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Sowing Seeds of Subalternity in Somali Studies: A Literary Perspective of the Social, Political and Cultural Dimensions

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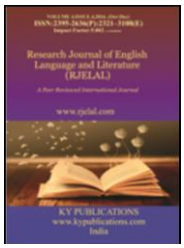

ABSTRACT
Although scholars of Somali Studies have engaged themselves in examining the Somali society from several perspectives, colonial and early Somali writers mainly observed the Somali people as homogenous, egalitarian and nomadic pastoral. Themes on multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, and linguistic diversity were ignored as topics that sully the myth of the selfsame ideology colorfully embroidered in the official historiography. The notion also deluded pioneering Somali scholars from critically studying their people and analyzing colonial writing; at least not beyond the western scholars' knowledge boundary. Accordingly, the Horn of Africa was exemplified as a unique African nation where citizens enjoy equality and share an all-in-one identity: culturally, ethnically, historically, and linguistically. Contrary to that notion, though, the everyday social situation makes the primordial ideology of selfsameness unsustainable. To establish the evidence, this essay discusses about how the Bantu Jareer agrarian community, a section among the different groups of subalterns in the country, views its environment and social space within the boundary of deeply offensive segregation by an extremely suppressive Somali society.

Key words: domination, education, identity, literature, oppression, Somalia, Somali studies, subaltern studies, suppression

I. INTRODUCTION

> By focusing on the Jareer oral poetry in Somalia, Eno not only illuminates a literary space dominated by studies on Nuruddin Farah, but also allows us to revisit oral literature as the one genre of literature whose resilience and fluidity has ensured it survives the draconian censorship long associated with successive Somalian regimes, [and] allows its practitioners and consumers to subvert the same systems that have been determined to mute them. – (Odhiambo & Siundu 2014:5)

The idea of Subaltern Studies has been drawn to academic attention in the early 1980s by a group of academically focused scholars "comprised of historians based in India, Australia, Britain and North America" (Dworkin 2014:190). The founding team consisted of "an assortment of marginalized academics" of South Asia (Ranajit Guha cited in Ludden 2002:1). They were critically observing and defining elitist historiography from the gamut of nationalist and neocolonialist discourses in Indian history. Their critique drew on contrasts between the official text and the sociology of everyday life of the marginalized, the voiceless among the society.

From that effort emerged studies in varied disciplines that interrogated the nature of subjugation faced by the Dalit people in India, earlier called 'untouchables'.

Etymologically the term subaltern had been in use in the far past where its description was attributed to any group under domination of another such as the underclass, peasants, or low rank army men (Ludden 2002; Roy 2010). It was, however, Antonio Gramsci who featured subalternity in the critical theory of class, although the movement of Indian subalternists of South Asian History and Society dissected the cast crisis in India by problematizing the plight of the marginalized such as the Dalit. Later, it became an interesting subject that attracted a considerable scholarly attention from multiple disciplines. According to Ludden (2002:1):

> Subaltern Studies became a hot topic in academic circles on several continents; a weapon, magnet, target, lightning rod, hitching post, icon, gold mine, and fortress for scholars ranging across disciplines from history to political science, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, and cultural studies."

Under this critical scholarship, academics and other experts enriched knowledge with fresh discourse and extensive understanding that became phenomenal not just in India but in many other parts of the world where similar problems existed. Voices emerged to challenge and overturn official texts and contradict with existing state and scholarly biases against their version of the discourse. Grassroots knowledge based on the unchanted section of society acquired space in postcolonial studies as well as in critical academic circles. Through this dynamic scholarship, women and other voiceless groups were inspired to share their experiences and resist domination; at least to occupy a noticeable space and raise their voices of concern by speaking to the issues affecting their problems (Spivak 1988; Guha & Spivak 1988).

On the Somali scene, it is noteworthy to reflect back to Ali Jimale Ahmed's articles as early as the 1980s in Heegan Newspaper, the only English language weekly of the Somali Ministry of Informational and National Guidance at that time. In those difficult days under the dictatorial regime of Mohamed Siad Barre, Ahmed produced two remarkable articles challenging the hypocrisy of the Somali society regarding segregation and domination of the subalterns. In one of the articles he discussed about the situation of the outcast groups known in Somalia as Gaboye, Beydari, Midgaan, Madhibaan, Muuse Dheryo and by other names. He condemned the Somali elite for denting national unity due to the system of marginalization against the so-called outcasts. In the other article, Ahmed stunned the readers by comparing the praiseworthy advocacy role of a white South African citizen, challenging his regime to end its Apartheid against the blacks, to the way Somalis were marginalizing the agrarian (Bantu Jareer) people, despite the latter's magnificent role in production and national development.

Later, in the academic field, the pioneering work that raised a discussion on subalterns, though one could argue not to the detail of everyday sociology, appeared in 1994. It was also written by Ali J. Ahmed in his article "Daybreak Is Near: Won't You Become Sour?" published in *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, which reappeared later in his edited volume *The Invention of Somalia* (1995). This was the first major attempt that gave the world a new image of Somalia. Ahmed's rebuke to the advocates of the state-sponsored official narrative and his support to the voiceless are explicitly marked in his critical assertion:

> By conferring a mantle akin to what Levin calls 'an institution of literature' onto a form of poetry that is panegyric of the 'dervishes,' [western/colonial & Somali] writers failed to anticipate the day when the unofficial narrative would be written in blood (1994:14).

A prolific poet, cultural sage, scholar, and seasoned literary critic, Ahmed's defense of the unofficial literature and culture of the subaltern stands as no less important than concerns raised elsewhere by subalternist scholars. With that unusual but critical perspective in Somali Studies, he energized the Somali literary and socio-political discourse by contributing to the global momentum of

subalternist scholarship. Needless to say, the vigor of Ahmed's tenor is elucidated in his statement about the "narrative [that] would be written in blood." That moment came when dissidence broke the banks of patience and the country literally fell apart in dread and disarray hard to recover from. Ahmed's referents were non-beneficiaries of the official discourse including poets and literary artists in general (including the group discussed in this essay).

