

DER - 38  
The Italians Leave Africa.

March 11, 1955  
En route down the  
Congo to Leopold-  
ville

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The following newsletter was started during my visit to ex-Italian Somaliland in January. It was continued amid a heavy schedule of travel and other activities in Kenya and Uganda during February. I finished it this week in the Belgian Congo, aboard a steamer going down the Congo River from Stanleyville to Leopoldville.

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It was five o'clock on a Sunday afternoon in Mogadishu, capital of what used to be Italian Somaliland and now is the United Nations trust territory of Somalia. The sidewalk cafe of the Albergo Croce del Sud or Southern Cross Hotel was crowded with people out for a breath of fresh air. It had been hot all afternoon and all windows in town had been shuttered against the equatorial sun. But now the sun had started to dip down behind the continent of Africa and it was cool at last. The monsoon was blowing steady and strong from off the Indian Ocean. The palm trees along Corso Regina Elena, which runs in front of the hotel, swayed back and forth in the wind. The table cloths in the cafe were tucked in under the table tops to keep them from whipping off down the street.



The Croce, in the early afternoon, before the tables have been put on the sidewalk.

"This place is finished for us," said Giuseppe. He was a short, husky young Italian, a blond Tuscan, and he had been in Somalia three years with Desert Locust Control. "In five years we will leave and we will turn the place over to these," he said with a sneer. He was referring to a group of dark-skinned young Somali men in western dress at the next table. In fascist times they would not have been allowed into the Croce or any other Italian-patronized place. But it is a different Somalia these days. The Italians maintain some private clubs but all hotels, restaurants and bars are open to everyone. "Where will I go after they get independence?" said Giuseppe.

place. But it is a different Somalia these days. The Italians maintain some private clubs but all hotels, restaurants and bars are open to everyone. "Where will I go after they get independence?" said Giuseppe.

"Who knows? There are no jobs in Italy and it is difficult to get to America."

The Somalis, teetotaling Muslims to a man, were drinking tiny cups of bitter, black coffee. They talked in tense whispers. Somalis are famous for hatching intrigues and, with independence coming in 1960, there is much scheming and politicking to be done.



The Corso



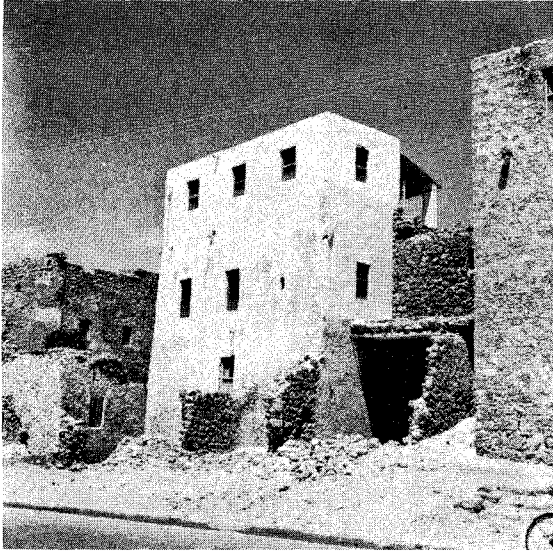
"Come on, let's go," Giuseppe said. The presence of the Somalis irritated him. We walked down the Corso, past a rambling white palazzo with Moorish arches at the windows. In the days when Somalia was an Italian colony, the palazzo functioned as headquarters for the Governor. The late Marshal Rodolfo Graziani made plans there for the invasion of neighboring Ethiopia in 1935. That was the heyday of Italian colonial power and Mussolini boasted of an African Empire that also included Libya and Eritrea.

Somalia fell to the British in 1941. It was practically a bloodless effort. The black soldiers of the Nigerian Brigade entered Mogadishu, an open city, to find posters declaiming: "Victory is meant for the Italian people." The British remained as military governors until 1950, when Somalia became a United Nations trust territory under a ten-year Italian administration.

