

# Media under Dictatorship: The Case of Somalia

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**Abstract:** *The prime objective of this article is to emphasise how the flow of information, press freedom as well as freedom of expression was ignored and how the Somali people were deprived their rights during the reign of dictator Siyad Barre. During the dictatorship there was not any single private media, media was the property of the government and journalists were civil servants.*

**Keywords:** press freedom, freedom of expression, rights, dictator, media, journalists, foreign newspapers, magazines, headlines, military rulers, revolution, parliamentary democracy, post-independence

## 1. Introduction

I have been working at Somali National University (SNU) under Ministry of Culture and Higher Education), in the years 1976-1981, during Siyad Barre's regime. Before being appointment as personnel director on June 20th, 1978, I was assistant chief librarian at the College of Education at SNU. During this period, my duties among others included ordering local, foreign newspapers and magazines. On several occasions, I found some part (s) of a page, and/or even some page tabloids of an issue were cut from the newspaper or magazine. The missing parts were obviously critical to the military regime in Somalia, even though its headlines were noticeable in the contents.

The Somali media is one of the virgin areas that remained least studied in the country. Because of this reason it is mainly based on my own experience and interviews senior Somali journalists in exile.

The management and control of the media, as well as its functioning in practice, were determined by Somalia's particular political system during the 1970s and 1980s. Somali journalism was almost muzzled by strict censorship imposed by the military rulers of the nation for their own interest.

The year 1991 signaled the explosion by the masses after two decades of dictatorial suppression. This explosion is the result of long-term oppressive regulations, as when a bottle full of air is tightly suppressed, at the end; it will blast and fall apart. This study will focus mainly on Somali media during the 1970s and 1980s. Before the revolution, Somali people had enjoyed parliamentary democracy during the post-independence.

## 2. The Political History of Somalia

### 2.1. Post-Independence

Politically Somalia became independent in July 1960 and emerged as a result of the unification of the former British Somaliland in the North and the Italian trusteeship territory in the South. Multi-party democracy was experienced from the post-independence until October 1969, when the elected government was overthrown in a military coup led by Siyad Barre. (Bongartz, 1991)

Like in many African countries, there was misuse of government. Emphasis was on party politics and personal power rather than on mobilisation for national development. Corruption became rife and deputies traded their votes for personal gain. Sixty-four parties with 1000 candidates took part in the March 1969 election. (Salwe, 1996: 74-75)

The National Assembly was no longer the symbol for free speech and fair play for the citizens. It was now widely regarded as a market place with little concern for the interest of those who had voted. Deputies traded their votes for their personal gain, deputies were ferried in limousines, bearing the magic registration letters A. N. (Assemblea Nazionale) which was interpreted as "*Anigaa Nool*" (I live or I am all right). (Lewis, 1988: 204-7).

### 2.2 The Military Revolution

Before a solution to the languishing democracy could be found, the situation took a new turn. On Wednesday, October 15th, 1969 during a tour, late president **Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke** was assassinated in Las Anod by one of his police guards and the incident has created a political vacuum and exacerbated the tense and unstable political atmosphere. The situation was taken advantage by the army, which seized the power.

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 1969, a group of military officers overthrew the government, and most of the Somali people were happy about the change because of the deeply felt discontent.

### 2.3 The One-Party State and the Decline of Democracy

General Siyad Barre had formed The Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1976, appointed himself as its Secretary General and offered himself as the sole candidate for the post of the president, reducing the country to a one-man dictatorship. Accordingly, the Chairman of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) had issued the Third Charter of the Revolution, which among other affairs, stated:

*Art.1: With the effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1976 a national political party called Somali revolutionary Socialist Party had been established;*

*Art.3: The Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party is the only party that exists in Somali Democratic Republic and*

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*no other party or political organisation which is not the one mentioned in Art.1 of this Charter is allowed.*

Once the SRSP had been established, Siyad Barre made himself as the sole decision maker of everything in Somalia, as he took all titles like, Major General M. Siyaad Barre, the President of Somali Democratic Republic, the Secretary General of SRSP, the Chairman of SRSP's Political-Bureau, the President of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), the Chairman of Council of Ministers, Chairman of National Defence Council, and Commander in Chief of Armed Forces.

### 3. Legal Restraints

#### 3.1 The Employment of Oppressive Laws (1969-1991)

The 1961 constitution provided for a unified judiciary independent of the executive and legislative authorities with a Supreme Court as the highest judicial organ. By a law passed in 1962 the courts of northern and southern Somalia were integrated into a four-tiered judicial system: the Supreme Court, courts of appeal, regional courts, and district courts. All members of the Supreme Court, supplemented by four additional members, comprised the Constitutional Court, which had the power to review the constitutionality of the legislative action.

The constitution in force until the October 1969 revolution strongly protected the civil rights specified in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The country's record of honouring these rights was impressive not only by the standards of the developing states but even by those of developed Western democracies. They included the presumption of innocence before the courts; the right of habeas corpus; the freedom of political association, freedom of public expression, and personal liberty and movement; and the rights to form labour unions and to strike.

