# Cartoons in conflict: Amin Arts and transnational geopolitical imagination in the Somali-language public sphere

*Peter Chonka, University of Edinburgh*

## Abstract

*Amin Amir is the most popular and prolific political cartoonist in modern Somalia and his work is disseminated digitally and in print across the Somali territories on a daily basis. His appeal to such broad audiences is remarkable given the extreme political fragmentation of the media environment, and in the fact that his renderings of broad themes of Somali political discourse (as well as highly localised developments) are all transmitted digitally into the region from the diaspora. This article explores certain recurring discourses in these 'texts', including corruption, political violence, 'clanism', and endemic external interference in Somalia. Building on theories of popular geopolitics and diasporic civic agency, it argues that analyses of such material must be attentive to the particular political, linguistic and socio-cultural features of the cartoon form within distinctive media settings. Considering the technological context of these texts' dissemination into dynamic public spheres of Somali political debate, it argues that the artist collapses conventional distinctions between diasporic production and local consumption. The cartoons – being both ubiquitous in and spatially detached from on-the-ground realities of political change - epitomise the wider transnational character of the global Somali public sphere. This in itself facilitates the reproduction of particular tropes of shared cultural, ethno-nationalist or religious identity of the 'Ummadda Soomaaliyeed' (the Somali Ummah) across multiple political boundaries[1].*

**Keywords:** cartoons; geopolitics; Somalia; diaspora; nationalism; Islam

**Fig. 1**



- Man in red: 'The Somali politician [pictured in the chair] sees this as being in his interest. Oh Allah may you bestow on Somalia a patriotic politician.'
  Man with stick: 'Amen to Allah.'                    (Amin Amir, October 2014)

## Introduction

Online and in print, Amin Amir's ('Amin Arts') political cartoons are a distinctive and prevalent feature of news media and political commentary in Somalia. Unlike other prominent East African political cartoonists (such as Kenya's Gado) who produce work for a single major national newspaper and are syndicated in various international publications, Amin Arts' cartoons are produced and reproduced across the diverse and highly fragmented world of Somali news media. The cartoonist maintains a personal website (aminarts.com) and his images find their way – often 'copy-and-paste' fashion - into the myriad Somali-language news websites, blogs, forums and print media across the patchwork of regional authorities or *de facto* independent states that make up what remains defined on the political map as the nation-state of Somalia. Amin Amir is undoubtedly the most popular cartoonist at work on the Somali political scene, and there are very few other producers of this particular type of visual commentary in the Somali-language 'public sphere' of political commentary and popular debate (Habermas 1991; Calhoun 1993; Tomaselli 2009; Willems 2013).

Insofar as a unitary Somali state ceased to exist a quarter of a century ago, and given the continued fragmentation of political power across the Somali territories, it is remarkable that any single political commentator has the type of widespread popularity enjoyed by Amin Amir. At present, the internationally recognised (but territorially constrained) Somali Federal Government operates from Mogadishu, while a reconfiguration of embryonic federal state structures is being arduously undertaken across south and central Somalia. The autonomous 'state' administration of Puntland controls the North East, while the fully secessionist Republic of Somaliland governs the North West. Various layers of armed conflict are sporadically manifest amongst and between these entities, various clan/region-based militias, the Islamist militants of *Harakat Al Shabaab Al Mujaahidiin* ('Al Shabaab')*,* and different African Union Mission in Somalia troop contingents (AMISOM). Amin Amir's consistent lament at the predicament of Somalia and his critiques of venal politicians and malign foreign influences strike a chord with audiences both inside Somalia and in the global Somali-speaking diaspora. It is from a position of physical detachment that the cartoonist – based in Canada – comments, both on the daily developments and intrigues of local or regional politics in Somalia or on the wider 'national' concerns of the community addressed as the global *Ummadda Soomaaliyeed,* the Somali Ummah - a supranational conceptualisation of shared identity based on a common religion (Islam) and ethnic descent.

This paper situates its analysis of Amin Amir with reference to three interlinked bodies of scholarship on the modern public sphere: popular geopolitics, civic agency, and the 'cyber-subjectivities' of 'digital diasporas'. I examine the role of Amin Amir's cartoons in reflecting and conditioning popular orientations towards geopolitical discourses, and speak to recent literature on African civic agency in the public sphere, particularly with regard to the commonly invoked theme of 'resistance'. The paper engages with literature exploring the possibilities that transnational and diasporic-influenced public spheres afford for de-territorialized forms of political identification or nationhood. In responding to recent calls in the popular geopolitics literature for greater focus on audience reception and interpretation of media texts, the paper analyses the cartoons in the context of their reproduction within the media ecology of Somalia. I argue that greater attention needs to be paid to the ways in which

different forms of production (the political cartoon for instance) hold significance in particular media environments. The political, technological and cultural contours of the Somali public sphere mean that certain visual and linguistic characteristics of the political cartoon format (taken for granted in other contexts) are themselves of importance to ongoing contestations over Somali state reconfiguration and broader geopolitical discourses.

The paper surveys these three bodies of literature highlighting the ways in which this case study both aligns with and diverges from recent conceptualisations of popular geopolitics and (transnational) civic agency. Constraints on media production in Somalia are then outlined, and the position of this particular producer and his form of commentary is contextualised. A selection of Amin Amir's cartoons is then critically analysed in terms of its discursive content and appeal to Somali nationalist sentiment. This sample is representative, I argue, of his much wider body of work and is divided into three thematic sections: a critique of foreign intervention and the 'venal politician'; critiques of 'clanism'; and a discussion of cultural or religio-political 'imports' in processes of state contestation. Bringing back into focus the transnational dynamics of the Somali public sphere, the paper then considers the cartoonist's position as a diasporic cultural producer vis-á-vis contestation over the reconstruction of the state (or states) across the Somali territories. The paper concludes by arguing that the Somali public sphere is characterised by an inherent trans-nationalism (perceived and understood as such by local and external producers and consumers of Somali-language media), and that this has a profound influence on the parameters of discursive conflict taking place over the re-emergence of state structures. Instead of conceiving of these cartoons primarily as a product of the diaspora (and analysing them in terms of the 'cyber-subjectivity' of those external populations) this paper conceptualises them as *part of* the media environment on the ground in Somalia.

**Cartoons, critical/popular geopolitics and public sphere 'resistance'**

The critical geopolitics literature has long been concerned with the relationship between hegemonic representations of geographically-framed political relations and 'everyday' experiences of power and resistance (Ó Tuathail 1996, 2006; Dodds 1996; Hammett 2011). Dodds and Dittmer note that whilst analyses of geopolitical representation and discourse remain important, only recently have focuses begun to shift 'towards audience interpretation, consumption and attachment' (2008, 437) of texts which reflect, condition or challenge popular perceptions of local or global power relations. The writers here cite Thrift's contention that overemphasis on geopolitical 'representations' overlooks the 'little things' of how '(and therefore why) geo-power is actually practiced' (2000, 380). They go on to argue that 'everyday practices such as the consumption of news media and serialised popular culture need to be connected to our interest in the representational qualities of maps and other geopolitical objects' (Dittmer and Dodds 2008, 445).

This paper takes up this approach by critically examining the ways in which Amin Amir's diasporic cartoons are disseminated, consumed, and reproduced inside Somalia itself. Conducting extended fieldwork in 2015 across different political centres in southern Somalia, Puntland, and Somaliland on the wider media environment brought me into contact with the cartoons as reproduced in various newspapers, websites and civil-society publications. Whilst

my research did not focus on gathering a large sample of audience reactions to the cartoons specifically, my following theoretical discussion of the case study is underpinned by several observations derived from my study of the media environment 'on the ground' in Somalia. Firstly, there is no other individual political commentator (using cartoons or other media) whose work is reproduced so widely across the different public spheres of a fragmented Somalia. Secondly, such widespread dissemination is, in part, a function of audiences' ability to selectively utilise different cartoons from the artist's prolific output speaking to particular regional events or in support of various political positions – this I conceptualise in terms of 'performative consumption' where consumers' agency is demonstrated in the strategic deployment of selected material (Hills 2002; Dittmer and Dodds 2008). Thirdly, the popularity of Amin Amir's cartoons was commonly related to me in terms of his perceived neutrality: detectable for audiences in his desire to critique multiple political elites and aided by his position of relative security in the diaspora, as well as his own (marginalised) 'clan' background. Furthermore, I argue that the relative novelty of the political cartoon form (visually and linguistically) in the Somali public sphere is a factor in the cartoonist's popular reception: it productively and provocatively uses humour - highlighting dynamics of cultural contestation in which the cartoonist plays a particular generational and ideological role.

Each of these observations reaffirm to the importance of situating popular geopolitical media production within local contexts of consumption. There is increasing literature on African, Middle Eastern and diasporic media production in the form of cartoons, satire and humour which illuminates the myriad devices by which power is challenged (or re-inscribed) in imaginative and important ways. Often, however, I find that the contextual backdrops offered on such production raise further questions, particularly around language usage and class or ethnically-influenced patterns of consumption. What is the significance, for example, of cartoonist Zapiro's own cultural or class background and his use of English in the dissemination and reproduction of his work in South Africa (Hammett 2010; Zapiro 2010; Mason 2010; Eko 2010; Dodds 2010)? Similarly, who is English-language anti-state propaganda in Zimbabwe aimed at? (How) does it circulate within the country (Hammett 2011)? Are jokes in Nigeria which critique the state (and form an auto-critique of national identity) delivered and re-interpreted in languages other than English? If so, where and how (Obadare 2009)? What are the ethnic or class politics of language choices – between English and Amharic – in Ethiopian or Eritrean diaspora media (Skjerdal 2011; Bernal 2014)? How does an (Arabic) *lingua franca* influence production in an Arab public sphere engaged in anti-imperialist political cartooning? Does the form of the political cartoon have the same history, status or popularity in each of the different national media contexts (Falah *et al.* 2006)? Does the alleged 'liberal' potential of internet-based discursive connectivity, as analysed by Brinkerhoff (2006), have anything to do with the linguistic (English) basis of the particular (Somali) diaspora network studied? To what extent can this be representative of a far wider Somali-language sphere operating betwixt and between the diaspora and the Horn of Africa and engaging multiple (and not necessarily 'liberal') political-religious subjectivities?

