

**JOURNAL OF SOMALI STUDIES**

**Volume 1, Issue 2, 2014**

**Pp 91-118**

**Racial and Caste Prejudice in Somalia**

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**Abstract**

Based on in-depth oral interviews carried out in Mogadishu, Somalia, and countries neighboring Somalia in 2009 and 2013, our purpose in this study is to map the nature of prejudice and hate discourse used by Somalis against the Bantu Jareer and the Yibir, Gabooye, and Tumaal communities in Somalia. The hate discourse used against the Yibir, Gabooye, and Tumaal outcast communities is premised on assumptions of their supposed unholy origin and their engagement in occupations and social activities that are despised by the so-called Somali noble groups. The prejudice and hate discourse against the Bantu Jareer Somalis is derived from their African origin and alleged African-like physical characteristics in comparison with the features of other Somalis.

## Introduction

According to Kusow (2004), much of Somali scholarship has been skewed by the persistent legend that Somali society is essentially homogeneous and fundamentally egalitarian. Consequently, the principle ontological assumption through which the social boundary of “Somaliness” is constructed has been based on the argument that while most African countries have been concerned with enacting linear historical events and social identities to create a national identity, Somali society has always enjoyed a collectively shared national identity such that almost every Somali individual spoke the same language, came from the same ethnic background, and shared the Islamic faith (Lewis 1955, 1961; Samatar and Laitin 1987). This presumption of a homogeneous nation created several epistemological and ontological problems. First, it created a condition in which the main task of Somali scholarship was not to understand, much less interrogate, internal racial and caste differences in Somalia. Instead, Somali scholarship has centered on rescuing and recreating the supposedly historical moral fiber of *Xeer* (Somali for customary law) that had held society together prior to the intervention of corrosive Western economic and social structures and the division of the historical Somalilands and their incorporation into several different colonial regions.

The breakdown of the Somali moral fiber, according to this narrative, was later compounded by postcolonial regimes led by mindless elites and dictators who pitted hitherto harmonious and homogeneous clans against one another through divide-and-conquer tactics. Second, the emphasis on the notion of a self-same nation as an analytical category for understanding social reality in Somalia has created conditions in which social differences are not appreciated as strengths and part of reality but instead are downplayed—and in many situations violently

suppressed. (Kusow 204) The problem with this argument is that neither theoretical narrative can resolve the fundamental dilemma of why such an essentially homogenous and fundamentally egalitarian society would adopt a systematic process of discrimination and racial and caste prejudice. This contradiction is aptly echoed by Korieh and Mbanaso who write:

The domination of the Somali Bantu and Madhiban communities by the majority and their experiences as a people oppressed socially and politically challenges the usual display of this Horn of Africa peninsula as a country of homogeneous people, speaking the same language, holding the Islamic faith, and sharing the same nomado-pastoral culture. (2010, 12-13)

While our argument is not to undermine the fact that people in different regions of Somalia might differ in their understanding of the significance of race and caste prejudice; there is a collectively shared understanding that certain groups are socially and racially stigmatized. The focus of this paper is to highlight the nature of hate and derogatory language used against some of the marginalized groups in Somalia particularly the Bantu Jareer community and the outcaste people in the country.

## **Background**

Broadly speaking, the Somali Bantu Jareer and the Somali caste communities come from different social, historical, and ethnical backgrounds. The Somali Bantu Jareer community can be divided into three groups: (1) runaway slaves, (2) emancipated slaves, and (3) an indigenous community. The social formation of the first two can be traced to nineteenth-century Indian Ocean slave traders, who brought large numbers of slaves from Tanzania and Mozambique to Somalia. The slaves provided

labor that supported the booming plantation economy in the southern Somalia Banadir coastal communities of Mogadishu, Merka, and Baraawe, as well as in the Jubba and Shabelle valleys and the wider agro-pastoral regions of southwestern Somalia (Cassanelli 1982; Besteman 1999; Eno 2004). By the first decade of the twentieth century, 33 percent of Mogadishu's population (2,233 out of 6,700), 28 percent of Baraawe's population (830 out of 3,000), and 14 percent of Merka's population (720 out of 5,000) were classified as slaves.

