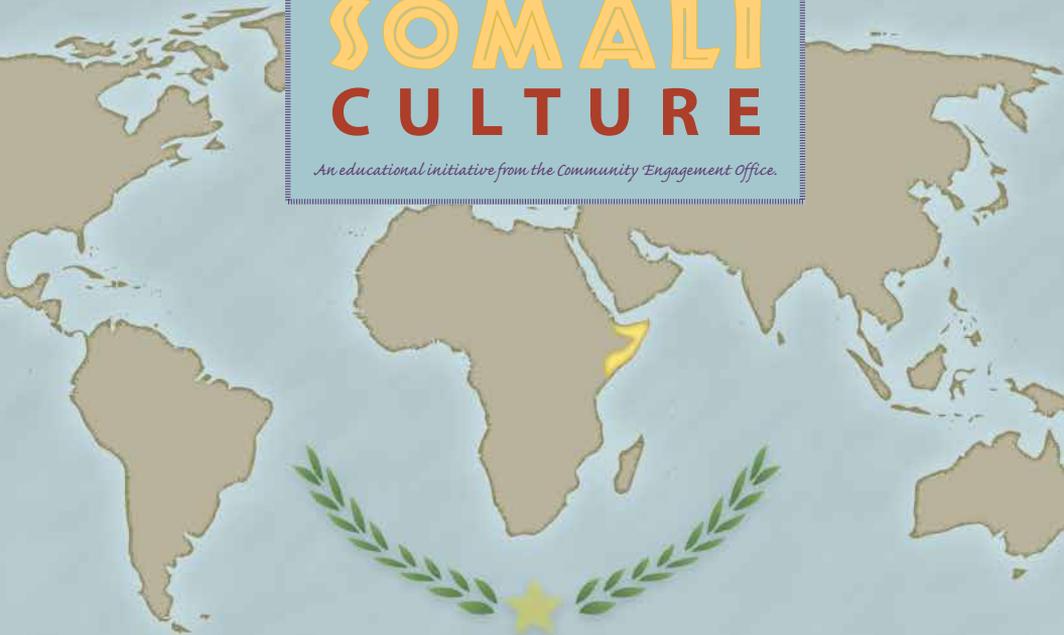
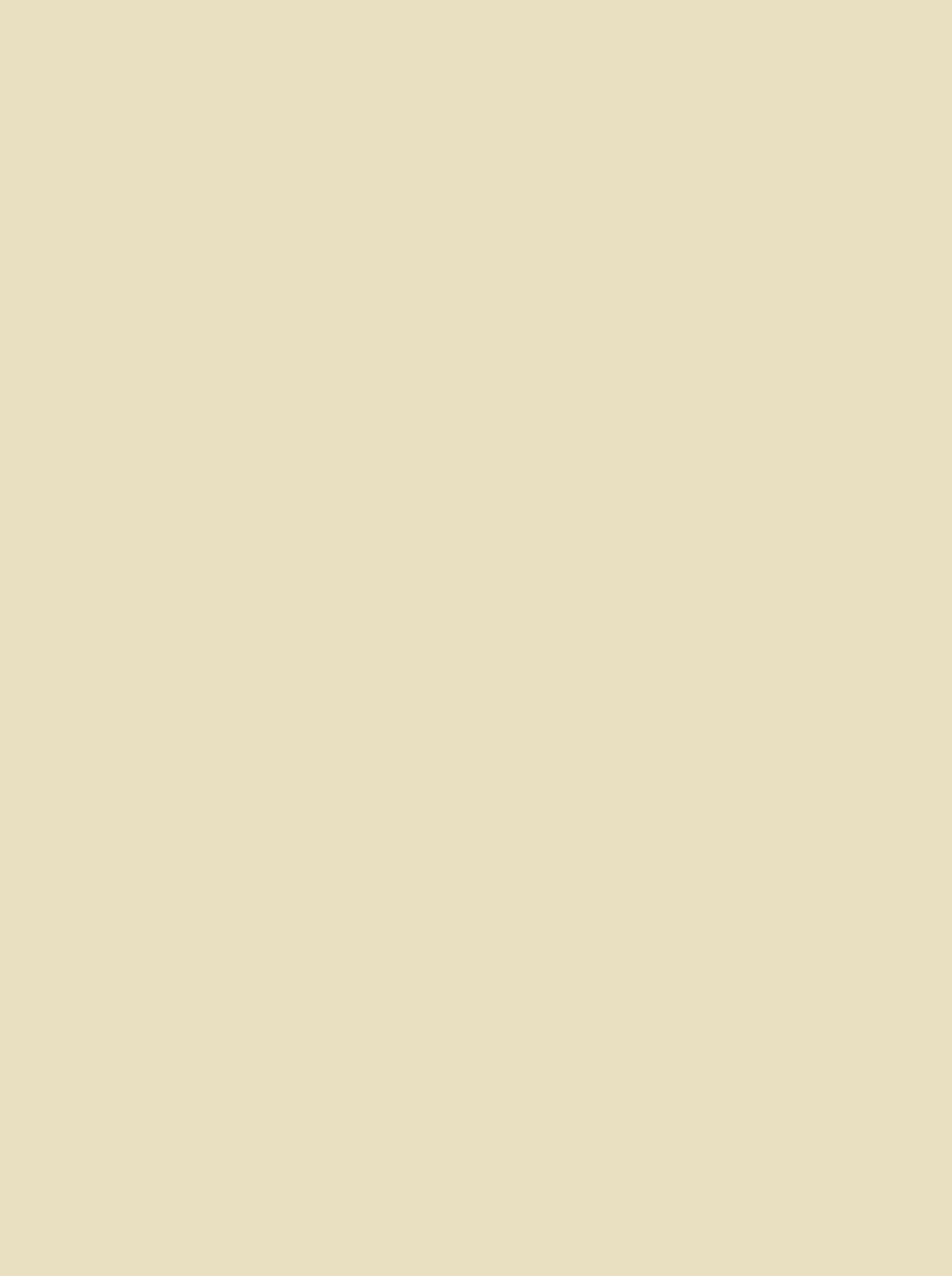




A GUIDE TO
SOMALI
CULTURE

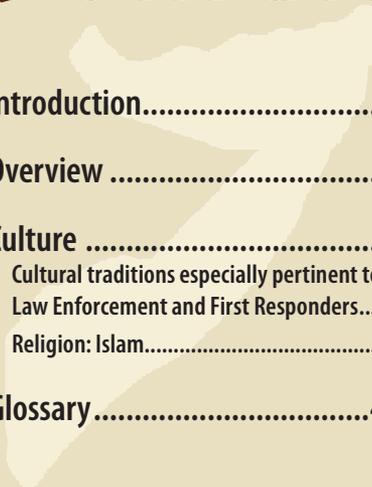
An educational initiative from the Community Engagement Office.







Somali



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OHIO'S REFUGEE ARRIVALS SUMMARY

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	TOTALS
Afghanistan				39	9	5	1	7	61
Azerbaijan								3	3
Belarus							23	5	28
Bosnia & Herz.								10	10
Burma		1	9		6	43	36	66	161
Burundi	1	2	23			8		11	45
Colombia						9		2	11
Congo								4	4
Croatia							4		4
Cuba	8	8	3	1	3	10	2	40	75
Dem. Rep. Congo						10	7	2	19
Djibouti					1	4			5
Ecuador						1			1
Eritrea			3			9	3	12	27
Ethiopia	36	3	6	4	22	90	16	41	218
Guinea					1	1			2
Haiti			1						1
Iran	6	22	29	2	28	15	7	11	120
Iraq	20	26	22	2					70
Jordan				1					1
Kazakhstan							21	4	25
Kyrgyzstan							4		4
Laos						30	14		44
Liberia	15	12	24	22	44	139	132	38	426
Rwanda	18	27	8	4		12		12	81
Sierra Leone	8	16	54	3	51	60	81	10	283
Somalia	82	562	339	34	116	814	961	1,487	4,395
Sudan	6	20	77	12	19	46	17	13	210
Ukraine							70	44	114
Russia	438	407	366	245	200	85	125	48	1,914
Unknown					1	1			2
Uzbekistan							5	42	47
Vietnam	99	31	16	30	8	10	6	63	263
Yugoslavia	747	643	384	162	149	35			2,120
TOTALS	1,484	1,780	1,364	561	658	1,437	1,549	1,961	10,794

An educational initiative from the Community Engagement Office

The Community Engagement Office was established within the Ohio Department of Public Safety's Division of Homeland Security to develop a culturally diverse outreach program for Ohioans of all backgrounds.

We recognize the importance of developing relationships with many different cultures throughout Ohio in achieving:

- cooperation
- understanding
- mutual respect, and
- harmony

Until 1991, and according to the U.S. Census, only 2,070 citizens were born in Somalia, but the upheaval in Somalia and the subsequent civil war changed the number dramatically. The number of Somalis admitted into the United States began to increase from 139, admitted as immigrants in 1985, to 6,500, brought in as refugees, in 1996. The number of refugees increased to 43,000 by 2003. An additional 31,000 immigrants arrived in the United States between 1985 and 2003. These numbers make the Somalis the largest number of African refugees in the United States.

The immigrants wave that followed the refugees was brought in by relatives who arrived earlier. Most Somali refugees and immigrants were placed in many states and major cities like Columbus, Ohio – which welcomed 14,000 in the 1990's. Since then, the number has been growing steadily. No one knows the exact number

but the estimates vary from 30,000 – 50,000; which makes Columbus home to the second largest Somali population in the nation after Minneapolis, Minnesota.

