mission work of the RCC, both the SIM and the MM demonstrated the proverbial missionary zeal.⁴⁶⁶ Both mission organizations won numerous Somalis to the Lord within a short time. A Somali Muslim fanatic killed an MM missionary in Mogadishu in 1962. Merlin Grove was only 33 years old when he was stabbed to death in Mogadishu, Somalia.⁴⁶⁷ The RCC was not spared of martyrdom. Bishop Pietro Salvatore Colombo, 66, is the highest profile martyr this church has produced in Somalia. He was shot and killed in the Mogadishu

The 2017 World Watch List places the Somali Church as the 2nd most persecuted in the world.⁴⁶⁹ This church often makes the infamous top two slots of the World Watch List;⁴⁷⁰ it has been on this list since 1992.⁴⁷¹ According to *Open Doors*, “The mere suspicion of one’s having renounced Islam leads to a rushed public execution.”⁴⁷² The most prominent Somali martyr is arguably pastor Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan who was martyred in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1994.⁴⁷³ One of the most prominent Somali Christians is the late Michael Mariano Ali who served his country as an elected member of parliament, cabinet member and an ambassador.⁴⁷⁴ While the Somali constitution was tolerant of the tiny Christian population in the 1960s, the 2009 constitution was amended to make it Sharia Law compliant, thus adding insult to injury in the eyes of the already besieged Somali Christians.⁴⁷⁵

Pastor Shaafi’i Ibraahim Faarah (b. 1932) is the most high-profile living Somali Christian; he is also the oldest known Somali Christian in the world. These two distinctions and his fearless witness sustain his larger-than-life image. The confident and charismatic pastor sat down with me in the Somali inhabited North East Kenya. Following is the interview I conducted with this eminent Somali pastor. The interview has been edited for space and clarity.

⁴⁶⁵ Abdurahman M. Abdullahi (Baadiyow), *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*, 21.

⁴⁶⁶ Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, “The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000).” PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011, 111.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 129. See also: Ruth Myers. *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia*. Acorn Press, 2016 (chapter 18: Murder in Mogadishu), Kindle version.

⁴⁶⁸ “Taking the Catholic Pulse: Somalia one of world’s great danger zones for Christians,” *Crux*. (2016). <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2016/10/25/somalia-one-worlds-great-danger-zones-christians/>

⁴⁶⁹ “World Watch List,” *Open Doors USA*, (nd). <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/> (accessed 20 Feb 2017).

⁴⁷⁰ “World Watch List,” *Christianity Today*, (2017). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/january/top-50-countries-christian-persecution-world-watch-list.html> (accessed 03 June 2021).

⁴⁷¹ “About Somalia,” *Open Doors USA*, (nd). <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/somalia/> (accessed 30 September 2017).

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ J. Gordon Melton *Faiths across Time: 5,000 Years of Religious History* [4 volumes]: 5,000 Years of Religious History. ABC-CLIO, 2014. 1897. Kindle Version

⁴⁷⁴ Somalia - Trusteeship and Protectorate: The Road to Independence. Country Studies. Nd. <https://country-studies.com/somalia/trusteeship-and-protectorate:-the-road-to-independence.html> (accessed 31 March 2019).

⁴⁷⁵ “Somalia,” *Voice of Martyrs Canada*, (nd). Somalia. <https://www.vomcanada.com/somalia.htm> (accessed 30 September 2017). See also: “Somalia,” *US Department of State*, (2011).

The Interview

AAA: Tell me about your childhood.

Pastor: I was born in the Somali inhabited region of what is now North-East Kenya in 1932. My father died when I was about five years old. My mom raised me. I grew up herding cattle and camels in the Horn of Africa. No one could steal my camels. I was a fearsome warrior who would lay down his life for his cattle and camels. When I was about 19, a lion grabbed my favorite heifer in broad daylight in the North-East county of Wajer, Kenya. I seized the lion by the ear and then stabbed it in the neck with my double-edged dagger. The lion jumped off the heifer and groaned in pain. It disappeared into the forest.

AAA. How did your father die?



Pastor Shafi'i Ibrahim Faarah
Photo credit: Aweis A. Ali

Pastor: My father was inside a shallow makeshift borehole collecting water for his cattle in the Afmadow district in southern Somalia. Two oxen fought at the mouth of the water well, and one of them fell into the borehole, smashing my father to death.

AAA: When did the Lord find you and what challenges did you face as a new disciple?

Pastor: The Lord found me in 1969 after an American tourist had witnessed to me. Somali Muslims started persecuting me; relatives, neighbors, and even total strangers targeted me. My fellow Somalis could not comprehend the idea of a Somali Muslim leaving Islam and following Jesus. To them, I committed religious treason, an apostasy. My Ogaden clan is known for their violence and religious fanaticism. I feared for my life, yet I was determined to stay with the Lord.