In teasing out important theoretical distinctions between, for example, discourse and narrative, or language and practice (Müller 2008) such 'little' or seemingly self-evident things as language, audience composition, place or media form, may loom rather 'large' in

analysis. It is my own focus on the place and deployment of diasporic media in the Somali territories (as well as my professed ignorance of the 'on the ground' media realities of the other contexts referenced above) which prompt my questions on this range of public sphere geopolitical media. I recognise that answers may be difficult to uncover ethnographically, particularly in 'closed' political contexts where subversive anti-state media production is highly sensitive. Although Somalia can be an extremely dangerous environment for journalists to work in, the decentralised and transnational nature of media production across multiple political territories - where political authorities have relatively limited capacity to systematically control media flows - affords various opportunities for a researcher to comparatively examine the ways in which different media products are popularly consumed and redeployed. I thus offer a semi-ethnographic account of media consumption in Somalia which examines the discursive output of a particular diasporic producer in the context of the wider Somali public sphere. It attempts to demonstrate how the very form of the media and the identity of the producer themselves can both reflect and condition debates ongoing on the ground over Somali state reconstruction and conflict.

This approach engages with a recent trend in the scholarship on civic agency in Africa which has involved a shift in focus away from realms of organised civil society and onto the public sphere and popular culture in analyses of multiple forms of resistance – whether multi-directional, radical, mundane, vernacular, universalised, structured or spontaneous. Willems and Obadare emphasise the 'fractured sovereignty' of the African state and the 'disruptive influence of the global economic system on the ordinary African' as contexts in which 'parallel infrastructures [of resistance are] mobilised, plotted and enacted' (2014, 2). Their volume highlights the various nuanced ways in which resistance can be interpreted, and their conceptualisation of this notion transcends reductive formulations of a reified 'unified and heroic subaltern subject' (*Ibid,* 7; Abu-Lughod 1989). In understanding civic agency, many of these debates centre around Mbembe's discussion of popular ridicule of elites and the extent to which such expressions in popular culture and local vernaculars constitute challenges to power relations or represent (as he would have it) the reinforcement of political hierarchies through 'conviviality' (2001, 110; Obadare & Willems 2014, 7; Hammett 2010, 8). Whilst resistance here is appropriately problematised - and binaries of subordination/domination are jettisoned - the nature of the case studies explored necessitates a continued focus on the relationship between 'ordinary' Africans and the 'official' in terms of state structures or power holders.

This is the point from which my analysis of political cartoons in the Somali public sphere somewhat diverges. Given the prolonged conditions of flux and contestation that characterise Somali state-structures and state-society relations (where these can be clearly discerned), it is difficult to read public sphere agency primarily in terms of 'resistance', nor in distinctions between 'official' and 'informal' media and communication. Instead, political and thus media fragmentation across Somalia creates an environment where public sphere or 'civic' agency can be conceived of as producing the discursive spaces in which political organisation is legitimised or struggled against. This is not to argue that resistance is absent from the discursive framing of Amin Amir's work; on the contrary, the analysis below highlights how his representation of the 'poor' Somali 'population' (*'shacabka masakiinta'*) is fundamental to his speaking of truth to power holders. Nevertheless, from an analytical

standpoint I argue that a more productive framing of his 'civic agency' involves a focus on the cartoonist's position - in terms of his cross-sectional influence, his generational ideological perspective, his location in the diaspora, and the technological means through which his material is disseminated. These factors are indicative of the transnational dynamics which characterise the Somali public sphere and, crucially, the debates which are ongoing in Somalia over the ideological, cultural and religious foundations of reconfigured Somali statehood(s).

Amin Amir is as much an 'African' cultural producer as Zapiro (Jonathon Shapiro), the white South African cartoonist who is a prominent subject of many of the contributions to Critical African Studies' Special Issue on political cartoons and satire in Africa in 2010. The focus on Zapiro's provocative output yields valuable insight into the discursive dynamics of the post-Apartheid media environment and parameters of political debate. However, I emphasise here the value of engaging with other contexts of African public sphere production which differ vastly from the South African experience. Unlike Zapiro, Amin Amir is not published in major national newspapers but instead disseminates his work (widely) through online media and reproductions in multiple local newspapers across the Somali territories. Additionally, his cartoons are written in colloquial Somali and not in a national English or French media *lingua-franca* as in the majority of political cartooning studied elsewhere in African public spheres (Wekesa 2012). Importantly, the reality of conflict in Somalia and the dangers faced by journalists or commentators has meant that the cartoonist has based himself outside of the region. This does not, however, limit - and may actually enhance - his ability to reach multiple audiences in a way that virtually no other individual political commentator does in this media environment.

**Diasporic cultural production and activism**

Amin Amir's work and its reception epitomise the wider blurring of geographical boundaries found in these transnational Somali public spheres, and represents a collapsing of firm distinctions between diasporic and 'local' artistic production or political commentary. This is a theme grappled with by many recent discussions of globalised African 'cultural production', and as Harrow and Ekotto argue: 'the new conditions of globalization have generated possibilities for subject positions that cannot be simply defined by terms such as 'exile', 'hybrid'. 'creole' or 'diasporic'' (2015, 3). Insofar as Amin Amir's popular cartoons are produced for a global audience identifying with a Somali political context regardless of their geographical location, his influence on what is an inherently transnational public sphere clearly transcends such reductive labels.

The peculiar nature of the political cartoon itself (residing somewhere between 'artistic' cultural production and direct political commentary or activism) shifts the focus for our critical engagement. If a recurring theme in African cultural studies is the stylistic or thematic gulf between material produced for 'local' (read 'African') and 'international' (read 'white/western') audiences – mediated through the 'geodeterminism' of publishing opportunities and the market (Ibironke 2015, 38) – then the transnational popularity of Amin Arts represents a very different setting for production and consumption. The paper collapses firm distinctions between diasporic and local content firstly by discursively analysing the themes of the cartoons in the context of the media environment in Somalia, and secondly by

interpreting the geographical detachment of this particular producer (from the messy political realities which are his subject matter) as an enabling factor in his presentations of nationalist identity, political critique and generational or cultural identity to multiple audiences across the Somali territories.

Much scholarship on diaspora media or online engagement with countries of origin focuses attention on the influence that such media production has on diaspora communities themselves - the importance of cyber-subjectivities for identities in 'host' countries, or recreations of conflict in new sites (Georgiou 2006; Horst 2006; Osman 2015). In some cases, the analytical distinction between a dispersed and diverse global ethnic community and a single distinct state-dominated 'home' polity is both clear and logical. Victoria Bernal's work on Eritrea and 'deterritorialised identities' focuses on prominent diaspora-based websites and emphasises the role of an online public sphere as an 'imaginatively constructed space' (2005, 661; 2014). Taking the starting point of Anderson's imagined national community (2006), Bernal argues that 'one should not see the imaginings of diasporic Eritreans simply as a feature of diaspora, reflecting the nostalgia of people far from home...one should understand them as part of the construction of Eritrean nationhood' (2005, 669). Her argument proceeds with a call for a re-theorizing not of cyberspace itself but the wider public sphere, where online infrastructure does not simply facilitate access to 'information', but provides discursive arenas for new imaginations of nationhood to be constructed (*Ibid,* 672).The online Dehai platform, she argues, has served as an experimental space for alternative forms of knowledge or cultural production that de-territorialize emotive attachments to the nation-state. Other work (Skjerdal 2008) on Ethiopian diaspora journalists highlights both the possibilities that a detached transnational public sphere offers to political exiles critiquing the state, as well as the potential ideological blurring that occurs between 'journalists' and 'activists' in this decentred media environment.

There are several important differences between Eritrean (and Ethiopian) public sphere case studies and the Somali context which have an important bearing on my own analysis. Firstly, the political context in Eritrea around which Bernal's transnational public sphere operates is dominated by a single, functioning authoritarian state which has a high level of control over domestic media and even the capacity to extract resources from the diaspora community itself (De Waal 2015). In this sense it can be imagined that the state – dominated by the (omni)presence of President Afewerki – can serve as a focus of the intellectual, creative and/or rebellious activity of transnational platforms of debate. A contrast with Somalia could hardly be more striking: multiple state projects exist with a varied level of control over media and political communication. It is difficult to assess the potential for online engagement in the forums discussed by Bernal by citizens inside Eritrea given levels of censorship and online media control, and whilst her account touches on the impact of these platforms on politics inside Eritrea (for example the rumours about political elites using pseudonyms to participate in these transnational debates) this element of the analysis seems secondary to a focus on imaginings of the Eritrean nation within the diaspora itself.

This account of the Somali public sphere emphasises the blurring of the boundaries between local and diasporic intellectual discursive production and proposes a dual conceptualisation of the Somali public sphere. Here, local public spheres coalescing around particular political projects (the Somaliland print news media, for example: Hoehne 2008)

coexist and overlap with wider networks based in the diaspora and in the region which speak to a broader transnational Somali audience, the *Ummadda Soomaaliyeed*. It is in this latter arena that Amin Amir operates, although as my subsequent analysis shows, local actors may selectively appropriate this material for particular sectional agendas. Crucial here is the sense that participants in this media environment perceive themselves to be members of a global Somali community (often regardless of or alongside their political/regional affiliations in the Horn) and that this transnational subjectivity creates the space in which multiple discursive strategies can gain audiences and traction.

It is important to clarify the political-geographical focus of my analysis of these particular texts, not merely as a disclaimer but rather for its relevance to my wider argument. Although the use of the term 'Somalia' refers in the broadest sense to the internationally recognised borders of that nation-state, the analysis attempts to situate the various power structures and or state/administration constructions within the context of the visual rhetoric analysed. Given that Amin Arts' cartoons often focus on southern Somalia (i.e. events as seen from and in Muqdisho [Mogadishu]), my analysis will primarily focus on these images. However, it is significant that the cartoonist engages with other Somali political arenas such as the Republic of Somaliland. I make occasional reference to this material to demonstrate how subtle thematic or discursive differences in the portrayals of different political actors or environments are indicative of one particular (but influential and illuminating) external conception of political identity across the Somali Horn of Africa. Although Amin Amir has been making political cartoons since the 1990s, the individual images analysed here are taken from the period 2012-2015 and deal with the current presidency of Xasan Sheekh Maxamuud and issues related to the ongoing process of state reconstruction, federalisation and conflict against Al Shabaab.

