

Bibliography of English-language books about Somalia

The following is an annotated list of English-language books published since 2000 about Somalia and the Somali people. This list is in-progress and is not exhaustive. Our aim is not to recommend certain titles, but to make researchers and librarians aware of their existence and the topics covered. Entries are arranged alphabetically by author.

Materials owned by the Minnesota State University, Mankato, Library include a link to the library record for that title. Materials not owned by MSU may be available via Interlibrary Loan.

Abdullahi, M.D. (2001). *Culture and customs of Somalia*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Pr.

Describes the land, people, vegetation, government, and culture throughout history of the area now called Somalia. The Introduction relates Somalia's long history, describes how its varied geography and climate belie Somalia's equatorial location, and outlines its changing religious and political practices. Succeeding chapters focus on aspects of modern culture and their development, such as religion, fine arts, and social customs. Though written Somali did not exist before the 20th century, meaning Somalis did not write about themselves in their own language before that time, this book provides background on customs and beliefs preserved in their oral tradition and recorded in other languages. [Library link](#)

Ahmed, A.J. (2002). *Fear is a cow*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Read Sea Pr.

This poetry describes life experiences in and away from Ahmed's Somali homeland. Both earthy and intellectual, his images touch on the immediate difficulty of tribal life during political upheaval as well as calm distant reflection from another continent. Contrasting images do not so much collide as co-exist with little reflection: terror taking solace in intimacy, a backbreaking harvest that never leads away from poverty, breathtaking beauty in a life that does not know it is not complex. Words and images here remind us that life in Somalia is basic and close to the land for some, complex and western for others, and perhaps a combination of both for more than we realize. But always, peace and war, like sanity and insanity, exist uncomfortably close together.

Anamoor, A. & Weinberg, M. (2000). *Fighting shame: a Somali single teen mother in Canada*. In S. A. Inness (Ed.), *Running for their lives: girls, cultural identity, and stories of survival* (pp. 97-112). Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield.

This interview, arranged and transcribed by a "white, liberal, middle-class academic" (p. 98), recounts significant parts of the childhood and adolescence of an unmarried, teenaged Somali refugee in Canada. Ayanna's story focuses on the impact of an unplanned pregnancy on her family and herself. Pays special attention to the racism she felt as a member of a minority tribe in Somalia and as a Somali in Canada; the

influence of Islam on her sexual and familial identity, including the different roles accorded to men and women in Somali society; and the dilemma she faced in choosing whether to have an abortion, thus "killing" (p. 104) her baby, the shame and ostracization that would result in being an unwed mother, and the repercussions that would occur if she married the baby's father, a non-Muslim black American.

[Library link](#)

Bridges, Peter. (2000) *Safirka: An American envoy*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP.

Concise, readable biography of a United States ambassador to Somalia in the mid 1980s. Outlines Bridges' foreign service prior to the Somalia assignment, then provides insightful information on all aspects of his duties and the people he met and worked with. Highlights include meetings with dictator Siad Barre, differences between Somali's aid requests and Washington's responses, interaction between the embassy staff and Somalis, and Bridges' travel throughout the country. Describes multi-national tensions created by Somalia's past and contemporary interactions with communist countries and with Ethiopia. Also discusses how information travels between embassies and Washington.

Brons, M.H. (2001). *Society, security, sovereignty, and the state in Somali: From statelessness to statelessness?* Utrecht : International Books.

Examines the history of Somali from pre-colonial times to the present. Through the author's analysis of statehood and society, she provides a foundation for examining the Somali conflict and the emergence of Somaliland, Puntland, and the Riverine State following the fall of the Siad Barre regime from a societal rather than a state-based perspective. Includes maps, a diagram of Somali clan structure, bibliography, and index.

Dirie, W. & Miller, C. (1998). *Desert flower: The extraordinary journey of a desert nomad*. New York: Quill William Morrow.

