
SOMALI DAY

CULTURE AND POLITICS THROUGH THE LENS OF
LITERATURE AND ORATURE

LEIDENASA - 'AFRICA 2020'



29 JUNE 2021

**AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE LEIDEN
LEIDEN UNIVERSITY**



Why Somalia in 2021 and today

On 1 July 1960 Somalia became an independent state. We would like to commemorate these 61 years of independence and pay attention to this complex region in the Horn of Africa, praised for its (oral) literature, marked by its civil war and voiced by its diaspora.

This one-day seminar on Somalia will address the country from a historical-cultural perspective by reconsidering Somali culture and governance through the lens of its literature and orature.

Also read the country information on Somalia and the web dossier on Somali literature:
www.ascleiden.nl/africa-2020-country-information.

Programme

14.45-15.00 Welcome speech

PANEL I: SOMALI TEXTS AND VOICES

Chair: Annachiara Raia

15.00.-15.30 Keynote lecture by Ali Jimale Ahmed (CUNY University)

Culture and Politics through the Lens of Somali Literature

15.30.-16.00 Keynote lecture by Martin Orwin (University of Naples "L'Orientale", UNIOR)

Somali music: from kaman to keyboard

16.00 - 16.20 Q&A

16.20 - 16.30 Tea break

PANEL II: TRANS-REGIONAL SOMALI BOOK NETWORKS

Chair: Jan Abbink

16.30-16.50 Key note lecture by Jama Musse Jama (Hargeysa Cultural Centre, Somaliland)

The Soundscape Archive in Somaliland (SAS): revival of an otherwise endangered intangible heritage

16.50-17.10 Digital exhibit curated by Jos Damen , Gerard van de Bruinhorst, Ursula Oberst and Yasmin Noor (African Studies Centre Library)

Somali books in Leiden: decolonizing the library? Remarks & highlights.

17.10 -17.30 Digital exhibit curated by Ali Jimale Ahmed (CUNY University)

Somali books and publishing links overseas : a glimpse into Laashin publishers

17.30 – 17.50	Q&A
17.50 – 18.00	Closing remarks

Keynote abstracts

Culture and Politics through the Lens of Somali Literature | Ali Jimale Ahmed (CUNY University)

Literature as a gateway or entrance into other people's lives allows the reader/audience to reflect on the existential and experiential quotidian of fictive characters, trying to make sense of life's vagaries and vicissitudes. The Somalis say, "Sheekadu waxay buuxisaa ama kabtaa baahi jirta ama jiri karta," meaning "Narrative fiction covers or completes a need, a lack, real or perceived/imagined." In other words, narrative fiction allows societies to develop the requisite language and vocabulary needed to depict the tasks they set for themselves, as well as the preoccupations and contradictions they grapple with. Through imaginative literature, writers and storytellers are able to sift through the rubble of life, and proffer solutions to existential and epistemological problems. In Somali society, the stories give an insight into the storyteller's relationship to the civic place. This paper examines the power of the literary text (both oral and written) to limn, wrestle with, and demystify the interstices between politics and culture. It also problematizes the literary text's potential to transform consciousness.

Somali music: from kaman to keyboard | Martin Orwin (University of Naples "L'Orientale", UNIOR)

In this talk I shall outline the development of Somali music, all of which is associated with poetry. The traditional luuq has been used for as long as we know as a mode of performing poetry and specific melodic lines are associated with different genres, though there is variation in some of the musical forms, especially that of the gabay. The luuq is still used today, though not as much as in the past. In some parts of the Somali territories, there is a tradition of instrumental accompaniment that goes back some time, such as the use of the shareero (a form of lyre) in some southern regions. However, it was the introduction of the kaman, the oud, which initiated the musical instrumental accompaniment to poetry that became the most popular mode of performance and influenced later musical developments. Larger ensembles became popular in the 1960s, and, in the 1970s, innovation in melodies was led by composers such as Cabdikariin 'Jiir'. The use of electric instruments in ensembles and influence of music from outside the Horn of Africa brought about a greater variety to musical forms. The advent of the electronic keyboard came later and this has become very widely used in the music of today. The kaman nevertheless continues to be appreciated by many, and performers such as Daa'uud Cali Masxaf and Cabdinaasir Macallin Caydiid keep this popular instrument very much to the fore. Examples of these different forms of music will illustrate the talk.