New Somalis have been moving to Columbus for the last 10 years, not as new refugees or immigrants but due to second migration within the United States. Many predict that the migration will continue which will make Columbus home to the largest Somali population in the nation. Columbus is an appealing place for many refugees and immigrants because the city has been helpful and supportive in providing the communities with affordable housing that accommodates migrants with large families. The city also provided the Somalis with many training programs that empower them to get employment. The presence of relatives, friends, and the low cost of living makes Columbus attractive to re-locate.

As refugees, Somalis have numerous disadvantages living in the United States.

- Separation from their relatives and homeland.
- Lack of language skills.
- Difficulties in adapting to the American culture present many religious, cultural, social, and economic challenges.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging changes is a cultural crisis that started to surface recently. A generational gap created familial conflicts where preserving or passing Somali traditions to young Somalis becomes a problem.

Somalia's patriarchal society, where the extended family is the most important unit, is challenged by individualism. The sovereignty of the individual in the United States is a major challenge to the authority of the extended family.

Furthermore, many Somali cultural norms are not accepted by American society and some are illegal. One example is the practice of female circumcision which the West calls "Female Genital Mutilation". It has been labeled as a major

human rights violation in many countries, including the United States. It's illegal in the United States and victimized women can use it to apply for political asylum.

Another example is the use of *qat*. Somalis accept the use as cultural habit, while it's labeled as a drug in the United States and possession of which, is subject to prosecution.

These are among the major issues that face the Somali communities in the United States. There are major misconceptions in our popular culture regarding the Somalis and their culture, and there are many misconceptions among Somalis regarding American society.

This cultural guide is a small attempt to explain some aspects of the Somali culture. It was reviewed by Somalis representing various groups and organizations in central Ohio where the vast majority of Somalis live.

It was written as a quick reference to Somali culture. The most effective and informative way to learn about Somali culture is to interact with Somalis. They're wonderful people who are eager to share their experiences.

They're generous and hospitable and I found them very pleasant people.

Organizations in central Ohio for cultural contact:

African Refugee Educational and Cultural Services: www.arecsohio.org

Horn of Africa Community Center: mashqul2001@yahoo.com

Somali Community Association of Ohio: www.somaliohio.org

Somali Women and Children's Alliance: www.somalifamily.org

United Somali Refugee Women: usrwomen@msn.com

Author: Omar Alomari,
Community Engagement Officer,
Ohio Homeland Security
(A division of the Ohio Department of Public Safety)

History

The history of the Somali people goes back thousands of years. Since a significant portion of Somalis lives a nomadic life, population has been estimated, rather than counted. Estimates vary from 5 to 8 million people.

In 1983, the ethnic component of Somalis showed 98% Somali, 1.2% Arabs, .05% Bantu, and .03% was defined as 'other'.

When the Somali government collapsed in the early 1990's, tens of thousands of Somalis were brought to the United States as refugees. The majority were settled in California, Minnesota, Ohio and Washington. Minneapolis, Minnesota, which has the largest number of Somali refugees, is rivaled by Columbus, Ohio. Due to secondary migration, Columbus may soon have the largest Somali population in the nation.

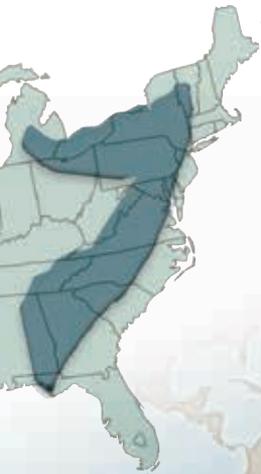
In Somalia,

- Birth rate is 49 per 1000 population (the world average is 29).
- Death rate; however, is 29 per 1000 population (the world average is 18).
- Fertility rate is 6.8 per woman.
- Life expectancy is 44 years for males and 47 years for females.
- 60% of the males are literate.
- 40% of females are literate.

Thousands of Somali live in central Ohio:

- 7% speak English well enough to get a job.
- 80% live with their families; the average family has 7 – 8 members.
- 99% are Muslim.
- 15% are U.S. citizens.
- 75% are eligible to become U.S. citizens.

Source: www.somaliohio.org



Somalia and Egypt had a long trade relationship in products like ivory, frankincense, and ebony, among others. Somali merchants were also middle men providing trading with the Egyptians products from neighboring land.



Cultural contacts

As the first people to sail the sea, the Phoenicians were a Semitic tribe from the Arabian Peninsula and relatives to the Canaanites of the Old Testament. They came in contact with

the Somalis on their way out of the peninsula. The Phoenicians' contributions to world history and civilization were immeasurable and their interaction with the Somalis brought numerous Semitic customs that are practiced today as well as linguistic influence detected in Somali vocabulary.



Ethnicity

Since Somali language wasn't written until one hundred years ago, Somalis relied heavily on oral traditions to pass on their history and cultural traditions. According to folk history and oral traditions, Somalis lived in the land for thousands of years. One of the oral traditions on the explanation of the word Somalia is that Somali people are descendants from a man who lived thousands of years ago, *Somal*, after whom the land and the people are named. Other stories suggest that the name was derived from the word *Somalida* which means *milking animals*, like camels, cows, sheep, and goats.

Ethnicity ...continued

Archeological evidence shows that as hunters and gatherers, Somalis made and utilized sophisticated tools thousands of years ago.

In later periods, Egyptians referred to the land of Somalia as *Punt*.

Another historical encounter was the trade relationships between Somalis and the Sabaean (Arab) kingdoms in Yemen, which flourished hundreds of

years before the rise of Islam. The Arab/Somali connection began centuries before Muslim Arabs entered the land. The Sabaeans expanded their rule over Somalia, ushering the beginning of a fusion between the cultures. This explains the present special cultural and historical relations between the Arabs and Somalis, including the ethnic connection between the two nations.



Transmigration

Somali culture is characterized as a synthesis of traditions and customs brought by migrant tribes who settled and created the present Somali population.

Oromo (or Gallas): Arriving in Somalia thousands of years ago, they appear to have emigrated from Egypt. Settling in the western, southern, and northern regions of Somalia, the Gallas were distinguished from the rest of the Somalis who believed that they were the descendants from the Sabaean Arabs of Yemen. The Gallas were forced into countries like Kenya, Eritrea, and Ethiopia by other Somali tribes after their conversion to Islam.

Hawal-tiriyat: Noted for building small pyramid-like structures mounted on graves, which suggest a connection between them and either the ancient Egyptians or people of Merawah in Sudan.

Midgan: A hunting tribe with semi-nomadic traditions, it appears they had a strong cultural relationship, which may include the slave trade, with the Egyptians.

Ajhuran: Their descendants are believed to be members of *Ogaden*, a powerful tribe in present Somalia.

OVERVIEW

Language

The Somali language is an Afro-Asiatic language, related to Semitic and Hametic languages like Arabic, Swahili, Hebrew and Amharic.

Since more than 99% of Somalis are Muslims, and Muslims use Arabic to read the Qurán and practice other Islamic rituals. Therefore, Arabic is the liturgical language for Somalis. Many Arabic words are part of the Somali language.

Colonialism languages are evident in the use of English and Italian in parts of Somalia.



Until recent history, Somali language was completely oral with occasional use of the written Arabic language. A native alphabet was developed in the 1920's under the name *Osmanya* language (illustrated above).

A writing system debate ended in favor of adopting the Latin alphabet in 1972. Although the alphabet is written the same as English, the sounds and intonations are different.

The new writing system, with pronunciations below each letter:

Ø	ʃ	ɓ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ
Ø/Ø/Ø	ʃS	ɓS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	Ø/Ø/Ø	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS
alef	ba	ta	ja	xa	kha	deel	ra	sa	shiin	dha	cayn	ga	fa	qaaf	
[ʔ]	[b]	[t]	[dʒ]	[h]	[x]	[d]	[r]	[s]	[ʃ]	[ð]	[ç]	[g]	[f]	[q]	
ʔ	ɓ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	ɗ	
ʔS	ɓS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	ɗS	a	e	i	o	u	aa	ee	oo	
kaaf	laan	miin	nuun	waw	ha	ya	[a]	[e]	[i]	[o]	[u]	[a:]	[e:]	[o:]	
[k]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[w]	[h]	[j]									

Short Vowels	A E I O U
Long Vowels	AA EE II OO UU
Consonants	B P T J H D TH R S SH DH G GH F Q K L M N NG NY W H Y

Geography

Situated on the tip of the horn of Africa, the coast of Somalia is the longest in the continent. It's so long that it's located on both the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

Somalia is about 396,000 square miles. Ethiopia borders the west, Kenya the south west, Djibouti and the Red Sea to the northwest, and the Indian Ocean east and southeast.

Somalia's land is diverse. It varies from mountains in the northern arid regions to fertile land in the south. In the hot, dry, and mountainous north, the rainfall yields good agriculture.