The revolution of 1969 brought to power a socialist-military government that gave considerably less importance to most of these rights, suspended democratically shaped constitution of 1961 and abolished all basic human rights of freedoms. It also abolished the Constitutional Court and High Court of Justice. The socialist revolution which renamed the country as 'Somali Democratic Republic' (*in reality there has not been any sort of democracy*) promised new social and political changes. To give certain credibility to the proposed constitutional and democratic changes, the first step needed was to abrogate immediately all the oppressive laws.

The military junta had suspended the old penal laws of the country, code No.5 of 16 December, 1962 and the penal procedure No.1 of 10 January, 1963 enacted by the former democratically elected Somali parliament, and at the same time introduced and employed oppressive laws, which the Somali people had experienced during 1970s & 1980s. These oppressive laws which had functioned during (1969-1991) included:

- 1) Law No.01 of 10 January, 1970-Power of arrest
- 2) Law No 03 of 10 January, 1970-Creation of National Security Court
- 3) Law No.14 of 15 February, 1970-Creation of National Security Services (NSS)
- 4) Law No.54 of 10 September, 1970-Law of National Security
- 5) Law No.64 of 10 October, 1970-The abrogation of the right to Habeas Corpus
- 6) Law No.67 of 01 November, 1970-Socialistic Defence
- 7) Law No.38 of April, 1972-Judicial powers to the Military Supreme Revolutionary Council (Horn of Africa, 1990).

#### 3.2 Political Offences Punishable by Death

- "Acts against the independence, unity or security of the Somali state" (Article 1);
- "Organising a subversive association" (that is, directed against the national unity or directed towards subverting or weakening state authority" (Article 3);
- "Conspiracy against the state" (Article 4);
- "Receiving or raising funds for subverting or weakening state authority" (Article 11);
- Exploiting religion for creating national disunity or subverting or weakening state authority" (Article 12);
- "Organising strikes, walk-outs, stoppages" (Article 17). (Amnesty International, 1988).

#### 3.3 Thought Control in Somalia

*"When information becomes available, ideas flow smoothly, but if the sources dry up, thirst sets in afterwards, the person, for whom silence is prescribed, goes astray, I count not civilised men who conduct no debate. "*  
A Contemporary Somali Poet. (Bongartz, 1991).

A typical totalitarian ideological standard had been applied in Somalia's media and public opinion. In monitoring and seeking thought control and public opinion; considerable use was also made of agents'provocateurs and rights of assembling were limited.

The employment of this Maoist cult to focus the vital energies of the masses was supplemented by a growing plethora of other agencies of thought control. The political office of the president was expanded into a national organisation of apparatus staffing 'Hanuunin' (*orientation centres*) which were set up in all permanent settlements of any size throughout the country. Members of the public were expected to assemble in these centres on public holidays to study the aims and methods of the revolution within walls decorated with pictures of the new trinity: 'jaalle' (*comrade*) Markis (Marx), jaalle Lenin and jaalleSiyaad.

These restrictions were justified by references to the pervading atmosphere of gossip and intrigue which in uninhabited days of civilian government, so it was argued, facilitated the subversive activities of foreign governments

hostile to Somalia. *'afminshaar'* which literally means "having a mouth like a saw" (rumour-mongering) were indeed probably and most frequently denounced of all anti-government influences and spreading malicious gossips against the regime was a charge incurring serious penalties.

Although few political prisoners were brutally tortured or died in custody, this oppressive climate was particularly distasteful to the westernised elite and to many of those who played a prominent part in political life during the previous civilian regimes. Many of the more outspoken who were able to do so fled the country seeking employment overseas notably in Arabia, the Gulf states and in Kenya. There was thus a marked *'brain-drain'* which substantially depleted Somalia's manpower resources, particularly in those fields where there was most need of talent.

In the capital, Mogadishu, a national top-level orientation centre for all levels of the civil services was established in a former military training school, it was called "Bottego" which was later renamed *'Mohamed AbdulleXalane'*, a Somali martyr who had died in the first Somali-Ethiopian war of 1963-1964. There was a popular song which reads as "*MaskaxdoxalaaXalane*" which literally means (*washes the brain*). **Ali Jimale** writes "the root *xal* means a small amount of water used for cleansing purposes. (Faro *xal*, for example, is water in a bowl for washing one's fingers before eating). *Xalane* as a noun means 'the cleansed, 'the purified.' It is here that the name of the camp assumes an ideological dimension, barely hidden from the view." (Ahmed, 1996: 104) All new and senior government employees, high school graduates, foreign universities graduates, as well as diplomats in abroad had to attend a three month to two years socialist orientation course at Halane centre, where all non-socialistic ideologies were purified.

The organs for shaping and sustaining patriotism at the appropriate pitch were reinforced by other agencies which checked deviations from the official policy. Prominent amongst these were the National Security Services (NSS.) and the National Security Courts which jointly dealt with a wide range of political offences. These agencies were aided by *'Guulwadayaal'* (*victory pioneers*), an organisation recruited amongst the unemployed, with their bright green uniforms and Orwellian-eye's surveillance on the public, (Lewis, 1988: 211-213).

Bearing in mind that the military regime detained in Afgooeye all former politicians of the civilian government, and with the establishment of the above-mentioned military regime's defending forces, free expressions and freedom of speech were lost among the communicating citizens. Because of this oppression, many anti-government jokes appeared, for the sake of breathing. The very famous and popular jokes for that purpose, belonged to **Farah Gololeey**, who several times had been detained and released by members of the NSS.

