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Diaspora Media and Resistance: Somali Horizon and the Struggle Against Siad Barre's Regime

Marwaad Kayseⁱ

Somaliland Centre for African Studies

Abstract

This article examines Somali Horizon, a short-lived but politically charged diaspora magazine published in the United States during the late 1980s, as a site where media, resistance, and community converged in the struggle against Siad Barre's authoritarian regime. Drawing on thematic analysis of the journal's surviving issues alongside interviews with contributors and readers, the study highlights how Somali Horizon operated at once as a watchdog, a mobilizing tool, and a voice of solidarity for the Somali National Movement (SNM). The magazine's content consistently condemned the regime's repression, mobilized diaspora communities through appeals to both duty and strategy, and reframed Somalia's conflict for international audiences by drawing on democratic idioms and human rights discourses. Beyond reporting, it also functioned as an active instrument facilitating diaspora fundraising, documenting prisoners of conscience, and sustaining networks of solidarity across borders. By situating Somali Horizon within broader debates in media theory and diaspora studies, the article argues that such publications were not only historical records but also transnational actors that challenged authoritarian control, shaped political consciousness, and redefined belonging in exile. In doing so, the study contributes to a wider understanding of how African diaspora media intervened in liberation struggles and contested erasure through print culture.

Keywords: Somali Horizon, History, Diaspora, SNM, Media and Resistance.

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1. Introduction

During the 1980s, Siad Barre's regime¹ in the Somali Republic, encompassing what is today the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, projected a carefully curated image of stability, national unity, and progress. In reality, however, the country faced profound political turbulence. Beneath the state-controlled narrative lay widespread repression, armed resistance, and strict media censorship. Citizens navigated a landscape marked by surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and violent crackdowns, while dissenting voices within the country were systematically silenced (Amnesty International, 1988).

Against this backdrop, self-initiated and diaspora-led media emerged as alternative spaces for communication and resistance. Produced largely outside the reach of the government, these publications documented human rights abuses, exposed political crises, and amplified perspectives that the Barre regime sought to suppress². The geographical position of diaspora journalists, coupled with the strategic use of English in many publications, allowed these journals to reach audiences beyond Somalia's borders, including human rights organizations, and Somali diaspora communities. By doing so, they circumvented state censorship and ensured that the realities of the Somali Republic were visible to the global public.

This study focuses on one such publication, *Somali Horizon*³, circulated throughout 1980s. Through a combination of thematic analysis of the journals and interviews with authors and diaspora readers from the period, this research addresses three key

¹ Mohamed Siad Barre (1910–1995) was a military dictator of the Somali Republic from 1969 until his overthrow in January 1991, an event triggered by years of mounting internal opposition and the civil war his regime had helped instigate.

² These media outlets include: Somali Uncensored, Liberty, UFFO, Radio Halgan.

³ I obtained access to this journal through the archives of the Somaliland Centre for African Studies, a department of the Hargeysa Cultural Centre (HCC). The HCC is a cultural preservation and performance hub that engages with all aspects of Somali culture from music and poetry to the oud while also serving as a space for both academic discussions and timely societal debates.

questions: What were the primary thematic focuses and messages of the journal? Who constituted its intended audience, and how did writers and readers perceive their roles within the broader struggle? How did the journal function as a medium for resistance, mobilization, and solidarity for the Somali National Movement (SNM) in its opposition to the Barre regime? By interrogating these questions, the study situates *Somali Horizon* not merely as a historical artifact, but as an active participant in the politics of resistance and transnational communication.

The significance of this inquiry is twofold. First, it addresses critical historical gaps: despite their central role in shaping resistance narratives, diaspora-led publications like *Somali Horizon* have received limited scholarly or archival attention. Second, many of these journals were ephemeral, surviving only in private collections or dispersed archives, rendering them particularly vulnerable to historical erasure. This study therefore contributes to broader understandings of African liberation media, diaspora advocacy, and the ways in which marginalized communities use media to contest authoritarian power and foster transnational solidarity.