Libya has become independent, the Ethiopian Emperor has been restored and Eritrea has become part of his domain. The Italian flag flies only in Somalia these days and it will come down forever when the Italian Trust Administrator vacates the palazzo in five years.

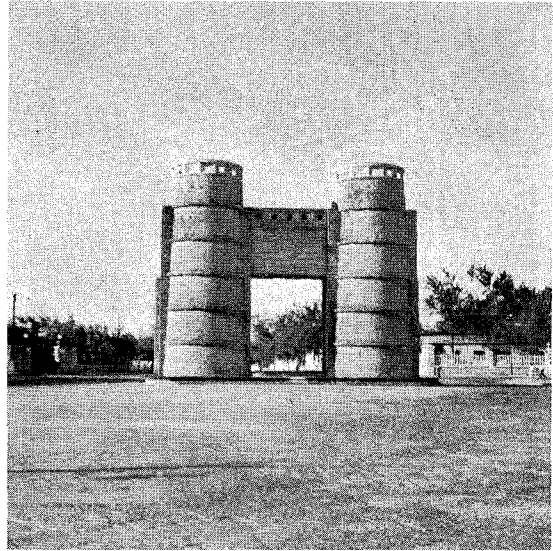
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(Left) The Cathedral of Mogadishu



Arab ruins

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Fascist relic

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Giuseppe and I walked through an old section of the city. It looked like the bomb ruins of a city in Europe, but no bombs had fallen there. The limestone buildings, put up one or more centuries ago by Arab invaders, were crumbling into dust. It has been many Ramadans since an Arab ruler held sway in Mogadishu. Today the Arabs are a small and forgotten community. The ruined houses are still in use and young Somali women were sitting on the doorsteps. "Scharmutte," Giuseppe said. The word comes from Arabic slang and means prostitute.

We came to a monument in the center of a square. The monsoon was whipping up piles of sand around the base of it. Giuseppe straightened his shoulders and read the inscription:

"In the sixteenth year of victory  
Thirteenth of the fascist era  
Italian Somalia welcomed with profound joy and pride  
His Majesty Vittorio Emanuele III  
Living symbol of the history and of the glory of Italy  
And before him the pioneers, the farmers, the soldiers..."

Here the inscription trailed off into broken and missing letters. No one had ever bothered to replace them. Soon the inscription may become illegible. "We're all fascists here," Giuseppe said. "Mussolini was the greatest man who ever lived. In his time Italy was a great country."

Giuseppe had emigrated to Somalia because he had not been able to find work in Italy. The Italians originally had high hopes that Somalia would provide an outlet for Italy's surplus millions. But Somalia is a barren place, with practically no discovered resources, and only a small amount of agriculture is possible. It served as a

springboard for the invasion of the fertile Ethiopian highlands, but that was about all. In 1931 there were less than two thousand Italians in the territory; there are less than five thousand today. American geologists are exploring for oil, but if it is found the self-governing state of Somalia will benefit, not l'Italia. Somalia was a colonial failure but Italians like Giuseppe like to look back with nostalgia to the days of imperial greatness and of Mussolini, another symbol of "the glory of Italy."



Mogadishu coastline

We walked along a road next to a bathing beach. The monsoon was so strong that it made my cigaret burn unevenly. The road ended at the Lido, a sea-side night club. Beyond that stretched the vast desert and bushland that makes up most of Somalia. It was six o'clock and inside the Lido, Italian soldiers and civilians were dancing with Somali girls and drinking beer. Somali women are brown skinned and have pretty faces and flashing dark eyes. They are shapely and they are a regular topic of male conversations all over eastern Africa. Their standing is enhanced by the fact that attention paid a Somali belle rarely goes ignored.



Beyond the Lido:  
A lighthouse, the desert

An elderly Italian was playing sentimental tunes on an accordion. Then the juke box took over with American numbers, among them "Shot Gun Boogie." We ordered beer and Giuseppe drummed his fingers on the dirty table cloth in time to the music. "What do you call it, boo-ghee boo-ghee?" he said. "I would like to go to America. Is it true that everyone in America has an automobile?"

