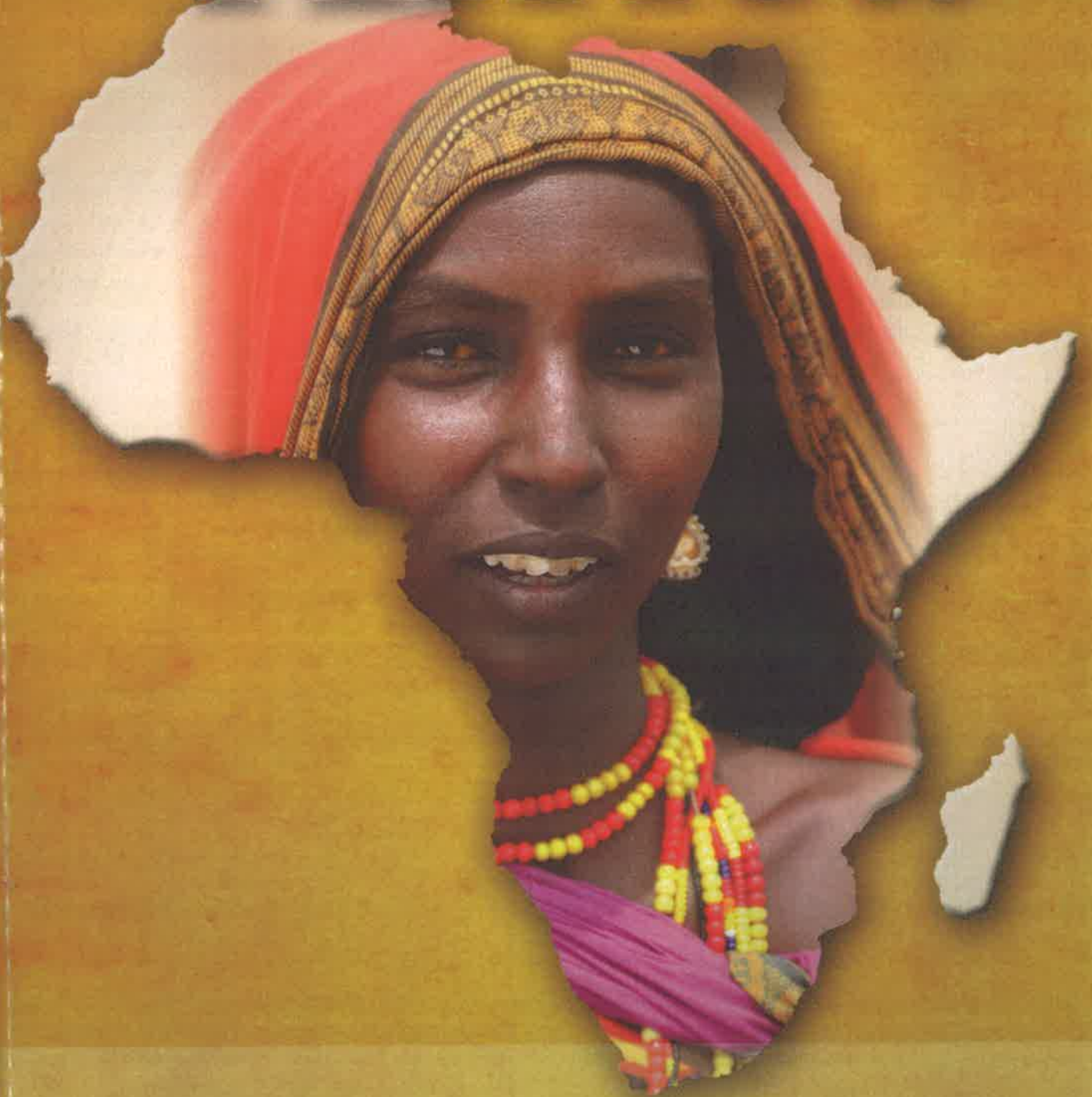


Minorities and the State  
*in*  
**Africa**



EDITED BY  
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## CHAPTER 4

# A TALE OF TWO MINORITIES

## THE STATE OF THE GABOYE AND BANTU COMMUNITIES OF SOMALIA<sup>1</sup>

*Mohamed A. Eno and Omar A. Eno*

Discrimination is like burning anthracite, it destroys society from inside-out. It is also a sin against the Omnipotent and a crime against humanity.

—Omar Eno<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

Colonial scholars of Somalia and nationalist-oriented Somalis have often portrayed this Horn of Africa peninsula as a country of a homogeneous people that emerged from one progenitor, speaking the same language, holding the Islamic faith, and sharing a common nomado-pastoral culture. They further reveal in praise of the nomad and his culture a society

characterized by an egalitarian way of life and a social structure ordered by a kind of pastoral democracy.

Despite all the emphasis on shared commonalities and self-sameness, we reveal in this essay the existence of distinctive communities. We aim to approach the subject by contrasting the social situation of two Somali minority communities—the Somali Bantu and the Gaboye—and their sociopolitical relationship with the civilian and military regimes of independent Somalia. These communities are both considered minorities but situated in distinct social categories in respect of ethnic background for the former and breach of a so-called social custom for the latter. We will draw similarities with other nations and will interchangeably juxtapose the lugubrious experience of the Somali Bantu and the Gaboye in Somalia. In doing so, we reveal the reality that the Somali society is structured around castes, in which the Gaboye/Baidari and Bantu communities are not only a minority but also occupy the lower strata of the social hierarchy.

