THE SOMALI CHALLENGE

From Catastrophe to Renewal?

edited by
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The human race had the wisdom to create science and art; why should it not be capable to create a world of justice, brotherliness and peace? The human race has produced Plato, Shakespeare and Hugo, Michelangelo and Beethoven, Pascal and Newton, all these human heroes whose genius is only the contact with the fundamental truth with inner most essence of universe. Why then should the same race not produce those leaders capable of leading it to those forms of communal life which are closest to the lives and harmony of the universe?

—Leon Blum

Reer ba’ow yaa ku leh!
(O, wretched household, to whom do you belong!)

—Popular Somali saying

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, a Somali poet and playwright, Mohamed Warsame “Hadravi,” produced a satirical play using the above Somali saying as its title. The plot centered around a poor nomadic family victimized by a member of the corrupt ruling elite. This saying can, however, be more aptly applied to the current upheaval in Somalia. Indeed, the whole nation could be described as a reer ba’ay, a place squalid in every sense of the phrase.

The entire fabric of Somali society has been ravaged. The very existence of the whole nation has sunk in a deep dark sea of unimaginable human and material disaster. Furthermore, in my view, the communal mind of the society seems to be in a coma. No collective responsible effort, voicing national concern or calling for saving the savable, has so far emerged. For a nation proverbially
known for its deep-rooted traditions of reasoning and a history of national consciousness, this is an utterly puzzling development. Why and how has it happened? This is the knotty question that persists as Somalia increasingly captures the attention of the world.

Any attempt to deal successfully with this problem requires a better understanding of Somali culture and society. What, in cultural perspective, are the real reasons for this unprecedented collapse of Somali political and civic life? Is it true that the cause lies in the old Somali culture, as repeatedly argued in some recent newspaper articles and other publications? What are the basic characteristics of Somali culture? What are the principal messages conveyed by the major forms of Somali cultural expression, both traditional and modern? This chapter is a modest attempt to contribute to the search for answers to these questions. Obviously, this is not an easy task because this chapter seeks to focus on a theme that, I feel, has never been studied before.

In order to achieve its goals, the essay is broken into four components. The first introduces the salient cultural values and attitudes of traditional Somali society, as featured in its stories, plays, poems, and oral traditions. The second section explores the predominant cultural trends during the two and a half decades spanning the early 1940s to late 1960s, a landmark period in the development of Somali culture. The third part traces the present catastrophe to practices of social and cultural deformation that took place during the past twenty years. The major argument in this section is that a systematic social, cultural, and moral destruction has succeeded and paved the way for political and economic collapse, precipitating the present insanity. A whole body of new and destructive political culture has set in, replacing the positive cultural values of the nation.

The concluding section attributes the present agony to the legacy of the ill-intended political excesses of the military regime under Siyaad Barre, its outrageous manipulations of the traditional kin system, and armed and clanist factions on the scene today. Finally, I suggest that a serious effort at cultural reconstruction and a rehabilitation of the Somali mentality are prerequisites for a political or economic reconstruction.

Culture and Society: The Precolonial Era

The definition of the term culture is still a matter of debate, and it is not the intention here to delve into this complex dialogue. Suffice to say that culture will be referred to of perceiving the world and react creatively. At all times, culture serves as a mental, social, and political condition which plays a considerable role in the

Given the fact that the remotest era reference material existed to my view, the most reliable and understanding of this society, I believe culture can provide important insight into the thinking of the Somalis through the ages and help for any serious cultural situation in Somalia.

The abundance of Somali or important role it plays in Somali society by early testimonies of outside contemporary researchers of life in society contains most contradictions, constructive and destructive elements. Evidence for the existence of Somali traditional attitudes in this chapter. On the other hand, it is clear that it has been the construction of national culture its salient features, which provide ample evidence that a reason and an unmistakable evidence that have been the prominent traits of the society which have so far been the ideals of tolerance, mutual understanding, and commitment to the common good. Substantiating these statements is left to the Somali verbal art. First, however, observed above.

Anthropologists and political organization of the Somali system based on descent. In the state, the traditional clan system hypocratically is maintained in the conditional clan family system among people who lived unitary. However, there are many neg
...s of reasoning and a history of utterly puzzling development. Is this the knotty question that pervades the attention of the world.

Every problem requires a culture and society. What is culture for this unprecedented conflict? Is it true that the cause lies in some recent events? What are the basic characteristics of the principal messages conveyed through oral expression, both traditional and modern? How can we best attempt to contribute to the solution? Obviously, this is not an easy task. Let us focus on a theme that, I feel, has been

The essay is broken into four sections, each of which is featured in its stories, plays, novels, and more. The first section explores the present and the future, two and a half decades spanning a period of major economic and social change. It highlights the evolution of a new political and economic order, the replacement of the traditional system with a modern one. The second section focuses on the social and political aspects of the changes taking place. It addresses the present situation and the challenges facing the country today. The third section examines the cultural and intellectual aspects, exploring how sociocultural, economic, and political developments are shaping the future of the country.

Culture, in the broadest sense, is a system of values that guide human behavior. It is a collection of beliefs, customs, and practices that are passed down from one generation to the next. Culture is also a means of communication, a way for people to express their ideas and feelings. In this text, the author explores the role of culture in shaping human behavior and its impact on society.

The Precolonial Era

Still a matter of debate, and it is complex dialogue. Suffice to say that culture will be referred to, in this paper, as a people's mode of perceiving the world and reacting to it through various forms of creativity. At all times, culture is closely associated with the environmental, social, and political conditions of a society; at the same time, it plays a considerable role in the regeneration of these conditions.

Given the fact that the remote history of Somalia is shrouded in mystery, as well as the recent destruction of the location of whatever reference material existed in Somalia, oral culture remains, in my view, the most reliable and effective resource to a better understanding of this society. I believe that study of Somali national culture can provide important insights into the modes of life and thinking of the Somalis throughout history. Such study can therefore be helpful for any serious attempt to deal with the current peculiar situation in Somalia.