The soldiers on the dance floor carried pistols in hip holsters. The soldiers were all diminutive. The Somalis are tall people, ranging to around six feet, and some of the girls towered over the ex-master race. A drunken Italian civilian tried to cut in on one couple and the Somali girl pushed him aside roughly. He lurched past our table, spotted Giuseppe and gave the fascist salute. "Heil Hitler," he shouted. "Viva il Duce," Giuseppe replied with a

wry smile.

A soldier tried to kiss a Somali girl and she slapped him playfully. The other soldiers laughed. A Somali girl sitting at a table flung a beer bottle onto the dance floor and it shattered. The Arab bartender stormed over and wanted to throw her out. Then the Italian proprietor smoothed things out and the girl apologized. A boy swept up the pieces as the soldiers snickered. From time to time individuals or groups of Italians left with Somali girls. "Scharmutte," Giuseppe said. "These Somali girls are magnificent. I know them all and they like me." He scanned the room. "I am looking for my girl friend. She is usually here but I do not see her."

We left the Lido and I suggested we take a bus back to town. Giuseppe said no. I neri, the blacks, ride the buses. He would rather walk. We passed a group of Somali youths on the road and Giuseppe tensed. He showed me that he was carrying a Beretta automatic in a shoulder holster under his short-sleeved shirt. A friend of his had been injured in the head recently by a rock thrown by a Somali. In 1948 something more serious happened. The territory was still under British military administration and the idea of returning it to Italy as a trust territory was being discussed in the United Nations. A riot broke out in Mogadishu and Somalis killed fifty-one Italian men, women and children. The situation is quiet on the whole now but the Italians have not forgotten those riot-torn days of 1948. I asked Giuseppe how he liked the three years he had spent in Somalia. "Tanta miseria, so much misery," he replied.

Giuseppe's idea of a future may be finished but for the young westernized Somalis the future spells those magic words of Africa: self-government. Among these young men is Abdulcadir Mohamed Aden, who is an old regular at the Croce intrigue sessions and who is something of an old acquaintance of mine.

I met Aden nearly two years previously on a plane between Paris and Rome. Aden (the name means Adam, whom Muslims regard as one of a series of prophets, Jesus included, that ended with Mohamed) was returning from New York where he had presented a Somali petition to the United Nations. Aden's father had worked as a clerk for the Italians in fascist times and Aden was brought up in Mogadishu. Aden managed to get a little education and then his father became fed up with life in the big city and returned to the desert as a nomadic chief. Aden stayed on in Mogadishu, worked as a clerk for the Italians, married a girl from a nomadic family and now is in business for himself as an importer-exporter. Business seems to be good as Aden smokes only American cigarettes, the most expensive, and dresses in natty sports shirts and slacks. He also is in the thick of politics as General Secretary of Hisbia Dighil Mirifle, the second most powerful political party in the territory.

Somalis are classified as Hamites and are of a different origin than the Bantu and Negro people of Africa. Aden has brown skin, black kinky hair, thin lips and a straight nose. He is in his 30s and is nearly six feet tall. Unlike most Somalis he is heavy-set,



Aden

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weighing close to two hundred pounds. He has a lame foot and the Somalis call him "Zoppo"--- Italian for lame. The foot is something of a handicap, but at the same time it serves to emphasize a swagger Aden presumably would have anyway.

In a British territory, the "evolved" African often becomes a strict imitation of his English masters. He insists on having his tea each afternoon, he may dress in a blazer and he may even achieve a bored manner of speech. Aden had grown up around the Italians. He eats his spaghetti in the noisy Italian fashion, one end of a piece of spaghetti approaching the mouth, the other still on the plate. He is a teetotaler and never samples vino rosso but he does insist on having a quart of acqua minerale, effervescent "mineral" water, with each meal. "Improves la digestione," Aden says, patting his not inconsiderable stomach. Aden likes people and he likes to talk. When he does, it is in the voluble Italian fashion, complete with all the histrionics. One minute he roars with laughter, the next he waves his hands wildly, then he puckers his face as if he were going to cry.

