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## From Linguistic Imperialism to Language Domination: “Linguicism” and Ethno-Linguistic Politics in Somalia

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### Abstract

As was the case with many newly independent African nations, Somalia was beset by a language problem whose complexity had begun well before independence and the unification of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland in 1960. With three languages (English, Arabic, and Italian) used as media of communication in government offices and in schools, various Somali administrations struggled to contain the impasse but found no tangible solution. Barely three years after Mohamed Siad Barre seized power in October 1969, he had his military regime introduce the Somali orthography in the Latin alphabet. Based on this milestone, Siad Barre's military rule is highly commended for taking a remarkable step forward in what came to be known as the Somalization project. However, officials of the government and Somali scholarship failed to

examine the social impact of the Somalization project on sections of the multi-ethnic and multilingual entities in the country, in addition to overlooking the possible alternative interpretations that could be drawn from the factors underlying the project. Hence, in this essay, we bring into focus some of the factors related to the adoption and implementation of the national language, particularly in two aspects: (a) the selection of Af Maxaa (Maha language) over other vernacular tongues (b) the central/northern variant of Maxaa that was standardized as the national language. In more specific terms, we dwell on how ethnic politics and hegemony were not only longstanding problems in Somalia's language issue but also significant actors in the military regime's language decision and how despite the pride that underpinned nationalizing the language of the supposedly homogeneous monolingual nation, aspects of linguisticism and cultural prejudice remain visible in Somali studies and scholarship, a likely reason that scholars have been too shy to examine the considerable pitfalls of the process throughout sections of the society.

*Keywords:* culture, ethnicity, identity, language problem, nationalization, Somalization

## **Introduction**

Very few language policies, if any, appear to work in Africa. This is because many of the language policies are not objectively and rationally thought out but rather are motivated by political expediencies. There is a great deal of contradiction involved. (Abdulaziz, 2003:110)

Contemporary scholars have critically observed the functions of language from diverse perspectives other than mere communication; they have analyzed the virtually hidden agendas, including values, prestige, identity, pride, power, culture, and economy, as factors related to this powerful device of communication (Ahmed, 1996; Auerbach, 1995; Fairclough, 2001; Pennycook, 1995; Shohamy, 2006; Tollefson, 1995). Similarly, a subgroup of the scholars and writers engaged in Somali studies (Eno et al., 2014; Eno, 2005; Gassim, 2002; Mukhtar, 2010, 2013) analyze the

nationalization of the Somali language and the standardization of the variant spoken in the central and northern regions, among others, as an economic and privilege-driven project not entirely disentangled from ethnic factors. They also contend that the objective of the project can be traced beyond the purported national cohesion or collective cultural and identity pride it is assumed to embrace.

The notion of collective cultural and identity pride is inherent to the mythical description by colonial writers and early students of Somali studies that Somalia is exclusively occupied by a homogenous people who descended from a progenitor of Arabian origin, more specifically a close kin of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Based on that postulation, they also popularized the assumptions that all the people in the country speak the same language, share one religion (Islam), and pursue a single nomadic culture as a mode of living (Lewis, 1955, 1961). Though they are appreciable, these generalized assumptions have been too damaging to sections of the society at different levels—ethnically, historically, politically, culturally, linguistically and academically—such that many scholars have unanalytically glossed over the reality of the multiethnic composition and linguistic diversity of the ethnicities in Somalia.

By relying too much on the works of early writers who studied Somalia from the perspectives of their northern Somalia informants and who later portrayed the entire population of the country as a homogenous people; many scholars have been misled into a misreading that neglects the diversity among the ethnicities in the country. For instance, and despite her advocacy for African languages against colonial media in African schools, Kanana (2013), among others, is one of the scholars trapped in the misconception of a “homogenous Somalia” (p. 53) apocryphally postulated by British colonial anthropologist I. M. Lewis and other colonial

scholars. Drawing from that untenable notion, and likely unaware of the sociopolitical hegemony and sociolinguistic diversity of the groups in the country, Kanana has set Somalia alongside Burundi and Rwanda as nations of people who use “a common language” (p. 53).

Similarly, following Lewisite studies of Somalia, Abdulaziz (2003) wrote, “Somalia is one of the most homogenous areas of Africa in terms of ethnicity, language, culture and religion” (p. 107) but did not name examples of such countries. This (mis)presentation of the country as an all-inclusive anthropological unit under the umbrella of a homogenous Somali people has massively contributed to a kind of scholarly docility and unconsciousness toward any critical observation of linguistic domination, which, ironically, Abdulaziz strongly advocated against, thus paradoxically attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable. It is indeed the disingenuousness of the early writers that created what Kubota and Lin (2006) described elsewhere as “internal and external gaps” by not attracting first-generation Somali scholarship toward conducting “vibrant enquiries” that investigate Somali society beyond the colonial assumptions and state-supported fallacy of homogeneity (p. 473).

Contrary to the spurious ideology of homogeneity and monolinguality, the country has experienced a difficult situation where society and civil administrations after independence could not agree on a single Somali orthography or official language. When the military regime of Siad Barre announced the Somali orthography and endorsed the Somali language as the only official language in state bureaucracy and in schools, many African scholars and Africanists applauded the development as a step in the right direction. In contrast, close observation of the issue exposes a number of anomalies that the original ideas of homogeneity and the Somalization of the official and curricular language have caused to

communities of various ethnic backgrounds in terms of identity suppression, cultural oppression, and other forms of prejudice and linguistic domination related to the ethno-political hegemony prevalent in the country.

### **Methods and Data**

Methodologically, we use the case study because of its flexibility in data collection and possibility for expansion and inclusion of new data as the research unfolds and for the richness of the data the subjects can provide relevant to their experiences, emotions, and perceptions regarding the subject under study (Eno & Dammak, 2014; Flyvbjerg, 2011). We also invoke a bit of critical race methodology that Solórzano and Yosso (2002) delineated as “an approach to research grounded in critical race theory” (p. 38). In view of that, we concur with Solórzano and Yosso in the notion that “Critical race methodology pushes us ... to recognize silenced voices in qualitative data” (p. 38). Furthermore, the study benefits from primary data by way of interviews and various sources including narratives and available literature borrowed from relevant academic disciplines.

### **Language as a Political Tool for Domination: A Global Context**

One of the reasons for raising the topic of linguistic domination in this context is that we often criticize English and other colonially imposed languages for their domination of the indigenous languages in former European colonies, especially in Africa (Mazrui, 1975; Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998; wa Thiong’o, 1996). African scholars tend to critically debate the social and communicative functions of foreign languages from the perspective of their superior position compared with the inferior status of the indigenous languages in these cultures. In

comparison, there is insufficient attention focused on the domination of an African native language over other equally indigenous forms of communication, particularly in the case of Somalia, where mythical homogeneity has taken the center stage and with it a huge toll on the suppressed cultures and languages.