The abundance of Somali oral expression and the exceptionally important role it plays in Somali life has repeatedly been confirmed by early testimonies of outside observers and scholarly works by contemporary researchers of different origins. As elsewhere, Somali society contains most contradictions: good and evil, right and wrong, constructive and destructive. The divisive character of kin ideology is evident for the existence of some negative aspects in Somali traditional attitudes. This will be discussed later in this chapter. On the other hand, it must be emphasized from the outset that it has been the constructive virtues that have given the Somali national culture its salient features. The bulk of Somali oral culture provides ample evidence that a strong belief in (unwritten) law and reason and an unmistakable sense of respect for social institutions have been the prominent traits of Somalis. Poets and parents consciously and constantly used narratives and other forms of cultural heritage as educational tools to imprint in the minds of their children the ideals of tolerance, mutual aid, condemnation of violence, and commitment to the common good.
outlook, wherever it exists. Among Somalis, such attitudes and behaviors represented potential threats to national unity and the very essence of a modern state. For example, consider the following Somali saying:

Haba kuu darraatka dad waa ina adeerkaa.
(However unhelpful to you, your cousin remains the best of people.)

According to the above saying, one has to judge people on the basis of blood ties and not on their merits. This saying is derived from the widely held concepts of sokeeye and shisheeye, according to which people are divided into kin, for whom support is compulsory, and strangers, who are often perceived as potential foes.

Shisheeye shiilo duxa ma leh.
(Expect no mercy from outsiders.)

Clan-based principles can potentially become dangerous. For example, if a man wants to commit a murder, he may be encouraged by the feeling that he will be protected by his kin; likewise, the aggrieved party may seek to take vengeance not just on the murderer but on his kin individually and collectively. As a result of this irrational outlook, innocent people may be harmed, and culprits need not be held accountable for their deeds.

The most disastrous application of this ideology is manifested in the political life of present-day Somalia. A ruthless tyrant, Siyad Barre, and such similar culprits as the present warlords and war criminals have succeeded in manipulating the kin mentality, protected—even encouraged—by the majority of their immediate kinspeople despite the fact that, unlike traditional clan members, these "leaders" clearly do not represent the interests of the group. On the contrary, their acts are potential threats to the very existence of their own particular clans.

It must be noted here that in traditional Somali society, the harmful consequences of this sort of clan "insurance" for wrongdoers was avoided by the existence of a more powerful cultural force operating within the kin group. The righteous majority of the kin group, vested in the elders and wise men, were always able to control violent actions and other evil practices that were likely to be committed by extremists. Everyone had to abide by the heer (the

customary law) and the collective clan family.

Talo walaal diide, tagoog buu qaad 
(He who rejects brotherly advice)

Nin qaladan qabashadi, nin qeex 
qatan wax-siintii buu tol ku 
(It is in restraining those who are up right, and coming 
hungry that kinship is propri 
ty)

In spite of a profound sense of willing to bow before reason as ever, it must still be said that these traditions can be described as dark scene of Somali culture.

A mature knowledge of Somalism widely propagated by the anarchy constitute the cornerstone of Somali society political tolerance in media accurately describes Siyadism and Siya 
who compete to replace him, but he case. The following samples from extent to which people believed in cultural virtues.

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Somalis, such attitudes and behaviors to national unity and the very fabric of the nation. Consider the following Somali proverb:

Aadeerka ah, iyo kor cusaadka ah oo yahay darteed. Nidaamka loogu bixiyaa in la ahaa adeerka ah ee jiray, oo kor cusaadkiga ah ee jiray oo kuu soo heli kartaa. Si ayaa u soo shaqo, miyaad ujeed ah oo adiga oo yahay darteed. Fadlan waxaan u baahnahay in ay u helo dhammaan las oo ay ku jirtaa nidaamkaadaa koraal oo ahayd. Waan la xiran tahay nidaamkaadaa koraal oo ahayd ama loo heli kartaa in ay u helo dhammaan las oo karaa. 

In spite of a profound sense of dignity and pride, "the Somali is willing to bow before reason as long as he is proven wrong." However, it must still be said that the above negative aspects in kin relations can be described as dark shadows in the generally bright scene of Somali culture.

A mature knowledge of Somali custom disproves recent arguments widely propagated by the Western media that violence and anarchy constitute the cornerstone of Somali culture, or that in Somali society political tolerance is anathema. This assessment by the media accurately describes Siyaadh Badde's regime, as well as those who compete to replace him, but such anarchy was not always the case. The following samples from Somali oral tradition illustrate the extent to which people believed in reason and tolerance as supreme cultural virtues.

The first is the well-known parable about a young man who, fed up with his wife leaving him frequently, decided to cut her shins. The man was charged and instructed that he could no longer divorce his wife, that he could not marry a second wife, and that he had to pay special attention and care for his wife for life because he disabled her. When the man's father heard the verdict some days later, he asked if his son had accepted the sentence. Yes, was the answer. The father replied with relief, "Then, I recognize him as my son."

The moral of this parable is clear. It is aimed at teaching the coming generation to be tolerant, to side with justice and reason, and to respect the majority rule, even if your immediate personal interests are at stake. The popularity of this story and the way it has been preserved in the collective memory of Somali oral traditions signify the extent to which the story is a true expression of the collective consciousness. There are many proverbs and popular sayings that convey the same message, such as:

Talo waxaal diide, tagoog buu ka jabaah. (He who rejects brotherly advice, breaks his thighbone.)

Nin qaldan qabashadi, nin qumman kuweyni iyo nin qatan wax-siintii buu tol ku dhaqmaa. (It is in restraining those who are at fault, supporting those who are upright, and coming to the aid of those who are hungry that kinship is properly exercised.)
Gar-diid waa Alle-diid.
(He who rejects a verdict rejects God.)

Somali oral tradition teems with hundreds of proverbs, poems, and prose narratives with explicit messages condemning violence and despotism. They preach the virtue of peace and the value of law and order. The following are but a few:

Dagaal waa ka-dare.
(War is worse.)