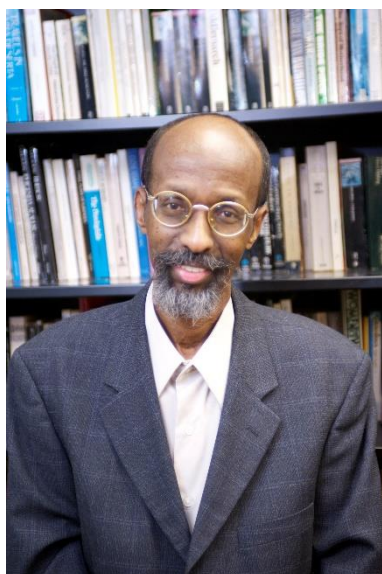
The Soundscape Archive in Somaliland (SAS): revival of an otherwise endangered intangible heritage | Jame Musse Jama (Hargeysa Cultural Centre, Somaliland)

At the Hargeysa Cultural Centre (HCC), there is a special archive, the Soundscape Archive in Somaliland, whose main purpose is to collect and preserve melodies and sounds that are fading or dying out which are part of the Somali nomadic and indigenous identities in Somaliland. In this

presentation of preliminary findings, we share the work that has so far entailed collecting and sorting out files deemed suitable for the project's goals. We have 108 sounds collected from three sources: HCC Musical Archives, fresh recordings by the staff, recordings by externals and finally sounds coming from previous recordings owned by individuals or institutions that we found interesting to include as they are historical and/or had a unique meaning for the Somaliland society. We are interested in documenting endangered sounds and melodies, which can be both natural and human made (human voice, whistling, singing special melody, ululating, different types of tradition non-Arab-style prayer-calling, sound made by typical traditional musical instruments, traditional dances, etc.) These can be sounds/melodies used traditionally for different social and day-by-day life activities that today may disappear if not properly documented.

About the speakers

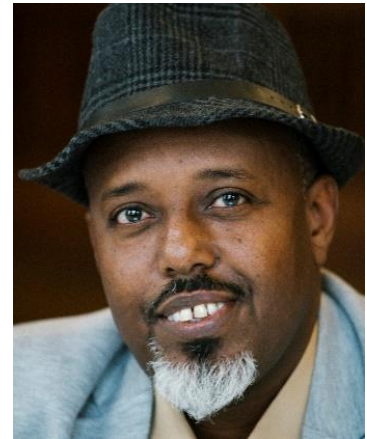
Ali Jimale Ahmed



Ali Jimale Ahmed holds an M.A. in African Area Studies and a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Born in Mogadishu, Somalia, Ahmed is Professor and former chair of Comparative Literature at Queens College of the City University of New York, where he also teaches for the Africana Studies Program and the Department of Classical, Middle Eastern, and Asian Languages and Cultures; he is also on the Comparative Literature faculty at the CUNY Graduate center. Ahmed practices creative teaching and focuses his research on Islamic literature, Literature and Politics, Fiction across Cultures, Immigrant Literature, Greed in Literature and Film, and the poetics and noetics of orature. His books include *The Invention of Somalia* (1995), *Daybreak Is Near: Literature, Clans, and the Nation-State in Somalia* (1996), *Fear Is a Cow* (2002), *Diaspora Blues* (2005), *The Road Less Traveled: Reflections on the Literatures of the Horn of Africa* (2008, coedited with the late Taddesse Adera), *When Donkeys Give Birth to Calves: Totems, Wars, Horizons, Diasporas* (2012) and *Gaso, Ganuun iyo Gasiin* (a novel) (2018; roughly translated as “Kraal, Milk, Sustenance”). His poetry and short stories have been translated into several languages, including Japanese, Danish, Bosnian, Portuguese, and Turkish.

Jama Musse Jama

Dr Jama Musse Jama is an ethnomathematician with a PhD in African Studies specialising in Computational Linguistics of African Languages. He has extensive research publications in mathematics, ICT and the role of art and culture in development. Founder and yearly organizer of the influential Hargeysa International Book Fair, and currently Director of the Hargeysa Cultural Centre in Somaliland, Dr. Jama has also a Senior Research Associate position at DPU, University College London, UK.



Martin Orwin



Martin Orwin studied Arabic and Amharic and has a PhD in the phonology of the Somali language. Since 1992, he has been a lecturer in Somali and Amharic at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Since 2020, he teaches both Somali language and Somali literature at the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" (Naples, Italy). He has also published articles on Somali language and poetry and has conducted field research in the Horn of Africa. His research centres on the use of language in Somali poetry. He has written articles on metre and alliteration both from general perspectives and also in relation to specific poems and how these features are crafted in them. He has written a little on the relationship between language and music from a theoretical perspective with reference to Somali.

He has a strong interest in the translation of poetry and has published translations of poems by Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame 'Hadraawi', Xasan Xaaji Cabdullaahi 'Xasan Ganey', Xuseen Sheekh Axmed 'Kaddare' and Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' among others. He has worked closely with the Poetry Translation Centre in London since it was founded.

Venue: Online event **Registration:** [via this registration link](#)

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