In addition, because any kind of oppression is “evil,” including language domination, the colonial practice can be contextualized in the African scene where the various languages used in one country are treated as dominator and dominated or superior and inferior as determined by the powers that be. In other words, although some would argue a distinction between weak and strong types of evil, Southwold (1985) suggested that the more we try “to keep ‘evil’ in the strong sense, the better to point to the problems that arise” (p. 132). The gist of the argument has been that in most cases, the ruling elite’s political position and power to nationalize a language underpins the ethno-cultural supremacy imposed on those who lack significant and sufficient voices within the ruling circles, notwithstanding that the language policy is ideologically implemented under the pretext of nationalism and national unity (Fishman, 1991; Freire, 2000; Mukhtar, 2010; Ouane, 2003; Wright, 2004).

The ruling elite’s nationalistic rhetoric is often used as an effective, but hidden, device to create ethnic blindness towards the supremacy the ruling group maintains for its ethnic affiliates. The elite’s nationalistic rhetoric is then used to obfuscate society and gain their support for the hidden agenda. It is indeed this group that brings to the fore what Ouane and Glanz (2010) noted are obfuscations in Africa’s language policies and the double-talk of those in power, characterized as “a lot of confusions that are proving hard to dispel, especially when these are used as a smokescreen to hide political motives of domination and hegemony” (p. 5), thereby

overshadowing the intent of the imposition and the subsequent domination. Observing the various functions of language necessitates its problematization from definitional, functional, and ideological perspectives as a form of imperialism (Galtung, 1988; Phillipson, 1992). In fact it extended our understanding of language by viewing it as a tool of domination. These functions and elaborations were succinctly coined “linguicism” by Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) who aptly contextualized the phenomenon from the perspective of language discrimination and more specifically with regard to the inharmonious discussions over official and unofficial languages. The author defined linguicism as

ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language. (p. 13)

Swiss philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure (1966) perceived language not merely as a phenomenon that carries the values and ideologies of the dominant speech community but also an apparatus to exclude and marginalize those outside the sociolinguistic pattern. Poststructuralist scholars such as Derrida and Foucault (Waseem & Asadullah, 2013) have emphasized the dire repercussions a language may cause to those outside the ethnolinguistic community in terms of ideological beliefs, general worldviews, and modes of life. Critically analyzing the intersections and interconnectedness between language, politics, literature, society, and culture in Somalia in the mid-1990s, Ali J. Ahmed (1996) shed light on how, due to its multiple functions, a language cannot be “neutral or value-free” (p. 2). Furthering his analysis of the language phenomenon, Ahmed wrote that “Language is not only a vehicle” for mediating the exchange of ideas but a

powerful instrument that “also formulates the socio-political and economic definitions of the nation concerned” (p. 3).

An exploration of language from the perspective of its potential motivates us to focus on the power associated with it both as a medium of communication and as a carrier of the cultural ideology of the dominant political group. That is why, according to Saussure (1966), “Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula” (p. 112). Consequently, being exposed to a dominant language makes the learner or user of that language vulnerable to the influences of the culture it represents and the ideological views it enshrines (Ashcroft, 2000). Concurring with Fairclough (2001) and Halliday (1971), scholars Waseem and Asadullah (2013) aptly argued that from the perspective of critical pedagogy, “language teaching and language of instruction in education, assumes a crucial role in the teaching situation” (p. 802) where one group’s knowledge and cultural ideologies are inculcated in learners who hail from different ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds.

Within the perception of cultural domination, Waseem and Asadullah (2013) reported Macaulay’s opinion that by studying the imperial rulers’ curriculum, the natives were offered the daily opportunity “to converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the language of their work” (p. 801). In Macaulay’s imperialistic view, the exposure to English culture would ultimately “westernize the people and impress upon them the superiority of western culture and knowledge,” implying “benefits” of domination by the so-called superior culture to the dominated people (p. 801).

Contrary to Macaulay’s discernment, Brock-Utne and Holmarsdottir (2005), in discussing the place of Kiswahili in Tanzania’s academic institutions, maintained that “Learning opportunities are not designed to meet the basic learning needs of the students if the language of instruction becomes a barrier to knowledge” (p. 17). We can argue here that “a

barrier to knowledge” informs deprivation of education and abuse of learner rights; additionally, although it was never discussed amid the euphoria of introducing the Somali orthography, the case might have been so for many students who were exposed to the nationalized Somali language, which was more of a barrier to them than a facilitator of knowledge acquisition. Our contention is supported by the fact that the Maxaa language and the central/northern variant in which the Somali school curriculum was delivered were unknown to many students for whom these were literally not their mother tongues but were in fact foreign. This particular situation reminds us of Phillipson’s (1996) critical point of view of being “suspicious of domination by speakers of any language” and hence an emphasis on advocacy for “the rights of all languages” (p. 163).

Aiming at foreign languages, Bamgbose (2011) said that “The imported official languages have maintained their dominance not only in terms of their high status but also in terms of the prestigious domains in which they are used” (p. 1). Banda’s (2009) opposition to linguistic domination referred to the disadvantages caused by language as a powerful institution of control in that “[t]he proclamation of languages as official, national and non-official imposes a power and status hierarchy not only among the languages, but also among the speakers of these languages” (p. 7). In an attempt to trace one of the sources of the predicament, Batibo (2005) accused the African elite, especially the political decision makers, for their role in hoisting the status of the language of the former colonial rulers or elevating the language of a dominant group to a nationally decreed language and thus disregarding the distinct vernaculars used by the diverse communities in the same country who are unable to comprehend the elite imposed tongue.

Ouane (2003) was opposed to “simplistic universalist approaches” in language standardization because these strategies may often be laden with “hidden subtle attempts to control and maintain unequal power relations and a comfortable status quo” (p. i) enjoyed by the proponents of the national language project. Banda (2009) also seemed unconvinced by the promotion of a single dominant code as a national identity; instead, he advocated for multilingualism that fosters “the means for increased socio-economic, political, etc. participation across broad African populations” (p. 10). Compulsory communication media, according to Fafunwa (1990), remain among the most significant factors that work against the diffusion of knowledge and skills, posing a potential hindrance to the rapid social well-being and economic transformation of the majority of people in Africa.

Additionally, as Binsbergen (2006) elaborated, “Language policy—even if appealing to ‘objective’ considerations of linguistic analysis, constitutional equity and socioeconomic development—is often formulated and implemented in a political and ideological context partly defined by ethnic parameters” (p. 142). Therefore, it is through questioning this scenario that we intend to provide a nuanced discussion of the interplay between language, power, and ethnicity in Somali society, with more emphasis on the impact of the nationalization of one language among others and the standardization of a variant that is popular only in certain regions and, for that matter, not spoken by a majority of the citizens.