The Somali elite liked to sit and drink tea with Farah Gololeey and listen to his techniques of expressing public feelings towards the military regime.

The following is one of Farah Gololeey's famous jokes, perhaps his first joke, produced in the early days of the revolution, and when people were left to decide whether "to praise 'Big-Mouth's policy, or keep their mouths shut, otherwise go to Afgooeye."

"Ama Af-weyne<sup>1</sup> ammaan, praise Barre to the skies, ama afkaadaqabso, or, keep your mouth shut, ama Afgooyeaad!. " or, go to Afgooeye!<sup>2</sup>

- **'Afweyne'** (big-mouth) was Siyad Barre's nickname.
- **Afgooeye** is a town 27 km from Mogadishu towards the west.
- **When** Siyad Barre overthrew the civilian regime, members of the parliament were detained in Afgooeye.
- From that day on, the public were left to choose either to praise Barre's policy, or keep their mouth shut. (**Johansson and Diesow, 1993: 29**).

### 3.4 Censorship in Somalia

As in many republics of the then Soviet Union, socialist countries and in countries ruled by military dictators, censorship had been imposed both to spoken and written words in Somalia. The dictatorial regime had copied socialistic ideology from the ex-Soviet Union and exercised censorship to all kinds of information in the early days of its rule.

Originally, censorship office existed within the Somali National Films Agency until 1985, and its role was to censor all commercial films and sort out the right films matching the Somali culture based on Islamic religion. But, in 1985 the censorship agency had been placed under the National Security Service (NSS), widened its duties and was made a cornerstone institution *Faaf-reebka* (*Censorship Board*). It was composed of four sections; (1) The audio-visual section which was assigned to screen all audio-visual materials; (2) The literature and information section; (3) The Arabic publications section; and (4) other foreign languages section to censor all publications in other foreign languages.

The Censorship Board had its branch offices at the airport terminals, harbour terminals and at the borders censoring all in coming and/or outgoing publications and recordings.

The Censorship Board imposed that the ordinary individuals who exchanged messages on tapes, or in some circumstances sending video-recordings of a family party, etc., to their relatives or friends living abroad, had to have their tapes first checked at the Censorship office and apply for *mailing permission*. The tapes had to undergo the censorship process for 2-3 days, if any anti-government criticism was not found, they would then authorise for mailing. This situation is comparable to the one in Great



Britain, with the register of aliens living in Britain, blanket interception of certain categories of mail at the post office, and the Special Branch was transformed into a domestic counter-subversion agency. (Bernard, 1989)

Foreign newspaper and magazine kiosks, like **Samatars Bookshop**, the two Italian newspaper kiosks (the one at **Croce del Sud Hotel** and **Azan kiosk** near FIAT) and two and/or three more at Jubba, Shabeelle & Al-Uruba hotels in Mogadishu had to follow the censorship rules. The censorship officers had to go through all different foreign publications before they were sold publicly. Particular attention was given articles critical the Somali government at the time. If they found criticism in any paper, they took out these pages from that issue, after that it was possible to sell it. Readers buying newspapers had frequently found that pages were missing from his/her issue just bought from a kiosk. Obviously, it was understandable that the missing pages were critical to the government and this had become an accepted norm. Still the articles appeared in the contents. (Author's own experience).

At the State Printing Agency (SPA) two colonels from the national security service were stationed, each heading a group of NSS officers assigned to a specific task. One group was responsible for government publications, like the Official Bulletin, passports, etc. The other group sharing their duty with a Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party representative, was assigned to act as a "proof-reader" reading at night all materials prepared to be published for next morning by the sole daily paper **Xiddigta Oktoobar** (October Star) as well as the few other weekly and/or monthly magazines and periodicals. Assumingly the NSS and Party representative at the SPA acted as the main editors of above-mentioned publications.

There had been no other private publishing house in the country, except **Sharif Aidarus's** small publishing house in Shibis, Mogadishu, which produced only school exercise books, notebooks, calendars and invitation cards. Even when publishing these items, he had to take some samples to censorship and apply for publishing permission. (HRA/Mr. MX, a former NSS officer/summer 1995).

It must be realised that the Press had been the only major mass medium which had been fundamentally changed by the introduction of the Somali script. The two daily newspapers, the Arabic **Najmat Oktoobar** and the Italian **Stella d' Ottobre** as well as the weekly English language **Dawn** ceased publication on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1973. A Somali daily newspaper **Xiddigta Oktoobar** replaced these but with a much higher circulation. **Xiddigta Oktoobar** had a circulation of 10, 000 copies per day and distributed rapidly each day.

Despite lip service in certain articles of the Somali National Constitution approved in 1979, to the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the reality in Somalia is contrary and moreover is rapidly deteriorating.

Somali government did not allow public expression of dissenting views, it owned and operated our media. It also had increasingly had been seeking to suppress the truth abroad. Civil and political rights remained tightly circumscribed, and public criticism of the government was not allowed. Worse, the government had shown less and less hesitation in imprisoning those whom it seen as a threat to the so-called national security. (New African, November, 1988).