Somalis are independent and assertive people. When we arrived in Rome that time, Aden, his tarboosh at a jaunty angle, lurched imperiously through the air terminal, pushing aside customs officials, porters and fellow passengers. The startled Italians probably thought that a dangerous eastern potentate had descended in their midst. They made way for him. "Porter!" Aden bawled over the heads of the diminutive Italians. "Bring those bags, presto presto." An aged Italian came hopping along behind us with Aden's fancy luggage. "Now I'll show you Rome," Aden said to me. It was his first visit too. But some officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were waiting to welcome their impatient colonial protege to la Citta Eterna and Aden and I lost contact with each other. When we met again in Mogadishu, I told Aden I was thinking of hiring a car to visit Ischia Baidoa, a provincial headquarters one hundred and sixty miles to the northwest. "Fine," said Aden. "I'll go with you and show you around. As you say... What do you say? Oh, yes, that's my 'home-town.'"

We left for Ischia Baidoa two days later in a small Fiat driven by a Somali named Ahmed. Aden chatted rapidly in a mixture of English, Italian and Swahili as Ahmed zipped out of Mogadishu on a tarmac road. "Things were pretty bad here before the war," Aden said. "But that's all over now. The only problem is on the economic side, developing the country. We don't even have a railroad. We had one---it was 110 kilometers (68 miles) long---but the British dismantled it during the war and took it away."



The economic situation is one thing; there also is a critical dearth of Somalis with enough education and training to take over important posts when independence comes. In the early 1930s, Somalis were allowed to get a few years of education, but the fascists halted even that in 1935. Somalis were supposed to be the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the master race. For those who didn't get the point, there were laws forcing Somalis to work for Italian farmers at wages described as sufficient only for mere existence. Somalis say the lash was often applied.

The British opened the first school program and the Italians took over in 1950 under the watchful eyes of the permanent United Nations Advisory Council in Mogadishu, composed of one representative each of Egypt, the Philippines and Columbia. But it was necessary to start almost from scratch in educating the Somalis. Today there still is not one Somali doctor, engineer or college graduate of any type. One youth, who got his early education in Khartoum, is in his second year of medical school in Italy, but he is the only one currently undergoing college-level education. Secondary schools have been established in Somalia now, but the first class will not graduate until 1957. The United Nations undoubtedly will give Somalia plenty of assistance after 1960, but it will be a long time before the Somalis will be able to manage their own affairs.

"There are two mentalities among the settlers here," Aden was saying. "There are the newcomers and there are the old settlers. The newcomers are all right although some of them aren't interested in anything but spaghetti and scharmutte. But the old settlers--- they like to think of the glory of Rome and they don't want to treat us as equals. Some of them will just have to get into step after 1960 or get out. But we will want the others to stay, provided they keep out of our politics. We'll want them to keep their farms going. We'll need their exports to keep our economy up."

There are about 250 Italian farms in Somalia, covering an area of about 160 square miles. The farms are irrigated with intricate systems of canals and the chief crop is bananas. Despite assurances from Somali leaders, Italian farmers seem to be uneasy about their future. "We used to feel that the quickest way to get to heaven was to kill a Christian," Aden said. "But that's all changed now."

The tarmac came to a sudden end and we were on a dirt road. Some stretches were dotted with potholes and had been ploughed up during the rain by lorries. That made no difference to Ahmed. He tore along at speeds of up to 70 miles an hour, slowing to around 60 in the longer skids. Frequently the road was blocked by camels and cattle, but Ahmed never slowed down; he merely leaned on the horn. The animals would gallop in terror in all directions and Somali herdsman would bawl curses on us and all our progeny. Ahmed sang as we raced along. "He is singing about love," Aden said with the isn't-that-cute expression an Italian assumes when discussing "an affair of the heart." "He is telling us how beautiful his girl is, how great her father is and how pure and noble our Somali race is."