Childhood in Somalia for Dirie involved herding goats, drinking camel milk, endless migration through the desert while barefoot, and responsibility for younger siblings. When she was 13, her father arranged her marriage to a man in his 60s. Headstrong all her life, Dirie ran away to Mogadishu and found relatives willing to give her a home in exchange for her hard work. The last such relative, a politician, took her to London to clean a mansion for four years. Illiterate and speaking only Somali, she became independent living at the Y and working at McDonald's, until a chance meeting led her to fashion modeling. Success came through hard work and hard decisions, like deciding to marry in order to be eligible for a British passport. Dirie eventually established her own family, and now speaks out for the United Nations against female genital mutilation. [Library link](#)

Drysdale, J. (2000). *Stoics without pillows: A way forward for the Somalilands*. London: HAAN.

Reviews the history of Somalia since colonial rule, including changes in Somali culture due to British and Italian influences. Provides observations of contemporary society, politics, and economics in Somaliland,

a former British colony. Discusses the impact of Islam on the educational system and on social conduct. Examines the effects of the war on Somali society and possible scenarios regarding Somaliland sovereignty or the reunification of Somalia. Includes maps, bibliography, and index.

Drysdale, J. (2001). *Whatever happened to Somalia?* London: HAAN. (First edition published in 1994)

Based on his observations, the advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative to Somalia in charge of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) recounts events in Mogadishu from 1991 to 1993. Examines the personalities and political bodies in power at the time, including Somali General Mohamed Farah 'Aideed' and U.S. Admiral Howe, and the effects of their decisions. Briefly examines why the people of Somaliland chose to create their own republic. Revised to reflect the situation through 2001.

Dualeh, H.A. (2002). *Search for a new Somali identity.* Nairobi : H.A. Dualeh.

The ambassador recounts his life in and serving Somalia, including his role in the failed 1961 coup, and provides a brief history of the Somali people. He begins by exploring the origins of the Somali people, discusses the impact of colonization, and leads to Somaliland's secession from Somalia. Explores Somalia's history of conflict with Ethiopia, including the position of ethnic Somalis living in Ethiopia. Includes photographs of the author, his family, and prominent political leaders and a map of Somalia.

Farah, N. (2000). *Yesterday, tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora.* New York : Cassell.

Somali novelist Farah speaks with other Somali exiles and refugees in Switzerland, Sweden, Britain, and Kenya. He recounts how those interviewed escaped from Somalia and their attempts to establish themselves in their new homes, where they generally did not receive warm welcomes. As they share how they as individuals have or have not adapted to their new circumstances, they create a portrait of life for Somalis throughout the diaspora. Includes index. [Library link](#)

Fitzgerald, N.J. (2002). *Somalia: Issues, history and bibliography.* Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Broadly provides information about the national origin, physical environment, religion, language, and historical economy of Somali. Also discusses issues including healthcare, refugees, the media, criminal justice, and human rights during and after the rule of Siad Barre. Briefly discusses Somalia's relationship with Egypt and Ethiopia, and compares the Somali people's unfavorable impression of the United Nations with a generally favorable impression of the United States. Includes a pre-1992 bibliography of Somali resources.

Ford, R., Adam, H.M., & Ismail, E.A. (Eds.) (2004). *War destroys, peace nurtures: Reconciliation and development in Somalia.* Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.

Provides forty-one papers from the 8th Congress of the Somali Studies International Association, held in 2001. Broken into nine sections, covers topics including literature, history, education, economic development, women's roles, and healthcare. The themes emphasized in this volume are the effects of war and peace on child development and, therefore, on the future of society as a whole; the dangers of a strong centralized government; and how to achieve reconciliation, especially given the refugee situation and a global Diaspora. Includes bibliography and index.

Fox, M. (2000). *Political culture in Somalia: Tracing paths to peace and conflict*. Uppsala, Sweden: Universitetstryckeriet.

Understanding the various political successes in Somaliland (northwest Somalia), Puntland (northeast Somalia) and Southern Somalia comes from considering their different political histories. Since kinship and social patterns do not differ regionally, they cannot illuminate the disparity. Examining regional politico-economic disparities reveal differing regional experiences. For example, coastal regions historically experienced more contact with the outside world, and since Islam permits enslaving only pagan (non-Islam, non-Jewish, non-Christian) peoples, southern areas having more pagan neighbors had larger slave populations. Furthermore, no political authority, sultanate or anarchy, was either extensive or long-lived. Trade goods and trade routes varied regionally. During mid- to late-twentieth century, Somalia seemed close to a stable national government, until the early 1990s. Since then, Somaliland and Puntland have attained separately stable governments and relative peace, while Southern Somalia remains unstable and violent.