The number of slaves absorbed into the interior was much larger than on the coast (Besteman 1999). Cerrina Ferroni, governor of Italian Somaliland in early 1900s, writes that out of a total population of about 300,000 in the larger inter-river region, the estimated size of the slave population has ranged from 25,000 to 30,000 (quoted in Hess 1966, 100) to as high as 50,000 (Cassanelli 1982). Within a few years, however, a significant number of these slaves had escaped from the Banadir Coast and settled in the Gosha forest in the Jubba valley, creating maroon communities. Other runaway slaves settled and formed a second maroon community in Avai (derived from the local name Awaayle) near Baraawe in Lower Shabelle region. As slave treatment became harsher and the movement for abolition intensified, an increasing number of runaway slaves made their way into these maroon communities. In all likelihood, the Bantu Jareer groups in the Shabelle—the Shiidle, Reer Shabeele, Makanne, Kaboole, to name a few—are recognized as indigenous Somali Bantu Jareer and remnants of the Mjikenda, who were settled along the banks of Shaabelle River (prior to Somali settlement in the region). They were part of the legendary Shungwaya kingdom in parts of southern Somalia with settlements around Bur Gabo, and later migrated to the Tana River. By the end of slavery in Somalia in the 1920s,

descendants of both groups, the indigenous and the diaspora Bantu Jareer, had come to be regarded as members of a permanently racialized and stigmatized community within Somali society.

Unlike that of the Somali Jareer Bantu, the history, social, and ethnic formation of the Somali caste communities is hardly distinguishable from that of other Somalis. The difference is that these communities are stigmatized because mythical narratives claim that (a) they are of unholy origin, and (b) they engage in denigrated occupations. One narrative suggests that at the time of the arrival of the Somali founding ancestor there existed in the land a vicious magician king who ruled the country. This king, according to the narrative, was ruthless and terrorized the people—raping women, killing innocent children, and in general exploiting the people—until the founding Somali ancestor, with the help of Saint Aw Barkhadle, caused two mighty hills to close down on him. This event created the distinction between the noble and non-noble groups.

The difference between noble and non-noble castes is also explained in another narrative. This narrative contends that the ancestors of both the noble and non-noble castes were two brothers. Before setting out on a long journey, their father advised them that in case they became hungry at any time during the journey, they should eat whatever they could find, even if it were the meat of a dead animal. However, the father warned that when they reached their final destination, they should force themselves to vomit in order to cleanse their souls of the negative elements of the nonhalal meat. As the narrative goes, midway through the journey, the brothers became so hungry that they ate the meat of a dead animal. Later, when they reached their final destination, the younger brother followed his father's advice and forced himself to vomit, while the older brother refused to do so. What happened after that is

well known: the descendants of the younger brother became the nobles, and those of the older brother became members of the outcast groups.

Despite their mythical nature, these narratives have been very successful in effectively marginalizing and stigmatizing a significant portion of Somali society as having an unholy origin, despite Eno's (2008) argument claiming the absence of substantive historical evidence. These groups are variously known as Yibir, Midgaan, Tumaal, and Boon. To this day, they remain outside the boundary of "Somaliness." Like the Bantu Jareer, they are not allowed to intermarry with other social groups. In some situations, they cannot shake hands with their so-called noble brothers, simply because they are considered socially polluting (Kusow 2004). Even though, it is arguable that among the inter-riverine and coastal Somalis there has been, historically, higher degree of assimilation of potential outsider communities; the degree of prejudice and discrimination against the Somali Bantu *Jareer* and Somali caste groups is as strong as other regions of the country.

Consequently, our purpose in this paper is to provide a preliminary outline of the nature of racial and caste prejudice against the Bantu and the outcast communities. The paper specifically introduces racialization and social stigma as important theoretical instruments for understanding the social structure of Somali society. At threshold, such a view disturbs traditionalist scholars' presentation of Somalia as a nation of one ethnic group and culture. This is because the earlier teaching was based on a universalized pastoral culture where social organization and mobilization are considered as less hierarchical, unstable and more anarchic - though often described as an egalitarian society. This tutelage represents one of the major factors that hindered a discussion of the prevailing ethnic inequality and oppression in the society as well as in the Somalia scholarship

which treated a study of prejudice and its underlying stigma more as a taboo than interrogate the phenomenon for national education and global understanding of the Somali society. Therefore, we will specifically explore aspects of this prejudice, particularly the hate language used to denigrate these communities by Somalis who claim nobility through ancient lineage to Arab ancestry, particularly to the Quraysh tribe of Mohammad the Prophet of Islam.

