

The Mission of Revisionists of Somali History: Intellectual Righteousness or Retributive Justice?

By Muktar M. Omer
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As I write, there is a sizeable debate regarding Somali History. It is multifaceted and it touches broad disciplines and areas. In the last couple of years, Somali scholars who reject some core historical narratives of the written Somali history have emerged. These scholars have now become to be known as revisionists of Somali history, although in truth, and on the basis of the radical nature of some of their conclusions, some of them would definitely qualify more as abolitionists of history than revisionists.

It is reasonable to question whether these scholars are indeed revisionists or mere reductionists; for revisionism entails reconstruction, but these scholars are offering little more than a different interpretation to historical events. The radicalism of those I referred to as abolitionists manifests itself more in their preferences of what type of history Somalis should have than the exceptionality and rationality of the explanations they offer.

For ease of reference, I will use the term 'conventional historians' for proponents of old school of Somali history, but will refer to these new scholars as the 'revisionists'. I am not implying that there is anything unconventional about the methods of research, arguments or conclusions of the revisionists though. I see flaws in their approach and arguments, but not eccentricities.

I am not a historian. I mainly deal with unthinking numbers and statistics, not tales about Human beings – dead or alive. However, the glaring deficiencies and holes in the historical theories and arguments of the revisionists are so evident, so obvious, that one need not be a specialist in history to detect it. In this attempt to engage this substantive debate, I will challenge the plausibility of some of their main conclusions and assertions, with the view of exposing these claims for further scrutiny.

1. Important nuances

I started the task of reviewing the main conclusions of the revisionists by reading Dr. Mohamed A. Enow's thesis "*the Homogeneity of the Somali People: A Study of the Somali Bantu Ethnic Community*". I found it a strong dissertation with robust analysis based on good research, but with many flawed conclusions.

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I was later advised by friends that I should have stated with the book *'The Invention of Somalia'* edited by Dr. Ali Ahmed Jim'ale. I read half-of it (the sections relevant to the arguments I want to advance here), but quickly realized that Dr. Enow's thesis referred to Dr. Ali Jim'ale's book at length and that there are no differences in their main conclusions on the issues I want to debate; which are the origin of Somali race, Somali homogeneity, historical heroes, marginalization and stigmatization, and the causes of post-independence political and socio-economic atrophy in the Somali Republic.

My main critique is therefore on Dr. Enow's thesis but I extrapolate my judgments to Dr. Jim'ale's book as well, which is the main source document of revisionist literature.

2. Disclaimer

I want to make a vigorous disclaimer. Wherever clan names are inevitably mentioned, as we discuss a history full of clan events, I am referring to the political and social elites and leaders of those clans mentioned, unless I am talking about the clans in genealogical and demographic terms.

3. The ill-timed debate, why I join it, and convicts who masquerade as victims

At the risk of aborting my central theme with this digression, I will discuss why I decided to join the debate and some aspects of the most recent Somali history in this section.

The appropriateness and urgency of a brawl above the protruding and still bones of people buried centuries ago, at a time tens of thousands are dying and many more are displaced by a meaningless war between ruthless Islamists and foreign-sponsored false Government is questionable. Intellectual energy and resources should have been spent on finding ideas for national healing, reconciliation and reconstruction of the Somali state, this writer thinks.

Nonetheless, I can understand where academicians are coming from and there is a merit to it. It is only when we are open about our past that we can face present and future challenges. But knowing the Somali psyche, I suffer from a searing skepticism and consequential cynicism; and hence I think that what starts as intellectual righteousness to unravel the truths and falsehoods in our history could be hijacked by individuals and groups for special interests and retributive justice.

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I, therefore, find myself in an invidious position where to make the point, I actually have to participate and extend parameters of this same blameworthy brawl. In fact I had resolved to let the disgrace pass without me, until I saw the recklessness with which certain sections of Southern elites, mainly from the *Hawiye* clan, peddle researched lies and half-truths in an attempt to wrestle political power and exonerate themselves of Somalia's troubles by shifting attention to a miasmatic debate over men and women who died centuries ago, when we are still living with the nightmares of the total destruction the United Somali Congress (USC) caused as recent as few decades ago. Ever heard of researched lies and half-truths? They do exist!

I saw that inventors of the 'vaginal torture', the very same scary *Mooryaans*¹ who had pioneered the insertion of dry-cells into the reproductive organs of wailing Somali sisters and mothers, seek easy pickings from genuine grievances of marginalized and massacred Somali clans like the *Bantus* in the South and the *Issaqs* in the North.

