

A STORY WE MUST TELL

Our Peace Journey to Hargeisa, Bosaso and Mogadishu

2017

‘Peace is not merely an absence war but an absence of harm. Peace is the practice of Justice and the implementation of good governance.

‘Violence begets violence. Violence is never the solution to a problem’

“Violence is the behavior of someone incapable of imagining other solutions to the problem at hand” (Fisas cited in *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Lederach, J, 2005 p. 29)

It was 4:30am in the morning and not yet light at Jomo Kenyata Airport in Nairobi. Khadijo and I said our morning prayer and walked to a coffee shop. I was sipping a cup of tea when I caught sight of an acquaintance coming towards us. “Assalaama alaykum” he greeted. “walaykum assalaam” we responded. He looked tired and sad. “Are you feeling well?” I asked. There was a brief pause. “I am so exhausted, had no sleep the whole night” he said lowering his head.

“What happened?” Khadijo prompted. “My brother and his friend were killed in yesterday’s bomb attack in Liido’s Beach View Restaurant in Mogadishu. I know you are peace activists and I don’t like to demoralize you but this is the reality you want to operate in. Good luck with your mission,” he answered. “What you’ve said shows the need for lasting peace and stability in Somalia” Khadijo commented.. My friend frowned, closed his eyes and tried to rest on his chair saying “My brother had a Masters Degree and his friend a PhD. Both were lecturers at Mogadishu University. Militias often target well-educated people, particularly the diaspora who have returned home to rebuild the crippled nation. The armed militias want to disrupt our sense of normalcy and peace. Take care of yourselves. More than 20 people were killed in this cowardly attack.”

We flew from Jomo Kenyatta to Hargeisa stopping over at Mogadishu's Aden Abdulle Airport for an hour. A young female passenger, the mother of a 2-year-old boy who lost her gold necklace in the chaos of passengers disembarking got mad and began using abusive language against her baby. "*Qurun yahay iga aamus, iga tag eeyahow kuma rabee, adiga ayaa ii lahaa*" (Shut up, you are dirty. Go away, you are a dog. You caused me this problem. I don't want to see you) she fumed in her anger. Her words were distressing.

Khadijo took the baby, lifted him up emotionally to her chest, saying "*danbi ma lihide aamus. Wiil fiican baad tahay*" (Calm down, you are innocent. You are a good boy). "Yusuf, what do you expect from a child raised like this?" she whispered to me. "Only violence and foe." I answered. "We should include parenting sessions in our peace capacity building initiative. If this mother had been given a positive parenting course, her attitudes would have been different. Charity starts at home. An everlasting peace in Somalia should start in our homes and will then naturally extend to neighborhoods, cities and the nation", Khadijo stressed. "Babies are like sponges. If you add honey you get back sweet but if you add something sour you will get back sour or worse still bitter. I believe that the roots of violence in Somalia begin with the ways children are raised" I agreed. She nodded saying "yes, yes, yes." "Fathers' role of parenting is worse. We should be critical to our culture. That is the best way we can improve and transform our society" I said.

This incident reminded me of another experience when departing from Jomo Kenyatta Airport. Khadijo, myself and another Somali man who in the past lived in London were walking toward the aircraft. A woman in her 50s said to him "take this bag for me". He and I looked each other and then helped her. She deserved to be helped but her rough attitudes did not encourage us to help. "When I returned from the UK to Somalia, I became frustrated by such behavior but now, I accept it as reality. Just stay for few months in Somalia and you will behave like everyone else otherwise you need to work hard to transform the prevailing norm and bring an alternative" he said.

Around 20 minutes after our arrival in Mogadishu airport, several skinny and possibly poorly trained young men boarded our airplane. They carried hoovers and rubbish bags and looked like cleaners. However, we felt, they did nothing except walk around and talk amongst themselves. "The security of this airport is at risk. These young men could easily be recruited by terrorists to

plant explosives in the plane. I am really concerned” I murmured to Khadijo. Two weeks later, a Laptop planted with a bomb exploded in a Dalo-Jubba plane, 15 minutes after takeoff, tearing a one meter hole in the side of the airplane. Fortunately, only the evil bomber was the victim as the pilot managed to land the plane safely. Dr Abdirashid a fellow researcher at Helsinki University was among those serious injuries. Al-Shabaab claimed the responsibility stating that the bomb was initially meant for a Turkey Airline flight cancelled after the conspiracy was leaked.