## Cartoons in the Somali media

Divisions of political authority across Somalia are mirrored in the fragmentary nature of the media environment. Apart from several large and externally-based Somali-language broadcasters (including the BBC's Somali Service and Voice of America on the radio, and diaspora-run stations such as Universal TV), the news-media market is characterised by multiple FM radio broadcasters usually focused in and around specific areas or cities, as well as newspapers which are primarily consumed in the specific urban areas where they are printed. As for online news – the primary (but not exclusive) vector by which Amin Arts' cartoons are disseminated – the market is highly fragmented with hundreds or even thousands of localised news websites competing for 'hits'.

In early 2015, as part of my PhD fieldwork into news media production and consumption across the Somali territories, I gathered questionnaire survey data from 325 university students at the University of Mogadishu, Puntland State University and Gollis University (located in the political capitals of Somalia, the Puntland State of Somalia, and the Republic of Somaliland, respectively). The Somali-language questionnaire was designed to gather basic data on young people's media habits and preferences, and this was supplemented by nine focus groups held in these universities which probed further students' perceptions of the Somali media's role, capacity and neutrality. When I asked the survey respondents which

Somali language news website they used most often I received 64 different answers. While there are clearly certain news websites which are more popular in these different areas amongst this particular generation, the sheer number of possible news sources reflects what some focus groups participants memorably described as '*hebel.com*': the perceived phenomenon where *hebel hebel* ('every so and so') has a personal 'news' website to propagate their views or generate revenue from advertising.

State control of media is limited in South-Central Somalia and state broadcasters (such as Somali National TV or Radio Mogadishu) have no monopoly over the airwaves to shape an uncontested political narrative (Chonka 2016). In the Republic of Somaliland (and to a lesser extent in Puntland) where political institutions are stronger, a greater level of media control exists, a feature of the political settlements reached in both areas (Stremlau 2013). Somalia is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist and media workers (particularly, but not exclusively, in the south) have been frequent targets of Al Shabaab attacks, politically or economically motivated violence related to payments for news coverage, and sporadic state violence or arrest (Stremlau *et al* 2015; Human Rights Watch 2016). Despite this, and due to limited alternative employment options and low technical barriers for entry into the profession, the number of young people working as trained (or merely self-described) journalists is ever increasing. For an extremely high-profile commentator such as Amin Amir however, a very real threat of violence is one of the reasons that he remains based outside of Somalia.

Although radio remains the primary mode of news media transmission across the country, levels of internet connectivity are increasing rapidly, particularly in urban areas and including the use of mobile internet technologies (more than three quarters of my student survey respondents stated that they used mobile internet for news). In the absence of libraries and state archives, the internet is becoming the primary repository of Somali media and cultural production as virtually all content (radio broadcasts, television programmes, print news) finds its way online to become accessible for wider local and global audiences (Isse-Salwe 2008; Kapteijns 2012, 23). In this online milieu the cartoons of Amin Amir are reproduced across the Somali regions through news sites and social media forums such as Facebook, itself an important conduit into news media. Given the range of regions and political contexts addressed by the cartoons, reproduction in various locations and forums is often highly selective: a cartoon critiquing this or that politician in this or that region/government will be picked up on by a local news broadcaster or commentator to make a specific political point. The fact that Amin Amir is generally seen to be critical of virtually all power-holders across Somalia serves to popularise his work and allows it to be employed by multiple actors with different positions or agendas.

Although visual political commentary or communication may be apparent in the various urban centres of a fragmented modern Somalia, considering the (varying but limited) role of state authorities it is unsurprising that commercial advertising is far more visible in everyday public life. Hargeysa, the Republic of Somaliland's capital, is an urban centre where visual political communication is particularly obvious, often in the form of monuments and murals commemorating the nationalist struggle against the Siyaad Bare dictatorship and the eventual emergence of the state structures of the *de facto* independent Republic. In

comparison, the internationally recognised Somali Federal Government (SFG) based in Muqdisho has much less capacity to communicate visually on the streets of the capital. Visual government communication is not entirely absent and political artwork sometimes appears in the political centre of the city: murals contrasting the chaos of past conflict with the benefits of contemporary peace (however fragile or however often punctuated by sporadic Al Shabaab violence) may be seen outside the Parliament complex, or posters at the important KM4 junction depict the role and benefits of taxation for the development of society and state services.

Amin Arts' cartoons may themselves be used in the performance of politics in Muqdisho. Pictured below, they have featured on the banners of a 'youth' demonstration (organised by the regional Benaadir administration) against Al Shabaab[2]. One of the cartoons used on the banners - depicting a would-be suicide bomber being dragged to the execution ground by the regional security forces - can be read primarily as a critique of the police and national security forces who were 'sleeping' as the Benaadir regional administration carried out their own security operations. Here we see how multiple meanings can be 'encoded' in and 'decoded' from the images (Hall 1980; Pillai 1992), as well as the different possibilities which exist for their reproduction and utilisation. Reflecting on why that image stood out to me as an observer I note that the whimsy of the cartoonish image jarred with the grim reality of the stakes and firing squad which are often publicised in action. Such executions are themselves highly political acts, choreographed by often beleaguered local state authorities as a demonstration of state power against those that contribute to instability in the city (whether government soldiers accused of killing civilians or Al Shabaab itself).

**Fig. 2**                                                           **Fig. 3**



(Images: Jowhar.com)

Examining political art or visual communication in contemporary urban Somalia it is important to recognise that tensions exist between certain doctrinal interpretations of Islam and what may be considered appropriate artistic expression in this Muslim society. Orthodox Sunni strands of *salafi* (or '*Wahhabi'* influenced) politico-religious thought play a role in public sphere, and injunctions against the recreation of images of humans may, in part, explain the relative infrequency of the visual depiction of people, epitomised elsewhere by Amin Amir's cartoons. I recall in Hargeysa, for instance, the common sight of paintings of people on the streets (for example, in posters or murals advertising NGO activities) which

had been literally defaced - presumably by passers-by with religiously-inspired iconoclastic intent. Whilst further research would be required to adequately conceptualise such acts in the wider context of visual culture, it is nonetheless important to note that the very form of the satirical cartoon itself cannot simply be taken for granted here as a 'standard' or universally accepted mode of civic agency, and may multiple contested meanings for different audiences.

Similarly, much can be read into the religious or 'cultural' iconography visible in the demonstration in Muqdisho by young people and political authorities referenced and pictured above: for example, the use of English and Somali in the banners (an appeal to multiple audiences), and the positioning at the speakers' table of what are considered quintessentially 'Somali' pastoral cultural paraphernalia (the traditional *haan* water container, here emblazoned with the national flag). Themes of nationalist and Islamic identity will be revisited below in the discursive analysis of a selection of Amin Amir's cartoons, and also in a discussion of what I refer to as the artist/cartoonist's generational identity.

The use of written colloquial Somali in Amin Amir's cartoons should be viewed in the context of wider cultural production and political contestation. Since state collapse in the early 1990s, Somali intellectuals have bemoaned the degradation of the Somali language, a process intimately linked with conflict and the destruction of unitary governance (Samatar 2009). Although the formalisation of the Somali orthography in 1972 was a notable (if contested) achievement of Siyaad Bare's military regime (Laitin 1977), the collapse of state institutions from 1991 had a huge impact on the role and development of the language. As mechanisms and institutions of *erey-bixin* (the process of vocabulary assignment) ceased to function, and along with massive disruptions to school systems, the written language was seen to be degraded, with foreign languages, notably Arabic and English, coming to play a greater role particularly within educational institutions (Cassanelli and Abdikadir 2008; Lindley 2008; Heritage Institute 2015). The absence of state or educational structures operating in written Somali has reduced ordinary people's exposure to the written language, while oral society continues to operate primarily in the various dialects of Somali. For many people the news media provides one of their only substantial points of contact with the written language. In processes of state (re)construction across Somalia the status of the written language takes on a certain political or nationalist salience, while the linguistic role of journalists or political commentators is frequently recognised by those individuals themselves, or donors or political authorities seeking to build their professional capacities[3]. The use of the vernacular - as is usually the case in Amin Amir's cartoons, where the discussants are often the 'ordinary' people who watch politics or conflict unfold, or are victims of it - is also relatively rare to see in written popular culture or news media[4].

**Amin Arts' constant critique: humour and discourse analysis**

Based on my research and professional experience as a consumer of Somali-language media across Somaliland, Puntland and south-central Somalia since 2009, I argue that the sample of cartoons I present below is representative of several important discursive tropes employed in his wider work[5]. These include critiques of external interventions in Somali politics, the role of venal politicians, exhortations against 'clan-ism'; and frequent appeals to a nostalgic register of pan-Somali nationalism. Wodak highlights some of the core principles of the

'heterogeneous school' of critical discourse analysis which include inter-disciplinarity; a problem orientated approach (i.e. a starting focus on identity or social change); an emphasis on textual data combined with ethnographic fieldwork in sites of text production and reception; the abductive process of constantly moving back and forth between data and theory; and persistent recognition of the importance of the historical context of the text under analysis (2004, 186). Critical discourse analysis treats language as a social practice in itself and emphasises the dialectical relationship which exists between a context and a 'discursive event' - i.e. the fact they mutually condition and are conditioned by each other. The following analyses of cartoons as 'texts' identify various discourses which are expressed in the Somali public sphere and the ways in which they structure and are structured by the 'practice' of conflict and state reconfiguration or reconstruction.