### **Language as a Burning Issue in Somalia: An Unfinished Struggle?**

Abdalla Mansur (2015) convincingly wrote that the establishment of the Somali orthography was followed by the

immediate production of “many textbooks for all schools from primary to high schools.” Nevertheless, neither he nor any other scholar has claimed to have investigated the dismal effects of the Somalization project on speakers of the unsung vernaculars used in the country and the multiple varieties of the nationalized language. Neither has any study revealed, so far, the extent of the cognitive limitations that resulted from the lack of sufficient academic resources in the Somali orthography to support learners beyond school textbooks. Instead, Mansur pressed the accusation that by appreciating the use of foreign languages, Somalis are minimizing the “prestige of the mother tongue,” which as a result makes them lose what Szecsy (2008) termed “language loyalty.”

Although Mansur’s simplistic argument fell short of withstanding scrutiny, it nevertheless brought a caveat: how many mother tongues would emerge had Mansur gathered in the same classroom early-age schoolchildren directly from their ethnic villages and hometowns whose mothers hailed from the multiple ethnicities of Reewing, Baraawe, Jiido, Tunni, Garre, Isaaq, Abgaal, Reer Xamar, Mushunguli, Yibir, Shiidle, and Midgaan? In terms of language preference and learner motivation, would Mansur have considered the approach of critical language awareness (CLA) pertinent to the detailed examination of “the nature of disadvantage and injustice” faced by different sections of society as a result of language domination (Wallace, 1999:104), or would he have imposed the mother tongue of one pupil on all others regardless of the linguistic distinctness of the individual mothers mentioned? Mansur’s view of the mother tongue controversy and language loyalty fed from Somali scholars’ docility in the environment of the state-sponsored project, a language policy designed to uphold the culture of those who were “loyal” to their language and to dominate “others” who

did not share historical experiences, same culture, or did not embrace loyalty to that same language.

Unlearning the early writers' metaphor of a homogenous Somalia reveals language as one among the various heavily contested issues in Somali society. In fact, a quick reflection on the work of Ehret and Ali (1984) demonstrates a division of the Somali languages and their related dialects into over 20 different subgroups; the main vernaculars being Af Maxaa (Maha language) and Af Maay (Maay language). However, the popularity of these two vernaculars does not mean that every Somali individual speaks either of them with high or equal competence.

Additionally, and despite the two sharing some etymological similarities, presumably due to contact or fringing of one from the other as a proto-language, they are mutually unintelligible with each other. Both of them have a variety of dialects characterized by ethnic group and/or the geographic location and culture that shape each sociolinguistic group (Eno, 2008; Kusow, 1995). In essence, the adoption, adaptation, and implementation of the Maxaa language was enforced without considering the reality that many Somalis lack access to or have very limited understanding of what the state endorsed as the national official language.

With time, the economic intentions of the Somalization project became evident in that merely perfunctory skills at reading and writing the Somali language were used as sufficient qualifications to empower essentially uneducated members of certain kin groups. These people were appointed to high bureaucratic positions with no consideration of their barren academic backgrounds (Eno et al., 2014; Gassim, 2002); this ironic and treacherous situation resulted in the coining of the urban slang phrase "from camel to colonel." It is the situation Gassim (p. 61) describes sarcastically as the "ruralization" of the urban dwellers and Eno (2014:16) as the

“fast multimillionairization of individuals with the least education.” As Gassim commented, the phenomenon of ruralizing of urban areas by those who were ethnically related to the power-wielding clan:

[...] was accelerated by the recruitment of pastorals into the Somali National Army and Police Force. In a relatively short time after the military takeover, the majority of government high-ranking officials were of pastoral origin. The camel myth and poems were central to Somali elite conversation. The ruling elite considered city dwellers, unable to cite such verses for their different background, strangers, if not foolish. (p. 62)

Reflecting on this dichotomy via imaginative writing was Kaddare’s novel *Waasuge iyo Warsame*. Here, though they are fictionalized, Kaddare’s characters are a vivid representation, among others, of the two major modes of production—i.e., peasant and pastoral—that are extant in the country. Warsame, the nomad, represents the pastoral culture sponsored by the state and promoted as the national identity, whereas Waasuge is of peasant background and the dominated culture. Through the dialogue in his novel, Kaddare questioned the social situation that prevailed in the country. Commenting on a similar situation, Ahmed (1996:64) wrote, “by questioning the social world the writer registers his/her dissatisfaction with that which already exists.” Therefore, despite what seems to be an enduring silence on the topic, there have been hints in literary forms, but of course with little or no critical analysis of the scenario by the pioneers of Somali studies, not to mention the many sketches and performance pieces on the topic and the differences in culture and language.

To the extent that Maay and Maxaa “are not intelligible to each other” (Kusow, 1995:93), it is our contention that the peasant Maay speaker in the Dhankafaruur village of Buur Hakaba District or the Jiido pastoral or agro-pastoral who speaks only his ethnic Jiido mother tongue (and possibly a

variety of the Maay language as spoken in the hinterland of the Dhoobooy area in Lower Shabelle) are linguistically hindered from communicating with their fellow citizens in the north or in central Somalia. In the same way, the speakers of Yao, Ngindo, and Kizigwa (sub-Bantu ethnic dialects) who inhabit parts of the Juba Valley and the speakers of Garre, ki-Bajuni, ChiMwini or Chimbalazi would all have difficulty understanding the Somali Maxaa speaker from the northern or central regions; same as the nomad in Hagal, Saba Wanaag, or War Idaad in the heart of Somaliland and the pastoralist in Ceel Doofaar or Qodax in parts of Puntland would all be overwhelmed, if not utterly frustrated, among Maay speakers in a conversation in their ethnic vernacular—considering the difference of the two languages “to the same extent as Spanish and Portuguese” (p. 93).

In addition, and more specifically, Maay is spoken widely in many regions of the south; Maxaa, in contrast, is popular in both the south and the north but with distinct varieties influenced by both geographical space and socio-ethnic or sociolinguistic group, as we mentioned above. Notwithstanding these complexities, Somalia’s linguistic impasse is observable from multiple viewpoints, influences, and periods. These are related, but not restricted, to Arabic influence, colonial involvement, competing indigenous scripts, attempts by the civilian regimes, the solution adopted by the military regime, and finally, the emergence of agitation of ethnic-nationalism and advocacy for language equality and recognition during the civil anarchy. We will expound on each of these factors and their impact on the language issue in Somalia in the next segment.

## **Competing Rivalries in the Somali Linguistic Landscape<sup>1</sup>**

### **Arabic/Religious Influence**

The use of the Somali language transliterated into the Arabic alphabet was initiated by religious scholars. These early texts were mainly religious and *sufi* (mystic) songs. Due to the religious scholars' knowledge of the Arabic script, it was easier for them to preserve their songs and other oral creations in Arabic.

