

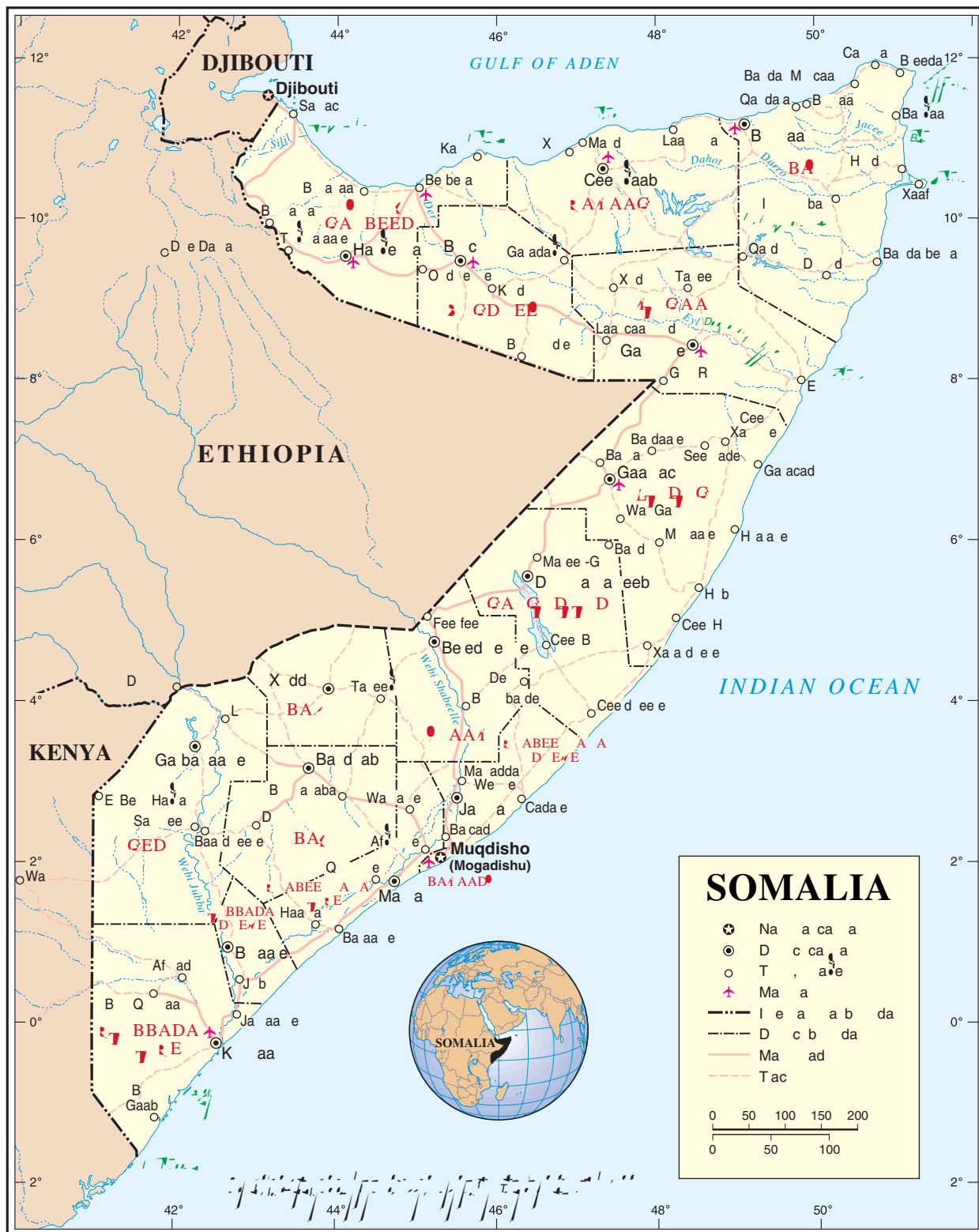


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Nomads, sailors and refugees.

A century of Somali migration.