If I may elaborate, why I refer to Ahmed's work as a pioneering piece simply relates to the fact that his was the first voice to *denounce* marginalization of the cultures and ethnicities untaught about by the state and society. It was as well a study that analyzed Somali society through the multiple intersections of culture, literature, ethnicity and politics, among others. By accentuating the disparity between the groups and cultures and emphasizing the issue of those neglected by the state, Ahmed humbles Somali scholars and Somali Studies scholarship with such chilling words as these:

> We forgot that there is unity in diversity that the Reewin (in the riverine area) and their Maay language are as Somali as those with Maxaatiri (the official language of the state); that persons speaking in Chingwene or Kizigula are also authentic Somalis (1994:15).

By referring more specifically to the subaltern group concerned in this essay, Ahmed addresses a wound never tended to by a Somali scholar; actually a wound too intimidating to Somali scholars to mention. However, Ahmed demystifies the rot to the dislike of many:

> Of the dozen or so movements in Somalia today, only one—SAMO (Somali African Mukay Organization) seems to be ready to confront the issue of the Somali as an Arab with a tan. By including "African" in its name, the organization bares a hidden secret in Somali society. Supporters of the movement belong to that segment of Somali society who are often given the derogatory epithet of *jareer* (kinky hair). The organization's name therefore is indicative of their subtle refutation of the Arabization of the Somali. In this sense, political considerations are not absent. SAMO supporters have attracted attention of the world as a group that has among others been victimized for its physical features. – (Ahmed 1995:142)

Indeed studies in the 1980s by Ken Menkhaus, Lee Cassanelli, Catherine Besteman, and Virginia Luling in the early 1970s and afterwards, all mentioned the existence of ethnic inequality and related segregation against the agrarian communities of Bantu origin. But these works, despite contradicting the traditionalists' ideology of homogeneity, did not articulate a subaltern perspective or voice in their analysis as Ahmed's did. Moreover, Ahmed has utilized a method that concatenated various aspects of the society through the massive lens of literature – a critical perspective that had hitherto been deficient in the pedagogy of Somali academic discourse.

Subsequently, various individual and collaborative studies supportive of the cause of subalterns, also called 'minorities', 'minority groups' or 'others' in Somalia, appeared as written by Omar Eno, Abdi Kusow, Mohamed Eno, Rasheed Farrah, Mohamed H. Ingiriis, Martin Hill, to highlight but just a few. Renowned Somali poet Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame, popularly known as Hadrawi, broke his long silence and added a very strong voice to the Somali subaltern issue. Hadrawi's piece was concerned about the marginalized Gaboye/Beydari communities inhumanly suppressed, but mainly in northern Somalia. The poet Hadrawi struck the target with an unnerving poem titled 'Dhulgariir' equivalent to the English term 'earthquake' as cited in an article by Saacid Maxamed Geelle (2014).

II. Method

By utilizing a literary approach, this study discusses about subalternity in Somalia, particularly presenting as a case study a discussion on the Bantu Jareer agrarian poet in the town of Afgoye, about 28 KM west of the capital Mogadishu. It uses the poetry genre by demonstrating poems mostly in the original Jareer dialect of the Maxaa version of the Somali language and their English translation, thus taking a qualitative approach of narrative and analysis. It invokes available literature from various

disciplines as found pertinent to the theme under discussion. In the following sections I will first contextualize the nature of the Bantu Jareer poet. It will be followed by a section on the need for a new shift in Somali Studies including literary/cultural emancipation of the subaltern groups. Next to cultural emancipation will be a segment that argues the necessity to broaden Somali Studies to incorporate subaltern studies for the benefit of society. The final part will present the conclusion.

III. Contextualizing the Locus of the Bantu Jareer Oral Poet

a. Literature and society: The place of cultural art, by its nature, particularly literature and more specifically poetry, has a major concern with society and its political and cultural sophistication at any given time in the historical and current experiences of that society. It is the kiln of enlightenment that embraces perceptively focused dialogue and discussion on issues of societal importance. As a form of art, poetry's reaches, concerns and themes of discussion illuminate the annals of human life and experience, from politics to bionetwork. George Orwell (1957:316), on the connection between politics and art, argues, "The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude." This sounds in turns true and ironical. Conservatives in both culture and politics would insist on the separation of art from politics, while literary and cultural critics would raise a counter argument that the artist, as a social agent, may have his political intentions and therefore use any form of art as his medium of expression to communicate his message (Highmore 2016; Pateman 2016).

Observed from an artist's viewpoint, politics itself is part of the broader human culture that shapes the life of society in aspects more expansive than mere electoral processes, governance and government structures. Thus I agree with Orwell regarding one's choice of what to politicize, how to politicize it contextually, and one's choice of medium for one's expression. But, I am to argue further that the conservative notion of separating politics from culture or art professes disengagement from thought and expression, two important realities that shape our world. At minimum, it denies society the enthusiasm of artistically measuring the political nature of its environment and the imagination to politicize prevailing events. It is therefore politics and other agencies of social interaction as well as the poet himself as an agent of society that have made poetry the vein of communal thought and cultural art.

Therefore, similar to other poets in Somalia's inter-riverine area and elsewhere in the country and all over the world, the Bantu Jareer poet, locally known as *laashin* or *afyaal* in Afgoye, uses different styles and metaphors in the presentation of his oral art and creative imagination. Sometimes he sings in fictional plurality, in the first, second or third person, and in other occasions in the passive voice to conceal the original source of the information on the topic of his discussion – if it is contentious. When dealing with crude matters, he selects a type of verbosity and archaic codes indecipherable to the young singers or audience. Of course it may sometimes leave the substance of his narration unfathomable except to the elderly or others with profound understanding of the events or moments that triggered the versal discussion.

