CAMPACC Somali workshop 18.04.2015\_rpt\_LL

**Report on workshop, 'Somali Self-determination & Decoloniality', 18 April 2015, London**

The third workshop in CAMPACC's series of workshops on 'Self-determination against the global counter-terror regime' took place on Saturday 18th April 2015, focusing on Somalis in the UK and in the Somali regions.

The Somali context has strong indigenous practices, a relatively less entrenched colonial-modern nation-state infrastructure, heavy external interference & violence and consequently a large diaspora. So this workshop was re-titled more specifically as 'Somali Self-determination & Decoloniality', with emphasis on the decolonial lens for exploring this context and its relation to other 'self-determination' struggles world-wide.

The workshop started with a general introduction to the Self-determination project and to CAMPACC’s relation with Somali communities here. As Les Levidow explained, this began in 2009 after the mass-media revelation that MI5 had been systematically blackmailing Somali youth workers to spy on their communities. CAMPACC contacted the Kentish Town Community Centre and organised a public event to protest against MI5, and then a subsequent event in 2013, especially to defend Mahdi Hashi. Through discussions with Somali activists, CAMPACC had also produced a briefing document on how the UK ‘anti-terror’ regime persecutes Somalis in order to help impose a client regime in Somalia. Today’s workshop takes up self-determination in its own right. See <http://campacc.org.uk/uploads/CAMPACC_Somali%20briefing_v130510%281%29.pdf>

Then Aden Abdi from Conciliation Resources (<http://www.c-r.org>) took us through a journey from pre-colonial Somalia to the present day. He emphasised how colonial powers politicised the pre-colonial 'clan' system and imposed military intervention, mainly by regional proxy forces. In response, Islam is widely put forward as a way to unite Somalis across clan lines. Outsiders continue to promote the Western model of a central state with a standing army. By contrast, Somali needs its own a way to construct a different kind of state. Much of the territory is stable today, with people managing their own affairs. Al-Shabab is on a downward trend as people have become disillusioned about it.

Complementing Aden's presentation, Duale Yusuf from Somali Voice emphasised how Somalis are kept divided and silenced by state persecution, both here and in Africa. In 2006 the Islamic Courts Union had brought peace to Mogadishu, but the ICU was soon expelled by foreign troops with Western backing. This interference has continued through AMISOM. Somalis are divided about how to oppose foreign domination. They need to speak for themselves and create a different future.

This was followed by a short discussion among participants, with questions for the speakers. Some comments criticised the prevalent emphasis on tribe and clan – concepts which mean little for most Somalis. This emphasis also obscures socio-political, economic and geopolitical factors that warrant analysis: Why is the Horn of Africa so important geopolitically for external powers? What strategies do they pursue for their aims? Somalis have continuously critiqued the nation-state model as a colonial imposition. It was pointed out that we should pay more attention to how Somalis see themselves. This leads to the question: How to rebuild a Somali state? Although now people are living, working and managing themselves, they are fighting against both drones and Al-Shabab.

Following this discussion, Hudda Khareih from Decoloniality London gave a presentation on decoloniality, a post-independence concept which understands coloniality as a dependency continuing after formal colonialism ended. The concept has been elaborated by many writers, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind*. There is a growing network of decoloniality theorists and practitioners from the global South in the global North. A Somali-led initiative criticises models that negate Somali ways of knowedge whilst imposing others' concepts; it is called Caadan Studies, <https://twitter.com/hashtag/caadanstudies>.

Hudda closed her presentation by suggesting that prevalent models of ‘national self-determination’ may divert us from seeing how people are already trying to achieve self-determination.

Extending this thread, Kinsi Abdulleh from Numbi, described how the Numbi project was set up as a space for Somali dialogue to go beyond narrow definitions of Somaliness towards embracing diversity (<http://numbi.org>). State models have created problems by reducing Somalis to a conflict, e.g. around tribalism, terrorism, piracy, etc. But in Numbi's view, Somalis don't have a problem with tribalism; rather, they have an opportunity for independence from foreign powers by resolving internal divisions. During the civil war, rural indigenous people were the first to be persecuted but were largely observers of urban battles, oblivious to political conflicts and suspicious of politics. Siad Barre's government brought some benefits but it tried to impose its own version of national identity. Today the mass media silence anyone who does not fit a narrow definition of Somali-ness. Whilst business people and their goods easily cross borders, ordinary people cannot. However, there is a Somali proverb, ‘We come together to mend the crack in the sky.’ Kinsi urged us to talk more with each other towards a common way forwards.

An in-depth discussion followed these presentations. Duale informed participants that the UK gives £700m/yr to Somalia, benefiting British people there and Israeli factories.  But if Somalis protest, they are locked up. Somali children are also being trafficked in refugee camps. Saleh Mamon continued by noting that British investment and control has remained Kenya. Every Somali young person here is under surveillance. There is a new legal duty of public bodies to implement the Prevent programme and monitor 'extremist views', which includes criticism of the UK’s foreign role.

Another participant raised the problem that Somalis have a deep fear of persecution if they speak out, so we need more organisations where people can gain support. Other communities experience this problem too, so we need to share experiences and build support. Another told the group that his organisation, the Somali National Council, works with schools. Although they tried to create a Somali Unification Council, the government stopped it;MI5 tells many Somalis to not meet specific individuals. He urged the group to create organisation for self-reliance, mobilise people and hold group tele-conferences.

Kinsi added that we need to learn from history by speaking to older people who were here first and dealt with similar problems. Many Somalis never requested UK passports because they can be so easily taken away; they are seen as a false security. Organisations get hammered and destroyed, so Somalis end up being silent to avoid being attacked. Responding to stories being told by other participants, for example about children taken away from parents, she said she was also heartbroken when working in the family courts and hearing this take place. But we need to work through different ways of telling our stories, including working with people who are not targeted as heavily as Somalis are. Somalis there are telling us in the diaspora to raise the issue of the UK's role there. In particular NGO-run refugee camps in Somalia are funded from London, so Somalis should criticise them both here and there.

Estella Schmid from CAMPACC told the group that is is crucial to look beyond national borders, as the Kurds are doing. The CAMPACC publication which will document this workshop series will link the experiences of Kurds, Tamils & Somalis. Another participant said that the conversation today reminded her of discussions in Afrocaribbean communities in the 1950s. She wondered whether we needed to go back in history and ask: beyond not being criminalised, what do we want? Les encouraged everyone to attend the 13 June conference, 'Preventing Violent Extremism?' critically examining the ‘Prevent’ programme, organised by IHRC and supported by CAMPACC (Events at [www.ihrc.org.uk](http://www.ihrc.org.uk))

Anna Lau, facilitating the workshop, noted that it had attracted a diverse group of participants working on different parts of the problem, with distinct but complementary perspectives. She hoped that the conversations could continue, towards more cohesive strategies. CAMPACC will support an event during Numbi's Summer festival where artists, activists and others from different communities (including Somali, Kurdish and Tamil artists) will share ideas through the mediation of music, poetry, visuals & objects. This aims to affirm our own political concepts and strategies to build non-colonial knowledge infrastructures. See <https://www.facebook.com/Numbiarts>

Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC), www.campacc.org.uk, [estella24@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:estella24@tiscali.co.uk), tel. 020 7586 5892