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Abstract

This working paper offers an outline of Somali migration in the 20th Century, primarily to the West. The paper argues that the overall geopolitical development from colonialism to the so-called new post cold war world order significantly has structured migration from the Somali region to the West. In order to contextualise Somali migration, the paper briefly goes through the biggest events in Somali history from the turn of the 19th Century: Colonialism, independence, and civil war. Different cohorts of migrants include nomads and traders crossing African colonial boundaries; sailors and soldiers in the British Royal Navy both during and after colonialism; student and professional migration to the colonial powers, and after independence to the former Eastern bloc up until 1977, and to the West after 1977; oil workers and white-collar workers to the Gulf; and refugees following the outbreak of civil war in 1988. Three 'migration stories' told by three Somali-Danes shows how historical events and conditions as well as personal initiatives and coincidences have framed their journeys and destinations. Finally, the paper concludes that Somali migration seems to continue within Europe, where Somalis who have obtained Western citizenship move on to the UK, but also to Somalia and Somaliland.

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"My father was a sailor, seaman, and always told me about all these places. I knew the name of Copenhagen, even before I knew of Denmark! He went there as a sailor. I always wanted to be a sailor myself, like him."

'Mohamed', came to Denmark in 1969.

"I came to Denmark as a refugee in 1990. To get asylum I had to teach my children their clan lineage, which I had never taught them before. It was horrible to come to Denmark. I was always a very active person and here I became a passive person."

'Aisha', came to Denmark in 1990.

"All the time I was thinking that the war would stop, that Somalia would be normal again. We had this farm. So we took all our farming tools with us to Kenya, thinking that we would return. In the end, my father and I agreed that we will sell our tractor to find an opportunity for me."

'Omar', came to Denmark in 1993.

1. Introduction: A short history of state and a long history of migration

Somalis have travelled and migrated for many years. Today Somalis are spread over the whole world as a consequence of the civil war in Somalia, which started more than 15 years ago. However, while many Somalis have fled and gone to the West as asylum seekers or through family reunification, Somalis have also migrated along other routes and for other reasons.

In this paper I offer an outline of a history of Somali migration. The aim of the paper is to show how different 'cohorts of migrants' from (what became) the Somali Republic are embedded in a historical framework, which not only relates to the different periods and events in Somali history, but also to global geopolitical developments. I exemplify this through the stories of 'Mohamed', 'Aisha' and 'Omar'. All three have come to Denmark, a destination whose particularities are considered in more detail lower at the end of the paper.

While there are studies of the history of the Somali speaking region and Somalia more generally (i.e. Lewis, 2002; Bradbury, 1997; Ahmed, 1995; Lewis, 1994), this working paper focuses on the migratory aspects of Somali history – especially migration to the West. It does not pretend to be a full-fledged historical account of

Somali migration - it is an outline, a sketch, where I present the major political events and developments and their implications for migration. The paper does not include an account of 'the Somali communities in the West' (see Montclos, 2003 for such an account), but focuses instead on the migratory processes.

In order to do this, I have combined historical reviews with colonial documents and other archival material. Likewise I have included reports, newsletters and other kinds of grey literature to find details, which I could not find anywhere else. I refer to statistics, even if statistics concerning migrants and refugees are often notoriously unreliable. When I refer to numbers, it is to exemplify tendencies, rather than to document the actual numbers of refugees, asylum seekers (cf. Steen, 1993). The migration

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2. Colonialism

As the main focus of the paper is migration to the West, I will not go into the pre-colonial history of Somali migration here². Still, it is important to note that mobility appears to have been a quintessential part of life in the Somali-speaking region for many centuries. Nomadic pastoralism and trade being the main livelihoods, mobility has played an important part in Somali culture and in the dominant discourses of 'Somaliness' (Horst, 2003; Lewis, 1994). Furthermore, the Somalis are said to have migrated from Aden to the Horn of Africa about thousand years ago (Lewis, 2002, 18-19). Being a migrant is thus a part of the myth of 'Somaliness' itself. The explorer Richard Burton, in his famous 'First Footsteps in East Africa' reports of Somalis who spoke three to four languages and discussed international politics in the desert (quoted in Wilson, 1990b). Certainly, Burton would also have met Somalis who did not speak English or knew of the Crimean war; my point is not meant to essentialise Somali mobility. Rather I want to point out that migration as such is not a new phenomenon; there is a certain kind of continuity, even if the forms, routes and opportunities /restrictions of migration have changed, due to different geopolitical developments.