They, of all people, whose loins have sired the *Mooryaans*, cannot cry together with the *Bantus* they stigmatized and the *Rahanweys* they starved. They cannot point fingers at anyone. Whatever scars they claim to bear, whatever bitterness they harbour and whatever sympathies they court and seek to cull, they should never hope to get away with false solidarity built around cheap notion of false persecution. And Dr. Enow saw to it when distributing blame for Bantu oppression.

So far, they have run with the hares when it comes to '*Dervisization*' of Somali history, while at the same time hunting with the hounds when it is about SYL and Somalia's First President. Starting off from a false consciousness, this section of chauvinist elites who claim to speak for the imaginary '*Hawiye* marginalization' premise have been mischievously tendering false claims of injury and entitlement, all unchallenged. And some of their dangerous misconceptions have congealed and settled by sheer default.

If at all we have to analyze Somalia's demise from the myopic clan perspective, the *Hawiye*, like the *Darods*, are a big part of Somalia's problem and have caused a big share of its present ailment. Let the *Hawiye* elites not register false sense of persecution for the sake of the company of bruised and battered clans whose succor they need in adversity².

¹ *Mooryaan* must not be read as *Hawiye* or *Hawiye* elites. *Mooryaan* here means sections of the *Hawiye* elites who suffer from false sense of persecution and inflated clan ego based on demographic might and size. The term here is not limited to the 'glue-sniffing' juveniles who perpetrated gross human right violations, but also to those who stood behind them and provided ideological ammunition by way of exaggerated injury and entitlement claims.

² The Destruction of Somalia and the Regional Question, Faisal Roble, Wardheernews.com

I know the *Hawiye* clan has not suffered more than the *Majeerteens (Darods)* under Siyaad Barre's dictatorial rule. I know *Hawiye* commanders were key players in the decimation of Hargeisa. I know that *Issaq's* hate towards Siyaad Barre and the *Darods* is much about the oppression they faced and the systematic killings of their elites. But that is not the episode they say they cannot forgive and forget. They consider killings and political oppression as an integral element of Somali clan warfare.

Many SNM veteran fighters told me that the most painful side of the war was the rape of their daughters, sisters and mothers by Siyad's army. The most horrific of these rapes were committed by southerners in the army, *Hawiyes* included.

I know that the clear-cut *Hawiye Vs Darod, Darod Vs Issaq* theories about Somalia's civil wars is false and misleading. Alliances were changing based on the associations of the elites of these clans with the military regime. The same *Issaq* army commanders who led the destructive military campaigns against *Majeerteen* civilians in early 1980s later slipped into SNM fatigues as freedom-fighters.

Notable among these *Issaq* military men are Colonel Mohamed Abdi, Division commander in Galkacyo; Brigadier commander Hassen Yonis Habane and Major Ibrahim Dhagaweyne. I am sure there were *Hawiye, Rahanwein, Ogaden* commanders, and even *Majeerteen* sell outs, who took part in the massacre of *Majeerteens*. I also know that when Siyaad Barre was fleeing Mogadishu in 1990, a certain man by the name Colonel Ahmed Omer Jess, an *Ogadeni*, was working with General Aideed.

It is the duty of Somali historians to provide an accurate description of the nature of political alliances in Somalia pre and post 1990, but I assert that the fleeting '*Eryaay Darood'ka*' uprising in Mogadisho masked a lot in terms of the genesis, nature and dynamics of various political and 'banditry' alliances that preceded and succeeded this event.

You then ask what the rhyme and reason for the false victim mentality is? Clearly, you can see how crass and infantile arguments simply gain decency by default, by the silence of men and women whose duty it is to eschew such nonsense. And it's not like this grotesquery will go away through indifference. Far from going away, it is actually overstretching itself, getting bolder and bolder.

The cheer-leading role unrepentant extremist *Hawiye* elites have assumed in the revisionists camp is not only out of a bizarre sense of victim mentality; it is for a purpose. The emerging tales of Aideed/Sayid-Mohamed heroism interlace is a clear illustration of this. I hope, dear reader, you can figure out the link between the cheer-leading frenzy and this tip-off about the impending parallel between these two men.

Indeed, we are only one rain or two away from when what is so far said noiselessly in discussion forums will be flaunted publicly by these elites: that General Mohamed Farah Aideed is the legal heir to Sayid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, and all the adulation heaped on the pious nationalist ought to be equally conferred on the 'gallant' General. We will be told the two are monozygotic twins, inseparable in their deeds and wishes. Really?

I can't judge the wishes of lifeless people but when everything about General Aideed is said and done, there can be no escaping the screaming fact that he was just a political quack and assassin that was thrust by history upon the Somali nation for reasons or sins which only posterity shall tell. His local supporters see him as a brave and courageous leader.