Xeer la'aan waa xukun iyo xoolo la'aan.
(Without moral and social codes, all is lawlessness and abject poverty.)

Gacmo wada jiraa galladaa ka dhallaa.
(Joint hands bear success.)

Aan waddabadallo waa aan heshiinno.
(Let's talk means let's reconcile.)

Rag waxaad "walaal" uga weydey waran uga heshid.
(What cannot be done by persuasion cannot be done by the spear.)

Nin talo ma yaqaane gun baa talo taqaan.
(A lone man knows no solution; a council knows it.)

In addition, oral narratives depict the characters of tyrannical rulers as villains. The stories of Arrawelo\textsuperscript{2} and Geeddi Babow\textsuperscript{3} may be cited as examples.

It is likely that self-governance of traditional Somali society was based on the rule of the majority. This is what I. M. Lewis calls \textit{pastoral democracy} and Ali Musse Iye describes as \textit{Goo'ankii Geedka} (the decision under the tree);\textsuperscript{4} all the mature men of the community would participate in collective decisionmaking under a tree (the lack of democracy in excluding women is another serious matter). These thorough discussions and verdicts demonstrate that there was a compulsory reference to tradition and customary law in the past. Each speaker was aware that the weight of the deliberations would be validated with the support of a whole range of literary background (such as proverbs, poems, quotations of wisdom, and historical events), just as the Islamic ulema would substantiate their preaching with verses from the \textit{Quran} and \textit{Hadith}. This form of decisionmaking is one of the practices that preserved and disseminated oral tradition.

It is worth emphasizing that the oral is actually very important in Somali culture and it is how its highest respect to cultural pride is observed. Among the traditional intellectuals, the role of erudition, experience, and consensus is maintained. If a member of these groups was present, he required the resolution of a problem. These intellectuals were not easily moved (desiring a sword), a group of several tribes and the event of war. Complicated issues were resolved for their ability and experience. They were to be implemented because, as a traditional saying goes: when a man is a year older than you is wise.

The verses of poets had tremendous impact and it is this that Ali Dhuh, a distinguished poet, brought to light in his poem \textit{Dhul} (That Which Burns).\textsuperscript{5} On the other hand, the \textit{Waar tolow colka jouja} (Oh, my people) he describes the warring factions of the society, five clans, who had reneged on any产 to annihilate each other.\textsuperscript{6}

In a comparison of traditions, it is evident that the role of those who were educated was crucial. In the destruction of a society, as with any other society, the power of negative values and vileness prevailed, thanks to the guidance that \textit{Goo'ankii Geedka} provided. Today, however, it is the other way.

Culture and Tradition: The Era of Great Ayaa Shadaa

The period of roughly two decades after World War II and ending in the late 1970s saw the development of Somali society. It was a period of rejuvenation or rebirth, a general feeling of openness and of a new experience.

In this section, I endeavor to express myself in terms of culture and tradition, highlighting three salient aspects of this reformation of people's consciousness from...
It is worth emphasizing that the role of the intellect was traditionally very important in Somali culture. The kin community used to pay its highest respect to cultural producers and intellectuals. Prominent among the traditional intelligentsia were three groups: the poets; men of erudition, experience, and competence; and the Muslim ulema. If a member of these groups was present in any given circumstance that required the resolution of a problem, he would be the one to be consulted. These intellectuals were members of biri-nta-gayo (those not deserving a sword), a group of seven men who would not be killed in the event of war. Complicated issues were referred to those esteemed for their ability and experience. Their decisions were final and had to be implemented because, as a traditional Somali saying goes, “a man who is a year older than you is wiser than you.”

The verses of poets had tremendous power. A vivid example of this is that Ali Dhuh, a distinguished poet, put a whole kin group into a disastrous war by reciting his well-known poem “Guba” (That Which Burns). On the other hand, Salan Arabey’s declaration “Waar tolow colka jooji” (Oh, my kin, please stop the hostility) disarmed the warring factions of the Ahmed Farah and Dahir Farah subclans, who had reneged on all agreements and were ready that day to annihilate each other.

In a comparison of traditional Somali society with that of current times, it is self-evident that the former was far more thoughtful and intelligent. Bullets and immorality dominate today, showing the magnitude of intellectual and cultural bankruptcy. Undoubtedly, as with any other society, old Somali society had its own share of negative values and vileness. But the positive elements usually prevailed, thanks to the guidance of the traditional intelligentsia. Today, however, it is the other way around.

Culture and Society:
The Era of Great Awakening, 1940s–1960s

The period of roughly two decades commencing around the end of World War II and ending in the 1960s was significant in the history of the development of Somali society and culture. The whole spectrum of Somali life was characterized by an overwhelming feeling of rejuvenation or rebirth, a general sense of being on the threshold of a new experience.

In this section, I endeavor to examine how this renaissance expressed itself in forms of cultural creation. I begin by looking briefly at three salient aspects of this rebirth. The first was the transformation of people’s consciousness from kin loyalty to a higher form of
Nationalism as a Major Theme of Oral Expression

Any examiner of the Somali verbal art of the past fifty years will note that soomaalimimo, or patriotism, is the major theme in almost all major works. The relation between Somali nationalism and oral expression is of paramount importance. First, a word of forewarning: what is routinely referred to as soomaalimimo need not be associated solely with the period of struggle for independence or even the days of Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan. The concept of soomaalimimo as a communal identity has obviously existed since the time when the Somali entity was forged through culture, language, geographical location, and ethnicity. A camelboy would sarcastically reply, “I’m Somali” to an inquiry about his clan. Similarly, a nomadic woman whose husband was not around used to say, “We’re Somalis” in reply to strangers’ questions about who her family was; it was a sign that the wife was not prepared to host guests. The travelers would in turn say, “We’re Somalis, but which clan?” The camelboy and nomadic woman were aware that their own lineage ultimately led to their Somalihood. This knowledge made Somalia unique among other sub-Saharan countries, where people do not identify themselves with the national name that their country assumed after independence.