## **Methodology**

Data for this study were derived from in-depth oral interviews conducted in 2009 and 2013. The interviewees consisted of members of the various minority communities discussed in the study. They were interviewed in separate communal meetings in Somalia and in neighboring countries. While some of the participants are residents of Mogadishu, others are from neighboring towns as well as the diaspora. The subjects were selected without bias in terms of gender, age, educational background, or individual social status. This ethnographic method was utilized to obtain in-depth understanding of the subject as well as access the emotions of the informants.<sup>1</sup> The informants whose names appear in the study gave their consent to that effect.

## **Prejudice and Discrimination**

We employed several theoretical frameworks, including Blumer's (1958) conceptualization of prejudice as a sense of group position, critical race theory, communication-based hate discourse. According to Blumer, traditional sociological literature on race and ethnic prejudice has been dominated by the idea that prejudice exists as feelings lodged in individuals.

Blumer argues that this perspective overlooks an understanding of prejudice as reflecting everyday interactions that occur between members of differing racial groups. Racially and ethnically prejudiced individuals, according to Blumer, think of themselves as belonging to a given group in contrast with other groups. This sense of group position is realized through a schema of racial identification based upon the formation of an image of one's racial group as opposed to other racial groups. The formation of this image results from a collective experience and operates through the public media and culminates in a number of collectively shared feelings, including: (1) a feeling of superiority shown by dominant groups through the disparagement of the behaviors and qualities of the subordinate minority group, (2) a feeling that the subordinate group is intrinsically different, alien, and therefore justifiably excluded, (3) a feeling of the oppressors' proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, and (4) fear and suspicion that the subordinate group harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant group (Blumer 1958, 4).

Taken together, these four sentiments constitute the crystallization of a fully developed group position and refer to positional arrangements such that the feeling of superiority places the subordinate group in a lower position. The feeling of alienation places the subordinate group beyond or outside the social boundary of the dominant majority, and the proprietary claim of the dominant group excludes them from any rights or claims to equal rights, privileges and advantages. In other words, as the social context of suspicion creates an emotional state of fear of the subordinate group, the sense of group position does not permit equal social status because it incorporates a hierarchy that is structured not only vertically but also in other ways.



According to Blumer (1958, 5), the sense of group position “is not a mere reflection of the objective relations between racial groups. Rather it stands for ‘what ought to be’ rather than for ‘what is,’” and therefore determining and installing, “a sense of where the two racial groups *belong*” thereby drawing the root for discrimination (emphasis original). More importantly, the sense of group position cannot be reduced to the individual level. All members of the dominant group develop a similar sense of group position regardless of their social status or class. This sense of group position or “definition occurs through a complex interaction and communication between members of the dominant group,” including “leaders, prestige bearers, officials, group agents, and ordinary laymen,” by engaging in a collective disparagement of the subordinate group “[t]hrough talk, tales, stories, gossip, anecdotes.” This disparagement fosters a collectively shared understanding. As Blumer further theorizes, the cause of race and ethnic discrimination “lies in the felt challenge to [the] sense of group position” such that the greater the sense of socially, culturally, and economically perceived threat, the more likely are members of the dominant group to intensify the prejudice toward the threatening minority group (1958, 5).

From another viewpoint, dependent on the position of the communicator the nature of communication also defines the power that determines the hegemonic position of the interlocutors. Accordingly, the discourse of hate and prejudice clearly envisages who stands where on the rungs of social interaction. The relation between communication and hegemony is clearly defined, among others, by Carey, who describes communication as a process in which the social reality of everyday interactions is “produced, maintained, transformed and repaired” (1989, 23). In a similar thesis, Williams (1977, 113)

argues that hegemony is constantly “renewed, recreated, defended, and modified.” However, it is not only the verbalization of hate that leads to depersonalization, but also the social effects of these processes on the group to whom the hate discourse is directed. This paradigm makes the “environment-hegemonic model of communication,” as described by Calvert (1997, 7), “[a]n appropriate alternative model to [Carey’s] ritual model,” which can provide experts with the necessary tools for contextualizing the trend from “the social reality harm” that it is capable of inflicting. These dynamics affect individuals in various ways within the hate-prejudice social situation.