2. Methodology

To examine the political orientation, priorities, and rhetorical strategies of the *Somali Horizon*, I conducted a systematic thematic analysis of the journals' articles, editorials and letters to the editor. The goal was to identify recurring patterns/themes of reports particularly in relation to the Siad Barre government. This publication spans seven issues from 1986 to 1989⁴, with four issues missing in the 1985 volume, which was unfortunately inaccessible to me, representing a limitation of the study. The issues were selected based on availability and their relevance to political discourse during this period.

Each issue was carefully reviewed in full, with particular attention to editorials, political commentary, and letter to the editor which often contained the most explicit statements of orientation and purpose. A combination of inductive and deductive coding strategies was employed. Broad thematic

⁴ Publication was ceased this year.

categories including *critique of government, mobilization rhetoric, and support for opposition movements mainly the Somali National Movement (SNM)*. These categories were iteratively refined as recurring patterns and motifs that emerged during analysis. Selected passages and quotes were extracted to illustrate and substantiate each theme from all issues in each volume, providing both descriptive and interpretive insight into the journal's content.

To complement the textual analysis, I conducted semi-structured interviews with one author⁵ and a small number of diaspora Somalis who read the journals at the time, this restrictive sample of people was due the fact that most of the authors are no longer with us.⁶ Additionally, I could not get pin down the establisher of the journal but from insights of the interviews, I believe the person was Ibrahim Maygaag Samatar (Chairperson of SNM to North America) who has passed away 2011 in Tokiyō, Japan⁷. These conversations provided additional context, reception of the journals and allowed for a limited but meaningful triangulation of the archival findings.

Overall, this methodological approach was designed to balance rigor with contextual sensitivity. Thematic analysis allows for both the identification of structured patterns across the corpus and a nuanced understanding of the political, cultural, and social dimensions embedded in the texts. Here I chose as it particularly suited for analysing politically charged, diaspora-led publications, where content is both a reflection of and a response to authoritarian contexts, censorship, and transnational advocacy efforts. Limitations of this study include the missing first volume, reliance on available archives, and the small number of interview participants; these constraints are acknowledged in interpreting the findings.

⁵ Dr Hussien A. Bulhan.

⁶ People interviewed were Yousuf Abdi Gaboobe, Boobe Yousuf Du'ale, Saed Shukri and Saed Habashi.

⁷ See Jama Musse Jama (2011), *Somaliland: The way forward: Achieving its Rightful International Status – volume one*, Pisa: Ponte Invisible.

3. Historical and Political Context

The Somali Republic under Siad Barre in the 1980s exemplifies the intersection of authoritarianism and media control, offering a clear illustration of how political repression directly shapes information systems. During this period, political power was highly centralized under Barre and his ruling Socialist Revolutionary Party, and dissent was increasingly criminalized. Citizens were subjected to constant surveillance, arbitrary arrests, torture, and reports of sexual violence, while the latter half of the decade saw entire northern cities, such as Hargeysa and Burao, targeted by indiscriminate bombardments. These repressive measures left profound social and psychological damages, but they also shaped the very structure of media and communication, establishing an environment where state oversight permeated both content and distribution. Media access was tightly constrained: television and radio were limited to those who could afford the necessary antennas, satellite equipment, or other costly technologies, effectively restricting audiovisual communication to a privileged few. Print media, however, was somewhat more accessible and became the primary platform for mass communication. Newspapers and magazines were produced in Arabic and English, with Somali-language publications, yet all were subject to strict government regulation. The Ministry of Information monitored and controlled nearly all circulation, allowing only state-sanctioned outlets to operate. Attempts to publish material outside official channels were met with immediate suppression, illustrating the mechanisms of an authoritarian media system in practice. Key newspapers of the time included all governmental-owned publications such as *Xidigta Oktoober* (Star of October) printed in Somali and English and its sister *Najmatu Oktoober* which used Arabic, and *Heegan*. One notable exception was *Ogaal*, established under the auspices of the Socialist Revolutionary Party itself. For a brief period, *Ogaal* appeared to enjoy a measure of editorial independence, publishing articles that sometimes critiqued government policy. However, this relative freedom may have reflected an attempt by the ruling elite to create the impression of pluralism, or to provide a controlled outlet for limited criticism. Whatever the motivation, the experiment was short-lived: in 1988, as the regime's