AAA: How are you still alive if so many people wanted to kill you for your Christian faith?

Pastor: I had kept a very low profile until 1971 when I started to share my new faith with my close family members openly. Like apostle Paul, the Lord has revealed himself to me and encouraged me not to waver in my walk with Jesus. My own Damascus Road encounter gave me extraordinary courage in my conviction. I was never the same.

AAA: Tell me about your birth family?

Pastor: My family are nomadic pastoralists. While they own cattle, sheep, and goats, they are best known for their camel herding prowess. My entire clan is also known for their pride; they believe they are the best people ever created by God! I belong to a warrior clan that is feared by many. While my clan could choose to kill me anytime, no one from another clan would have the guts to lay a finger on me because my Muslim clan will strike back with a vengeance. While my Ogaden clan protects me to this day, my sub-clan, Mohamed Subeyr, protects me the most.

AAA: Why would your Muslim clan protect a Christian convert whose punishment should be death according to the teachings of Islam?⁴⁷⁶

Pastor: In popular Islam, the clan is more important than Islam! If a man from a different clan kills me, my clan would see that as humiliation because they could not protect one of their own from a rival clan. My clan is not protecting me as an individual, they are also protecting their honor.⁴⁷⁷ My Ogaden clan is the most numerous clan of all Somali clans. We reside in Somalia, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and North-East Kenya.

AAA: Should Somalis continue being an integral part of their clan after the Lord finds them?

Pastor: Absolutely. This Somali proverb best illustrates my point, “both your shoes and your clan protect you.”⁴⁷⁸ The Somali clan system is a mixed bag, but I like to focus on the positives. The clan system offers protection, social security, and a safety net for its members.

AAA: Were any of the Somalis whom the Lord found in your ministry martyred for their faith?

Pastor: I am aware of 8 who were martyred in North-East Kenya.

AAA: I heard from multiple sources that you are the first known Somali to follow Jesus in Kenya. Tell me about this.

Pastor: That is correct. There were no known Somali Christians in the Somali inhabited counties of North-East Kenya and the entire country of Kenya before the Lord found me. For decades, I was the only visible Somali Christian in Kenya.

AAA: What do expatriate missionaries ministering to the Somalis do well and what could they do better to be a better witness to the Somalis?

Pastor: Bringing the Gospel to my Somali people is a huge blessing. I am thankful for the sacrifices of expatriate missionaries to make Christ known to my people; they do this well. Expatriate missionaries often struggle to understand the Somalis. We are proud people and sometimes arrogant even when our stomachs are empty. Missionaries assume Somalis to be docile and humble because we are poor with limited formal education. They are shocked when they learn we are hawkish, proud, and sometimes egotistical. Many missionaries then get discouraged; they should not be disheartened because their sacrifices are bearing fruits.

⁴⁷⁶ “Ali burnt some people and this news reached Ibn ‘Abbas, who said, “Had I been in his place I would not have burnt them, as the Prophet said, ‘Don’t punish (anybody) with Allah’s Punishment.’ No doubt, I would have killed them, for the Prophet said, ‘If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.’” *Sahih al-Bukhari*, translated by M. Muhsin Khan 4:52:260, (Kazi Pubns Inc1995). <http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/052-sbt.php#004.052.260> (accessed 01 April 2019). See also: *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 9:89:27. <http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/089-sbt.php#009.089.271> (accessed 09 May 2018). *Arab Law Quarterly*, vol. 13. No. 3, Brill, 1998. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i276475> (accessed 18 June 2021).

⁴⁷⁷ Nomadic background Somali Christians martyred for their walk with the Lord in Somalia since 1991 were killed in regions where their clan is not the dominant one.

⁴⁷⁸ *Tolkaaga iyo kobtaada dhexdaa looga jiraa.*

AAA: How do the Somali Christians and missionaries see your ministry?

Pastor: Many of them think my strategy is too reckless because I share my faith very openly. I do not blame them! I preach with no fear. Many Somali Christians and missionaries believe that keeping a low profile in sharing the Gospel is the most effective way in this hostile environment. I must admit they have a point. Despite our different strategies, we serve the same Lord, and we pray for one another. I believe that what is inspired is the Gospel, not the strategy we employ to communicate it.

AAA: What has helped you the most to become a mature and prominent minister of the Gospel?

Pastor: I joined a local church shortly after I was saved; this community of faith and the larger spiritual family in the denomination helped my faith to deepen. Many Somali Christians do not understand the value of a denominational family; mission workers with parachurch organizations often encourage new believers to attend Bible study groups and fellowships that often meet in the living rooms of these missionaries.⁴⁷⁹

AAA: Why do you think missionaries with parachurch organizations do not often encourage new Somali believers to attend a local church in addition to the Bible studies and fellowships?