### THE CASTE SYSTEM AND ITS UNDERPINNING FACTORS

Scholars from various disciplines have contributed to the definition of the terms *caste* or *casteism* and *minority*. According to Hans Raj, "Caste system finds its origin in the Spanish word 'Casta' meaning breed or race. Thus basically caste means people belonging to the same breed."<sup>3</sup> West African social scientists T. Odetola and Ade Ademola describe a caste as a "hereditary group which forms hierarchies that are based on status."<sup>4</sup> In its broader version, M. Peil and O. Oyeneye note that a caste is a "stratification system based on ascription."<sup>5</sup> According to them, it is endogamous because "intercaste marriage attracts considerable community disapproval."<sup>6</sup>

In a more concise elaboration, C. Cooley, according to Raj, argues, "When a class is somewhat hereditary, we call it caste."<sup>7</sup> From whichever perspective we may approach it, the caste institution promulgates separation and social divisiveness, a phenomenon of isolation with a limited outlook but one embedded in political, racial, occupational, cultural, and

religious as well as psychological factors. These factors, in their empirical significance, lead to prejudice, oppression, social discrimination, and racial segregation. Hans Raj explores extensively the rigidity of caste in rural society in the Indian subcontinent. Kaka Kelekar, cited in Raj, defines the caste enterprise as one lacking "the healthy social standards of justice, fair play, equity and universal brotherhood."<sup>8</sup>

Under the pretext of socio-racial determinants, the Somali society remains stratified into a variety of ethnic groups with distinct statuses midwifed by the pastoral section of the society that created for itself an apocryphal attachment to Arab origin.<sup>9</sup> These social and racial determinants then position segments of the society at the bottom rung of the social hierarchy or even sometimes throw them off board the whole structure of Somaliness. Consequently, such marginalized communities become the subject of stereotypical names such as "others," "out-caste," "low-caste," "minority," "slave," and a complete corpus of pejorative epithets related to low status.

Although scholars suggest multiple factors for the existence of caste as an institution of subversion and inhumanity, Hans Raj attributes the rigidity of the caste system in India, for example, partly to what a Somali would call *aqoon-daro* (illiteracy), a factor that we cannot altogether ignore also in the Somali case. As Raj believes, the caste system deepened its roots in India "because vast majority of our people were illiterate."<sup>10</sup> Raj acknowledges that at the time, the Indian society "had no scientific approach to the whole problem."<sup>11</sup> Due to a similar factor also pervading Somalia, society had been deprived of the courage necessary for the repudiation of the anomalous institution of caste.

Looking at the caste system from a religious perspective, both the Gaboye and Bantu are Muslims just like any other nomadic Somalis who often claim religious piety. But as A. M. Keynan notes, most of the Sheiks or Ulamaa ud-Diin "religious clergymen" of the nomadic clans who were supposed to be free from biases did not condemn this un-Islamic scheme of discrimination against these two communities.<sup>12</sup> Instead, the clergymen opted to condone it by staying numb over the aberrantly stratified social imbalances among the Somali people. Dipankar Gupta, on the other hand,

sounds dissatisfied with the global understanding of the caste institution and draws distinction between casteism and racism, with claims that the phenomenon has been overly politicized.<sup>13</sup> But unlike Gupta's analysis, D. N. Majumdar examines it as an enterprise "probably founded on racial and cultural differences."<sup>14</sup>

The term *minority* may be tricky to use for either the Bantu or the Baidari based on numerical distribution. Lack of clan demography makes a minority by number utterly hard to determine in the Somali situation. This said, we heed the interpretation of Anthony Giddens suggesting the sociologists' use of the etymology as "a group's subordinate position within a society, rather than its numerical representation."<sup>15</sup> Giddens aptly elaborates, and as we assume it also to be in the case of the Somali clan scenario vis-à-vis the Bantu and other oppressed communities, "There are many cases in which a 'minority' is in fact in majority."<sup>16</sup>

The stigma, stereotypes, and prejudices in Somalia remind us of the United States in its days of racial marginalization, which Derrick Bell would describe as a "land where racial justice remains a hazy hope while racial subordination thrives as the major stabilizing force in an otherwise fractious society."<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Park argues that prejudice related to race remains one of the hardest obstacles to overcome. Through an obtrusive doctrine of nomadic social psychology, these two communities of non-nomadic occupation were reduced to inferior status. They were not seen as different from what Park would describe as "more or less tolerated aliens."<sup>18</sup> To put it more succinctly, the Gaboye and Bantu communities are destined to endure perpetual isolation of what Park might have termed "a cause and an effect of race prejudice."<sup>19</sup> Park contends elsewhere, "It is a vicious cycle—isolation, prejudice; prejudice, isolation."<sup>20</sup>

We may, to some extent, draw here a similarity between the apartheid system in South Africa and the oppression of some of the minority groups in Somalia, not excluding colonial oppression. Drawing a similitude between apartheid and colonialism, Mahmood Mamdani reasonably postulates, "Like every colonial rule on this continent, apartheid too turned around two core identities: race and ethnicity,"<sup>21</sup> whose interplay in the Somali peninsula has brought about the divide between the communities

as “high culture” and “low culture,” although Keynan claims, “A careful examination shows most of the admirable cultural aesthetics in Somalia actually belong to the minorities.”<sup>22</sup> The rest of the chapter will discuss the situation of these two communities and their social exclusion in a country which colonial scholars praised for its “homogeneity,” “pastoral democracy,” and “egalitarianism.”

#### OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL HISTORIES OF THE GABOYE/BAIDARI AND BANTU/JAREER

##### The Gaboye/Baidari

One of the apocryphal origins of the Gaboye people informs that the group descended from a Somali boy who got lost. The supporters of this tradition want us to believe that this disadvantaged boy was brought up by a hyena (*waraabe*). Despite what we know about hyenas, as a carnivore and ruthless wild beast, he could not devour this young human being but instead brought him up! The myth of this peculiar relationship has become a strong social reason to ostracize the descendants of that forefather.