Nationalism is not a mere phrase, correctly believed. In fact, Somali the modern concept was given in times, Somalis collaborated in Somalism through a new structure shared by all Somalis. This became consciousness for many people old affinities or straddled the war, and lasting jumble of contradictions writers deal with this subject, the long old. Although a detailed explanation scope of this chapter, I will picture that stretches across the history of Somalia, the image of the deep, a well-known character Somali oral expression during the

The imagination of Somali people deep as a symbol of the country’s reason for choosing a she-camel to in the nomadic cultural background, the she-camel is the meat whose she-camel is stolen does not a camel has just given birth missed from the beasts. To understand in oral narratives is to read the

In particular, changes in the history of Somalia over the past has been into four different periods. The period. The following stanza by Young oral expression of this age:

Hadhuub min sitoo hushasho
“Ha maalin” la leeyahay a
Dagaal nimuu haysto meel.
Hubktisu hangooy yahay a
(I’m a man with a milking up
But told not to milk it for love
I’m a man dangerously endowed
Whose only weapon is a weapon)

The year 1960 marked the
Somali Republic was born at last.
Nationalism is not a mere political concern, as many have incorrectly believed. In fact, Somali nationalism existed long before the modern concept was given its political interpretation. In recent times, Somalis collaborated in an organized manner to achieve Somaliism through a new structure: a modern and independent state shared by all Somalis. This became an ideology that superseded the kin consciousness for many people. Others, however, stuck to their old affinities or straddled the two worldviews, creating in their wake a jumble of contradictions. Contemporary poets and playwrights deal with this subject, voicing the new and criticizing the old. Although a detailed explanation of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will present one reasonably elaborate depiction that stretches across three or four different periods of modern Somali history: the image of a symbolic she-camel called Maan-deeq, a well-known character frequently used in most genres of Somali oral expression during the past forty years or so.

The imagination of Somali poets and playwrights created Maandeeq as a symbol of the country, the state, and sovereignty. The reason for choosing a she-camel to embody the most valued ideals lies in the nomadic cultural background of most of the authors. In this context, the she-camel is the most valued of all property. The man whose she-camel is stolen does not rest, and the one whose she-camel has just given birth misses no prosperity but has to protect it from the beasts. To understand the evolution of Maandeeq’s image in oral narratives is to read the history of the modern Somali state.

In particular, changes in Maandeeq’s image symbolize the history of Somalia over the past half a century, which can be divided into four different periods. The first was the preindependence period. The following stanza by Yusuf Hagi Adan is an example of the oral expression of this age:

Hadhuub nin sitoo hashiisaa irmaan
"Ha maalin" la leeyahaan ahay
Dagaal nimuu haysto meel halisoo
Hubkiis yahgo yahaa ahay
(I’m a man with a milking vessel and a dairy camel
But told not to milk it for himself
I’m a man dangerously encompassed by war
Whose only weapon is a wooden hook)

The year 1960 marked the second period. An independent Somali Republic was born at last. The streets of Mogadishu, Hargeisa,
and everywhere else were filled by jubilant people dancing in celebration:

Maantay curatoo
Caanaha badisee
An maalxo hasheenna Maandeeq

(Today is its first delivery
Her production increases
Let’s milk our she-camel, Maandeeq)

The months of June and July 1960 saw a gush of hundreds of songs composed in celebration of the joyous occasion of the independence, but the feeling would soon change. What happened? Abdillahi Qarshi answers:

Hasbaan toban sano u heesaayey
Hadhuubkiyo heeryadiba cuntee
Lixdankaan haybin jirey maxaa helay?

(The she-camel I’ve been singing about for ten years
Has eaten both the milking vessel and the saddle
What happened to the [year of] sixty I so much longed for?)

The poet angrily depicts the people’s concern by questioning the misallocation of the supposedly increased spring milk of the suckling Maandeeq. A Somali audience would easily decipher the message. The poet shows that independence was beginning to fail the people who struggled for it.

A later reference to Maandeeq was made by the significant composer Hussein Aw Farah. In a song that begins with “Markii ay gabeene” [When they failed her [Maandeeq]], Farah portrays a she-camel flagrantly neglecteted by her herdsmen—tortured by thirst, hunger, and blood-sucking ticks—that is finally rescued by good men who move her to rich pastures and protect her from the effects of chronic diseases. A great Somali artist customarily expresses the feelings of the majority of the people at any given time. In this example, Farah, in anticipation of badly needed reform, depicts the jubilation with which the majority welcomed the military coup in 1969.

Shortly thereafter, however, poets who used to complain about misallocation of the she-camel’s milk and a drought during which they grossly suffered portrayed the slaughter of Maandeeq. Silence descended on the whole country as militaristic regimentation became the order of the times.

Dhabanada ayaan labada suurta:
Dhibaataay runtii noqotay oc:
Sallax buu ku dhexayaa afka:

(With my two thumbs pressed
It’s truly a difficult to face
The mouth that dares to show)

Finally, let us consider a poem found in a play called Aqoon iska ah (standing), jointly authored in 1960 by “Hadrawi,” Saeed Salah Abdi, and “Gariye,” and Musse Abdi Elmi. It is presented by a character named Daabas from the Dahson family. Dahson is tormented afternoon a disease who cannot help her but press the doctor’s real advice to Dahson is to abandon her power to cure her, an army off      2
structions of the doctor, Dahson is told. He supplies her with medicine. Furthermore, Dahson sees that her husband, Dulmar, with whom she was fair. The play painfully depicts

Cirrolihih dhulku aaway?
Yaa caruurtii halleeyey?
Caaniihii dhashu aaway?
Hashii yaa candho gooyey?
Cindiid yaa na wadaajey?
Isna sii caaylaaya?
Camakinnu xumaal?
Bal ayaan u cawdaan?
Yaa codeeyka kasaaya?
Dhaayahagga caawimay?
Yaa curuuda dhayaaga?
Jinjimii cududaydiyo
Cambarkii surku aaway?
Mee hugaagii cusbada?
Alla yaan cuskaduu?
Ciirsii yaan ka filaa?
became the order of the times. "Abdulkadir Hirsi" (Listen to the Truth) captures the beginning of the suffocation of creativity:

Dhabanada ayaan labada suul dhiyagag hayaaye
Dhibaataay rontii noqotay oo la isku dhaadhiic yee
Sallax buu ku dhagaayaa afkii laga dhaawaa jaa"y

(With my two thumbs pressed against the cheeks, staring
It's truly a difficulty to face imprisonment.
The mouth that dares to shout sticks to a stony floor)

Finally, let us consider a portrait of Maan deeq being mutilated, found in a play called Aqoon iyo Afgarad (Knowledge and Understanding), jointly authored in 1972 by Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame "Hadrawi," Saeed Salah Ahmed, Mohamed Hashi Dhamaa "Gariye," and Musse Abdi Elmi. In this play, Maan deeq is represented by a character named Dahson (Invisible), a girl from a poor family. Dahson is tormented and becomes blind. She visits a doctor, who cannot help her but prescribes medication anyway. The doctor's real advice to Dahson is to look for the one man with the power to cure her, an army officer named Dahir. Following the instructions of the doctor, Dahson takes the prescription note to Dahir. He supplies her with medication that makes her condition worse. Furthermore, Dahir seeks to use Dahson as bait for her sister, Dulum, with whom he would like to have an extramarital affair. The play painfully depicts the anguish and distress of Dahson.

Cirrolihii dhuulku aaway?
Yaa caarurtti halleeyey?
Caaniihii dhashu aaway?
Hashii yaa caadho gooyey?
Cindii yaa na wadaajey?
Isna sii caaylaa?
Camalkiinu xumaal
Bal ayaan u caawdo?
Yaa codkayga kasaayay?
Dhaayahaygan caaweermay
Yaa cruuqda dhaayaya?
Jinjimii cududaydiyo
Cambarkii surku aaway?
Mee hugaayji cusbaa?
Ala yaaan cuskaadaa?
Ciirsii yaaan ka filaa?
(Where are the elders of the land?
Who has abused the children?
Where is the milk for the babies?
Who has cut the udder of the she-camel?
Who has made us share stupefying cocktail?
And is getting himself fatter?
How ridiculous are your deeds!
Whom should I complain to?
Who should understand my voice?
My blurred eyesight
Who should medicate the veins?
The bangles on my arms
Where is the amber on my neck?
Where is my new dress?
O Lord, whom should I turn to?
Whom should I expect to help?)

Even the dress and the fashionable jewelry of the defenseless and blind victim are stripped off her, one by one. With no guide, Dahson falls over a steep cliff, indicative of the times. In the end, a rescue operation must be mounted by the people to retrieve her.

This play seems to contain references about circumstances in the late 1960s. However, a careful analysis reveals that the play is a statement on what was happening in the 1970s. An example is the “infallible” officer, who has all the power yet no one dares to blame him for anything. The last scenes of the play seem to be a deliberate attempt to finish a sad story with an artificial happy ending. Such a practice was common during the military dictatorship. Moreover, this final act could be the result of last-minute censorship by the Ministry of Education, so that the play would meet the standards for study materials for secondary schools.

Education as a Major Theme of Oral Expression

One of the attributes of the great awakening of the period under discussion was a generalized realization of the importance of modern education. Earlier, the colonial administration was suspected of having covert designs to convert the Somalis to the Christian faith. By the 1950s, however, this attitude dramatically changed in favor of the campaign for modern education. Somali oral expression always reflects issues of public concern, so the idea that knowledge is the key to development and that the Somalis ought to take note of this was reiterated by many poets, including Ali Husein Hirsi, Osman Yusuf Kenadid, Abdullahi Ismael “Balaya-Ass,” Ali Elmi Ali. These cultural notables are now able to write:

In regard to popular songs, the most memorable piece in 1961:

Aqoon la’aani waa iftiin la’aani
Waa aqal iyo ilays la’aan
Ogaada ogaada dugsiyyaada ogaada
Oo gaada oo ogadu
Walalaayaal oo adaal

(Lack of knowledge is lack of knowledge. Homelessness and no light. Be aware, be aware of school. Be aware, be aware. Brother, be aware!)

John Johnson reminds us that the songs like this clearly reveal the struggle for freedom. The mass holds and individuals received education is lack of enlightenment. Education is not only limited to public school, but it also includes poetry, newspapers, and artistically designed songs to spread the messages of the resistance. The poems and the intrinsic melody of the songs were created by the only legendary festa, Fenjti (The Light of Education). Rather, the words edubsan used in the dissemination of messages through the medium of song. Plays were undoubtedly the most important medium for modern education. It was the exception of a very few, however, when they were promoting.

In the 1950s and 1960s, people would use music as a tool for change. The positive protagonists. For instance, in the “Balaya-Ass” 1959 play “Iban Sabool” (A Man Who Trick), written by a man named Elmi, a descriptive presentation of the changing times. The play is about a beautiful woman (the girl symbolizes Somalia's...
Jewelry of the defenseless and by one. With no guide, Dahi of the times. In the end, a rescue people to retrieve her.

Stories about circumstances in the play reveal that the play is a result of last-minute censorship of the military dictatorship, and the play would meet the standards of the time.

Prescription

Awakening of the period under the prism of the importance of modernization was suspected of Somalis to the Christian faith. Dramatically changed in favor of Somali oral expression also so the idea that knowledge is Somalis ought to take note of, including Ali Husein Hirsi, Osman Yusuf Kenadid, Abdullahi Sulaan “Timaa-Adde,” Mohamed Ismael “Balaya-Ass,” Ali Elmi Afyare, and arey Isse Karshie. All of these cultural notables are now dead, and their life histories wait to be written.

