

THE ANARCHIST CITIZENSHIP

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PEOPLE MADE OF STORIES

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THE ANARCHIST CITIZENSHIP: PEOPLE MADE OF STORIES

THE ANARCHIST CITIZENSHIP is a collaborative research project examining how storytelling, visual culture, architecture and social life (re)shape citizenship in Somaliland, the Somali region and its diaspora.

How can we avoid, refuse, or obscure the colonial gaze and continue to tell stories that defy the status quo? Especially when so much of the visual culture produced on (the Horn of) Africa continues to enact and reproduce ideas of desire, sympathy, extraction to resemble the terror, power and violence exercised upon communities and their capacity for Self-determination? What does it take to create stories that highlight the multiplicity of identities and experiences that sustain cultures in times of ongoing crises? These sets of questions animate THE ANARCHIST CITIZENSHIP: PEOPLE MADE OF STORIES.

The project is informed by both local and diasporic visual culture and offers an alternative approach to understanding, broadcasting to/with/from and engaging with the world. By placing the agency of the people of Somali(land) at the centre of the narrative, it attempts to challenge the Eurocentric, (neo)colonial and imperialist hierarchies of who gets to document, write, and think about whom.

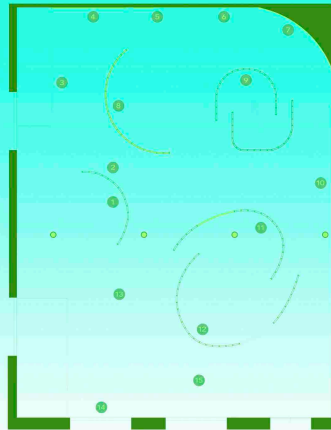
THE ANARCHIST CITIZENSHIP acknowledges that rethinking the 'making process' of an image demands a (re)negotiation of time, resources and community participation. Within the presented works, each image reflects the collective efforts of those who participate in its creation, weaving together stories, histories, and language to create visual narratives that celebrate the complexities of citizenship in this region.

Together with collaborators and contributors Kinsi Abdulleh, Rashid Ali, Abdullah Barre, Salman Dirir, Sumia Juxun, Elmi Original, Mustafa Saeed and The Somali Museum UK, Stijns and Alhaag will present a special THE ANARCHIST CITIZENSHIP programme - consisting of a visual installation, a screening and public gatherings that explore the complexities and joys of Somali social life, memory work and the ways communities create alternative ways of being together as survival strategies.

ON SPATIAL DESIGN

The spatial design is by architect and researcher RASHID ALI and is inspired by the Somali architectural concept of the Buul or Aqal Somali, which translates to home/house in English. The Buul, traditionally built and designed by women, is crafted from natural grass, tree branches and recycled materials. It represents home and togetherness, with the spatial design reflecting the infrastructure of Hargeisa. The use of recycled materials mirrors local adaptations to the climate and resource scarcity.

Within this context, the spatial design takes on a crucial role - it serves as an intermediary between the different artistic positions. It mirrors the provocative visual language, vibrant cosmos, aesthetic sensibilities and storytelling that define contemporary Somaliland - zooming into its capital city, Hargeisa



- (1) Collage, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2017-2024, Collaborators: Nijaax Harun and Khadra
(2) Mosque, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2024
(3) Ruun, Salman Dirir, 2024
(4) Formations, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2017-2024
(5) Collage, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2017-2024, Collaborators: Ayeeyo Fadumo
(6) Portraits, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2017-2024, Collaborators: Ayeeyo Gawa, Noura, Salma, Naama, Rayaan, Hanan, Yasmin
(7) Buul, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2018
(8) Atelophobia, Mustafa Saeed, 2024
(9) If you want to dismantle a hedge, remove one thorn bush at a time, The Anarchist Citizenship & Abdullah Barre, 2017-2024
(10) Visual Interventions, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2017-2024
(11) Sibaaq, Kinsi Abdulleh, 2024
(12) Dirac, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2023
(13) Courtesy of Somali Museum UK, 2023
(14) This morning I tripped over the quiet part of my ache, Sumia Juxun, 2024
(15) Ode to Youthful Daredevil, The Anarchist Citizenship, 2018-2024, Collaborators: Muna, Fadumo, Farhiye, Warda, Fyax, Fatima, Khalid, Madhane, Abdi, Ayaan, Amal, Eemahan, Amira, Bilal
Visuals, textiles & products as interventions to the space by The Anarchist Citizenship

ON HARGEISA, SOMALILAND

In the small corners and pockets of the city, young people come together to dream, laugh, play music, and flirt innocently out of the sight of Big Brother Imam. At the same time, nothing is what it seems in the eye of the beholder. The calm and conservative face of Hargeisa transforms into a lush, playful place of belonging throughout the evening. Its metamorphosis into a multiplicity of sites comforts some and frightens others, but most importantly, it becomes a temporary home for the youth. A site where young singers, producers, and rappers whisper in English about broken hearts at a rooftop party, while girls turn their niqabs into an architectural extension of home. Religion is not the motivator, but the freedom to shop anonymously for makeup or smoke shisha at the lounge around the corner is the reason why some prefer to hide their faces at night.