legitimacy crumbled and armed opposition movements grew stronger, *Ogaal* was forcibly shut down by the state. (Gaas et al., 2012.)

4. Media as Resistance: Theoretical Framing

Media theory, at its core, attempts to explain how communication systems shape political, cultural, and social life, and its genealogy stretches back to the early twentieth century when the rise of mass media such as radio, newspapers, and cinema transformed how societies communicated. The devastating use of propaganda during World War I heavily influenced early scholars, who assumed audiences were largely passive and easily manipulated. This produced what became known as the “magic bullet” or “hypodermic needle” theory, which imagined media messages as a kind of injection or direct shot into the minds of citizens. According to this model, once information was transmitted, it was believed to be received by a uniform audience who would predictably internalize it and act accordingly. This view of media power was powerful but also simplistic, and by the 1940s and 1950s it began to face significant criticism. Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues, for instance, argued that audiences were not so straightforwardly passive. Their “two-step flow” theory introduced the idea of mediators or opinion leaders who filter and interpret media messages before passing them along to their own social networks. In other words, the impact of media was not direct, but mediated by layers of human interaction. Building on this, the “uses and gratifications” approach further shifted the emphasis by asking not simply what media does to people, but what people do with media. This perspective portrayed audiences as active and motivated, using media to fulfil their own needs whether the desire is for information, entertainment, or a sense of social belonging. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

By the mid-twentieth century, early communication research was primarily concerned with information flows, asking how messages were transmitted, received, and interpreted. Some of the most influential frameworks of this period continue to shape scholarship today. The late-twentieth century moved towards a more complex understanding of culture, ideology and audience

agency. Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), for example, argued that while the media may not tell people *what to think*, it is remarkably effective at telling people *what to think about* by prioritizing some issues over others. Around the same time, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) developed the propaganda model, which exposed how structural constraints such as ownership patterns, advertising pressures, and political alliances push media organizations to reproduce dominant ideologies rather than act as neutral conveyors of information. This was a crucial insight because it revealed how even in liberal democracies, supposedly “free” media was often limited in the stories it could tell and the dissenting voices it could amplify.

Alongside these more critical perspectives emerged. Critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, argued that mass media operated as part of the “culture industry,” a system that standardized cultural production and discouraged critical thought, turning citizens into passive consumers (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Their pessimistic view suggested that mass-produced media helped maintain social hierarchies by stifling resistance and creativity. Marshall McLuhan, in contrast, brought a different kind of radical insight through his media ecology perspective. His famous phrase “the medium is the message” suggested that the form of media itself whether print, television, or later digital technologies was often more transformative than the specific content it carried (McLuhan, 1964). For McLuhan, technologies reshape how humans perceive, organize, and interact with their social world.

Building on both these traditions, the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies in the 1970s and 1980s emphasized the dynamic and contested nature of media texts. Stuart Hall’s influential encoding/decoding model, for example, showed how media messages are not simply passively absorbed by audiences but are subject to different readings. Audiences may accept, negotiate, or outright resist the ideological codes embedded in texts, depending on their social position and lived experiences. This shift was vital because it recognized ordinary people not as passive consumers but as participants in meaning-making, capable of resisting dominant ideologies through interpretation.