British anthropologist I. M. Lewis writes about a tradition that traces the origin of segments of the Gaboye to one Gowedi, who is said to be a consanguinal relative of Issak, the supposed Arab progenitor who arrived in northern Somalia as an immigrant and later produced “noble” children with an African woman from the host community.<sup>23</sup> Douglas Jardine contends, “Apart from the Somali proper there are three outcast tribes—Midgan, Yibir and Tumul. The origin of the Midgan and Yibir, who speak a language unlike Somali, is unknown.” Jardine then suggests that the Tumul subgroup of the outcast community represents descendants of “Somalis who demeaned themselves by marrying a Midgan woman.”<sup>24</sup>

In another version, a British colonial document of naval intelligence ethnically classifies this group as descendants of the Darod segment of the Somalis.<sup>25</sup> It continues to suggest that their nobility and purity were tainted through intermarriage with the Sab, an agro-pastoral community

in the south. The Sab clan (referred to here as the *Digil-Mirifle* group), although not outcastes, is considered by their northern brethren as less pure Somalis as a result of their genealogical and geographical distance from the birthplace of Somali Arabness.<sup>26</sup> Yet another narrative by Lewis suggests that the Yibir subgroup of the Gaboye confederacy of outcaste communities have their lineage through Mohamed Hanif.<sup>27</sup>

In a long discussion about casteism in general and the Somali outcaste breed in particular, Mohamed Eno mentions another account of an uncorroborated incident in which a forefather of the "outcasts" and a forefather of the "nobles" (both noble brothers at that time) fed on the meat of a dead animal that was not slaughtered in the norms accepted in the Islamic faith. However, Eno casts doubt over the validity of the narrative particularly when one of two culprit brothers who ate the so-called dead animal's meat is ostracized as "impure" while the other retains his nobility untainted.<sup>28</sup> Eno claims that none of the traditions or the oral historians suggests the location, the type of the animal concerned, or the approximate period of time when the incident occurred.

Another account is discussed by Mohamed-Abdi Mohamed, who describes this community as "excluded from the Somali kinship system" because they "include marginal castes." Mohamed suggests that "the caste members in question are either the descendants of previously noble groups who were defeated and had fallen after a war against another group or descendants of the first inhabitants of the horn."<sup>29</sup> As a consequence, they do not appear in any of the over seven different lineage trees the Somalis worship for their genealogical purity from Mohamed the Great Prophet of Islam.

However, in a brief study, Guido Ambroso provides the opinion that although elsewhere they are at times called "les Gitanes," meaning "the gypsies," "the origins of their perceived impurity are vague."<sup>30</sup> According to Ambroso, the ethnonym of this community as Gaboye is not the personal nomenclature of a pedigree but rather "refers to the quivers where the arrows of an archer are kept."<sup>31</sup> Ambroso's description, like others, lays open two empirically compelling realities about these people: (a) That, among other occupations, the group in question consists of

hunters; and (b) That they are warriors often prepared for confrontation. Therefore, the group's latter description supports Mohamed's previously quoted hypothesis, which hints at the warriorship of the outcaste people who dropped their status after their fall in war.

Baidari elders and elites presented different corroboration for the distinct names used in referring to them: *Midgo* or *Mid-go* means "one is gone," a popular Gaboye battlefield term denoting a fallen enemy. Another definition relates *Midgo* to leather tanning and shoe-making, therefore more occupation-focused than genealogical; *Madhibaan*, despite its use as a derogatory term, etymologically alludes to "one who does not harm"; in other words, "a harmless one." Religiously observed, this description augurs well with the Islamic doctrine of peace and mutual coexistence; *Tumaal* is occupationally related to "smithing," and *Yaxar* denotes shoe-making.

From this picture, we can deduce that the names are occupationally oriented, though the Somali people depreciate and disdain skilled occupations they lack knowledge of. Whatever the intentions, another section of the historiography suggests the Tumaal lineage of the Baidari confederation as originating from the "Aydur" race and thus "nobles" at the time. But because they had intermarried with servile people, they became vile themselves and intermarry only with their community and class.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Bantu/Jareer**

The comparative community, which is often called locally Jareer, is the group we can also interchangeably call Bantu. Like the Gaboye, the Bantu are composed of a conglomeration of groups which otherwise have distinct historical as well as socio-cultural backgrounds. Italian ethnographer Enrico Cerulli argues that although there exists a stock of Bantu who descended from recently imported slaves in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, studies support that the segment of Bantu settled in the Shebelle valley could not have been slaves. Cerulli sounds convinced that the latter stock could be the residues of the Bantu-speaking Sabaki tribes of the Wanyika who populated this part of the Horn of

Africa before they were driven away by marauding Galla warriors from parts of Abyssinia. He postulates the coexistence of the Bantu and the Somali as indigenous and newcomers respectively.<sup>33</sup> I. M. Lewis, considered as authority on Somalia,<sup>34</sup> notes that the "Negroid population is that referred to by medieval Arab writers as the Zengi (blacks)" and describes them as hunters, and sedentary agriculturists.<sup>35</sup>

In the classification of these two categories of communities, Lewis writes, "The hunting people seem to be most appropriately classified with hunters of the central equatorial forest while the second group belongs to the Swahili speaking Bantu typically represented to-day by the north-eastern Bantu of Kenya."<sup>36</sup> In expanding the assumption of ethnic conflation of the two stocks of Bantu—that is, indigenous and diaspora (the latter were brought into Somalia as slaves)—Lewis acknowledges "the extent to which such communities owe their present composition to actual residual populations, since there can be no doubt that the repression of slavery enabled great numbers of Negroid freedom to seek asylum among them."<sup>37</sup>

However, colonial Italy classified all the Bantu Jareer population as diaspora and imported and freed slaves. The Somali pastoralists in the south have also played a significant role in the exploitation of this community and in support of the colonialists. The subjugation served different purposes for the Italians and for the Somalis. According to the former, the deliberate mixing of the slave identity with that of the free-born indigenous Jareer people would provide them with larger human resources from Jareer conscripts to work on Italian settler plantations; for the Somali, it would assure them better ethnic status than the Jareer and therefore put them next to the Italians in social status and above the indigenes. The nomads have seen it in their interest to work with the colonialists as middlemen and were on the colonial payroll for identifying the hideouts of the Jareer Bantu who were resistant to conscription and forced labor. These two sources have become the root and reason for the perpetual discrimination, segregation, and antagonism toward the indigenous Bantu groups in the country, a stigma whose effects they live with to date.