In regard to popular songs, Abdillahi Qarshi composed his most memorable piece in 1961:

Aqoon la’aani waa iftiin la’aane
Waa aqal iyo ilays la’aane
Ogaada ogaada dugsiiyada ogaada
Oo gaada oo ogadaa
Walaalayaal oo adaal

(Lack of knowledge is lack of enlightenment
Homelessness and no light
Be aware, be aware of schools, be aware
Be aware, be aware
Brother, be aware!)

John Johnson reminds us that this song was one of the most popular songs for several years, to the extent that it was chosen as the signature tune of Mogadishu Radio. It was later replaced by “Dhul-kayaga” (Our Land).

The immense popularity and memorization by the public of songs like this clearly reveal the eagerness with which most households and individuals received education in the 1960s. “Lack of education is lack of enlightenment” was a favorite expression. Plays, poetry, newspapers, and artist groups adapted names derived from the words and the intrinsic meaning of this song. One such derivative was given to the only literary journal of the time, Iftiin Aqoonta (The Light of Education). This was not merely a coincidence. Rather, the words education and enlightenment were often used in the dissemination of modern literature through the media. Plays were undoubtedly the major form of art advocating the quest for modern education. Ironically, the playwrights themselves, with the exception of a very few, had no chance for the formal education they were promoting.

In the 1950s and 1960s, plays depicted educated characters as positive protagonists. For instance, in Mohamed Ismael “Balaya-Ass”’s 1959 play Irin Sabooy (A Poor Daughter), a pivotal character is a man named Elmi, a descriptive name meant to signify an educated man. The play is about a beautiful and worthy girl from a poor family (the girl symbolizes Somali sovereignty). She is vulnerable and
needs care. Uneducated men try to seduce her and take advantage of her. They all fail to win her, but they keep pestering her until Elmi finally appears on the scene. The play had a simple plot, representative of the plays of the period. The underlying message, however, promotes nationalism and enlightenment, thereby expressing Mohamed Ismael's conviction that independence and true sovereignty can be achieved through education alone.

A later example is Hassan Sheikh Mumin's 1969 play Gaaraa-Bidhaan (Fireflies), in which the protagonist is a young man who goes abroad for higher education. The man returns after some years and is saddened by the state of backwardness in his country. He works hard to educate the people. The only sources of criticism Mumin has for this character concern the character's marriage to a European woman and the shaky relationship between his wife and his extended, tradition-abiding family. The play expresses disapproval of marriage to foreigners and what is seen as a serious deviation from cultural origins.

A pertinent question to ask is whether this image of the educated Somali in modern oral art forms (including plays) is typically accurate. Unfortunately, it is not. The artists were reflecting the feelings of those who had a profound understanding of the significance of education, but many of these artists became disappointed in the efforts of those who were given the opportunity, through the meager resources of the state, to become educated. The poems and songs of the last twenty years are replete with lamentations and condemnation, as the once-positive depiction of the educated is tarnished by images of surrender or cowardice. An example of this shift is found in a play called Qaran iyo Qabii (State and Clanism), by Abdi Magane, staged in Djibouti in 1985. The protagonist is a character named Samadid, a young graduate in charge of a government agency. Instead of acting professionally, befitting his status, he plunges himself into clan politics. The agency becomes bankrupt, and he undermines his own future.

Although this period of great awakening came to an end around 1971 or 1972, its last thrusts delivered the creation of a Somali orthography, completed on 21 October 1972. Abdille Raje's poetry is representative of this moment:

Labaatan iyo laba aamustiyo shaqal irmaaneya
Ebyaniyo haddaan magac-u-yaal ku arkay joornaalka
Mar haddii afkaygii la qoray aabbe iyo hooyo
Mar haddaan amaahsiga ka baxay lagu agoontoobey
Abaal waxa leh nimankii faraato soo abaabulaye

Amiirrino sin iyo garab jirjirka
Aafkaa qalaad iyo maxaa eeg ka sugan yahay
Anaa macallimta jirka iyo markii uu bixiyaa
(Twenty-two consonants with opening i sound)

Having seen an article and the column
Having my mother and father
Having relieved myself from the burden of orphans
Gratitude to the men who are to blame: They created a mammoth problem
Why should I accept foreignness, I too am a teacher who needs support.

The cultural excitement and eventual achievement, heady though it was, gave the children their place in despotic—a killer of human elements.

Arrested
The Extortionist

The popular characters that are narrated to children include a small boy, called Afar-Bole (Four-Throat), in children's stories, is said to be
Among the instructive and ridiculous
appear is the following one:

One day, Higis's mother left for market, knowing that the little boy Afar-Bole is widely known for his ability to disguise himself as someone else. He goes to the market and dresses and wears a veil like the mother's. He brings milk to him. Afar-Bole, being young and gorging on milk, needs the voice of Higis's aunt. He . When Afar-Bole's mother comes close. Quickly, Afar-Bole grasps Higis, exposing its desperate aim of scaring the child to
reduce her and take advantage of her weakness; they keep pestering her until she plays a simple plot, repetitively. The underlying message, which is a call for enlightenment, thereby exponents of independence and true education alone.

In Mumin’s 1969 play Gaarara, the protagonist is a young man who is about to be married to a woman, but he refuses to go through with it. The play expresses the idea that women should not be treated as mere possessions of their husbands. The character eventually decides to leave his country in order to find a better life. The play is seen as a serious deviation from the traditional values of the society.

Whether this image of the educated individual (including plays) is typically composed of individuals who are reflecting the feelings and experiences of the educated, the poems and plays present a picture of the educated as hardworking, devoted, and committed to their education.

The cultural excitement and euphoria that greeted this important achievement, heady though it was, could not forestall the coming of despotism—a killer of human creativity.