Fig. 1: Dalo airplane that exploded mid-air. You can clearly see one meter hole in the side of the airplane torn by the explosion

(Source: The Guardian, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/03/explosion-daallo-airlines-flight-somalia-bomb>)

After one hour's transit we left Mogadishu for Hargeisa and arrived in Igal International Airport around 12:30pm. "What is the purpose of your visit?" asked an immigration officer. "We came to the University of Hargeisa to deliver peace training" I answered. "Oh professors! Welcome to Somaliland. It is a peaceful country. Enjoy your time in Hargeisa" said the officer while stamping our passports. We took a taxi to our hotel reserved by University of Hargeisa. I was carrying a large piece of luggage, and Khadijo another. "You don't need to carry this luggage. You are a woman. Yusuf and I will do it" said the taxi driver with a big grin. When we arrived at the hotel, a young male receptionist said similar thing to Khadijo "no need for women to carry luggage". We unpacked, and had a late lunch made out of *dhaylo riyo* (baby goat's meat) rice and banana. Khadijo warned me not to eat too much dhaylo because when I did the year before in Mogadishu I got bad diarrhea and thought I was dying. Around 5pm, we went to the inner city carrying our peace camera, pocket money and passports. We walked in the dark until we reached the city centre. We really enjoyed the weather and felt serene and peaceful. We yearned to see a peaceful region in Somalia after 25 years of civil war, social unrest and only bad news. We felt we were flying because of our excitement and euphoria. We had our first dinner of chicken and chips in a popular grassroots women's only cafeteria called Cadaani. I refused to be separated from my wife. Fortunately, they accepted my demand. I was the only man among tens of women. Many women stared at me. Apparently, they were in big surprise of my presence. In the days that followed, we were also exploring other grassroots restaurants because we wanted to taste cuisines in Hargeisa, mix with the ordinary people, talk with them face-to face, catch glimpses of their everyday life and hear how they felt and what aspirations they had in a country unilaterally declared self-independence without recognition from any country.



Fig. 2: The author in the heart of Hargeisa

(Source: author's register)



Fig. 3: The author with two young men in *suuqa* (market of) Hargeisa

(Source: Author's register)

We chose to begin each day's training in Hargeisa, Bosaso and Mogadishu with a session entitled 'reflection' in which we encouraged participants to share their daily experiences in relation to the training. We also shared our everyday experience in Hargeisa. Once, we told them about our experiences in eating at grassroots' restaurants. "These restaurants are called *dhuumo oo dharag* that literally means "hide into and get full" which means go and eat at a cheaper grassroots' restaurants where you can get full for a minimum cost.

Life in Hargeisa was quite expensive when considered average income of the general population. Gender segregation was more common in grassroots' restaurants than in expensive restaurants or hotels used by middle class and upper class people where women and men mix and eat freely together. In Hargeisa there is a well known restaurant that Somali diasporas go to for socializing. It is called Summertime restaurant. You can go there and meet with a lot of people mostly young

and middle aged diasporas from Western countries. It is quite expensive but service is good. I tell you, you feel at home and peace when eating in summertime restaurant.

Our next day in Hargeisa, we changed hotels because the services were extremely poor, no wifi, no internet, no hot water, and no functioning telephone. At night, we were plagued by mosquitoes. We did not feel relaxed in this hotel and it was not a good introduction to Hargeisa. First impressions are very important. So, we asked the university to change us to another hotel with reasonable services. We moved to Damal hotel, which was fantastic. Again, when we arrived at Damal the security guard said to Khadijo “no need for women to carry heavy luggage. Men can do it”. We were told that was a common culture in Hargeisa. Even when entering hotels, I was checked most of time by guards for security reasons but Khadijo was rarely checked.

Although women were respected, we felt that they were marginalized both in Somaliland and Puntland. We also assumed that other states in Somalia were on the same page. Women’s involvement in politics and decision-making was restricted. For example, there was only one woman in Somaliland’s lower house that consisted of 82 members. Similarly there was only one woman in Puntland’s lower house that consisted of 66 members. Women’s employment opportunities in the public service were extremely limited across Somalia in general. I believe that women’s full participation in public and private activities is a prerequisite for development, peace and stability in Somalia. With all these restrictions and denial of their rights, most Somali women bear the burden of the society. They are the backbone of Somali society and the breadwinners for their families through their small business including selling clothes, tomatoes, milk, tea and even khat.

The issue of gender and inequality in Somalia was articulated by our participants. “I can understand the hostility from illiterate men and ignorant people but what burns inside me is when my classmates here in the university say to me “why do you waste your time studying? You will end up in the kitchen cooking” complained a young woman from Bosaso. “How could you persuade these men who believe that we are bared meat that anyone or anything including insects can eat. How can you explain that we are equal to them?” grumbled another young woman from Mogadishu. Khadijo assured them that our priorities in peace training include gender and equal access to opportunities.

One of the most frequently asked questions was about how we as husband and wife work together harmoniously and manage our differences. For most Somalis, it is strange and rare to see wife and husband working as a team. “Seeing you delivering your training, as a team, is a unique in Somali environment. It is a living example. It speaks volumes of books in gender and equal participation” commented a male participant from Hargeisa. “You epitomize positive role models for us” said a young woman in Bosaso. We told them that we are an ordinary family like any other and sometimes have differences but we discuss these and compromise. We practice what we teach people. Simple as that. Equal gender participation is the heart of our peace initiative.