Up until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the interests of the European colonial powers in the Horn of Africa were relatively limited and consisted of a few different treaties with local rulers. Following the Berlin Conference in 1885, where the rules of the partition of Africa were laid down, the colonial powers started to divide their spheres of influence in the Somali-speaking region between them. In 1897 the Somali-speaking region was divided between four colonial powers. Great Britain possessed the Protectorate of British Somaliland (from 1960 the North Western part of the Republic of Somalia, from 1991 the self-declared Republic of Somaliland) and the Northern Frontier District (NFD – from 1963 the North Eastern Province in Kenya). Italy colonised *La Somalia Italiana* (which became the UN-Trusteeship of Somalia under Italian administration in 1950, from 1960 the Southern part of the Republic of Somalia). France possessed *La Côte Française des Somalis* (from 1977 Djibouti), and the regional colonial power Abyssinia (Ethiopia) colonised the Ogaden and later the Haud areas (still parts of Ethiopia)

(Colonial Office, 1960a; Lewis, 2002; Bradbury, 1997; Colonial Office, 1960b; Hess, 1966; His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1928; Vignéras, 1900). As part of the British, Italian and French empires, the Somali colonial states were gradually incorporated into the world economy (cf. Veney, 1998, 220) and the two world wars.

2.1 Nomads

As a substantial part of the Somali colonial subjects were nomads, who would wander over distances – including colonial borders – to find pastures for their animals or to trade, mobility and borders seems to have been an issue from the beginning of the colonial ventures. The colonial powers tried to govern the 'Somali tribes' by restraining mobility in order "to avoid tribal trouble" (Colonial Office, 1931). In a treaty between the British and Italians in 1924, the governments agreed to "endeavour to prevent any migration of Somalis or other natives". However, it was also reported that it "was impossible to control nomad tribes" (ibid).

The aim of territorialising and circumscribing the mobile Somalis was articulated as a question of maintaining order to avoid the Somali clans or 'tribes' mixing with or waging war on each other - or, perhaps, on the colonisers. From 1901 to 1920, the British Government was continuously challenged by the so-called 'Mad Mullah', Mohamed Bin Abdullah Hassan (ibid); "maintenance of order" was not merely a rhetorical question. On the other side of the border, in Italian Somaliland, there were similar attempts to territorialise the nomads. In an account of Italian colonialism, Robert Hess describes the Italian colonial policy like this:

"To do away with one cause of intertribal disputes, Italian administrators formally established the borders of the areas occupied by each tribe. Limitations were placed on the movements of each tribe in a first step toward what the Italians hoped would be the civilizing

² For accounts of the pre-Colonial history of the Somali-speaking regions see (Lewis, 2002; Ahmed, 1995; Hess, 1966; Colonial Office, 1960a).

established Somali community came into being (Suleiman, 1992).

Apart from intercontinental migration, a larger number of Somalis migrated back and forth between the Somali colonial states, East Africa, and the Arab countries in relation to trade, pastoralism, family movement, education etc. (Goldsmith, 1997, 472; Greenfield, 1987). Whereas overseas migration seems to have been an almost exclusively male phenomenon until the 1960s, Somali women have a reputation for being traders or otherwise moving around neighbouring countries, not least in relation to nomadic pastoralism and general family-related mobility.

One effect of colonialism is that mobile livelihoods (Sørensen & Olwig, 2002) of Somali pastoralists and traders became international migration as colonial – and later national – borders were established. Somali family networks might – for instance – be divided between the British Protectorate, Aden and Ogaden in Ethiopia, or between British East Africa, and *Somalia Italiana*. All the same, the colonial 'motherlands' became destinations and as Empires, they offered possibilities in relation to trade, military employment and seafaring. These themes are illustrated in the story of Mohamed (See Box 1).