In such situations, the *laashin* is considerably generous in that he gives an explication of the unintelligible parts of his concluding couplet. He does highlight this in a preceding length of poem which he usually recites as a foreground to illuminate on the matter of his discussion before he produces the couplet. Finally, the couplet is where the main gist of the preceding long poetic narration is captured and the confusion over the verbosity settled. The singers then sing the couplet as a thematic piece to which they also dance while moving in two parallel lines (Eno & Eno 2014). In his recitation and in the couplet, the lyricist portrays a variety of messages through the literary wisdom of his poetic art, if simply because "poetic language attracts attention to itself" (Barber 1993:91). Some examples are here:

Dalkaa dad ma joogo waa soo dibideeysi
Dayuuro ahaanaa iigu soo dagteen

Trans: Your migration has left your rural home lifeless
Yet, as a fast jet you landed on me (in my country)

The poet's verse is directed at the government and its pastoral population. It was recited during a time when the state was conducting a mass migration project to resettle rural nomads in the fertile land of the Bantu. The traditional leader was displeased with the authority's disrespect of not seeking community approval for using the latter's land – according to the pronouncements of the traditional canon. The other problem with the project is that the pastoral migrants traditionally despise agriculture as a mode of living practised by lower level humans. In addition, the bard foresees more to the problem than mere resettlement; he imagines it as a precursor for land grabbing and final uprooting of his people from their fertile land. With that picture in mind, he challenges the state's ironic choice of the Bantu's ancestral land. He thinks of the resettlement project as a very unrealistic implementation with hidden agenda. Subsequently, it is in the following sonnet that he reveals his suspicion over the whole scenario:

Daaftiin dibid waaye waa ka soo dudeen
Dad oo deggenaayaa dareen giliseen
Trans: Your exodus (to loot other's land) left your quarters dead
Thus creating suspicion (of unsettlement) in a community calm and in harmony

The *laashin* remembers crucial historical incidents when both migrants and speculators connected to the state arrived in Bantu inhabited areas and expropriated enormous chunks of irrigable land adjacent to the rivers. Therefore, no wonder this state-managed mass migration of pastorals has struck him with suspicion. He senses that behind the resettlement project might be another hidden plot for mass appropriation as the community has been experiencing throughout colonial and postcolonial Somalia. With time, the poet's distrust became true as most of the migrants became legal owners of huge portions of land with title deeds offered to them by their kinfolk in the state bureaucracy.

Notably, prior to these incidents and as early as around independence, the community was overwhelmed by northern pastorals filling en masse positions in the bureaucracy, while the southerners in general found themselves being replaced by the former (Eno and Eno 2014). A Bantu poet could not tolerate state bias anymore that he had to acknowledge his community's resentment. He casts doubt over the pastoral elites' original ideology and the entire nationalist and decolonization movement. He exposes the pastoral elites' competition for accumulation and self-enrichment, concluding his message as follows:

Xaabsee xandha lahaaw leed dhammaan isku xineysiine
Xoolo xad ee ku xarakoo xilkas la'aan waaye
Xamar soo deg lee miyaa xurnimo-doonkiina?
Trans: Otherwise, your (leadership's) concentration is gauged only to compete for accumulation
But misappropriation and arrogance are not symbols of wisdom
Is the essence of your nationalism based only to find a footing in Mogadishu? – (Eno 2008:313; see also Eno & Eno 2014).

Indeed tradition teaches us that it is through the power of the verse that the subaltern Jareer bard speaks the "unspeakable," to borrow from Samuel Obeng (cited in Galyan 1999). In one of such 'unspeakable' instances, the Jareer lyricist comments on the fate of a community member compromised by the Somali state of early 1960s with promises for a post. After the state rigged the election the member was offered a lower post than he had anticipated. Much to the member's undoing, he held the position only for a few months before he was indicted with misappropriation of public funds. As a consequence, the *laashin* throws his poetic embers at the betrayer, named in the verse by his real name Jibriil to evince the gravity of the situation:

Jeega leew ka goosti jasuur ka ma gaarin
Jiimbaarta Jabriil waa ka joojiyeen
Trans: He achieved not much more than enough for a hair-cut
Alas! How too soon they unseated Jibriil!

The traditional philosopher, regardless of the nature and narration of the subject and its underlying politics, respects what Ukala (1986:263) describes as "the laws of aesthetic response," when addressing perplexing matters of social concern. His place of high regard among the community coupled with the

gist of his lore makes society to value and respect the traditional artist as a trusted repository of the social culture and history. These unique qualities assign him leadership role of immense social responsibility in that he plays the position of thinker and speaker of society.

