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## **Art and Literature: The Other Weapon for Resistance**

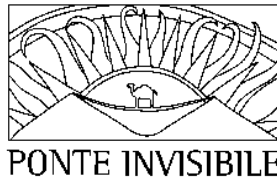
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Taxanaha *Dhaxalreeb* (*Dhaxalreeb series*):

- [1] Jama Musse Jama, Juun 2005  
*Layli Robot: Makiinad iswadda oo ciyaarta Layli Goobalay*
- [2] Cabdiraxmaan Faarax 'Barwaaqo' iyo Mohamoud H. Nugidoon, Noofember 2005  
*Qalabka iyo Suugaanta Qodaalka.*
- [3] Cabdiraxmaan Faarax 'Barwaaqo', Diisember 2005  
*Mahadhadii Muuse Xaaji Ismaaciil Galaal.*
- [4] Cabdiraxmaan Faarax 'Barwaaqo', Jeenarweri 2006  
*Kumaa ah Aabbaha Miisaanka Maansada Soomaaliyeed: ma Carraale mise Gaarriye?*
- [5] Jama Musse Jama, Abriil 2007  
*Tirada iyo habka tirsiimo ee Afsoomaaliga.*
- [6] Cabdiraxmaan Faarax 'Barwaaqo', Meey 2007  
*Miisaanku waa furaha kala asooridda badaha maansooyinka soomaaliyeed*
- [7] Ibraahin Yuusuf Axmed "Hawd", Juun 2007  
*"Dhulgariir" waa digniin culus*
- [8] Khaalid Jaamac Qodax, Oktoober 2007  
*Suugaan Xul ah iyo Abwaan Axmed Aw-geedi "Dheeraad"  
Maansoyahan mudh baxay!*
- [9] Xasan C. Madar, Maarj 2008  
*Raad ka mid ah raadadkii addoonsiga.*
- [10] Aadam Xaaji Cali Axmed, Seebtember 2008  
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*Toddobaadka Fanka iyo Suugaanta Soomaalida ee Landhan*
- [12] Xasan C. Madar, Diisember 2008  
*Ruwaanda: Xasuuqii boqolka maalmood*
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*Art and Literature: The Other Weapon for Resistance*

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## **Introduction**

### **The relationship between language, art and literature**

In the earlier years of colonization, African native languages and cultures were seen as inferior and incomprehensible and did not even deserve scientific examinations. *Nations themselves were often seen as narrations.* The power and the authority to narrate or to block other narratives from emerging were, according to Edward Said, an important aspect of the culture of the imperialism.

African nations and states don't want to be seen any more as "inventions." They have already become members of the international community and though as yet not economically prosperous they don't feel culturally inferior to the older nations.

Literature and arts particularly oral literature has played a significant role in the understanding of the state complexity and the political ideas associated with it.

This presentation highlights how literature was utilized for resistance against:

- colonial powers
- Post-colonial state corruptions, manipulations and particularly the oppression of the military regime and its abuse of human rights in the Somali context and how the military regime used also to discredit the opposition.
- and finally the lamentation of the loss of the state and the restoration of somaliland as a separate state.

## **Historical Background**

Language is the strongest and durable factor that can unite people. It is a medium for communication among nations and peoples. Language is also a tool for making meanings and producing images. For Ngugi, language is the collective memory bank of people's experience through history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, articulation, and its transmission from one generation to the next.

During the Indian struggle for independence, some Indian intellectuals who studied in Oxford and Cambridge in Britain had returned to India and joined the struggle that Gandhi was waging against the British rule in India. Gandhi demanded from them to think like Indians, to dress like Indians, to sit on the ground and eat like Indians. This was a challenge to the previous colonial system of education, which created a certain class of

Indians, who were Indian in blood but in their life style, attitude, and taste were British. Gandhi's primary objective was to see Indians appreciating their language and culture and Indians who were educated in foreign languages should be understood by the Indian masses and help them restore their epistemological worldview and culture.

Frantz Fanon (1963) exposed the psychological effects of colonial experience on the colonised peoples. He put forward the argument that colonised peoples see the world of their colonisers as great and civilised and their own world as primitive and worthless, and hence rely on the languages of the colonial powers. Though one can appreciate the revolutionary content of Fanon's statement to evoke the consciousness of the colonised peoples to revolt, evidence in the Somali society shows that Somalis never considered their language and culture as inferior to the languages and cultures of the European who colonised them.