We stopped at several villages and Aden conferred briefly with branch leaders of his Hisbia Dighil Mirifle. They were always younger

men, all or partly in western dress. At one village a group of blanket-clad nomads crowded around the car, chattering with excitement. "They have never seen a small Fiat like this," Aden explained. "They have only seen the larger one and they are saying, 'Maybe it is the child of the big one.'"

The nomads had let their kinky hair grow very long. Then they had packed it with ghee---clarified butter---and the result was one solid, huge and somewhat-rancid coiffure. The nomads are tough, wiry---and wily---people. They are clever and quick. They have to be that way; their environment offers them no choice. Their home is the endless bush and desert. It is flat and barren, containing little but thorn bushes, parched clumps of grass, rock, sand and swirling dust. Life is one continuous trek for water and new grazing for the camels, cattle and goats. A few Somalis practice agriculture, along the rivers and in places blessed with a little rainfall. But only one river, the Juba, flows all year around and manages to reach the sea. The rest dry up after the rains have ended; the river beds soon crack open under the relentless sun.

The nomads and semi-nomads, who together make up perhaps 70 per cent of the population, don't give a hoot for politics, parliaments or even Mogadishu. Politics are only for the men of the towns and villages and the younger ones at that. But the nomads do join the others in feeling strongly about one thing---Ethiopia. Somalis of all sorts call the Ethiopians the "worst imperialists of all." They say that the Somalis living in Ethiopia's Ogaden Province are mistreated. Feelings are currently aroused by Britain's action in returning a strip of Somali-occupied territory to Ethiopia. "We have lived under fascism and even that is not as bad as life in Ethiopia for a Somali," one old man said to me. He and others mutter that jehad, Muslim holy war, may be waged against these black "imperialists" in the future. Meanwhile shootings and cattle raids are fairly common occurrences along the Ethiopian-Somali frontier.

Somalis pride themselves on being able to go without water for long periods of time, but Aden is no man of the desert. He informed us that he was dying of thirst so we stopped for water at the home of the Italian Capo del Distretto or district administrator in a village called Bur Hacaba. It was half past four in the afternoon and the Capo was still deep in siesta. Aden barged into the house and sent the Somali servant flying for water. We left without awakening the Capo.

An hour later we reached Iscia Baldoa and the Italian officials greeted Aden courteously. Aden's Hisbia Dighil Mirifle is more pro-Italian and more conservative than the territory's biggest political party, the Somali Youth League, and it pays to have a few friends around. The officials put us up in the government rest house. Aden washed the dust off his face. He leaned his weight against the washbowl and it went crashing to the floor. He howled in amusement.

At sunset we went to the local cafe, a wooden cottage illuminated by a few unshaded electric light bulbs. Italian soldiers and civilians





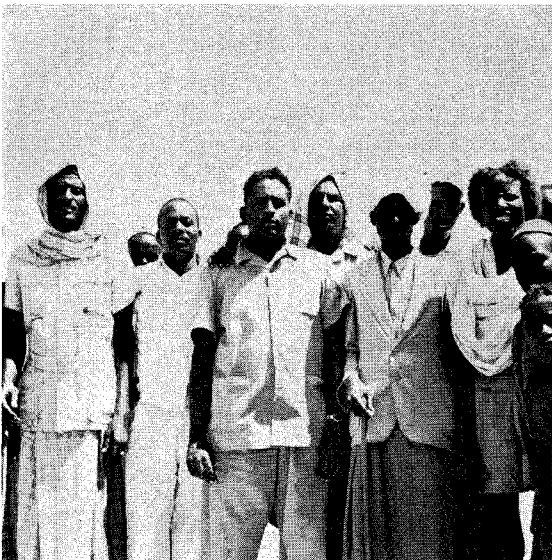
Nomads on the move,  
along tarmac road  
just outside Mogadishu