Furthermore, there are some customary rules and regulations he has to undergo before assuming recognition and rise to fame as a *laashin*. To name a few, he must have participated in performances and convinced the audience and performers of his poetic skills. His rich knowledge of the history of the people, early migration and inhabitancy processes must have resonated well with his audience and participants. He must be endowed with ample understanding of the community members and be a great master of ethnic sub-divisions of the communal lineages and names that crisscross through marriage links. He should have acquired a profound learning of the general principles of the canon practiced by the community and customary laws (known is Somali as *xeer*) and relationships between the community and its neighbours or other communities. Additionally, an understanding of subcultures and cultures of other Bantu groups or pastoral Somalis is considered as an asset that adds value and respect to his bardship.

b. Crowning the *laashin*: Only after he has met the above conditions and other prerequisites would the elders validate the subject of bringing the coronation of a poet into consideration; to privilege him with the showering of their *tuf* or "blessed spit". For this important communal ceremony, a day is set when elders assemble at a pre-agreed venue. It is a day of feast when goats are killed and sufficient amount of food (usually a two-course meal) is prepared for the invited guests and others who might wish to witness the ceremony. At the end of the feast, the candidate for coronation is seated in front of the elders including renowned poets, religious men and the other guests. He faces towards the *Qibla*, the direction of the Holy Ka'ba where Muslims face for their prayers. The leader of the religious group assigns the participants the *Quraan akhris*, meaning the recitation of the Holy Qur'an, by naming the specific *suras* (chapters; singular *sura*) to be read on the candidate and the number of times each *sura* is to be read. The participants or readers not well versed in the Qur'an are requested to read short and simple *suras* while the expert readers recite the long and harder chapters.

In a moment, the atmosphere in the room gravitates to spiritual height with the murmur of the reciters filling the surrounding air. They start "dedicating" the Holy Word to the candidate by informing the designated enumerator the number of chapters each reader has read. All the while, the *tuf* or holy spit from the reciters, the symbol of blessing, continues showering on the candidate undergoing the ritual bardic grooming, till the last reader submits the account of his assignment. The recitation usually takes about an hour, after which the eldest among the group is requested traditionally to read the final supplication while the other elders keep patting the new griot on the back as the rest of the participants piously and continuously state '*aamiin*' for Allah to endorse their wish as supplicated. The occasion symbolizes the elders' official decoration of the poet or *afyaal* with the handing over of the mantle of cultural leadership. The ritual makes him an officially endorsed representative and thus a plenipotentiary ambassador of his community and culture. The significance of the proceedings, in other words the crowning ceremony, known as *duubis* or *duubid* to the agrarians in Afgoye, is equivalent to the official oath-taking or swearing-in of top level state officials that we see in today's modern world.

Upon completion of the ceremony and coronation, word then spreads around the community about the crowning and recognition deemed to the newly decorated sage who now automatically assumes the title *laashin* before his name. Because of receiving the official *tuf*, his word becomes trusted as factual, uncontaminated, and most important of all, aesthetic. The attributes mentioned here share a lot in common with Sir Philip Sidney's statement elsewhere that the poet "never lieth" (cited in Barber, p.91); which in the case of the Jareer griot occurs on grounds of his being blessed and bequeathed with the mastery of "the domain in which popular creativity originates"

(p.89). It is in the same trend of this thought that the Jareer people highly exalt the traditional verse-master as one whose poetic utterance enjoys solemn sanctity from untrue declarations. With this responsibility, he is expected to follow more earnestly the social trends, including politics, to be abreast of the occurrences that affect the society.

Discussing African artists in the Foreword of their edited volume, Banham et al (2001: xi) Acknowledge a remarkable conjecture of how artists are "acutely aware of the political dimension of their work," regardless of time and space. It is a tradition also axiomatic in the world of Somali Bantu poetry as political discussion arises time after time in the context of literary art, especially oral poetry. But unlike Mildred Mortimer's (1990:82) assumption of the griots in certain African countries as "ambiguous" due to material enticement; in the Bantu Jareer culture, the traditional sage is a self-respecting leader above parasitic living style. For, apart from poetry and mastery of the related social and cultural institutions, he is a professionally self-sustaining individual with skills for his livelihood income. Accordingly, I concur with Okpewho (1992:41) in his postulation that in some African countries, "…no one sees the oral art as a regular occupation; artists are expected to have respectable jobs as an income base." The subaltern Jareer oral artist's verse confirms Okpewho's assumption:

Busaa igu taal beeraan falahaa
Bini (penny) qaadashoow ii been leeyguma sheego

Trans: The dirt on me suffices evidence of the tillage I perform
Never am I to be accused – neither of perjury, nor of corruption

As the preceding couplet explains, the Jareer rhymester feels proud of his livelihood as a cultivator and is expected to be ethically above acquiescence or indulgence in compromising his position for material object. For the latter, he is convinced; there are special occasions like weddings and youth outings when he is awarded material rewards openly for his praise poetry to the newlyweds and their families and friends. In this regard, he is quite unlike the griot "in the African Savannah" whom Mortimer censures of leaning towards the "wealthy and illustrious benefactors" (p.82). The practice probably exists in areas where politicians attract the bard with material compensation to exempt them from the wrath of his bardic sting. But that may come with a heavy price such as community mistrust and disrepute towards the poet.

From the onset, his authority within the society makes the traditional sophist one with "an interesting self to express," – not only regarding public opinion of the day but his integrity as a representative of social opinion which is very unlike that of a corrupt politician (Bishop 1987:58). The poet's 'self' is engendered by an implicit desire in his persona; it informs a strong drive in various appearances of the social emotion, before he codes that consciousness into an intentionally devised narrative that heightens into an explosion of "the poem's emotional climate" (p.58). If, therefore, contrary to the anticipated mutual trust, the poet undermines the actual interpretation of the people's sentiments, it may occur that the community will be disrespectful of him. He might subsequently become a subject of objectionable lyrical discussion by other bards whose taunting tongue a reputable cultural artist would very much wish to avoid.

c. The poet's potential: The word manufacturer's understanding of the social inkling is then paramount in the sense that the social emotions respond to an existing abnormality through which the gifted Bantu poet has to explore and reveal to the surface, in his entertaining manner. For, it is Mutiso (1974:7) who tells us that "all literature in the African context tends to function as a kind of social commentary." Mutiso intends to propose that as a commentary, literature carries with it and in it a prolific legerdemain that responds to the dual purpose of entertainment and education, as Ahmed (1996) would also approve. The crossroads linking these factors presumably led to Mutiso's proposal that "enlightenment concerning the values and activities of a society can thus be facilitated by studying its literature" (p.3).