### LIVING WITH STIGMA, EXCLUSION, AND LAND APPROPRIATION

Although the Bantu and the Gaboye belong to two different ethnic communities, they experience similar social oppression and ostracization of phenomenal spheres. As outstanding Somali sociologist Abdi Kusow posits, each one of these two categories of the society suffers a certain stigma as determined by the noble-claiming nomads. Kusow contends that the Somali narrative that is related to the Gaboye community was meant "to engage the violent removal of non-Islamic cultural traces and heritages and those who refused to become part of the social boundary of this new Somaliness."<sup>38</sup> He then interpolates how a portion of the social fabric is discriminated against "as having an unholy origin...in essence, considered as socially polluting in ways not dissimilar to that of the untouchables in India."<sup>39</sup> Comparatively, Kusow describes the Somali Bantu as a "group permanently removed from the social boundary of Somaliness...because of their supposed African-like physical appearance which allegedly makes them distinguishable from the Somali one, whatever that may mean."<sup>40</sup>

Based on the concoction of these narratives, the two communities became social casualties. But whereas the Bantu are discarded off the locus of Somaliness as a result of their African origin, the Gaboye are marginalized related to a so-called "unholy" act. The latter group, notwithstanding the alleged contamination of their purity, is Jileec and Cushitic in their physical features, undistinguishable in many ways from their Somali oppressors.

According to Keynan, the Baidari are culturally dispossessed and settled in isolated areas with despicable names underpinning impurity and inferiority, such as *Ureyso* (stinky), *Dhami* (animal slaughterhouse), and *Jaama Laaye* (center for pathetic services). Cerulli also suggests the outcast "Sab" Gaboye/Baidari are communities with no cultural right for the possession of certain categories of animals such as horses or cattle, but that at their low status, they are allowed by the "nobles" only to own donkeys.<sup>41</sup>

As Odetola and Ademola argue, a lineage "owns its land in perpetuity and no other person or persons may deprive a lineage of its land."<sup>42</sup> But contrary to that African dogma, the trend in Somalia is the reverse. Ancestral land has been alienated from its rightful owners, the Gaboye, by other Somali groups claiming a "noble" origin. Douglas Collins (nicknamed Abdel-Malik by the Majerten) mentions how the Majerten of Alula attempted to loot date farms from the outcastes.<sup>43</sup>

The traditions, according to various Gaboye/Baidari sources and Gaboye historical documents, suggest original ownership of the northern part of the country by the Gaboye people, earlier than the first Somali migration northward from Ethiopia or arrival by sea of the Somali progenitors as immigrants. They populated the northern horn as hunters and farmers in their own kingdom (similar to what happened to several Jareer segments in Shungwaya in the south<sup>44</sup>) before Somali nomads in conjunction with strong Arab armies overwhelmed them in successive confrontations that finally saw the subjugation of the Gaboye. According to Rasheed Farah, "It was during this time of battle that the Baidari lost both their status and land, and not because of unfounded narratives of 'eating the meat of a dead animal' which is the creation of a beaten and visionless nomad."<sup>45</sup> Italian as well as British colonial officers provide some evidence. One such example is Douglas Collins, mentioned earlier, who elaborates on how a Majerten sultan by the name Sultan Mohamed Boqor and his lineage attempted to impound and loot farms that belonged to the Baidari community in Alula.<sup>46</sup>

This is not an isolated incident. Dalmar Biixi, one of our informants in a Nairobi Minority Workshop in 2003, relates: "The Somalis confederated with Arabian invaders who came by sea and with more sophisticated weapons. Baidari men were killed without compensation and our land was misappropriated. Ever since that engagement we have been reduced to destitute subordinates to others."<sup>47</sup> In a similar contention, Hagi Mohamed Gaceyte told one of the authors (Mohamed), "Most of the north of the country, including Hargeisa, was originally the home of sections of the Gaboye. Later, the pastoral Somalis in association with

well armed Arabs from the sea engaged the Gaboye and pushed them into isolation in nearby villages and settlements off the main towns."<sup>48</sup>

Maka Heile's ingredient of the tradition about Gaboye land appropriation by the Somalis sounds identical to the version narrated by Saleebaan Nageeye, though their interviews were conducted on two different continents and approximately five years apart.<sup>49</sup> According to Saleebaan Omar Nageeye, alias Jumbur, "Land expropriation of the Gaboye has taken place not only in Hargeisa, but also in other northern towns like Burao and Berbera. Although the oral tradition of the Somali nomadic culture is too shy to discuss the subject, the north of the country once belonged to the Gaboye."<sup>50</sup> Poetess Karara Handulle, a Baidari female elder and midwife, also talking in the minority workshop already mentioned, narrates, "When the Gaboye rejected domination by pre-colonial Arab immigrants, the Somalis took sides with the immigrants and devastated our Kingdom, expropriated our land and ostracized our people as 'pagans' and 'sorcerers' because of practicing our own traditional religion."