#### 4. Media under State Control in Somalia

During the dictatorial regime all modern information media were in the hands of the government, and news carried in radio broadcasts or in the few domestic publications was subject to editorial control by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance. A limited number of uncensored foreign publications such as the American news magazines were available to the educated elite. Foreign radio programs could also be heard by anyone possessing a short-wave radio receiver.

Radio was the most important medium of communication. Nearly all urbanised Somalis had access to a receiver, and nomads commonly owned portable transistor models. Radio broadcasts could also be heard in village orientation centres, which were designed as places for social activities but had as their principal purpose the political indoctrination of the people.

Politics was at once the Somalis' most practiced art and favourite sport. A radio was the most desired possession of most nomads, not for its entertainment value but for news broadcasts. The level of political participation often surpassed that in many developed Western democracies.

(Somalia a country study. Foreign Area Studies. The American University Edited by Harold D. Nelson Research completed October 1981).

##### 4.1 Print Media

During the euphoric early days of a newly independent Somalia, the country boasted a fledgling parliamentary democracy. It was during the 'Africa's independence decade'-1960s. It was a time when the military regimes had not yet started to proliferate in Africa, though was just around the corner.

A few benefits, however, were enjoyed by the people, such as freedom of speech, freedom of association or assembly and press freedom.

In the climate of hope of 1960s, which encompassed a gloriously free press, the runaway success of **DALKA "Homeland"** spawned other. Similar journals, though most of them quickly folded. Perhaps the reasons for their eventual failure could be found in the reason of their establishment. One, the Somali journal, for example, was financed by the office of Russia's Novosti Press and though in appearance was in every way modelled on Dalka, the 'advertisements' in the guise of articles gave away who were the real owner/editors. More sophisticated

competition came from the Italian-language journal **La Tribuna**, which was clearly a response from the Italian educated graduates, and which even had some help, it was alleged, from Italian Diplomatic Mission in Mogadishu, who may have had reaction of `why can't our boys do something like that.` (Duhul, 1997).

During the 1960s and until 1972, all newspapers and magazines were in foreign languages-Arabic, English or Italian-because there was still no official script for the writing of Somali, so anyone who was literate was so in one or other foreign language.

The most prolific print journalism of the day came, of course, from the government media; there was a daily newspaper in Italian (*Corierradella Somalia*) and in Arabic `Saw-al-Somali` (Somali Voice), and a weekly in English (**Somali News**). (Duhul, 1997).

During the nine years of civilian government after independence, the literate segment of the population had access to daily, weekly, and monthly periodicals that presented relatively freely the views of all significant elements in Somali politics. In 1968 some fifteen such publications appeared fairly regularly, but only four had a circulation of more than 1, 000 copies; three of these were owned by the government, and the fourth belonged to the then-dominant party, the Somali Youth League (SYL).

All independent periodicals like *Dalka* and *La Tribuna* ceased publication after the military take-over in 1969, and journals appearing thereafter under government agencies. The only daily newspaper was *October Star*, whose editions in Arabic, English and Italian were published by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance. When the new Somali script was introduced in 1972, a new Somali language newspaper, *Xiddigta Oktoobar* (*October Star*), replaced the earlier Arabic, English and Italian editions. An Arabic version also appeared as *Najmat Oktoobar*. The combined circulation of the two editions of the newspaper was believed to be about 12, 000 copies. **Horseed (Vanguard)**, a weekly published in Arabic and Italian was described as independent but was believed to be controlled by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance; it had a circulation of about 1, 000. In 1978 a six-page English-language weekly **Heegan (Vigilance)** began to be published by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance, replacing a monthly called *New Era*. **OGAAL**, Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party weekly appeared in mid 1980s.

#### 4.2 Somali Broadcasting Service (SBS)

*“Broadcasting plays a vital role in the world and particularly in developing countries. It provokes thought and helps form correct attitudes in a revolutionary society like the one in Somali Democratic Republic.”* said by Col. Ismail Ali Abokor, ex-vice-president of the SRC and Secretary of State for Information and National Guidance. (Broadcasting Handbook, 1970s).

The Somali Broadcasting Service consisted of two radio stations; one in Mogadishu and the other in Hargeysa, known as **Radio Mogadishu** and **Radio Hargeysa**, the voice of the Somali Democratic Republic.

The motives that led to the creation of the two stations were that during the post-war period British which the colonial power over the greater part of Somalia was worried by broadcasts from Russia and other socialist countries beamed to Africa. After 1952 Cairo Radio was busy in encouraging African countries in their struggle for independence.

Thus, the colonial powers in Somalia were killing two birds with a single stone, by projecting themselves to the colonised population and thereby minimising opposition while at the same time propagating their own interests through the medium of the radio. Of the two stations Radio Hargeysa was established in 1943 preceded Radio Mogadishu by some ten years. The first station at Hargeysa opened under the name of **Radio Kudu** (kudu is one of the Somali antelopes) and was set up by the British army. The broadcasting station was in a low building consisting of a single studio, a small control room and an office with a 100 watt transmitter.