From the beginning, Somali nationalists knew the shortcomings of independence and state construction without a national orthography by which the Somali people could write on and understand western political ideas for society/state relationship and state formation. Having a common language constitutes one of the essences of the Somali collective identity. Introducing a national orthography was considered as a part of the nation- state's survival and independence.

Language as a pattern of thought and power has become the focal point of contest between those who were interested in western political ideas as a condition for nation- state construction and those who were only interested in conceptualising politics in an Islamic context. What delayed for a long- time to have an appropriate orthography for the Somali language was the conflict between those who were in favour of Arabic to be the appropriate and acceptable official script in the country; because it is the language of the Qur'an and those who were in favour of Latin script. Adopting Latin, the later group believed, would enhance the ideology of the post-colonial state which was fashioned in western epistemology and it is also considered technologically cheaper.

When the British and Italian colonial rulers imposed their educational systems and made their languages the languages of administration and communication, Somalis protested that this would damage their religion, culture and language. The Somalis saw imposed European languages and systems of education as dilution of their Islamic education and way of life.

Religious scholars were aware of the importance of education and knowledge, which is embodied in Qur'an. The first verse of the Qur'an revealed to Prophet Mohamed starts: "*Recite, in the name of your Lord the*

*Creator. Who created man from the clots of blood? Recite, your Lord is the most Bounteous One, Who taught by the pen? Taught mankind things they did not know (surah Al-Alaq, verses 1-5)".*

In a famous Hadith, the Prophet also said to the nation (Omah) *"Go and search for knowledge even if it is in China,( China being at that time considered a place far away from the world of Islam.)"*

Language is generally seen by the Somalis as the golden key to the soul. Religious leaders were afraid if they accepted European languages and educational systems; this could erode their soul, and make them different people.

The resistance against European languages and systems of education might have been attractive from an anti-colonial perspective, but it can also create unnecessary prejudice and barriers to the flow of human knowledge and experiences between nations and peoples. In the current stage of globalisation, world knowledge and the technological aspect associated with it have its roots largely in European epistemology and cultures and express itself prime in European languages.

### **Literature and Nation State Conjunction**

Culture consists of systems of beliefs, expressive symbols and values, which define the situation in which political action takes place. It provides the subjective orientation to politics. In Africa, the state has been accommodated to African culture and must be understood through African lenses. The survival and the development of the state is even more dependent on the local political structures and ways of thinking in African societies as Migdal (1988) explained, *"There is a need constantly to look back and forth between the top reaches of the state and local society. One must see how the organisation of society, even in the remote area may dictate the character and the capabilities of politics at the centre..."* (p. xvii).

Somalis are known to have an oral and written literature through which they express themselves on daily basis. In the Somali context, literature is the historical repository of the nation and its intellectual resources. It is the poets, songwriters and playwrights who have taken on the task of explaining the myriad problems brought about by social challenges, and predicting the future.

The late Professor B.W. Andrzejewski of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) 1954-1992 based his scholarship on the study of the Somali language and literature. He translated many poems and stories exposing their richness and made them available to wider readers outside Somali society. Elaborating this point, Andrzejewski wrote *"The richness and the diversity of the Somali Poetry are vast, but so far little has been made available in translation to the world outside"* (In Johnson, 1996, p .ix).

Somali oral literature needs more substantial separate study; here we are interested only in the role and the function of literature and its articulation of national feelings and aspirations in connection to nationalism and nation state building, or the destruction of the latter.

The emergence and development of Somali literature can be divided into five major periods according to Professor B.W. Andrzejewski:

1. The pre-independence period, which Andrzejewski likes to call the Golden Era.
2. The period for the struggle for independence.
3. The aftermath of 1960, during the civilian governments, when the literature focused on the workings of nation state, parliamentary democracy and promotion of the awareness of nationalism and greater Somalia.
4. The junta period when literature was utilised both as an instrument for praise and elevation of Siad Barre personality cult and at the same time as a weapon for resistance used by the opposition against the oppressive military regime of Siyad Barre
5. After the collapse of the state, oral literature was used as the lamentations of the loss of the state in Somalia. In the case of Somaliland, oral literature was used for state restoration, state building and the process of democratisation.

The first two periods will be briefly commented and from the outset we must bear in mind that literature is mainly a reflection of political, economic and social conditions of a given society's historical juncture.

