

UFAHAMU

JOURNAL OF THE AFRICAN ACTIVIST ASSOCIATION

AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024-1130

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UFAHAMU

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VOLUME XVII NUMBER 2

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EDITORIAL

...so long as a plant has not blossomed
One can hope that its flowering will be beautiful.
What a mirage surrounds what has not yet blossomed!
What a disappointment when one can no longer
Blame the abjection on the deficiency!

Hugh MacDiarmid, "Reflections in A Slum"

In a beautiful language, MacDiarmid captures the dilemma of, to borrow from Langston Hughes, "a dream deferred." For a long time, African leaders have been shouting 'wolf' when the predator was only 'wolf-ing' the sheep with their own blessing. In the meantime Africa's peasants are still pursuing the dream. Pastoralists are still mistaking mirages for water. City dwellers are still bribed with dividends extracted from the labor of the peasant/pastoralist. As Fanon had stated in his The Wretched of the Earth, African peasants have gained comparably less benefits than their French counterparts had after the bourgeois revolution of 1789. It must not be construed, however, that by putting the blame on African rulers and their acolytes, we are giving neo-colonialism any slack. For before colonialism retreated from places like Africa, it ensured that newly independent countries were for all practical purposes deeply entrenched in the socio-economic system of the metropole. Rather, our disappointment with Africa's leaders is best described by the Somali proverb, "masaari geed ma goyseen, haddaan geed kale ku goyn" (an ax wouldn't cut/fell a tree had it not been for the support of another tree). It hurts when Africa's rulers accept to play the role of the handle.

To be fair to our rulers, we should be honest to acknowledge that they are authentic expressions of their people. Our use of the word 'people' is not to blur the class composition of our countries. The group of people we are referring to is the urban elite among whose ranks spring most of the technocrats/bureaucrats who run the state. Intellectuals among this group are, more often than not, expected to be in the vanguard of the struggle for total liberation. The role of most intellectuals in this field is less than enviable. It only becomes apparent why the populace take refuge in their God(s) to spare them from the ventriloquism of the intellectuals.

No less shunned by the populace are members of another group of intellectuals. These preach aloofness from the humdrum of daily life. Instead, they advocate a life of research, not knowing that any research which does not jolt one from apathy is not worth the name. They, in their own ways, succumb to historical catalepsy. Erudition as an end in

itself only furthers estrangement from reality. The two groups of intellectuals share a common denominator. Said Samatar writes in "Nomad on the Nile", "The tragedy is that their [intellectuals'] artful tongues have yet to be harnessed for a responsible, imaginative search for [total emancipation] rather than contempt and opprobrium."

The scene of Somali intellectual life is no different from that which exists in other parts of Africa. Somalia has had its share of charlatans in scholars' robes. The magnitude of our particular problems is all the more exacerbated by the absence of a modicum of historical responsibility on the part of these quacks. Indeed, one can't but weep for the sorry state of Somali intellectuals. It is sometimes difficult to imagine of any benefit most of our graduates have reaped from education both formal and informal. To continue committing past blunders--under the mask of scholarship--attests to Somali intellectual sterility. Education which does not bring about change in the consciousness of the "educated" is hardly beneficial to the individual, let alone to society. Some intellectuals wait for epiphanies to come out of the slumber. Some do claim to have found an exit from the slumber, but refuse to share with us what is needed for the metamorphoses. Their refusal is indicative of an abysmal ignorance. For, as a Chinese adage has it, "To know and not to act is not to know."

Lest the disparaging comments on our intellectuals are taken to suggest an intention, on our part, to paint a lugubrious picture of Somali life, we must point out that cosmic optimism pervades Somali tradition. Indeed, a depiction of angst is not only inutile indulgence, but ignores the historical role of the populace. Here, once again, we reiterate our sincere belief in the strength of an amalgamation of popular and intellectual forces in the country, as unity of action and purpose is sorely needed at this juncture of Somali history. It is hoped that the articles in this special issue will shed some light on the major hurdles which encumber our progress towards a Somali agenda for unity. In "The Need for Preserving Somali Culture," Ms. Holmes describes the importance of cultural identity to nation building and the fostering of a national consciousness. Culture must, therefore, be preserved to ensure the passing of tradition to posterity. Somali culture/tradition is replete with structures which allow one to seek redress against injustice. The role of the *heerbeegi*, men well-versed in dispensing justice, is clearly described in the Somali social fabric. In "Gaal Dil", Abucar explores the dialectics of justice in Somali pre and post-colonial tradition. The formation of the nation state proves to be the nemesis of the Somali traditional system of dispensing justice. Under the nation state, the dispensing of justice is entrusted to a few who owe their allegiance to those who appoint them rather than to the public at large. The complexities of the nation state breed the mushrooming of diverse

organs under whose aegis justice can be tampered with and sometimes made victim.

Somali oral poetry with its mnemonic qualities is a viable agent which ensures the survival of tradition in the minds of the young. Here, the Horatian elements of instruction and entertainment coalesce to give Somali poetry 'divine powers'. Rirache's piece reveals an interesting aspect of Somali culture: that poetry which has over the centuries become a term of reference for Somalis is yet to be defined and structured perhaps bespeaks a similar need to re-define the nation's socio-political structures. Our concept of what a Somali is perhaps a concoction of a few elites who for a variety of reasons have found it easier to perpetuate existing stereotypes rather than embarking on a rigorous research for the truth.