This trajectory of thought directly intersects with scholarship on authoritarian contexts, where media is not merely shaped by market forces but is overtly subordinated to state power. A foundational framework here is *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956), which formalized the “authoritarian” model of media. In such systems, the media functions as an arm of the state, limiting dissent and enforcing the government’s dominance over public discourse. This is a textbook description of the status of media in Barre’s government. What is equally important, however, is the way this authoritarian control inevitably produces counter-publics and alternative media spheres. This is evidenced by the publications like the Somali Horizon, Radio Halgan etc. Scholars like Katrin Voltmer (2013) point out that underground, independent, and diasporic media often emerge as spaces of resistance in these contexts, offering alternative narratives and challenging state hegemony. Thus, repression and resistance are two sides of the same coin in the media landscape.

It is at this point that my own framing comes into focus. While the above traditions mostly analysed media within the boundaries of the nation-state, the Somali case, like many others, demands a more expansive lens. Here, transnationalism theory provides a crucial framework. Originally articulated by anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1992), transnationalism is described as the process by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic, and political ties that link their societies of origin with their societies of settlement. Although their work was not primarily about media, it has been taken up by communication scholars to explain how diaspora communities use various forms of media to maintain connections across borders. Unlike older paradigms of “international communication,” which framed media flows largely in terms of relations between states, transnationalism shifts the focus to non-state actors and everyday practices. (Schiller, 1969 and Thussu, 2000).

This framework is particularly powerful because it recognizes that media whether in the form of print magazines, satellite television, or contemporary digital platforms enable migrants to participate simultaneously in the politics and cultures of their

homelands and host societies. For diasporic communities, media becomes both a bridge and a battleground: a means of sustaining identity, mobilizing resources, and contesting narratives imposed by authoritarian regimes. In authoritarian contexts, where state media monopolizes information, these transnational media practices become especially significant. They create alternative circuits of communication, challenge official narratives, and give voice to forms of resistance that would be impossible within the domestic sphere alone. In the Somali case, as will be shown, such media practices were not only about reporting news but about forging collective identities, mobilizing diaspora resources, and sustaining a political struggle that transcended borders. (Arafat, R., 2021).

5. Case Study: Somali Horizon

5.1 Brief introduction

Somali Horizon, published from Virginia, United States, began in 1985 (though I could not access this initial volume). I do have access to later issues from November 1986 through April 1989. During this time, the magazine appeared irregularly, with notable runs in April–June, August–September, and October–November 1987; June–August 1988; and January–April 1989. The 1987 volume alone contained four publications. Each issue followed a fairly consistent format: editorial, letter to the editor, viewpoints, feature articles, press releases/news briefs, registration forms, and often a section on prisoners of conscience forms.

The cover bore the SNM (Somali National Movement) flag at the top-left corner, declaring itself openly as a magazine of the SNM. *Somali Horizon* was clearly a diaspora-led initiative aligned with SNM sympathies. Information sources were varied: word of mouth from locals and relatives, reports from rebel fighters, military radio intercepts passed to centres in Jigjiga and Addis Ababa, as well as international news outlets and humanitarian organizations like Amnesty International, *Daily London*, and Human Rights Watch.

The magazine's tone was set by the editorials, which offered background, context, and a launching point for debate. Across its short lifespan, three recurring themes defined its content: *critique*

of the Barre government, mobilization rhetoric aimed at diaspora and international audiences, and support for the SNM. These themes often overlap within the same texts, but for analytical clarity, I discuss them separately.

5.2 Critique of Government

From its earliest issues, *Somali Horizon* published accounts that condemned Siad Barre's regime as repressive, corrupt, and violent. The Nov–Dec 1986 issue (Vol. 4) carried the article “*The Disintegration of Barre's Armed Forces*,” which traced the regime's authoritarian consolidation:

“On assuming the reins of power, Barre started the reign of terror. He firstly dealt with the members of the civilian government whom he neutralized either by incarcerating them or banning them from politics. He realized that, if he were to survive, an army loyal to him should be built, starting with the elimination of the senior officers who knew Barre.” (p. 6)

This early commentary pointed to the growing fragility of Barre's rule and his reliance on repression and militarization to secure power.

