

[BOOKS & CULTURE]

Malkiat Singh's titles approved

Malkiat Singh, the indefatigable one-man publisher-cum-writer, has scored a rare first by having a whole series of social studies books approved by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) for use in public primary schools. The series, *Revised Social Studies*, all authored by Mr Singh, from Standard 1 to 7, received approved status to be used in primary schools starting next year. This means that all the seven titles will be included in the Orange Book for schools to choose from. Submission for social studies titles to be used by Standard 8 pupils will be done next year. "Hopefully, our title will receive approval, and we shall have a complete primary school series in the Orange Book," says Mr Singh. "This approval is testimony to the strength of our books."

Poet's work now in an anthology

For many of her adoring fans, she is just a Kenyan poet, but Njeri Wangare is a lot more than just a pretty face reciting poems. She is one of the young Kenyans who have revolutionised poetry and its performance in Nairobi. She is also an IT specialist and arts blogger. Wangare has now added a new feather in her cap: *Fading Faces* is the title of her upcoming poetry book. "This is a collection of some of the poems I have written and performed," explains Wangare. "It has over 50 poems written in English, Kiswahili and Gikuyu as well as in Sheng. The book is expected both in hard copy and as an e-book in all major bookstores globally as well as on Amazon and other major online shops in March next year". Some of the memorable pieces in the collection include Digital Hearts, Women Behaving Badly, and Matatu Culture. Her blog, www.Kenyanpoet.blogspot.com has been in existence for over three years now. The anthology is published by Nsemia Inc Publishers based in Canada.

EAEP, Google enter into deal

East African Educational Publishers has entered into an agreement with Google to have their books available on the giant Internet platform. The partnership deal, signed in July, is aimed at digitalising all EAEP books as part of a marketing strategy for the publisher and content generation for Google. "Last month saw the first collection of EAEP books live on Google books," says Mr Peter Nyoro, EAEP's editorial manager. Texts of EAEP books in English, Swahili and other African languages are now accessible online via Google Book Search. "The relationship with EAEP marks a very important step for Google Book Search in East Africa," said Santiago de la Mora, European Partnerships Lead for Google Book Search after the partnership deal was signed.

Compiled by JOSEPH NGUNJIRI
josegunjiri@gmail.com

Lessons from Somaliland on self reclamation from mayhem

Success rooted in its bottom-up approach that embraces local norms, structures

Book title: Somaliland: An African Struggle for Nationhood and International Recognition
Author: Prof Iqbal D. Jhazbhay
Year of publication: 2009
Pages: 243

Reviewed by AHMED AIDEED

Any reader may wonder if anything other than piracy, warlords tussle and the sound of bombs can ever come from Somalia. Such negative perception of Somalia is understandable if one is to refuse the *de facto* break-up of Somalia into two disparate parts that have had paradoxically different trajectories since 1990.

Prof Iqbal Jhazbhay's recent book, *Somaliland: An African Struggle for Nationhood and International Recognition*, deals with that part that has attracted huge academic interest but little media attention.

In this study, Prof Jhazbhay provides us with a detailed analysis of a part of former Somalia that ironically seems to escape international attention for doing well.

He takes us through a historical journey of the internal struggles in what was viewed as the most successful attempt at re-drawing of colonial demarcation at independence.

From a brief history of the genesis of Somaliland alienation from the union project to its unique liberation movement that set the stage for the move from insurgency to clan-based democracy, Jhazbhay provides an interesting academic analysis of Somaliland's effort to re-establish an independent nation-state.

He also reviews in broader detail the



Unlike the rest of Somalia where chaos reigns, Somaliland is a remarkable success. Business as usual in Hargesia (above), the capital of Somaliland.

import of its colonial legacy and powerful clan structures on the reconciliation process and the role of its diaspora in providing an important cushion to the minimal support it receives from the international community for its reconstruction process.

It is a classic analysis of how a society can retract itself from chaos and establish a relevant and rooted social contract.

While the rest of Somalia seems to have failed to move forward from Hobbesian chaos, Somaliland's remarkable success is rooted in its bottom-up approach that has employed local traditional norms and structures. The descriptive analysis gives us adoptable format to execute a social contract where such is required.