Frazier, C. (2004). *Creating an inclusive community: Somali refugees in Mankato*. Mankato, MN: Minnesota State University.

Political unrest between Somali clans has brought a large number of immigrants to Mankato, Minnesota. Defines 'refugee' and outlines the government's conditions for allowing immigration to the United States. The government has designated the Minneapolis/St. Paul area as having the infrastructure to support refugees. Many refugees prefer small communities, such as Mankato. To create an inclusive environment for Somali refugees, the Mankato community needs to increase communication with Somalis who do not speak English (well); to address specific housing, educational and cultural issues; and to involve all Somali ages/groups in creating solutions. [Library link](#)

Gardner, J. & El Bushra, J. (Eds.) (2004). *Somalia, the untold story: The war through the eyes of Somali women*. London: Pluto Press.

Recounts women's experiences during the war, reflecting the position of women in Somali society before and after the war. Includes contributions from professional Somali women in the South, in Puntland in the northeast, Somaliland in the northwest, and refugees in Yemen, Canada, and Britain. Provides historical information about the economy and social traditions of Somali, and how women have established positions of economic and political leadership since the war. Also provides recollections of how women responded to the use of sexual violence as a weapon against them and to the slaughter of their men.

[Library link](#)

Gassem, M.A. (2002). *Somalia: Clan vs. nation*. Mogadishu: s.n.

The pull between clan and national allegiances began with differences in colonial governments. Italian invaders ignored southern Somalia's clan-based hierarchies when colonizing, while British used them to extend their own power in Somaliland. After the United Nations promised Somali independence, the Italian trustees installed a democratic government. Somalis quickly blamed their leaders' clan affiliations for unpopular governance. At independence, Somalia adopted the more populated south's nationalistic administrative style, which did not change life for nomads. Cold War objectives influenced international interaction with Somalia. Describes the history of politics in Somalia. Grammar not standard English, loosely organized.

Griffiths, D.J. (2002). *Somali and Kurdish refugees in London: New identities in the Diaspora*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Comparative study of two refugee groups in London, focusing on their social identities. Roots of migration for Somali come from the collapse of a pastoral clan-based society attempting to create a national economy, whereas the Kurds have a strong cultural unity, but no geographically/politically independent nation. Since 1990, England has legislated and enforced laws regarding refugee immigration, which is more liberal toward those from former colonies. Somalis, regarded as political refugees, and Kurds, regarded as economic migrants, had vastly different experiences attempting to enter England. Once admitted into the country, Somali settlement patterns remained clan-centered, whereas Kurds from different countries of origin struggled to establish a national identity. Both groups faced combining traditional identities with their new British affiliation.

Kapchits, G. (2002). *To know something for sure, one would even part with a she-camel: Somali proverbs: A study in popularity*. Moscow: The Way.

Results of a study identifying best known Somali proverbs and their most common forms. Used and cross referenced sayings from previously compiled Somali proverb dictionaries, then surveyed Somalis living in Berlin for familiarity with the proverbs and interpretation of their meanings. Discusses semiotic and literary qualities of proverbs. Author recommends as guide for Somali literacy.

Kusow, A.M. (Ed.). (2004). *Putting the cart before the horse: Contested nationalism and the crisis of the nation-state in Somalia*. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Pr.

This collection of essays challenges how Somalis currently define Somali-ness. Myths of a common ancestor or beliefs about the nobility of the nomadic life created an artificial class hierarchy. Even historically and anthropologically recorded information on Somalia is misleading since it details only the most recent 1000 years, generally takes a Western view of Somalia, and virtually ignores the older oral tradition. Modernization and emigration have brought changes in gender roles and in how Somalis practice Islam. Even assumptions about minorities in Somalia come from incomplete and inaccurate

information. Prejudices occasioned by mistaken beliefs have led to injustices committed by Somalis and by sympathetic Westerners.

Little, P.D. (2003). *Somalia: Economy without a state*. Bloomington: International African Institute in Association with James Currey, Indiana University Press, Btec Books.

