Marco Svolacchia

INSIGHTS INTO SOMALI PLACE NAMES

In memory of Giorgio R. Cardona

"The light that burns twice as bright,
burns half as long". Philip K. Dick

1. *Introduction*[1]

The toponymy of Somalia is not a subject that appears to have captured the attention of scholars. Apart from some sporadic indications in maps or travel books of the colonial age (as in Robecchi-Bricchetti, 1899), the only works worthy of attention are an old and largely provisional paper by Cerulli (1931) and a brief paper by Tosco–Milanese (1996).

To be sure, both Italian and British cartographers did much work in the attempt to provide maps with consistent toponymy, in spite of the remarkable problems with language and transcription.

The introduction of a national writing in 1972, along with a better understanding of Somali phonology, gave cartographers an incomparably better means for the transcription of toponyms.[2]

The present paper is not meant to be an exhaustive study – whatever that might possibly mean for a subject such as this – or intended to be used for reference purposes. Nor is it meant to be an essay in classical toponymy, i.e. historically-reconstructively oriented. Rather, it aims to offer a general and, possibly, holistic overview of the phenomenon, its concerns being linguistic and anthropological. It will address questions such as: *What geographical items are named? How are they named? Why are they named? What role do toponyms play in traditional Somali life? What do Somali toponyms tell us about the people that make use of them and their relation to the Land?*[3]

We will first address some general characteristics of Somali toponymy, its *uniformity* – as far as language and geography are concerned – and some major *issues of interpretation* comprising the problems of different transcriptions, subsequent layers of reference and the somewhat fuzzy distinction between proper and common nouns.

1.1. *Uniformity and transparency*

We are going to deal here with the question of how far a general description of Somali toponymy can achieved, i.e. to what extent it is constant in language and type, in spite of differences in space, time and geomorphic features.

Multilingualism

A remarkable aspect of Somali toponymy is its extensive uniformity. This is in line with the overall linguistic uniformity of Somalia, an unparalleled case in sub-Saharan Africa, where multilingualism is the rule.

A number of non Somali toponyms do occur, but they are generally confined to specific regions or domains. Bantu toponyms occur in the Juba region (*Kisimayu*, *Raas Kiamboni*), while some Arabic, religious names are found in the 'Land between the Rivers', the lowland surrounded by the rivers Shebelle and Juba (*Masaajid* 'Mosques', *Janna* 'Paradise'). Names relating to sea geography are also Arabic (*raas* 'Cape', *bender* 'Port'; *khoori* 'Lagoon'; *qubbad* 'Bay'; *jasiiro* 'Island'). There is a residue of toponyms, mostly relating to the oldest cities, which have a different origin: Oromo inland, and Semitic along the coast (an example of which is *Mogadishu*, which most probably has its origins in some Arabic dialect).

Dialects

Somali is a rather uniform dialect cluster, with the exception of the Lowland, whose dialects are grouped under the generic name of *maay*. Toponymy echoes this situation and the most

remarkable phonological and lexical differences in toponyms are found in that area. Nonetheless, except for some geomorphically related differences, there is no remarkable typological variation between northern and southern toponyms.

Diachrony

It is reasonable to assume that, *in principle*, toponyms have a degree of transparency which is inversely proportional to their age. An evident fact regarding Somali toponyms is that most of them are remarkably transparent, at least as far as their literal meaning is concerned. Therefore, it is plausible to suppose that most of them are fairly recent (in part, this may be a consequence of the rationale of this research: the database upon which the analysis is based is made up of names whose interpretation is reliable, i.e. potentially more recent).

Evidently, it is unrealistic to believe that the toponymy of Somalia has not undergone changes of any kind. Nonetheless, there are reasons to assume that the types of Somali toponyms (i.e. place names created by Somali speaking people) have changed very little, if at all. First of all, Somali toponyms are extremely uniform in type. Secondly, and most remarkably, even the areas that were only quite recently inhabited by Somali people (like Jubaland) have exactly the same kind of toponyms as the rest of Somalia.

As will be argued below, uniformity and transparency have crucial importance in determining the special function that toponymy has for Somali, the only population in Africa where nomadic pastoralists still constitute the majority.

These facts lead to a rather paradoxical consequence as far as traditional studies in toponymy are concerned: the possibility of studying Somali toponymy through a systemic-synchronic approach, rather than an atomistic-etymological approach.