### **Colonial Involvement**

In the late 1890s, Christian missionaries wrote a book about the Somali grammar using the Latin script in Af Maxaa. Later, in the early years of the 1900s, in the British Protectorate of Somaliland in northern Somalia, W. C. Kirk published a grammar for the Yibir and Midgaan languages spoken by sections of the marginalized outcast groups in that part of the country.<sup>2</sup>

### **Competing Indigenous Scripts**

The indigenous scripts in the country were introduced by individual scholars and were favored or rather, promoted based on ethnocentrism, specifically, membership in the clan or sub-clan from which the inventor of the proposed orthography hailed. This was the era of inventions such as Cismaaniya script, Gudibirsiya script, Kadariya script, and others, all of which were named after a sub-clan or its inventor as its basic identity rather than the nation. One of the reasons that none of them would qualify to represent the nation's identity was the tribal politics that were at the center of the language issue.

## **The Civilian Regimes: 1960–1969**

Until 1959, the two main languages of Maay and Maxaa were both broadcast on Radio Mogadishu, the official broadcasting organ of the nation. The provincial, transitional pre-independence government endorsed airing solely Af Maxaa on Radio Mogadishu, effectively banning the broadcasting of Af Maay from the national airwaves (Mukhtar, 2010). More significantly, the provincial government's banning of Maay from the national broadcasting network was the beginning of its institutionalizing an operative form of linguistic marginalization and effecting a kind of language rights abuse in Somalia, despite Somali and Somalist scholars' long silence on the issue.

At independence and upon unification of British Somaliland in the north and Italian Somaliland in the south on July 1, 1960, "there was a curious linguistic dilemma" (Abdulaziz, 2003:107) because the two regions had different foreign languages (English in the north and Italian in the south) as their official means of communication. Soon after, the civilian regime constituted a language commission in October 1960 that because of ethnic politics and competition for supremacy failed to bear any fruit. As a result, English, Arabic, and Italian continued as the official languages (Laitin, 1977)<sup>3</sup> and were also broadcast on the national radio while the ban on Maay was effectively maintained.

The following civil administration (1964–1967) raised the language concern, but language politics precipitated ethnic volatility, rendering all efforts unsuccessful. This is the time when English was slowly gaining popularity with the support of high bureaucrats in the civilian administration from the north for whom English was an official language in their part of the country during the colonial period. The Italian-speaking elite of the south, Ismail Jimale Osoble being detrimentally

vocal among them, expressed their anger about the Anglicization project and the imposition of the “language of Shakespeare” without regard for the fact that a majority of the southern elite spoke Italian (Laitin, 1977:127). The southern protests also bore no fruit, mainly due to an ethno-political move propelled by the dominant ethnic group in the top political circles.

### **The Military Regime**

When the National Armed Forces seized power in October 1969 in a bloodless coup d'état, the language issue was immediately revived under the pretext of national unity and a single Somali identity. Army leader President Siad Barre constituted a National Language Committee whose mandate was to write the Somali language, with clear indication that selecting the script would be the prerogative of the Supreme Revolutionary Council, the ruling body. In 1972, during the third anniversary of the military rule, a solution was in hand: Somalia had chosen the Latin alphabet for its orthography, and Maxaa, particularly the central/northern variety, was to be the national official language and medium of school curricula.

The selection of Maxaa over other languages can be explained from different standpoints. One such view, by an elderly Digil-Mirifle politician, analyzed that the decision was not an accident but an “ethno-politically motivated decision which targeted primarily the Maay language.” The reason for that, according to the informant, could be traced to the fact that:

...the Maay speakers, and particularly the Digil-Mirifle [confederation of communities], have been campaigning for a federal system of administration since pre-independence. It was therefore a signal to the Digil-Mirifle elite who were still sympathetic to the federal system and the recognition of the place of their Maay language, that a revival of the

idea would not be tolerated by *Golaha Sare ee Kacaanka* (the Supreme Revolutionary Council). (Discussion, March 2012)

In his discussion of the problematic situation surrounding the Maxaa dialect as the national official language and the dire consequences for the advocates of Maay, Mukhtar (2013) proclaimed that

[t]his experiment alienated speakers of other Somali languages, especially Maay speakers who, in 1976, formed a literary association called Af-Yaal, “the language keepers” whose main concern was the protection and revival of Maay culture and language. By 1980, many of the members of Af-Yaal were jailed, harassed and killed by the Barre military administration forcing some into exile. (p. 16)

The elite of the Maay speakers believed that the specific dialect of Maxaa selected was the one dominant in the central and northern regions, the same dialect of those also dominant in the Supreme Revolutionary Council, including President Siad Barre himself. It is a variety that might thus be used by fewer speakers than others spoken in the south, with an assumption that the choice was also based on an ethnically situated ideology (Eno, 2008; Mukhtar, 2010, 2013). In any case, to the speakers of that variety, its selection marked an elevation of their linguistic and cultural identity considering that their superiority in that regard had won state affirmation through the nationalization of their dialect and therefore their cultural identity.

As a consequence, that particular variety of the language as well as the nomadic culture of the dominant ruling clan were imposed as the standardized identity that every Somali citizen was obligated to claim and be proud of, regardless of ethnic diversity or social background (Ahmed, 1996, 1995; Gassim, 2002). From this turbulent linguistic landscape, and notwithstanding Abdulaziz’s (2003) optimistic acknowledgment that “the Somali Language Academy has done tremendous

work to develop Somali as a working national official language” (p. 107), which indeed it did, our disputation is that among other factors the policy has been implemented at a high cost to the communities whose members were not dominant in the top decision-making echelons of state administration. With time, a different image appeared during the civil anarchy, as we will show in the next section.

### **The Civil Anarchy Period: Resistance to Domination**

The civil war has become one of a number of issues relating to the social transformations that the Somali people experienced, including in the linguistic landscape of postcolonial Somalia. Aside from the magnitude of the devastation, in some cases the war might have been a blessing in disguise, particularly to certain ethno-linguistic groups. Significantly, however, it was during this period of chaos that the Digil-Mirifle confederation of ethnic communities gained voice. The group, which mainly consists of the major Maay-speaking ethnic populations in the southern regions of the country, was able to heal the old wounds sustained during their pre-independence quest for regional autonomy and the ban of their language from the national airwaves in 1959. Because they took up arms, liberated their area from invaders from other regions, and gained equal participant status in the national political scene, they engaged in uncompromising negotiations for making Maay an official language of the country; as a result, they won linguistic stature that constitutionalized Maay alongside Maxaa at the national level. They also achieved a number of parliamentary seats equal to that of the clans who once were their dominators.