By the Jan–Mar 1987 issue (Vol. 6), such critiques had expanded to firsthand testimonies from inside Somalia. A letter published in that volume described the nightly raids and plunder carried out by government forces:

“At night authorities armed with orders and machine guns invade homes and businesses. During the search they first collect all items that are small and valuable. They take money, jewellery and portables. They snatch rings, chains and watches from the arms and necks of women. With deadly weapons they threaten the residents to silence.”

These vivid accounts of looting, intimidation, and violence typify the journal's depiction of Barre's rule. Nearly every issue reinforced the image of a predatory state that denied basic freedoms while directly preying on its own citizens. This portrayal grew darker over time, laying the groundwork for justifying opposition and the SNM's armed resistance.

The Jan–Aug 1988 volume sharpened this critique through Ahmed Geelle’s article, “*Somalia’s Torture Trials*.” The piece revisited the 1982 court case of 22 young defendants mostly university graduates accused of forming an illegal organization. Geelle emphasized that the charges were fabricated, that government-appointed defence lawyers argued the crimes were non-existent, and that confessions were extracted under torture. He further noted that the trial itself symbolized the hollowness of justice under Barre:

“Procedurally, the trial was quite a spectacle of injustice. First, the government reneged on its promise to hold an open public trial. International observers who asked to be permitted to attend the trial were denied access. ... Among the issues raised by Amnesty International: acceptance of recanted confessions as evidence, the denial by the court of defence requests to introduce clear evidence of torture, and the lack of legal training and expertise of the military judges.”

This case would later become infamous as the spark for the UFFO group, whose imprisonment and mistreatment galvanized the youth-led “*Dhagax-Tuur*” (stone-throwing) protests of the late 1980s.⁸

By the Jan–Apr 1989 issue, the regime’s violence had escalated into full-scale atrocities. One article described the military’s brutal assault on northern towns following SNM offensives:

“General Barre’s army, emboldened by arms shipped in by Khadafi of Libya, started coming on like gang-busters against the civilian residents. The government’s response, bloody by its own standards, was a massive contribution to the civilian carnage unheard of in the entire history of the country. Consequently, more than 50,000 people were massacred and close to half a million ran for their lives and became war refugees in Ethiopia. In a highly homogeneous Somali society, as much as any society, such massive killings of countrymen are not condoned under any circumstances.”

⁸ For further information about UFFO, see Jama Musse Jama (2003) and Ebba Tellander (2025).

This extract highlights the disproportionality of state violence under the Barre regime, framing it as a deliberate massacre of civilians. It also situates these atrocities within the moral fabric of Somali society, underscoring the rupture such violence inflicted on a culturally homogenous nation.

6. Mobilization Rhetoric

6.1 Diaspora

A strong recurring theme in the *Somali Horizon* stressed the responsibility of Somalis abroad to contribute actively to the liberation struggle. In the Aug/Sep 1987 editorial, “*Somalis in the Diaspora and the Liberation Struggle*” (Vol. 8), the magazine acknowledges its own shortcomings but insists on the need for greater diaspora involvement:

“What are we in the Diaspora --- those of us who are lucky enough to breathe the air of freedom --- doing as our share? Needless to say, the liberation struggle requires a lot of tasks to be accomplished abroad. We need to explain our position and programs to the people and governments of the countries in which we reside, we need to expose the ugly face of the clique ruling in our name, we need to gain friends. Above all we need to study and analyse our predicament as well as organising ourselves for the present and future struggles of our people...” Pg-2

Here, mobilization is framed as both a moral duty and a strategic necessity: the diaspora must fund, advocate, and amplify the struggle, especially since those at home face the regime’s violence with limited resources.