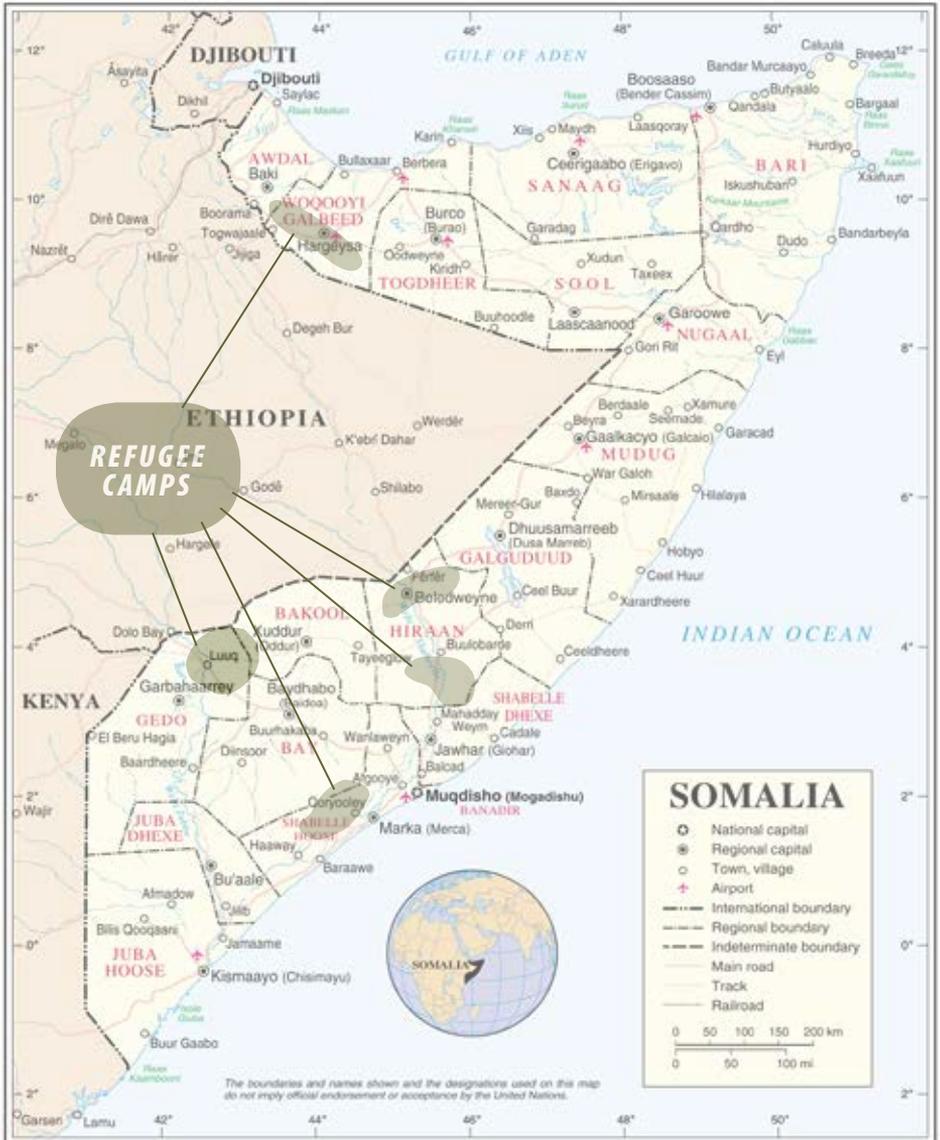
In the Harar Plateau, more rainfall brings in good crops such as wheat and sorghum, among others. The Somali Plateau is the where the most Somalis live, with farming and raising livestock prevalent because of good rainy seasons. Southern Somalia is savanna. A proposal was in the works to declare it a national park for international tourism. One of two main rivers, the Juba River, ends in the Indian Ocean and the other, the Shebelle River, disperses in the dunes.

Climate

Monsoons, known as hurricanes in the United States, form in the Indian Ocean and drench countries located on the coastal areas of southern Asia and eastern Africa. In Somalia, two monsoon seasons each year bring strong winds and heavy rains. The temperature varies from the low 70s°(F) to high 80s°(F) in the summer. The rainfall is from 15 inches along the coastal area to 50 inches in the mountainous area.



OVERVIEW



Map No. 3890 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
January 2007

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

CULTURE | *General Characteristics:* TRIBAL

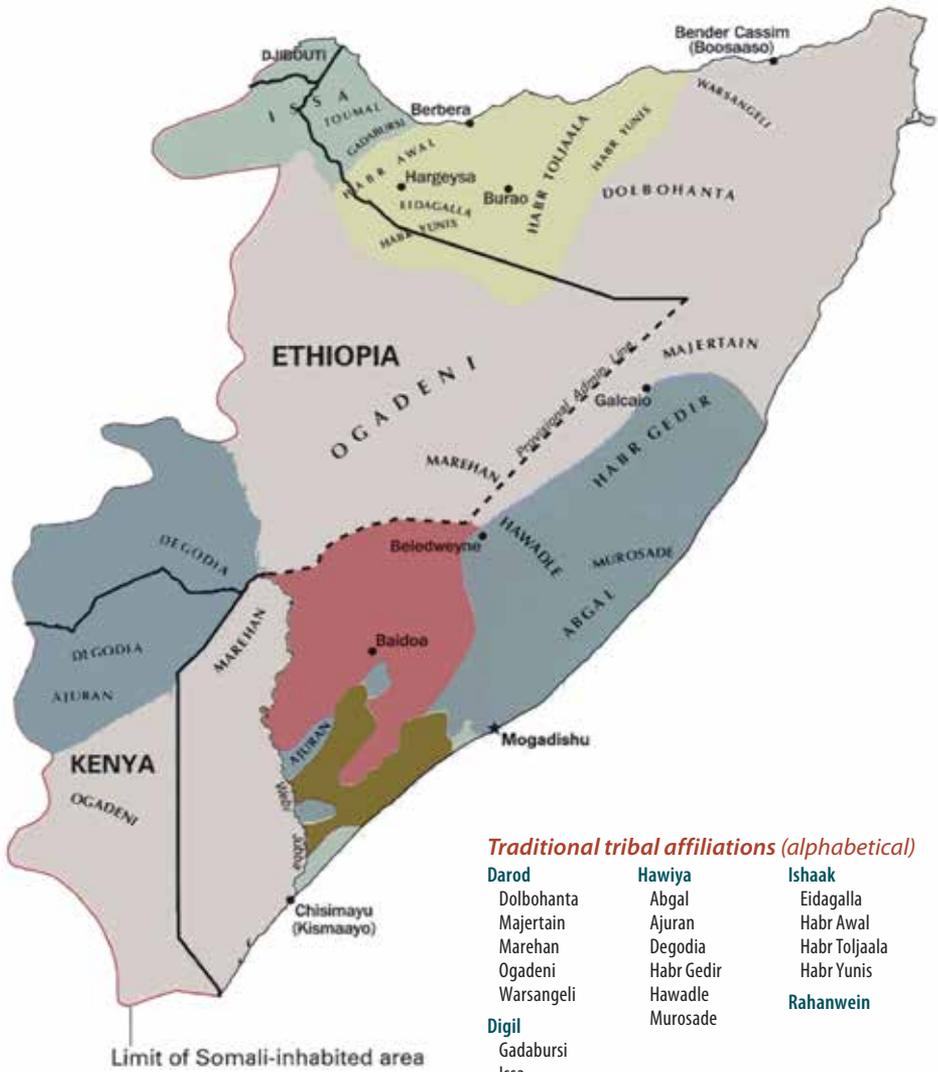
Tribal social structure means that the socio-economic stratification is dependant, not on a central government, but on the cultural power the tribes exert in society.

The power of any tribe is determined by the size, geography and wealth of its members. Powerful tribes affect both the culture and the political system

of the country. It is very important to notice that more than 15 years after tens of thousands of Somalis came to live in urban centers like Columbus, Ohio, they still practice tribal customs and traditions. Tribal councils have cultural power and regular meetings are held to discuss and rule on matter of the Somali communities.

To facilitate effective communication, social coherence, and economic cooperation, tribes are divided into the following sub-systems:

<p>EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM</p>	<p>More than one family with close kinship lives in one big house. Many bonds link members of the extended family together but in an urban setting where it's less common to have extended family houses, the traditions of the family like daily contacts, visitations, celebrations and joint ventures still prevail.</p>
<p>HOUSEHOLD</p>	<p>More than one extended family lives next to each other.</p>
<p>LINEAGE</p>	<p>More than one household live in the same geographical area.</p>
<p>CLAN</p>	<p>Comprised of two to three lineages. Since tribes are very large, communicating with thousands of people is problematic, and the clan system presents a practical solution. For easy communication, each clan selects a chief who can easily connect with all members.</p>
<p>TRIBES</p>	<p>A tribe includes more than one clan. Tribes vary in size but members are in the thousands and tens of thousands. All share a last name but are recognized by the clan to which they belong. The tribe always has a chief who inherits the position of power from his father, with the consent of the clans' chiefs and tribe's members. His position is very often ceremonial, but has political influence on the central government. Most often, tribes' chiefs have access to people in power, and governments seek them out for favors or support by appointing them in high positions in government offices. In Somalia, tribal chiefs are critical in the political, religious, and cultural life.</p>



CULTURE | *General Characteristics*

TRIBAL

As many members of tribes and clans still live the nomadic life, many others live a sedentary life in cities and urban centers.

While city dwellers are accustomed to settled culture, tribal traditions and customs are prevalent in their relationships and interaction.

CULTURE | *Traditions*

PATRIARCHAL

Men are the center of Somali society and hold the cultural authority. Typical of old cultures, patriarchal systems had been prevalent for thousands of years. Men are decision makers for almost every aspect of society, including matters of life and death.