Pastor: Missionaries with parachurch organizations are often territorial; they do not want to lose their hard-earned fruits to a local church with its own denominational distinctive. So, these missionaries who do not share a theological persuasion or doctrinal unity isolate the new believers. This makes the new believers weak and confused. The mature Somali Christians I know belong to established local churches with denominational links. The weakest ones I know only attend intermittent Bible study and fellowship meetings held in the living rooms of missionaries with parachurch organizations.

AAA: Could you name one or two missionaries who had the most positive impact on your life and ministry?

Pastor: Yes. They are Larry and Debbie Kitchel of Christian Mission Aid.

AAA: How are the Kitchels different from most of parachurch organization missionaries?

Pastor: The Kitchels always knew their ministry was to strengthen the church, not to replace it or compete with it. The many African church leaders the Kitchels trained and equipped will agree with me.

AAA: Tell me one unforgettable favor the Kitchels did for you?

Pastor: The late Larry Kitchel once visited me when I worked in Nairobi; he asked me how he could best help my ministry. I requested from him about 200 Bibles to smuggle them for believers in Somalia; he gave me 220 Bibles next time we met. I donated 20 of the Bibles to Somali believers in North-East Kenya. I put the remaining 200 Bibles on the back of a he-

⁴⁷⁹ Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 111.

camel and started walking 17 days from North-East Kenya all the way to the southern Somali port town of Kismayo. I donated some of the Bibles to believers in Kismayo and walked with my camel to Jamaame, Jilib, Wanlawein, Baidawa, all in southern Somalia, and finally Mogadishu. I blessed all the Somali believers I met with Bibles, and I prayed with them. I then walked back from Mogadishu to North-East Kenya. It was an epic journey; I cannot do that anymore. I am an old man.

AAA: What most excites you about the people of God?

Pastor: I sometimes see tourists, visitors, and other foreigners with no ministry assignment but they still share their faith with wisdom and courage. These Great Commission-minded believers excite me the most. I love them.

AAA: How could the community of faith pray for you?

Pastor: I need plenty of prayers for God's protection from the evil one. When Satan fails to undermine our relationship with the Lord, he targets our loved ones.

Conclusion

The Somali church is the product of a partnership between various innovative expatriate mission organizations, churches, and valiant Somali believers; it is this divine effort that gave birth to what is often described as the second most persecuted church in the world after North Korea. Expatriate mission workers do not only bring the Good News to the Somalis but also education, healthcare, impeccable work ethics and a host of other benefits. This is the holistic ministry that appeals to many Somali Muslims, some of whom become disciples of Christ; many of the Somali Muslims who do not follow Jesus pick up some Christian values and develop a friendly attitude towards the Christian minorities.

While parachurch organizations like the SIM are overrepresented in the Somali ministry, church-based mission organizations like the MM most benefit the Somali ministry eventually because they can deliver their evangelistic message with consistent and coherent doctrines shared by all the mission workers. New Somali believers also learn the importance of belonging to a local church and to a larger denominational family. While parachurch organizations like the SIM lack this distinction of doctrinal unity, they still have a lot to offer to a people group that is Muslim majority. After all, Warren and Dorothy Modricker pioneered the modern mission work among Somalis in 1933. The Modrickers later joined the SIM and expanded the Somali ministry to the entire Somali peninsula. The Modrickers are considered as the First Family of the Somali Church. One would be hard-pressed to find a Somali Christian whose faith journey is not directly or indirectly traceable to the Modrickers.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Ahmed Ali Haile in Poetry



Prof. Ahmed Ali Haile
Photo Credit: Facebook

In oral traditions, strong feelings and deep emotions are better expressed in poetry. This is why love is best articulated in songs and poems rather than in stories and parables. If prose is human, poetry is divine. No wonder then that Somali Christians use well-crafted poetry to immortalize the memories of expatriate missionaries and local believers who are held in very high esteem in the Somali Church. While the list continues to grow, only a handful of missionaries and Somali Christians have been honored enough by Somali Christians to have had poetry composed to codify their memories in the Somali psyche. The sincerest form of adoration in the Somali culture is to compose a poem or a song for the cherished person.

Prof. Ahmed Ali Haile, (1953-2011), is without a doubt the most prominent Somali Christian ever. Ahmed demonstrated spiritual maturity, humility, Christ-likeness, academic achievement and ministerial service never mastered by any other Somali Christian to this day. Ahmed was also a peacemaker and one of the most generous people I have ever known. In short, Ahmed was a great man who married a greater woman; no wonder then he achieved so much in such a short time.