Amin Amir's cartoons consistently critique power holders across Somali politics and employ the 'visual language' of signs, conventions and rhetorical devices familiar in political cartoons the world over (Werner, 2003, 83). As with any satirical image, the discursive tool-kit required by the viewer for an understanding of its 'visual argument' (Birdsell & Groarke 1996, 1) includes recognition of its general purpose, and the shared beliefs, assumptions, conventions or practices which allow the image and the text to make sense in a particular environment (Werner 2003, 82). Caricature in Amin Amir's cartoons - the artistic rendering of a recognizable individual through the exaggeration of particular physical features - is less obvious or grotesque than in other examples, and it is through a more realist portraiture-rendering of individuals that audience recognition is ensured. Identification of particular types of character (the venal politician or the ordinary or 'poor' citizen) is achieved through the indexical signs of clothing, bodyweight, political emblems as well as text labels where the cartoonist deems them necessary. In presenting such characters the cartoons can also be seen to employ what Billig describes as the device of 'unlaughter' (2005, 192), the rhetorical use of the absence of laughter in a situation where it might otherwise be expected. The firing squad cartoon noted above is a good example of this meeting of a grim reality with the apparent humour of the medium. This device is often at work in the visual portrayal of similarly grotesque or violent scenes, particularly related to graphic bloodshed and the destruction of the 'ordinary' Somali population.

When discussing the cartoons with people in Somalia the most common reaction I noted was that of laughter on first sight of the image. Increasing attention in the popular geopolitics literature is being given to the role of humour in reflecting, challenging, redirecting or remaking power relations (Obadare 2009; Ridanpää 2009; Semati 2012; Dittmer 2013). An important distinction is made here with laughter defined as a physical response that 'is not always the response to a conscious reflective and controlled subject... at times laughter has no clear basis in humour – we may laugh and not know precisely why' (Macpherson, cited in Dodds and Kirby 2013, 51). As a subjective individual consumer of Amin Amir's cartoons I find some to be *laugh-out-loud* funny – particularly those that ridicule power holders with ingenious and absurd visual devices like the figurative political football match, or a 'federalist' political vehicle trying to go four directions at once. Others, which directly portray visceral human suffering are, for me, more difficult to laugh at – they are not 'funny'. I fear that to laugh at them would imply a disrespect to those whose plight is depicted. The fact that people, in my experience, have laughed at all these different 'types' of

cartoon speaks to the above distinction as well as the amorphous socialised orientations towards humour which are so difficult to define, particularly in a cross-cultural context.

I speculate, however, that responses of laughter have something to do with the novelty of the cartoon form in the context of political commentary in Somalia. The discussion above has briefly introduced the political-religious context of visual communication and it is the distinctiveness of Amin Amir's voice (or portraiture) that makes him such a visible part of the wider media environment, capable of deconstructing and ridiculing countless figures. Laughter may be one response to the unique positioning of this commentator and may reflect tensions around the parameters of culturally acceptable commentary or art which are manifest in the Somali public sphere. Although there are difficulties inherent in gauging the level of applicability of this assertion across different local audiences, it nonetheless highlights again the importance of sensitivity to the cultural context of particular forms of commentary (like the cartoon) whose meanings may take different forms for audiences in different places.

### *Discursive tropes: foreign intervention and the 'venal politician'*

Amin Amir's cartoons frequently address a set of specific political themes, often combining them to present an overview of the problems he sees facing Somalia, or, occasionally, to depict a positive development or event. A primary target of the work – and a familiar focus of ire in political cartooning elsewhere – is the venal politician. This (invariably male) character, sells out the Somali nation to other corrupt power holders or external actors with malign intent. The cartoon featured at the beginning of the paper (Figure 1) is a characteristic example of the visual rhetoric employed by the cartoonist in his presentation of a grand theme of modern Somali political discourse: the division of Somalia by neighbouring powers and the complicity of local political actors. In the image the cartographically defined shape of the Somali state (i.e. the borders recognised by the 'international community') coloured in the sky-blue of the Somali flag, is being shattered by the jackboot of Ethiopian power, on top of which rides the diminutive 'Somali politician' seated in his all important 'chair' of political status. Whilst it is the visual argument that does most of the work here – the fragility of Somalia embodied in the shattered glass metaphor, alongside the blunt impact of a (literally) big regional power – the speech bubbles and the identity of the speakers are not insignificant. There is a lament at the intentions of contemporary politicians and a call to the divine for aid for those who are 'patriots'.

The dialogue here comes from the two older gentlemen pictured on the left, one dressed in a *macawis* (the male sarong-like garment worn often across Somalia, and considered a 'traditional' or typically 'Somali' item of clothing - although they are often imported) and holding a walking stick. The other is dressed in a more 'western' fashion - perhaps hinting at the diaspora or different styles of male dress in Somalia. These two particular characters, offering sage comment over what they observe, are a common feature of the cartoons and are presented to demonstrate the wisdom of age and experience over a changed Somali political or social reality. Standing always in witness over proceedings (and never part of the action themselves), the two gentlemen could almost be seen as avatars of the cartoonist: himself somewhat detached from events and yet engaged in them, himself of an older generation (Amin Amir is in his mid 50s).

**Fig. 4**
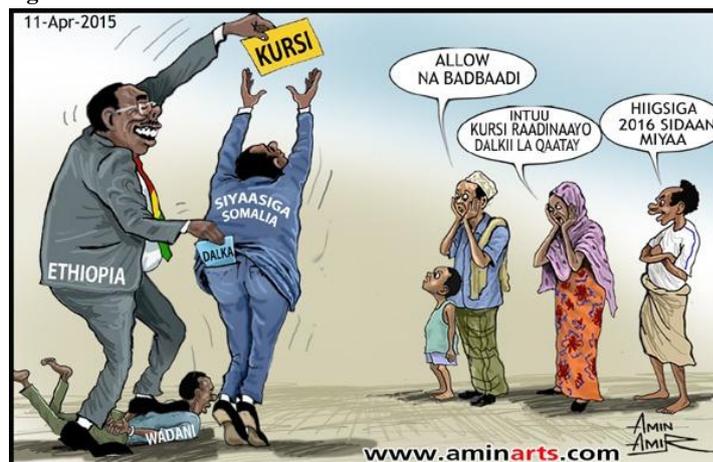


- *Ethiopia stealing 'the country' from back pocket of Somali politician reaching for 'seat' (while standing on a 'patriot')*
- Man in hat: 'Allah save us!'
- Woman: 'As he searches for the seat the country is taken'
- Man on right: 'Is that what Vision 2016 is like?'                    (Amin Amir, April 2015)

Figure 4's cartoon again addresses the theme of foreign intervention, this time drawing comment (and explicit explanation) from ordinary citizens who witness the interaction between the suit-wearing politician and the downtrodden (and barefoot) 'patriot'. On this occasion, one of the observers makes specific reference to political developments in Somalia by indicating his perception of 'Vision 2016', the Muqdisho-based Federal Government's internationally-backed transitional framework for constitutional review and elections as the term of current President Xasan Sheekh Maxamuud expires. The cartoon reflects popular frustrations with the political machinations of international powers to divide Somalia in the carving of Federal states out of the patchwork of regional power holders, with Ethiopia playing a primary role in this allegedly nefarious conspiracy. Elsewhere this is a prevalent theme particularly in media and political comment in Muqdisho[6] and frequent reference is made to historical enmity with the Ethiopian *'Xabashi'* neighbour and its role following the collapse of the Somali state, notably, during its full-scale invasion in 2006 to oust the *Midowga Maxaakiimta Islaamiga* (The Union of Islamic Courts). This intervention paved the way for the installation of a transitional and then internationally recognised federal government more palatable to the 'international community' and set in motion the dynamics which would empower Al Shabaab as a significant political actor and insurgent force (Hansen 2013).

The emergence of the northern breakaway or semi-autonomous states of Somaliland and Puntland is frequently discussed in southern-Somali political commentary in terms of their status as alleged proxies of Ethiopia, given this neighbouring state's historical relationship with movements fighting the Siyaad Bare dictatorship. Interestingly, whilst Amin Amir's cartoons often focus on the role of Ethiopia (and Kenya) with regard to the southern or central regions of Somalia (the emergent Jubaland State, The South West State and the Galmudug region, all at various stages of institutional formation), there are few portrayals of Somaliland as an Ethiopian 'proxy', perhaps with the view to avoid alienating audiences in

the North West, or as indicative of the artist's conception of polity as a distinctly separate political space.

**Fig. 5**



AMSIOM solider (standing over bodies of the 'poor population': 'So, how about our efforts for peace in Somalia?'        (Amin Amir, August 2015)

Whereas Ethiopian influence in Somalia is usually depicted in the form of political conspiracy, other contingents of the African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM) are often critiqued for the direct impact on the civilian population. Despite its labelling as a 'peace-support' mission, the AMISOM mandate extends to direct military engagement against Al Shabaab and its contingents are involved alongside SFG forces in the capture of territory and counter-insurgency operations. The cartoon above (Figure 5) was produced in response to the alleged killing of civilians in Merka by Ugandan forces on patrol in the town[7]. The spilling of the blood of the figurative body politic of Somalia is a common theme of the cartoons and often takes the graphic form of the population literally ground between or pulled apart by the various political or military powers.

**Fig.6.**



(Amin Amir, September 2014)

There is often a gendered element to this embodiment of the nation, exemplified in Figure 6 where the woman dressed in the blue and white of the Somali flag (also evocative of the young anti-colonial martyr Xaawo Taako) is dragged away by AMISOM, while the Somali press remains restrained from reporting. Again, this image refers to a specific event or period: throughout 2014 alleged sexual violence perpetrated by AMISOM and Government

Forces was very much in the media and controversy followed the imprisonment of journalists accused of spreading 'false' news[8]. At the same time, there are wider visual arguments that could be read into this image regarding its gendered nationalist rhetoric and the 'rape' of Somalia by foreigners.

The depiction of the Ugandan AMISOM troops typically emphasises racialized differences in appearance (in terms of skin tone, facial features), and whilst, on one hand, this can be interpreted simply as the cartoonist's device for audience character recognition, it does also hint at a perceived and expressed distinction between Somali and non-Somali (or 'African') subjects. Tensions between 'African' and 'Islamic' or 'Arab' components of 'Somali' identity is a complicated subject, particularly when one considers the relevance of tropes of relative religious, ethnic, or linguistic homogeneity in Somali popular culture, alongside realities of ethnic and linguistic diversity found across the Somali Horn. The point ventured here is simply that this particular cartoonist employs a visual style in his presentation of the Somali population which distinguishes it (ethnically) from those characters drawn as foreigners.