PATRILINEAL

A father's patriarchal ancestral names are given to children in the family. As the tribe dictates, male and female children are given first, second, and third names.

The second name is their father's first name, and their third name is their grandfather's first name followed by their father's family name.

To affirm a tribe's name, women keep their paternal name in marriage.

Father	Omar Elmi Dihoud
Mother	Waris Abdi Duale
Son	Ali Omar Elmi
Daughter	Roda Omar Elmi

PATRILOCAL

Traditionally, the basic unit in Somali culture is the extended family, which is nomadic and patriarchal. This system combines more than two generations in the same family.

Therefore, when a son is married; he brings his wife to live in his father's house. The size of the father's house expands in accordance with the number of sons. Whether sedentary or nomadic, the extended family system is practiced and preserved.

LARGE FAMILY

Somali families are large in comparison to Western standards. It's not surprising to see a nuclear family of nine or ten members living in the same house. One of the most attractive reasons for migration to areas like Ohio, is housing situations which accommodate large family size.



By age 5, most children can recite the names of male family members in their father's line for 17 generations.

RELIGIOUS

Beside culture, religion is a way of life. As indicated before, 99% of Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Somalis rely on Islam as a source of strength and reference for their daily life. The religion's doctrine provides guidance on how to live and behave correctly in public and private in this life; and how to prepare for salvation in the life after.

POLYGYNOUS

As both tribal and Muslims, some Somalis practice polygyny (a man having more than one wife). This practice however depends on the economic abilities of men to provide dowries and support for additional wives. Therefore, the practice varies from one age to another.

STATUS OF WOMEN

As both an eastern and tribal culture, the status of Somali women is not equal to that of men. Somalia is a patriarchal society and that gives men the cultural edge over all societal matters, including decisions in marriage and divorce.

While literacy rate is low among men (36%), it's even lower among women (14%). Women in urban areas are educated and many have professional careers. For the

last 20 years, Somalia witnessed a rise in women's organizations and the demand for equality and empowerment.

Since 1991, thousands of Somali families have immigrated to the United States as a part of the efforts of the U.S. government to help in stabilizing Somalia.

It's worth noticing the tremendous level of female enrollment in U.S. schools and universities for the last 18 years.

DIETARY LAW

Similar to kosher food in Judaism, Islam forbids the consumption of swine, carcasses, blood, predatory animals, packaged and commercial meats, and animals that are not slaughtered properly. These foods are *haram* (forbidden). Only Muslims can guarantee *halal* (permitted) food. There are stores in many major American cities that sell such food and label it as *halal*. Pork, alcohol, drugs and any product that alters the state of mind are strictly prohibited in Islam but exception is given to products with a mild stimulant, like caffeine.



Samosa



Canjeelo

Marriage

Marriage among Somalis can either be arranged or be an individual's choice. Arranged marriages rely on parents, relatives, or friends of the husband to choose a wife for him. A visit by a man's mother to a woman's family will ensure the right choice, as seen by the mother. The usual visit "examines" the potential wife for her physical attributes and her behavior, to determine how suitable she is for the son.

Religious rituals and ceremonies are used to complete a marriage. Before marriage takes place, a period of time, which is agreed upon by parents of both parties, takes place for the bridal couple to get acquainted with each other. Engagement is not obligatory for marriage to take place, the cultural traditions make it mandatory.

Very often, marriage between families is multi-dimensional; it means that two families, clans, or tribes are connected with a cultural alliance that affects the status of the groups. Marriages are bound by a religious contract which is similar to a pre-nuptial agreement in the United States. The two parties negotiate the terms of the contract to include everything from dowry and divorce, to rights and duties of both the husband and wife. It covers all aspects of the marriage and divorce. The contract is conducted by a religious clerk from the *Sharia* court (the Islamic religious court), which oversees the *Personal Status Code* for families and individuals. Contracts are usually open documents, provided they state the amount of dowry.

There are two types of dowries:

- *Immediate* – delivered to the wife at the time of signing the marriage contract. It's the property of the wife and she has the sole control of it.
- *Late dowry* – paid to the wife, if the marriage is dissolved.

The dowry is seen as a financial insurance to the wife because of the negative cultural stigma associated with divorce. A divorced woman doesn't have the same cultural acceptance women usually have in western society, thus, re-marriage is more difficult for a divorced woman in a society that stresses marriage and family.

A dowry can be monetary, real estate, jewelry, or anything the two parties agree upon, but it should have monetary value. Although Islam permits divorce — the most un-favored, permitted act; the culture stigmatizes it so the number of divorce cases in Islamic societies, like Somalian, is very low in comparison to non-Islamic countries.

As usual for tribal societies and extended family systems, Somali traditions established the age of marriage should be around fifteen or under for both boys and girls. The young age of marriage means that parents of potential husbands or wives choose the spouse for the other party. Very often, cultural contacts or good reputation are critical in deciding marriage, especially for girls.

When the parents of a boy decide on a wife for their son, they gather as many

close and distant relatives and friends as they can and send a message with their intention (*murad*) to their potential in-laws. The girl's father invites a group of his closest relatives and friends as he welcomes the group with full hospitality that includes a feast of national dishes. Afterward, the visiting group explains their visit. It is similar to the tradition of "asking the father for his daughter's hand in marriage" that exists in the western society.

The visiting group brings various gifts, traditionally these items were a horse, rifle and clothing. One important issue both sides discuss is the dowry (*yarad*) which might be offered in various forms of monetary value. The father usually welcomes the offer, but asks the guests to wait until he consults with his family. Usually, the answer is given the same day, unless most of his relatives are not present. In this case, the father may ask for more time to respond. The dowry, traditionally, is paid in the form of camels, with the quantity varying by tribe.

The families normally have an immediate celebration followed by the signing of the marriage contract, usually conducted by a religious clerk. Wedding ceremonies are lengthy and elaborate, they take place when the whole dowry is paid in full. Some families celebrate a whole week before the actual wedding night.

One tradition may raise concern for outsiders. It's manifested in a southern Somali custom where the groom uses a whip to

beat the bride. It's not a hard beating, it is believed to be a way to coerce the bride into being an obedient wife.

One rare approach to marriage in Somali culture is *masafa*. An ancient custom practiced by many cultures, it may demonstrate a couple's fear of the girl's parents' rejection of their marriage. In this scenario, a couple develop a relationship, leave their village, and contact a clerk to sign a marriage contract. Only then do they notify the girl's father and attempt to make amends. In other words, the couple creates a situation where the parents have no choice but to accept the marriage.

Polygamous marriages

One custom still practiced by Somalis that combines religious and cultural traditions is polygyny for men. The man can marry up to four wives if he provides for them and treats them equally.

We don't have statistical facts on the number of polygamous marriages but it happens especially among the well-to-do families because of their economic means. However, another custom which vanished from many western cultures is still practiced in Somali and Arabic cultures. If the husband dies, it's expected that his brother (even if he's already married) should marry his brother's widow. If she wants to marry someone else, she can't proceed without her brother-in-law's approval. Similarly, if the wife dies, the husband is expected to marry his unmarried sister-in-law with the blessing of her parents.

Traditions: DIVORCE

As stated before divorce is permitted in Islamic societies like Somalia and it's carried out according to the Shariá of Islamic law. There are three types of divorce sanctioned by Islamic law:

Traditional repudiation

Occurs when a person (usually the husband has the decision making power) decides to end the marriage. He usually tells his wife, "I divorce thee," one time. The couple must wait a three-month period (*uddah*) to ensure the wife is not pregnant before the divorce will be final. Another kind of repudiation is when the husband tells his wife, "I divorce thee" three times. Divorce in this case is final and can't be reversed if the couple wants to remarry unless the wife marries another man, divorces him, and wait for a period of three months before the couple re-marry. For this type of divorce, the woman is entitled to late dowry and the man is obliged to pay what he owes the wife in full. It's not surprising that educated women and their families waive large immediate dowries in favor of large late dowry, in case a divorce takes place. This becomes a factor in minimizing the cases of divorce in societies like the Somali.

Joint Divestiture

This is the kind of divorce where both husband and wife decide to end the marriage. They engage the Shariá or religious court to oversee the process. According to Islamic law, the *qadi* (judge) doesn't issue a judgment on divorce until all options are used to solve the issues that cause the split. The judge usually engages families of both sides and allows them a period of time to solve their problems. If problems are not solved, a divorce might be granted. In this case, the wife is entitled to half of her late dowry.

Disuniting

This divorce is automatically granted according to religious teachings. If a spouse is absent and his/her whereabouts are not known, like in cases of abandonment, travel, or war, a divorce is granted after a spouse requests the divorce and two years have passed since the last communication with that person. It usually is granted for inheritance, financial matters, or re-marriage.

CULTURE | Traditions

PREGNANCY

As delivery nears, pregnant women practice a cultural tradition of inviting female friends, neighbors and relative, for a gathering to pray for a safe delivery and a healthy baby. Since Somali culture values males (for their labor) more than females, prayers ask for the delivery of a boy. The gathering is very festive, and includes cooking a special meal and offering full hospitality of coffee, tea, milk, and dates, among other things.

Upon delivery, the husband invites the female relatives and friends of the wife to help in the delivery and volunteer as midwives.

After delivery, the mother and the baby are secluded to bond with each other. She spends forty days in seclusion eating healthy meals to allow her to take good care of the baby. Baby boys are named by the relatives and neighbors and baby girls are named by their mothers. Names are usually representative of religion or kinship.