### **Literature in Pre-independence Period and its Islamic Dimension**

The pre-colonial period was characterised by conflicts and disputes, often arising from water wells, running away with women, rape and land. This doesn't mean that politics were absent from this social structure. As Bayart (1993) noted, African ethnicity is almost never lacking in politics. One can also say in every human community that exists there must be some element of politics involved in their system.

Poetic art was used to convey vital political messages to pacify inter-clan politics and it was also used for entertainment. Poetic contests were often organised during the annual spring (Gu') festivities, at times of availability of abundant water and pasture for the entire nomadic communities.

Earlier European travelers to Somali territories such as Richard Burton (1854) were impressed by the richness of the oral literature of the Somali people. Europeans were not expecting poems of higher imagery contents and quality to be found in the so-called "primitive cultures". In

appreciation of the poetic resources of the Somalis, Richard Burton wrote "The country teems with poets ...) the fine ear of these people caused them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetic expressions."

Burton also commented that each Somali poet had his recognised position in the literature, and his poems were accurately defined as if he had been reviewed in well-known magazines for a long period of time. He said that poets were received very well wherever they went and given the best hospitality, food and accommodation.

Poetry was and still is the effective oral art of influence. It has multiple functions in Somali society particularly in the pastoral communities as Said Samatar (1982) noted:

*"Poetry has the force of ritual among the Somalis and it is resorted to in the formalization and execution of almost every public act of importance: a man explains his behaviour towards others in poetic oration; marriages are contracted and terminated through use of verse; verse is chanted to fight wars and perpetuate feuds as well as to put an end to wars and feuds; and blame and praise are spread most rapidly through this medium. In short, poetry for pastoral Somalis is a principal vehicle of political power" (p.56).*

Orwin (2000), who has translated some Somali poems into English including the well known Qasim's poem named "Sweetness and bitterness" "*Macaan iyo Qadhaadh*", writes: "*Anyone who has come into contact with Somali culture will be aware of the central role poetry plays in that culture. For as long as we know, poetry has been the core form of cultural expression and is the basis upon which some other forms have been developed, in particular Somali theatre*" (In Weissbort, 2000, p.12).

Poetic art with all its philosophical, aesthetic and political dimensions did not dare to challenge the Islamic dominant worldview held by the Somali society. Morality and norms were regularly referred to Islam for acceptance or rejection and poets in their verses helped people to arrive at an appropriate judgement. The poet Raage Ugaas is generally believed to be the founder of Somali modern poetry. The wisdom of his verses in connection with practical life is highly appreciated. But Raage was also a very religious person and a Sufi too. He came from a wealthy nomadic family, left his home when he was still young and joined a dedicated group of Sufis who roamed among the nomadic population to preach Islamic values. His poems were largely moralistic with plenty of philosophical content but always within the confines of Islamic worldview.

Raage came into the scene when there were plenty of Sufi poets. Some of them were going back to the 14th century and were well spread among the Somalis. These poems were about the veneration of Sufi saints and

meditation. Among them were series of poems in veneration of Sheikh Hussein of Bale and the miracles attributed to him. The Sheikh was buried in Bale Region in Ethiopia and his shrine still attracts a lot of people. Other poets who lived at the later period, Ali Duuh, Salaan Arabey, Qamaan Bulhan and Farah Nur became famous for their verses, but they were all devoted religious people who regularly prayed five times a day "*Salat Sax*" and fasted during the holy months of Ramadan and other important Islamic days. Their poems covered a range of topics: peace and war, pastoral land rights, praise to women and horses. Their Islamic style of life and behaviour definitely enhanced their poetic prestige in the community.

The following story explains this fact. Salaan Arabay who lived 1870-1940 recited a poem in which he was able to separate the forces of two clans, who were on the verge of fighting by reciting a memorial poem starting with the following sentence, " Oh clansmen stop the war". In the poem he spoke about the evils of war and advantage of peace. After hearing Salaan's poem, it was reported that the two sides laid down their weapons and walked away from each other. Had Salaan not been seen as a devoted religious man (Salat Sax) and man of justice, his verse would not have had an effective impact on his audience. In another words it was not only the poetic aspect of the poem which was important, but also more importantly its religious content and manifestation.