Geographical variation

There is some degree of variation in place names that merely depends on geography. A typical case is that of horonyms: terms such as *cal* or *qarqar*, which refer to mountain ranges,

occur in the largely mountainous North, and not in the South, which is mostly plains with just a few isolated and low mountains. Similarly, the term *webi*, 'river', is only seen in the South, not due to linguistic differences, but to the sheer fact that rivers (i.e. permanent streams of water) only exist in that region.

1.2. *Issues of interpretation*

Besides the usual problems of interpretation, the state of the art of research into Somalia's toponymy gives rise to some particular problems that will be addressed in this chapter.

Transcriptions

A problem concerning both the identification and the interpretation of Somali place names is caused by discrepancies in transcription as a name can often appear in different variants. This is the result of a stratification of different cartographic traditions.

Apart from a few Arabic transcriptions, the oldest transcriptions of the bulk of Somali place names are Italian (often accompanied by an English transcription in Somaliland and Jubaland). A major problem with these transcriptions is that they are grossly inadequate in representing Somali phonology, leading to serious difficulties in the task of identifying names. Nonetheless, they retain an official status and are still widely used.

A second layer consists of the transcriptions in the national writing of Somali, which was introduced only in the Seventies. In spite of the fact that Somali writing is incomparably more adequate than Italian or English to transcribe Somali names, some variation still occurs. Some variants are purely graphic, ultimately due to some morphophonological processes in Somali (e.g., a diphthong such as 'aw' can be written either as 'ow' or 'oo'; postvocalic 'q' can be represented as 'kh'). Other variants arise from dialectal differences (for instance, some guttural consonants of Standard Somali are absent in Southern

Somali: e.g. Somali *ceel* 'pit' is *eel* in Maay). As a consequence, the likelihood that there may be up to three or even more variants for the same toponym, a problem which does not particularly seem to bother Somali people.

Time Layers

Another issue affecting the correct interpretation of toponyms is that their constituent parts do not necessarily belong to the same time layer. A good number of instances of this kind are provided by toponyms in which the name of a near place is embedded. The embedded place name can be accompanied by a modifier (e.g. *weyn/yar* 'big/small') – as in *Buhoodleh Yara*, which is related to *Buhoodleh*, a city in North-western Somalia – or be preceded by a category noun, as in *Webi Shabeelle*, which is obviously related to *Shabeelle*, an area around the upper course of the river Shebelle, where it is simply named, not surprisingly, as *Webiga* 'The River'.

It is quite clear that these toponyms are temporally subsequent to the place name they embed, i.e. they were conceived in relation to the latter. As a consequence, the translation must take into account the correct referential relationship of the name. As an example, *Buhoodleh Yara* should be interpreted as 'Little Buhoodleh', instead of 'Place with small oasis' (vs. *Buhood-leh* 'oasis-with'); *Webi Shabeelle* is 'River of (the) Shebelle (region)', and not **'River with leopards' (vs. *Shabeel-le* 'Leopards-with').

A different type of diachronic layering is shown by those toponyms in which a foreign name is embedded, a familiar situation for scholars of toponymy. A well known example is *Webi Ganaane* (another name for the river Giuba), which is formed by *webi* 'river' and *ganaane*, again 'river' in Galla Borana (and in some varieties of Sidama). The curious redundancy in this toponym is apparent. The name *Ganaane* was adopted by Somali people when they settled in a region formerly inhabited by Oromo people, for whom the name was transparent. On the contrary, the name was not transparent for Somali, who added the category noun *webi*. As a result, the

correct translation is 'River Ganane' (not *'River river'), while the original Oromo form was simply *Ganaane* 'The River'.

Proper or common noun?

It is worth considering a further point which has a bearing upon this discussion. In more familiar countries – due to long established traditions of registering place names and the fact that they are rarely transparent – toponyms are clearly distinguished from common nouns, so that problems of categorization very seldom arise. On the other hand, in countries such as Somalia – in which standardization of place names is more recent and less comprehensive, and most nouns are blatantly transparent – issues of ambiguity do arise.