In an interview in 1979 the Director of the Somali Broadcasting Department, mentioned the following as among the objectives of government broadcasting:

*“Strengthening national co-operation; spreading the spirit of solidarity dealing with social problems; advocating adherence to spiritual and moral values; evaluating, filtering, and disseminating ideas and aspirations of the national leaders; giving listeners a ready understanding of the aims of the socialist revolution; and explaining how the people fit into the overall system.”*

This scenario of Somalia's media situation was very much similar to that of the Baltic countries during and/or under Soviet rule in the region. In the early 1950s, all dialogues and interviews were recorded, and broadcasts were read from printed script. Naturally, these texts had been censored; there were very few exceptions to this rule. The more popular genres included stories about everyday life, speeches and talks, and to a lesser extent news style reportage. The first post-war reportage on Estonian Radio in January 1945; *THIS IS HOW BREAD IS MADE* was read from a text. So was the impressive coverage of the 1947 Song Festival. (Høyer, Lauk & Vihalemm 1993: 191).

#### 4.3 The Ideological Objectives of Media under Military Rule

To the government during the revolutionary era, a great deal of responsibility rested upon the shoulders of the radio medium. The responsibility aimed at changing the effects of a backward past which the country had inherited from the mould of colonialism and the reactionary leadership of civilian government which followed.

The revolutionary authorities quickly re-organised the mass media as a powerful instrument of ideological awareness and to be the most influential medium. Responsibility for guiding the nation was entrusted to the Ministry of Information and National Guidance whose portfolio absorbs the means of mass media. By implying the name `national guidance` it is understandable that the ministry of information alone had to guide the public, and that no other guidance/thoughts were acceptable, meaning the denial of freedom of expression.

One of the essential elements for their responsibilities is to define the ideology of the revolution. with broadcasting, this becomes an even more serious matter due to the particular nature of broadcasting work and the extent of its direct effect on listeners particularly people in the circumstances of the Somali nation at the time.

The radio being the most important information medium in the country, during the revolutionary period the Broadcasting Department underwent a sizeable face-lifting operation to enable it to function more efficiently as the source of contact between the government and the masses.

To spearhead the revolution and its aims, the main burden of the activities fell within the scope of national guidance programmes. In order to achieve the revolutionary role of the radio all possible ways were sought to create a people's broadcasting for the Socialist State of the Somali Democratic Republic.

#### 4.4 The Experiences of Somali Journalists during Military Rule

For research purpose, I went to BBC Somali Service in London in 1996, to interview some Somali journalists whom I have met at the BBC to portrait their professional experiences during the dictatorial regime in Somalia. Most of whom have had worked in the ministry of information and national guidance.

It is interesting to observe their views of life experience in the system for references to enrich and compensate written documents. One can easily find from these perspectives how the flow of information in Somalia was restricted, and how the media was put under state control.

In order to be able to digest their views, let me share you with their life experiences:

**4.4.1 Mohamoud Abdi Du' ale**, former head of Radio Mogadishu, tells his experience in the ministry. He had been told by the Minister of Information & National Guidance, that they cannot tell any item that may harm the revolution, let it be a crash of an aeroplane or a coup that occurs somewhere in the World. Du' ale told the Minister:

*"These are the main news we have to tell, if we could not tell them, you better close the station. "*

The blockade of the flow of information in Somalia was noticeable in the restrictions from the government high

officials, including the head of state. President Siyaad Barre himself, did not like to hear to international news.

Du`ale once again explains the following, one day while editing an item concerned with the establishment of the national council and the introduction of a constitution by President Moussa Taraore of Mali. The news was aired at 14.30pm. At about 15.00pm, we all broadcasters & editors, including Somali National News Agency (SONNA) staff were invited to the library of the Ministry of Information, where **Siyaad Barre** was waiting to meet with us. He made a long speech in which he said:

*"MoussaTaraore! Moussa Taraore!  
What the hell is with him?  
We don't care about Moussa Taroare. "*

Du`ale went on saying; during the cold war between the two superpowers in 1970s and 1980s, when Somalia's international relationships had shifted from socialist countries to the western countries. This phenomenon had also an impact on the media situations in Somalia, it worsened media pressures. Du`ale describing this phenomenon said:

*"The building of the Ministry of Information and National Guidance was located between the Presidential palace and the headquarters of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP). Therefore, if reporters broadcast an item concerning with **Brezhnev**, the Presidential palace would ring and complain, and if they broadcast an item concerning with the Western world, the SRSP would ring and criticise them because of being pro-westerners. "*

Du' ale remembers well until today, that one day some ditors (Ahmed Ali Askar, FiqiBuraale and himself were assigned to check which songs could be played out for the public. They decided to play a song called `hooyo` (mother) written by late Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame 'Hadraawi' who was in jail because of his previous poems critical to the government. Others in authority, however, stamped the `hooyo` song with the red word '*rejected*'.

Hadrawi's poetry contributed to an early warning system about the dangers of pseudo-patriotic council members intent on obfuscating the genuine political unconscious of the period. Barre saw Hadrawi's poetry as getting too close to the bone. (Ahmed, 1996: 106).

Radio Mogadishu's amplifiers on land rover vans moved around the city, warning the public not to listen to either BBC Somali Service or Radio Kulmis, a radio owned by a Somali opposition group. The NSS were put in full alert to arrest anyone listening to Radio Kulmis.