But having seen what he has done to the city he set out to 'liberate' and the legacy he left behind, and the millions he starved to death in *Bay and Bakool*, not to mention the gruesome crimes the militias under his command committed against Somali citizens (mainly women and children) who thought they had every right to live in the capital city of their nation, the growing view across Somalis' political divide is that his alleged bravery and courage was without responsibility and is therefore not different from hooliganism. No wonder why he squandered leadership opportunities by choosing the road of hooligans.

Don't tell me he did a good job by fighting the Americans; he should not have fought them. What followed the departure of the Americans? Famine! And, what else? Is it not the era of Warlordism, which is a special franchise area of the *Hawiye* clan? Am I wrong? Shall I chronicle the chuckle-inducing world of Muse Sudi, Omer Finish, Mohamed Dheere, Bashir Rage, Abdi Qaybdiid, Yusuf Dabageed, the one with the 'white-eyes' and all the other clowns? What else did the 'white-eyed' man own, except a nice epithet? A whole river! The *Mercca Brawans* also talk about 'the years of the Dark Cat' – *Mukulaal Madoow*, in their parlance, whatever that means.

No. I shall leave it there, and discuss the revisionists' motives and conclusions in the sections below. One big observation I made is that those who are trying to rewrite Somali history are repeating the same mistake conventional historians have done, which is to look at intricate historical tales and figures with the Manichean simplicity of black and white, clean and dirty, good and evil.

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Below, I shall not prevaricate and I shall say the truth, whatever tenuous chords snap because I said it!

4. Bantu wrath and compromised objectivity

Dr. Mohamed O. Enow's thesis is superb, and for a man who suffered the indignity of being called *Adoon* (Slave) by fellow Somalis from childhood to adulthood, he is remarkably restrained; but you cannot miss the dint unremitting humiliation left on his objectivity. There is no dispute over the appalling treatment of the Somali Bantus and other outcast clans who are outside the social strata altogether. It is our shame as a nation.

But the rancor in Dr. Enow's 'academic retribution' shrouded his objectivity and sullied his thesis a little bit. For instance, in an attempt to provide statistical backing to the pervasiveness of Bantu abuse, which could easily be captured by the naked eye anyway, he comes up with suspect percentages and trends. Like phony elections in a totalitarian regime, the respondents to his questionnaire gave a landslide figure in the range of 89% - 99% for most types of abuses: denial of job opportunity (99%), denial of promotion (98.5%), denial of education opportunity (98%), denial of business opportunity (95.6%), social degradation (98%), and inequality/injustice (98%).

Imagine, this means nearly all respondents experienced all forms of abuses in their life time. There is strong possibility they have indeed gone through all this; they are Bantus and hey, we know the '*Adoons*' have no rights. But my reaction was to immediately go and see if a questionnaire is attached to the thesis. It was and it confirmed my suspicions.

When a questionnaire starts with the title '*daraasad ku saabsan ku-xadgudubka xuquuqda aadaniga ee bulshada jareer-ka/bantu-ga ah ee soomaaliya* (survey on the Somali bantu/jareer human rights violation)', in 2005 Somalia, you want to tell me expectations are not raised? Perceptions are not created? Don't you think the Bantu community elders with a firm eye on UNHCR's resettlement programmes will 'orient' the community?

And what about when you follow up with two questions on the personal history and the level of education of respondents, and then the third question starts with '*Which of the following human rights abuse(s) have you suffered?*' You would think '*have you experienced any abuse?*' should have preceded the third question. Even such a 'yes' or 'no' question is not bias-free, but it surely would have been useful to include.

The statistics didn't lie in the above case. They offered a posteriori justification for what, for all purposes and intent, was a priori knowledge: Bantus are abused and abused in all wakes of life. But my point is neither about the

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figures nor the leading questions which influenced the answers of respondents. It is to show that Dr. Enow made lapses of standard in his eagerness to transmit powerful advocacy message.

How about this tale? While doing some temporal analysis of abuses against Bantus, Dr. Enow curiously came up with a sharp increase both in terms of crude cases and percentages as we move from the past and get closer to the present. He concludes that Bantus suffered most under the military dictatorship of Siyad Barre. The cases registered are given as follows: Italian Colonial era [128 (6.04%)], Aden Abdulle Osman [1439 (68%)], Abdirashid Ali Sharma'ke [1439 (68%)], Mohamed Siyad Barre [1667 88.80%], Civil War/Anarchy 1990 to date [2074 (98%)].

Could the rise in cases have been due to the natural annual population increase and therefore you would have more cases in absolute terms from year to year as you go from early 20th century to 21st century? Have the percentages and number of cases been weighted to account for the discrepancies in population size of the years compared? Has the sample size been appropriately adjusted to reflect the changes in the population estimates? I doubt.