A few Somali names only consist of a generic noun – such as *pond, mountain*, etc. – so that it is not clear whether they should be considered as proper nouns in the ordinary sense. It is possible that in some cases cartographers misinterpreted some descriptive expressions as proper names which were not considered really specific by natives.[4]

2. Which geographical items are named?

What follows is a list of the major geographical categories to which Somali place naming makes refers and which cover nearly all Somali toponyms. In many instances, these nouns are embedded in the name itself. The geographical super-categorisation is in part borrowed from the maps of Somalia and in part derives from general conventions applied to the particular Somali territory.[5]

2.1. Elevations

Elevations include mountain ranges, mountains, hills, dunes and parts of mountains. Some are confined to specific areas: mountain ranges are only found in the North; some types of hills are specific to the South; dunes are typically found along the coasts.

MOUNTAIN RANGES	*buuraha; cal* (high and rocky); *qarqar* (low and rounded)
MOUNTAINS	*buur*
PEAKS	*duud; dul*
SHOULDERS	*dhabar, san*
HILLS	*garab* 'hill, ditch'; *dabo, doon* (in the land between the Rivers); *tuur, gumbur, qar* (in the North)
HIGHLANDS	*kuunyo* 'hill made of red, flood ground' (in the South)
SLOPES	*deg* 'slope, river bank'
DUNES	*bacad*

2.2. Depressions

'Depression' is a blanket term referring here to both round and elongated landforms below the surrounding area. Given the hydrological features of Somalia, in which almost all bodies of water are seasonal, no clear distinction between dry depressions and depressions with water can be drawn.

RIVERS	*webi* (only applied to the rivers Shebelle and Juba)
WADIS	*waad(i), tog/tug; dix* 'small wadi'; *bohol, doox* 'river valley'; *far,* 'canal, affluent', *keli* (canal in the Shebelle area), *durdur* (in the North), *laag*
BASINS	*balli, weel* 'basin'; *billiq, faaf* 'swamp'; *caag, war* 'pond'; *gal/gel/kal* 'marsh'; *haro* 'small lake'; *saxaa(x)* 'rain water basin'; *uur* 'depression'; *dhesheeg* 'depression along a river'
HOLES	*god; hog*

2.3. Subterranean water

'Subterranean water' includes both artificial watering holes, such as pits – both deep and superficial – and natural underground sources, such as wells and natural pits.

PITS	*ceel; laas* (in dry riverbeds); *ran* (in sand or gravel soil); *qod-qod* (cluster of small *ran*); *biyo*[5]
WELLS	*il; buq; biyo*

2.4. Human settlements

'Human settlements' refer to a variety of geographical items of human origin, such as permanent or temporary dwellings, fields, watering places, and burial sites. Dwellings and territo-

ries (for which see below) are the least restricted as far as category nouns are concerned. The reason is that almost every aspect of the land, or element on it, can be used to identify a place. Names of cities have a tendency to be less transparent because in most cases they are older in origin, sometimes even pre-Somali.

A particular case of dwelling is religious settlements. They are confined to the Land between the Rivers and generally relate to agriculture. The names are almost always Arabic and have a religious quality.

DWELLINGS	*buulo*; *beled* (along the river Shebelle);
POSTS	*mooro* 'corral'; *xuddur* 'camp, fort'
BURIAL SITES	*xawaale/xabaale*; *xawl*; *qabri* (in Northen Jubaland); *xawaal tiirri* (ancient burial place, with stone cairns)
RELIGIOUS SETTLEMENTS	*masaajid, buulo, beled, bender, janna*
WATERING PLACES	*ceelo, malka*
FIELDS	*beer*; *shambe, adable* (in the South)

2.5. Lands

'Lands' includes a number of natural geographical items of considerable extension, such as territories, forests, deserts, etc. and items relating to the sea. *Bender* 'port' can refer both to sea and river ports, although the latter is uncommon. Being a human-related item, it should be included in the 'human settlements' category, but it has the same more-Arabic-than-Somali character of the other names relating to the sea.

| LAND ELEMENTS | *carro* 'territory'; *gelgel* 'pastureland'; *ban(-an)* 'clearing'; *cayn* 'forest' (in the North); *hawd* 'bushland'; *sol* 'dry land' (in Migiurtinia) |
| SEA ELEMENTS | *bender* 'port'; *khoori* 'lagoon'; *qubbad* 'bay'; *raas* 'cape, headland'; *jasiiro* 'island' |

2.6. Routes

Reference to routes are found, although not frequently. These include mountain passes, paths, and fords.

PATHS	*jid, tob*
PASSES	*karin* 'mountain pass'
FORDS	*dabbaan* 'ford'

3. How are geographical items named?

This section deals with the form and the content in the naming of Somali geographical elements.