BIRTH

As in all cultures, birth is a very joyous occasion to the parents and their families. It is customary to circumcise boys in Islam and is considered a religious right of passage. In Islamic countries, a certified person called *mutta'hir* performs this religious ritual.

However, Muslims understand that such a profession might be difficult to establish in the United States, and thus expect a physician to circumcise their children. It's important for the parents to attend this procedure, which is usually followed by a celebration with relatives and friends.

FAMILY PLANNING & ABORTION

Islam permits family planning and the use of birth control methods as long as it's reversible and that both the husband and wife are in agreement on this issue. However, abortion is banned unless the mother's life is in danger as commanded in the Qurán: *"Do not slay your children for fear that you can't provide, God will provide for you and them"* (6:151). In addition to banning abortion, surrogate parenting is not acceptable either.



CULTURE | Traditions

DEATH

As mentioned before, dependency on God is an essential part of daily Muslim life. Muslims view life and death as God's will, and thus length of life is determined by God. Death brings everyone back to the Creator as stated in the Qurán: *"Every human being is bound to taste death; and We test you all through bad and good things in life by way of trial: and unto Us you all must return."* (Qurán, 21:35)

Rituals performed for the deceased:

- washing the body,
- wrapping the body with white linen,
- transporting the body in a casket to the mosque for a special prayer,
- the face of the deceased should be turning toward Mecca, Saudi Arabia (southeast of the U.S.),
- a quick burial (within 24 hours).

Muslims usually specify in their will where they should be buried and who should handle their funeral. The concepts of incarnation and Judgment Day oblige Muslims to ban cremation in favor of burial in a cemetery. Muslims visit grave sites on Fridays, reciting prayers of supplication and reading Quránic verses.

Embalming is not part of Islamic tradition, but can be performed according to the law. An autopsy is not permitted unless the death is connected with an investigation. There is an ongoing debate among Muslims on organ donation. Many Islamic scholars interpret Islam to permit organ donation.

EUTHANASIA

The deliberate act of ending someone's life is not permitted in Islam. It's considered a challenge to God's will, and thus a crime.

SUICIDE

Life is considered precious in Islam and ending one's life or others' lives (unless in self-defense) is strictly forbidden. There is no religious justification for suicide bombing as the Qurán is very clear in forbidding the murder of any person. Killing innocent people is comparable to murdering the entire human race.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Similar to Judaism and Christianity, Islam forbids the practice of homosexuality as commanded in the Qurán: *"Of all the creatures in the world, will you approach males and abandon those whom God created for you as mates."* Since Semitic languages, like Arabic, use the masculine form to refer to both genders, the practice is forbidden for women as well.

GENDER SENSITIVE

It's imperative to know that Somali culture is gender sensitive. It's highly recommended that only female physicians treat female patients, especially when a medical exam requires exposing a woman's body. Almost in all cases, Somali women go to a female OB/GYN. Of the entire

world, Muslim countries have the highest percentage of female gynecologists because women would not go to a male physician.

As a patriarchal culture, Somalia empowers men

to make a decision regarding providing treatment for any member of their families. This is an acceptable practice among Somalis and should be honored by care providers whenever possible.

It's highly recommended that an interpreter who understands both the *language* and the *culture* be present to aid health workers.

Somali culture encourages large families and thus, birth control might not be acceptable by either Somali women or men. Islamic doctrine is clear and direct when addressing this issue. As mentioned previously, the Qurán commands parents not worry about having children for fear they can't provide, for God will provide. *"Do not slay your children for fear that you can't provide, God will provide for you and*

them" 6:151. Family planning might be the alternate and convincing term to use at present to discuss this issue with families. Many Islamic scholars see no contradiction between the religion and family planning, and thus the use of birth control is permissible.

For many Somalis, the Western approach to health care is a new experience. Procedures, logistics, forms, consent, diagnosis, treatment, and alternative treatment should be explained and translated accurately. For effective treatment, trust must be established between health workers and families, not just the individual patient.

FOLK MEDICINE

Folk medicine is deeply seated in Somali culture and practices. Regardless where Somalis live and even with the presence of modern medicine, traditional medicine will be used as a reference for health needs.

A belief among many Somalis is that illnesses and diseases are caused by "Shaitan" (the "devil", Satan) and the "evil eye", which can inflict either joy or pain, including sickness, on others. Treatment very often includes a combination of herbal remedies and written verses from the Qurán on a piece of paper folded and inserted in a leather case and worn as a necklace by the sick person. They believe it has healing and protecting power from further physical or emotional harm.



CULTURE | Traditions: Information especially pertinent for First Responders & Law Enforcement

MUSLIM APPEARANCE & ATTIRE

In general, Muslims don't look any different than anyone seen on the street. However, some follow the Prophet's Hadiths (sayings and deeds) of wearing long beards but shaving the mustache, while others wear beards and mustaches.

Wearing a beard is not obligatory. Some



wear only a mustache which is a cultural, not religious, tradition. It's not unusual to see some Muslim men wearing skull caps and long robes, especially when they attend a prayer or a sermon at the mosque.

Attire and appearance cannot be used as the sole criteria for determining if someone is a Muslim. A Sikh, from India, was killed in the aftermath of the September 1, 2001, attack in New York City, because he was mistaken for a Muslim. It's important to establish that Muslims belong to all ethnicities and cultures.

Somalis adhere to modesty in appearance. As a result, interpreting modesty can be subjective because different Muslims wear different styles of clothes. For example, some women choose a more conservative appearance by covering their entire body while others might wear a long

dress with a hijab (head cover), but neither dress would be a tight fit. Most Muslim women wear a long coat over their dresses.

Some Muslim women might adhere to neither style, but rather wear attire similar to that of non-Muslim women. It's important to note that not all women who

wear long dresses are Muslim, as women in many cultures wear similarly modest clothing.

Items of female clothing:

- Toob – a long dress that covers the body from shoulder to ankle.
- Hijab – a shawl or head scarf that covers the hair.
- Dirah – a long dress.
- Coantino – a cloth shawl tied around the shoulders that reaches the waist.

Men, typically, dress in similar fashion to formal and informal western clothes, although some of them wear turbans or a cap, *koofiyad*.



CULTURE | *Traditions:* Information especially pertinent for First Responders & Law Enforcement

GREETINGS

Assalamu Alaikum: Peace be upon you

Nabad Miyaa: Peace

Subah Wanaagsan: Good morning

Galab Wanaagsan: Good afternoon

Habib Wanaagsan: Good night

HANDSHAKES

Hand shakes are gentle, not as strong as in the hand shaking tradition in the United States. If a hand shake takes place, always use the right hand. Due to cultural traditions, a left-handed shake is considered insulting.

A male officer should not shake hands with a female, because this would invalidate prayer ablution. If the female extends her hand, then it is appropriate to shake hands.

COMMUNICATION

Somalis are image conscious; therefore, a visit by law enforcement might give neighbors the impression that a member of the family either is in trouble with the law or done something unacceptable. This shames the family, and shame is the ultimate image problem in the culture. Therefore, if an officer communicates or deals with Somalis; unless the safety of the officer is threatened, discretion is encouraged.

When interacting with a Somali female, it's preferable that a female officer conduct the communication or the search. It's a gender conscience culture and a male officer might not be able to communicate with a female.

It is suggested an officer seek interpreting services from someone outside the family, because many cases have shown members of the same family, who speak English, were not accurately interpreting what the law officers were asking or saying.

BODY LANGUAGE

When communicating, Somalis tend to stand close to others and in many instances, touch shoulders, arms, or hands of others. This is a concern — an officer might consider this as reaching for a weapon. It is suggested an officer mark a distance and explain to the person to keep that distance.

As instructed by religion and culture, looking someone in the eye is considered rude and disrespectful; therefore, one should not interpret this custom as a sign of guilt or cessation of dialogue.

GESTURES

Pointing a finger is very insulting to Somalis because they use this gesture to call a dog. Dogs are not culturally acceptable, and one of the ultimate insults to Somalis is to call one a dog or point a finger as you do for a dog.

Typical of ancient cultures, Somalis use of hands, arms, and facial expressions are important for communicating with others. Here are some of these gestures:

- Use of the index finger with other people is not acceptable – since it is a gesture used to call dogs.
- Snapping fingers expresses attempts to remember something that happened a long time ago.
- Opening the palm of hand and bending it back means “No”.
- Crossing legs is impolite and arrogant because it was used by tribes and clans to indicate power and wealth. Islam rejected all practices and gestures used earlier.
- Showing the sole of your shoes to others is considered impolite and insulting because soles of shoes touch the ground. The soles gather dirt and become impure, showing the soles is bringing the impurity of the ground in the face of others.

ENTERING MOSQUES & HOMES

Cleanliness

Removing one’s footwear is very important before entering a mosque. This is encouraged when entering Muslims’ homes because they try to keep their space pure for prayers.

Personal space and privacy

If a male officer visits a home, he should give women the time and privacy to cover themselves before entering, but it’s preferable that a female officer communicates with a female Muslim.

Police Dogs

Dogs are considered impure and Muslims don’t touch, nor allow them inside their homes. If an officer can complete an investigation without them, it’s preferable dogs not enter a building. Muslim Americans may be less cooperative in such an uncomfortable situation.