Intuitively, you would think the *Kacaan* (revolution) with its communist pretensions must have been the least oppressive for the Bantus. But they say figures don't lie, although I know they do and I deal with them on a daily basis. You get what you want from your computations with a little bit of subtlety.

Dr. Enow wanted an unambiguous outcome in the shape of a competitive firm's short-run supply curve in two dimensional diagram, where quantities supplied on the Y-axis respond to changes in the price on the X-axis. He wanted to show that the abuse against Bantus was on the rise and that the abuse and discrimination is and was across all facets of life.

He ordered the figures to agree with him and they complied - the unthinking figures, always obedient with their client. The mistakes at the questionnaire design and maybe data collection and analysis stages skewed the data in favour of the outcome the researcher wanted. I am not even talking about the problems with the definition of crude terminologies and concepts such as social degradation, injustice/inequality.

So, what am I saying? I am saying that the researcher wanted a statistical output that matches his instinct and prior knowledge. He got it. In a similar fashion, he too wanted a particular outcome in the debate surrounding the Sayid. He wanted a devil Sayid. He got one by endlessly quoting British historians and army generals whose accounts may not be bias-free.

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No attempt was made to capture the essence of the vast contrary accounts of other historians. Enow may argue that he did give a summary of the versions of other historians and that detailed review of this literature was outside the scope of his research as his objective was to expose the hidden side of the Sayid. But if he wanted to pass conclusive judgment on the heroism status of the Sayid, he should not have done so on the basis of only one-side of the story; and if he does so, he should have qualified his assessment. That is not the case in his thesis.

He asserts, with the finality of the words of God, that Sayid Mohamed Abdille Hassen's motivations in the fights against Somali clans and British colonialists were all about morbid infatuation with human blood and insatiable lust for debauchery.

He concludes, *"the dubious military administration under the ideological tutelage of nomadic political doctrine deliberately forged a Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan hero-ization scheme in an agenda to exonerate him and his Dervish militia from the genocide they committed against innocent peoples of diverse Somali communities in the north as well as in the south. The policy that Mohamed Abdulle Hassan exploited was his people's desire for wealth in camel and for women because he preached, contrary to the sound teachings of Islam, the lawfulness in misappropriating the wives of the non-compliance to his way of life."*

I challenge this categorical contention.

5. Sayid Mohamed Abdille Hassaen - The Inimitable Zebra!

The controversy surrounding Sayid Mohamed Abdille Hassen (the Mad Mullah) has nothing to do with the veracity of the various versions of historical tales told about him by different sources. It has much to do with our understanding of what a hero is or should be, and with the atavistic affliction of Somalis to look at historical issues with Manichean simplicity. Somali intellectuals such as Dr. Ali A. Jim'ale, Dr. Enow and the proponents of the revisionist school of thought, like their predecessors, are the product of a society plighted by the need to put things in good-evil, right-wrong dichotomy.

Conventional Somali Historians portray Sayid Mohamed Abdille Hassen (the Mad Mullah) as an angel who should sit on the same pedestal *Maliku Jibriil* sits on in the high heavens. Their reasoning: He was ahead of his time; he recognized the need for modern governance, the rights of the native and the need to defend the cultures and social ethics of the Somalis against marauding Colonialists. They continue: He was a nationalist who wanted to

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achieve what the Dervishes in Sudan wanted to achieve; there are evidences that show he was influenced by the Dervishes of the Mahdist in neighboring Sudan. They are right, and a history that doesn't capture these truths will not and should be sold as a Somali history.

The Sayid was a fearless fighter, a poet of par excellence and a man of strong principles who stood and died for what he believed in. *Dardaaran*, the poem he composed in his last days speaks volumes about his religious and nationalistic convictions, vision, intelligence, and wisdom; despite its vitriol against some Somali clans. His rejection of numerous tempting deals offered by the British colonialists and Ethiopian Empire is a historical fact, and while interpretations can be submitted retroactively on his intentions, there is little disagreement over the fact that he refused to work as a privileged 'Askari' of the British.

But the Sayid was also a sadist marauder with macabre fascination for murder, mutilation and wantonness. He was a clanist who coined deprecating poems for so many Somali clans who stood against his interest; and he was a misogynist. For the revisionists, he is the devil himself in the visage of a human. They want this side of him to be the defining feature of his legacy, or at least that is the message I got from Enow's book, unless the rest of the flock disowns him on this one.

It is the inability of Somali historians, conventional or revisionist, to recognize and account for the dual persona of humans and the possibility that nationalism and clannishness could co-habit in the minds of a single human that has put us in this quandary. The eminent Somali poet, Ahmed Ismail Diriye (Qassim) recognizes this duality as can be seen from the soul of his literary life *Macaan iyo Qadhaadh*, which as well maybe a tale of his own troubling personality.