Concerning land looting and land expropriation, the Bantu Somalis share a lot in common with the Baidari since the community has fallen victim commencing in the colonial period and extending to postcolonial civil and military administrations. Ibrahim Farah and others tell us about the formation after independence of a new elite of entrepreneurs who caused the acquisition and expropriation of Bantu land in the inter-riverine areas of rivers Jubba and Shebelle, using all means of force.<sup>51</sup> This statement provides more credit to Ahmed Ali's contention that "Somalis of certain clans with the support of the state could confiscate land without any due process."<sup>52</sup> Virginia Luling writes, "One ex-Italian plantation was owned by the Prime Minister, another by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, another by the President's daughter. Two very large ones belonged to Kuwait Arabs."<sup>53</sup> The complexity of the unrelenting hardships over the Bantu Jareer was multiplied when, again in Ali's words, "Farmers were ordered to sell all their harvest to [a state] agency. The new price was fixed arbitrarily by the agency. ... Farmers were re-buying their products with tax added."<sup>54</sup>

Mohamed Eno underscores the treacheries apparently employed regarding appropriation of land and the Somali administrations' formulation and promulgation of laws governing land tenure system. In these laws, all arable land was put under state ownership in a scenario where "sedentary cultivators were shrunk to squatters without legal rights to their ancestral land, by means of forgery and fraudulent title deeds acquired by the well-connected total men of the day."<sup>55</sup>

Shedding more light on the expropriation of arable Bantu land and their alienation, Omar Eno notes that both the colonial and postcolonial administrations embarked on a land looting spree by coercing the autochthonous Jareer cultivators into poverty and underdevelopment.<sup>56</sup> Somali intellectual Ahmed Qassim Ali critically laments both the Italian colonial regime and the various postcolonial administrations for neglecting to address the grievances of the peasant farmer and condemn the colonial policy of land appropriation.<sup>57</sup> Omar Eno exposes the culprits as the Italian colonial regime, the Somali nomads, and the coastal people, who all created slave institutions at specific periods in the history of the country. The latter groups, he claims, have also collaborated with the Italian colonial authority to conscript the Jareer people for forced labor on Italian plantations.<sup>58</sup>

At the social level, Guido Ambroso contrasts the Baidari outcasts and the untouchable Dalits of India. He notes that the "les Gitanes" ("the gypsies"), as they are known in Djibouti, "approaches in status the Indian pariah castes."<sup>59</sup> This rhetoric, whatever its social effect, is connected to behavioral features and is in agreement with Peil and Oyeneye's view that "prejudice confines affective and cognitive factors—hostile feelings towards members of another group and groups (often inaccurate generalizations) about them."<sup>60</sup> According to them, "It tends to be acquired as part of primary socialization and, because of the emotional element, it is difficult to change."<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, there is resemblance between the *osu* of the Igbo in Nigeria and the Gaboye of Somalia, one of them being the lifelong stigma with which members from both communities are born without undermining differences. Odetola and Ademola, writing about the

outcaste group of Nigeria, state, "A child of an *osu* who was born...in Britain or in the United States thousands of miles away from Igbo land, resumes that status once he returns and enters into Igboland."<sup>62</sup> While this remains dehumanizing in its nature, the Baidari newborn resumes bearing the burden of stigma immediately after birth, regardless of the geographical location of his/her birth, as long as a Somali acquaintance who knows the family lives in that vicinity. Put in another way, social rejection and exclusion are automatically more immediate to the Gaboye in the diaspora than to the *osu*. As Asha Samad unveils, the stigma haunts the Baidari even in the diaspora.<sup>63</sup>

Accordingly, the Baidari situation seems to be clearly defined in Peil and Oyeneye, who assert, "A community may reject individuals who do not appear to share its norms and values."<sup>64</sup> Though in a fiction form, respected African writer Chinua Achebe mentions the misfortunes laden on *osu* marriage and its related curse in his volume *No Longer at Ease*. And as Peil and Oyeneye inform us, "A low frequency of marriage between two groups may be a measure of prejudice between them."<sup>65</sup> Gichure, nevertheless, interprets the same notion but in a different mode and suggests, "When there is an intermarriage people tend to shed most of their prejudices and look at other communities more positively."<sup>66</sup>

The social situation of the Bantu in the midst of the Somali society has been observed with ample description. We concur, in this regard, with Aylward Shorter in the narrative that "Colonial administrations politicized the ethnic groups in their efforts to make them serve the needs of a modern state."<sup>67</sup> By doing so, significant derailment of ethnic balance and ethnic equality has been ushered in Somalia and among a society that was internally disintegrated but externally loosely interwoven. Shorter debunks the ill-advised approach and the harmful impact laden on it: "More dangerous, in light of after-events, was the colonial tendency to create ethnic stereotypes."<sup>68</sup> This is the same as we discussed about the relationship between the Bantu and the pastoral nomads on the one hand and the Gaboye and the nomads on the other. As we agree with Shorter, "Slavery and colonialism helped to give the ethnic groups their final mould and to sharpen tribal antagonisms."<sup>69</sup>

We referred to the notes by Shorter as a brief prelude to our argument that, although prior to the arrival of colonialism sections of the Bantu had coexisted well with their Jileec nomadic pastoral counterparts as equals, the colonial selection of special interest groups has become a fertile ground for creating ethnic supremacy and breeding of animosity.<sup>70</sup> Observing the whole scene of the interplay between ethnicity and colonial rule from this background, we argue that the great impetus of ethnocentrism had its foundation laid during this period and purposefully extended into postcolonial administrations. We believe that the colonial handing over of power into the ethnic docket of the nomadic pastoralists was by no means an accident, nor did it come by the euphoria of nationalism.<sup>71</sup> It was indeed a clear-cut policy preordained to distance the Bantu from the echelons of political power and decision-making in order that the colonial atrocities committed against them over the years would be put to natural death.