“In Somali culture if a man and his wife work together this means that the man is weak and overtaken by his wife” argued a young man from Mogadishu. Sadly a well-educated man who obtained PhD from a Western country, who we met in Nairobi, believed deeply that two PhDs cannot make a successful family. In his view, man should make all decisions and dominate his wife. He read a verse of the Quran which I thought he misunderstood or misinterpreted to support his argument. “But we are PhDs and we are a happy family. So how can you explain that?” I contested. He blinked and changed the subject. His words still echo menacingly in our heads.

While gender inequality is a big issue, we encountered a lot of other ethical dilemmas and social problems across Somalia. We felt attitudes toward the environment were irresponsible and created many problems such as an unhygienic environment. At several public and private events we attended people threw things away recklessly. An example was that on one occasion used plates, empty plastic bottles, tissues, and plastic bags were scattered around in the buildings. We saw plastic hanging on fences, trees and walls. Indeed people needed education and awareness of the environment. Academics confirmed that climate deterioration and abuse of the environment dramatically increases the chances of war and sustains armed conflicts.

On the other hand, both our participants and ordinary citizens we talked with attributed the instability in Somalia to what they described as an endemic corruption from the public and from different levels of government. Many talked about a lack of work ethics in the public services. Many participants argued that government staff work only three or four hours a day and even during that time they do not work effectively. They simply kill time bickering about things like

dirty and dysfunctional clan politics. “We cannot rebuild our country or have a viable nation if this corruption and ethical difficulties in the workplace exist” complained a young woman from East Africa University in Bosaso. A Somali man from the diaspora who we met in Bosaso also talked about the relationship between violence and the lack of customer service skills in Somalia. He stated that people in the work place: be the public or private, have not been trained on how to politely serve and please their clients. He was unhappy about many violent events and confrontations he witnessed where a lack of good customer service skills was the main cause.

During our peace journey, we observed that the dress code had changed throughout the civil war because people had become more religious. Dr Akou found that clothing is a uniquely human characteristic, a silent but powerful medium from which we can learn who we are and what we value. The prevalence of Niqabi women in Mogadishu, Hargeisa and especially in Bosaso was both a phenomenon and fashion. Dirac (Women’s traditional saris), guntiino and garbasaar (women’s traditional wrap around) have almost been wiped out by the new understanding and practices of Islam. For men, unlike 25 years ago, they are not now tucking in their t-shirts. When asked people reasons behind these new dress styles their answers were diverse. Some said it was a proper practice of Islam and others said it was for security reasons particularly in the south of Somalia. “If you do not wear Niqab you are likely targeted by those who have strong religious views. For men, you will probably be considered a government or International NGO staffer and therefore may be targeted by Islamic militants. We felt that the country was experiencing an internal decay and demise of beautiful Somali cultural aspects: freedom of choice and freedom of religious practices. In many ways, what is happening is contradictory to the great principle of Islam “there is no compulsion in religion” (Surat Al-Baraqah, verse 256). You can promote and share people of your own understanding of religion but it is wrong to force them to believe and practice of your own version of interpretation. You must respect the rich and diverse schools of thoughts within Islamic framework. Black and white, wrong and right binary attitudes have prevailed in Somalia.



Fig. 4: Two Somali Niqabi women



Fig. 5: Two Somali women wearing dirac (saris)

On our second day in Hargeisa, we started facilitating training at University of Hargeisa with 16 participants. Gender was well balanced. Participants were well-educated with most holding master's degrees from Hargeisa University. Some had double degrees. In terms of age, they were a bit older than Bosaso and Mogadishu participants. Their intellectual discussion was enlightening and thought provoking. Bosaso and Mogadishu participants talked mainly about the impact of wars on their local areas and grassroots perspectives on peace building. Their insights and experiences enriched the discussion.



Fig. 6: The author and Khadijo standing in front of Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies of University of Hargeisa

(Source: Author's register)



Fig. 7: Khadijo is engaging with two female students at the front door of University of Hargeisa

(Source: Author's register)



Fig. 8: Graduation ceremony after five days of intensive peace training at University of Hargeisa

(Source: Author's register)

Ordinary people in Hargeisa were very proud and expressive about the peace they enjoyed. Taxi drivers, waiters in restaurants, and street people believed that peace in Somaliland was earned and achieved by the grassroots people. Some Somalilanders told us that Southern Somalis can learn from the North about how to bring peace, stability and harmony.