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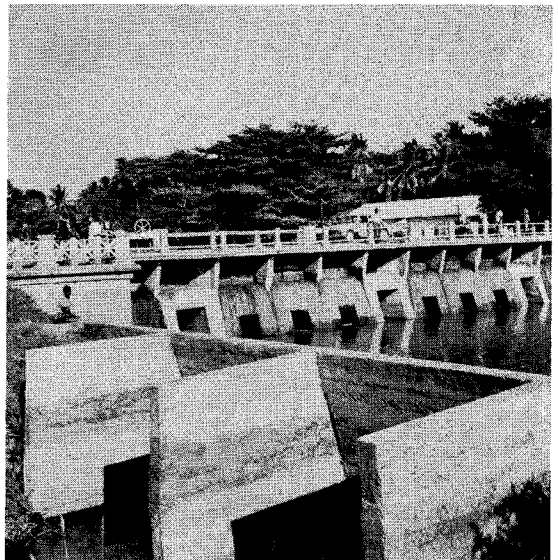


Nomadic man

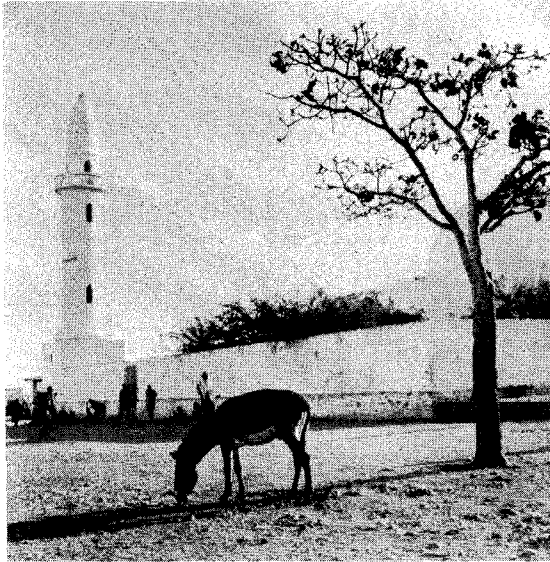
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Aden (center), with  
political leaders of  
one village



Irrigation dam  
for Italian farms  
near Gennale



Mosque at Ischia Baidoa

were drinking beer and a lissom, barefooted Somali girl was waiting on the tables. "She sleeps with an Italian," Aden said with a sneer. The Capo del Distretto for Ischia Baidoa joined us. He was a fairly tall, heavy, aristocratic-looking man in his fifties named Signor Teatini. He talked in Italian and apologized for not speaking in English. He had not had an occasion to use it since 1945, he said. Teatini refused a drink---he said he rarely drinks---and he asked Aden and me to come to his house for dinner.

Dinner was served on the verandah and la Signora Teatini, a good-looking woman some years younger than her husband, did most of the talking. A Somali servant brought soup, then meters of spaghetti, then the main course---veal, potatoes and vegetables---then desert, then cheese and

crackers and finally coffee. A jovial Italian priest joined us for a liqueur.

Teatini told me he had spent nearly thirty years in Africa as an Italian colonial official and as an Army officer. He had been rewarded with the title of Commendatore. He had seen the colony of Somalia consolidated and he had seen the strapping giant Graziani roll into Ethiopia at the head of his armies. After the Italian surrender to the British, Teatini spent five years in Kenya sitting behind barbed wire waiting for the war to end. That was where he had learned a little English. The years in the prison camp and the collapse of the Italian Empire seemed to weigh heavily on il Commendatore. Later, when Aden was not around, I asked Teatini if he thought the Somalis would make a success of self-government. He was silent for a while. Then, in carefully-composed English, he said: "I have only one more year left in Africa. Then I will go elsewhere in our foreign service. So what happens here will not affect me. But... these people are still very backward... there are no resources here... nothing but deficits for Rome to meet... no, I don't think it will be a success."