### Discursive tropes: clan and 'clanism'

**Fig. 7**    **Fig. 8**



**Figure 7:** *'Somalia' chained to the fire and destruction of 'clan', held back from obtaining the prize of nationhood.*
(Amin Amir, August 2014)

**Figure 8:**
- Reporter: 'Mr Attorney General, if it is the case that many people have stolen government property, then why is it just this man who has been arrested?'
- Attorney General: 'This man's clan isn't big so I know I can try out my power on him'                    (Amin Amir, December 2014)

Subtle discourses of ethnicity also overlap with the identification by the cartoonist of 'clan' or, more specifically, 'clanism' (*qabiil/qabyaalad)* as an influential factor in the political situation of Somalia. This is highlighted by the two images translated above. That Somalis are divided through a genealogical system of patrilineal descent (*abtirso* – literally to count one's forefathers), and that this 'construct' (Kapteijns 2012, 11) of collective imagination is a fundamental feature of social organisation, is a tenet of seminal works in the field of Somali studies, many of which date back to colonial-era anthropology (Lewis 1994). To recognise the continued salience of clan constructs in Somali politics (or in popular perceptions of politics) does not equate to an endorsement of a primordialist conception of clan as the

monolithic and timeless determinant of all power and social relations in the Somali context, or a reductionist approach which interprets all conflict through the lens of clan competition. Debates in the literature, particularly post state-collapse, have highlighted the shortcomings of such narratives while emphasising the fluidity of clan-identification and the diversity of material determinants of political change or contestation across the Somali territories (Samatar 1992, 2011; Besteman 1998; Luling 2006; Barnes 2006).

Figure 7 represents a broad conception of a (literally) monolithic malaise of 'clan' (*qabiil*) and situates the problem in a nationalist context where the prize of unity (embodied in the flag) remains unobtainable due to the shackles of a destructive past. This broad-brush rendering of the spectre of clan politics is frequently reproduced online and in print. For example, its use for the front cover of Maxamed Cismaan Xaashi's book *Aafada Qabyaaladda* ['The catastrophe of clanism'], published in Hargeysa in 2014, indicates the image's blunt resonance across the Somali territories, as well as the ubiquity of Amin Amir's work in the wider Somali public sphere. It is noteworthy that this image uses the word *qabiil* (clan) rather than *qabyaalad* (clanism), as political commentators or columnists often distinguish between the two: clan or tribe as a natural phenomenon and ordained by Allah so that the peoples of the world might know each other (Xaashi 2014, 14, quoting the Qu'ran, Surat Al-Ĥujurāt), distinct from 'clanism', the divisive prejudice often manipulated by outsiders (e.g. the European colonialists) to divide the Somali *Ummah.* Indeed, Amir himself has made this distinction when referring to his work (interview with Universal TV, 2011) and thus this image can be read in terms of the individual who is chained to his own *qabiil* even as he strives for nationalism, and it is this general predicament which can be conceived of as *qabyaalad.*

Figure 8 paints a more detailed picture of the cartoonist's perception of clan and power politics on the ground in Muqdisho. Since 2012 and the formation of the Somali Federal Government, processes of state reconstruction have involved the reclaiming of government property from those groups or individuals who had been occupying it, often since periods of chaos in the city after 1991, and/or through the largely stateless (if not entirely anarchic) development of the city in the following decades. As the state struggles to demonstrate capacity there is frequent debate in the public sphere around which groups in society it is able or willing to act against. The cartoon here portrays the Attorney General – legal representative of the state, but pictured with pistol in hand – 'trying out' his power against an individual whose clan is 'not many' (in number). Returning to the theme of ethnicity or race, the cartoonist may be depicting as his victim of state authority an individual from the so-called Bantu/Jareer ethnic group(s). Part of the *Beesha Shanaad*, or 'fifth clan', this (internally diverse) group is usually considered to be outside of the main 'Somali' lineage

construct and the various groups which fall under this label are believed to descend either from 'indigenous' ethnic communities which pre-date 'Somali' expansion or from slave populations brought from south eastern Africa during the 19th Century (Eno, Eno & Van Lehman 2010; Hill 2010).

The designation of 'minority' status (i.e. those diverse and multilingual groups which fall into the 0.5 of the 4.5 power equation) is problematic not only for the fact that accurate census data regarding population sizes is non-existent, but also in the terminology (in Somali) around these issues. The fact that the term 'minority' does not translate easily or clearly into the Somali public sphere of political commentary (I have seen the English term transliterated into 'maynoorati' or translated as 'beelaha laga tira badan yahay' or 'the communities that are less [than others], or outnumbered'[9]) is indicative of the difficulties of defining what this phrase actually means in different contexts in Somalia. For example, is it conceived of as including other coastal populations such as the Benadiri groups believed to descend from Arab settlers, or those speaking Bajuni Swahili dialects on the southern-most coastline? What of the Digil and Mirifle, whose lineage group is considered to be one of the 4 major Somali clan families but is characterised by their use of the *Maay* language or 'dialect'[10], and predominantly agro-pastoral livelihoods, in contrast to the perceived pastoral heritage of the other 3 'noble' *samaale* clan families of the Darood, Dir and Hawiye? [11]

Although this discussion of the lexicon of the debate raises more questions than it answers, it is necessary to highlight these complexities of the 'minorities' question as they are important for an understanding of the discursive grounding of the cartoon analysed above. Whilst the image hints at the ethnic dimension of clan or 'minority' politics in Muqdisho, it simultaneously obscures the specific identity of the victim through its use of generalising language - someone who's 'clan is not many'. This device – whether consciously conceived of as such by the artist or not – locates the individual in the wider context of *qabiil* or *qaybyaalad* politics which are discussed across Somalia. This constitutes a conversation about the relationship between clan and national identity/ies (epitomised in the other '*qabiil*' cartoon), while also referencing the status of particular 'minority' groups in the Muqdisho context. Informants in Muqdisho noted to me that the perception of Amin Amir as being from the Reer Benadiri – a label which includes several 'minority' groups and long-time inhabitants of the southern coastal cities, believed to trace descent from Arab traders – contributed to his reputation as a 'neutral' commentator on politics[12]. One informant, who self-identified into this group himself, described the way in which these communities were so marginalised in politics that they were perceived not to have such a stake in the dynamics of elite level power sharing and contestation.

While this impression of neutrality in the political game may be a popular sentiment (derived not just from the cartoonist's perceived identity but also his constant critique of all manner of different political figures), it does not mitigate the controversy caused by the cartoons. Another informant told me that he was a close relative of Amir, but that he kept this a 'secret' for fear of retaliation against him by way of family association[13]. Amir's work generates threats and insults on a regular basis, as he has himself stated on various occasions[14]. Violence against journalists (whether perpetrated by the state, Al Shabaab or other interests) has been prevalent across many parts of Somalia and is a theme noted above in the depiction of the gagged reporter[15]. The cartoonist's physical detachment from this risk

is an important aspect of his work and perhaps gives a certain freedom of expression and critique which would not be available to a similarly prominent commentator in Somalia itself.

*Discursive tropes: cultural/religious imports and state contestation*

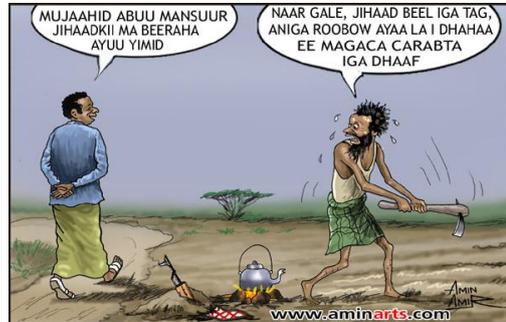**Fig. 9**                                                   **Fig. 10**



**Figure 9**
- Man on left: 'Who are this lot? They all look the same.'
- Man on right: 'They're members looking for positions, flooding into the Somali presidency'. (Amin Amir, November 2013)

**Figure 10**
- Passerby: 'Mujaahid Abuu Mansuur, has the Jihad turned into farming?'
- Mukhtar Roobow (Al Shabaab Commander): 'Go to hell, get the lost Jihad away from me. I'm called Roobow, don't use the Arab name'. (Amin Amir, undated)

Considering Amin Amir's position as a cultural producer and political commentator located *outside* of Somalia, it is instructive to explore his contributions to local debates (particularly in Muqdisho) surrounding cultural or religious 'imports' and the role of 'returnees' in state reconstruction. His interventions, I argue, highlight the complexity of these local discussions relating to the cultural and religio-political identity of a reconfigured Somali state, as well as being indicative of the inherent transnationalism of the public sphere in which they take place.

In Figure 9 our two wizened commentators are depicted watching a flow of political cadres arrive in Somalia - members of the so-called Dam al Jadiid ('New Blood') clique that is popularly understood to have formed the backbone of President Xasan Sheekh Maxamuud's government. Itself a splinter of the political Islamist Al Islaax movement and ideologically orientated towards the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's brand of activism in pursuit of state power, this faction has been characterised by strong ties with certain Gulf States, notably Qatar. The cartoon references the disembarking cadres who have all graduated from Egyptian or Sudanese universities. The importance of alumni networks (particularly from Sudanese institutions) has been noted in relation to their role within the establishment and development of different phases of the Islamic Courts' Union experiment in Muqdisho and beyond (Sharif 2015), and my experiences in Muqdisho confirm the continued prevalence of elites in various Ministries and security services with shared backgrounds in such Islamic educational institutions.