The Hargeisa people were very sensitive about having pictures taken of public sites in the city. For instance, when we arrived Igal International Airport, we took our peace camera inside the airport to capture our impression, however, a security personal prevented us taking any photos. “Not allowed for security reasons” said a passer-by. On another day, I wanted to take pictures of a mosque located in the heart of Hargeisa as people walked from every corner to the mosque like thirsty camels flocking on a water lake. “Why do photos?” asked a man angrily. “I intend to spread these wonderful images of prayer in our people in the diaspora so they can identify with

this and feel good about Islam in Hargeisa” I said. “Let him do it. He is not an *ajnabi* (a foreigner). He is a Somali” begged a middle age woman. “I am concerned. *Dadyahow* (oh people) prevent him from taking pictures” shouted a woman in her small stall of *diracyo* (saris).

In a minute, a lot of people had mobbed me. The majority supported me although some were against me. But, the voice of opponents was louder. A policeman with his rifle added his voice to those against me. “Why pictures?” he questioned me. “I am on holiday and just taking pictures” I stammered. “If you fear Allah and like his prayers, why don’t you go to the mosque and pray?” he prodded. “I am a traveler, so I am allowed to postpone and pray until later in the day” I stumbled. “You are in Hargeisa, in your country, you understand what I mean? So you are not allowed to do so. Either you go to the mosque or go with me to police station, under arrest” he threatened. The crowd seemed to become antagonistic.

Khadijo was shopping somewhere else in the market and when she saw me in a middle of chaotic crowd she run toward me. “Shocking! What happened to you?” she cried. “Nothing” I de-escalated the situation by moving in the direction of the mosque.. I prayed in the congregation. In the prayer, I was thinking about the accident, the policeman, the lady who fueled the situation and how the peaceful, supportive majority of voices were shut down by small aggressive tones. When we returned to the hotel I prayed again because I thought I had prayed for fear of police not for Allah.

On another day, I was photographing a monument of a MIG-17 fighter aircraft of the Somali defense force located in Hargeisa's Freedom Square. “Don’t do that” shouted a man in a *fadhikudirir*¹. Others joined the chorus of disapproval, so I stopped filming immediately. One of the men called to me “Come here. Do you know what we are talking about?” “No, tell us” I replied. “We are talking about whether Somalia should unify or separate. I am from Burco region and I am a unionist. This man is against me because he believes in the secession of Somaliland. How do you think?” he tested us. “We are not politicians. We are peace activists. We teach peace for all Somalis regardless of where they live, be it in Somaliland, Puntland, Jubbaland, Gulmugland, Hirshabeelle land, Banaadirland, South-West Stateland, in Kenya, in Ethiopia and even in the diaspora. Sorry, I can’t say anything right now about this issue” I responded leaving

¹ *Fadhi-kudirir* is when men sit in or around restaurants arguing aimlessly with each other

the scene. Then we walked down to a historical site where the most esteemed Somali poet named Abdullahi Suldaan Timacadde recited his historical and popular poetry “kaana siib kanna saar” - ‘get down that flag’ (British flag) and ‘put up this flag’ (Somalia’s flag) on the eve of gaining independence from Britain in 26th June 1960. That place used to be a memorial but has recently been changed to a Mosque. While we were taking photos here, a man came out from his shop opposite to Timacadde’s memorial Mosque and said “some people are so sensitive when they see you taking pictures in the Timacadde Mosque and they may hassle you. If you feel any harassment, come to me. I am a local and will defend you”. “We will be okay, insha’llah. Anyways, thanks for the offer” I replied.



Fig. 9: The author in car parking located nearby monument of a MIG-17 fighter aircraft of the Somali defense force located in Hargeisa's Freedom Square

(Source: Author’s register)



Fig. 10: The author standing in front of Abdullahi Suldan Timacadde's Mosque where he recited his historical and popular poetry “kaana siib kanna saar” - ‘get down that flag’ (British flag) and ‘put up this flag’ (Somaliland's flag) on the eve of gaining independence from the British

(Source: Author's register)

Travel often holds surprises. One night Khadijo and I were walking in the inner city of Hargeisa. “Hi, Yusuf, hi Khadijo” called a young man. He was Abdalla Bin Suleyman. He was, one of our participants in Mogadishu training in 2015 and was visiting his father who lives in Hargeisa with his second wife and children. We asked Abdalla if he could attend the graduation ceremony for our participants at University of Hargeisa to introduce himself to the new group. He came. Now, he is a bridge between the Mogadishu team and the Hargeisa team. On the following day, we were walking in the streets of Hargeisa, when another man approached us, asking “Is it Yusuf and Khadijo? I am from Brisbane, Australia. I attended your presentation about peace initiative

over there and it was good. I see myself as a member of your peace network in Brisbane” he commented. We thanked him a lot.