Despite his untimely death in 2011, Ahmed still remains a hero in the Somali Church. Upon his death, three Somali Christian poets composed heartfelt and powerful poems in his honor. Well-known Somali Muslim singers and musicians joined this effort by producing and singing several songs to remember Ahmed. These songs which are available on YouTube include *Xog Warran* (Discourse), *Nabad* (Peace), *Xaylaa Ka Digay* (Haile Warned About This) and *Guhaad* (Angry and Helpless). In one of the poems he composed in memory of Ahmed, Faisal Hassan Jaama’ says in part:

Axmed Kale Allow Keen ⁴⁸⁰	O! God Give Us Another Ahmed
<i>Balse adiga Axmedow</i>	<i>O! You Ahmed</i>
<i>Ardaydaad daryeeshaa</i>	<i>The students you nurtured</i>
<i>Amaan kuu hibaysee</i>	<i>Send praises to you</i>
<i>Intii aad arsaaqday</i>	<i>All those you fed</i>
<i>Ama aad difaacday</i>	<i>And all those you defended</i>
<i>Cilmi aad u tira badan</i>	<i>The wealth of knowledge</i>
<i>Uurkooda gelisaan</i>	<i>You bestowed upon them</i>
<i>Ku ilaabin abidkood</i>	<i>Will never forget you</i>

Rev. Mohamed Gurhan, one of the most prominent Somali Christian poets, composed poems to immortalize Ahmed’s legacy. One stanza from one of his long poems says:

⁴⁸⁰ Faysal Xasan Jaamac, “Axmed Kale Allow Keen” in *Maansada Masiixa: Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry*. Volume 1. Maandeeq Publishing. Nairobi, Kenya, 2020, 6.

Xerow Xusuus Mudan ⁴⁸¹	O! Disciples, He is Worthy of Our Remembrance
<i>Xayow Axmed Xayloow Xerowgii Eebbihiisee Xulashada walaalaha Xilbax loo nisbeeyee Xurmo nagu lahaayee Xusuusteenna mudanow</i>	<i>O! Ahmed, may your legacy last The disciple of his Father The believers acknowledge You helped the needy We owe you respect You are worthy of our remembrance</i>

As the two above cited Christian poets illustrate, Ahmed Ali Haile is still cherished and will always be cherished by the Somali Church; this adoration is codified in Somali poetry. Somalis believe that poetry is akin to angelic language while prose is the language of earthly beings. It is therefore a widely held Somali belief that God answers poetic prayers faster than ones expressed in lowly prose. To date, no Somali Christian, alive or deceased, was ever honored with so many poems to commemorate their legacy. Books could be written as to why the Somali Church loves Ahmed so much. The Somali Church produced other prominent and godly Christians who are also deceased including Aadan Jim'aale Faarah, Abdulkadir Mursal and Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan. However, Ahmed occupies a unique place in the Somali Church. Here is a poem the author composed in 2011 shortly after Ahmed's passing:

Axmed Xayle Geerida Ku Timid ⁴⁸²	The Ahmed Haile We Lost
<i>Axmed Xayle geerida ku timid Ee galbisay manta Geyigeena waxay uba ahayd Guuldariyo hooge Nabadoon gar gala buu ahaa Geesi gacan wayne Agoon gaawa maran baynu nahay Ginina aan haysan Afar uu gob ku ahaa balaan Goobta ka caddeeyo</i>	<i>The death that took away Ahmed Haile Which made him disappear today It meant catastrophic disaster For our motherland He was an elder and a peace maker Known for his courage and generosity We are now broke and orphans We are indeed empty handed Let me mention four things For which he was respected</i>
<i>Dadkoo gees u kala boodayoo Nabadu geed fuushay Hubkoo laysu guranahayoo Gawrac laysla maagay Garaad iyo islaan iyo malaaq Midiba gees raacay Isagoon gabanahayn haddana Ridayn gartii eexo Geeshkii gulufka u fadhiyay</i>	<i>People girding up their loins for war When peace vanishes away People arming themselves to the teeth To be ready for a mass slaughter When chiefs, elders and other leaders Add fuel to the fire He was there fearless and determined Just and impartial He counseled the warring factions</i>

⁴⁸¹ Maxamed Gurxan, "Xerow Xusuus Mudan" in *Maansada Masiixa: Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry*. Volume 1. Maandeeq Publishing, Nairobi, Kenya, 2020, 38

⁴⁸² Aweis A. Ali, "Axmed Xayle Geerida Ku Timid" in *Maansada Masiixa: Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry*. Volume 1. Maandeeq Publishing, Nairobi, Kenya, 2020, 88-90.