This imbalance and inequality of the cultures as dominant and dominated have emphasized “the construction and reproduction” of demeaning hate-based terminologies that have become standardized “symbolic meaning systems” used to taunt the marginalized groups among the society (Christians, Ferre, and Feckler 1993, 131) As determinants of the social nuances between distinct groups, hate-based terminologies reinforce the lower status of targeted groups and more effectively segregate the target communities. As Matsuda et al. (1993, 18) observe, the injurious effects of hate speech and prejudice on targeted groups are comparable to a burdensome “psychic tax” that victims are “least able to pay.” Matusitz (2012:91) indicates that conventional stereotypes have an enduring impact and remain too problematic to surmount if our internalized categorization and positioning of the group concerned is related to “negative attitudes and beliefs.” Arguing similarly on the negative impact of ethnic related prejudice, Tarimo (2011, 39) writes, “The dynamics of ethnocentrism nourishes attitudes of intolerance, discrimination, and exclusion.” These attitudes, once internalized, become a belief which, according to Sorokin (2001, 670) paraphrasing Ross,

“regardless of whether it is right or not--- if it is believed, is a real force which determines human actions.”

Within the African context, Odetola and Ademola (1985, 170-1) write, “To discriminate means to exclude others, such as minority groups, from the privileges which we enjoy.” They further acknowledge that this kind of segregation has the potential “to limit association, voluntarily or involuntarily, to our own kind” (171). As Odetola and Ademola (217) argue, “Ethnic bias in African societies does not allow many Africans to see other ethnic groups as they truly are.” One of the reasons for such prejudice is related to the fact that, according to Odetola and Ademola (217-218), “We often view others from our own jaundiced perspective.”

### **The Discourse of Hate as Stigma**

Hate discourse constitutes the core of the evils surrounding discrimination, bullying, prejudice, and other forms of hatred that a dominant group perpetuates on a subordinate group. As such, hate discourse has attracted the attention of experts from diverse professions. In some cases, the definition of hate speech or hate discourse is seen as a fluid phenomenon that experts have interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, Delgado (1982, 135) suggests that race-based verbal abuse represents one of the most common means of expressing societal attitudes of discrimination. Walker (1994, 8), on the other hand, contends that hate speech does not have a “universally agreed-on definition.” Scholars with a legal orientation, such as Smolla (1992, 152), define hate discourse as “a generic term that has come to embrace the use of speech attacks based on race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation or preference.” On the other hand, race theorists (Matsuda et al. 1993, 1) view expressions of hate speech “as weapons to ambush, terrorize,

wound, humiliate, and degrade” members of the society classified as the subordinate group.

According to Calvert (1997, 5), “Hate speech is a communication phenomenon,” whose importance can be understood from the growing field of communication-based research conducted in the legal profession (Grimes and Dreschel 1996). From a perspective of the legal implications of hate discourse, the role of communication science can facilitate a broader understanding of the subject. Conceptualizing the impact of hate related discourse, Delgado (1982, 133) states that ethnic or racially based hate discourse can no longer be seen as “mere insulting language,” considering its potential to inflict emotional or physical damage to the victim. As Delgado (1982, 135–136) further emphasizes, “Such language injures the dignity and self-regard of the person to whom it is addressed, communicating the message that distinctions of race are distinctions of merit, dignity, status, and personhood.” Although scholars support the idea that situations like poverty can be contained, Mason (1970, 2) argues that stigmatization inflicted as a result of race cannot be alleviated, hence making it a very fertile ingredient “of human misery.” In support of this understanding of the impact of discrimination, Kenneth Clark (1965, 63–64) writes: “Human beings ... whose daily experience tells them that almost nowhere in society are they respected and granted the dignity and courtesy accorded to others will, as a result of course, begin to doubt their own worth.” Moreover, Kovel (1970, 195) notes how the amassing of negative attributes may lead to “one massive and destructive choice: either to hate one’s self ... or to have no self at all, to be nothing.” This accrual of stigma and anguish can cause socially stigmatized individuals to develop emotional problems such as isolation and loss of self-esteem. This stigmatization not only causes individuals to

underestimate their own worth but also chips away at their core sense of self (Goffman 1963, 7). Paraphrasing Hayakawa on the harmfulness of derogatory epithets, Delgado (1982, 13) points out how “[r]acial tags” hinder the ability of victims to interact with members of socially dominant groups, a phenomenon so evident in the social stratification and ethnic marginalization in Somalia.

Internalizing hate discourse can have an enormous psychological impact on members of victimized communities, including mental illness and psychosomatic disorders (Harburg et al. 1973). The anguish of psychological damage acquired as a consequence of socially sanctioned discrimination, according to critical race theorist Delgado, cannot be erased even by a vertical economic mobility. As Delgado interpolates, prejudice may affect its victims to the extent of undermining their aspirations and consequently decreasing their performance potential. This, in turn, fosters a continuation of “a tradition of failure” brought about by “negative expectations concerning life’s chances” (Delgado 1982, 138) and “high expectancies of failure” (Martin and Franklin 1979, 43).

