

The London School of Economics and Political Science



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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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IML/MB

22nd August 1991

Basil Davidson
Old Cider Mill
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Dear Basil Davidson

I have now read Mohamed Adan Sheikh's book which I found both informative and highly interesting. Having known him as Minister of Education, this account fills in many gaps for me. As a narrative record, which it largely is, I think it would be helpful for the reader unfamiliar with events in Somalia if there was a chronological table of the main episodes in this period of Somali history.

On a more sombre note, I found Mohamed's account of his imprisonment particularly moving - the horrendous details he records confirm what other friends, who have had the same experience in Somalia, tell me. The most remarkable and attractive feature is, of course, Mohamed's lack of rancour and bitterness and his extraordinarily detached judgement that Siad is essentially a banal dictator - not worthy of his hatred. I also share Mohamed's diagnosis of the corrosive legacy of clan divisions and feuds which Siad has left his countrymen (see enclosed paper).

All in all, I think this is a very valuable document recording the disillusionment of a young African leftist intellectual who joins an ostensibly reformist government which quickly slides into dictatorship and tyranny and by which, he is himself eventually thrown brutally into prison and solitary confinement. It also well captures the survivalist spirit of people who are condemned to work under capricious despots who one day make them Ministers and a few days later throw them into jail. On a narrower canvas, Mohamed makes an invaluable contribution to the political history of Somalia, providing unique insight into the opaque workings of a one-man government based on his position as a senior Minister and clansman of the head of state. As far as I know, this is the first such revelatory text from someone who has held high office in a recent government in the Horn of Africa. It also provides interesting insight into the complex relationship between independent 'liberated' African intellectuals and their former colonists - here in the rare case of Italian colonisation.

I hope these few remarks are of some use. I enjoyed reading Mohamed's book which has an attractive vigour and freshness and rally comes across like a



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memorable conversation. Would you like me to return the MS?

I wonder if you could please give me Mohamed's address in Rome?

All best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Ioan M Lewis
Professor of Anthropology