*Qoloba gaarkeeda
Garansiyyay inay kala galbadaan
Nabadu waa guul e*

*Nin ragoo gabanno uu dhalay
Uu gambo u waayay
Gurigiisu uu maran yahoo
Gaaridi ay yaabtay
Gurbood aan wax garano aqoon
Gaajo lagu seexdo
Axmed Xayle yaa loo gudaa
Guriga kiisaaha
Wixii guule siiyay buu yira
Buuxso gacantaada*

*Cilmi kii la garan waayo oo
Galti bixin waydo
Isagaa loo gayn jiray xaajadii
Garasho loo waayo
Jaamacado nin galay buu ahaa
Oo gunaanadaye
Masaladi la garan waayay buu
Gaanka ka caddayne
Aqoon gaamurtay buu lahaa
Garasho dheeruhuye*

*Kaftan aan gedaafe lahayn
Gogosha uu joogo
Googaalaysi iyo sheeko ay
Guud caddu bilowdo
Gebi aftahan intii isu fishaa
Goobta wax ka sheegto
Guurrow iyo wixii gabay halkaa
Geeraar laga sheego
Gebagebada isagaa lahaa
Guubaabiyo sheeko*

*Maantase haddii uu galbaday
Waa xaq geeriduye
Nebiyadii Eebbahen ee go'uu
Gogol la joogaaye
Inna sida gobti yaan u caban
Guulaha awoodda le
Ummadduu gargaarka u aha
Yaa guhaad badane
Geyigooda nabad uga yeel
Goor iyo ayaanba*


*Reasoning with each group
Convincing them to disband
For victory is in peaceful coexistence*

*A father unable to feed his own children
Who is penniless and empty handed
When there is no food in his home
His wife is bewildered
Little hungry children
Unable to sleep
That is when Ahmed Haile's home
Receives such needy visitors
He gives to them sacrificially
Until they are not hungry anymore*

*When an academic solution is needed
And novices are confused
That is when they called him
For he was well prepared
He attended a number of universities
And graduated with honors
He provided the solution needed
With clarity and eloquence
The wise man we lost
Was well educated*

*When it was time for lighthearted jokes
And he is there with the people
Elders start with riddles and stories
These are the respected leaders
When all the gifted people speak
In idioms with a figurative meaning
Poems with evocative qualities
Are well recited
The conclusion was rightfully his
With stories and commendation*

*But he left us today
For all will die as ordained by God
He is fellowshiping today
With the departed prophets of God
And we mourn in dignity
For God is almighty and powerful
The nation whose succor he was
Is in great anguish today
Bestow peace and stability
On our motherland*



Somalis, both Muslims and Christians, demonstrated their love and admiration for Ahmed Ali Haile by composing quality and evocative poems and songs in his memory. Richard Burton, the 19th century British explorer, argues that Somalia “teems with poets.”⁴⁸³ Similarly, Modern expatriate intellectuals, like Margaret Laurence, describe Somalis as a “nation of poets“ and a “nation of bards.”⁴⁸⁴ Like Somali Muslims, Somali Christians have widely known gifted poets and songwriters. However, in the 140 years of the history of the Somali Church, no Christian, local or expatriate, was honored with poetry like Ahmed was. This illustrates the unquestionable caliber of Ahmed in the Somali Church. Future generations of Somali Christians will recite from memory all the songs and poems composed to commemorate Ahmed’s life and ministry.

⁴⁸³ Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in Somalia*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, 1854, 91.

⁴⁸⁴ Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 75.

Conclusion


The heritage of the Somalis includes Waaqism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All these faith systems affect the Somali identity regardless of their belief. While Waaqism does not exist today as a standalone religion, it has become part and parcel of the Somali Islam in a syncretic manner. Since much of the Qur'an is derived from the Old and the New Testament of the Bible, Somali Muslims are well versed in many OT narratives and NT teachings. Likewise, Christian missions have positively impacted the lives of many Muslims who benefitted from mission schools and hospitals in Somalia. While only a tiny minority of these Somalis became followers of Christ, many of these Muslims developed Christian friendly worldviews.

The benefits of denominationally based ministries among Somalis have long been ignored by most Protestant missionaries. This book makes the case that Somali Christians are better off when they are denominationally connected. Generic Christianity has disadvantaged the Somali Christians from the Protestant wing of the church. The assumption that denominational ministries are counterproductive among Somalis is not a Somali concept but an alien idea imposed on them by well-meaning expatriate missionaries. Non-denominational ministries are often promoted by interdenominational parachurch organizations. This is not a surprise since these mission organizations lack an organization wide shared doctrinal unity and theological persuasions.

Persecution has long been a double-edged sword in the church. While the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church, it also inflicts pain and suffering on the community of faith. The Somali Church should not pray to God to eliminate persecution but to give the persecuted Christians strength to thrive in the suffering. This view of persecution is important since all godly Christians are persecuted in one way or another (2 Timothy 3:12). During persecution Christians who are still connected to their Muslim clans and extended families fare better than those who isolate themselves. The *qaaraan* paying Somali Christians enjoy tremendous respect and protection from their fellow clansmen.⁴⁸⁵ Somali Church leaders and expatriate missionaries should encourage local believers not to abandon their extended Muslim families and clans after becoming Disciples of Christ. The church should complement the clan system but never attempt to replace it.