For the most part, racial or ethnic insults and epithets directed at minority groups represent a social mechanism of hate that has developed internally and been systematized over a period of time. Without doubt, the function of abusive epithets is to position members of the targeted group as “inferiors” who should not only accept this form of abuse but also acknowledge the claims to social, economic, and political superiority of the dominant group. Racial epithets thus have the function of perpetuating not only an inferior self-identity on members of oppressed groups (Delgado 1982, 145) but also demonstrate an absolute derogation of their ethnic identity (Sandalow 1975, 653,

668, 672). In effect, these slurs demolish the “characteristic central to one’s self-image” Delgado (1982, 144).

Drawing upon the available literature, the next segment of this essay will discuss the nature of the hate narratives that dominant groups in Somalia use to subjugate the Bantu Jareer and caste groups.

### **Kinds of Hate Discourse Against Somali Minority Groups**

In Somalia, a variety of hate epithets are directed against minority groups. Some epithets appear to be related to cultural issues, while others are based purely on ethnic traits. Both kinds of epithets are derogatory in nature and carry demeaning undertones that place these communities in very deplorable social positions. Although the stigmatizing of both the Bantu Jareer and the caste communities is evident, not all the hate terms are or can be generalized as having the same attributes, especially considering the variance in the nature of stigma and othering attached to each of them.

As minority rights advocate and scholar Rasheed Farah (June 2013, in a communication with one of the authors, Mohamed Eno), emphasizes that “It is important to note that not all insults are applied similarly to the entire groups of the so-called outcasts.” Farah defines the phenomenon thus:

The Gaboye group, or those who were formally called Midgaan, consist of two ethnic sections: Madhibaan and Muse Dheri. Neither the Tumaal nor the Yibir outcast communities belong to this group; as such, the Gaboye term should only be used for the Madhibaan and Muse Dheri in any literature addressing these groups. According to this distinction, insults towards the Gaboye, formerly Midgaans, do not apply to the Yibirs, and Tumaals, because these last two tribes are accused of things different from those accused of the Gaboye.

## **Abusive Words Used Against the Tumaal**

Privileged Somalis have made use of a number of epithets and forms of hate discourse to stigmatize and discriminate against lower-caste Somali groups. One Tumaal respondent in Mogadishu, Mohamud Sanaad, recalled: "After they [dominant clans] discovered her clan, my daughter was unable to return to school because everyone would call her the Tumaal (ironsmith). No one would sit or interact with her in the classroom." Another Tumaal, Abdiweli Artan, noted: "The same problem is prevalent everywhere even today. A few years ago I had to transfer my two children from their old school because they have been continuously called names and referred to as *sixirooleyaasha* (the magicians) for reason of degradation as Tumaal." Another informant, Soyaan Hussein, talked about an incident in the late 1980s:

My kids were often bullied by other children in the neighborhood, so one day my wife went to one of the neighbors' houses to redress the problem. As the neighbor backed out her car, with a female passenger in the front seat, she snarled in despise, "I have no time to debate with a *nasab-dhiman*," meaning [an ignoble outcast] and drove off.

## **Hate Speech Against the Gaboye (Madhiban and Muse Dheri)**

A number of words have been used pejoratively to describe members of the Gaboye groups. Gaboye respondent Firdowsa Ali Omar recalled:

We are called *bakhti-cune*, *kabo-tole*, *gun*, *nasab-dhiman*, *laan-gaab*, *reer Urayso* and *reer Daami*. Hate and prejudice are the order of the day, and we are the helpless recipients. We grew up with hatred, socialized under stratification and inferiorized to the bottom. That is what Somaliness means to us. But this is our country—what should

we do? Where should we go? Sometimes we feel scared of our own clothes, lest they insult us.