Du`ale mentioning an incidence said:

*"I came back from the office to my home, and I was told that my family were taken to the orientation centre in their area and they were accused by a lady servant of being listened to Radio Kulmis in our house. Du'ale who was driving*



*a Radio Mogadishu car with a monitor, came and told them: "listening to Radio Kulmis is part of my job. RadioKulinis had been monitored and 12 copies; were made; one for the President, one for Col. Geelle, Chairman of the National Security Court, one for the Head of Radio Mogadishu (myself) and one for the Head of SONNA. "*

(London Recorded Audio/Du`ale/09.01.96).

Media in Somalia, as Somalia is one of the third world countries, was considered by the Somali journalists to be under the strictest censorship. Because Somali media served only for the interests and propaganda of the military regime in power at the time. Somali media had no other choice, but toeing to the government line. All Somali journalists whether in programme production, news and comments had accepted this norm. Henceforth, Somali journalists have had censored by themselves.

Censorship was a routine oppression to every Somali journalist in his/her working spot. The journalists were not able to meet and interview with everyone whom they thought were news makers. If the interview wasn't concerned with politics, then they were able to interview whom they wanted. But, if it was concerned with politics, the only interviewees were government ministers, director generals, military officers, etc.

**Yusuf-Garaad Omar**, former government newspaper and radio editor said:

*"Latashi (consultation) had been used for the term censorship. If a government official gave a piece of information that might harm the government policy, the interviewer would consult with a chief editor. If he could not decide, then the matter went to the Director of Broadcasting. If the matter was still undecided then it went to the Minister, and if the Minister himself was unable to decide, he would consult with the president, who finally decided whether or not to air that piece of information. This was the chain of censorship within the Ministry of Information and National Guidance, " (LRC/Garaad/19.01.1996).*

Due to the strict censorship on the flow of information, the result was that the news of local events could be heard from foreign media channels before the local ones. When this information had been heard from, for instance, the BBC Somali Service, the editors had already known the item two-three days earlier.

Yusuf Garaad gave the following example:

*"One evening, while I was producing the news bulletin broadcast at 17, 00pm, SONNA reporter from Bosaso (a coastal city) reported that a ship was burning near the coast of Bosaso. I was not able to broadcast the ship item, while discussing whether or not to broadcast, the clock stood at 17, 00pm. The news went out without it. At about 17.30 still working, we opened the BBC Somali Service which broadcast the news of the burnt ship, because a reporter from SONNA had reported to BBC. After the long consultation hours, I was told to broadcast the ship item.*

" Garaad came up with a Somali proverb to emphasise the media situation,: *"War la qabaaxiiso ma leh. (a heard news is worthless). "* (London Recorded Audio/Garaad (19.01.1996).

Yusuf-Garaad kept pointing out:

When President Siyad Barre had been wounded in a car accident between Afgooye and Mogadishu. He was flown to Saudi Arabia for medical care. Somali journalists were not reorting untruthful information to the public, such as the president was quite well, he met with some Saudi officials and the Somali community in Saudi Arabia, while at the same time the journalists were hearing from their own audience that the president was unconscious and in a comma situation.

Late Colonel Mohamed Omar Jees, the then Minister of Information and National Guidance at that time, who had accompanied the President to Saudi Arabia, had been interviewed by the BBC Somali Service. He was asked about the health conditions of the President? He said in the interview:

*"President Siyad had been wounded in a car accident, his arm got broken, etc. He was asked again whether he could eat something or not? He told to the BBC "todayhe has drunk a glass of milk. "*

Garaad said: *"that he found from the interview of his minister, that they were disseminating propaganda to the Somali audience and not being truthful, fair, objective and faithful. The words of the then Somali Minister of Information had contradicted what Radio Mogadishu was broadcasting. The Somali Information Minister was supposedly, if and only if, he gives an interview, should give to the national radio. If BBC Somali Service broadcast an item concerning the Somali President's health situation, it should have to refer to Radio Mogadishu, although both stations address to Somali population. "*

## **5.The Impact of the Absence of Free Expression**

### **5.1 The shift from local to foreign stations during the dictatorship regime**

In 1986, International Broadcasting and audience Research (IBAR) commissioned AMER, a Market Research Agency based in Cyprus, to conduct a radio listening survey in Mogadishu, Somalia. It was not until August 1989, after many difficulties and frustrations, that this finally took place. Until then, the only audience information available out of Somalia had been purely anecdote. Some interesting results had emerged from the study; principally, that the BBC was the main, one may say that the only international foreign radio station recognized and listened to amongst radio listeners in Mogadishu. It comes second only to the local service, Radio Mogadishu.

60% of the radio listeners were aware of the BBC's existence, and 41% listened to it regularly in Somali. (**Radio listening audience**) The other foreign stations with regular audiences of any magnitude in Somali were regional: Voice of Revolutionary Ethiopia (14%) and Voice of Kenya (8%). In English, the BBC was heard by about 4% of the respondents (sample composition of 758 respondents), and same population listened to regularly to VOA. The VOA was quite well-known: 20% of the respondents were aware of it. (IBAR Survey, 1988).

IBAR survey showed that all respondents had access to a radio set in their household, and almost two-thirds (64%) to a TV set. Virtually all the radio sets were checked by the interviewers, and all were equipped to receive Short Wave.