3.1. Form

The word structures which underlie the vast majority of Somali place names are as follows (MOD = Modifier; DET = Determinant; C = Clause; NP = Noun Phrase; AP = Adjectival Phrase; IMP = Impersonal; REL = Relative; CONJ = Conjunction; PRES = Present; HAB = Habitual):

1. [[NP] Mod] $_{NP}$
2. [[[NP] Mod] $_{NP}$ Mod] $_{NP}$
3. [[NP] [[Mod] Mod]] $_{NP}$
4. NP = N (Det)
5. Mod = AP/NP/(C)

As the above patterns show, nouns with a Determiner occur, but are not very common.[7]

In what follows, the common types of Somali toponyms are given and exemplified. They are divided into *phrasal names*, which are by and large the most common ones, and *clausal names*, which are relatively rare.[8]

a. Phrasal Names

| N(pl.) | *Buur-o* mountain-s 'Mountains' | *Berde* fig_tree 'Fig tree' |
| N+Det | *Gumbur-tii* hill-the 'The hill' | *Jiif-ta* slope-the 'The slope' |

N+AP	*Buur Cad* mountain white 'White mountain'	*Balli Weyn* pond big 'Big pond'
N+ [N-le]_{AP}	*Ceel Garab-le* pit ditch-with 'Pit with ditch'	*Buur Dawac-ley* mountain jackal-with 'Mountain with jackals'
N+NP	*Bohol Baar* stream dum_palm 'Stream of *dum* palm'	*Buq Berde* 'Well of fig _tree' 'Well of fig tree'
N+Det+AP	*Buur-ti Biyoo-le* mountain-the water-with 'The mountain with water'	
N+Det+NP	*Buq-da Aqab-ley* well-the acacia-with 'The well with acacias'	*Deg-tii Caliima* slope-the Alima 'Alima's slope'
N+[[NP]+AP]	*Ceel Biyo Mac* pit water sweet 'Pit of sweet water'	*Bacad Qorio Madoobe* dune wood black 'Black wood dune'
[[N+[NP]]+SA]	*Buur Barbar Cad* mountain spotted white 'White spotted mountain'	*Buur Dhagax Yaro* mountain stone small 'Small stone mountain'
N+[[NP]+NP]	*Bacad Ceel Xamar-a* dune pit tamarind_tree-s 'Dune of tamarind trees' pit'	*Buur Madax Maroodi* mountain head elephant 'Elephant head's mountain'
[[N+[AP]]+AP]	*Buur Biyo Caddo Yar* mountain water white small 'Small mountain of white water'	
N+(CONJ+)N	*Hal Iyo Nirig* She-camel and camel_foal 'She-camel and foal (mountain)'	*Xarar Jilico* carissa_harar cadabe _jili' 'Carissa (and) cadabe plants'

Note that toponyms with conjuncts are rare; those with an overt conjunction are exceptional.

a. Clausal Names

(N)+C	*God La Qoday* hole IMP dug 'Dug hole'	*Biyo M-aal,* water not exists '(Land) without water'
	Iska Duubo itself-with folded (REL) 'Which is folded with (stone)'	*Geel Joog-aa* camel stay-PRES/HAB. '(Land) where there are camels'

3.2. Content

Let us now consider the content of Somali toponyms.

a) The minimal type of a place name is one in which *only the place category* occurs – which is obviously rather uncommon given its weak power of identification. Less frequently, it may occur in the plural or be preceded by a quantifier, such as a number. The examples below illustrate this:
Buur 'Mountain'; *Bacado* 'Dunes'; *Lamma Durdur* 'Two streams'

b) The item can be identified by referring to a *nearby place*:
Buur Caanoole 'Mountain of Anole'; *Buur Dhinsor* 'Mountain of Dhinsor'

c) In most cases the identification is performed by referring to a remarkable feature of the item.