Some exclusive studies on the Bantu Jareer of Somalia expose the magnitude of marginalization which people of ethnic Bantu origin suffer and tolerate among a socially and politically dominant Somali pastoral stock.<sup>72</sup> Reviewing his youthful days in race-ridden America, Kenneth Clark succinctly defines exclusion of the oppressed from the circles of the power-play, a strategy which is seen by the oppressors as a safer contrivance for maintaining the status quo of their domination. He underlines, "Dominant groups exclude the oppressed from formal political processes in order to prevent them from engaging in political decision-making," the reason being that an engagement of this nature poses a threat to the "overall system of domination."<sup>73</sup>

Notwithstanding the stereotypes and prejudice of the Bantu, Ahmed Samatar and Abdi Samatar uncover how the Italian colonial regime "appropriated some of the most fertile land in Southern Somalia where the local cultivators were coerced into what amounted to slave labour... for the benefit of settlers, ruthlessly forcing peasants to become cheap laborers...by debasing Somali culture in order to undermine indigenous self-confidence."<sup>74</sup> Elsewhere in the same study and contrasting the national agricultural policy of Mohamed Siad Barre's military regime

with his predecessors in the post-independence civil administrations, Samatar and Samatar postulate that "agrarian strategy vis-à-vis the producers was little different from that of their predecessors,"<sup>75</sup> as important development agencies, parastatal organizations, and the development departments in the state institutions were hijacked by members of the ruling clique and their supporters and making the state synonymous with clan property.<sup>76</sup>

After a field study in 1989–1990, Abdi Samatar criticizes the undesirable impact SAP (Structural Adjustment Program) took on the local Jareer community in Lower Shabelle, detailing the despicable nature of the hard work the local people face, including children, in earning a living by working on foreign-funded banana plantations without any sign of improvement in their livelihood, despite working from 7:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. As Samatar analyzes, "The wages paid to these children are not sufficient to buy more than a loaf of bread, or five cups of tea, or a kilogram of rice." Then the scholar quotes one of his informants as saying, "No real man is willing to work for slave-like wages."<sup>77</sup> Samatar concludes that despite the accumulation of profits by the shareholding partners, the Somali military regime, and Somalfruit, SAP was not an appropriate development strategy since the profits were realized as a result of the exploitation of the peasant farmers.<sup>78</sup>

#### SOCIAL TABOOS AND CROSS-CLAN MARRIAGES

There is virtually no intermarriage between the Bantu and the pastoral or agro-pastoral Somalis and even the other Somalis of diaspora, descendants from Asia such as Arabs and Persians in the Banadir coast. Similarly, the Gaboye suffer the same type of discrimination. A section of scholars indicates the precarious impact inherent to the contracting of marriage between the Gaboye and their nomad counterparts as an ethnoculturally illegitimate institution. J. C. Kirk hypothesizes the decline of the status of the Tumul lineage of the Gaboye confederacy to an outcaste class after they contracted marriage with the Midgan and Yibir sub-sections of the Gaboye community.<sup>79</sup> Lewis agrees this version that

Somali tradition of origin was debased by intermarriage with *sab* "runs through the English writing."<sup>80</sup> He also cites R. E. Drake-Brockman, who noted that any "noble" Somali drops his status to Sab outcast and is called Tumul in the event that he marries a Midgan female.<sup>81</sup>

Examining the miserable and lowly status of the Somali outcasts, Asha Samad writes, "To be a Midgan–Madhiban, or an outcast person, in Somali society is to suffer lifelong indignities, to be deemed impure, unlucky, sinful, polluting and thus meriting the disdain, avoidance and abuse of others."<sup>82</sup> In her study, Samad presents the magnitude of this intriguing social stigma as one with stereotypical and prejudicial implications, since "even small children shout insults at both child and adult Midgans."<sup>83</sup>

Notwithstanding the social exclusion of the outcasts by their Somali brethren, the Jareer do not assimilate into the nomadic culture of disgust against the Gaboye community. On the contrary, the Bantu/Jareer deems it normal to celebrate intermarriage with the Baidari. Probably, Virginia Luling can provide us with some evidence to that effect as she states, "There is one group of smiths [Gaboye/Baidari] who originated in Mogadishu but became attached to the Jareer Mooge lineage of Balgure about seven generations ago."<sup>84</sup> While we concur with Luling about the attachment of an outcast group to the Jareer in Afgoye town, we may add to the argument the elucidation that unlike the Somali nomads, whose attachment and alliance with the outcaste is governed by a customary structure of segregation and human degradation, the Bantu Jareer respects the attachment as a symbol of unity and equality, embracing all social interactions from the contract of marriage to the rituals of the funeral institution. Kaahiye Cige Kaah, a Baidari/Gaboye in the Diaspora, portrays the same view. He reiterates, "We share something in common with the Jareer. We even intermarry with them. We haven't had any discrimination with them. My sister has Jareer offspring, same as my daughter does. And there are about three or four families I know who have married Jareer girls."<sup>85</sup>

Despite the claim of Somalia's sharing of one religion, Keynan censures the religious morality of the pastoral Somalis who socially ostracized

the Gaboye community on the basis of unfounded breach of religious doctrines.<sup>86</sup> He calmly unravels the hypocrisy of the so-called Somali Ulumaa-ud-Diin (religious sheikhs) by comparing how the Gaboye communities lost Somali nobility because of “unsubstantiated claims of un-Islamic practice only once,” compared to how the noble-claiming Somalis “severely and continuously violate the tenets of the Islamic laws by drinking alcohol, committing adultery, killing fellow Muslims, robbing and raping, among other violations without suffering any ostracization as a consequence.” According to him, such hypocrisy is “not only double-standards but a deliberate travesty of the Islamic jurisprudence.”<sup>87</sup>

By contrast, the Bantu did not need the attributes of their exclusion to circumvent the breach of customary laws in inconsumable diet, nor to practice exogamy with despised people. As we argued elsewhere, it is more about his physical features and African origin that “justify” his low status in society as Adoon (slave),<sup>88</sup> despite the absence of evidence.