The next morning Aden and I had coffee and buns in the cafe while the fat Italian owner, wearing only a piece of cloth wrapped around his middle, stood behind the bar yawning, scratching himself and reminiscing about his native Bologna. "When he arrived here ten years ago, he had only one donkey, some whisky and a woman," Aden said in loud Italian for the benefit of both of us. "Now he is the proprietor of this magnificent cafe! It is a real success story, no?" The Italian beamed at Aden.

Aden and I got into the car for a tour of the district. We started out on a straight tarmac road. It had been a good road once but now it had fallen into decay and was full of potholes. Even Ahmed found it necessary to drive slowly. "This is Mussolini's old Strada Imperiale," Aden said. "Il Duce wanted to link Addis Ababa with Mogadishu and make Mogadishu a great port for his Empire." Aden guffawed. "Now you are seeing the glory of Rome." The Imperial Road leads nowhere---just across an empty stretch of bush. Soon it will look like a Roman road in Britain.

We visited an experimental farm where Somalis are taught better farming methods, then a hospital and finally a boarding school for Somali boys. All three places were run by Italians. "We'll need Italians like these and other foreigners after 1960," Aden said. "We can't run these things by ourselves yet."

We buzzed around the village while Aden handed down the word to the local politicians. People kept crowding around him to shake hands. Sometimes, when there were too many hands to be shaken in comfort, Aden just stretched out his arm in mass greeting, like the old newsreels of Mussolini taking the cheers of the crowd from a balcony in Rome.

I learned later that my presence stirred up suspicion in the village. "He is English!" the villagers hissed at Aden. "No, American," Aden replied. They refused to believe him. "Why do you try to tell us that? He speaks English, therefore he is English. The English have given our land to the Ethiopians. Why does he come here now?" Aden could not convince them that I had no thought of giving Ischia Baidoa to the Ethiopians.

We stopped to say arrivederla to il Commendatore. It was nearing sunset and he was standing at the foot of his verandah steps, gazing at his garden with a melancholy air. The garden was watered carefully each day and it was the only bit of color in miles of burnt bushland. After we said goodbye to Teatini, we got into the car to return to Mogadishu and he went back to his verandah steps to gaze at his garden.

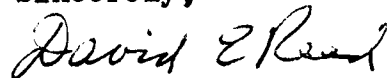
After three hours, Ahmed came to a flying stop at an outdoor restaurant in Afgoi, a village about twenty miles from Mogadishu. Aden barged in, exchanging noisy greetings with some Italians. He spotted a good-looking Italian woman. "Bring us some spaghetti," he barked. "I don't work here," she said haughtily. "Umm, excuse me," Aden said. Then, turning to me, he burst into laughter and said, "There used to be an Italian waitress here who looked just like her."

Aden spotted a group of Egyptian ulama, professors from Al-Azhar, the thousand-year-old Muslim university in Cairo. He lurched over to their table and said, "Salaam alaikum, peace be upon you." "Alaikum salaam, on you be peace," the learned men intoned in response. Aden chatted with them in Arabic. The ulama were dressed in richly colored robes. They are in Somalia at the expense of the Egyptian government to give religious and other teaching to the Somalis.

We took another table. Aden sat down on the Beretta automatic he was carrying in his hip pocket. He shifted it to another pocket.

"It's in case we hit an animal on the road and have to destroy it," he said piously. We had spaghetti and salad. Ahmed the driver joined us and a sudden gust of monsoon blew the lettuce off his plate. "Sometimes I hate the Italians," Aden said. "It's true they have a better attitude than the British, but sometimes I hate them." A Somali girl entered with an Italian man. "There you see the elite of Somali society---she's allowed to associate with white people," Aden said. He finished his meal long before Ahmed and I and peeled a banana. "Just five more years," he said, throwing the peelings on the ground. "Then we'll be free of foreign domination at last. Freedom, independence and national self-respect! They're ours now too."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David E. Reed". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

David E. Reed

Received New York 3/21/55.