



Amina Jimale, BS7, 'My family history'

Most of Somali history has been passed down orally. Folk tales, stories and even your own family ancestors. After an interesting facetime chat with my father, I learnt a lot more about my family history.

Here you can see part of our family tree, which demonstrates the surname and middle naming system in Somali culture.

Family tree (condensed)

ALI ILGAMALI

NUR ALI UPTO

MOHAMUD NUR ALI

JIMALE MOHAMUD NUR

HASSAN JIMALE MOHAMUD

AMINA HASSAN JIMALE

Your fathers name by default is your middle name

In Somali culture, your Grandfathers name is automatically your surname. Weirdly, you'll never share a surname with either of your parents!



Below is a photo of Ali Illgamali, my great x 5 grandfather, who was a significant figure in Somali history during the colonial period. Ali was born and raised under Italian and Portuguese occupation. During that period Somalia was divided into three countries: British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, and French Somaliland. Yes, three countries simultaneously colonised Somalia.



He fought off the Italians in his later life, for six years and hoped to witness an untied independent Somalia. Sadly, one year after his death, in 1961, Somalia achieved independence and declared a republic state. Ali couldn't see his country free however, he left behind an amazing legacy for the future generations. He is one of my role models in activism and just proves how much determination can pay off.

However, the repercussions of colonialism are still evident in modern day Somalia. The northern region of Somaliland (formally British

Somaliland) is seeking autonomy and is currently unrecognised. It just makes me think, 'would've this happened if they never divided us in the first place?' Probably not. We all used to identify as 'Somali' no matter what our tribe or name was and not 'Lander' or 'Mali'. Just a side note 'Lander' refers to those from Somaliland and 'Mali' is shortened Somali (i.e., from Somalia). We worked so hard as a country to unify, just so we can divide ourselves again... (facepalm)!

On an interesting note, the further back we investigate my ancestors the more we can see pre-Islamic Somali names. Upto and Illgamali are good examples of this. With the arrival of Islam during the Middle Ages, Somali people started to adopt Arab names like Hassan, Amina, and Mohamed, whilst slowly abandoning the original 'pagan' names. I think it's quite a shame this happened because it mirrors the similar process that happened in West Africa with the adaptation of Christian names. The fact that names like Jimale and Upto have still survived shows that our history is still embedded.

I hope you enjoyed this post about my family history and learnt something new!