Analogous to other oral societies, and paradigmatically in Afgoye town, a poet is considered to be worthy of praise if he is bestowed with not merely familiarity with the ascendency of

lineage names or branches but adeptness in poetic skills to:

1. respond spontaneously to a verse by a rival poet or a compatriot
2. intervene in a subject under discussion in times of crucial poetic duel
3. reply with the same alliterative letter of the original verse of the rival poet, compatriot, or the subject in context
4. take out the *barbaar* meaning 'youth' for a night-long performance of entertainment to demonstrate his bardic potential as an entertainer and in cultural leadership
5. provide spontaneously the *kab* meaning joint or second line of a couplet which the first line was produced by an amateur or another expert poet
6. adjust a verse containing '*dalo*' meaning inconsistency with or violation of the rules of poetry such as meter, wording/phrasing or rhyming of a couplet or part of it as created by a novice poet.

d. The missed point: Although the above discussion portrays significant characterizations of the agrarian poet, studies on his culture have been deliberately detached from official state discourses and spaces of social narratology. The so-called pioneers of Somali Studies, whether western/colonial or Somali, overlooked these distinctions and, worse still, coerced the adherents of the agronomic culture into the alien docket of pastoralism. On the other hand, to suggest that the detailed descriptions and definitions highlighted in the preceding section, notwithstanding the brevity, conform exactly to the western scholars' account featuring the pastoral poet and his literature and culture, is sloppy at the very least. At the very most, it endorses the violation and denial of the distinctness of the agrarian culture and tradition. Hence, a point Somali scholarship missed to exhaust!

Reiterating on diversity is not meant to be misconceived as disputation over or denial of the symbiotic features possibly extant between the cultures either by way of borrowing or as natural properties shared globally by all cultures and literatures. The emphasis aims to place focus on the different characteristics of the two cultures as the road maps that draft the topography of each culture as a separate entity and distinct mode of living. It is on the basis of these dissimilarities that one needs to consider the exigency to embark on a new perspective that reshapes and redefines Somali Studies, particularly ethnic, literary and cultural studies. This new way of interrogating, or new shift in perspective, inculcates a fresh beginning of hope towards a process of academic participation in recognizing subaltern identities and rewriting a real history inclusive of every ethno-cultural identity.

IV. Cultural Emancipation: A New Shift in Somali Studies

a. Cultural obscurity in context

In kastoo leysukeen tidcoo la mideeyey tilmaanteennu
Taabagal sideey u noqon kol haddaad ummaddi ku takoortay
Tin iyo aragti iyo tayo wanaagga tacabkooda?

Trans: Although we've been etched into each other in a unified identity
You fragmented it with your segregation of the masses by
Hair (texture), physical appearance (ethnicity) and prowess in quality skills (outcastehood)

The Jareer lyricist recited the foregoing ode in the central/northern dialect of Maxaa, the version of the Somali language endorsed by the state as the official medium of the country. The poet moves into the oppressors' linguistic domain to indict them for creating the fracture that befell onto social cohesion. According to him, they are the agents of evil who segregate the citizens on the basis of ethnicity for some groups, and on accounts of unconfirmed breach of religious or cultural practices for others.

Identity obscurity that left all non-pastoral cultures absent from the national discourse necessitates a new shift in Somali Studies that focuses on the numerous subaltern groups or minorities for achieving cultural emancipation. The subalterns' quest for cultural liberation needs not to be seen either as "an illusion" or "an impossibility" as Freire (1996:116) would ideologize it. Neither does the place to initiate the transformation create a challenge as the locus of the oppressor constitutes

"the social entity in which [the suppression] originated" (Freire, p.117). Besides, Freire denounces any "act of conquest" as human degradation that causes destruction of moral and cultural values of society and finally a precursor for possible genocide (Freire, p.119).

Accordingly, the shift in perspective calls for dialogue for society to overcome "the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality" (Bhabha 2008:188) of the new progress. Upon achieving that, the cultural stakeholders gain a momentum to tackle the "cultural invasion" that incurred "violence against the persons of the invaded culture," same as was commented on by Freire (p.133). Thus the process is aimed at paving the way for a socio-psychological journey that will ultimately help the dominant society "to overcome prejudices against what the other stands for" (Ahmed 1996:71).

The dominance of the camel complex over the agrarian and other subaltern thought and the imbalance created between them indicates historiographical negligence and, according to some critical analysts, an academic absurdity as well. Regardless, to move beyond the cultural and psychological scars caused by that absurdity, we need a sound beginning of what Freire codes as a "cultural action of a liberating character," (p.88) or an implementation of a "liberating pedagogy" (p.30). Such a gallant initiative will accelerate the process of healing through society's journey to "collective redemption" (Ahmed 1996:7) and a definitive deliverance from the psyche of evil lodged in the heart and mind of the oppressor.

b. Redirection of the course: The effort towards emancipation entails a hard task. However, although Freire juxtaposes "liberation" to the excruciating "pains" at "childbirth," the consolation lays in the optimism of achieving fulfillment for the psyche and soul (Freire, p.31). Out of the arduous pains of the "childbirth" labor, one eventually becomes "a new person…new being," a kind of born-again "no longer oppressor no longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom" (p.31). And for both sides, co-existing with a transformed, born-again 'human' is a triumph of a remarkable accomplishment. It is a mechanism with which society can confront and contain the unilateral "force of acculturation" that premeditated the creation of state-administered "ethnic invisibility," as Giunta (1977:49, 59) elucidated elsewhere discussing subalterns and their thought.