As Ahmed noted, literature's main social function has been a vehicle for communication, the reservoir of the nation's collective memory and a barometer of the pulse of the nation. Classical poets had the task of warning people against coming disaster and evils that they might befall on the community, if the community behaved in certain bad ways. Such warnings always had a religious reference.

On the power and suitability of the Somali poetry for memorisation and alliteration, Ahmed Jimcaleh (1996) wrote:

*"...Somali tradition, like any other oral tradition, extols the virtues of memory, and poetry has historically been best suited for memorisation. The salient role of poetry in the Somali oral literature is attributed to the fact that their poetry is structured in alliteration, which is known for its mnemonic qualities..."* (p.9).

Political literature was utilised for resistance against the colonial powers during 1900- 1920 Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle's time and in 1970-1990 against the military regime of Siad Barre. It can be used to evoke moral issues by taking examples from the Qur'an, Islamic history and Islamic heroes. It can be used in conflict resolutions and for bravery, for praising a ruler or regime, or to tarnish them.

In the 1930s the British colonial administrators in (British Somaliland) wanted to introduce a head tax in the country. The population refused,



viewing the policy as further colonial oppression. There was a bloody confrontation between British forces and Somalilander's, particularly on Tog Dheer Region (Buroa). In the event, a British police officer was killed.

Haji Muse Egere, one of the tribal chief who was advising the British side how to handle this case was asked by the British whom he thought the killer could have been. Haji Muse advised the British to wait for a while, adding that when the rainy seasons, spring arrives and the country becomes green and the community (Beel) comes together to enjoy the prosperity brought by the season. Then, somebody might boast that he was the man who had killed the British police officer.

After the arrival of the spring, the community started its usual festivities and one evening a man by the name Dhegaweine jumped onto the dancing floor. He recited the following poem: "Oh God don't cut my hands, I am the man who killed Gibb". *"Allow kacanta ha go'yn ninkii Gibb dilaan aheye"*. By referring to Allah, Dhegaweine wanted to justify his action on religious grounds, but he also communicated this important information through a dancing song. The British colonial administration realised that what Haji Igre had said before was in fact to the point. They issued a warrant for the arrest of the man.

During the Second World War, the British Security Service in Somaliland often watched out over what the poets were saying about the war. They knew the political sting of the tongues of the Somali poets. The poet Abdi Gahair recited a polemic poem addressed to his wife, indirectly commenting on the War and the British role in it.

Gahair lived in the hinterland of Somaliland. One day he took with him several of his livestock to the town to sell in the market in order to buy sugar, tea and rice. Before his departure in the morning his wife asked him if he could buy her a scarf. He did not buy the scarf, and might have spent the money on himself. When he returned in the evening and his wife found out that he had not bought the scarf, she became very angry.

Abdi Gahair recited a poem, but indirectly commenting the Second World War and the role of the British Empire, addressing to his wife he said *"Don't be angry with me my dear wife, things are not always as we thought, even the British Empire lost the control of great harbours of the Middle East such as Port Said"*. This poem had wider implications. It was a political poem disguised as personal communication between a husband and a wife. After, the colonial local administrators heard about the poem and being aware of the power of Somali poetry, they realised its propaganda content. They contacted Abdi Gahair and told him to stop his unfounded propaganda against the British Empire. The story did not stop there. They took Gahair together with other traditional leaders of the

country to Port Said in Egypt, to impress them and show them that the British was indeed in control of the Middle East harbours, including Port Said. What Abdi Gahair expressed in the poem was not true, but a mere poetic metaphorical speculation, however, the damage was already done. Those who heard the poem believed the information conveyed in poem by Abdi Gahair, rather than the official information coming from the British side. This poem is still popular among Somalilanders.

In 1900-1920 during the battles between Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan and his Dervish forces, British officer Richard Corfield (Kofil) was killed in battle. Corfield's head was cut off and brought to Sayyid Mohamed's court by Ismail Mirreh who was also leading the Dervish battle. Ismail Mirreh was also a formidable poet. He reported in poetry how the fighting went on in detail. Before he finished the entire poem, he said to Sayyid Mohamed "I left the poem open to be completed by you". Sayyid Mohamed recited the following poem in which he addressed Corfield and took the opportunity to outline the general aim of his resistance against the British rule. This poem became a source of inspiration for his followers and still a memorial event of Sayid Mohamed's struggle.