In reviewing this timeless poem, A. Duale Sii'arag hypothesizes that the poet contextualized metaphorically, '*the mere symptomatic reflection of the many shades, attributes and imperfections of the human being*' in general and the '*complex Somali persona and the symbiosis of its innate split personality traits*' in particular. Qassim's own split personality could explain the conflicting character attributes of Sayid Mohamed.

Qassim was such an imaginative poet with prophetic powers. Yet, he was so clannish deep down. The same man who composed effusive elegy of the Sayid in 1960, ends up lampooning Siyad Bare and the *Darods* for seeking help from *Midgaans* by proclaiming "*Dabatada iyo way iskaashadeen, nimankii daroodee*" in 1990s. Qassim, who observed the neo-colonial ethos of Somalia's post-independence leaders with "*Ismadoorin Gaalkaan Diriyo, daarta kii galaye*", dies reduced to a hapless worshipper of witch-craft admonishing the Somali National Movement (SNM)

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fighters from hastily entering and occupying their houses in freed Hargeisa with "*Dameeraaba lagu aasay, iyo Deero iyo Xuure*".

The Sayid's dual personality need not only be analyzed from psychological angle, for it will lead to a misguided and hasty conclusion of him being a mentally-challenged leader. He may well be, but we need more research and evidence, including his dealings with those closest to him and family members, to get a fuller insight. I am of the opinion that context can also offer a good explanation. Context, both in terms of the prevailing moral ethos of the society, geo-politics, Islamic interpretation, social upbringing and the dominant political and leadership ideology and philosophy of the time.

A closer examination may reveal that the treatment of enemies by way of annihilating villages and dispossessing livestock/properties was the order of the day in the world at the time. Taking wives of others might have been perfectly fine religion-wise, according to the Sayid's interpretation. All he needed was to rationalize his actions by labeling those he was fighting as infidels and unbelievers.

The elastic nature of religious interpretation permits him to do so. One can, therefore, hypothesize that he could have done these crimes with the firm conviction of a believer in Islam and not with reckless abandon of it. Look no further than Alshabab to see how interpretations can be deadly. Alshabab commanders, who despite their denial, ordered the death of Professor Adow, a man they have known and prayed with only few years ago, believe they were acting within the realm of Islam.

Despite the remonstrations by Dr. Enow that the Sayid was doing something un-Islamic and hence his Islamic 'grandstanding' was bogus, the Sayid, like Alshabab, could have believed he was acting within the limits of Islam. The religion permits taking wives of defeated 'infidels' and while I do not know if the Sayid had indeed taken any, it will not qualify him as a hypocrite if he did so. Heartless and immoral, yes! But hypocrite, no! Blame it on Islam!

That is why Dr. Enow and the revisionists should take an issue with the teachings and interpretations of Islam, and this author may support them in that, but not with the Sayid's piousness. Khalid Bin Walid and the companions of the prophet committed the same act. If we are speaking from moral point of view, these actions are deplorable but we cannot use them to draw conclusions on the motivations of the Sayid.

It is clear the Sayid was a Zebra, with white and dark stripes. Somali history need not present him as a uni-colour. He can remain a national hero with warts. Revisionists must accept that for every interpretation they offer on

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Sayid's actions, there are equally plausible refutations from conservative historians. Somalia's history books must narrate both sides of the man and events surrounding him, but when Dr. Enow comes up with there is nothing good about the 'Mad Mullah', we have a problem. The same problem he accuses of the 'camel-boy historians' who measured wisdom in 'camel-tales' scale. He is not a revisionist; he is an abolitionist of Somali history.

To me, the Sayid was no ordinary Zebra. He is an inimitable Zebra with more white stripes than dark ones. I see things not in black and white but in numbers, and the numbers tell me the Sayid had mobilized and inspired millions of Somalis who took the nationalism ideal from him. He had committed crimes against thousands too. He should therefore have a million white stripes and thousands of dark ones.

6. Operation Hawo Tako: Why History is not a Supermarket

I don't even know which clan Hawo Tako is from but I am not so daft as to not know she must be a Darod given the outcry of the opponents of the 'Dervishized' Somali history. I will not go into much debate about her status. I don't know her contributions, only that she was killed while throwing stones at colonialists. Conventional historians can defend their selection, not me. But I want to argue on her behalf, as a person. If it is true she had contributed to the anti-colonization struggle in one way or another and paying in your life is the ultimate sacrifice, why is she not allowed to rest in peace with her laurels?

What is the argument? Is it she is not a hero or is it there are other heroes who threw stones as well and are not recognized because they are not from the 'right' clans? If it is the former, it is for those who put her in history text books and as result built her statue to fight back and defend their accounts.