SOMALI YOUTH

Many Somali youngsters who grew up in the United States are exposed to various ideas not familiar to their families, especially those who don’t speak English. Drug possession cases have arisen where marijuana was grown in a household and the parents didn’t know what it was. This is critical to law enforcement, because parents might be liable; when in fact they are unaware a plant is considered a drug, or illegal.

CULTURE

Traditions:

Information especially pertinent for First Responders & Law Enforcement

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION [FGM]

Healthcare providers and first responders should be aware of the cultural practice of *female circumcision*, referred to in the western hemisphere as *Female Genital Mutilation* (FGM).

In cultures where it is an accepted norm, followers of all religious beliefs, as well as animists and non-believers practice it. Although usually performed without anesthetic by a traditional practitioner with crude instruments; for the more affluent it may be performed in a health care facility by qualified health personnel.

The age at which female genital mutilation is performed varies by area. It is performed on infants a few days old, female children and adolescents and, occasionally, on mature women.

The most common type of female genital mutilation is excision of the clitoris and the labia minora, accounting for up to 80% of all cases; the most extreme form is infibulation, which constitutes about 15% of all procedures.



More than 90% of Somali-born women have some form of circumcision.

Female circumcision is a cultural, not religious, practice.

More than 90% of Somali-born women have some form of circumcision. In Somalia, traditionally a woman (*medgan*) performs this procedure at home using a knife (*mendhil*), while holding the girl's hands and feet. This is not an easy method – it causes a lot of pain and crying. If the *medgan* doesn't perform it correctly, she has to re-perform it, causing the girl even more pain and suffering.

Female circumcision is not only a health concern, but also illegal, and violators are prosecutable. Moreover, the United States Congress passed a law labeling the practice as a violation of human rights. Women from practicing cultures can use FGM as a reason to seek political asylum in the United States.



CULTURE

Traditions:

Information especially pertinent for First Responders & Law Enforcement

Female circumcision is illegal in Australia, Burkina Faso, Canada, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ghana, Guinea, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Senegal, Sweden, Tanzania, Togo, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Today, the number of girls and women who have been undergone female genital mutilation is estimated at 100 to 140 million girls. It is estimated that each year, an additional 2 million girls are at risk of undergoing genital mutilation.

Regardless of the religion, most females who have undergone genital mutilation live in 28 African countries, although some live in Asia and the Middle East. FGM is increasingly found in Europe, Australia, Canada and the USA, primarily among immigrants.

Female circumcision is not only a health concern, it is illegal in the U.S.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is opposed to medicalization (performed in a health care facility by qualified health personnel) of any type of female circumcision.

According to the WHO, these types of female circumcision practiced today:

- Type I Excision of the prepuce, with or without excision of part or all of the clitoris.
- Type II Excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora.
- Type III Excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of the vaginal opening (infibulation).
- Type IV Pricking, piercing or incising of the clitoris and/or labia.
 - Stretching of the clitoris and/or labia.
 - Cauterization (by burning) of the clitoris and surrounding tissue.
 - Scraping of tissue surrounding the vaginal orifice (*angurya* cuts) or cutting of the vagina (*gishiri* cuts).
 - Introduction of corrosive substances or herbs into the vagina to cause bleeding, or for the purpose of tightening or narrowing it.
 - Any other procedure that falls under the definition given above.

FGM: Cultural Implications

This is a cultural, not religious, practice. Ancient Egypt reliefs show Egyptian women practicing this custom. Through trade and expansion of power from Egypt, the custom integrated into many cultures. Although practiced for many years, only recent advancements in communications like the Internet have created a worldwide awareness of this cultural tradition.

It is also important to note that many Somali women, who oppose FGM, initiated numerous educational campaigns in Somalia and worldwide; to inform women of the problem and to rally global support for eradication of this custom.

In societies like the Somalis, a shame/honor code dictates people to behave

correctly in public and private. Shame and honor are associated with gender and sexual relations. One of the most important cultural traditions is purity and virginity for women.

In this patriarchal culture, women, viewed as the weaker sex; are considered the ones who entice men sexually. Therefore, they're distrusted and viewed in society as the ones to shame a family or society. Genital mutilation deprives them of their sexuality and thus men won't be "trapped" or "provoked" by women.

Until they reach puberty, women are considered androgynous (neither males nor full females). Removing the woman's clitoris (which is viewed as a resemblance to the male penis) allows females to enter womanhood.

Families' reasons for having genital mutilation performed include:

Psychosexual	Believing the reduction, or elimination, of the sensitive tissue of the outer genitalia, particularly the clitoris, will attenuate female sexual desire. Thus, a belief that removal maintains a woman's chastity and virginity before marriage; and fidelity during marriage. Some believe it increases male sexual pleasure.
Sociological	Identification with the cultural heritage, initiation of girls into womanhood, social integration and the maintenance of social cohesion.
Hygiene & Aesthetics	Believing the external female genitalia impure and unsightly, therefore; removal promotes hygiene and provides aesthetic appeal.
Health	Believing it improves fertility and a newborn's survival.

FGM: Health Implications

The immediate and long-term health consequences of female genital mutilation vary according to the type and severity of the procedure performed.

Immediate complications include:

- severe pain,
- shock,
- hemorrhage,
- urine retention,
- ulceration of the genital region,
- injury to adjacent tissue,
- possible death from hemorrhage and/or infection.

Recently, concern has arisen about possible transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) due to the use of one instrument in multiple operations, but this has not been the subject of detailed research.

Long-term consequences include:

- cysts and abscesses,
- keloid scar formation,
- damage to the urethra resulting in urinary incontinence,
- dyspareunia (painful sexual intercourse),
- sexual dysfunction,
- possible childbirth difficulties.

In addition to these physical aspects, genital mutilation leaves psychological marks on the life and mind of the woman who has undergone it. In the long term, women may suffer feelings of incompleteness, anxiety and depression.

CULTURE

Traditions:

Information especially pertinent for First Responders & Law Enforcement

HEALTH

Most Somalis lived in a chaotic political environment infested with civil war and absence of political order. Traumatized by their experience at home, they may need to adjust to living in a democratic, free society. As oppressed citizens under tyranny for a long time, they developed a distrust in government and its institutions. This experience may apply to the U.S. government and American society.



As a result of the civil war and lack of health services for a long time, many Somalis might have health problems of which they are unaware.

Health problems may include malnutrition, tuberculosis, tetanus, and diabetes.



ILLEGAL DRUG: Qat (variations: cot, kat, khat, quatt, tchat)

Qat is a shrub (*Catha edulis*), native to Ethiopia and now grown in countries like Somalia and Yemen. During the first 48 hours of harvest, the leaves contain *cathinone*, a strong amphetamine.

Qat is a concern for both Ohio's law enforcement community and Somali families. In the United States, cathinone is classified as a Schedule I drug; the same category as heroin, LSD and ecstasy. If not used within two days, cathinone converts into *cathine*, a Schedule IV drug in the United States. In both cases, the trade or use of this drug has been illegal in the United States since 1993.

Qat is a stimulant when chewed. The longer the chew, the more high it produces including euphoria, and in some cases aggression and violence.

Somalis men, and to a lesser extent women, use qat. It's used in social settings and daily gatherings. Even with a cultural acceptance of qat, the global stigma associated with its use prompted many governments to illegalize it, but that didn't stop either the use or trade.

Somalia culture permits the qat use, based on numerous misconceptions of the drug's benefits, such as:

- mental alertness,
- sexual potency,
- appetite inhibitor, and
- intellect empowerment.

However, *The American Medical Journal* disagrees. Also, the World Health Organization labels qat as a "dependence producing drug".

RELIGION OF SOMALIS

Islam entered Somalia in the seventh century A.D., during the life of the prophet Muhammad. 99% of Somalis are Muslims. They follow the mainstream Sunni Islam and the Shafi'i school of thought – the most followed school of thought among Muslims worldwide.

While Islam is the main religion in Somalia, many tribal and African traditions which preceded Islam are present along with religious practices. As Islam entered Somalia, Muslim practices were

infused with local traditions and customs so it's not surprising to see some aspects of Islamic practices are different from Islamic practices in other countries. For an example, folk religious practices are deeply seated among Somalis, especially when dealing with sickness and diseases. Superstition also is practiced on good spirits and demonic spirits.



HISTORY OF ISLAM

Islam was born in the city of Mecca in the Arabian peninsula in what's called Saudi Arabia at the present time. The prophet of this religion was Muhammad who grew up as an orphan under the protection of his relatives who were members of the clan of Banu Hashim, of the powerful tribe, Quraysh.

Most of the people in the peninsula were Arab Semites who trace their back their ancestry to the prophet Noah and his son Sam (Shem). Their language also is a member of family of Semitic languages that includes Hebrew, Aramiac, and Syriac.

Islam is a member of the family of Abrahamic religions and presented itself from the beginning as a continuation to Judaism and Christianity. It isn't surprising to hear Muslims reference to stories, prophets, and messengers of the Old and New Testament because they're part of the Islamic doctrine. Very relevant to the culture of Somalia is the location of the city of Mecca

because centuries before the advent of Islam, Mecca was the trade center as well as a crossroad between many cultures. The Arabic civilization of the Sabaeen Kingdom in Yemen was a trade partner with Somalia and Ethiopia around the first century AD. Moreover, trade relations yielded Somali and Ethiopian immigration into the Arabian Peninsula as well as Arab immigration into different parts of Africa.