The association of divine powers with poetry is what allows Umar Ma'allin to take up the cudgels for women's rights. In his poem, Umar captures the physical and emotional scars wrought on women by female infibulation. These scars rarely heal as they recur to haunt women in menstruation and then later in child birth. The need to control female sexuality through such diverse means as circumcision and the use of a chastity belt is as old as patriarchy itself. And while these means may be different, their underlying factor, as Lilian P. Sanderson explains in Against the Mutilation of Women, emanates from a value "placed upon a small vaginal orifice" by men in most societies (p.52). The social values placed on infibulation and "the suturing of the vagina" as a result of an episiotomy after child birth (in the West) should equally be castigated. Lest we feel impotent to help, we should remember as the poem states that "in the extremity of war, even laughter is some support."

Said Samatar's article on the 'Hurgumo' poetic combat also attests to the 'magical efficacy' of the word in Somali society. A legitimate concern, is Said's interpretation of the Somali driver's 'fetishes'. The latter's arsenal of fetishes include a picture of Marilyn Monroe. But in a society known for its utilitarian characteristics where, for example, a koranic school is a shack built of beer tins, Monroe's picture is no more of an object of worship than the shack is an object of desecration. The question to ask is what, if any, purpose does Monroe's picture serve for the Somali driver? To answer this question, one has to analyze the effects of cultural hegemony on a small country which can't export nuances of its own culture. Said's keen observation of the driver's fetishes reminds one of a play by Suleiman Al-Hakim, "Wafaat Rajul Mayyit" (Death of a dead man). The character intellectuals are immersed in a fantasy. One of them has a crush on a Brigitte Bardot and has a picture he affectionately calls 'B.B' in his monologue and in conversations with friends. The play unfolds how the minds of those in the periphery are besieged by cultural symbols

from the Center. The two examples above in which a Somali driver and an Egyptian intellectual 'fall in love' with Western concepts of beauty perhaps illustrate the relevance of Ariel Dorfman's The Empire's Old Clothes to any discussion on cultural hegemony. Dorfman succinctly warns to beware of the effects "innocent heroes [and heroines]" might have had on our minds.

From Somali oral poetry, we move to the works of Nuruddin Farah, so far Somalia's only novelist in English. Felix Mnthali examines how Nuruddin's trilogy, under the general rubric of "Variations on the theme of an African Dictatorship," is germane to Africa's socio-political and economic reality. To put his analysis into wider perspective, Mnthali pays a "visit" to a number of articles on Nuruddin's work. One of these articles, "A Somali Tragedy of Political and Sexual Confusion: A Critical Analysis of Nuruddin Farah's Maps," by Hilarie Kelly appeared in UFAHAMU, 16:2. It is quite natural, therefore, that Ms. Kelly was prompted to write a rejoinder which in turn whet the appetite of Mnthali to reply to some of the issues raised in the rejoinder.

Moving from the domain of literature, Mukhtar's article dwells on history - another subject for which Somali scholars have a great predilection. His piece bares the grim fact that history is that of the victor. Add to this a tendency common among some in academia to only glean reality from critiques of writings. Many scholars become too lackadaisical to challenge the official version of a government whose blessings they need for research clearances. Many Somali and foreign scholars have relied on extrapolations to explain socio-political phenomena in the riverine areas. To confess ignorance about the region is one thing; to insist on extrapolations borders on intellectual dishonesty. Mukhtar is one of the few scholars who can claim to be an expert on the riverine areas. Clan names in this piece, as in the rest of the articles in the issue, do not, under any circumstances, allude to a cynicism of any sort. Our anger must be directed against the institutionalization of the concept and practice of clanism. We must also beware not to perpetuate colonial terminology in describing ourselves. It is incumbent upon us to expropriate language and exorcise from our vocabulary words such as "tribe" which, as shown by an article of that name, is "often disparaging in its application to a 'class or set of persons'." [Ufahamu, 7:1, (1976);147]. Indeed, we are sure that the use of the word in this issue does not have such a negative connotation.

Still on the theme of the shaping of history in riverine areas, the seminal work of Ms. Ahmed on Sheikh Uways illustrates the paucity of materials in English on perhaps one of "the most important leaders of the anti-colonial struggle in East Africa." The time has come, we believe, to endeavor an honest appraisal of the role of Sheikh Uways in Somali religious and political history. Acknowledging one Sheikh's

role in the history of the Somali struggle for independence does not diminish the importance of another. Sheikh Uways' contributions to Somali independence transcend the role of the Uwaysiyya Movement during his life time. His grandson, Abdulkadir Sakhaw-eddin was the founder of the Somali Youth League (S.Y.L.), an organization generally accredited for its relentless fight for Somali independence.

Somalia's economy in the 1980's is the subject of Albert Gray's piece. His descriptive analysis of the Somali economy reads like observations by an expert without attempting a diachronic analysis of the available data. While we agree with Dr. Gray that the Somali economy is in total shambles, we do not, however, share his implied solutions to the problems. The issuing of "marketable bills, notes or bonds to the public" does not provide a panacea for the failing economy of Somalia. The U.S. government which does just that is the largest debtor-nation on earth. Nonetheless, we agree with his ideas expressed in a letter to the Editor that a real analysis of the Somali economy is best left to those economists who are Somali.

Said S. Samatar's travelogue, "Nomad on the Nile," in which he reminisces about an international conference on the Horn in Cairo concludes the articles in this issue. By reading the article, it becomes easy to understand how Africa's future is thrown to the hounds by charlatans in scholars' robes. The cacophony generated by intellectual quacks disrupts an already precarious situation in Africa. As we go to press, we are told of another international conference on the Horn to be held in Tunis sometime this year. International conferences tend, more often than not, to yield dividends for their sponsors. We hope this one will be different.

Ali Jimale Ahmed