**Arrested Development:**
**The Extortion of a Culture**

The popular characters that are often used in traditional Somali oral narratives include a small boy by the name of Higis and a beast called Afar-Bo’le (Four-Throats). This fictional beast, usually found in children’s stories, is said to frighten youngsters out of their wits. Among the instructive and rich tales in which Higis and Afar-Bo’le appear is the following one:

One day, Higis’s mother left him at home. Afar-Bo’le, knowing that the little boy was alone, came to him. Afar-Bo’le is widely known for his cunning and tricks to deceive children when it is hunting them. The beast has the ability to disguise itself as someone familiar to the children. It dresses and wears a veil like Higis’s old aunt, who usually brings milk to him. Afar-Bo’le knows that the boy is hungry and needs milk. From some distance, the beast mimics the voice of Higis’s aunt. Higis cheerfully welcomes the impostor. When Afar-Bo’le enters the house, Higis joyfully comes close. Quickly, Afar-Bo’le takes off its disguise and grabs Higis, exposing its dreadful canine teeth with the aim of scaring the child to death.
Of course, Higis is not real, and nobody has ever seen Afar-Bo’le. Both are creations designed to deliver educative messages to each new generation. The emphasis is one of vigilance and alertness against the myriad deceits and sinister acts of evil forces.

The Somalis of the late 1960s and early 1970s apparently forgot the lessons that their ancestors stored in this tale. Like Higis, they fell into a deadly trap. Such is the fate of contemporary Somalia. The critical question is, why did Somalis, including some of the sagacious ones, embrace the military order that was introduced by the coup d’état of 1969? Obviously, the first reason is that most Somalis were sick of the incompetence and corruption of the civilian government of the day. Second, the army was regarded with a great deal of awe, verging on a romanticization of its role as the defender of the nation. Third, the Somalis are basically nonconformists; they like change. Fourth, Somalia was part of a pattern of military coups in Africa that year. The fifth reason is that events were moving at a fast pace and that the low level of public awareness made it impossible for Somalis to anticipate the true consequences of military rule.12

Culture and literature were among the areas most profoundly affected by the military regime. The cultural structures of the nation were undone and spiritual values distorted. As the traditional moral code of right and wrong became reversed, what was once seen as offensive assumed a degree of acceptance or was even perceived as salutary. For instance, theft, lying, hypocrisy, rape, and dishonesty began to be defined as indicators of ragannimo (manhood). Xoogga Dalka (the National Army), one of the most respected social institutions, turned into a much-feared tool of repression and killing.

The opposition groups that stepped forward were not much better than Siyaad Barre. They adopted the same policy of political intolerance, clanist rivalry, and blind violence, as though salvation lay in surpassing the regime in acts of killing and destruction. Two reasons, among others, can be suggested for this tragedy: The first is that the leadership of these groups consisted of former Siyaad Barre loyalists who fell out with him simply because they found their political ambitions threatened by Barre’s pernicious manipulations. After all, many were military officers who had been involved in turning the National Army into a looting, raping, and intimidating concern. As the Somalis say, “Hal booli ahi nirig xalaal ah ma dhasho” (A stolen she-camel does not give birth to a rightful baby). The second factor for the spread of this grievous mischief is that the broad masses did not rise up in opposition, mainly because the new destructive political culture of “Massafo” was already at an advanced stage.

Somalia has been ravaged by a political culture that empowers by this perverted system is still hostage to them. Any attempt to oust all those who dominated the country by proving them of the weapons they used to pull down the de-funct National Army.

**Corpus of oral expression**

In this chapter, I have attempted to separate the modern period between traditional Somali thought and the postcolonial period. From thereon, it could be argued that the country is still in a state of flux, from the past and the current state of affairs.

The corpus of oral expression is the first section of chapter has shown that this period was governed by a moral code of behavior, tolerance, rule of law, and a strong sense of the individual, to the detriment of leaders, who have been shown to be insecure, negative attitudes and behaviors in such events as kid or subjugation, however, community elders and leaders were always able to either prevent or deal with them quickly. Consequently, peace was maintained over time and is under control.

Much of the modern period, since the 1960s, represented a significant departure from the traditional. An entire generation emerged and blossomed, the effects of which included a strengthening of political awareness, a rejection of the old idea of kin loyalty to a Pan-Somali identity, and an increasing acceptance of the need for decolonization and political independence. Most took this period as the beginning of a new millennium, as a way of promoting Somali aspirations on a broader scale.

The bulk of material reviewed in this chapter is in line with the evidence that old Somali national identity is dead, and that making of the ongoing bloody
obody has ever seen Afar-Bole. They have educative messages to each other, and they are vigilant and alertness for acts of evil forces.

By the late 1970s apparently forgotten is the tale. Like Higis, they are a tale of contemporary Somalia. It is a story of malice, including some of the order that was introduced by the first reason is that most Somali and corruption of the civilian was regarded with great suspicion of its role as the defender of basic nonconformists; they of a pattern of military coups that events were moving at a record speed awareness made it impossible for the military to avert the consequences of military power.

The areas most profoundly affected were those that had a cultural structure of the nation's present. As the traditional values reversed, what was once accepted as common became wrong, such as lying, hypocrisy, rape, and other forms of violence. The indicators of ragannimo (male honor), one of the most respected and feared institutions of society, disappeared and was replaced by a new form of violence. Violence was not as much a real policy of violence; it was an expression of fear, terror, and destruction. Two names are responsible for this tragedy: The first is the firing on the people of the former Siyaad Barre's pernicious manipulators who had been involved in killings, looting, raping, and intimidation of women and children. The second is the men who gave birth to a rightful baby. The only solution is the reconstruction of the nation, mainly because the new

destructive political culture of "bowing before guns rather than reason" was already at an advanced stage.

Somalia has been ravaged by these kinds of people, who in turn are empowered by this perversion of traditional culture. The country is still hostage to them. Any attempt at rescue must start by defeating all those who dominated the country in recent times and depriving them of the weapons they have illegally inherited from the defunct National Army.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to highlight the stark contradiction between traditional Somali thinking and that of the present. It is my contention that no neutral observer of Somali cultural production could fail to notice the astonishing distance between the dignity of the past and the current state of mindless degradation.