By interpreting these terms, one finds the magnitude of ethnic hatred present in Somali society. For example, *bakhti-cune* literally means “eater-of the dead animal” and is an extremely harsh and blood-boiling connotation of debasement. This epithet cannot even be attributed to an actual human being, let alone a fellow Muslim. Even though this story is historically uncorroborated (Eno 2008), this stigma had been attached for generations to the descendants of that forefather. *Kabo-tole* (shoemaker) in Somali culture is an abusive word directed against those skilled in shoemaking, an occupation relegated to people of low status.<sup>2</sup> The term *gun* refers to the lowest part, or bottom-most rung of society. *Nasab-dhiman* is among the harshest, strongest, and most demeaning expressions of hate speech; it denotes a tarnished nobility or status, hence an ignoble individual of the lowest social standing.<sup>3</sup> The expression *laan-gaab* is used for those who do not belong to a strong or long lineage branch; it is almost equivalent to saying that an individual has no ethnicity. *Daami* refers to villages or sections of towns or cities in Somaliland that are predominantly occupied by the Gaboye groups; therefore, *reer Daami* signifies the residents of a *Daami* area and carries an undertone of denigration indicating an outcast identity. According to Rasheed Farah (2013, communication with Mohamed Eno ), “The Tumals and the Yibirs do not live in these areas, therefore *reer Daami* or *reer Urayso* is used specifically for the Gaboye groups.” To conclude the section, the hate word *Urayso* means “stink,” an indication of absolute pollution; *reer Urayso* is an undignified expression used for the Gaboye people in some parts of Burco in northern Somalia. Significantly, *Urayso* is the



name of the secluded area where the “untouchable” outcasts live.

### **Common Insults Directed at the Yibir Community**

A Yibir respondent in the study, Heyle Abdi Heyle, expressed this: “We are called every nasty term in the *qaamuus* [dictionary]. The sun doesn’t set a day without someone saying to us something demeaning. They call us ‘*caado-qaate*’ to denigrate us for the blessings we pray for their [dominant groups’] own newborns.” The expression *caado-qaate* derives from the old tradition in which certain Yibir groups blessed newborns. Whenever a Somali child was born, the Yibirs blessed the baby by singing, reciting poetic verses, or reading from the Qur’an. The Yibirs then tied an amulet (*qardhaas*) around the child’s arm or occasionally the neck. It is commonly believed that the *qardhaas* will protect the child from illnesses, snakes, evil eyes, and other spirits of malicious nature. Somalis often have had to pay the Yibirs for their services, or are obliged to give them gifts. In addition, Somalis have also stereotyped all Yibirs as *ummulo-tuug*, beggars who ask alms from mothers who have just given birth. A young Yibir man in his thirties, Muhuddin Farah Elmi, who has no experience with magic or performing any such ceremonies, offered this perspective:

Although I have never been associated with *sixir* (magic), some boys would always call me “*waryaa, sixiroow*” (hey you, magician) or “*ummulo-tuug*” as if I enjoy the stigma of their insults. If I answer back then it becomes a bigger problem because I have no armed clan to protect me; so I just smile and they get away with it.

*Sixirloow* or *sixiroole* are similarly common terms that mean “sorcerer.” According to Arabic etymology, both terms are derived from the word *sihir* (magic), which is written in Somali

as *sixir*. These terms are used against this community because Somalis believe in the myth that *Bucur Bacayr*, the forefather of certain communities in northern Somalia, was a magician who indulged in evil practices, including the right to the first night with every nomad Somali's new bride.

A female Yibir interviewee, Ikraam Said Ali, who participated in the survey while residing in neighboring Kenya, recounted how she had been introduced to another Somali not by her name but as *reer Bucur Bacayr*, which means the offspring of Bucur Bacayr. She recalled:

My acquaintance did not want to identify me as a descendant of Sheikh Mohamed Haniif but *Bucur Bacayr* because, although both are the same person, Bucur Bacayr relates more to magic and sorcery, while Sheikh bears the attribute of sainthood and is therefore more appealing. This explains how Somalis are mentally tuned to hate and prejudice, negative attributes towards us the minorities.

Abdi-Madoobe, a grey-bearded minority man in his sixties related how his "people are completely driven away from Somaliness and called names like *Yibir Yahuud*," meaning Jewish Yibir. According to him, "Prejudice and hate feed from the life nerve of the Somali people. They are experts in prejudice and heinous manufacturers of hate language. Their insults pierce through the bone and deeper into the marrow."

### **Hate Slurs Addressed to the Bantu Jareer Community**

Unlike the outcast communities, the Somali Bantu or Jareer are oppressed as a group on the basis of their African ancestry (Kusow 2004; Eno 2008; Eno and Eno 2010). Most prevalent in the hate discourse directed against the Bantu Jareer is the word *adoon* (slave). According to Ayub Omar Ayub, "Derogatory terms against us (Bantu Jareer) are abundant: *adoon*, *bidde*,

*sankadhudhi*, *qurumboow*, *boong* and *medde* are just a few of them." Ayub continued, "Although it was God's decision to create us the way He was so pleased to do, Somalis saw it as a lesser skill in the art and science of creation; hence the Somali people's fundamental hatred against us and our culture." To further substantiate the stigma of Africanity and the burden of the broad African nose, Ayub related the following incident: "I was mocked by a Somali who referred to the two nostrils of my nose as rooms. He then asked me sarcastically whether he could rent one of my 'rooms' and how much it would cost him per month!"