#### **Few lines of the Poem**

*...Now Corfield,  
That you have embarked on your perilous journey  
[To the Underworld]!  
Tell them, if they [the already departed]  
Care to question you about the Upper world,  
How the valiant Dervishes have slain you;  
How they have abandoned your rotting corpse,*

The Sayyid remains a controversial figure among the Somalis. Some people regard him as a national figure and the founder of modern Somali nationalism, the inheritor of Ahmed 'Gurey' and protector of the religion (diin) against the colonial intrusion. On the other hand, others see him simply as an ambitious leader of a militant Muslim sect, the Salihya, who was bent on wresting power by force, and a man who destroyed his people's chance for modernisation and development. He was accused of excessive and extreme cruelty and dictatorship, as the following famous poem composed by one of his opponents, Ali Jama Habeel from Berbera, reflects another example how Somali poetry is also used as a weapon by two opponents:

*The Torah, the Qur'an and the Gospel are of varying weights,  
For us, the Blemishless Mohamed has come down  
from Heaven with a true message, showing us  
the Straight Path from which one cannot stray.  
His Divine Teachings are still recorded on*

*our wooden slates, sturdy pillars upon which  
we lean comfortably.  
But say you this veritable Italian is a true Mahdi!?*

*Towraad iyo Furqaan iyo Injiil kala tan wee yaan e  
Toolmoonihii Mohamed baa u tegey Illaahen e  
Tanbiixuu nafaray looxyaday noogutaal weli e  
Waa tiir aan naga liicahayn taannu leenahay e  
E ma talyaanigaasaa mahdi ah tanuna waa yaab e!?*

Another example: the height of the Somaliland struggle for independence in 1950-1960 Abdullahi Qarshe applied a similar metaphorical imagery when he recited a song starting with the following lines.

*Wake Up! Arise! Wake up! Arise!  
Kamakame has arrived to rule us. He burned Kenya  
(Ka kacaay! ka kacaay!  
Kamakame yimiyeey. Kiiniyuu gubayeey)*

Kamakame was the nickname for Sir Gerald Reece who was transferred from Kenya where he had been the head of the administration of the Northern Frontier District of Kenya (NFD). Qarshe's song was designed to convey a powerful anti-colonial message and it exactly fulfilled its message and became one of the memorial songs in the anti-colonial literature in the Somaliland political history. There was no evidence that Sir Gerald Reece had burned Kenya but the song was meant to link the Somaliland struggle with that of the Kenyan anti-colonial struggle, particularly in NFD. In fact, Sir Gerald Reece was the most popular governor in Somaliland during the colonial rule. He encouraged education and one of the first elementary schools built in Hargeisa bore his name. In the song, however, Abdullahi Qarshe wanted to make a political point. He wanted to stir the political consciousness of the nation and direct them to particular political action.

On 26th June 1960, the day in which Somaliland achieved its Independence, Abdullahi Sutan Timade recited the everlasting poem which later became known as the "**Lower this flag and hoist this one in its place**". "*Kana siib kana saar*". Timade put more emphasis on religious meanings of the poem, he said "The flag that God provided us with and, which nobody gave us as charity. "*Cidi kii aanay na siinin ee saatir noogu yabohayaow aan siduu yahay eegee kana siib kana saar*". A configuration of poetic eviction and religious imagery were deployed to record this historical event.

In the 1940s and 1950s Somali literature underwent a revolutionary transformation. A seeming separation of the sacred and the profane was taking place. To the poetic art was added to another form of genre called

"Heello" which developed from "Belwo". The Belwo is regarded as the beginning of urbanised literature. It came from the mind of Abdi Sinimo, a driver from Awdal Region. The first poem he composed was a love song and it was an immediate success. The growing urban "elite" embraced this style of artistic production. A small-dedicated group of admirers including the first Somali women singer Khadija nicknamed Khadija Belwo joined Abdi "Sinimo".

### **Political Literature and State Formation**

In Africa, political ideas, concepts of nationalism and nation-state have been linked to the de-colonisation process and the struggle for independence. It was important, therefore, that these concepts be explained to the wider population. In Somali society, poets, playwrights and songwriters, singers, musicians, all artists, undertook this task.