3. Independence

In Mohamed's migration story, the dynamics of colonial rule are outspoken – as are the personal and adventurous initiative that Mohamed undertakes to go to Europe. While British colonial officials were in charge of when Mohamed could seek his luck as a sailor, his knowledge of the importance of appearance when crossing borders (being dressed up), his father's friends and the immigration legislation in France and Britain were just as crucial in framing his journey to Britain. There, his engagement in the political development in the Protectorate was so strong, that he returns.

When Mohamed came back to the British Protectorate, preparations for Independence were busy both in the Protectorate and in the Italian UN-Trusteeship of Somalia. After the fascists were defeated in World War II, the future of *Somalia Italiana* was unclear and the ambitious plans of uniting Ogaden, British Somalia and Italian Somalia to a Greater Somalia failed. In 1950, an Italian administrated UN Trusteeship was ratified and the UN decided that the Trusteeship should be independent ten years later. Italy had started to make preparations, such as educating civil

servants and holding elections, and political parties had emerged (Hess, 1966, 190-193).

In British Somaliland, independence was less well prepared. Elections were held for the first time in 1960 and the leader of the biggest party, Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, was appointed Minister for Local Government. In May that year, Egal and a delegation went to London to discuss

see1b

1999, 22). Some of them became asylum seekers in the West. Aisha was one of them (See Box 2).

children whose parents were in the government or trade, who received education, for two

Box 2: The journey of an educated woman: The Story of Aisha

The mother of my father was born in Aden. My grandfather married my grandmother and they settled as nomads in Somalia. One day my father got a job in Jijiga as a medical assistant through his uncle. Jijiga was then a part of the British Protectorate (the reserved area), which is now a part of Ethiopia. The uncle took care of my father's education, as he already spoke Arabic and knew the Koran. He received further education in a Secondary School and then went to Aden for more education. His uncle could do this because he was a part of the Camel Corps in the Protectorate. After he came back, my father got trained as an administrator. He worked different places –the British transferred him all the time; they did not want him to settle. He retired in 1963.

My mother came from a town in the Western part of the Protectorate, she is from a merchant family. Her uncle was a trader between Djibouti [the capital in the former French Somaliland and present Djibouti] and this town. My mothers and her siblings were split in different families, when my grandmother asked my mother to cook for them. My grandmother opened a shop selling sorghum. After that she bought cows and lambs, became a nomad and collected the whole family. My mother's family became very famous, because they earned a lot of money from trade. One of my uncles went back and forth. He did trade from Iraq. He also became a politician and was elected as a Member of Parliament. When my father and mother married each other, my father worked in my mother's hometown. I was born in the town district in a place, which is now in Ethiopia. My mother had seven children: five girls and two boys. I am the oldest girl.

My father was famous for the fact that he was the first man to send three girls to school! When I was small, we settled in Hargeisa and I went to a Koranic school from when I was four to six years old. When I was six years old, I knew the Koran by heart and I could speak Arabic. My sister and I then went to the only girl school at that time. We got a special permission and started directly in the second grade. Later one of my other sisters also went to that school. Somebody teased my father about his girls going to school, but he always defended us; he always thought that it was better to be educated.

After the school I first worked as a clerk. From 1964-69 I worked in an office. I did all kinds of work. In 1969 I married my husband, who was in the administration. I then made the big mistake of giving up my work and went into administration myself. In 1972 we moved to Mogadishu. I became a professional secretary and studied public administration, but I never pursued further education as much as I wanted to. In 1977 we went to Kuwait. One of the reasons was that I wanted my girls to go to school. I worked in different offices with administration and as a secretary. I also worked in different embassies. Also in Kuwait, women's work also proved more promising than men's work, so I had to work and I worked all the time.

In 1990 I came to Denmark as a refugee, due to the Gulf war. My husband stayed. To get asylum I had to teach my children their clan lineage, which I had n

3.2 Students

In many ways, Aisha is a remarkable woman. She was among the first girls in the British Protectorate to pursue education and later a professional career. This opportunity must be seen in relation to her family background, where her father was an administrator in the Protectorate and her mother part of a well to do merchant family. As Aisha explains, it was only

reasons: because they could afford it and because they could understand the value of secular education. In this way, Aisha has been one among very few girls. Secular education was not very widespread or valued during colonisation or after independence, though Barre initiated big literacy campaigns in the early 1970s as well as introducing Somali orthography in 1972.