On the final day of the training at University of Hargeisa, we were offered a dinner by Dr Mohamud Yusuf the President of University of Hargeisa alongside his Vice-President Professor Said and the Director of IPCS Nasir Ali. Dr Mohamud and I knew with each other when we both were students in Sudan in 1990s however we have disconnected since 1995. We are grateful to Mohamud and Nasir for facilitating us in running our peace training at University of Hargeisa.

After we concluded the training, we drove to the well-known city of Borama that is described as the brain of Somali society because it produces many intellectuals and scholars. Amood University is in Borama. The land is semi-desert and was inhospitable and arid. Animals were thin and malnourished. On our way to Borama, about 2 kilometers this side of another city Gabiley we caught sight of many green trees planted along both sides of the road. “Interesting! Who planted these trees in the desert?” I asked our local driver. “The community of Gabiley came together and decided that every new family established should plant one tree. So, all these trees have been planted by people who have got married for the last 6-7 years” explained the driver. “These trees are seen a source of peace, stability, serenity and progress” he continued. Here we enjoyed seeing camels, goats, sheep and the nomadic lifestyle I have missed over the past 35 years. At one point, I couldn’t resist the beauty of the nature and therefore I asked our driver to stop so that I could get wander through the animal and physically touch the camels, and talk to Geeljire (camel keepers). “Nasiiya (give us) *Jabane*?” requested one Geeljire in the distance. “What does *Jabane* mean?” I inquired. “It is a kind of khat² chewed in the morning” clarified the driver. “Shocking” I responded looking at Khadijo’s disapproving face because Geeljire was addicted with this harmful substance. “Khat is destroying our society even that of the nomads” I said with disappointment.

After 3 hours, we finally arrived in the city of Borama and went straight to Amood University located on the outskirts of the city. Amood is the best of the colonial legacy. Originally established as a school by British in 1952 it is now one of the leading Universities in Somalia. During our trip from Hargeisa to Borama, we saw many red flags fluttering over the villages,

² Khat (Catha Edulis) is a leaf cultivated in Kenya, Yemen and Ethiopia that contains the alkaloids cathine and cathinone which have amphetamine-like properties.

Aqal-Somali (nomadic huts in the bush), cafeterias and shelters alongside the road. On our return to Hargeisa, we stopped at a nomadic camp with a red flag. A nomadic man and his wife came out of their hut. “Howe many of you live here?” I asked. “Only myself, my wife, our children and our animals” replied the man. “Why this flag?” I asked him. “It is the flag for the Wadani opposition party. We support them at this time. We will vote for Wadani in the upcoming election.” His wife nodded her head in agreement. The life of this nomadic family symbolized a flourish of nascent democracy, and relatively political maturity, stability, and nonviolent civilized social transformation. We were amazed that peaceful nomadic democracy survives in Somaliland.



Fig. 11: The author standing at a welcome sign of Amoud University erected at the main road taking to Amoud University

(Source: Author’s register)



Fig. 12: Khadijo and the author inside Amoud University

(Source: Author's register)



Fig. 13: Khadijo and the author standing at the trees planted by newly established families

(Source: author's register)



Fig. 14: The author reconnected with camels which he missed for the last 35 years

(Source: Author's register)

We continued our journey and while we were crossing over a dry river in the desert, our car's tyres sank into the sand. The more the driver tried to drive out the more the tyres dug in. Khadijo, another passenger and I tried to push the car forward but we failed. In a few minutes another car came and it stopped to help us, then another car with four young men stopped to help us and then another one with an old man, and then other cars came from the two sides of the road and all stopped to rescue us. Khadijo and I were impressed with the community spirit and sense of solidarity and support among Somalilanders. "Now I can understand the reason behind the peace they enjoy here in Somaliland. It is a peace nurtured, grown and owned by ordinary people," I said to Khadijo. "You have just stolen these words from my mouth. I agree hundred percent with what you have said" Khadijo said nodding her head.



Fig. 15: Young men from Hargeisa attempting to get out our car’s tyres that sank into the sand

(Source: Author’s register)

After 10 days in Somaliland we flew to Bosaso. Before our departure from Hargeisa airport, an old woman walking in the direction of the Jubba airlines counter saluted us with sincere smile. “Assalaamu alaykum. Thank you very much. My Allah bless you” she greeted us and continued her walk. “Wa’alaykum assalaam. Thanks a lot” we responded. “She thinks that we are members of Jubba airlines staff” whispered Khadijo to me. “I don’t think so. But I will find out” I murmured. I strode in the direction off Jubba airlines counter where the woman was in a queue. “Assalaamu alaykum *hooyo* (mum). In Somali culture you can call older women ‘hooyo’, habaryar (aunt) or eedo (aunt) I am trying to recognize your face. Did we meet before?” I asked. “I know you both from the air, from TVs. I follow your great work on peace and reconciliation. I support you from my heart and my *duos* (prayers) are for you” she said with a beaming face. I