As Richard Burton and other competent authorities opined, Somalis are known for their poetry. Poets occupy a coveted place in the Somali culture. One of the reasons Somalis embraced Islam so readily is the poetic nature of the Qur'an. The Qur'an in its original language, Arabic, rhymes and is therefore so easily memorized by Muslims who do not even know the basics of Arabic. The importance of poetry is also evident in the Bible. More than 8,600 verses in the Bible are in poetry. This is about 28% of the entire Bible. The only book in the Old Testament without poetry is Esther which makes it very unique. In comparison, 6 books in the New Testament are without poetry (II Thessalonians, Titus, Philemon, 2 and 3 John and Jude). Any ministry to the Somalis is more likely to appeal to the Somalis if poetry

⁴⁸⁵ The Somali clan system provides its members essential services that the state is either unable or unwilling to provide. Such services include protection, visitations, financial assistance for medical care and marriages. Such finances are collected from other clan members in the form of *qaaraan*, clan wide contributions. As the Somali proverb says, *tolkaaga iyo kobtaada dhexdaa loogaa jiraa* (stay in your shoes and stay in your clan. As shoes protect your feet, your clan protects all of you).



is included in the ministry outreach. A ministry that is overwhelmingly prose is less likely to succeed among the poetic minded Somalis.

Rev. Aweis A. Ali, PhD

What others said about this book, 2/2

A fascinating and comprehensive book that tells about the history of the religious experience of Somalis: their religious beliefs have been diverse in the past and they would be so today if freedom of belief will one day be granted to them.

Giorgio Bertin, O.F.M.

Bishop of Djibouti and Apostolic Administrator of Mogadishu, Somalia

This is a well-written book by an author who has excellent insight and knowledge about the history of the Somali Church. "Understanding the Somali Church" is an asset to the current Somali Christians and the coming generations as well. The timing of the release of this book is not an accident; the Somali Church is rising to a new height in terms of numerical growth and spiritual maturity. Praise be to God for calling so many Somalis to Himself.

Shino & Shania Gabow

Somali Christian Media Ministries

An informative and insightful read. This book sets the Church's mission to Somalia in an historical, cultural, religious, and ecclesiastical context. It is a history written with a purpose, providing some significant clues for a successful strategy to reach an Islamic nation for Christ that has been often written off as unreachable. I wish I could have read this prior to my involvement in the Somali ministry.

Dr. Howie Shute

Missiologist

This book is well organized and full of new knowledge; as far as I know, it is the first book of its kind ever written on the Somali Church. While this book is a treasure trove for the community of faith, it is also a source of excellent knowledge for the Somali Muslims who seem to know little about their pre-Islamic history. Dr. Aweis did a commendable job in demystifying the Somali Church.

Bashir Muse

Chairman of the National Board

The Somali Bible Society

This impressive book does not only help with the understanding of the Somali Church but also the understanding of all Somalis regardless of their religious affiliation. The chapters on Waaqism, Judaism, Christianity are a genuine goldmine. The book chronicles how the colonial authorities in British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland kicked missionaries out of the territories they ruled. This sad episode illustrates the irrefutable fact that it is not only Islamic governments or Muslim fanatics who hampered the propagation of the Gospel in Somalia.

Ahmed Philip

Evangelist

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Index

A

Abdul Rahman, **80**
Abgaal, **2, 3, 30**
Abu Bakr, **60**
Abu Dawud, **59, 70, 71, 108**
Abu Hanifa, **60**
Abyssinia, **8, 20, 22, 25, 26, 30**
Ad-Dimashqi, **26**
Afghanistan, **67, 68, 69, 75, 77, 80, 82**
Ahl al Islam, **31**
Ahmed Gragh, **25**
Al-Azhar University, **59**
Ali Gaaf, **2**
Aliyah, **xiv**
Al-Shabab, **31, 68**
Altenmüller, H., **102**
Anaas, **14**
Arab League, **30, 31, 34**
Aram, Ben I., **102**
Arbore, **5**
Ashraaf, **12**
Asmara, **10**
Aw-Barkhadle, **2, 13, 22, 106**
Axum, **9, 20, 26**
Ayaan, **4**
Ayaanleh, **4**