Overcoming the destructive ideology of "ethnic invisibility" mounts responsibility on the shoulders of scholars. They are the knowledge base that can overturn the old traditionalist course to create a viable space for subaltern studies. In any case, now that the subaltern voices have been raised and evidence of inequality drawn in the 4.5 (four-point-five) clan power sharing chart, a task awaits scholars, Somali academicians in particular. The four-point-five system has heightened the bar of discrimination related to ethnic subordination and marginalization to an unparalleled dimension in the history of the hidden Apartheid and identity torture that has assumed the sociology of everyday life in Somalia (Kusow and Eno 2015; Ingiriis 2012; Eno and Eno 2009). It has magnified, with tangible effect, the dimensions of ethnic divide and identity qualification of who is equal among the equals and who is not.

By any analysis, the evidence demonstrated here invalidates the narratives of homogeneity and egalitarianism the colonial writers and avaricious elites colorfully designed for their own separate gains. But one thing is real; the pronouncement of the 4.5 and the resultant invalidation of the selfsameness both bring to light the subtaltern's sentiments as a betrayed people constantly used for convenience whenever it augured well with the hegemonic groups' purposes. Thus, the *laashin* sounds unhesitant to confront them with evidence of their immorality as a justification for his disavowal of the unifying structures of egalitarianism and related institutions:

Balan Allaad naaga baxdeen
"Beesha shan"-aa noo bixiseen
Trans: You violated the oath taken (for unity)
before the Almighty
Degrading us to a "5th Group" (non-Somali status; 2nd class citizens)

In another lurid rhyme, the oral artist, with morally devaluing epithets, attacks the hegemonic lot of

viciousness vis-à-vis the four-point-five institution of Apartheid:

Boogta xunoo bageey ku taal
Beriga baantaada miyaa?

Trans: Has the nasty wound in my belly (the 4.5)
Become your sole (political) remedy?

The ethnic distinction defined in the political institution of the 4.5 power sharing method, which separates the society into four equal groups and a section equal to a half of one share demonstrates the wide ethnic and cultural gap in Somali society. It does illuminate too, how ethnic inequality influences social thought as the order of the day. For that reason the bard challenges society on whether the "wound in my belly" (the painful system of apartheid) became the only solution for power sharing in the country with no consideration of equality for the subjugated. The poem also reveals another level of subjugation that stimulates those categorized as the lower and/or non-Somali i.e. the 0.5 (point-five) to seek their separate identity to be reflected in the kaleidoscope of the "imagined communities" of Somalia, to make use of Anderson's concept (1991). The voices of argument from the subaltern need to be heard and their grievances healed. It makes incumbent on Somali scholars to realize that without engaging Subaltern Studies to its depth and breadth, they will be committing unforgiveable crimes against generations of Somalis to come.

V. A Case for Somali Subaltern Studies: Confronting the Conundrum

a. Introspection: In thinking about a writer, poet, dancer or performer of any cultural art, one realizes that the meaning and substance of the message delivered are associated with a multitude of intertwined factors. Yet, despite them appearing as separate elements, they constitute parts of a whole; a sum total of inseparable units in the same system. Concisely put, it involves multiple aspects of society as attached to its history, culture, civilization and experiences of past and present. The approach to the study of a society, especially the areas concerned with literature and culture, demands essentials such as proficiency in the society's background, originality of discourse, grasp of the narrative content, mastery of the medium, understanding and critical analysis of informants' stories, and agility in the form of delivery, among others.

Under this state of complexity, grasping the subtlety contained in understanding an alien culture and grappling with the interpretation of its text—whether oral, written or performed, exposes to the outsider interrogator with considerable degree of perplexities which language functions as the primary device to bridge the inherent communication gap. And here is where one would dare Somali scholars to move beyond the sterile rhetoric of a long stagnated selfsame curriculum. It is here, again, that one would advise them to set out beyond arrogance and predilection for self aggrandizement and instead strive for the extra mile of learning some of the vernaculars spoken in the country, with the same grueling patience and enthusiasm they demonstrated in mastering foreign languages such as Italian, English, Arabic, French, German, and Russian, just to spotlight a few.

The reason is that, at threshold, one finds himself exposed to cumbersome cultural codes whose unfamiliarity the alien would first seek definitions to the mixture of settings that inform the narrative or performance in the context, well prior to delving into the labyrinth of cultural deciphering. The intricacy underlying the situation is delineated by Ngara when he says: "To read a paraphrase of a poem or novel is to read another poem or novel" (1982:29). The impact reveals, as Ngara tells us, loss of originality of the paraphrased item. That is why Ngara is commendable for his generosity to caution us on how paraphrasing can threaten and even "completely kill a work of art" (p.29).

Apparently, although paraphrasing may cause deformity, it does not always distort originality if the author is proficient in the medium, context, and environment in which the original work is/was presented. He is able, with his familiarity and training as a researcher, to interpret the scenes, experiences, and emotions of the informant or text as the dialogic interlocution advances and the narration of facts develops. This is what brings understanding of the culture and language of the narrator at the center of knowledge production in studying societies and thus Somali scholars' effort to

consider this perspective. At this critical juncture, for the Somali people (including scholars) to acquire "The ability to shift the ground of knowledge," to share Bhabha's (p.233) wisdom; disengaging from the tutelage of a single dominant pastoral identity and medium remains inevitable as that presupposition no longer stands sustainable in the current chaotic atmosphere of unquiet subaltern voices and critical analysis of revisionists of Somali scholarship. Existing opportunities, which expand knowledge by examining the unexamined, need to be exploited and developed even further.