If it is the latter, it is simple. In an era where gender sensitivity and inclusivity is the vogue, we can afford to slot more women from various clans, as long as there is evidence they were part to the stone-throwing heroism. We can even widen the scope and search for women who fought in other forms of struggle.

And, the candidates should all be dead and buried. *"A person, once declared a national hero, should be incapable of negating that status and verdict, which is what death comprehensively does for us,"* Said the late veteran Zimbabwean lawyer and leader Eddison Zvobgo, when a similar debate about who should be a hero raged in the ruling ZANU-PF party. For the same reason, and not for his buffoonery, we cannot take Qanyare, the law-maker who is a serial law-breaker, or any living lady he fronts as a hero, for instance! I mean history is not a supermarket where everybody has to look for and find what he wants.

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You cannot atone for 'underrepresentation' in Somalia's liberation war heroes by ensuring equity in the allocation of hero status. Equity and justice has nothing to do with who should be and should not be a hero. It is not about resource allocation and income redistribution and there is no need why we should aim for efficiency and *Pareto* optimality. The process of anointing heroes is simple and clear. You define who the enemy was and who fought it. In the case of the anti-colonialist struggle in Somalia, this pits the *Darawiish* against Britain, and the SYL against Italian occupation. The *Darawiish* were mainly from Darod clan and other pastoral communities in central and Northern Somalia, and in Somaligalbeed (Western Somali).

Therefore, there is no reason why a Bantu or a Rahenwein or a Hawiye, who was engaging a stubborn earth with *Yaanbo* in peaceful farming when pastoralists were firing aged *Maadhiin* and *Laaran* in the breadths and depths of *Nugaal* and *Hawd*, should be posthumously bestowed with a hero status. To do so, you need to expand the parameters for consideration beyond the deeds of men at mere battlefields. To do so, you need to redefine the concept of heroism and widen the scope of Somali people's resistance. In the case of SYL, if there is complain there as well, my reasoning applies to it too. You would expect less number of northerners in the heroes who struggled against Italy (although not through liberation wars) and more southerners.

Another example is the case of Somaliland and the disproportionate number of Issaq heroes in the new history written by victorious Somali National Movement (SNM). It is all true. It was the Issaqs who fought against Siyaad Barre; not the Gadabursi, not the Dhulbahante, and not the Gabooye. Somaliland historians define the enemy as Siyad Bare, his *Faqash* army and the refugees from Ethiopia who tried to wrestle Issaq lands in the manner the Jewish took over Palestine. To the extent they are embarking from this conceptual consensus and framework, Somaliland heroes will remain Mohamed Moge, Koodbuur, Silaanyo, Muse Biixi (Muse Dalab), all *Issaq*. And any outcry over this issue is disingenuous.

Inclusive history is what we need as Somalis, but inclusivity doesn't entail arbitrary conscription of heroes. It is a fact of life that if the British and the Italians are to be recognized as arch enemies, there are clans who fought against them and those they sponsored. This doesn't show the higher moral values of those who fought colonialists and the baseness of the collaborators. It could well have been an accident. Roles could have reversed for instance if the British had mobilized the clans in the hinterland against those in coastal areas.

When revisionists finalize their discovery of the 'true' Somali history, it will not be only the Sayid who will come out tainted. They will have to put the record straight and label certain clans as collaborationists of the British and some

The Mission of Revisionists of Somali History: Intellectual Righteousness or Retributive Justice?

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as passive bystanders. It will have to be fair in discussing who committed the most obnoxious crimes in Somalia's most recent history, without fear, favour or prejudice. I hope these clans will take what follows as the matter gets turned over, and with it, their own deeds and pride.

7. Siyad Bare and Silaanyo's Doctrine of Entitlement and Impunity and the SSC Acronym

While Siyad Bare and Silaanyo's anointing of war heroes may be fair and correct, there is nothing wrong in censuring and rejecting the doctrine of entitlement and impunity that follows such claim to heroism which is enjoyed by themselves and the elites from their clans. It is fair to expect the fruits of Somalia's and Somali National Movement's (SNM) struggle against colonialism, and marginalization and oppression respectively to trickle down to all other communities under their rule.

There is also nothing wrong in *Sool-Sanag-Cayn* (SSC) people wanting to join Somalia and rejecting the secession agenda as well. It is a clear evidence that Somali elites and political leaders do not learn lessons from history that SNM is now accusing SSC leaders of being 'secessionists'. The correct nomenclature to describe SSC folks should have been '*Secessionists of Secessionist Clan enclave*', with the acronym SSC intact!

8. Marginalization and stigmatization

Marginalization and stigmatization existed, exists today and will continue to be a malady in future Somalia. The plight of the outcast *Tumal*, *Yixir*, *Midgaan* communities is most distressing. The racism against Bantus is disgraceful. But, no remedy and redress is to be achieved by way of academic retribution of the victimized, who would exact the injustice they suffered by debasing those who debased them. The remedy doesn't lie in mosque sermons, lip-biting and appeal to conscience.