B

Baadi Adde, **2**
Baghdad, **20**
Bakol, **29**
Balisky, Paul, **102**
Banadir, **26**
Barawa, **29**
Bardhere, **29, 45**
Bartire, **3**
Bar-Waaq, **5, 6**
Bay, **29**
Bayso, **5**
Belet Weyne, **36**
Berbera, **ix, 11, 21, 22, 26, 35, 40, 89, 104, 108**
Bertin, Giorgio, **102**
Beta-Israel, **8, 9**
Bidde-Waaq, **5, 6**
Borana, **6**
Bowersock, Glen, **102**
Brava, **11, 29**
Bulhan, Hussein A, **102**
Bulliet, Richard, **102**
Bulo Burde, **2, 36**
Burji, **5**

C

Caabudwaaq, **6**
Caliph al-Mamun, **79**
Ceelwaaq, **6**
Cheese, John Ethelstan, **41, 104**
China, **69, 82**
Ciida Gale, **23**
Ciise Catholic, **52**
Crypto-Jews, **xiv**
Cushitic, **vi, xiv, 1, 2, 5, 7, 13, 30, 106**
Cyprian of Carthage, **79**

D

Daa'uud, Isaaq, **3**
Dahalo, **5**
Damot, **9**
Darod, **23**
Dasenech, **5**
Daymoole, **21, 35, 36, 40, 89**
Dechatu, **9**
Decius, **78, 79**
Dervish, **xiv**
Dhubato, **9, 22**
Dhulbahante, **18**
Dhuxun, **22**
Diinti-Waaq, **6**
Diognetus, **56, 81**
Dir, **84**
Dire Dawa, **9, 47**
Djibouti, **9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 22, 30, 34, 42, 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 101, 102, 103, 107, 109**

E

Eastern Orthodox, **52**
Ebir, **13**
Edict of Milan, **56, 57, 79**
Edict of Thessalonica, **56, 57**
Egypt, **4, 30, 32, 59, 80, 106, 108**
Elmolo, **5**
Emozaidij, **26**
Eritrea, **9, 30**
Ethiopia, **ix, 8, 9, 13, 15, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 30, 33, 34, 35, 40, 42, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 78, 87, 92, 102, 105, 108, 109**

F

Fatwa, **xiv, 38, 59, 64**
French Catholic Mission, **xv, 21, 35, 37, 40**

G

Gaal Je'el, **23**
Gabbra, **6, 7**
Gabiley, **48**
Gaboye, **14, 15, 109**
Gallad-Waaq, **6**
Garre, **6, 7**
Ge'ez, **9**
Gedo, **29**
Gibe River Valley, **9**
Gratian, **57**
Greece, **9, 15**
Green, Michael, **103**
Gudit, **9**
Gulf of Tadjoura, **9**
Gurage, **9**
Gurhan, Mohamed, **104**

H

Habar Yonis, **23**
Hadiya, **5**
Hahamim, **xiv, 10**
Haile, Ahmed Ali, **104**
Hakkari, **80**
Halakhic, **xiv**
Hanbali, **59**
Harar, **13, 29**
Hargeisa, **9, 22, 44, 46, 48, 51**
Harti Abgaal, **23**
Haud, **23, 48**
Hawiye, **23, 35, 84**
Hazzan, **xiv**
Hebrew, **8, 10, 13, 14, 15**
Hersi, Ali Abdirahman, **42, 104**
Himyar, **20**
Horus, **4**
Huur, **4**

I

Ibn Battuta, **18, 26**
Ibire, **13**
India, **9, 15, 19, 47, 80, 108**
Indians, **19**
International Christian Concern, **xv, 39**
Iran, **58, 67, 69, 75, 77, 78, 82**
Isaaq Daa'uud, **3, 23**
Islamic State, **xv, 31, 62**
Israel, **xiv, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 103, 104**

J

Jama'at, **xiv, 31**
Jama'at al Islah al Islamiyah, **31**
Jamaame, **21, 33, 41, 51, 89, 94**
James, F.L., **104**
Jeelle, **84**
Jerusalem, **12, 30, 39, 75, 79, 105**

Jewish Telegraphic Agency, **xv, 10, 11, 104**
Jewry, **8, 11, 12**
Jigjiga, **13, 21, 35, 40, 48, 87**
Jilib, **21, 33, 41, 51, 89, 94**
Johnson, David, **x**
Jowhar, **21, 41**
Jubaland, **21, 41, 42, 51**
Judaism, **v, ix, xiv, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 20, 60, 99, 101, 110**

K

Kenya, **ii, iii, ix, 6, 7, 13, 15, 21, 22, 27, 30, 33, 34, 41, 42, 44, 48, 49, 63, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95, 96, 104, 108**
Kismayo, **21, 33, 41, 89, 94**
Kobrin, Nancy Hartevelt, **105**
Konso, **5**
Kosher, **xiv**
Kulanka Culimada, **38, 64**