The word *adoon* is the hate word most frequently used against the Bantu Jareer and has an inference of slave identity and in many ways is as harsh as, and equivalent to, the word *nigger*. Similarly, *bidde* is an expression that means a slave who works in the household of a king or sultan, whereas *sankadhudhi* is equal in meaning to *sanbuur* and describes a flat or big nose. The other hate idiolects—*qurumboow*, *boong*, *medde*, and *sankadhudhi*—all represent debasing characteristics attributed to Somalis of African descent who as a result are subjected to bullying from so-called noble Somalis. In the same context of hate discourse also fall epithets like *sanbuur* and *beyla-sanbuur*, both of which are pejorative references to someone having a large nose, a connotation of African origin.

The word *qurumboow* became very popular in the 1980s. It refers to negroid-appearing persons and does not really have a conspicuous meaning within the context of the Somali language. Etymologically, it is slang and carries the undertone of "nigger." It also refers to a species of fish, which some Bantu Jareer sell. Because it is said that "noble Somali despise fish-eaters" because of the fish smell (Burton, 1894, 109; see also Mohamed O. Omar 1993), this epithet might well be related to

the Somalis' stereotypical concept of "smelly Bantu" (Gesheker 2001, 13). While the Maxaa-speaking Somalis use the aforementioned slurs, taunts such as *boong* and *medde* are terms quite often used by the Maay-speaking segment of Somali society against Bantu Jareer members who coexist with the Maay-speaking Digil-Mirifle confederation of communities. Both words belong to the pejorative corpus of the Somali hate speech as referents of slave identity and therefore indicate an individual of perceived inferior African descent instead of a superior, noble-claiming Somali of Arab pedigree. Mohamed Omar Ali, a Bantu Jareer wheelbarrow pusher, further explained this kind of hate speech:

When they [dominant Somalis] want to call me, they just say, "Where is the *sankadhudhi*." or "where is the slave?" or "where is the *qurumboow*?" Yet they know my name, but that is how they are. They are so ignorant and arrogant. They think that the more they taunt you, the more they praise you. And sometimes the more you help them, the much more they think you are stupid [like them].

Finally, the civil anarchy that has persisted in southern Somalia since the late 1990s has contributed to the sociolinguistic landscape in general and to the vocabulary of hate and stigma against the Bantu Jareer and other minorities in particular. Hawa Rasheed Miigane, a Bantu Jareer woman in her forties related, "Some of the earliest terms coined during this period in the spirit of hate and prejudice include the terms *looma-ooye* and *looma-aare*, which allude to worthlessness of one's ethnic group." The same phenomenon is further elaborated in the words of Abdi Hussein Gaambi, "These days we are also called *Jamaica*, *reer-baari*, *Jareer-jifi*, and many more. Being a Bantu Jareer or an African is a very unforgiveable crime in this country, past and present. May the Almighty help us out of this stigma!"

The compound word *looma-ooye* denotes a kinless person for whose blood none would shed tears of grief. A similarly related utterance to *looma-ooye* is *looma-aare*, which is specifically used for the victims of the minority whose tribesmen cannot avenge the death of their murdered relatives because they are peace-loving and do not bear arms. *Jamaica* is a new addition to the vocabulary of hate and probably came with the advent of diaspora Somalis' contact with Jamaicans in the West. Noble-claiming Somalis have now converted that country's name as a term to insult the Bantu Jareer. On the one hand, *Jamaica* reveals the Bantu Jareer people's otherness and, for that matter, how they are positioned distinctly outside the ethnic social boundary of *Somali*ness. On the other, the Bantu Jareer people's "ethnic" juxtaposition to Jamaicans alludes to not only a negroid appearance but also the presumption of slave descent. Note also that elsewhere Eno and Eno (2010) and Maren (1994) elaborate how Somalis believe that all black Africans are slaves and therefore inferior to Somalis, regardless of their actual socioeconomic backgrounds or levels of education. The phrase *reer-baari* bears a connotation of a people who have been tamed to be obedient and tolerant to subjugation in any situation. One meaning of the term *Jareer-Jifi*, connotes a "stinky, kinky haired" Bantu person. In another definition, *jifi* is a very low-quality homemade ghee extracted from animal fat. The insinuation here is, given the low economic level of the Bantu population, they can't possibly afford to buy good quality cooking oil, so they consume *jifi* which is congealed and hardened ghee, compared with purified liquid oil which is more preferable for consumption.