6.2 International Appeals

The same issue included an “Open Letter to President Reagan” from the SNM’s North America branch, which explicitly linked Somalia’s plight to American values while also listing the SNM’s objective. Drawing on the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the letter reframed Somali grievances in a familiar liberal-democratic idiom:

“The Somali people, peace-loving and patriotic as they are, have been patient.....The abuse of their humanity, the degradation, the pillage, the rape, the massacre reached beyond the point of tolerance. It became in the words of the American Declaration of independence, ‘...their right and their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security’. This is the sacred task which the Somali National Movement is spreading. Our Goals, simple but profound, are in brief: To remove Siad Barre’s oppression, and autocratic rule;

Establish a democratic representative government on the basis of universal suffrage.

To bring about the lasting peace with neighbouring countries, taking the interests and the right of all people in the region into consideration ...” abuse of their humanity, the degradation, the pillage, the rape, the massacre reached beyond the point of tolerance. It became in the words of the American Declaration of Independence, ‘...their right and their duty, to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security.’”

The letter, written by the chairperson of the SNM’s North American branch rumoured also to be one of the journal’s founders outlined the movement’s objectives: to remove Barre’s dictatorship, establish a democratic representative government through universal suffrage, and pursue peaceful regional relations. In this sense, *Somali Horizon* acted as a transnational mediator, translating local grievances into terms accessible and persuasive to international policymakers, particularly in the U.S.

By the Jan–Apr 1989 issue, the magazine’s mobilization rhetoric combined international appeals with on-the-ground reports of the conflict. Rejecting the government’s claims of stability in the North, the editorial noted:

“Although the government has repeatedly stated that the situation has returned to normal in Northern Somalia, the weekly arrival of a plane load of wounded soldiers from the area indicates that the fighting goes on. The latest news from the front is that SNM forces are converging from all sides on

the cities of Buroa and Berbera. Ayn, Erigavo, Oodweyne and Adadley are effectively in SNM hands.”

Such dispatches served a dual function. They provided international audiences with alternative information that contradicted regime propaganda, while simultaneously reinforcing the SNM’s image as a credible and advancing force

6.3 Support for the SNM

Finally, the magazine consistently portrayed the SNM as a legitimate and the inheritor of Somalia’s original national promise. For instance, in the Nov/Dec 1986 issue, for instance, an open letter from Abdi Adan Jama directly addressed SNM fighters:

“Congratulations on your spectacular accomplishments and victories over the enemy. I have not been to Somalia for the past sixteen years... my dream and that of many other fellow Somalis going back home rests in your hands. The armed struggle that you are engaged in is our last resort, for you have already exhausted all other possible avenues.”

Here, the magazine acted as a conduit between the diaspora and the fighters on the ground, expressing both solidarity and dependency, while underscoring the idea that the SNM’s armed struggle was the only viable path left.

By the April–June 1987 volume, the tone had grown more assertive, framing the SNM as the vanguard of national regeneration. The editorial declared:

“We are confident that such spirit of resistance is spreading rapidly among all strata of the population of the whole country. The Somali National Movement will continue the sacred task of kindling that fire and transforming it into effective action until final victory... Long live the Freedom Fighters of the SNM, long live Somalia, death to the dictatorship.”

This rhetorical positioning casting the SNM as “freedom fighters” rather than insurgents became a recurring device. It elevated their role to that of national guardians, while reinforcing the moral and political legitimacy of the struggle. The Jun/Aug

1988 editorial, “*Celebrating Independence Day With a New Spirit*” (Vol. 10), juxtaposed the hopeful vision of 1960 independence with the bleakness of the Barre regime, while highlighting SNM victories in Hargeysa and Burco:

“Indeed, the young brave fighters of the Somali National Movement have given all people a new chance. That’s freedom and that’s regaining their destiny. Within a year... these brave young fighters have scored impressive and stunning victories, and have thrown out the forces of evil from the cities of Hargeysa and Burco and their surroundings.”

The use of “brave young fighters” became a recurring rhetorical device, presenting the SNM as both protectors of the people and the vanguard of national regeneration. In this sense, *Somali Horizon* did more than report it positioned itself as a celebratory voice for the SNM, while implicitly shaping ideas about what a post-Barre Somalia should look like.