At the end of the Second World War Abdillahi Qarshe arrived in Hargeisa (Somaliland) from Aden with a lute "Oud" "*kaman*" adding to the Belwo a musical aspect, which had been absent until then. Abdullahi Qarshe is recognised as the founder of Somali music. Qarshe made another important contribution by writing and producing patriotic songs encouraging people to take political action such as petitioning the United Nations and demonstrating for independence. His songs became political enlightenment and the soul of the nation's struggle for freedom. Poets, singers, musicians, playwrights, such as Abdullahi Sultan "Tima'ade", Abdullahi "Qarshe" and Ali Hussein became household names and an inspiration for many years.

Abdullahi Qarshe and many others produced more political and patriotic songs. These artistic productions depicted not only the Somali political situation, but also the political changes that were engulfing Africa at the time. Abdullahi Qarshe and his colleague Hussein Aw Farah, a playwright and co-producer and other artists established an organisation called "*Walaalo Hargeisa*", in Hargeisa Somaliland.

This group, which was dedicated to literary production, substantially improved Somali literature and put it firmly in its urban social setting. The artistic production of the period shows an attitudinal change from nomadic conservatism to greater liberalism. Conservative religious leaders described some of the songs: particularly those relating to love, as anti-Islamic blasphemy which must be stopped immediately.

In Somaliland, the criticism of the religious leaders (*Ulema*) discontinued because of the intervention of two important scholars and teachers, Mohamoud Ahmed Ali and Yussuf Haji Aden. They were pioneers of western education in "Somaliland", and they had enormous respect from the religious leaders in the country. Aden was himself a songwriter and artist. He was also a political activist. In Somalia (Mogadiscio) urbanised

artists with a more liberal attitude similarly came into the scene at the same period and were engaged in the same themes, but compared to "Somaliland" they had less opposition from religious leaders.

These urban songs had an enormous impact on the development of western ideas related to formation of the nation-state. This was period when Somali political parties were intensifying their demand for independence or preparing the population for the eventuality of the coming independence. Artists became the soul of the nation's struggle and the inspiring force of its consciousness. They undertook the task of explaining to the public the meanings of liberation and the construction of a nation-state. For a predominantly illiterate society, this was an important undertaking. Furthermore, the artists made links between the Somali liberation struggle and liberation struggles in other parts of Africa.

In 1960, during the Congo civil war, Abdullahi Qarshe composed a patriotic song demonstrating this link, after he heard the news of the assassination of the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba and he wrote:- .  
*"Patrice Lumumba is neither dead nor alive, He physically passed away, but his spirit is always with us". "Luamumba mana dheere mana dhiman, muuqiisa oo la waayay mooyane innuu maqan yahay ha moodina."*

### **Political Literature in Post-Colonial State**

When Independence was achieved and the post-colonial state was in place, poets, songwriters and playwrights started to act as advocates of the nation state, saying it would bring justice and prosperity. They spoke of a golden era once the colonialists had left. The she-camel's milk image was highlighted in poems to visionalize the benefits of the nation-state. The state was symbolised by a she-camel (Maandeeq) which means *"the one who gratifies the mind"*. The slogan of the song goes like this: *"Let us milk our she-camel" (Aan maalo hasheena maandeeq).*

However, after few years of independence, artists raised doubts about the achievements of the nation-state and its political philosophy. Their predictions did not match the reality that had emerged. The rosy picture they had portrayed about the benefits of the nation-state was not forthcoming. Things were becoming even more difficult for the majority of the population.

It was the artists who again started to criticise the failures of the post-colonial state. Poems, songs and plays were injected into the public space once again questioning the sincerity of politicians and civil servants, "the representatives of the state". Through plays, songs and comedies, they educated the public to demand accountability and transparency. They raised the issues of corruption and nepotism in the state institutions and

high places, saying that the government had become an instrument used by politicians and the elite to advance their power and personal interests. They reminded the public that those who fought for independence and freedom had been pushed aside, while those who were closer to the colonialists and had not made any contributions to the struggle now inherited state power and economic resources. The following poem by Abdillahi Timaade strongly indicate this argument. *"Those who inherited the nation-state and the ones whom I drove out are the same". "Isma doorin kan diray iyo daarta kii galaye" "No one must entertain the illusion that there is a government in Mogadishu" "Dowladbaa Xamar fadhida ninowna ha durbaan tumine"*

In 1965, one of the critical playwrights in the country Hassan Sheikh Mumin wrote a play in which he exposed the social decay as result of the malfunctioning of state institutions. The following lines are an extract of a song, which was part of a play he wrote. The play, which was full of political satire, was staged first in the national theatre in Mogadiscio and was immediately a great success.