Argues that despite political, social, and environmental instability, the Somali society and economy have survived. The author focuses on the Somali borderlands adjacent to Kenya, comparing that region with other urban and rural areas of Somalia. His main findings are that, despite the lack of a centralized government, in some areas clan, religious, or business leaders have provided stability; that the Somali currency is stronger than it was during 1980s; that while urban areas continue to suffer economically, rural areas have benefited from fewer movement or trade restrictions; and that in comparison to the failure of Western-funded development projects, those projects selectively adopted and led by Somalis have succeeded. However, despite the economic benefits seen since the disintegration of the centralized government, there is a strong need for the re-development of infrastructure in areas including public health, education, and transportation. The author concludes by discussing how events in Somalia have challenged orthodox ideas of how societies and economies operate, and why those outside Somalia should care what happened. [Library link](#)

Luling, Virginia. (2002). *Somali sultanate: The Geledi city-state over 150 years*. London: HAAN.

Relates history of town formerly called Geledi now called Afgooye, home of the Geledi clan, which existed as an early city-state before Italian colonization. As with other Somali areas, clan loyalties and alliances form the political framework. Colonization and modernization have barely changed basic village roadways or cultural hierarchies, but European building styles and dress coexist with the old. Explains settlement patterns, cultural hierarchies, and economic and agricultural practices. An annual New Year's Stick Fight symbolically recreates local history. Includes some maps and illustrations.

Menkhaus, K. (2004). *Somalia: State collapse and the threat of terrorism*. New York : International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Through the example of Somalia, examines how non-state actors adapt to state collapse and implications of that on peace building, political development, and counter-terrorism. The author explores the events in Somalia since 1995, looking at how the continued instability has affected those in Somaliland, Southern Somalia, neighboring nations, and Western governments. Observing that the lack of stability has hindered both state formation and foreign terrorists, the author argues that the current situation may be more of a hindrance to terrorism than would a centralized, corrupt government. He also asserts that Western political assumptions regarding politics in general and Somalia in particular have and will continue to lead to misguided reconstruction programs. However, as some Western governments view state collapse as a security threat and nation-building as unrealistic, they are adopting a strategy of containment rather than resolution. The author argues that rather than embracing such an inevitably ineffective strategy, Western powers should instead develop relations with local and regional authorities, thus viewing Somalia on its own terms.

Sheikh, F. (2001). *Ramadan moon*. Göttingen, Germany: Steidl.

Sayings from the Qur'an and stories from the Hadith preface a Somali woman's account of murder and violence before entering the Asylum Seekers' Center in Holland. Faced with eviction from the Center, she is frightened for her and her son's future. Includes a timeline of Somalis in Holland. Illustrated.

Somalia: *Countering terrorism in a failed state*, Africa report no. 45. (2002) Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group.

Examines the situation in Somalia since the last United Nations mission left in 1995, providing information about the nation's history, current conditions, and possible future scenarios. Although the mass civil war is over, localized clan-based and warlord based violence continues in some areas, while other areas are establishing regional administrative bodies and still other areas are living relatively peacefully without an established government. Argues that to attain internal and external security against terrorists in the still-fractured nation, a strong central government needs to be reestablished. However, attempting to broker a peace without taking into account historical or contemporary political divisions will be ineffectual (such as different regional factions, clan-based leaders, Islamist groups-both genuine and terrorist fronts-and foreign powers). Concludes by arguing for a coalition including various stakeholders in the peace-building. As progress will likely be unsteady and slow, long-term commitment will be required.

WSP Somali Programme (2001). *Rebuilding Somalia: Issues and possibilities for Puntland*. London : HAAN Associates.

Briefly describes Somalia's history since it obtained independence from colonial rule, before analyzing the processes and effects of post-conflict reconstruction efforts begun in 1994. The War-Torn Societies Project (WSP) describes its attempt to rebuild relationships and restore trust within Somalia, starting in Puntland, and between the Somali people and external bodies. Discusses economic and political factors, infrastructure, social integration of armed forces, and the role of women in the reconstruction process. Concludes with an evaluation of the project along with theoretical and operational recommendations for the future. Includes selected bibliography. [Library link](#)

If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact librarian Jessica Schomberg via e-mail: jessica.schomberg@mnsu.edu or by calling 507-389-2155

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