appreciated her encouragement and said “ma’asalaam”. Again, in the departure room, another woman carrying an infant in her hands approached us asking if we were Khadijo and Yusuf? We said *haa* (yes). “I pray for you. May Allah protect you from *shar iyo shadaan* (the evil). I am aware of your work through the media” she recounted. “We are so appreciative of your *duos* (prayers)” we exchanged. After half an hour or so, a third lady asked me “are you Yusuf?” “*haa* (yes)” I responded. At that time, Khadijo was sitting somewhere and I was walking in the departure room. “I watched your peace training throughout Somalia on the TVs. Good job. I know you are from Melbourne and I am from Melbourne too. Let me know if I can help. God bless you” she said. After an hour in the air we landed safely at the newly constructed runway of Bosaso airport. The airport is located on the edge of Gulf of Aden coast. We disembarked and passengers began taking memorial pictures in the airport. Even security officers were asking passengers if they could help by photographing them in the airport. This was different from Hargeisa airport where we were not allowed to take pictures.

In Bosaso airport, a couple of Somali Melbournians welcomed us and drove us to Gacayte Hotel. The hotel was located in strategic location facing to the beach. Puntland politicians meet often in Gacayte and engage with the general public as well. The city is growing but less developed than Hargeisa. Bosaso people were friendly and their warm welcome made us forget the rough punishing environment. Their welcome was the greatest.



Fig. 16: The author in front of Bosaso International Airport

(Source: Author's register)

We started our training at East Africa University (EAU) on our second day in Bosaso. 30 young men and women mostly in their final year of the University participated in the training. The gender balance was not what we had hoped for. Only 7 out of 30 participants were females. On our second day of training at EAU, we heard a lot of gunshots (dhuf,dhuf,dhuf,dhuf,dhuf...). “Listen, listen, it is gun-shots. Isn’t it?” asked Khadijo. “There are some skirmishes between the Puntland government and some clan militias” said a young male participant. A few people from sub-clan militias were killed and others were arrested. It was a slippery situation. A few days later, a well-known businessman, a relative of the Puntland’s president, was murdered as *aaro* (revenge). In *aaro* culture people with high status are targeted. The tension became very high. A friend of mine who was a former minister of Puntland under Abdirahman Farole Government advised us to be cautious and stay indoors especially at night. We went to our hotel a bit early. As we slept, Khadio tossed and turned because she was scared. We were in a difficult situation.

Violence could have broken out at any moment. As an African man, I was trying to keep my apprehension buried inside me. Early in the morning, I opened the curtain wide on the beach side to let the morning light get in. “It is not a big deal. That is normal in Somalia” I consoled to Khadio when I felt her alarm. Thanks to *issamada* (traditional clan chiefs) and religious leaders who have intervened to stop the fighting and start a reconciliation process. Special thanks go to *boqor* Burhaan (king Burhaan) for his big efforts to stop the fighting and build reconciliation. He succeeded in his peace mission with flying colors. Just before we completed our training at EAU, Khadijo contracted bad diarrhea. It was very tough time for us. Fortunately, we had a lot of Imodium tablets that was good for diarrhea treatment. After few days Khadijo recovered well. We recommend for anyone who is planning to travel to Somalia to take with them a lot of Imodium. When we were in Hargeisa and Mogadishu we provided Imodium for a few people who contracted diarrhea.

Apart from our assistants from East Africa University and Mogadishu University branch in Bosaso, we knew few people in Bosaso and all were from Melbourne. One night, we were contacted by Yasin Dihale, the owner of Red Sea hotel, who is also from Melbourne, inviting us for dinner in his hotel with 6 other people from Melbourne, including Dr Abdirahman Kulmiye the Minister of fishery and Mr Ali the first cousin of president of Puntland. There were also two other people from the diaspora, one from UK and the other from USA. We felt at home among these people. They were either in top government positions or in highly skilled professionals in the public service. Two days later, the Minister of fishery invited us for lunch made out of unique fish found in Bosaso. It was yummy. The minister and other people from the diaspora shared with us the challenges posed by the scarcity of skilled people across Somalia and talked of how this could negatively affect the development of Somalia and lead to instability and conflict over meager resources.