During her fieldwork in the Juba valley, studying the Wa-Zigua diaspora sub-stock of the larger Bantu group, Catherine Besteman expresses her astonishment in learning of the social divide between the Bantu and nomado-pastoral ethnicities within the social fabric of the Somali society,<sup>89</sup> which the ruling nomadic tribes and unsuspecting colonial scholars like Lewis often portrayed as a homogeneous society of egalitarian pastoral culture.<sup>90</sup> After studying the situation, Besteman explains what constitutes Jareer or Bantu from the perspective of the Somali pastoralist: “the Bantu category is equated with ‘African’—and thus slave—ancestry, as distinguished from ‘Arabic’ ancestry of Somalis.”<sup>91</sup>

In our opinion, Jareer exclusion is inherent, principally, not only in what are viewed as social per se, but also in political as well as economic sectors since they are interrelated in the social development. Sociologists like Giddens and Kusow extrapolate the tragedy underlying exclusion by highlighting how those who lack economic resources can remain vulnerable also in the political arena. Whereas Giddens asserts, “Active political participation can be out of the reach of the socially excluded, who may lack the necessary resources, information and opportunities to engage in the political process,”<sup>92</sup> Kusow would utterly endorse Giddens’

hypothesis to inform also the Somali context,<sup>93</sup> a society which Ahmed accurately characterizes as a composition of "a group of people who are wronged, and the presence of a villain, a perpetrator of the wrong."<sup>94</sup> In the same paradigm, however, Mariam Gassim enlightens us about how the first president of independent Somalia looked at the political institution from the acutely narrow perspective of serving the interests of Hawiye and Darod clans while, in contrast, the participation of the Bantu or the larger Jareer nation (*Jareer weyne*) in the country was persistently neglected.<sup>95</sup>

#### THE GABOYE, THE BANTU, AND THE SOMALI STATE

As concerns the Gaboye, the so-called "egalitarian" system and the mode of "democracy" of the pastoralists would not allow the nomination of an outcaste for political participation. The Gaboye neither could nominate nor fielded one of their own for parliamentary elections; they were utilized as ballot bank to increase the numbers of their respective dominators.<sup>96</sup> Another deterring reality is that of the strong financial base required to support political campaigning, which the minority groups lacked. Odetola and Ademola raise the importance of finance in politicking and remark, "Businessmen may contribute money to support the election campaign of a politician friend,"<sup>97</sup> which somehow encourages the notion that future manipulations by and favoritism to such contributors may possibly not be easily ignored in the case that the candidate acquires the post. These two West African scholars acknowledge a rather more complex entanglement between politics, power, and society, asserting, "Politics involves the taking of decisions, the allocation of resources and the distribution of these resources."<sup>98</sup>

This kind of financial support, which was also prevalent in the Somali situation, is what we concur with Odetola and Ademola as they write "many people with little education are political activists and hold political positions."<sup>99</sup> The same is a reality in the Somali situation as a clique of illiterate "pastoral democrats" flooded the parliament on ethnic basis and accumulation purposes, without the ability to keep abreast with key

national demands in the development sector. It is, insomuch as clan power politics is concerned, quite unlikely for an ethnocentric society like Somalia to deem much regard for the necessity of education for political leaders, thus disrespecting the ideals recommended by Benedict Anderson.<sup>100</sup>

Though both of the minority groups in this study have tolerated and still live under massive social exclusion and stigma, there exists a difference in their access to political participation, particularly in the last administration of the country, 1969 to 1991, led by notorious dictator Mohamed Siad Barre. The Bantu, as Mariam Arif Gassim emphasized, had received no consideration and mainly, according to Kusow's observation, because of their undesirable ethnic background as Africans and as a misplaced assumption that has erroneously but enduringly characterized all of them as descendants of "slave" ancestors. In addition to the scholars who contextualized the subject from their respective perspectives, Bantu poets have manifested the ills and evils of their exclusion in literary art, poems that were preserved underground until Barre's removal from power.<sup>101</sup>

Unlike the Jareer, who suffered absolute political alienation in post-colonial Somalia, Barre accorded the Gaboye/Baidari some solace (if one may call it so) by accommodating them in his military administration. Barre extended this gesture to the Gaboye not only as a form of consolation in political inclusion, but also as a path to social mobility. At the political level, members of the Baidari enjoyed incumbent positions unequalled. They dominated some top decision making posts which many members of the noble-claiming nomadic clans envied. The positions of vice president and/or defense minister were sensitive as much as they were challenging, and the Gaboye elites appointed to such posts, however divisive the social view related to those nominations, were treated as equals and perhaps well-dignified individuals.

If we examine the issue from another perspective, the Gaboye gained prestige at least in political inclusion, despite the fact that those positions would not make up for what they had lost as a result of the wider aspect of social exclusion. Yet, in comparison to the Bantu, the Gaboye

were hoisted to these upper political echelons as a result of belonging to the Jileec segment of the social society when gauged on the basis of Jareer and Jileec or Bantu and non-Bantu (i.e., African against Arab), as per the tutelage of Somali nomadic thinking.

However, an analysis of the episode lays open the verity that, in wider society, the Gaboye were unable to penetrate through the layers of barricades that frame and inform Somali social strata and therefore failed to experience full inclusion and equality to the "nobles." A scrutiny of the elevation of a few Gaboye elites in terms of *sanskritization* (or upward mobility), compared to the global disadvantage of the majority of their masses still as inferiors, can best be learned from literary critic Ali J. Ahmed, who shrewdly remarks, "Individual emancipation does not necessarily lead to a politics of emancipation, where the goal is collective redemption."<sup>102</sup> In any case, this military or rather nomado-pastoral philosophy was effectively preserving the ideology of homogeneity and egalitarianism purported by narrow-thinking stage-managers, a decadent group Ahmed describes as "the state's own charlatans enamored with this version of the Somali identity."<sup>103</sup> The aforementioned scenario is not confined to Somalia only but appears in the United States as well. According to Rasheed Farah, one or two African Americans such as Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell are elevated and ascended to a prominent position of power at the peril of millions of marginalized and disadvantaged African Americans. The ultimate motive of ascending a "few minorities" to the top is to pacify their concern and to portray the dominators and exploiters as inclusive, under the pretext of embracing multicultural governing system.<sup>104</sup> In reality though, the dominated are decaying in the squalid slums and ghettos.