Hess notes that until Somalia became a UN Trusteeship, Italy paid very little attention to secular education in the area (Hess, 1966). This changed during the 1950s, when new state schools replaced the private Catholic schools, and institutions for higher education were established. In the Protectorate, mainly Koranic schools existed and the British were considerably slower to establish secular education (Lewis, 2002, 140-141, 148-149) – such as the girls' school which Aisha frequented.

Though institutes for higher education were gradually established, most Somali students would have to go abroad to specialise. Italy and Egypt offered scholarships, as well as the UK – though on a much smaller scale, it seems (Lewis, 2002, 141; Ali, 2001, 92-94). Getting a scholarship to Sudan, Aden or the USSR, Cuba, and other communist countries (cf. Ali, 1994) was also a way of gaining access to higher education, though this abruptly stopped in 1977, when the USSR and Cuba sided with Ethiopia in the Ogaden war and subsequently expelled the Somalis.

From then on, educational migration turned more towards Western countries (Hadley, 1989). Funded by scholarships, and/or backed by family or government support, the students can be expected to have been among the wealthier and more privileged strata of Somali society. Again, this migration seems to be relatively male dominated, but women got scholarships to study as well (e.g. Ali, 1994). Some students eventually went back to Somalia; others stayed or went on to other countries. Likewise Somali students have gone to Pakistan and India, where education was cheaper (Marchal et al., 2000), as well as to other African countries. In some cases, student migration turned into asylum migration as students applied for asylum due to the development of the political situation.

4. Civil War

In 1988, the Somali and Ethiopian governments signed a peace accord to end hostility between the two countries. The peace accord recognised Ethiopian control over the Haud areas, meaning that a larger number of Somali refugees were forced to go to Somalia. Furthermore, the Somali National Movement (SNM), a clan-based resistance movement, which was founded in London in 1981 in outspoken opposition to the Barre regime lost protection (Lewis, 1994, 177-219; Silanyo, 1986). The SNM in turn, attacked and briefly captured the biggest cities in the North-Western part of Somalia, and the government replied by full-scale assaults on the

local population (Bradbury, 1997, 11). Civil war was a reality and more than 600,000 people fled to Ethiopia (UNDP, 2001, 214; Republic of Somaliland, 1994).

During the next two years, civil war spread to the rest of the country and in the beginning of 1991, Siad Barre was ousted from Mogadishu. Rebels, clan-based resistance movements and drought led to huge humanitarian crises in the southern and central regions of Somalia. It is estimated that by the end of 1992, half a million people had lost their lives due to violence and hunger, and an even bigger number of people had fled the country – estimated between 800,000 (UNDP, 2001, 59) and up to 1.5 million (Bradbury, 1997, 1). The large majority went to isolated refugee camps placed in the deserts of Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen, and Djibouti. As many as two million Somalis were internally displaced in Somalia in 1991-1992 (UNDP, 2001, 59-64, 122-123, 145-146, 149-150). During the next

world tended to drift away from Somalia. The US-led UN intervention called *Operation Restore Hope* was a total failure and since 1991, Somalia has effectively been without a central government (Gundel, 2003; Kleist, 2003a; Marchal et al., 2000; Bradbury, 1997). A number of peace talks and conferences have taken place, but so far no lasting peace agreement has been reached. In 2000, a three-year Transitional National Assembly was established and there are currently ongoing negotiations of what will follow³.

4.1 Refugees

With an estimated 429,000 Somali refugees in 2003, Somalis are ranked by UNHCR as the fifth largest refugee population in the world, after Afghans, Burundians, Sudanese and Angolans.⁷⁵ place,

As the tables show, the number of refugees has changed over the years. On the one hand, the decrease in the number of refugees in the neighbouring countries reflects the fact that substantial numbers of Somali refugees have undertaken so-called voluntary repatriation, often UNHCR assisted. The number of registered Somali

Table 4: Asylum applications lodged in selected Western countries, 1993-2002

Country	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	Total** 1993 –
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As time passes, many Somalis have obtained citizenship in their Western countries of asylum or

looks to be even more circumscribed, dangerous and costlier than before.

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