After five days of intensive workshops, we wrapped up the training at EAU. We are very much appreciative of EAU top leadership plus Mohamed Khalid’s and Abdifatah Aware’s support during the training. The conclusion of the training at EAU coincided with the Al-Shabab’s attempt to blow up Jubba-Dalo airlines coming from Mogadishu to Djibouti. As a result, all Jubba-Dalo airlines flights inside Somalia were grounded. So we were trapped in Bosaso. Our plan to facilitate training in Mogadishu was in jeopardy and we were running out of patience and

out of time. Jubba-Dalo airlines informed us that the only option we had was to fly back to Hargeisa on a special flight and then try to book in Hargeisa to a Mogadishu flight. Mogadishu is the most dangerous capital city in the world. Now, with only two days left to do our training at the Mogadishu University's main campus in Mogadishu, this seemed unattainable. We consulted with the Director of Mogadishu University branch in Bosaso, Mr Abdullahi Shekh Hassan, and discussed the possibility of running the training in MU branch in Bosaso instead of the capital city, Mogadishu. He welcomed the idea and in two days, MU in Bosaso recruited 29 participants. Gender balance was not that bad. Around 12 out of 29 participants were women. Two days after the training at MU in Bosaso, Mr Abdullahi invited us for dinner at one of the best restaurants in Bosaso. Abdullahi and I have known with each other since early 1990s when we both studied together at International University of Africa in Sudan.



Fig: 17: Graduation Ceremony at East Africa University in Bosaso

(Source: Author's register)



Fig. 18: Graduation Ceremony at Mogadishu University branch in Bosaso

(Source: Author's register)

After we finished the MU Bosaso training, we were invited by the Mayor of City of Bosaso to facilitate few hours of peace training for Bosaso city councilors and we did. Our training workshops in Bosaso have been covered widely by the major Somali TV stations, including Universal, Horn Cable, SBC, Kalsan, and Puntland TVs. So, our faces had become well known within Somali society both inside and outside of Somalia. As a result, when walking in Bosaso streets, people were calling out to us, some even using our names. One day, while walking in Bosaso Market a man sitting among his friends called out “Assalaamu alaykum Professors. Are you the peace builders? Good job. You are gurus. Come and interview me.” “I can say a lot about peace and reconciliation” said another. “Okay, this is a good opportunity. I am going to interview you” I said preparing my peace camera. A man sitting nearby these men put a tissue on the ground and then placed a pistol on it. “Here is Bosaso and this works here” he said pointing his index finger at the pistol. We were frightened by his attitude but our local assistant insisted

on the interview. We decided to decline this offer as Khadijo and I wanted to avoid any clash and perhaps violence.

Another day, Khadijo and I were walking in the city. A young man standing in front of the cafeteria intentionally threw a glass bottle into the street and vanished back into the cafeteria with a big smirk as if he has done something good for the passers-by. Bosaso is a city of stones, so the bottle broke into small sharp pieces. Khadijo and I were shocked by this violent action. Another young man who was walking on the street kneeled down and collected all these harmful pieces of glass. You see, how violence and peace happen every day and side by side! You see how one is fixing an aggressive act committed by another one.

When we arrived in Hargeisa we were advised that Jubba-Dalo airlines was under investigation and therefore not allowed to fly. Only Africa Express Airways was still flying to Mogadishu so we booked instantly but had to wait for three days. Because we were staying there for a few days we decided to reconnect our participants at Hargeisa University and invite them for dinner. The dinner was nice and the talk was engaging. Sahra Samadawa booked at a Fish and Stake Restaurant. Sahra Samawada surprised us by bringing a big cake with the words “Nabad iyo Naruuro” (Peace and Passion) written on it. Because of this, the Hargeisa team adopted this name for their team.



Fig. 19: Nabad iyo Naruuro (Peace and Passion) Cake made by Sahra Samawada in which the Hargeisa team was named after

(Source: Author's register)

After three days, we flew to Mogadishu. During the flight I wanted to find information about the aircraft and Somalia but nothing was there except a few words written on card which read “Fadlan haka bixin caarka dayuuradda (please do not remove this card from aircraft)”. A distant memory surfaced. I recalled that all flights from and to Somalia I traveled on were the same: nothing to read while on board. It is an oral society that values talking over writing and reading. Khadio asked “If experiences and consequences of war are not recorded how will coming generations benefit from their grandfathers’ and grandmothers’ experiences, and avoid repeating the hardships and failures their parents underwent?” All announcements were either in English or one of Eastern European languages (the crew and pilots’ languages) but almost 99% of passengers were Somalis and many of them do not understand either English let alone Eastern European languages.

In Aden Cadde Airport we were welcomed by Mogadishu University. It was sunny and extremely hot. We were driven out and in a few minutes arrived our Hotel Giyaajo. Before we changed our clothes, we heard a big explosion. I shushed Khadijo. Our mobile rang, and rang and rang. It was Khadijo's brother who was deputy-director of Heritage Institute based in Mogadishu. He was concerned of our safety. "What happened darling?" I asked Khadijo as soon she hung up the telephone. She seemed dazed and after a brief pause, she tried to regain her strengths but her hands were still trembling. "A bomb attack nearby our hotel," she said in a panic. Again, Dhiriiiiiiiiing, a text message arrived. I checked instantly. "A former defense minister of Somalia has been just assassinated nearby your hotel" texted an acquaintance minister in Somali federal government. Mogadishu was not safe and hearing gunshots was common. The mood of the people was negative. In the following day, we were taken around the city lurking in the back seats of bulletproof car. I wanted to fasten my seatbelt but the driver said "no". "Why?" I inquired. "If you are attacked or a bomb explodes, you can easily escape. A fastened seat belt could be a death sentence. Violent emergencies are a daily routine in Somalia, you know that Yusuf?" explained another passenger.