Reviewing through the political literature of the post-independence Somali states, most of the sources analyze the positions of state portfolios according to ethnic or clan participation. One document that does not purvey its sources is compiled by Awes O. Hagi and Abdiwahid O. Hagi. The second document by Abdulahi Osman is a reconstruction of Hagi and Hagi. Both documents, however, are in concurrence over the inclusion of the various clans, whether of Somaloid or Arab-Persian diaspora from Asia

(Banadiri), as well as the members of the Baidari outcasts, regardless of the meager percentage. Osman summarizes the participating communities as Darod, Hawiye, Isaq, Isse, Reer Hamar [Banadiri], Arab, Digil Mirifle, Gadabursi, Madhiban, Tumul, and Dir; hence Tumul and Madhiban represent the Gaboye/Baidari community.<sup>105</sup>

Although Osman discusses the nature and impact of political inequality in Somalia, he gives us the impression that his version of inequality lays the focus primarily on power-sharing among the Jileec Somalis, all except the Bantu Jareer. In other words, his work consummates a review of the descriptive statistics of state portfolio holders of the Darood clan as compared to the other Somali clans<sup>106</sup> with the exception of the Jareer. But we can utilize the same diagram to unfold the argument further and scrutinize that same narrative from the lens of the Bantu as they portray inequality, not from Osman's inequality within the Jileec but according to its paradigmatic nature and in the divide between the Jileec as dominant and the Bantu-Jareer as the dominated.<sup>107</sup>

While agreeing with Osman regarding Darood domination and manipulation of the Somali political cycle as well as state administration, the reigning fact is that Osman may not disagree that all other clans were mirrored in the government, whether noble or ignoble, save the Bantu, who statistically have broader numerical size than many of the clans that claim majority status with no supporting statistical measurement.<sup>108</sup> Ambroso's paper on Somali ethnic groups and the locus of the Gaboye minorities in Somali social texture asserts how "Siad Barre tried to emancipate these pariah clans and some of their members who held important offices during his regime, including the military."<sup>109</sup>

Ambroso's statement about Gaboye cabinet participation in Barre's regime comes in clear concurrence with Asha Samad's corroboration informing, "Only under the last government of Somali General President Mohamed Siad Barre did Midgans have some rights in their own country."<sup>110</sup> In another statement drawing from her earlier information of the Gaboye link with Barre's administration, Samad writes, "The last government of Somalia, that of General Mohamed Siad Barre, had appointed several Midgan-Madhiban clan members to visible defense positions."<sup>111</sup>

Despite the appointments though, and whatever Barre's motives, the reality remains that the status quo vis-à-vis the Gaboye social class has not changed in Somalia. Individual appointments and isolated cases aside, the community has not experienced what Ali J. Ahmed calls "collective redemption" or anything close to what Omar Eno terms as "the comfort zone," in the sense that even the *sanskritized* few who benefited from "individual emancipation" seemed to have been deprived of the necessary powers and political influence to advocate for equal rights and better social status for their community.

As for the Jareer, social exclusion in areas of development is a paradigm to which they attribute their ethnic background and African descendancy. The African identity becomes more comprehensive in the critical writing of Ahmed, who, from the critical perspective of literature, touches the political, social, and cultural domains of a Somalia which seems unknown even to many who thought to have studied it laboriously and written about it exhaustively. The Africanity, of which Ahmed extols the Somali Bantu for holding on to their ethnic identity, is what caused the nomad's rejection of the Jareer people for recognition and equality with the rest of ethnicities in the country.

Rasheed Farah opines that the minority groups in Somalia are the most productive, the most creative, and resourceful people.<sup>112</sup> They engage in the most promising skills, such as farming, manufacturing, and trade. Therefore, the rest of Somali society should learn a lot from them and appreciate their talent by giving them the respect they deserve. Somalis should follow the positive footsteps set by the minorities, which are based on hard work, peaceful coexistence, and progressive thinking. Hatred, warmongering, and megalomaniacal obsession do not contribute to a unified and prosperous Somalia.

## CONCLUSION

The chapter portrayed the social situation of two oppressed communities in Somalia and expanded what has been ethnically known about Somali society. Based on the social realities we furnished in this essay, we need

to unlearn the colonial scholars' Somalia and the myth of homogeneity and egalitarian pastoral democracy at the expense of distorting Somalia's multiethnicity and multiculturalism as well as identity loss and identity denial for the non-nomad communities. Somali society employs well-orchestrated methods of segregation, discrimination, and degradation against diverse segments of the society as "caste" or "minority." Consequently, these methods have been used as sacred tools to alienate these communities from social equality, state participation, or both. In order to create a just society, African states need to consider the incorporation into the state machinery of all the representative identities of the society regardless of their religion, culture, or ethnic background. Perpetual alienation of one or more groups from the framework of decision-making apparatus at the state level may in the long run lead to destruction of society in senseless wars and flight of the needed human capital for the development of the nation.

## ENDNOTES

1. A substantial portion of this chapter benefited from the contribution of both Bantu-Jareer and Gaboye-Baidari communities as well as other Somali groups, particularly the two upcoming coherent and cogent scholars, Ahmed M. Keynan and Rasheed Farah, whose knowledge of the Gaboye and Baidari history and culture is colossal. Our primary data comes from fieldwork in the regions, participant observation, and oral interviews with a number of informants, including members of the two communities in focus as well as individuals from other Somali communities with sound historical knowledge of the people in the subject. Please note that the following names will be used interchangeably: Gaboye and Baidari refer to the same people; nomado-pastoral and "noble" Somalis refer to the same people; and Bantu and Jareer refer to the same people.
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