- A very frequent specification is *colour* :
Buur Cad 'White mountain'; *Buur Madoob-a* 'Black mountain'; *Buur Cas* 'Red mountain'

- Another parameter to which reference is extensively made is *dimension* (specific dimensions – such as height, size, depth, etc. – obviously depend on the particular element under consideration):
Buur Dheer/Gaabo/Weyn 'High/low/big mountain'; *Tog Dheer* 'Deep wadi'

- A type of specification which is occasionally mentioned is some remarkable *geomorphic feature*:
Buur Jab/Madaxlaa 'Broken mountain'/Headless [i.e. without a peak] mountain'

- *Theriomorphic and anthropomorphic metaphors* are not very common but occasionally found, particularly for the names of mountains:

Gacan Libaax 'Lion's paw (mountain)', Hal iyo nirig 'She-camel and foal (mountain)'; Naasa Hablood 'Girl's breasts (mountain)', Buur Shan Jilib 'Mountain of five *necks*' [i.e. rounded tops]

d) Another very common referential strategy consists of referring to some remarkable element which occurs in the place.

- In water-related toponyms, a feature which is very often made reference to is the *presence of water and its organoleptic quality*:

Wadi Cusbale 'Salted wadi'; Malabley 'Honey [i.e. sweet] (water)'; Wadi Xangeye 'Dry wadi'; Wadi Mayrood Ooman 'Thirsty [i.e. dry] wadi of *phoenix reclinata*'.

- Descriptive *metonyms*, although not common, are found:

Duusa Mareeb ' Which does not hold farts in' [referring to a pit with thermal water]

- A highly recurrent specification for each category of toponym is the *flora* found in, or in the vicinity of, the place. It can be trees (one remarkable tree, a group of trees or a wood) or some kind of shrub or grass. Of the trees, some species of *acacia, poinciana, dobera* and *fig tree* are particularly recurrent; among shrubs and herbs, *Pennisetum divisum* (a shrub eaten by camels) and *Mormodica dissecta* are frequent:

Buur Cadaad/Lebi/Garas/Berde 'Mountain of acacia 'adaad'/poinciana elata/dobera/fig tree'; Buur Dhalan 'Mountain of *Pennisetum*'; Buur Dabayood 'Mountain of *Mormodica*'

In a common variant, vegetation noun is accompanied by *leh/ley* 'that has (mas./fem.)':

Buur Qurac-ley/Lebi-ley 'Mountain with acacia ombrellifera/poinciana elata'

- References to *animals* are also extremely common, particularly those which pose a danger to men or cattle:

Buur Abeesaaley/Dawacley 'Mountain with poisonous snakes/with jackals'

- Finally, there is reference to any *remarkable element* which is found in the place:

Buur Baqti Weyne/Duddum Caddo/Qoryo Guban 'Mountain of the big carcass/white ant-hill /burned wood'; Wadi Laf Maroodi/Qorya-le 'Wadi of elephant bones/with wood'

e) *Person's names*, often associated with a nickname, are another fairly common specification:

Buur Cali Gaagaab/Nuur Guduud 'Mountain of Ali the Shortest/Nuur the Red' [i.e. light skinned]

Since the maps usually report a burial place in the area (often with the same name), it is highly plausible that these toponyms originated with the name of a notable man who was buried nearby.

f) A small group of names is related to *ethnonyms*:

Buur Midgaan 'Mountain of Midgan' [a Northern group of Somali]

4. Why are geograpgical items named?

It might appear pointless, if not bizarre, to ask why elements of the landscape are named. In fact, when careful consideration is made, one has to conclude that, as far as cognition is concerned, there is more to the process of naming than meets the eye.

This seems to be particularly evident in Somalia, where most people have lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic life for centuries, lifestyles that impose an intense pervasive interaction with vast areas of the land and thus require a profound knowledge of it.

More specifically, evidence suggests that, apart from the most apparent function, i.e. to refer to a unique referent (in a given context), there are at least two other functions to naming, both of which have a predicative nature.

4.1. Identificational function

The transparency of the vast majority of Somali toponyms results in the fact that their association to the elements they refer to is perceived as motivated. Thus, a name such as *Buur Madaxlaa*, 'Headless mountain', is not just a word which arbitrarily refers to any geographical item whatsoever, but one which predicates some kind of quality about its referent. In most cases, as it has been shown, this quality is objective in that it can be verified.

This property has two consequences:
1. from the learner's point of view, this information will make the process of memorising a toponym more effective;
2. from the user's point of view, it implies that only by knowing a name will he have a number of fairly detailed expectations about a geographical item. These are useful in order to identify it and orientate oneself, particularly when conditions are not optimal (i.e. imperfect knowledge of an area, conditions of insufficient visibility, high incidence of elements of the same category in a territory, etc.).