To a certain degree, the impact is evident from the recently introduced infamous Somali political power sharing system known as Four-Point-Five (4.5), which divided the Somali

people into 4 ethnic categories of equal status and the minorities as not equal to the pure Somalis thus sharing only one-half of a clan's share. Earlier, during the height of the civil war when the dominant clans' antagonism against these groups was heightened, they established their own separate identities as minorities unaffiliated to the warring communities. This has contributed to the creation of awareness at the international level and the debunking of the ethnic based atrocities faced to them from the armed groups. The separate identity caused an imbalance not only to the ideology of Somali homogeneity but it also created an unprecedented kind of self-pride. At another level, the self-assertion and separate identity of the minorities has also caused discomfort to the dominant groups who now have to deal with the not so quiet voices of these identities and implausibility of the old philosophy of a self-same Somalia. The stigma continues all along even in the diaspora. For instance, citing Asha Samad, Eno and Eno (2010:125) write that as far as Somali diaspora towards minorities is concerned, even a "newborn resumes bearing the burden of stigma immediately after birth, regardless of the geographical location of his/her birth, as long as a Somali acquaintance who knows the family lives in that vicinity." According to Eno and Eno (ibid), the underpinning analysis suggests that, notwithstanding the distance from home, "the stigma haunts" the Somali minorities even in the diaspora.

### **Conclusion and the Way Forward**

In this study, we set out to map the nature of Somali prejudice, centering our discussion on epithets of the hate discourse used against the Bantu Jareer and caste communities in Somalia. We demonstrated how hate discourse employed in relationship to the Somali caste communities is fundamentally different from

that used against Bantu Jareer Somalis. The hate discourse used to insult the caste communities is premised on their supposed unholy origin, their engagement in occupations such as iron working and shoe making, their lowly social origins, and sometimes the notion that they can cast an evil eye on people, especially children, unless they are appeased with gifts or money. Based on mythical narrative, the Somali Yibir community is still stigmatized on the basis of the potential evil derived from their ancestry and the presumed havoc they can inflict on human life and property.

Unlike the caste communities, the prejudice and hate discourse against the Bantu Jareer Somalis is based on their alleged African-like physical characteristics and African origin as opposed to the Somalis who claim Arab origin. In our study we also revealed some of the most common epithets of hate and degradation that dominant Somali ethnic groups direct against the Bantu Jareer and, to some extent, how this group has been marginalized as non-Somali and therefore not accommodated within the social fabric of Somaliness. These depersonalizing qualities and prejudiced categorizations do not augur well with the assumed homogeneity or egalitarianism traditionalist scholarship has described Somalia; nor do they embrace the ideals of Islamic doctrine. We also argued that although both in scholarship and in the general discourse homogenization and egalitarianism attempts to universalize "Somaliness", it downplays the underlying degrees of stratification and marginalization that characterize the society. This form of universalization undermines the plurality hosted in the multiple identities.

In light of the inherent discrepancies mentioned above, the study of Somalia as a supposedly homogenous, and fundamentally egalitarian nation needs to be revisited. In particular, we have to learn from our early pitfalls and usher in new processes that engage in study of the groups whose

ethnicities, histories, and cultures have often been treated as taboo in Somali studies. With a bold shift of that kind, Somali studies will contribute a broader understanding of the real rather than the ideal.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We are very grateful to Omar A. Eno for his supervision and coordination of our fieldwork and to the staff of both St. Clements University Somalia and the Center for Training and Consultancy (CTC) for their support in conducting the data collection.

We are also thankful to the anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Somali Studies* for their critical and constructive comments.

## **Notes**

1. Note that the status of the Barawanese artisans in the shoemaking industry is a subject often absent from the discourse of the Somali caste system; a comparative study would reveal a more insightful understanding of this group and their social status among the Barawan minority community as well as their relationship with the dominant Somali groups.
2. Although the Islamic doctrine urges equality among all believers, in Somali society religion is often outweighed by the ethnic tutelage and predilection for supremacy.



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