Many Africans of Arab origin live in the Middle East similar to the presence of many Africans of Arab origin found in numerous African countries today. This connection was strengthened after the birth of Islam and especially after the trip the prophet Muhammad and his companions made to Africa in the early years of the religion. It shouldn't be a surprise to see that among the first Muslims were Somalis and Ethiopians. Today almost 100% of Somalis are Muslims.

PRACTICE OF ISLAM

To be a pious Muslim, one is obliged belief in the following:

1. The oneness of God, referred to as "Allah" in Arabic.
He's the same God which Christians and Jews worship. Arab Christians and Jews refer to God as *Allah*, as do Somalis.
2. The prophets and messengers in Judaism and Christianity.
3. The revelations of the previous monotheistic religions,
as mentioned in the Islamic scripture, the *Koran* or *Qurán*.
4. Angels
5. The Judgment Day
6. Afterlife
7. Reward and punishment

MUSLIMS RITUALS AND PRACTICES

Shahada:

To testify that there is only one God and that Muhammad is his Prophet and Messenger. (Arabic: *La Ilaha Illaállah Muhammadan Rasuluállah*). Muslims utter this testimony numerous times a day to confirm their religion. This is not a ritualistic testimony; Somalis can use it any time they want.

Prayer:

Muslims are commanded to perform five prayers a day. The first is performed before sunrise; the second is at noon; the third, in the afternoon; the fourth is at sunset; and the fifth one is an evening prayer.

They vary in length – the early morning prayer is the shortest, the evening prayer is the longest. Each prayer is divided into *rakaát*, or units, which require different rituals, sayings, positions, and supplication. Some of these positions include standing, bowing, kneeling, touching the floor with forehead, and sitting.

Prayers have to be performed on time as announced in loud speakers in a mosque's minaret (tower) which means that Muslims

can't combine all prayers in one lengthy ritual. Prayers can be performed after the prescribed time but not before.

Muslims can perform their prayer in any temple or place, as long as it's clean. To ensure cleanliness, Muslims keep a small prayer rug with them wherever they go and place the rug on the floor before prayer. If a Muslim cannot perform the prayers in their prescribed schedule, they can make them up at a later time.

One prerequisite ritual for performing prayer is *ablution* (cleansing). For cleansing, Muslims perform a series of prescribed rituals with water. There are two kinds of ablutions: minor, where Muslims clean their hands, arms to elbow, feet, hair and forehead; and a major one where Muslims wash the entire body (bath-like). There are different causes for invalidating ablution;



Rakaát: the ritual steps of prayer.

MUSLIMS RITUALS AND PRACTICES ...continued

like using the bathroom or shaking the hands of someone from the opposite sex. Therefore, many Muslims perform ablution at home and try to keep it valid for the next prayer, and that explains why some pious Muslims don't shake hands of opposite sex before prayer.

Non-Muslims should be aware this behavior is not meant to offend. It's not personal, it's a religious commitment. Moreover, bathrooms in the United States are not oriented toward performing ablution which makes it hard for many Muslims to use a regular bathroom for cleansing.

Holy Days:

Muslims have no Sabbath day but they have a place of worship called *mosque* (based on the Arabic word *masjid*). Since Islam has no clergy, the concept of mosque is different from the concept of "church" in Christianity.

A mosque has no hierarchy or set of sacraments; it's a place of worship, learning, and dialectics. It's open twenty four hours a day and maintained by the work of volunteers. Since the mosque as an institution that empowers Muslims to congregate and freely express their views on everything, including governments; and since most Islamic governments are dictatorial, many Islamic countries began to subjugate and control the mosque to ensure no opposition from the populace.

Traditionally, pulpits had been used by the imams to deliver critical sermons but in recent history, governments have been training *khatibs* (sermon presenter) to represent government's views on various issues to suppress opposition.

Fasting:

Muslims are obliged to fast during *Ramadan*, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims fast everyday from sunrise to sunset; abstaining from all food, drink, intimacy, and even bad thoughts. Fasting enables Muslims to exercise discipline as the faith commands people to subjugate and control their desires, but also a motivation to give the needy and disadvantaged. The Prophet, Muhammad, even said that fasting is healthy; when people give their digestive system an annual healthy break.

Ramadan is significant not only for fasting but also because Muhammad received the first revelation of the Islamic scripture during the month of Ramadan. Therefore, Muslims revere the month as they maximize their rituals with prayers, supplications, and daily visitations to mosques.

Muslims read the entire Qurán (Islam's holy scripture) by dividing it into three parts; finishing each part in one third of the month. Since Muslims break the fast at sunset, the meal itself becomes festive and elaborate. Women of the household spend the entire day preparing special multiple course meals followed by special desserts before they visit the mosque for the evening prayer and reading of the Qurán.

MUSLIMS RITUALS AND PRACTICES ...continued**Alms:**

Islam commands able Muslims to contribute 2.5% of their annual income to the needy. Since Ramadan is the month of giving, alms are given during this month. Charity is given to anyone the family determines as needy, including relatives.

Also, governments establish offices to handle issues related to religious matters like alms. If a family is not aware of a needy person, the alms is paid to a government fund which in turn distributes it to the needy.

Pilgrimage:

An able Muslim is obliged, at least once, to perform a pilgrimage to Islam's holiest places in Saudi Arabia. Abraham and his son Ishamael, initiated this ritual thousands of years ago. Since Muslims revere Abraham as the first Muslim, the tradition has been re-established as an obligation for Muslims. Poor Muslims around the world save for this trip and many die before achieving such a dream. A man who performs the pilgrimage is given the title *Haj*, and woman is called *Hajjah*.

Performing the pilgrimage is an event through which the sins are washed away, giving Muslims the opportunity to purify

themselves. After the rituals, pilgrims live a spiritual life closer to God and less involved in worldly matters. In addition to purification, pilgrimage symbolizes the equality of mankind and the equality between man and woman.

As the Muslim population increases, accommodating millions of pilgrims has become a tough task for Saudi Arabia, which led that government to impose a quota on the number of pilgrims allowed from every country. As a result, many people might not be able to make the journey, if they're elderly.



DENOMINATIONS & SECTS: Sunni, Shiá, Ahmadiyah, Sufi

Sunnis make up the majority of Muslims, approximately 85 percent of Muslims worldwide. The word “Sunni,” derived from Sunnah, means “the way of the Prophet.” As a prophet and a messenger, Muhammad held religious leadership, and as the founder of a community, he held political power.

The Qurán states that Muhammad was the last prophet to humanity and he was the only one to hold these two authorities. After his death, Muslims had to develop a system to delegate authorities and govern the Islamic community.

The system was called the *caliphate* with the following institutions:
Ummah – The community of believers.

Caliphs – Qualified secular leaders selected and consented to, by the Ummah.

Ulama – Jurists who rule on religious and legal matters.

Shura – Council of Advisors who advise and council the caliphs on all matters.

Muslims who accepted and practiced this system became known as *Sunni*, and the vast majority of Somalis are Sunnis.

Shiá is the second sect. About 15% of Muslims are Shiá.

The word Shiá means “followers of” and here is the difference:

Political friction developed in early Islam when the authority of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the prophet as well as the fourth caliph, was challenged by Mua’wiyah, the ruler of Syria.

The challenge ended with a battle, after which Ali was killed by his followers who thought he gave in to Muáwiyah. Those who followed Ali called themselves Shiá (followers) of Ali and they established within the community a system of government that opposed the caliphate, called the *imamate*.

The rulers of this institution are the imams who were the descendants of the prophet. They held both religious and political authority by the virtue of being members of the family of Muhammad; as if Shiás gave Muhammad a spark of divinity that would be passed onto his offspring. This was considered sacrilegious by Sunnis since Muhammad is not considered divine by either the Qurán or Hadiths.

Consequently, this development became a turning point in the history of Islam and eventually the two groups emerged with two different political views. Those who followed Mua’wiyah called themselves “Sunni” and those who followed Ali called themselves “Shiá.”

DENOMINATIONS & SECTS: Ahmadiyah, Sufi

It's important to note that unlike the doctrinal differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, the difference between Sunni and Shiá is *political* because both agree on the same God, scripture, prophet, and duties.



Shiá worshipers pray in front of the shrine of Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, in Iraq's holy city of Najaf in May 2003.

Shiism is widely practiced in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Oman, Syria, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan where a significant number of the population is Shiá. Muslims in America are both Sunni and Shiá.

One movement that can be considered an offshoot of Shiism is *Ahmadiyah*. It was born in India about a century ago by Mirza Ahmad who claimed to be Al Mahdi, the awaited *Twelfth Imam* in Shiism. He even claimed to represent the second coming of Jesus. We don't know the approximate number but some Somalis are members of the Ahmadiyah movement.

Sufi is the third group. Although Sufis are Sunni Muslims, they're the mystics of the religion. There are no available statistics on the number of Sufis in the world, but it's very small. The Sufis live in secluded and isolated communities, spending their time in deprivation and meditation. They abandon materialism and full participation in secular life by maximizing their spirituality and living a very peaceful life. A good comparison with the Sufis is that of the Amish communities in the United States. In addition to following basic Islamic rituals, the Sufis developed additional devotional

practices manifested in prayers, religious dance (whirling dervishes) and spiritual music. Most of these practices take place in mosques and at homes on Thursdays during the evening hours. Some of the most notorious Sufis in history, like the great Sufi poet Rumi, are very popular in the world today. Rumi's poetry transcends cultural and religious boundaries around the world and his odes are taught in American universities and recited in mosques, churches and synagogues. Many non-Muslim groups have organized Sufi-like music and dances in cities like Columbus, Ohio.