## Linguicism and Cultural Bigotry in Somalia

Efforts have been made to discourage scholars from studying other Somali themes. Valuable sources for the study of Somalia's past were ignored... The oral tradition of non-nomadic Somalia was *systematically ignored*, and their languages were not studied. Historical sites were set up where there were no signs of history. Religious heroes were made up where the practice of Islam has been insignificant. Truth is what is good for something and, in this instance, good for nomadism. The aim was, undercover of nationalism, to safeguard the interests of certain clans and suppress the aspiration of others. (Mukhtar, 1995:21; emphasis in original)

As we underlined above, Somalia's language problem had been ongoing for decades before the Latin alphabet was adopted and the central/northern variety of Maxaa was imposed as the national language. Although this linguistic turmoil was a reality, the colonially constructed concept of homogeneity was also effectually employed to conceal the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in the country. In the interplay of those realities, a fertile ground for internally maintained "othering" was established and effectively employed against members whose linguistic and cultural identities the state had failed to acknowledge, appreciate, or accommodate as part of the country's culture and civilization. Moreover, nationwide campaigns of what the military regime coined *qabiil duugid*, the "burial of tribalism," contributed to people's silencing and coercion to conform to the state-managed status quo (Ahmed, 1996).

This new development of the military junta's espousal of the central/northern variety of Maxaa and adaptation to the nomadic culture created two significant and interrelated predicaments: the concentration of Somali studies including the Somali language and culture on the premise of nomadism, the cultural mode of the elite dominant in the regime (Ahmed, 1995 1996; Mukhtar, 1995), and the degradation of non-

nomadic languages and ethno-cultural entities as less Somali or less pure than what is generally related to nomadism (Eno & Eno, 2009). These two aspects, as discussed in the paragraphs below, led a section of Somali scholars either to disdain the effective study of other communities or write about them with signs of bias emanating from either cultural bigotry, insufficient exploration of other cultures, or lack of constructive analysis.

For instance, Ahmed I. Samatar (1988:38) compared the leadership and literary qualities of Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, a northern Somali leader for whom “[l]ivestock raiding was the major source of sustenance and survival,” with those of Sheikh Uways, a mystic southern clergyman described by B. G. Martin (2003:163; see also 1976) of such noble qualities as being a “generous and free giver. No food or *dirhams* or *dinars* [material valuables] came into his hands but he soon gave them away for charitable reasons.” In another piece of his analysis, Ahmed Samatar (p.27) sullied the eminence of Sheikh Uways by deliberately implicating him in incidents of collaboration with colonialists that took place in northern Somalia and were indulged in by northern Somali religious scholars, not by Sheikh Uways or southern scholars of the Uwaysiya or Qadiriya sects.

However, in contrast to Ahmed Samatar’s framing of the issue, Martin’s original work (1976:181), which Ahmed Samatar cites in this context, made no mention of corruption by either Sheikh Uways or any other southern figure in these incidents of collaboration. When that particular section is read more cautiously, we see that Martin’s discussion focused on the consumption of *qat* (mild narcotic leaves also known as *miraa* or *mirungi* in parts of East Africa), a social habit in the north, and transportation of livestock from the port of Berbera (in British Somaliland) to Aden, a popular trade that was vibrant in the north at the time. Martin then highlighted

the situation with regard to the reluctance of the northern Qadiris to convert to Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan's Salihya sect. Their reluctance, among other factors, might have been influenced by the followers of the northern Qadiriya sect's desire to preserve their business interests, a conviction not to disrupt the stability that was prevailing in the region, and preserving the Qadiriya orthodoxy that the people had adopted and in which they were well versed prior to Mohamed Abdille Hassan's campaign of violence and coercion.

Extending his comments of giving more credence to Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, Ahmed Samatar (1988:35) invented an unprecedented diatribe that Sheikh Uways "never had (nor did he try to cultivate) some of the Sayyid's qualities that were bound to make one stand out in a crowd, particularly a Somali one—supreme poetic talent (especially the admonitory for allies and the invective against adversaries)." Although the limitations of Ahmed Samatar's uncorroborated claim can be confronted from multiple angles, we briefly dwell here only on three points because a more detailed empirical study on the subject is underway:

- Whether Sheikh Uways had "qualities that were bound to make one stand out in a crowd." Samatar's statement can scarcely withstand scrutiny against the fact that "Uways used his charismatic powers and spiritual prestige to gain leadership" (Said S. Samatar, 1992:53, not related to Ahmed), qualities a good leader (and a public preacher in this case) cannot achieve without standing out in a crowd and convincing them of the aims and objectives of his mission, unless Ahmed Samatar is discussing a society that was unaware of the leadership trends of its day. Verifying is not difficult because Said Samatar (*ibid*) confirms that "Uways's

missionizing efforts were rewarded with impressive success. Nomad and farmer flocked to his community bringing with them gifts in vast amounts of livestock and farm produce.” Further substantiation by Martin (2003:163) illuminated, “Uways had good success among the Rahanwayn tribes of the upper Juba Valley. Here his excellent organizing capacity, leadership, and spiritual gifts won him many supporters.” Martin’s and Said Samatar’s analyses not only pose sharp disagreement with Ahmed Samatar’s accusations and dented descriptions of Sheikh Uways; they also do so impressively on the basis of their broader and more detailed studies of the subject. In another contrast, unlike Mohamed Abdille Hassan, whose geographic operation and proselytizing mission was narrower and his leadership extremely coercive, violent, and more ethnocentric, Uways’s contributions, according to Christine C. Ahmed (1989) in a special issue of *Ufahamu* on Somalia, reached beyond the diverse communities in the country and extended wider into the eastern and central Africa regions of non-Somali communities. From here, we move to the next section, where we analyze a qualifying phrase contained in Ahmed Samatar’s sentence above:

- Whether Sheikh Uways had the oratory and leadership skills to stand out in a crowd, “particularly a Somali one.” Uways was a southern Somali leader who preached and proselytized initially in his hometown of Baraawe before expanding his mission to other parts of southern Somalia and to the east African coast. As such, from that background, one can barely deny that Uways’s enthusiastic crowds of supporters in the country, including the Rahanwayn tribes mentioned by

Martin, were all Somalis equal to the rest by any identity qualification. For more clarity on the expanse of Sheikh Uways's reach among the Somali tribes, Said Samatar (1992:53) wrote, "With messianic zeal, they [Uways and disciples] sallied forth from Beled al-Amin to take the banner of Uwaysiya to Abgaal, Geledi, Magani, and Shiidle clans in Benaadir province, the riverine cultivators in Lower Jubba and the Upper Jubba."

Needless to say, the communities Said Samatar names here, though of multiple ethnic and cultural orientations, are all Somalis with whom Uways conducted business in one of a number of tongues he and his audiences were familiar with, and therefore there was no disagreement over their Somaliness whatsoever, despite Ahmed Samatar's accusations against Sheikh Uways. Nevertheless, a further examination of Ahmed Samatar's statement sends shockwaves that turn attention to the long-debated issue of identity and the questions "Who is a Somali?"; "What should Somaliness constitute?"; and "What qualifications should we consider to determine one's identity as Somali?", all of which analyze Ahmed Samatar's statement of "particularly a Somali one."