In the song Mumin metaphorically compared the state with a stream, which cannot quench a thirst, or a medicine, which cannot cure the sick. He wrote: *"If the stream, from which people were supposed to quench their thirst with water, itself feels pangs of thirst then who shall quench the thirst of the people?...if the medicine which was supposed to cure the sick, itself is contaminated with disease, then who would cure the sick?" "Durdurka laga cabba biyihis lagu dabaasha haduu haraad dareemo halkee laga waraabsha? Qofkii cudur dilaayo dawadaabogsiisee, haday dawo bukooto maxa lagu dabiibba?"*

A review of the political literature in the five years before the military coup clearly demonstrates the loss of public confidence in the nation-state, which they previously believed would ease the burden of their daily life, or radically change their social and economic situations.

In 1970 - 1980 the poets, songwriters and playwrights produced a series of literary works; prominent among them were Hadrawe and Abdi Mohamed Amin. The literature simultaneously expressed political messages with religious symbolism to generate political action and expose the tyranny of the military junta. It was not only the opposition who used political literature to discredit the regime. The military regime also employed political poems to discredit the opposition, describing them as traitors. The official media focused on the propagation of the personality cult of Siad Barre.

Critical literature, in this case oral poetry, songs and plays can, by evoking religion and politics, provide a powerful emotion, which in turn can generate a particular action. It can also give conflicting explanations

of the causes and effects of various actions within the society / state relationship.

In a critical note, Ahmed (1996) commented that the poet by employing pastoral imagery fell short of devising "*an epistemological approach to things*". One can argue that the Somali poet's worldview is mainly an Islamic worldview, and his epistemological approach must be seen in this context. Careful analysis of different poems and songs on different topics and in different periods of time indicates the huge influence of religion in Somali literature. Poems often start with the name of Allah, or refer to Allah many times. The political action and the political ideas, which poets comment are often referred to in terms of Islamic ethics and solutions. In the final analysis, poets make political judgements whether a particular regime deserves their support or not.

### **Art and Literature: The Other Weapon for Resistance**

When the military seized power in 1969, most of the poets, singers and musicians "*suugaanlay*" hastily poured praises on the new military junta. They portrayed the new change of government as positive and in the right direction. The military junta called their coup a revolution "*Kacaan*". Artists endorsed enthusiastically this claim in their various plays, songs etc. They preached that the country was on the right track. Abdullahi Qarshe, the man considered as the founder of the Somali music and a radical nationalist and patriot composed the following song in the early years of the regime. "*This is the revolution for the people, this is the revolution for land. "Wa Towradii dadka, waa towradii dalka"*". Abdi Mohamed Amin was another artist, he praised the leader of the coup, Siad Barre in the early years of the coup. He composed a song, which starts with the words "*always lead the caravan*" "*Caynanka hay hay! hay! Waligaa hay!*". Both artists Qarshe and Amin later regretted composing such songs. In the 1980s Amin became critical of the regime, and produced several plays and poems before he was imprisoned. He wrote a controversial play with critical songs such as "*Land-cruiser.*" to discredit the regime. In the song "*Land-cruiser*" he depicted the rich new class who were most of them close clan members of the President with their new land-cruisers in contrast to the general economic deterioration of the masses, in particular in Mogadishu. This song was too much for the regime to tolerate; eventually the military regime banned it and the play in which it featured. Abdi Mohamed Amin and Abdullahi Qarshe are well known for their patriotism, But in this case, their songs reflects different periods of time. The regime, being aware of the influence of poets, playwrights, and singers (**Suuganley**) brought all the main artists in the country under its control, similar to what Stalin did in the Soviet Union and Mussolini in Italy.

In the capital there was one big theatre built by the Republic of China in 1960s. A military officer was appointed to be the managing director of the theatre in most of the time during the military rule. The regime's intention was to make sure that all artistic production was in tune with its political discourse. No narratives were allowed, except those approved by the regime. As a result of this move, the majority of artists, singers, musicians and poets in the country became government employees. They came under the direct control of the Minister of National Guidance.