These social evils are not intrinsic biological dispositions of few clans. They are the product of power differentials in economy, politics, military, and demography. Education and economic empowerment is the antidote. Barack Obama is a living example. In addition, strong judicial institutions and democratic governance will address the legal deprivations of oppressed communities.

9. The Myth of Pastoral Democracy? Pastoral Avarice?

Dr. Enow's appraisal of 'Pastoral Democracy' or in his case the absence of it makes a lot of sense in many regards. Above all, the point he makes about the exclusion of *Tumaal*, *Midgaan* and various outcast clans from decision-making processes is powerful. But throughout his thesis, a critical gap exists in employing qualifications, nuances and in putting issues in context. That is why he cannot see the many good sides of pastoral culture – the wealth redistribution mechanisms and social insurance, the conviviality and generosity embedded in it.

When explaining the demise of the Somali state and the leadership failure that caused it, Dr. Eno makes some correlations to Pastoral way of life, what he calls pastoral avarice. He looks for answers from clan discord as well. Dr. Ali Jim'ale's introductory lines in the book *'the Invention of Somalia'* also suggest that there is a relationship between what triggered Somali civil war and state collapse and the hidden and false 'homogeneity' claim of Somalis.

In truth, explanations for this phenomenon should be sought from analysis of the wider post independence governance failures in decolonized countries all over the world, and in particular Africa. The post-African State has been dissected by so many luminaries with the same conclusion. These include scholars such as Professors Ali Mazrui, George Ayittey, Wole Soyinka, Claude Ake, Dan Wadada Nabudere, Shardreck Gutto to name a few.

Prof Ayittey speaks for all of these scholars when he concludes "*the basic cause of Africa's economic atrophy has more to do with bad leadership and defective institutions established by African leaders after independence*". Dele Oluwu posits an even clearer analysis of the challenges of the post-independent African state arguing that "*what has further worsened matters is the attitude of the immediate post-independence African leaders. Claiming that they fought or led the struggle for independence, they appropriated the state as their personal property. The fundamental division expected between public and private realms of governance were dispensed with.*"

Mind you, almost all of these leaders referred to came from farming families and were Bantus, Pygmies and the like; not camel boys with soft hairs.

George Ayyitey puts forward the point that post-independence Africa was failed by "Hippos", (traditional African leaders who took power from colonialists, who other scholars also refer to as the 'herd men'), that are lazy, slow, ornery and corrupt. Indeed, it is a template history of most of Africa that Patrimonialism, clientelism, tribalism, cronyism and rent-seeking behaviour had become the basic architecture of dictatorial and militarized states.

The Mission of Revisionists of Somali History: Intellectual Righteousness or Retributive Justice?

By Muktar M. Omer

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Somalia is not an exception and the irreplaceable Somali Professor Ahmed Ismail Samatar recognizes this point very well. That is why he emphasizes the role of leadership and clean and strong institutions for the rebirth of Somalia. In fact, in his seminal paper the '*The Porcupine Dilemma: Governance and Transition in Somalia*', he gives a near-scientific taxonomy of States and the phases that a country passes through before it finally succumbs to the wounds of bad governance.

That is why I argue pastoralist culture has nothing to do with Somalia's descent into corruption and governance malaise. If pastoral avarice has led to moral decay and corruption in Somalia, the case should be made that Bantu avarice led to the legendary sleaze and corruption in Bantu lands, exemplified by Mobutu-sese-seko, Sani Abacha, Idi Amin and Daneil Arap Moi. The most stable Western Africa countries like Mali, with sizeable pastoral communities, should have disintegrated. Nigeria, which Dr. Enow at one point seems to almost identify himself with when gleefully rejoicing the irony of Siyad Barre's death in 'Bantu' land should not have been perennial number one in corruption indices produced by each and every institution.

It, therefore, should by now be clear to Dr. Enow that it is not the texture of hair and type of livelihood source that determines one's morality and curbs corruption and abuse of authority. It is the collective values that a society creates for itself and concomitant institutional checks it puts in place.

10. The Origins of Somalis and the 'Myth of Homogeneity'

Revisionist scholars contest the Arab genealogy of major Somali clans and Somalia's ethnocultural homogeneity. To be fair, they confirm my suspicions and gut feeling about Somalis origin and there is very little to disagree with. I have always looked with scorn at theories of Darod the Arab and Isaq the Hashimite. I saw it as a competition to get closer to Islam and by so doing prove one's nobility and purity. The *Isaqs* have outsmarted the *Darods* and *Hawiyes* in this respect, by leaving no doubt as to their 'Jordanian' origin with the unambiguous *Binu* and *Sheikh* exhibit. It is all myth.