Note here also that the very powerful adverbial qualifier "particularly" is not accidental either: it in fact holds a double-bladed connotation, one linguistic and the other ideological. The first is a linguistic function that emphasizes an intrinsic, fundamental choice of one and not the other, a distinction with strong specificity and separation of agents by identity. The second connotation embodies a discursive agility that denotes a structure of intuitively harmonized separation, though it is only subtly alluded to in this case. Whatever the underlying implications, from this issue of Somaliness and/or a Somali audience, we address the third and final point, the

hasty, biased, and unanalytical assertion that compared with Mohamed Abdille Hassan:

- “Uways...never had...supreme poetic talent.” As oral traditions, cultural repositories, archival documents, and historical studies suggest, Uways was not merely a multilingual scholar but also “a poet of considerable powers” (S. Samatar, 1992:53). He composed most of his poems and religious songs (*qasaa'id*) in Arabic, Chimbalazi, Tunni, and Maay, all of which are mutually unintelligible with each other as well as incomprehensible to speakers of Maxaa in general and, in particular, the variant that the ruling elite sponsored as Somalia’s national language. Therefore, for Ahmed Samatar (or anyone else for that matter) to have been able to assess the “poetic talent” of Sheikh Uways, he should have been a fluent speaker of all of these languages, if not a competently prolific user of at least one of them, to have been sufficiently proficient to judge the linguistic quality of Sheikh Uways’s poetry and then, based on that linguistic knowledge and by applying sociolinguistic tools of analysis, to assess the poetic talent endowed upon Uways and exhibited in his mystic songs.

Observed from a different analytical perspective, whereas Ahmed Samatar did not make any claim to fieldwork on the study of Sheikh Uways or knowledge of any of these dialects in his work under discussion here or in any of his other works, it is our argument that the Sheikh developed mastery of his languages to explore the semantic and syntactic concordances required to compose classics that appealed to the diverse audiences he encountered and attracted to his companionship inside and outside the country. But these bare accusations and

inaccuracies, indicators of the shortcomings in Ahmed Samatar's comparison between Mohamed Abdille Hassan and Sheikh Uways, could be viewed as manifestations of what elsewhere Scholes and Kellogg (1968:277) termed "an ironic gap," one that has the potential risk of situating the narrator "between limited understanding which is real, and an ideal of absolute truth which is itself a suspect." This is because the fractures in Ahmed Samatar's work, as analyzed earlier by Ahmed (1996:24), were testaments to the common drawbacks in Somali studies that result from "the researcher's reliance on [mis]informants with a stake in what is being said about other (rival) players in a world fraught with cultural symbols," thus making the analyst an unconscious "victim of the [very same] rhetoric he sets out to analyze."

The other academician, the late Said Sheikh Samatar, reveals not only the linguistic domination that was ever-present in Somali society but also the intriguing atmosphere of linguistic and cultural prejudice in Somali academia. In a discussion of Sheikh Uways in a chapter in his edited book *In the Shadow of Conquest: Islam in Colonial Northeast Africa*, Said Samatar (1992) announced his verdict:

While his [Sheikh Uways's] Arabic compositions sparkle with energy and style...his Somali compositions represent a disconcerting example of linguistic horror... The sheikh's Somali material is in the Rahanwayn dialect [Af Maay], which, though I understand haltingly, I do not speak (p. 69).

In the study under discussion, Said Samatar committed a tremendous academic compromise—if not corruption—by adulterating the subject under his assessment. What is more fascinating, however, is that he claimed to have conducted field studies on Sheikh Uways, in contrast to Ahmed Samatar, whose analysis was mainly based on existing literature. Notwithstanding our appreciation of his fieldwork, Said was

also honest about his difficulty with the Maay dialect used in Hudur, the town where he had conducted his research. The essential point is that if Said's analysis quoted here did not amount to barefaced prejudice, any scholar or undergraduate student of language and linguistics as well as any field researcher in oral history and traditions would challenge him over the kind of meta-cognition he used to have comprehended the "linguistic horror" contained in a language he unambiguously confessed he neither understood with certainty nor could speak competently.

Said Samatar's extremely serious oversight is demonstrated in his prejudice and indeed the ironic assertion that although Sheikh Uways's compositions in Arabic (a foreign dialect the clergyman had learned as a third, fourth, or even fifth language) "sparkle with energy and style," the same genius Sheikh was not sufficiently proficient in the native vernaculars he composed his mystic songs in and used to communicate with his audiences (disciples, followers of his brotherhood, and the general public) in daily interactions. An octogenarian member of the Qadiriya, in a 2014 interview, stated

It was at times difficult for the disciples to grasp portions of a *qasida* (mystic song) unless they sought his (Uways) help for better comprehension of the coding; so this makes it difficult for anyone else just to pick the meaning of some of what he said.

The comments in the preceding discussions reveal how the idealization of the state-empowered culture and language became so pervasive in Somali society, as we will similarly discuss in the following paragraphs, that further investigation and problematization of the topic have been treated with very scant scholarly attention.

The third scholar is Abdalla O. Mansur. As was the case with many others who viewed the subject through the single lens of the state, Mansur (2015) affirmed that the Somalization

of the national language “gave the entire population an access to their national heritage and cultural identity.” However, his pronouncement can be proven implausible given the enormous section of the society that cried foul over the nature of language domination the state had imposed on them. Mansur, a linguist and veteran language teacher, seemed to have overlooked the importance of employing critical awareness in pedagogy (Freire, 2000; Kincheloe, 2004), the theme ensconced in teachers’ detailed understanding of the tricky positioning and shadowy positions in which languages can situate their individual interlocutors according to their cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds.

What raises more concern over Mansur’s rhetoric relates to the background of his training as a linguist and language teacher in tertiary institutions. Analyzing the works of hundreds of scholars in her state-of-the-art article in *Language Teacher* and paraphrasing works by Andrews, Svalberg (2007:295) emphasized how teachers’ awareness must be quite distinct from other experts’, and that teachers are required “not only to know about the language, but also to reflect on their knowledge and on underlying systems.” Apart from using and teaching the language, teachers have the responsibility to critically analyze the various functions of language and principles of its application (Cots & Arno, 2005; Edge, 1988; Svalberg, 2007).