ON CAKELAND, HARGEISA

Hargeisa's architectural style is science-fiction and analogue, it remixes and layers modernist, futurist, neoclassical, Middle Eastern, Swahili and many other architectural/design styles to resemble what our friend architect Rashid Ali calls 'architectural wedding cakes'. Over the past decade, the city has experienced a significant housing boom. During the 2010s, bombastic and colorful cake-like designs transformed some of Hargeisa's new neighborhoods into 'Cakeland'. In the post-pandemic era, and with the arrival of Yemeni, Syrian and/or Pakistani construction workers, the colors have become more subdued and minimalist. Nonetheless, Cakeland remains fascinating, representing the construction of a new design language that is opaque, screaming colors, symbolising the search for a spatial identity. It highlights how people are (de)constructing and transforming their dreams into mansions, homes, rentals or/and ruins. The dream as a site of belonging.

ON BAATI/SHEED

Though it's a sort of homeliness, designed in the spirit of one-size-fits-all utilitarianism, the baati conjures elegance and refinement rather than the scraggly bohemianism of the mummuk and caftan. That's because of the self-possession of the women - usually Somali - who wear it, and because of the baati's inherent versatility, the way it fluid, wide sleeved silhouette flips from loungewear-like to dressed up depending on how it's styled. 'Somali American writer Saly Hellan Farah described eloquently the popular Somali baati/sheed and the way it symbolises Somali women's agency to define and redefine its usage possibilities and the stories it holds.

BIOS

THE ANARCHIST CITIZENSHIP is an ongoing research-based project that reflects on contemporary visual and oral culture in Somaliland. It was initiated in 2016 by curator Amal Alhaag and artist Nadine Stijns and developed in collaboration with Somali artists such as Mustafa Saeed and Kinsi Abdulleh, along with other thinkers, architects and activists. Over the years, it has taken on different forms. It is a space for collaboration with/between local and diasporic artists, filmmakers, architects, and designers to explore how Somali(landers) define citizenship and shape identity through visual culture.

MUSTAFA SAEED is a Somali-born artist based in Hargeisa, Somaliland. His multi-disciplinary work spans photography, graphics, and sound, blending poetic symbolism with socio-political critique to address themes such as war, conflict, and the environment. A prominent voice in contemporary art and culture in the Somali region, Mustafa is the founder of FANKEENNA, a youth-led art platform in Hargeisa that serves as a studio, gallery, and workspace for local artists. He is also a contributor to Everyday Africa, a collective of photographers dedicated to portraying the diverse and everyday experiences across the African continent.

KINSI ABDULLEH is an interdisciplinary artist, curator, and educator known for her work rooted in social justice and community engagement. She is the co-director of Numbi Arts, a Somali-led, African-centered arts and heritage organization based in East London. Abdulleh is also the founder of the Somali Museum UK, a virtual and physical space that tells the stories of Somali communities both in the UK and globally. Her projects focus on amplifying underrepresented voices, particularly within Somali and African diasporic communities.

RASHID ALI studied architecture at the Bartlett School of Architecture (University College London) and City Design at the London School of Economics. Prior to forming Rashid Ali Architects, he worked with Adjaye Associates in London. He has lectured extensively about his research interests and the work of the practice. Ali values the merit in combining practice with academia, as such cross-pollination stimulates innovation.

ABDULLAH BARRE is a Somali self-taught multi-disciplinary artist, part of FANKEENNA Collective. His work offers a glimpse into the vibrant and complex life of Hargeisa, the capital city he calls home. Abdullah's work focuses on everyday encounters that shape the working class and the intricate clan politics within an urban setting, capturing the essence of his community and providing poignant commentary on socio-political dynamics. Abdullah has participated in two significant exhibitions organized by Fankeenna: Hangool and Oodi aab Ka Dhov.

SALMAN DIRIR is a multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker based in the Netherlands, with Somaliland and Djiboutian heritage. He was born and raised in Eindhoven and has a background in audiovisual production, having studied at Sint Lucas College and the St. Joost School of Art & Design. His work spans various forms of artistic expression, including filmmaking, dance, music, and visual arts, and often explores themes related to biculturality, identity, and the immigrant experience.

SUMIA JUXUN is an elder sister, poet, producer, and educator currently based between Rotterdam, London, and Toronto. Her work often explores themes of memory, movement, and the cyclical process of leaving, as well as the rituals of departure. Juxun is known for integrating cultural traditions, such as Somali Buraanbur, into her poetic performances, offering a transformative exploration of these themes. Juxun is also the co-founder of SAWTI (2018-2022), a project that promotes East African literary and artistic expression.

ELMI ORIGINAL is a Somali-British artist and musician based in London. His work spans music production, art, and performance, often blending elements of Somali heritage with contemporary genres like Afrobeat, Amapiano, Afrohouse, R'nB, Hip Hop and electronic music. Elmi Original has contributed to several cultural and artistic projects, including the Somali Museum: Any-Space-Whatever exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery in 2023. This exhibition highlighted the role of Somali art and storytelling through various mediums, including film, photography, and music, where Elmi's work played a key part in bridging traditional Somali cultural elements with modern artistic expression.

THE SOMALI MUSEUM UK is an institution that serves as both a virtual and physical space dedicated to the rich cultural history and stories of Somalia and the Somali diaspora in the UK. The museum redefines the traditional concept of what a museum can be by combining various elements such as an art gallery, library, archive, dance studio, and music space, creating a dynamic hub for Somali arts and heritage.