According to Ngara on the indispensability of medium, the quality of "the wrapping" must define "the value" of the content in order to allure the viewer to unpack the parcel (p.29). Ngara alludes to the importance of the medium approached to express the art itself before discussing or disseminating its fundamental wisdom. Logical perception maintains that only after achieving this modality can one contribute to studies about 'the other's' experience, culture, and the often invisible narratives he may suffuse into the socio-cultural marketplace where mutual intercultural harmony is the desired destination. This is to affirm that by neglecting the study of what is non-pastoral or that which is ethnically unrelated to Arabness; generations of Somalis will live uninformed of what constitutes the "ancestral knowledge" of 'other' cultures and ethnicities within their most immediate social spaces inside the country (Moore, p.xvi). Avoidance will disadvantage society by making it oblivious of how these cultures are defining that "ancestral knowledge" in the modus operandi of the social interactions within their current world, which Somali society is part of. Viewed from another side, it will leave out the richness these cultures and ethnicities would contribute to the existing official version; considering that the unofficial edition contains fertile but yet uncultivated knowledge.

b. Academic contribution: Somali scholars and society in general need to put themselves together: to gather some courage and come to terms with the reality of heterogeneity, multi-ethnicity and multi-culturality. In order to develop a better vision for the country, it is incumbent, not just upon the scholars in research, but similarly on the educational authority, whether at lower or higher education levels. The national education authority, be it a ministry or any other organ, has to plan to redirect the academic course by redesigning the content of the educational curricula from the erroneous pack of the past to a more vibrant and real social studies program. It has to consider a curriculum that is reflectively informative of all identities and cultures in the country.

The success of an inclusive educational project and curricula points to the necessity for the education authority to engage experts from non-pastoral ethnicities and cultures to be included among the innovative team of curriculum experts, from primary to higher education. The reason is very clear: first of all, a pastorally-oriented curriculum committee of ethnically appointed self-styled 'experts' familiar *only* with their culture, and most of all clueless of any acquaintance whatsoever and importance related to other cultures, can only be called 'experts by accident'. Second, they will most likely reincarnate the old fictitious 'Somali' social studies curriculum that covers *only* what they represent and know – *pastoral* and *Arab* pedigree. Third, it is this same quality of 'curriculum experts' that felt withdrawn from informing the Somali learner the details underlying the peculiarity of how Somalis became "Arabs with a tan," to make sense of Ahmed's critical analysis (Ahmed 1995:140). Fourth, in this scenario, and for reason that these are not experts with substantive understanding of real world Somali studies, there is high risk that the entire endeavour of the new curriculum will be rendered a flop. Therefore, in order to avoid further damage; overhauling the constricted curriculum of the past and its pedagogy of mis-edification as well as engagement of highly qualified Somali Studies experts need to be a priority for the success of the new Somali education curriculum.

c. National mass media: Another strategy to educate the masses could be the introduction of special programs through the media that promote subaltern studies in a massive campaign that will inform the dominant groups about the 'other' cultures they live amongst. This useful budge will contribute to a better understanding of a richer side

of Somalia that remained unknown even to the citizens. Equipping the Somali people with this type of education will positively promote tolerance, intercultural communication, accommodation, and equality of the diverse ethnic groups. It therefore depends on the quality of conscientiousness of Somali scholars, and not only the demoralized subaltern voices, to create a dynamic platform dedicated to the creation of new knowledge in tandem with what is consumable from the cacophonous official narrative. The approach will usher in a rewarding impact in which all ethnic entities and cultures will contribute to the aspirations of a new Somalia that faces the future as a nation diversified in its ethnic and cultural composition but firmly unified in vision, mission, and purpose.

d. Role of religious and cultural leaders: Somali clergymen and cultural leaders, similar to the academics, have drastically aborted the use of the Holy Word in educating people as an approach for confronting segregation and marginalization. It is as well incumbent on them to break their long-enduring silence and apply the power of God's Word to enlighten their flock. The current scale of exclusion runs completely out of bounds with the sacred principles of Islam, particularly for people who claim followership to the faith at an overwhelming hundred percent. The challenge, in this case, rests on the practice, which, to say the least, reveals hypocrisy and un-Islamic behavior rather than the superficial enumeration of the number of believers subscribed to the faith. In order to correct the past, the new shift could be a great opportunity also for the so-called cultural artists and community leaders of the oppressor groups to add voice to the cause of equality and harmony. Their participation will feature a constructive impact on the process of emancipation and cultural reorientation of the nation.

e. Correction of past mistakes: Confronting and correcting cultural parody in Somalia, otherwise "correction of an old misconception," presupposes an onerous task; one that seriously begs for the unlearning of an enormous portion of the western-inscribed and state-authenticated myths (Ahmed 1996:50). The cultural insubordination movement will have to provoke fresh academic abstemiousness that adds considerable girth to Somali social studies—not solely in extending the horizons of the field but in imbuing the right structures that respond to and heal what Ahmed (1996:xiii) describes "the anxiety of emancipation" of both oppressed and oppressor. It has to foster, as much as possible, a mechanism for "dialogue with the people," (Freire, p.109) as an inevitability for socio-cultural harmonization free from the [mis]perceptions nurtured in the mind of the dominator. With that transformative dialogue, the corrective/subalternist literary and cultural mission can potentially engage the oppressor from his antidialogical lair to a dialogical domain where he is prepared for transformation. Supporting the oppressor to that end will make him accept participating in what Bhabha (p.232) recommends as "the process of transcultural negotiation," whose ultimate goal will bear fruits for all, oppressor and oppressed.

The venture into a literary approach, or subaltern studies in general, towards cultural emancipation, in its broader vision, promises vital progress in redirecting ourselves from the old trap of homogeneity misconception to a wealthier world of harmony in heterogeneity. Although "trying to redirect our attention...is at times more difficult than correcting an error," as Ahmed (1996:80) critically observes, it nevertheless fosters hope towards brighter future. The essence of the argument is not to disagree with the underlying principle that cultural identities, historical experiences, political orientations and linguistic norms are institutions of potential diversities among people (Ngara, p.3), but to embrace the fact that they also speak to the realities that shape current Somali society like others elsewhere in the universe.