I agree with the theory that the Somalis share common ancestor with the *Kushites* in Ethiopia, the Afars, Oromos, and Randilles in Kenya. But somewhere in the arguments of the revisionists, you notice that they accept that Somalis are a product of two races, Asian and African. The reference to a South-North migration that preceded the return North-South migration is plausible but no strong historical facts are produced to support it, beyond mere

hypothesizing of the etymology of some names like *Kombo*, which are said to be a Bantu name. They may well be something else.

The point is that whether the major Somali clans, *Darod*, *Hawiye*, *Dir*, etc are from of an Arab father and an African mother or the other way round, they are distinctively different from the Bantu race that inhabit most of sub-Saharan Africa, although one may stress the similarities between the Somalis, Sudanese, Fulani, and other races in East and West Africa. There is little doubt that the Asiatic features are more prominent than the touch of Bantu mix in most Somalis. That is why Dr. Ali Jimale Ahmed's concern of "*the creation of a Somali that is in Africa, but not of Africa*" need not be a concern at all. It is a fact and not a contradiction.

Egypt is in Africa, and yet 'not African' in the sense he is alluding to. And the Somalis preference to be classified as 'Asiatic' and not as an 'African' by the British Colonial rulers makes lots of sense, because in those days 'African' was about colour and physical attributes, not about geography and continent. In some ways, it still is. Dr. Enow laments this choice vigorously, and uses it to prove all that is wrong with Somalis self-image. It is true the average man from Somalia looks like an Asian (Arab or Tamil), although Dr. Enow may disagree with this because he says the Bantus account for 40% of Somalia's population.

Somali homogeneity is another contentious area. There are powerful arguments presented by revisionists with the conclusion that the claims of a nation with one language, culture and religion is a farce. To nurture scholarly vanity, it is now fashionable to speak of 'the debunked myth of homogeneity'. But if the concept of homogeneity is defined loosely and in relative terms, with comparisons to other countries and nations, it may be easy to see the basis of the arguments of traditional historians.

Actually, if you take out the Bantu and Brawan communities as 'outliers' to use statistics jargon, one would see that indeed most other Somalis look the same and the languages/dialects they speak are not that different. You can clearly see that the *Af-Maay* and *Maxaatiri* languages/dialects cannot be classified as 'very different' with no relationship to one another. Professor Abdalla Mansur, an authority on Somali languages and former lecturer at the Institute of Languages of Somali National University, provides solid evidences in this [Interview with the BBC Somali Service](#). I think that the case of the inadequate discussion of the cultures and ways of life of the Bantu, Barawans and other minorities in Somali history books is more of an omission than misconstruction of their identity.

It is also true that the Bantu and other communities have over the years assimilated with the other Somalis and there is a great deal of commonality in their cultures and that of other Somalis with whom they share borders. I think the revisionists have some strong points on this subject but they need to qualify their 'debunking' craze and wholesale indictment of the intentions of traditional historians. Not all mistakes and generalizations were done with malice and by design, I think.

11. Conclusion

The revision of Somali History is important. It is a welcome development and certainly more so from an academic perspective than for its value for political reconciliation and reconstruction of the state in Somalia. I believe that given the level of our social development, and the undying clan loyalties that still remain ingrained in our blood, taking the revision of the Somali history outside the academic circles is a risky proposition for now. It can lead to further polarization and hostility. But it is a job that has to be done at one point, regardless.

Regarding the question whether the revisionists' mission is a 'messianic' rescue operation of Somali history or a retributive agenda, it is hard to tell. The revisionists of Somali History, like any other school of thought, are a mix bag. While some are engaged in honest research for truth, one would expect some bad apples to join the search. What I can tell is that revising history can never be neutral, apolitical and purely an academic exercise.

After all, interests and orientations shape our perceptions and interpretations of history and events; sometimes we know their influence on us, sometimes unbeknown to us. And the revisionists cannot claim to be immune from the biases induced by their upbringings, orientations and interests. Political interest aside, re-writing Somali history offers economic and academic dividends by way of vast research projects and intellectual accolades earned. I think some may join the revisionists from this purely business-oriented angle as well.

Whatever their motives, the revisionists should not commit the mistakes they allege conventional Somali historians have committed, by trying to reject everything about old school of thought simply because its production was dominated by one clan.

Traditional historians must not be too defensive about their versions as well but instead must work to atone for the hurt their erroneous historical omissions or misconstructions have caused some sections of the Somali people, by acknowledging their shortcomings and the flaws in their stories and taking proactive role in rectifying these mistakes. That way, we can get a historical storyline we all identify with and we feel we own.

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