Although Prof Ali Mazrui suggests in his foreword to the book, that the study significantly contributes to our understanding of the Somali predicament, I am of the view that in terms of its theoretical contribution, there are bits where most African post-conflict societies can reflect on and

Rift Valley will not be healed by the establishment of a flimsy alliance of personalities

Making people laugh through their suffering

Title: The House of Doom
Author: Wahome Mutahi
Publisher: Africawide Network
Year of Publication: 2004;
Latest impression: 2009
Reviewed by JULIUS SIGEI

When Wahome Mutahi passed on in 2003, Kenya lost one of its most brilliant humorists. Various referred to as Whispers, Son of the Soil and Son of Nyaituga from the Slopes -- names which he called himself in his 18-year humour column in the *Sunday Nation* -- he connected with the average man with his refrain, "being neither too clever nor too foolish ..."

It was his love for literature and creativity which enabled Wahome to turn tribulations into literary gems and made many people laugh through their suffering.

For example when in 1986 he was arrested together with his brother Njuguna Mutahi and detained at Nyayo House for rattling the government of the day with

his theatre activities, he came out and wrote his two masterpieces of satire, *Three Days on the Cross* and *Jailbirds*. The former won the prestigious Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 1992.

Yet one of the most precious gems he left for posterity is a 254-page book titled *The House of Doom*. The story, published posthumously and serialised in the *Nation* to a huge acclaim, is set in the capital of an African country during the early years of the discovery of HIV and Aids.

Unlike the 2004 edition, the latest version has friendly font and short titled chapters, hence a friendly read for secondary school students. A masterpiece of suspense, it is listed in the Orange Book as a class reader for Forms one to Four. Rich in language and dialogue, it can be used for teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the current integrated syllabus.

It is the story of Bloggs Mbela, an investigative journalist who discovers with

even find useful and relevant, to their own progression.

As an academic and activist with wide connection with continental actors, his analysis of the external factors constraining Somaliland's aspiration for international legitimacy provides those interested with African diplomacy a mine full of geo-political intricacies.

This is not to mention the very interesting analysis of the interaction between disintegrating forces with the paradigm change on integration of the African continent. Closer home, the relevance of this study to our post-election reconciliation process is what he terms "quadrilateral framework" that constitutes, inter alia, reconciliation and reconstruction.

The analysis of the bottom-up process of Somaliland reconciliation and reconstruction as central variables in acquiring lasting peace can be of significant value to our policy makers if we are serious on ensuring a continued inter-communal peace in affected areas.

The public tussles between the top political actors in gatherings that are purporting to be facilitating communal reconciliation fall far short of the professor's description of the bottom-up approach rooted in local tradition successfully employed by Somaliland.

Rift Valley will not be healed by the establishment of a flimsy political alliance of personalities but rather an elaborate interaction of the communities concerned and a honest and serious commitment by the government in the reconstruction of the economic lives of those affected.

A public dance of political heavy weights or knee-jerk fundraising will never constitute reconciliation and reconstruction of the volatile region.

I am of the view that whoever is interested in deep-rooted reconciliation and reconstruction of a polity such as the inhabitants of the Rift Valley, Jhazbhay's study is a must-read.

ahmed.aideed@gmail.com

Wahome turned tribulations into literary gems

horror that he is infected with the dreaded virus. Devastated and shunned by his peers in *The Chronicle*, a leading media house he worked for, he recluses into his house. In a twist of irony and hypocrisy, his boss who was lavishing him with a spurious assignment a few days back cannot now as much as touch him with a 10-foot-pole following the fast spreading reports that he has been diagnosed with Aids.

Given the high profile Mbela enjoyed in the country for his incisive stories and sharp nose for news, his editor had sent him to cover a two-week conference on the depletion of the ozone layer in the Canadian capital of Ottawa.

When Mbela protests that he does not know anything that scientific, his editor tells him to "just enjoy the hospitality of your host and spend company money on beer under the journalistic pretext of investigating the nocturnal activities of animals grouped with the reindeer".