Mansur is a seasoned scholar with a reading in critical aspects of the subtleties within the language phenomenon, but the fact that he seemed untouched by the existence of domination in the practice of language inequality in Somalia (one of the “underlying systems” mentioned in the preceding paragraph) is by turns disturbing and implausible. That kind of dominance, as sponsored by the state, is tantamount to subjugation under which multilayered forms of identity dissolving, cultural disfiguration, and social degradation of the

subjugated are formally systematized and perpetually sustained. What is even more precarious is that from the perspective of education, dominance related to language and culture carries a hidden but powerful ideological indoctrination of the prescribed language and culture, both of which in Somalia were key instruments of the imbalance the state promoted through the education curriculum. Left uncritically observed and unchallenged, domination renders the national education system a breeding ground for complex forms of socio-educational deprivation against those on the margins of the ethno-linguistic/ethno-cultural communities to whose language and culture the state has committed the national syllabus. Some of the empirical effects to the domination are discussed in the next section.

### **Linguicism in Somalia: A “Counter-Story” Approach**

The practice of linguicism remains prevalent and in many cases evident among the Somali society but is often ignored for varied reasons including but not limited to colonial writers’ misconception of Somalia as a homogenous country; the concentration of Somalia’s post-independence state power in the hands of the sponsors of the Greater Somalia idea—and, for that matter, the dismissal of the idea of heterogeneity; state silencing of multiculturalism and multilingualism under the dominance of an untenable mono-culturalism and monolingualism; state-sponsorship of one language and a variety of it as the national language at the expense of others; and lack of scholarly engagement and exploration by pioneering Somali scholars beyond the colonial writers’ self-same Somalia. Therefore, the nature of debate and discussion on the subject begs for details regarding linguicism of which, as indicated in parts of this paper, Mansur (2015) still remains a stringent proponent.

To expose the unofficial narratives of the voiceless, their stories or counter-stories, one must invoke critical race theory, in which segregation and domination are taken more to task than Somali scholars are willing to do. More specifically, we draw on Delgado and what he coined “counterstorytelling.” In his earlier work on the importance of counter-storytelling to the dominated groups, Delgado (1989:2436) asserted how “stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” By engaging the counter-story or counter-storytelling, one gains the opportunity to develop “critical consciousness [which] always interacts with actual experiences” of those on the periphery of state-sponsored identity and culture (Kubota & Lin, 2006:485). One of the objectives is that a conscious reading of some of these experiences will help us in the next step of “producing synergy that elevates both scholarship and transformative action” (p. 485) toward equality and harmony. Another significance of the narratives and counter-narratives is that they dispel, albeit politely, Mansur’s (2015) statement that “[t]he new role assumed by the Somali language gave the entire population an access to their national heritage and cultural identity.”

In the following anecdotal section, we share stories and counter-stories related to the experiences of those among the linguistically dominated and/or despised groups. Our anecdotes were selected to speak to a reality that had been hitherto unexamined; they reveal various contexts and circumstances in which language was experienced beyond the rhetoric of interlocution, interaction, or Somali homogeneity and monolinguality. In the anecdotes, viewed as stories and counter-stories, individual experiences are visited and pains experienced are remembered. They furnish and interpret the academic, political, social, and cultural situations in which effects of domination or degradation were experienced. Through them, another version of linguistic reality, the non-

state-sponsored version, is laid open from the perspective of those who experienced the problem.

### **Anecdote 1**

Mohamed Ali Shafane, a southern Somali student in an Italian-language secondary school, was asked by his Somali-language teacher from northern Somalia to recite the nationalist poem the class had been assigned to memorize the previous day. When he reached a certain stanza, the teacher stopped him for mispronouncing the word “gaadhay”; specifically, the teacher wanted him to pronounce it this way, but Mohamed pronounced it as “gaartay” in accordance with his southern dialect. Another word that provoked similar contention was one that was written as “adhaxda” (northern dialect) but more easily pronounced by southerners as “araxda”; not only that, the usage of the term “adhaxda” does not frequently appear in everyday southern discourse, but the teacher suspended almost the entire class for not using his northern variety of the words, justifying the suspensions with *afki baad qarribeysaan*, “You are corrupting the purity of the language.”

### **Anecdote 2**

This episode took place on an inter-city bus from Ceel Gaab to Jidka Soddonka in Mogadishu. Two members of an agrarian community in southern Somalia were chatting when an elderly passenger with a northerner’s dialect interrupted their conversation very rudely:

- N. *Waryaa! War afkeed ku hadleysaan?*  
Hey you! (Pejorative) What language are you speaking?  
One of the young men replied
- S. *Af Soomaliyaan ku waramooynaa! “Afkeed ku hadleysaan” maxaa waaye?*

What do you mean by “what language are you speaking?” Of course we are speaking Somali!

N. *Af Soomaali buu ku leeyahay! War af Soomaaligaaga yaa qoray marka hore? Xagee se ku qoran yahay?*

Somali language, he says! Who wrote your Somali language, in the first place? And where is it written/endorsed?

S. *Runtaa waaye! Af Soomaaligeeya mugiin dowlo naqdaa la qoraa. Intii taas laga gaaraayo adne kaada ku waran anigane keeyaan ku waramaa. Haddiin is jabamno nawad, haddii kalene nimbo afkiisaan ka la haaysanaa.*

You are right. The state hasn’t endorsed my variety, but mine will be written when I (my ethnic group) assume power. Till then, you speak yours and I speak mine. If we understand each other, good for us; if we don’t, each one of us has his separate language.

This takes us to anecdote 3 as another example, one that contributed greatly to the development of oral culture in Somalia, particularly in the performance of modern music.

### Anecdote 3

The government introduced a competition aimed at musical talent promotion called *Heesahaa Hirgalay* (“Promotion of Oral Art”) for novice folklore artists. The theme of the program was *Heesahaa hirgalay oo la hagaajiyey waa hadalkii hooyoo* (“Promoting oral art represents the enhancement of our mother tongue); accordingly, a number of artists from the Maay-speaking community competed to display their talent. However, for these competitors, there was only one speaker of that language among the three judges; as such, no matter the substance and value of the lyrics, “these singers would never achieve above the second position out of three or four competitors, even in cases when the entire audience went wild

in excitement and persistently requested a repeat of the song,” reported a Maay-speaking composer and musician who was interviewed in Mogadishu in October 2013. The constant second position phenomenon for the Maay singers was interpreted too by a prominent singer and Maay-speaking cultural analyst who said:

For one reason, the singer in the Maay language could not be placed lower than second position for reasons of his artistic skills and talent in the performance. For the other, he could not be placed in the first position due to the lyrics of his song in the Maay language. I mean, the Maxaa language of the ruling class who ordained, planned, standardized and implemented the entire project of nationalizing their own language could not be judged lower than a language whose broadcasting they had banned from the national airwaves long before independence.

#### **Anecdote 4**

This disturbing episode took place in Isbitaal Martiini (Martini Hospital), one of the public hospitals in Mogadishu; our narrator, an aging former nurse, recalled:

As I came into the emergency room, a man was being told to speak Somali language so he could be treated. He was on the floor crawling and screaming from pain. He replied that he was indeed speaking Somali and not *af gaal* (an infidel’s [foreigner’s] tongue). Then one of the nurses told him to speak Somali that is “understandable, the written one” and not the “Maay Maay” spoken in his village.