The Dam al Jadiid cadres are presented here as (literally) faceless foreign imports, arriving to a red carpet reception from various Islamic institutions in Africa, the Middle East or Asia. They all dress the same way, and the short trousers cut above the ankle, make reference to their *salafi* Islamist political-ideological orientations. The clique is continually

named by the cartoonist in his critique of President Xasan Sheekh, and is usually portrayed as 'pulling the strings' of his government. The group may be embodied either by these same faceless operators, or in the form of specific political elites and the money men who buy off dissent from Parliament. The cartoonist also attacks what is often popularly perceived of as endemic corruption and vote-buying in the Parliament itself. A popular joke in Muqdisho likens MPs to mobiles phones: they need money put in them for them to work[16].

These cartoons speak to a wider discourse in local political commentary surrounding not only on the role of money in the business of government, but also the identities of those who are perceived to have captured re-emerging state structures. The 'return' of diaspora Somalis to Muqdisho and their role in government is an aspect of this discourse, though the phenomenon itself is multi-faceted and discussed in different ways in the public sphere. Often there is clear recognition of the value of the skills and expertise brought by 'returnees' to the ministries or organisations which are attempting to rebuild themselves, whilst at the same time unease is expressed as to the actual effectiveness of schemes bringing back 'professionals' into high level positions, at the expense of a local work pool of talent. This dovetails with popular accounts of how such systems are open to discrimination and nepotism[17].

Some arguments focus on the moral or 'cultural' impact of the diaspora on conduct and customs which are defined as local, appropriate, Islamic and 'Somali'. It is important to note that such critiques of 'foreign values' do not only come from Al Shabaab - which targets anyone associated with the Federal Governments and threatens those who engage in 'immoral' behaviour[18] - but are also found in the wider online or print media. Such discourses are indicative of a wider tension that exists between those who remained in Muqdisho through the bad years and those who may be perceived as swooping in from the diaspora to reap the benefits of improved security, favourable business conditions and other fruits of state reconstruction[19]. Perhaps given his location in the diaspora, it is unsurprising that Amin Amir's cartoons do not often wade explicitly into this debate. However, the portrayal of Dam al Jadiid as an external influence and the faction's prevalence in his wider political critique is representative of a certain angle of the 'foreign influences' discourse – one which hints at the alien nature of certain political or religious trends. One example could be the development of *salafi* orientated political-Islamist networks, or the *takfiri-jihadi* militancy epitomised by Al Shabaab, and interpreted by many commentators as a foreign import alien to 'Somali' Islam.

Amin Amir takes on the discussion of the role of Islam in political society through a persistent critique of the brutality of Al Shabaab and their preaching of a 'false' Islam. Figure 10 satirises the apparent disappearance from the scene of Mukhtar Roobow, a formerly prominent Al Shabaab commander. Likely due to internal tensions within in the organisation, Roobow is currently believed to have retreated to the Bakool region and territory of his clansmen (Bryden 2014, 5). In this cartoon Amir has him as a farmer having both relinquished his Kalashnikov and Arab name – a pointed reference to what the cartoonist may be portraying as externally orientated or inspired Jihad. As noted, the references to doctrinal religious debate or contestation are largely limited to a critique of Al Shabaab, and Islam often becomes a trope used in the presentation of the good Somali (Muslim) patriot, with an appeal (common to many polemics on unity) to religion and nationalism in the fight against 'clanism' or regional factionalism. Space for religious discussion has undoubtedly been

constricted in the Muqdisho context[20] for several reasons including trends towards increased doctrinal orthodoxy; concerns surrounding public morality; the influence of Islamist political or judicial governance networks in the post state collapse period; the 'sacralisation' (Vindino, Pantucci & Kohlmann 2010) of the current phase of conflict between Al Shabaab, the SFG and its external backers; and the persistent threat of violence against those seen to criticise that *takfiri-jihadi* movement. Whilst the cartoonist may be removed from the latter threat by virtue of geographical distance, the wider socio-religious context of Muqdisho (changed as it is since the last time he was a resident there) no doubt impacts on the tone and emphasis of his work. This detachment can be viewed through the cartoonist's presentation of daily life in the city – one example is that he never depicts women wearing the face-covering *Niqab,* now so common in the city. This may also be indicative of his generational identity as well as location in the diaspora, and this is where the analysis now turns.

**The digital diaspora and civic agency in a transnational public sphere**

This final section of the paper examines presentations of this particular generational identity and the cartoonist's geographical detachment from the environment on which he comments. This account reflects on the power dynamics inherent in these media production processes and considers the implications of the technological modes of dissemination of these texts for the argument advanced at the outset: namely, that the cartoonist epitomises the type of transnational and multidirectional digital engagement typical of Somali media, itself collapsing simple distinctions between 'local' and 'diasporic' in their productions of discourse on nationhood and political identity in the Somali Horn of Africa.

In an interview given to Universal TV (a popular private Somali-language TV channel, based in London) in 2012, Amin Amir discussed his personal history, motivations for work, and feelings about the political situation in Somalia[21]. It is clear that the female interviewer and interviewee (Amir) are of the same generation and had known each other working in the creative arts in Muqdisho prior to the collapse of the Somali state. The interviewer notes the changes in society back in Somalia (for example, in terms of dress) and in reply Amir acknowledges that the place he left is different to the country of today. Cultural or historical nostalgia permeates paintings by Amir which are displayed in the studio. He comments on their themes: the image of the young girl cradling the goat and the importance of livestock in 'our culture', 'traditional' dances and celebrations, images of boys learning the Holy Qu'ran using traditional *loox* writing boards, and the beauty of historical sites in Mogadishu – such as the Cabdulaziz Mosque in Muqdisho, damaged during the conflict. Although the pair discuss politics at length, none of his cartoons are displayed (presumably to avoid potential controversies or allegations of bias) and the focus is on these paintings of a Somali cultural or historical idyll.

Towards the end of the interview a film is shown which, with modern Somali pop music playing in the background, depicts the cartoonist/artist in his home in Canada and shows him mentoring a teenage boy (of Somali descent) through his art. The video portrays the young man making his way through the streets of the North American city to Amir's home and studio; contrasting the troubled youth's apparent alienation, with the warmth of Amir's family home and the satisfying endeavour of his artistic vocation. The home in

question is filled with the type of paintings featured in the interview, primarily women and children in a past Somali setting. Few *hijab* or *niqab* are visible here; rather women are depicted in the 'traditional' attire of the female *guntino* (Akou 2011). An image of domestic harmony is presented as the young man arrives to watch and learn from the artist at his easel. He is then pictured going home – past the distractions of the fireworks and liquor stores of downtown – and taking up the sketch pad himself, presumably inspired by his meeting with the artist.

The focus then returns to Amir's home (now with a different background pop song calling on society to be charitable, '*zakada bixiyo'*) and concludes with a shot of the digital image that he has been working on: a depiction of Ethiopian forces killing civilians in Somalia; a woman exposed on the ground, impaled by an Ethiopian flagpole. Whilst the juxtaposition of this bloody scene and the domestic tranquillity of the artist's home is unsettlingly stark, this contrast could be read as an attempt to override apparent contradiction by presenting the artist as a detached but engaged observer. Here he is an exemplar of cultural guardianship (in a particular historical imagination of pre-state collapse Somalia), and an activist-commentator on the abuses against the body-politic of modern Somalia perpetrated by external forces. If a generational identity of the artist is highlighted in the work displayed in this piece of self-promotion (the visual references to Somalia before the destruction of the state, and the emphasis on the interplay between Islam and 'traditional' Somali cultural practices) then his position in the diaspora and the legitimacy of his digital voice towards the homeland is also a theme pushed in the metaphor of tutelage and the power of art as solace.

This video emphasises civic agency in a transnational public sphere in which there is a lot more going on than 'resistance' - however richly that may be conceptualised. This cultural producer operates and exerts power within a specific transnational media context, itself conditioned by the particular political circumstances of Somalia. The previous section alluded to debates in the public sphere in Somalia over the different roles of diaspora returnees in the reconstruction of the Somali state, and here I emphasise the position of the transnational Somali public sphere in empowering media and cultural producers to speak to an audience of Somalis across the various political boundaries. Universal TV – on which this interview was broadcast – is in itself a good example of this phenomenon and is arguably the most popular television channel across political territories including Somaliland, Puntland and urban south central Somalia.

This observation corresponds to my dual conceptualisation of the Somali public sphere, whereby media flows can be categorised in terms of their local orientation around specific political contexts, and broader networks that engage with a global Somali-speaking population. In a sense, Amin Amir's work straddles both: the absence of print or online newspapers with a single nation-state focus creates an environment where the images uploaded on the cartoonist's personal site are disseminated via *copy-and-paste* across the myriad news sites, forums, social media spaces and print newspapers across Somalia. At the same time, the selective reproduction of the images often corresponds closely with the location of particular media content broadcasters and their political orientations. For example, it is rare in a Hargeysa newspaper or online news site to see an Amin Arts cartoon which addresses specific political developments in Muqdisho. Indeed, news media in Somaliland

only very selectively reports events in that 'other country', such as news linked to the relations between the governments in Hargeysa and Muqdisho, or those stories which illustrate the continued violence which continues to characterise the South.

Covering this range of political contexts and providing content of interest to numerous audiences is not only indicative of the cartoonist's perspective from the diaspora over the wider state of 'Somali' politics, but may also represent a shrewd commercial strategy in a challenging media marketplace where notions of intellectual copyright are rarely respected. With media revenue being largely generated from advertisements and web-traffic, the development of an Amin Amir 'brand' is important and the cartoonist has in the past produced (apparently) commissioned images promoting certain companies. This is indicative of the capacity of this unique producer to influence popular conceptualisations of state politics and political identity across the Somali territories, and should be viewed in the context of the wider development of private, diaspora-based media networks.

**Conclusion**

Critically analysing the popular geopolitics and discursive influence of Amin Amir's cartoons requires a careful contextualisation of Somalia's distinct public sphere environment. The transnational relationship between the artist and his audience is analogous with other transnational flows of media, politics and finance which characterise so many aspects of life across the Somali territories. The prevalence of media based in the diaspora and beamed into Somalia has been explored above, but it is also important to recall the role of diasporic communities on political change across the different political contexts (Verjee *et al* 2015, 40), and the importance of remittance finance to both national and household economies (Ahmed 2000). The point here is not that all consumers across Somalia are all equally 'globalised' in their cultural or material orientations - indeed, tensions regarding the role or influence of a specifically defined diaspora community have been highlighted in the paper. It is rather that the particular circuits of political commentary, news and artistic expression most prevalent across Somalia are characterised by intrinsic elements of trans-nationalism which collapse the distinctions between 'diasporic' and 'local' media identified and critiqued in other contexts of African 'cultural production.'