As the time progressed and the dictatorial rule of Siad Barre became more apparent and more oppressive, critical songs and plays with complex double meanings appeared in the public domain. A lot of these were underground literature only available through underground networks, but some of them were broadcast over the government radios undetected by the security service. In 1974 the celebrated poet and playwright Mohamed Ibrahim Hadrawe was arrested. He was a teacher in the Afgoye Teachers' College (*Lafole*) and had written a play (*Waayeel iyo Wacad*) in a highly metaphorical language intended to depict the military regime's ugly face.

Before the play was staged in the national theatre, it went under the scrutiny of the State Committee for Censorship. Its metaphorical and complex meanings nationalist imagery divided the censorship committee; should they stop it or allow it? The play finally passed and was performed. Its effect and influence were huge. Hadrawe conveyed very well all he intended, the beginning of nepotism and dictatorship. Commenting on Hadrawe's influence on the public, Ahmed (1996) wrote:

*"Hadrawe's poetry contributed to an early warning system about the dangers of pseudo-patriotic council members intent on obfuscating the genuine political unconscious of the period. Barre saw Hadrawe's poetry as getting too close to the bone. As a result, the poet was sent to a prison in Qansahdhere, a town in the inter-riverine area, where his poetic brilliance would lose its efficacy. Ironically, the incarceration of the poet in Qansahdhere brought to the fore of public consciousness a hitherto suppressed truism..."* (p.106-7).

When Hadrawe was arrested, he was exiled to Qansahdhere. All his poems, songs and plays with a political content were banned, while his songs on other topics such beauty and love remained unaffected. Hadrawe's poems and songs went underground, but became even more popular. It was difficult for the military to stop them reaching the public. There were other poets too, such as Gariye, a close friend of Hadrawe. They worked together at Lafole College, few miles from the capital where they formed an unofficial circle of elite artists, most of them (Somalilanders). Siad Barre called them 'the petty-bourgeoisie Northerners, or Somalilanders.



Including Hadrawe's literary work was a polemic poetic song putting the Somali tragedy in a historical context: He addressed it to another fellow artist, Abdi Qays. At that time Qays was living in Djibouti to where he had escaped after being labelled anti-revolutionary, "*Kacaan diid*". Qays answered Hadrawe in an equally dramatic poetic song. These songs later developed into series of poetic songs known as *Siinlay*. More than thirty other poets, young and old, entered the debate. This can be described as one of the major literary works in modern Somali history. The poems were highly allegorical and repetitive in content and style. They deviated or departed from the previous premises upon which Somali literature was expressed and communicated, not only in its revolutionary and political tone, but also its scansion and the imagery involved (Ahmed, 1996).

*Siinlay* was followed by another series of poetic songs more or less similar, called *Deelay*. These artistic productions were regarded as subversive and banned, but this made them even more popular. They were recorded and re-recorded onto cassettes. People listened to them at home and in their cars.

Hadrawe remained in prison for several years. The underground literature, which he largely contributed to, circulated and became a wide spread source of information to Somalis both at home and abroad during the military rule. Hadrawe's poems and songs were more effective and popular than Siad Barre's official speeches, which were broadcast the airwaves by the national radio and TV stations.

When Hadrawe was released from prison in 1978, he left the country and joined the Somali National Movement (SNM), writing more poems and songs which became an inspiring symbol for all those who opposed the regime; particularly the young fighters in the SNM. Most of Hadrawe's poems and songs are recorded in Hal - Karaan.

The Poems and songs of the *Siinlay* and *Deelay* were an important warning and reminder of what could happen in the absence of a modern liberal democratic state that guarantees social equality and freedom of expression. They also condemned clanism or clan politics (*Qabyaalad*). In the early 1980s the opposition established a clandestine radio (KULMIS) in Ethiopia where programmes to undermine and discredit the regime were broadcast. For some time a well-known former BBC Somali section broadcaster Mustaf Haji Nur was the head of the radio. Mustafa was popular broadcaster while he was working for the BBC, and because of this and his profound analysis of the social and political situation of the country, the radio attracted many listeners. Anyone caught listening to the radio was regarded as guilty and was arrested and the regime labelled the radio "KULMIS" "*Unity*" as Radio QUDHMIS "*Rotten*". The

opposition's messages of resistance were expressed in poems and songs and broadcast on radio KULMIS. Their impact was phenomenal and the regime tried by every means possible to stop these broadcasts. Songs and poems were also recorded in cassettes and tapes and were smuggled into the country. In the Somali oral tradition poems and songs were always used as weapons for a resistance or a cause.

### References:

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