Politician diaspora grapevines inside Mogadishu hotels are bad. "If I go to a restaurant I often sit the corner. You know why? If militias assault I can run away. They always target the crowd and the centre of restaurants" said a diasporic man in our hotel. In fact, many diasporas involved in politics living in Mogadishu hotels have developed their own negative stories. Their talk was all about bombing, assassination and all bad things. "Bomb attack is eminent this weekend" said a diasporic man from USA. "I have already decided where to escape to if our hotel is raided" said another from the UK. You know why? Diasporic politicians are almost prisoners in their hotels. They talked among themselves and created their own narratives of lamentation, and grievances and you can easily read acute stress, fight, and flight on their faces. "Why don't you talk positively? You know peace starts in our minds. We need to promote hope instead of fear" I shared with them. "You are too optimistic Yusuf. Everyone likes peace like you but we are talking about our experience, about a precarious condition and uncertainties. You go to universities and come back to your hotel and that is it but if you were to stay here for few months, then you would be like us" responded a diasporic woman.

Another diasporic man interrupted us questioning if these unaccountable universities in Somalia are real universities or just in name. He continued stating that except for a few, the vast majority are called “jaamacadaha hub ka dhigista”(disarmament universities). I asked him to explain what he meant by “disarmament universities”. His response was that the best thing these universities could offer was that they accept masses of young men who are or potentially could be violent and armed militias otherwise they have no quality. Another joined the debate saying that they are just transitional universities. “It is good if they can disarm thousands of militias or prevent millions of young men from joining the armed militias and at the same time provide them books and pens instead of pistols and guns and at least teach them how to read and write. That is what Somalia needs the most at this time of its history. UN and international community should fund these universities to improve their qualities” I commented. Apart from some politician diaporas in the hotels, a lot of diasporas like locals live in their own or rented houses in suburbs and contribute enormously to rebuilding Somalia. They invest almost in every sector including education, health, technology, services, business, import, export, and so on creating thousands jobs in the country which contribute to peace and stability. In fact the Somali future will be shaped greatly by diasporas.

On our second day in Mogadishu, we met with 20 young women and men who participated in 2015 peace training at Mogadishu University, updating them our peace activities. We also facilitated a few hours of advanced training with them. During the discussion about our peace activities across Somalia, they expressed hope in the improvement of Somali situation in the near future. They, sometimes, exhibited mood of optimism and on the other times displayed sense of pessimism created by the wilderness of civil war. “Some times we enjoy weeks or even months of peace and betterment, so the hope is to be high, but you suddenly hear series of bomb attacks happening in the city which demoralize you” said a young man.

While the public sector was messy, the private sector of Mogadishu was booming; a lot of new houses, villages, and businesses were established. In fact Mogadishu was ranked by the Guardian newspaper in November 2015 as the second fastest growing city in the world after Batam in Indonesia. Seven hundred years ago the internationally recognized traveller Ibnu-Batuta described Mogadishu as a bustling city of enormous size, full of merchants and successful trade.

After a half day of training and information exchange, we organized another afternoon get-together at Mogadishu Peace Garden Park. This is the only garden where the traumatized two million inhabitants of Mogadishu go for socializing and releasing the stress and anxiety posed by civil war. However, we were warned not to go there because it was in Al-Shabaab's priority target list. So, instead, we had a gathering in Shamo hotel in which graduating students and four ministers were murdered in 2009. Sadly, few days later, a bomb struck the peace garden while there were many families and celebrating students who recently graduated from universities.

On our third day in Mogadishu, we visited Dr Abdirashid who was badly injured in the Daalo airplane mid-air explosion over Mogadishu. Abdirashid, a well respected researcher at Helsinki University, was receiving medical treatment in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hospital, formerly known Digfeer Hospital. The upper part of his body had been sucked out of the aircraft. This was caused by a change in the air pressure when a hole was torn out of the aircraft by the blast. He was so lucky to survive.

Before we left Mogadishu, we went to see our land donated by Malaaq Osman to build a peace institute in the future. The land is far beyond Kaaraan Suburb of Mogadishu. Our place is on the top of a short and plain mountain facing the Indian Ocean. It is suitable for the spiritual and social healing for traumatized young people living in the war torn country of Somalia. Many thanks for Malaaq Osman for his generosity.



Fig. 20: The Author companied by Malaaq Hussein visiting a land donated by Malaq Osman to be built Peace Institute.

(Source: Author's register)

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