The generational and geographic detachment of Amir, combined with self-presentation emphasising his critical neutrality, enables him to provide specific pointed commentary as well as grand ethno-nationalist statements which are acceptable to a wide range of audiences, often receiving the material through the selections and mediations of an anarchic digital news marketplace. The scope of the cartoonist's critical gaze across the Somali territories serves to address a *single* broadly ethnically-defined Somali 'imagined community' (to borrow Anderson's conception of the emotive basis of nationalism), which is divided by *multiple* political boundaries and regimes of authority. Whether these exist in the form of sovereign states or the sub-state administrations of what is still officially considered to be 'Somalia', is not of great importance to this conceptualisation of *Soomaalinimo* incorporating, as it does, the lingering echo of the 'Greater Somalia' ideal (Barnes 2007), and a fluidity of transnational identification.

This is not to suggest that the various political boundaries are, in themselves, unimportant: a self-identifying 'Somalilander' in Hargeysa will quickly clarify the discursive fixity of that particular political identity. However, Amir's form of digital cultural production (freed from some of the technical or political constraints of television or radio) employs physical or temporal detachment from the context to speak to Somali audiences across this political spectrum. That people actually listen is indicative both of the ways in which identity is constructed across and through ethnic and political lines in the Somali Horn, and of the influence of novel forms of transnational political commentary and communication on a diverse but self-defined and discursively reproduced 'Somali' audience.

Instead of conceiving of these cartoons primarily as a product of the diaspora (and analysing them in terms of the cyber-subjectivity of those external populations) this paper has conceptualised them as *part of* the media environment on the ground in the Somali Horn of Africa that is itself permeated by cross-cutting transnational dynamics of information and identity creation. In approaching the material from this angle, the paper has attempted to introduce the interplay of the local, regional and global in the geopolitical vocabularies of state reconfiguration or contestation across Somalia, and collapse (or at least reconsider) the theoretical distinctions often made between these loci of production. The complexity of this particular cartoonist's potential 'civic agency' within the public sphere cannot be adequately conceptualised primarily in terms of the 'resistance' of the 'ordinary' against the 'official'. Whilst this is in no small part related to the particular conditions of political fragmentation in the Somali Horn, this framing of multifaceted public sphere agency may have relevance for other zones of conflict and contestation in Africa where transnational media technologies play a role in shaping political imaginations and ideological identifications towards or against the nation-state.

# Notes

1   I am grateful to the University of Mogadishu, Puntland State University (Garoowe, Puntland State of Somalia) and Gollis University (Hargeysa, Republic of Somaliland) for their welcome and assistance to me during my periods of fieldwork in those cities. I would like to thank my friend and former colleague Mohamed Yerow in Muqdisho for his proof-reading of my translations, and journalist Liban Ahmad for his comments on a draft version of the paper. I am also grateful to Ismail D. Osman for facilitating my contact with the cartoonist, and I'd like to thank Amin Amir himself for his permission for his cartoons to be reproduced in this paper. Naturally, I take responsibility for any errors contained within.

2   News story originally published on Jowhar.com: *'Dhalinyarada 17-ka degmo ee gobolka Banaadir oo isu soo baxay uga soo horjeedaan Al Shabaab ka dhigay Muqdisho'* [Youth of 17 districts of Benaadir region demonstrate together against Al Shabaab in Muqdisho] webpage no longer active, pictures in writer's archive. August 26, 2014.

3   Interview with Radio Ergo staff (May 13, 2015, Nairobi). This Somali language broadcaster had recently undertaken language training for journalists across Somalia with support from international donors.

4   This is not to suggest that written print culture (e.g. book writing) does not exist, and the holding of book fairs in Hargeysa and Muqdisho demonstrates a desire to promote written Somali cultural production. These events hold political significance both in regard to processes of state-building and the role of literacy and 'cultural' expression for societal development (see Heritage Institute report: http://www.heritageinstitute.org/successful-book-fair-highlights-need-for-libraries-in-somalia/). It remains fair to say, however, that the novel is not a prevalent form of cultural expression consumed widely by people across the Somali territories.

5   Between 2009-11, I was employed by the University of Hargeysa and between 2012-14, I worked as an interpreter for an international humanitarian organisation, primarily in south-central Somalia and Puntland.

6   See Cabdullahi Ibrahim Cumar's June 8, 2014 editorial: *'Taageerayaasha SNM iyo SSDF oo fuliyey balanqaadyadii ay la galeen Xabashida'* [SNM and SSDF supporters fulfil the promise they made with the Xabashi] Keyd Media: http://www.keydmedia.net/editorial/article/taageerayaasha_snm_ssdf_oo_fuliyey_balanqaadyadii_ay_la_galeen_xabashida/

7   Human Rights Watch statement August 18, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/08/13/somalia-au-forces-linked-wedding-killings)

8   Radio Muqdisho, February 5, 2013, *'Maxkamada G/Banaadir oo xukun ku riday Wariye Koronto iyo haweeney loo haystay faafinta kufsi been abuur ah'* ['Benaadir Regional Court passes sentence on Journalist Koronto and woman held for spreading false news about rape'] http://radiomuqdisho.net/archives/maxkamada-gbanaadir-oo-xukun-ku-riday-wariye-koronto-iyo-haweeney-loo-haystay-faafinta-kufsi-been-abuur-ah/

9   See Foore Newspaper, Hargeysa, April 30, 2015, *'Qurbe joogta reer Awdal waxay 90% aaminsan yihiin Somalilandnimada: Madaxweyne Ku-Xigeenka'* [Vice President: 90% of the Awdal diaspora communities believe in Somaliland], the transliterated term 'maynoorati' here refers to those who are not valued or given attention and are in the numerical minority in regards to their political stance (i.e. part one community's attitude toward Somaliland's nationalism). The other example is taken from the Heritage Institute's December 2014 report on attitudes towards democracy in the city and the term in Somali: The English and Somali versions of the report are available from: http://www.heritageinstitute.org/attitudes-towards-democracy-mogadishu/

10  The northern-centred *Maxaa Tiri* dialects were institutionalised as 'standard' Somali in the creation and promotion of Somali orthography in the 1970s.

11  The list could go on: one could consider those groups that are geographically detached from wider kinship networks and find themselves in minority in a given territory, and also the caste-type occupational groups often referred to under the collective label of Gabooye, who may be affiliated or bonded to dominant pastoral clan groups.

12  Interview, businessman, Muqdisho, February 8, 2015.

13  Interview, anonymous, Muqdisho, January 31, 2015.

14  BBC Somali.com, May 7, 2010, *'Amin Amir wuxuu BBC ku yiri 'Facebook anigu ma lihi''* [Amin Amir tells the BBC that he does not have a Facebook page]. This has since changed and the cartoonist now links to his Facebook 'opinions' page via his website Aminarts.com.

15  See National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) Annual Report 2014 'Press Freedom at Risk in Somalia: Murder, Imprisonment, Censorship and Bad Laws': http://www.ifex.org/somalia/2015/01/13/somalia_annualreport_2014.pdf

16  Interview, former senior INGO local staff member, Muqdisho, January 31,2015

17 See Xog Doon newspaper, Muqdisho, April 13, 2015, *'Maxaa laga dheefey mashruuca QUEST?'* [What was gained from the Quest program?], a critique of UNDP and IOM program to bring 'Qualified, Expatriate, Somali, Technical Support' to Government institutions.

18 Somalimemo.net, February 28, 2015, *'Sheikh Cali Dheere: Duulaanka dhanka akhlaaqda ah ayay gaaladu kusoo qaaday shacabka magaalada Muqdisho'* [Sheikh Cali Dheere [HMS *Spokesman*]: 'The infidels are leading an assault on good conduct against the population of Muqdisho]
http://somalimemo.net/articles/2270/ShCali-Dheere-Duulaanka-Dhanka-Akhlaaqda-ah-Ayay-Gaaladu-Kusooo-Qaaday-Shacabka-Magaalada-Muqdisho

19 Keyd Media, September 26, 2014, *'Wasiirada DFS oo curyaaminaaya mustaqbalka hablaha soo kacaya – dhaqan xumo!'* [SFG Ministers compromise the future of girls – bad behaviour!] Article refers to Ministers who have come from the diaspora and have young female aides.
http://www.keydmedia.net/news/article/wasiiradda_dfs_oo_curyaaminaaya_mustaqbalka_hablaha_soo_kacaaya_-_dhaq

20 For a (rare) critique in the Somali public sphere of doctrinal orthodoxy or the restrictions of religious debate see Bashir M. Xersi's October 10, 2014 opinion piece *'Wadaaddadii Soomaaliyeed ma UMAL ayaa ka haray?!'* [Of the Somali clerics is it only Umal who is left?!]
https://bilediraac.wordpress.com/2014/10/03/wadaaddadii-soomaaliyeed-ma-umal-ayaa-ka-haray/

21 Universal TV, Interview with Amin Amir, uploaded onto UTV Youtube channel June 19, 2012:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIAMIDFZpeY, the version of this interview uploaded on Saafi Films' Youtube channel (October 30, 2014) includes the footage of Amin Amir at home:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNR_b9n7ubQ

## References

Abu-Lughod, L. 1989. "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18: 267–306.

Ahmed, I. I. 2000. "Remittances and Their Economic Impact in Post-war Somaliland." *Disasters* 24 (4): 380–389.

Akou, H. M. 2011. *The Politics of Dress in Somali Culture.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Anderson, B. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso Books.

Barnes, D. C. 2006. "U Dhashay—Ku Dhashay: Genealogical and Territorial Discourse in Somali History." *Social Identities* 12 (4): 487–498.

Barnes, C. 2007. "The Somali Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis and the Greater Somalia Idea, C. 1946–48." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1 (2): 277–291.