By the Jan–Apr 1989 volume, the magazine was no longer only celebrating military achievements but also articulating a clear political program. It framed Somalia as being in “the most frightful phase of violence and fragmentation in its history,” highlighting the regime’s inability to stop SNM offensives and its growing international isolation. In this context, *Somali Horizon* offered concrete proposals for democratic transition, including:

“Somalia is in the most fright phase of violence and fragmentation in its History. The immediate trouble arose from the government's inability to halt the successful attacks carried out by the SNM in May of 1988” “Internationally, the Somali regime is on the defensive because it is isolated politically, economically and now militarily...Somali Horizon believes the following points will lead to a better atmosphere of an overall democratic reform.....1- immediate withdrawal of the gov forces from the North 2- creation of an interim government 3- Author a new constitution 4- Establish a multi-party

political system 5- hold free and fair elections 6- form a government of national unity)".⁹

Taken together, these themes reveal *Somali Horizon* as more than just a rebel-aligned newsletter. It simultaneously *condemned authoritarianism, mobilized diaspora and international audiences, and constructed legitimacy for the SNM*. Its role was that of watchdog, rallying cry, and spokesperson demonstrating how diaspora media can serve as a transnational instrument, translating local grievances into globally intelligible calls for action while sustaining morale and vision among dispersed communities.

6.4 Prisoners of Conscience

Across the volumes published between 1987 and 1989, the second to last pages consistently contain a form titled *Prisoners of Conscience*. Notably, this section is absent from earlier issues, appearing only in tandem with the growing frequency of reports detailing arbitrary arrests. The form primarily directed at members of the diaspora requests detailed information on relatives or acquaintances who had been detained: full names, birth details, reasons for arrest, location of detention, whether a trial was conducted, and the sentences administered. The form explicitly states that the information collected was required by the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations.

This insertion signals a significant shift in the journal's function, extending its role beyond that of a mere news outlet. It became, instead, a medium through which the diaspora could engage in active participation, documenting state violence and creating channels to connect with international humanitarian bodies. In doing so, the journal occupied a space that was simultaneously political, informational, and activist, repositioning itself as an instrument of both testimony and mobilization.

⁹ Contextually these conversations/ plans are before the ideation of the reclaiming of today Somaliland, hence the talk of regime change.

6.5 SNM Registration Form

Equally revealing is the final page of each volume, which frequently carried a registration form under the insignia of the Somali National Movement (SNM). Bearing the title *Somali National Movement U.S.A. Branch*, the form invited individuals to formally join the movement by providing personal details and paying a \$20 membership fee. In addition, a designated section encouraged voluntary contributions, with the statement:

“I understand that the SNM depends upon the generosity of its members, therefore I would like to make an additional contribution.”

The presence of this form underscores that the journal cannot be understood solely as a platform for disseminating news; rather, it embodied the multifaceted responsibilities of an exilic press, simultaneously narrating, mobilizing, and sustaining a liberation movement.

6.6 Diaspora Advocacy and Interview Insights

Scholars often use the term “*diaspora journalist*” to describe media practitioners working outside their homelands, whether professionally trained or self-taught, publishing in international outlets or running independent platforms (Ogunyemi, 2015; Skjerdal, 2011; Wojcieszak et al., 2013). Such journalists, maintaining strong ties to home, employ technologies ranging from print to social media to circulate narratives that influence political conflicts (Oyeleye, 2017; Ristow, 2011). *Somali Horizon* clearly fits within this category: an independent, diaspora-led magazine established by exiles, students, and professionals based in the United States. Most of its contributors lacked formal journalistic training, but, as several interviewees explained, they were university students, often pursuing advanced degrees, and recruited through networks of colleagues and friends. Writing was voluntary and motivated by a sense of responsibility to Somalia’s people.