4.2. Pragmatic function

We will refer to the other function which emerges from the place names of Somalia as 'pragmatic'. A good many Somali toponyms go beyond giving descriptive information about the item they refer to, also providing a sort of operative instructions, specifically about:
- *dangerous animals* that may be encountered (e.g. *Buur Abeesaaley* 'Mountain with vipers', *Maroodile* 'With elephants');
- *trees* providing rest for men and cattle, and *plants* for pasture (*Gel Yaaqley* 'Pond with baobab', *Canoole* 'Milky' [i.e. an area with grass which is suitable for dairy animals]);
- presence and quality of *water* (*Ceel Biyo Mac* 'Sweet water pit', *Biyo Maal* 'Without water');

- presence of *resources* (*Wadi Qoryooley* 'Wadi with wood', *Cusboley* 'With salt').[9]

5. Conclusions

The evidence strongly suggests that Somali toponyms have complex, multilayered meanings, presumably unparalleled in other more familiar traditions of toponymy. In addition to naming a specific item in the territory, they often add some information about it: the presence and quality of water, vegetation (with particular reference to pasture and cover) and (dangerous) animals found there, the presence of other resources (such as wood or stone), etc. It is therefore quite reasonable to assume that Somali herdsmen had (and in most cases still have) a relation with their toponyms which is markedly different from that to which we are generally accustomed.

Much more than in our society, Somali toponyms, at least for those who share the same culture that generated them, seem to represent a kind of cognitive map of the environment, one which informs them and reminds them of various notions which are crucial to their way of life.

The conclusions that can be drawn from data is that the toponyms of Somalia describe an inland people that make a living from semi nomadic stock raising with all the consequences and hardships that this entails: constant movement in search of grass for the herd and dependence both on watering holes, which are mostly seasonal, and on sites which offer shelter to men and herds.

On the other hand, other activities are, not surprisingly, represented marginally: agriculture related toponyms are confined to a restricted area (mainly along the two Rivers) and have a very special character. Sea toponyms are simply identificational, having no reference to fishing in particular, and are of foreign origin. Finally, reference to hunting is not evident, but cannot be excluded.

Bibliographical notes
Given the transdisciplinary character of the subject under consideration, it would be arbitrary, if not impossible, to try and give contextual references to all the works consulted. I will limit myself here to refer to them in a topic ordered way, in alphabetical order. For maps and list of cities, see below under *Cartography* and *Websites*.

Botany: Glover (1947), Quattrocchi (2006), Robecchi-Bricchetti (1899).
Culture: Cerulli (1957-64), Lewis (1983).
Cushitic: Abdalla Omar Mansur (1988), Fleming (1964), Heine (1977), Heine (1978), Sasse (1979), Sasse (1980).
Dialectology: Antinucci and Puglielli (1984), Banti (1985), Lamberti (1986a), Lamberti (1986b), Moreno (1955), Reinisch (1904), Tosco (1989), Tosco (1993), Tosco (1997).
History: Cassanelli (1973), Lewis (1960).
Lexicon: Abraham (1964), Agostini et al. (1985), Crevatin et al. (1984), Maffi (1984), Reinisch (1902), Yaasiin Cusmaan Keenadiid (1976).
Morphology: Banti (1985), Bruno (1984), Puglielli (1984), Puglielli and Siyaad (1984), Serzisko (1992).
Phonology: Cardona (1981), Svolacchia (ms.).

NOTES

[1] Strange as it may seem for a small (although long overdue) contribution such as this, I am indebted to many. *First of all*, I owe more than I can say to the late Giorgio Raimondo Cardona, who encouraged me to pursue this subject and patiently gave me direction and support. I also want to thank Giorgio Banti, whose expertise in whatever is related to Somalia was of great assistance. *Last but not least*, I want to express my gratitude to Annarita Puglielli, without whose infinite and generous insistence, which even succeeded in conquering my profound reluctance, this paper would have never come to light, and my debts would have been left unsettled.
[2] Soviet cartographers were the first to make use of the national writing in maps (cf. *Soviet Military Topographic Maps*, 1978-82). Although the degree of detail is im-pressive, their toponymy is not entirely reliable because there is a tendency (1) to overstate long vowels, and (2) to obscure dialectal diffe-rences in favour of Standard Somali.
[3] For two significant studies in this respect, see Boas (1934) for toponyms, and Cardona (1982) for anthroponyms and ethnonyms. Thornton (1997) dis-cusses the idea that place names are an intersection between language, thought and the environment.
[4] It is noteworthy that in some maps some of these names occur without an initial capital letter.