Bernal, V. 2005. "Eritrea on-line: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and the Public Sphere." *American Ethnologist* 32 (4): 660–675.

Bernal, V. 2014. *Network as Nation: Diaspora, Cyberspace and Citizenship.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Besteman, C. 1998. "Primordialist Blinders: A Reply to IM Lewis." *Cultural Anthropology* 13 (1): 109–120.

Billig, M. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour.* London: Sage.

Birdsell, D. S., and L. Groarke. 1996. "Toward a Theory of Visual Argumentation." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 33: 1–10.24.

Brinkerhoff, J. M. 2006. "Digital Diasporas and Conflict Prevention: The Case of Somalinet.com." *Review of International Studies* 32 (1): 25–47.

Bryden, M. 2014. "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: Strategy of Choice or Necessity?" Washington, DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Calhoun, C. 2011. *Civil Society and the Public Sphere.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cassanelli, L., and F. S. Abdikadir. 2008. "Somalia: Education in Transition." *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 7 (1): 9–125.

Chonka, P. 2016. "Spies, Stonework, and the Suuq: Somali Nationalism and the Narrative Politics of Pro-Harakat Al Shabaab Al Mujaahidiin Online Propaganda." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10 (2): 247–265.

De Waal, A. 2015. *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power.* Cambridge: Polity.

Dittmer, J. 2013. "Humour at the Model United Nations: The Role of Laughter in Constituting Geopolitical Assemblages." *Geopolitics* 18 (3): 493–513.

Dittmer, J., and K. Dodds. 2008. "Popular Geopolitics Past and Future: Fandom, Identities and Audiences." *Geopolitics* 13 (3): 437–457.

Dodds, K. 1996. "The 1982 Falklands War and a Critical Geopolitical Eye: Steve Bell and the If… Cartoons." *Political Geography* 15: 571–592.

Dodds, K. 2010. "Popular Geopolitics and Cartoons: Representing Power Relations, Repetition and Resistance." *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 113–131.

Dodds, K., and P. Kirby. 2013. "It's Not a Laughing Matter: Critical Geopolitics, Humour and Unlaughter." *Geopolitics* 18 (1): 45–59.

Eko, L. 2010. "The Art of Criticism: How African Cartoons Discursively Constructed African Media Realities in the Post-Cold War Era." *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 65–91.

Eno, O. A., M. A. Eno, and D. Van Lehman. 2010. "Defining the Problem in Somalia: Perspectives from the Southern Minorities." *Journal of the Anglo-Somali Society* (47): 19–30.

Falah, G., C. Flint, and V. Mamadouh. 2006. "Just War and Extraterritoriality: The Popular Geopolitics of the United States' War on Iraq as Reflected in Newspapers of the ArabWorld." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96 (1): 142–164.

Georgiou, M. 2006. *Diaspora, Identity and the Media: Diasporic Transnationalism and Mediated Spatialities.* Cresskill: Hampton Press.

Habermas, J. 1991. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Hall, S., D. Hobson, A. Lowe, and P. Willis, eds. 1980. *Culture, Media, Language.* London: Hutchinson.

Hammett, D. 2010. "Political Cartoons, Post-colonialism and Critical African Studies." *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 1–26.

Hammett, D. 2011. "Resistance, Power and Geopolitics in Zimbabwe." *Area* 43 (2): 202–210.

Hansen, S. J. 2013. Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012. London: Hurst.

Harrow, K. W., and F. Ekotto. 2015. *Rethinking African Cultural Production.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hertitage Institute Report, April 2015, *"Caqabadaha Waxbarasho ee Soomaaliya kaddib Kumeelgaarkii: Eegid Muqdisho"* [Educational Challenges in Post Transitional Somalia]: http://www.heritageinstitute.org/educational-challenges-in-post-transitional-somalia-case-study-mogadishu/

Hill, M. 2010. 'No Redress: Somalia's Forgotten Minorities' Minority Rights Group International. http://minorityrights.org/publications/no-redress-somalias-forgotten-minorities-november-2010/

Hills, M. 2002. *Fan Cultures.* London: Routledge.

Hoehne, M. V. 2008. "Newspapers in Hargeysa: Freedom of Speech in Post-conflict Somaliland." *Africa Spectrum* 43 (1): 91–113.

Horst, C. 2006. "In 'Virtual Dialogue' With the Somali Community: The Value of Electronic Media for Research amongst Refugee Diasporas." *Refuge: Canada's Periodical on Refugees* 23 (1): 51–57.

Human Rights Watch. 2016. "Like Fish in Poisonous Waters." https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/02/fishpoisonous-waters/attacks-media-freedom-somalia

Ibironke, O. 2015. "African Writers Challenge Conventions of Postcolonial Literary History." In *Rethinking African Cultural Production*, edited by F. Ekotto and K. Harrow, 29–51. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Issa-Salwe, A. M. 2008. "The Internet and the Somali Diaspora: The Web as a Means of Expression." *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 6 (1): 54–67.

Kapteijns, L. 2012. *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Laitin, D. D. 1977. *Politics, Language, and Thought: The Somali Experience.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lewis, I. M. 1994. *Blood and Bone: The Call of Kinship in Somali Society.* Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press.

Lindley, A. 2008. "Transnational Connections and Education in the Somali Context." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2 (3): 401–414.

Luling, V. 2006. "Genealogy as Theory, Genealogy as Tool: Aspects of Somali 'Clanship'." *Social Identities* 12 (4): 471–485.

Macpherson, H. 2008. "'I Don't Know Why They Call It the Lake District They Might as Well Call It the Rock District!', The Workings of Humour and Laughter in Research with Members of Visually Impaired Walking Groups." *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 26 (6): 1080–1095.

Mason, A. J. 2010. "The Cannibal Ogre and the Rape of Justice: A Contrapuntal View." *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 32–64.

Mbembé, J.-A. 2001. *On the Postcolony.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Müller, M. 2008. "Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse for the Field of Critical Geopolitics: Toward Discourse as Language and Practice." *Political Geography* 27 (3): 322–338.

Obadare, E. 2009. "The Uses of Ridicule: Humour, 'Infrapolitics' and Civil Society in Nigeria." *African Affairs* 108 (431): 241–261.

Obadare, E., and W. Willems, eds. 2014. *Civic Agency in Africa: Arts of Resistance in the 21st Century.* London: James Currey.

Osman, I. 2015. "The Somali Media, Diaspora Communities and the Concept of Conflict Recreation." *JOMEC Journal: Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies*. cf.ac.uk/jomec/jomecjournal/7-june2015/Osman_Communities.pdf

Ó Tuathail, G. 1996. *Critical Geopolitics*. London: Routledge.

Ó Tuathail, G. 2006. "General Introduction: Thinking Critically about Geopolitics." In *The Geopolitics Reader*, edited by G. Ó. Tuathail, S. Dalby, and P. Routledge, 1–15. London: Routledge.

Pillai, P. 1992. "Rereading Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model." *Communication Theory* 2 (3): 221–233.

Ridanpää, J. 2009. "Geopolitics of Humour: The Muhammed Cartoon Crisis and the Kaltio Comic Strip Episode in Finland." *Geopolitics* 14 (4): 729–749.

Samatar, A. I. 1992. "Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Convention." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30 (4): 625–641.

Samatar, S. S. 2009. "Somalia: A Nation's Literary Death Tops Its Political Demise." *Wardheer News.* www.wardheernews.com/Articles_09/May/17_literary_death_samatar.pdf

Samatar, A. I. 2011. "Debating Somali Identity in a British Tribunal: The Case of the BBC Somali Service." *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 10 (1): 36–88.

Semati, M. 2012. "The Geopolitics of Parazit, the Iranian Televisual Sphere, and the Global Infrastructure of Political Humor." *Popular Communication* 10 (1–2): 119–130.

Sharif, A. 2015. "Islamic Educational Networks in the Aftermath of State Collapse." Conference paper: 12th Somali Studies International Association Congress, Helsinki.

Skjerdal, T. S. 2011. "Journalists or Activists? Self-identity in the Ethiopian Diaspora Online Community." *Journalism* 12 (6): 727–744.

Stremlau, N. 2013. "Hostages of Peace: The Politics of Radio Liberalization in Somaliland." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7 (2): 239–257.

Stremlau, N., E. Fantini, and R. M. Osman. 2015. "The Political Economy of the Media in the Somali Conflict." *Review of African Political Economy* 43 (147): 43–57.

Thrift, N. 2000. "It's the Little Things." In *Geopolitical Traditions: a Century of Geopolitical Thought*, edited by K. Dodds and D. Atkinson, 380–387. London: Routledge.

Tomaselli, K. G. 2009. "Repositioning African Media Studies: Thoughts and Provocations." *Journal of African Media Studies* 1 (1): 9–21.

Verjee, A., A. Y. Abokar, Y. A. Haroon, A. M.Warsame, M. A. Farah, and M. F. Hersi. 2015. *The Economics of Elections in Somaliland.* Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute.

Vidino, L., R. Pantucci, and E. Kohlmann. 2010. "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: Al Shabaab,Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict." *African Security* 3 (4): 216–238.

Wekesa, N. B. 2012. "Cartoons Can Talk? Visual Analysis of Cartoons on the 2007/2008 Post-electionViolence in Kenya: A Visual Argumentation Approach." *Discourse & Communication* 6 (2): 223–238.

Werner, W. 2003. "Reading Visual Rhetoric: Political Cartoons." *International Journal of Social Education* 18 (1): 81–97.

Willems,W. 2013. "Interrogating Public Sphere and Popular Culture as Theoretical Concepts on Their Value in African studies." *Africa Development* 37 (1): 11–26.

Wodak, R. 2004. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *Qualitative Research Practice*, edited by C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubriem, and D. Silverman, 185–204. London: Sage.

Xaashi, M. C. 2014. *Aafada Qabyaaladda* [The Catastrophe of Clanism]. Hargeysa: Bilan.

Zapiro, 2010. "Letter to the South African Human Rights Commission: A Response to Complaints Regarding My Cartoon." *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 27–31.