Dr. Hussein Bulhan, one of the writers for *Somali Horizon*, recalled:

“I did not have journalistic experience at that time. Ibrahim Maygaag Samatar recruited me to write for the journal, which

I did. As someone who was very much concerned with the events happening back home, I felt a sense of duty to partake and do my share towards a better change.”

Critics of journalism often point to the absence of conventional standards of professionalism and objectivity which also are valid criticisms levied against the journals if the context was a conventional one. Yet, as Robert W. McChesney and John C. Nerone argue, journalism is always a political act, and in authoritarian contexts, neutrality risks becoming complicity. This was evident in *Somali Horizon*: its writing was emotionally charged, subjective, and unapologetically advocacy-driven. Insights from contributors confirm this orientation. Yusuf Abdi Gaboobe, currently a prominent communication media expert who was one of the avid readers of the journal living in Qatar, at that time, responded to a question on what was the perception as a reader of this journal.

“These media initiatives were considered a huge development in terms of challenging the regime's monopoly on information and providing a different narrative on the events in the country.”

In this sense, the magazine functioned less as detached reporting and more as an oppositional counter-public sphere (Fraser, 1990; Hall, 1980; Anderson, 1983), creating space for political mobilization and identity formation in exile. Additionally, the strategic use of English reinforced its dual target audience: the Somali diaspora and the international community.

On the diaspora front, testimonies highlight its effectiveness in raising awareness, strengthening networks, and enabling fundraising to support the SNM's armed struggle as the bulk of the monetary funds and medical supplies was shouldered by the diaspora. Internationally, it played a role in reframing Somalia's conflict: shifting narratives away from “clan warfare” toward struggles for democracy and human rights. Contributors, readers believed their publications and obeying efforts, alongside numerous critical reports of a mix of International humanitarian and news organizations most of these quoted in the volumes, namely Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch,

Washington Post, Guardian, Post foreign affairs, African Events, Boston Global pressured Western governments to reconsider support for Siad Barre and contributed to U.S. congressional moves to cut military aid in 1988 and broader reductions in Western backing by the late 1980s.

7. Conclusion and Findings

In summary, I found that Somali Horizon, as a diaspora-led medium of resistance, offers a valuable lens through which to understand an important period of Somali history. The journal's content reveals three main themes: a critique of Siad Barre's repressive regime, the mobilization of diaspora and international actors, and the support and legitimization of the Somali National Movement (SNM). In performing these functions, Somali Horizon acted as a bridge between local and global audiences, informing Somalis at dispersed outside the country then, while simultaneously communicating the realities of repression and resistance to the wider international community.

Placed within broader scholarly frameworks namely, transnationalism and diaspora journalism in the context of Barre authoritarian government, it illustrates how diasporic communities under the perceived patriotism and a national duty/responsibility can exert political influence across borders, partaking in the making of collective identities, mobilise communities, challenge official narratives and shaping transnational advocacy. This study contributes to filling gaps in the historical and archival record, particularly given the ephemeral and dispersed nature of publications like Somali Horizon, which risk historical erasure. By documenting its existence, content, and impact, this research highlights the agency of diasporas in political struggle and the critical role media can play in authoritarian contexts.

Its strategic use of accessible languages and narratives allowed it to appeal to both Somali diaspora audiences and global actors, providing a model for understanding contemporary diaspora media in conflict zones and authoritarian settings.

Finally, despite research constraints, including incomplete archives and limited access to surviving contributors, this journal, alongside others such as *Somali Uncensored* and *Liberty*, remains

a crucial artifact of Somali history, deserving further scholarly attention for its role in documenting resistance and amplifying marginalized voices.

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ⁱ MARWAAD Kayse is an emerging scholar with a background in Global Studies and International Relations, with research spanning environmental perceptions in Berbera, climate justice, regional integration in the Horn of Africa, and the politics of unrecognized states. She is affiliated with the Somaliland Centre for African Studies and can be reached at marwaad.kayse@redsea-online.org.