[5] The problem of geographical categorisation is an old and tricky one. For some considerations on the subject, see Tomai and Kavouras (2002).
[6] Biyo 'water' merely marks the presence of water, being a generic noun for a wa-tering hole, either artificial or created by natural underground sources.
[7] For the sake of simplicity, 'NP' is conventionally used here instead of 'DP'.
[8] Each toponym is accompanied by a gloss and a translation. The latter is meant to be as unambiguous as possible, not an idiomatic translation into the expected English format of toponyms. For example, *Buur Dawac-ley* ('mountain jackal-with') is trans-lated unambiguously as 'Mountain with jackals', while if it were an English toponym it would probably be rendered as 'Jackal mountain', which would be ambiguous de-pending on whether one privileges an existential interpretation (i.e. 'where jackals are found') or a descriptive one (i.e. 'resembling a jackal'). In order to keep glosses as vi-able as possible, functional words are translated with their English equivalent rather than being a literal spelling of their morphological features (e.g. *leh* is translated as 'with', rather than 'have_RESTRICTED PARADIGM_ MASC.').
[9] A remarkable example of this function is found in the toponymy of the Kwakiutl Indians, particularly in relation to fishing sites. Research on this subject was con-ducted by Franz Boas and his paper (Boas, 1934) proved to be of practical value for fishing purposes for many years after its publication.

REFERENCES

Abdalla Omar Mansur, a cura di (1988), *Le lingue cuscitiche e il somalo*, Studi Somali 8, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri.
Abraham, R. C. (1964), *Somali-English dictionary*, London: Crown Agents.
Agostini, F., Puglielli, A., Ciise Moxamed Siyaad (1985), *Dizionario Somalo Italiano*, Roma: Gangemi.
Antinucci, F. Puglielli, A. (1984), "Relative clause construction in Somali: A comparison between the northern and the coastal dialects", in Bynon J. (ed.), *Current Progress in Afro-Asiatic Linguistics*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 17-32.
Banti, G. (1985), "Lineamenti di fonologia, morfologia e sintassi del somalo e dei suoi dialetti", ms.
Boas, F. (1934), *Geographical Names of the Kwakiutl Indians*, Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology 20, New York: Columbia University Press.
Bruno, B. (1984), "Note sui verbi di derivazione nominale in somalo", in Puglielli A. (a cura di), *Aspetti morfologici, lessicali e della focalizzazione*, Studi Somali 5, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri, pp. 113-131.
Cardona, G. R. (1981), "Profilo fonologico del somalo", in Cardona G. R., Agostini, F. (a cura di), *Fonologia e lessico*, Studi Somali 1, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri.

Cardona, G. R. (1982), "Nomi propri e nomi di popoli: una prospettiva etno-linguistica", *Documenti di lavoro*, Università di Urbino, 119, pp. 1-16.

Cassanelli, L. V. (1973), *The Benaadir past*, PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin.

Cerulli, E. (1931), "Per la toponomastica della Somalia", in *Oriente Moderno*, 9, pp. 460-467.

Cerulli, E. (1957-64), *Somalia. Scritti editi e inediti*, voll. I-III, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri.

Crevatin, F., Cadbullahi Cabdi Cali, Maxamed Cabdi Xuseen (1984), "Ricerche lessicali sul somalo 2: *terra* e *acqua* nel somalo di Bardheere (dialetto maay)", in Puglielli A. (a cura di), *Aspetti morfologici, lessicali e della focalizzazione*, Studi Somali 5, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri, pp. 185-189.

Fleming, H. C. (1964), "Baiso and Rendille: Somali outliers", in *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 20, pp. 35-96.

Glover, P. E. (1947), *A provisional check-list of British and Italian Somaliland trees, shrubs and herbs*, London: Crown Agents for the Colonies.

Heine, B. (1977), "Bemerkungen zur Boni-Sprache (Kenia)", in *Afrika und Übersee*, LX, pp. 242-295.

Heine, B. (1978), "The Sam Languages: A History of Rendille, Boni and Somali", in *Afroasiatic Linguistics*, 6 (2), pp. 1-93.

Lamberti, M. (1986a), *Die Somali-Dialekte: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung*, Kuschitische Sprachstudien 5, Hamburg: Helmut Buske.