L

Lausanne Movement, **82**
Laws of Umar, **xiv, 80**
Licinius, **57**

M

Madhiban, **14, 15**
Madrassa, **xiv, 23**
Mahaddaay, **21, 41**
Majerten, **3**
Majma'a Culimada, **38, 64**
Makane, **2**
Maliki, **59**
Marehan, **3, 23**
Masjid al-Qiblatayn, **29**
Maximinus, **79**
Mecca, **26, 29, 32, 61, 70, 71**
Menonite, **xv, 21, 24, 36, 37, 40, 41, 49, 51, 53, 54, 62, 78, 89, 90, 108**
Minhag, **xiv**
Mire, Sada, **106**
Mogadishu, **11, 12, 17, 21, 26, 29, 34, 35, 36, 37, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 52, 53, 54, 62, 63, 73, 81, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 93, 94, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 109, 110**
Mogambo, **21**
Mohammed Subeyr, **23**
Mohel, **xiv**
Munadamah al Nahdah al Islamiyah, **31**
Murusade, **23**
Muslim Brotherhood, **11, 31, 49**
Myors, Ruth, **38, 63, 106**

N

Najran, **20**
National United Front, **43**
Nero, **57, 79**
Nidar, **4**

Nigeria, **40, 67, 78**

O

Obock, **9**
Ogaden, **23, 47, 48, 91, 92**
Open Doors, **64, 68, 90**
Operation Magic Carpet, **10**
Operation World, **ix, 67, 77, 78, 106**
Oromo, **2, 5, 6, 7, 9**

P

Perpetua, **79**
Polycarp, **79**
Pope Francis, **68, 73, 82**
Posek, **xiv**
Puntland, **8, 18, 19**

Q

Qaaraan, **xiv**

R

Rafida, **26**
Rahanweyn, **84**
Rami, **12**
Reer Aw Hassan, **3**
Rendille, **5, 6, 7, 13**
Roman Catholic Church, **xv, 24, 34, 37, 40, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 55, 89**
Rome, **10, 19, 34, 42, 75, 79, 89, 109**
Royal Geographical Society, **13, 18, 107**

S

Saahil, **22**
Sahih Bukhari, **60**
Sakatul Yuhuud, **11**
Salihiya, **27**
Sanaag, **18, 22**
Saudi Arabia, **26, 58**
Shafi'i, **25, 26, 52, 59**
Shamul, **12**
Shanta Saleebaan, **3**
Sheekhaal, **3, 23**
Shia, **58, 59, 70**
SIM, **vi, xv, 22, 24, 36, 37, 40, 41, 46, 49, 53, 89, 90, 94**
Six-Day Arab-Israeli War, **12**
Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), **19**
Socotra, **19, 20, 106, 107**
Sofer, **xiv**
Somali peninsula, **viii, ix, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 41, 42, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 86, 94, 110**
Somalia, **v, vi, viii, ix, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48,**

49, 50, 51, 53, 55, 62, 63, 64, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 78, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110

Somaliland, **ix, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35, 37, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 51, 73, 85, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109**

Sool, **18, 22**
South Sudan, **30, 31, 40**
St. Francis Xavier, **19, 20**
St. Thomas, **19**
Star of David, **9**
Sudan, **xv, 22, 24, 30, 36, 40, 49, 58, 89**
Sudan Interior Mission, **22, 24, 36, 40, 49, 89**
Sufi, **xiv, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 49**
Sunni, **25, 26, 31, 49, 58, 59, 70**
Suuqsade, **22**
Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church, **21, 24, 33, 37, 40, 41, 42, 51, 89**
SYL, **16, 17, 43, 44, 45, 48, 49**
Synagogue, **11, 108**
Syriac, **20**

T

Taallo, **5**
Tagaal-Waaq, **5, 6**
Tertullian, **39, 56, 67, 71, 73, 75, 76, 81, 82, 107**
Theodosius I, **57**
Tipu Sultan, **80**
Tumaal, **14**

V

Valentinian II, **57**
Valerian, **79**
Voice of the Martyrs, **38, 63, 64, 71, 77, 103**

W

Wa'aysle, **2, 3**
Waaq Nation, **xiv, 7**
Waaq-bare, **6**
Waaqdhaa'in, **6**
Waaqism, **v, vi, ix, xiv, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 25, 99, 101, 110**
Wagardhac, **3**
Wahdah al Shabab al Islami, **31**
Wanqal, **6**
Warsangeli, **18**
World Jewish Congress, **10, 11**

X

Xantaale, **13**
Xeero, **5**
Xuur, **4**



Y

Yemen, **11, 12, 19, 20, 42, 85, 109**
Yibir, **8, 13, 14, 15**

Z

Zafran, **20**
Zaidis, **26**
Zambia, **43, 51**
Zeila, **8, 11, 17, 18, 29**

Other Books by Dr. Aweis A. Ali as an author, editor, or translator