The IBAR study proved that most of its respondents listened regularly to the radio, the rest listened less often. Thus, it was found a sample almost totally composed of dedicated radio users.

The majority of the respondents said the radio was their main source of news, see the following table.

#### Main Source of News

(Base: Total sample = 755)

Source %

Radio 86

TV 9

Newspaper 3

(IBAR, 1988).

We have learnt from the survey that the local stations were unsatisfactory by the audience. Thus, it is justifiable if the public turned from their national local stations to foreign stations that broadcast in Somali or other languages. The other interesting evidence was that 80% out of the 86% radio users listened to foreign stations.

#### 5.2. The Beginning of Open Opposition and the Civil War

The intensity of the internal political unrest in Somalia increased after the defeat in the war against Ethiopia in 1978. Popular discontent with the political system, its monopoly of power and suppression of public opinion was heightened. The political turmoil and the aftermath of the war brought to the open several contradictions in government policy. Whereas many clans were excluded from power-sharing, the group supporting **Siyad Barre** had gained more influence.

The formation of an open opposition was prompted by the failure of April 1978 military coup d'état. The coup was staged by officers followed by the creation of the first opposition movement against the Somali government. The Somali salvation Front (SOSAF) was formed by those officers from Majeerteen clan who fled Somalia after the coup to seek refuge in Ethiopia. Being dissatisfied with the socialist rhetoric propagated by the government,

SOSAF directed its criticism mainly against the Somali government's close ties with the west

The fact is that any society whose rights of free expression and free press are denied by its authority, sooner or later, it will one day blast and end up in chaos and unstable situation, as in the case of Somalia. The public discontents to the government reached to its peak, and every one took part in protesting and uprisings against **Barre** and his military government.

After two decades of oppressive policy, his very survival was in doubt. The senseless obstinacy with which Barre was trying to hang on against all odds was leading the Somali state to a dead end. As he suffocated all attempts at peaceful change or reform, the only result which could develop was a violent breakdown of Somalia.

At the close of the decade, more regions were slipping out of the control of the regime. Only Mogadishu remained in Siyad Barre's hands and thus he earned the name "Mayor of Mogadishu." General Siyad Barre tightened security around himself and his family by nominating his son, **General Maslah Mohamed S. Barre**, to lead a newly formed sector that was to guard Mogadishu in the desperate hope of saving his last stronghold there; and appointed his son-in-law, **General Mohamed Said "Morgan"** as his defence minister. (Salwe, 1996: 106-7)

Second organised opposition group was the Somali National Movement (SNM) which was founded by (Isaaq clan) meeting in London in April 1981. Ahmed Mohamed `Silanyo` a former minister, became Chairman of the SNM, and Ali Mohamed Osoble, `Wardhigley` its Vice-Chairman. SNM developed in a short time into an efficient and strong military movement, being initially supported by Ethiopia and Libya. (**African Contemporary Record, IX, 1986/1987**).

**Lewis** (1990:899) states that "by July, however, It was clear that at least some areas of the towns of Hargeisa, Burao and Berbera had been captured by the SNM, and that the government forces had begun a full scale military campaign to regain control of SNM." An air bombardment by government forces, supported, as Greenfield (1989) mentions, by the experienced South African pilots, destroyed SNM military and civilian targets in Northern Somalia. (**Bongartz, 1991: 23**).

The United Somali Congress (USC) was founded in Rome in January 1989, by members of Hawiye clan, which constitutes the clan in southern Somalia. USC was one of the most formidable in any future political development in the country. It could be attributed in three reasons. Firstly, the bulk of its supporters comes from the south where the capital, Mogadishu, is located. Secondly, its political programme was more debated and far-reaching than those of the other opposition groups. Thirdly, its leadership and supporters were all versed politically and widely respected personalities, such as Aden Abdulle Osman, the first Somali President after independence. (Bongartaz, 1991: 24/25) But, at the later stage, USC was split into more



than four or five opposing groups, with a long a heavily disastrous fighting within the USC itself.

The opposition campaigns started by different Somali groups in the hope of toppling a dictatorial regime, had become distorted. Instead of the campaigns converging in a new nationalistic platform, faction leaders sought to use the support they had for their personal ambition, and the cost of the people they claimed to represent. (Salwe, 1996: 109-113).

### 5.3 The Manifesto Group

In May 1990, one hundred and fourteen prominent politicians, some of them respected citizens from the former civilian governments (like **Mr. Adan Abdulle Osman**, first president of truly Somalia during 1960-1966). Seasoned politicians, intellectuals, and senior figure-selected, apparently, to represent numerous ethnic, religious classes and political interests in the country addressed, in the manner of a petition, to president, General Mohamed Siyad Barre.

The manifesto document outlined, in painful, lacerating language, the political, economic, physical and spiritual horrors that have been inflicted upon the Somali people in 20 years of "reign of terror" by ageing dictator, General Barre. The brave authors of the document, **admirably**, did not hesitate to call evil things by their names. The contents of the `manifesto` were self-explanatory and requires no exegesis on no part or nobody.

The `manifesto` document with more than 100 signatories came up with the recommendation aimed at bringing about national reconciliation and salvation suggested to the president of Somalia. The document of the Manifesto Group was another form of expression by the whole Somali society, after had been denied to express their feelings via national media infrastructures. Since the media was serving for the interests of the ruling few, and not for the common interests.