Lamberti, M. (1986b), *Maps of Somali dialects in the Somali Democratic Republic*, Hamburg: Helmut Buske.

Lewis, I. M. (1960), "The Somali conquest of the Horn of Africa", in *Journal of Africa History*, 2, pp. 213-30.

Lewis, I. M. (1983), *Una democrazia pastorale*, Milano: Franco Angeli.

Maffi, L. (1984), "Somali colour terminology", in Labahn Th. (ed.), *Linguistics and literature. Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Somali Studies*, vol. 1, Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, pp. 299-312.

Moreno, M.M. (1955), *Il somalo della Somalia*, Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato.

Puglielli, A. (1984), "La derivazione nominale in somalo", in Puglielli A. (a cura di), *Aspetti morfologici, lessicali e della focalizzazione*, Studi Somali 5, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri, pp. 1-52.

Puglielli, A., Ciise Mohamed Siyaad (1984), "La flessione del nome", in Puglielli A. (a cura di), *Aspetti morfologici, lessicali e della focalizzazione*, Studi Somali 5, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri, pp. 53-112.

Quattrocchi, U. (2006), *CRC world dictionary of grasses: common names, scientific names, eponyms, synonyms, and etymology*, London/New York: CRC Press.

Reinisch, L. (1902), *Die Somali Sprache*, vol. II, Wien: Alfred Hölder.

Reinisch, L. (1904), *Der Dschäbertidialekt der Somalisprache*, Wien.

Robecchi-Bricchetti, L. (1899), *Somalia e Benadir*, Milano: Carlo Aliprandi.

Sasse, H. Y. (1979), "The consonant phonemes of Proto-East Cushitic (PEC): a first approximation", in *Afroasiatic Linguistics*, 7 (1), pp. 1-67.

Sasse, H. Y. (1980), "Textproben der Boni-Sprache", in *Afrika und Übersee*, LXIII, pp. 79-101.

Serzisko, F. (1992), "Collective and transnumeral nouns in Somali", in Hussein Mohamed Adam, Geshekter, C.L. (eds.), *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Somali Studies*, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, pp. 513-525.

Svolacchia, M., "The alleged pre-pausal voicing (crazy) rule and the phonology of stops in Somali", ms.

Thornton, T. F. (1997), "Anthropological studies of native American place naming", in *American Indian Quarterly*, 21 (2), pp. 209-228.

Tomai, E., Kavouras, M. (2002), "Vagueness in geographic categories. A setback to semantic interoperability", paper presented at the *5th Agile Conference on Geographical Information Science*, Palma, Spain.

Tosco, M., a cura di (1989), *Schizzo grammaticale del dialetto Karre di Qoryooley*, Studi Somali 9, Roma: Ministero Affari Esteri.

Tosco, M. (1993), "Boni, karre, digil: uno sguardo comparativo", in *Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica ed Applicata*, 22 (1), pp. 89-125.

Tosco, M. (1997), *Af Tunni. Grammar, texts, and glossary of a Southern Somali dialect*, Kuschitische Sprachstudien 13, Köln: Köppe.

Tosco, M., Milanese, E. (1996), "A note on Somali geographic vocabulary", in *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, 56 (1), pp. 105-118.

Yaasiin Cusmaan Keenadiid (1976), *Qaamuuska Af Soomaaliga*, Muqdisho/Firenze: Madbacadda Qaranka: Madbacadda Qaranka.

CARTOGRAPHY

Africa Orientale Italiana, 1:1.000.000, Consorzio Turistico Italiano.

Africa Orientale Italiana, 1:2.000.000, A. Dardano, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, III ed., Roma, 1939.

Carta della Somalia Italiana, 1:400.000, G. Zaccarini, Servizio Cartografico del Ministero delle Colonie, Roma, 1933.

Soviet Military Topographic Maps, 1:100,000, Voenno-topograficheskoe upravlenie General'nogo shtaba, 1978-82.

WEBSITES

http://www.cartographic.com/xq/asp/somalia/topographic/maps/rid.236/tid.1/sid.0/cid.0/vid.0/oid.0/qx/hub/index.asp

http://www.hobohideout.com/sitemap-alphabet/somalia.php

http://rumbletum.org/Africa/Somalia/Banaadir/_53654_Mogadishu.html#themap

http://earth.google.com