The corpus of oral expression and tradition examined in the first section of chapter has shown that precolonial Somali society was governed by a moral code of right and wrong based on reason, tolerance, rule of law, and a strong sense of obligation, on the part of the individual, to the general welfare. "People, know your leaders; leaders, know your limits" goes an ancient Somali saying. To be sure, negative attitudes and behaviors did exist, sometimes resulting in such events as kidnappings and subversive fighting. It must be emphasized, however, that community elders, poets, and other wise individuals were always able to either preempt such conflicts or settle the issues quickly. Consequently, peace was maintained, and hatred was kept under control.

Much of the modern period, particularly the 1940s through the 1960s, represented a significant landmark in Somali history and cultural development. An entire body of art and oral expression emerged and blossomed, thereby playing a major role in the strengthening of political awareness—including the transformation from kin loyalties to a Pan-Somali nationalism. This change was crucial to decolonization and the establishment of a modern state. Most took this period as the beginning of a better life, but such hope began to dry up by the end of the 1960s. Somalia's failure to bring about a system of competent leadership and governance capable of fulfilling Somali aspirations led to the current plight.

The bulk of material reviewed in this essay provides ample evidence that old Somali national culture had very little to do with the making of the ongoing bloody anarchy and political immorality. In
fact, these are products of disrespect and are relentless violations of the deep cultural values and social norms of the Somali people.

But the voice of protest is not done, and poets continue to speak. The following are Abshir Nur Farah’s words, reflective of the cry of the 1990s:

Moorryaan hubaysani balay, noo hor-kacayaane
Wixii hudurku nugu beeyay bay, ku haminnaa yaa ne
Haddaan laga hor-tagin wacad allaad, marin habowdeene
Helina wayde hadafkaan rabnaye, nugu habboonaaye.

( Armed Moryans would only lead us to disaster
They dream of the very thing that the sickness planted in us
If unchallenged, by Allah’s word, you will lose your way
And you will not find that which we wish and deserve)

Finally, it is my firm belief that a systematic cultural renewal is as urgently needed as any plan for political and economic rebuilding. Preservation of what is left of the nation’s cultural heritage is a monumental task, but such culture can do miracles in Somalia; it can restore sanity and hope, reintroduce democratic thinking, and help formulate a new vision of local community and national reconstruction. But to come to the aid of their country, poets, artists, and other traditional intellectuals must be helped to pick up the pieces of their own shattered lives and regroup.

Notes

The major references used in this chapter are unpublished works of oral expression collected by the author during the past fifteen years. These materials exist in the form of tape recordings and original manuscripts in the author’s possession.

2. Arraweelo is a very popular oral narrative about a ruthless legendary queen. For details, see Xaange, Sheeko Xarriwooyin Sooimaliyada.
3. According to the oral narrative, Geeddi Babow was a despotic ruler based in Bur Hakaba, in the area between the Shabelle and Juba rivers.
5. Gubal has become the name of a famous series of poetic combats centered around a kin rivalry. It was initiated by Ali Adan Goroyo (Ali Dhuh) in the early 1930s. Other prominent poets who had combated with him included Qaman Bulhan and Salan Arabey.
6. See Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry.

7. For more information about its transformation into the present-detailed account of the history and name: Masraaxda.
8. Author’s interview with two dillan kaxbii Uidhgal iyo Hadid. The poet alludes to a Somali saying by a licentious and irreverent herdsman’s protest against what he considered the abuse of a woman (sticking his mouth to a stony floor) and “plain about the slaying of his goats in front of my house.”
9. This journal was issued in 1990 and was edited by Shire Jama.
10. The poet refers to antipathy to and uses of language.
11. Despite the intimidating attempt to portray the realities of life, a leading example is the first example is Mohamed Warsameh, his gallant and revolting that led to the poet’s exile to a remote region for several years. The second example is that of Siyaad Barre himself attended the historic conference with outrage. He attacked the play with a diatribe. The third example is that of the late Shire Jama, who was serialized in the leading daily in the national traditional literature. The major events in the life of a parastatal (Wakaaladda Habek), a former military officer, Elmi Guelleh, who was also a poet.
12. Mooryaam is a new Somali term for those who indulge in murder and other criminal activities.
7. For more information about the emergence of the genre heilloo and its transformation into the present-day heess, see Johnson, Heelloo. For a detailed account of the history and nature of Somali theatre, see Afrax, Fan Masraxeekaa.

8. Author’s interview with two statesmen of modern Somali art, Abdiraham Qasim and Hussein Aw Farah, Mogadishu, 1979.

9. The poet alludes to a Somali parable that ends with a well-known saying by a fictitious and irreverent pastoralist. The saying expresses the herdsmen’s protest against what he saw as the unfairness of muzzling him (sticking his mouth to a stone floor) in order to instruct him not to complain about the slaying of his goats by the order of Allah.

10. This journal was issued in Mogadishu during 1966 and 1967, and was edited by Shire Jama.

11. The poet refers to and uses the newly introduced terms of Somali grammar.

12. Despite the intimidating atmosphere, many literary creators attempted to portray the realities of military rule. Consider three examples from three major areas of creative writing: poetry, theatre, and fiction. The first example is Mohamed Warsame “Hadrawi”’s two 1973 poems, “Hai be qalay raqdeed” and “Wadnahaan far ku hayaa.” Both were early warnings that led to the poet’s exile to a remote village and his silence at gunpoint for several years. The second example is Abdi Mohamed Amin’s play Muuf, which was performed as part of the official celebration of 1 May 1979 (Somali Workers’ Day). It was staged at the Mogadishu National Theatre. Siyad Barre himself attended the performance and immediately reacted with outrage. He attacked the playwright and everyone involved in a half-hour diatribe. The third example is my second novel, Galle-maaruf, which was serialized in the leading daily Xidigga Oktobar until it was suddenly discontinued. I was arrested and interrogated for several days by the National Security Service. The major events of the story take place in the offices of a parasitist (Wakaaaladda Horumarinta Qudaarta), run by a middle-aged former military officer, Elmi Gurey, who is corrupt and sinister.

13. Mooyaan is a new Somali word invented to refer to the armed thugs who indulge in murder and extortion in Somalia.

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