DENOMINATIONS & SECTS: Sufi

The *Shariáh* (Islamic law) is not the law of the land in most Islamic countries. Of 57 Islamic countries in the world today; only Saudi Arabia, Iran and Sudan use the *Shariáh* as the law. For the rest, the *Shariáh* governs matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance in religious courts. However, most Arabic countries use *Personal Status Codes*, of which the *Shariáh* is one source.

As Sufism evolved into different *tarikas* (ways), one in particular is prevalent in North Africa, including Somalia. Known as *Qadiriyyah*, it relies on the mystic practices of Islam; which include seclusion, isolation, and meditation.

ISLAMIC OBSERVANCES

Maw'lid Al Nabi: The prophet's birthday. It occurs on the 12th day of *Rabi Al Awwal*, the third month of Islamic calendar. Muslims in general don't celebrate birthdays, but they do observe Muhammad's birthday with prayers and recitation of the Qurán.

The Mirage: Muslims commemorate the Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and heaven to communicate with God. Many Islamic rituals, including the five daily prayers, were established as a result of this journey. Muslims observe it with special prayers at homes and mosques.

Lailatu'l Qadr (Night of Power): As explained under fasting, this is a very significant night for all Muslims as prayers and supplications are heard all night.

Ashura: It means "ten" in Arabic because it occurs on the tenth of *Muharram*, the first month of the Islamic calendar.

Ashura is celebrated differently among Islam's two major sects. For the Sunni, it's a fasting day. For the Shiá, it marks a sad occasion when Hussein, the grandson of the Muhammad, was killed in the *Battle of Karbula*. The day is observed with mourning and parades while some Shiá Muslims express their grief with self flagellation.

Some Somalis celebrate cultural events like *Nairus* or "the beginning of the spring." It's usually celebrated during the month of April.

ISLAMIC HOLIDAYS

There are two major holidays in Islam that are observed and celebrated:

Eid Al Fitr (Holiday of Breaking the Fast): As a reward for fasting in Ramadan, Muslims mark the end of the month with celebrating their first holiday. The first ritual of this holiday is an early congregation at the mosque for a special Eid prayer. The imam leads the prayer with a lengthy sermon that concludes with supplication involving all congregants. The word "Amen" is heard loudly inside and outside the mosque.

The Eid usually lasts three days. The first day is dedicated for family celebration, during which Muslim males are obligated to visit their parents and married sisters to exchange gifts. On the second and third day, Muslims open their homes to their relatives, friends and neighbors for visitation, best wishes and congratulations. Chocolate, sweets, tea and coffee are offered to the guests. In the meantime, children dressed in their best, knock on doors of homes in the neighborhood while carrying baskets to fill with sweets and money. Although the holiday is socially festive to the entire community, Muslim children are the only ones who are expected to celebrate while the rest of the community limits the traditions to religious rituals.

Eid Al Adha (Holiday of the Sacrifice): This is the major holiday in Islam. The celebration commemorates the biblical story of the patriarch Abraham when he was tested by God to sacrifice his son. As a submission to the will of God, he proceeded with the sacrifice until God sent him the ram (lamb in Islam) to sacrifice instead of his son. Since Abraham is revered in Islam as the first Muslim, the religion established this event as the major holiday. Each able family is obliged to sacrifice a lamb and give the meat to the needy. The celebration for this holiday lasts four days and its rituals are similar to that of Eid Al Fitr.

GLOSSARY

Selected Somali cultural and religious terms

hejab:	traditional clothing for women
maawis:	traditional clothing for men
Salaam Alaikum:	a greeting meaning <i>Peace be upon you</i>
Nabad gelyo:	a greeting meaning <i>Goodbye</i>
qat:	A mild stimulant used by people in countries located around the Horn of Africa.
toob:	A long dress worn by women in Somalia and some other African countries.
Subah wanaagsan:	a greeting meaning <i>Good morning</i>
Galab wanaagsan:	a greeting meaning <i>Good afternoon</i>
Habeeb wanaagsan:	a greeting meaning <i>Good night</i>
kofiyyah:	head dress for men (made like a cap)
dua:	supplication
shafi'i:	school of thought in Islam followed by Somalis.
qadiriah:	One of the two main Islamic groups in Somalia.
ahmadiyah:	The second of the two main Islamic groups in Somalia.
imam:	religious leader
abba:	father
garaad:	a chief
qat:	native plant chewed as a minor stimulant
diya:	'blood money'. It's divided into two parts. Mag deer or 'the greater blood-wit' is paid and received by all members of the group as a whole.
shir:	councils; usually called for discussion or treaty.
wadad:	religious man
sheikhs:	religious leaders
danakalah:	poisonous juice which sometimes is rubbed on meat to kill people; refers to the death in this manner; also refers to the death of the killer by his own tribe.
malakh:	from Arabic word <i>malik</i> , meaning master. Usually refers to the head of a clan as well.
dhill or haan:	pots usually filled with milk
imama:	also known as <i>amamah</i> , a turban given to a head of clan upon his election.
muddai:	plaintiff
mudda' alay:	defendant

GLOSSARY

wadaad:	religious men
baraka:	blessing
sihr:	witch craft
waqda:	offering to God
Sadkaa:	charity to the needy
Jumma:	Friday, the day of assembly and congregation in Islam.
kofia:	Somali national head dress for men
ghee:	clarified butter
will:	a boy
gabar:	a girl
gerar:	poetic competition, also known as <i>gabai</i> .
won:	a male sheep
orgy:	a male goat
gabathi:	marriage gift for the bride and her family.
yarad:	dowry of camels
halal:	legitimate or virtuous
makhdarad:	Contribution solicited from relatives of poor families who can't afford expenses of marriage.
goys:	families
aabbe:	father, also <i>abbe</i>
hoyo:	mother
weel:	son, also <i>will</i>
naaklelha:	wife
gabadh:	girl
allah garseeo:	realm of dead with God. This is a cultural, not religious concept.
baalako:	a big animal. Big animals are usually slaughtered by men. Women can slaughter small animals like chicken or other birds.
jinno¹-it:	fermented camel milk, which becomes yogurt-like.
gasangas:	A plant used by nomadic Somalis to wash clothes. Trunk of tree is rubbed on clothes before washing.
gup:	Somali women use these plant leaves to wash their hair.
noble:	ibid
rakoop:	trained camel
ri:	goat, also <i>ari</i>

GLOSSARY

idoh:	sheep, also <i>won</i>
lo:	cow
tulud:	general term for a single camel
geel:	a popular term for camels; plural, <i>geelal</i> . The Somali language has over 40 words for <i>camel</i> . Some of these are <i>ayro</i> , <i>geydo</i> , <i>seenyo</i> , <i>maydo</i> , <i>idiin</i> , <i>idil</i> , <i>wayroho</i> and <i>wayd</i> .
Ahad:	Sunday
Isniin:	Monday
Talaado:	Tuesday
Arbaca:	Wednesday
Khamiis:	Thursday
Jimce:	Friday
Sabti:	Saturday
La Illaha Illallaha, Mohamadur Rasoolullaha:	literally, " <i>There is no God but One, and Muhammad is His Messenger</i> ".

The Somali language has over 40 words for camel.

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By Tomer Shiran.

aaran:	young camels who are no longer sucklings
abeer or ameer:	female camel that has not given birth
afkuxuuble:	miscarried camel fetus
awr:	male pack camel
awradhale:	camel that always gives birth to he-camels; stud-camel that always breeds male camels
baarfuran:	female camel that is not used as a pack camel
baarqab:	stud camel
baatir:	mature female camel that has had no offspring
baloolley:	she-camel without calf that will or will not give milk depending on her mood
buub:	young unbroken male camel
caddaysimo:	unloaded pack camel; unpoisoned arrow
caggabbaruur:	lion cub; young camel
cashatab:	female camel that has stopped giving milk or failed to conceive when it was supposed to
cayuun:	camel (alternate spelling)

GLOSSARY

daandheer:	strong camel of the herd
duq:	old female camel; old woman
dhaan:	camel loaded with water vessels
dhoocil:	bull camel; naughty boy/girl
farruud or qarruud:	mature male camels; elders
garruud:	old male camels; old people
geel:	camel
gool:	fat camel
guubis or guumis:	first-born male camel
gulaal:	male camel unable to project from the gland in his mouth; person with hesitant or stammering speech
guran:	herd of camels no longer giving milk that are kept far from dwelling areas
gurgurshaa:	calm, docile pack-camel which can be loaded with delicate items
gurgur:	to carry things one by one
hal:	female camel
hayin:	tame pack camel; docile; simple, uncomplicated
irmaan:	dairy camels
kareeb:	mother camel kept apart from her young
koron:	gelded camel
labakurusle:	two humped camel [lit. two-camel hump-er]
luqmalliigle:	young camel
mandhoorey:	lead, best camel in the herd
nirig:	camel foal
rati:	male camel
qaalin:	young camel
qaan:	young camel/camels
qawaar:	old she camel
qoorqab:	uncastrated male (camel etc.)
qurbac:	young male camel
rakuub:	riding camel (from Arabic)
ramag or ramad:	she camel who has recently given birth
sidig:	one of two female camels suckling the same infant
tulud:	one's one and only camel
xagjir:	milk-producing camel that is partially milked (two udders for human consumption; two for its calf)