The next episode is an example of the vast number of incidents that have socio-psychologically traumatized the nonnative speakers of the institutionalized Maxaa language.

#### **Anecdote 5**

A member of the Jiido ethno-linguistic community living in North America told one of the authors, Mohamed, in a discussion in Nairobi in 2003, about a dialogue between his father and a member of his Jiido kin group. The informant’s

father was one of the elders recognized by the Barre government as a *nabad-doon*, meaning “peace-seeker,” a term introduced during the rule of the military regime to replace what was formerly known as “tribal chief” or “tribal elder.” In the wake of the 1974 campaign against illiteracy, which extended to rural areas, a Jiido resident of one of the villages raised a genuine concern with his *nabad-doon*:

They (teachers) have come to teach us their language. When we have learned it, they will claim that we are the same people, and as a result they will appropriate our farmland and livestock. Tell the government to teach us the reading and writing of our language, to assign the teaching job to people who speak our language, who will teach us better. The son of so-and-so learned Italian and got a job. What will this *AfJini* (Jinn language, meaning alien tongue) help us with?

The elder replied that everyone who learned the national script would have a good chance to obtain national employment, to which the villager replied;

The priority for employment will go to those who own the language of the government and those who can master other people’s tongues. Since it is an alien tongue to us and we cannot speak it like the owners, in that case we will have to wait for a lifetime for the government to consider us for jobs.

## **Anecdote 6**

According to a member of the Somali Maay ethno-linguistic community:

The introduction of the Somali orthography was one of Siad Barre’s smart ways of helping selected candidates from specific ethnic and cultural groups to gain easy access to public recruitment and state coffers, despite their lack of academic competence. Within a very short time after the introduction of the Somali orthography, unqualified young people with very little or no formal education at all were assigned to hold public responsibilities and/or join the ranks of the army and the police. Let’s not forget that it is this uneducated group that introduced the common term “*ila arag*” meaning “view it [the

document bearing the inscription] with me” to their deputies and assistants so that the task of reading the document comprehensively was delegated to the latter, who would later explain the details to the executives for final decision! Due to that gross mistake and irresponsibility on the part of the state, unaccountability became so chronic that it paved the way for state tolerance of malfeasance; the fast development of Booli Qaran estate and the paced construction of posh villas in prime areas in the capital; excessive consumption of *qat* and alcohol by government officials; unprecedented visits to Italy for occupational health, popularly known in Italian as “visita medico collegiale,” by certain groups on state accounts; high competition for embezzlement of public funds; increased misappropriation of private property such as prime plots in the capital city and agricultural plantations and farm land in the vicinity of the rivers; late or no attendance in and early departure from office by public executives; stagnation of public projects and services; injustices against the voiceless and the unprotected across the social spectra; in general, more eating of state funds by those at the top than they generated resources, a factor that finally promised to dig the grave of the country’s economy and consequently the disgraceful disenfranchisement of the entire state establishment.

## **Anecdote 7**

Complaining about the effect of Somalization on the academic performance of Maay-speaking pupils, a female informant believed that it always increased their learning burden whenever the teachers assigned them tasks. Specifically, she commented,

It was a daunting task to memorize poetry overnight that we had no idea what it was about and where it was heading, so we were often caned the following day or suspended from class for failing to retrieve it from memory. To many of us previously unfamiliar with Af Maxaa, learning was much harder because a lot of the language we used was really new to us. Yet the syllabus provided no space for the accommodation and appreciation of non-nomadic cultures, whether of agricultural, agro-pastoral, maritime, or mercantile background. But people did not always see this as a problem that was causing a major setback in our learning. The ensuing frustration was among the major reasons many students abandoned school (Interview, August 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Although we criticize linguistic discrimination based on native and nonnative speakers in the English and other colonial language contexts, we tend to ignore the enormity of the linguicism, linguistic discrimination, linguistic hegemony and deprivation, and stigma meted out to the voiceless sections of the society who remain linguistically and culturally abused. Accordingly, the phenomenon underlying language politics and linguistic discrimination can be viewed from the perspective of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), theory of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000), and critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992). These not only question the intersections between race, ethnicity, language, and power but also raise our consciousness toward new endeavors in seeking to introduce a transformational approach to the relationships among them.

Selecting the indigenous language of an ethnic group or a variety among competing versions of a language as a national language and the medium of school instruction promulgates the cultural heritage and subtle hegemony of that group. Hence, a political decision of this sort represents the redistribution of ethno-cultural and ethno-linguistic power into the hands of members of the elevated/supremacized culture. As with racial images, ethnic images that underpin linguistic distinction possess the potential to influence individual and communal perceptions of others and consequently to effect the dominants' ideology of otherization into the wider society.

In many social situations, a Somali speaker ethnically unrelated to the central and northern sociolinguistic groups would be criticized and told, "Your Somali is very poor," as in the cases of Sheikh Uways and the others discussed above. It is the negative impact of such prejudices and consequences of

related incidents of cultural misreading that call for more examination of the various functions of the standardized Somali language and its central/northern variety. That approach will further help students of Somali studies to understand the magnitude of the enduring fallacies contained in the ideological package of homogeneity and egalitarianism, none of which paradigmatically applies to the distinct ethnic groups in the country.

## Notes

1. This section draws mainly from Mukhtar's (2010) "Language Marginalization, Ethnic Nationalism, and Cultural Crisis in Somalia." In Markus V. Hoehne and Virginia Luling (Eds.), *Milk and Peace, Drought and War: Somali Culture, Politics and Society*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 281–300.
2. For more about Somali minorities, read Abdi M. Kusow and Mohamed A. Eno's (2015), "Formula Narratives and the Making of Social Stratification and Inequality." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 1(3), 409–423; Mohamed A. Eno and Abdi M. Kusow's (2014) "Racial and Caste Prejudice in Somalia." *Journal of Somali Studies*, 1(2), 91–118; Mohamed A. Eno, Mohamed H. Ingiriis, and Omar A. Eno's (2013) "Discrimination and Prejudice in the Nucleus of African Society: Empirical Evidence from Somalia." *African Renaissance*, 10(3 & 4), 13–36; Mohamed A. Eno and Omar A. Eno's (2010) "Who Is An African?: Surveying Through the Narratives of African Identity." *African Renaissance*, 7(3 & 4), 61–78; and Mohamed A. Eno and Omar A. Eno's (2010) "A Tale of Two Minorities: The State of the Gaboye and Bantu Communities of Somalia." In Michael Mbanaso and Chima Korieh (Eds.), *Minorities and the State in Africa*, Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, pp. 113–142.

3. David Laitin (1977) provides a more comprehensive reading of the relationship between language, politics and Somali society.

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