The institutions per se are not the problem, but rather the relinquishing of the age-old myth of homogeneity and egalitarianism doctrine exploited to incorporate identities externally while they are simultaneously excluded internally. To put it bluntly, to the outside world the pastoral elite's discourse of Somali identity and culture hinges on primordial egalitarianism and homogeneousness while internal exclusion and subjugation of "other" identities exist as the bedrock on which the social philosophy and

psychology of Somali society is constructed. The suppression of the excluded, in other words the voiceless, explains the society's stratagem of obscuring the bubbling internal disintegration and diversification—thanks to revisionist scholarship and proponents of the 4.5 system for revealing the dynamics of that bubble.

f. Visionary scholarship: From a different perspective, though, the *distinctness* of the internal could be converted into the energy that propels the quest to study each individual Somali culture and ethnic group as a separate entity yet within the whole. When effectively planned, such a work provides an in-depth approach of what distinguishes the way of living of a group from the 'other' rather than encapsulate the latter in an unending infernal process of alienation. The authenticity of a community, its aesthetics and values are enshrined in the specifics unique to its culture and not in that which is acculturated or assimilated unconsciously to serve interests of neo-colonial politicians of little credence and scholars short of analytical glut. For that reason, the task facing the visionary Somali intellectual is to create a different and more dynamic academic culture. He has to pioneer a new philosophy that permeates concentration not on what was known and areas already lit by others; but a new path of research and knowledge production in fields "unlit by early epistemological expeditions…" to borrow Ahmed's motivational rhetoric (2004:887). The way forward requires novel academic trends for developing solid scholarship not guided by sheer ethnocentrism but ethical and intellectual values.

Visionary scholar is meant one who is neither threatened nor discouraged by the murkiness of the immediate horizon of the tunnel. For he knows too well that the opaque dark is either unreal or ephemeral at most, and that an incandescent glow of light is real and perpetual at the other end of the tunnel. The visionary scholar heralds a possibility to overcome the obstacles. In every burden he sees an opportunity in which diversity will flourish into a fruition of unity. The visionary scholar in my imagination is one who believes a day will reign when:

Love will prevail over hatred
Compassion will wash away grudge
Forgiveness will decimate vengeance
And degradation a lesson of the past
A day when
Our offspring will sing Qur'an
In place of rap and rock & roll
And *dugsi* will replace the discotheque
A day when
Danger is neither you nor me
But the doggone enemy of our desire
That day
Under the dome of prosperity
We'll hold hands up in *duco*
Day-long supplication
So He may deliver us from
Our devilish deeds of past
To never drag us back
Into another devastation damned.

The scholar alluded to is one who sings lyrical tunes of optimism in his mission, anticipating a world of prosperity in which a coalition of purpose is both possible and imminent. He advocates for the rainy day when all the diverse ethnicities and cultures in the country will sooner than later:

Coalesce
The convergence ushering in the era of a new totem
With the body of a camel, the horns of a bull
The udders of a cow, the hooves of a horse, the
Mane of a lion, the beard of a goat, the gill of a fish
And the contours of red earth embroidered
With fresh stem from galool berde yicib yaaq beeyo
Murcood gob qare galleey miseggo waambe qamadi
Sarmaan shilan foodcas masaarojabis

Iskudumme, Isudumme, Molder of nations, where are you now? — (Ahmed 2012:17)

Indeed "molder of nations" is what a visionary and peace loving Somali society, the scholar not an exemption, has been waiting for. It symbolizes the core of the "childbirth" process discussed above – the eagerness for the appropriate occasion to respond to Ahmed's query at once and collectively with an enthusiastic thunder: "Here we are!" To

close this segment; before the final call comes for the realization of the:

> …dream of a new mix, the splash of
> Colors, a mishmash of totems… (Ahmed 2012:17)

every individual has to saddle up in preparation for the journey to emancipation by at least taking a glimpse of what subalternity or subalternism means in the Somali context and contribute a piece that adds to the field. It is time to start individual healing (both oppressor and oppressed) and move forward. For, hope teaches us that a prosperous future is an indispensible destiny that will replace our grief-stricken past. So, let us learn from the past, but not live the past.

VI. Conclusion

This essay tried to bring to attention some of the enduring myths and contradictions that have for a long time been the basic descriptions of Somalia. The concept of this uniqueness as a homogeneous country of people sharing same pastoral culture has nevertheless suspended from the national discourse the existence of other cultures, thereby hiding the suppression under which they exist. Rather than appreciate their existence, they were coercively subsumed into a state sponsored pastoral cultural identity and homogeneity, thus leaving theirs unlearned. The essay elaborated on how the practice of cultural obscurity has become a fertile arena for ethnic stratification, domination, oppression and enormous violation of human and cultural rights. It also discussed about the disadvantage of scholars and the masses in general who are least knowledgeable about their own environment and immediate neighbors by ignoring to appreciate the study of non-pastoral groups. However, in order to overcome this academic tragedy and educate current and future Somali generations, the essay suggested the importance for internal self observation of the Somali society that begins with educating the citizens about the diversity of the people and their cultures and languages. The burden of not knowing about the very citizen who lives with you has not only endured among the society in general but remains an undeletable shame on Somali academics who can only describe a section and not the other of the very society they claim to have come from and been engaged in studying. The neglect to demystify and treat the discrepancy in the imbalance has to a considerable scope contributed to the distancing of the communities from each other and more effectively to the misleading of generations of Somali learners. As a means of correcting the past mistakes, the essay raised the necessity to expand the capacity of national education curricula and strengthen the knowledge base of the people towards harmony, love, and peaceful co-existence.

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