In its two decades` rule, the ousted military regime had succeeded in monopolising power in the domains of politics, economy and security. In the process, the people lost all their basic freedoms and role in the participation of the affairs of their own economy. what was well known to all was the regime`s arbitrary practice of throwing thousands of innocent civilians to prisons simply because they happened to comment on certain government policies or decisions which seemed to them unjust, worse still, others were jailed for the mere suspicion of being members or sympathisers to opposition. (Horn of Africa Vol. XIII, N0s.1 & 2, Jan. -March and April-June 1990).

## 6. Discussion

"Dabnimaankuguban, dambaskiisakamacararo. "

(He who has not been burnt with a fire, does not flee from its ashes).

a Somali proverb.

The civilian regimes that ruled Somalia during 1960-1969, lacked any serious commitment to national development, as they were guilty of **glaring** neglect for the needs of economic and social progress. Like in many African countries, misuse of power, injustice, tribalism, nepotism and corruption existed in the country. Emphasis was on party politics rather than on mobilisation for national development. Corruption became **rife** and deputies traded their votes for personal gains, and the majority of the Somali population remained on-lookers standing outside the political arena. They neither participated in the decision-making process, nor did they share the national wealth or the limited social welfare. The National Assembly was no longer the symbol for free of speech and fair play of the citizens. Due to the sense of discontent and frustrations, the second president of the republic was assassinated; the incident was taken advantage by the army which seized the power in 1969.

The dictator had introduced all kinds of oppressive laws, oppressive forces and courts to secure him in power. He abolished the sixty-four parties that existed in the country, and introduced the sole socialist party, that signaled the decline of democracy. Censorship was imposed to the flow of information and the oral tradition of the people, as well.

The politics of the military regime was based on suppression and restrictions of the public, and the democratic rights of the people had been denied in Somalia, where the country was renamed Somali Democratic Republic. There were no democratic exercises at all. Oppressive laws had been introduced and employed, for instance, article 18 of Somali Penal Code and Law, in silencing propaganda against the government. Several oppressive forces such as NSS, Military Intelligence, Military Police, Party Investigators, Party Militia, etc. Were established to implement the earlier mentioned oppressive laws.

Despite the introduction of the oppressive laws, as well as the establishment of the implementing forces, there was a popular resistance. Somalis appear to regard oral communication not only as a refined art, but as a basic essential for successful survival. Somali oral tradition is used particularly in the form of poetry, as an extremely important medium of communication. The power of the tongue and of the spoken word in spreading hostility and enmity, in countering it, or in broadcasting conciliatory messages, in ruining reputations or praising men to the skies is very evident in Somali culture.

The Somali artists continually brought into the open the weaknesses and bureaucratic inefficiency of the state apparatuses. Their criticism had subliminal effects on the people. By consistently poeticising the agonies of the suffering masses, the artists laid the groundwork for the overthrow of both the civilian and military regimes.

However, we have learnt from this study, that the underground poetry of *siinley* (S) and the *deeley* (D) were poetic exploration and attempts to come to terms with the new Somali realities ushered in by Barre`s assumption of

power on October 21, 1969. The poets of Siinley were among the first to have observed political behaviours. The poets managed to unmask Barre's use of rhetoric to obfuscate the underlying political unconscious of the period. Because of Barre's self-serving ingenuity, the state had isolated the poets by labelling them as anti-revolutionary elements. Abdi Muhumud's case is another. Abdi's role as a literary agitator had come full circle. His poetry and numerous dramatic performances had played an important role in the overthrow of the earlier civilian regimes. He equally played a role, along with traditional intellectuals, in attempting to connect symbolically the early Barre's regime to the soul of the Somali people. Abdi and his colleagues were also apprehensive of the new realities ushered in by Barre's divisive tactics. As the circumstances of Barre's ouster from power and the chaos that still plagues the nation. (Ahmed, 1996).

Having observed the misuse of power in Somalia, both by the civilian regimes and by the military regime, and how both powers had based on clannism. It is not, therefore, surprising to see this society in an endless chaos (Ghalib, 1995) which appeared as a sudden and unplanned blast within the society. Therefore, it is not surprising to find Somalia falling apart into piece and bits or the so called 'independent authorities of lands' as (Somaliland, Puntland, Southwest, Jubbaland, Hirshabele, Galmudug, etc.). Because each group has the memory of Barre's clandestine power and his nepotism, therefore, they try to copy the same model.

Achievement will only be possible if we ignore the fear of government or authority and concentrate deeply into the multimedia agenda; it is then that laughter can be termed or seen as a free expression in Somalia.

Lack of free expression and free press opens the gate of corruption, injustice, nepotism, misuse of power, etc. as shown in this study. These factors are the fundamental causes of the current political crisis in Somalia.

The motto of this article "*He who has not been burnt with a fire, does not flee from its ashes*" should be kept in the memories of the Somali people, and other societies of similar experiences, and keep with keen eyes on what had driven this society into a fire, whose flames were fuelled with lack of free expression, tribalism, nepotism, injustice, misuse of power and many others. Societies experienced with such nasty oppressive atmosphere, should not repeat these evil political behaviours, if they don't want to end up in a devastating bloody civil war again.

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