

**The African Diaspora within Africa and the
Impact of Slavery and Stigma in the Islamic
Society: A Case Study of Somalia**

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Abstract

Certain proponents of slavery in the Islamic world assert that slaves exported from East Africa to the Arabian Peninsula or areas under Arabian domain within Africa were in fact acquired not for agricultural economic purposes but rather for domestic labor. According to some scholars, this facilitated the integration of former slaves more thoroughly into Islamic communities than into the Atlantic slaveholding communities. However, while the theory of integration may hold true, at least in part, historical evidence suggests this may not be true in the case of the Bantu/Jareer¹ population in the Horn of Africa, the main focus of this paper. Therefore, using the Bantu/Jareer population of southern Somalia as a case study, this paper explores the contradictions prevalent in integration theory, the impact of slavery as a social institution, and the economic functions the slaves performed in Islamic countries.

Introduction

... an intellectual is one who attempts to identify problems, reflects on them, and does not shy away from asking hard and unpleasant questions, and who suggests, not imposes, some type of solution to the problem under his/her scrutiny. An intellectual is also one who understands the validity of Somali poet Qamman Bulhan's words: "Maashaan la saarin waa dambeey sare kacaantaaye" ("Pus that is not tended to and cared for timely, will eventually suppurate with devastating consequences"). – Ali Jimale Ahmed (1995, 136).

Islam is considered to be the guiding doctrine equalizing all Muslims regardless of their race, color, or social status. When discussing the issue of integration and equality, one of the most favored Qur'anic verses often referred to by many Muslims is this: "The Believers are but a single brotherhood" (The Holy Qur'an, 49:10), suggesting egalitarianism among Muslims. But, as we argue, the brotherhood and equality stipulated in this *ayah* or verse exist only as ideals of the faith, in that marginalization, discrimination, and other forms of degradation are employed explicitly in practice in many Muslim countries and societies. In fact, the reality of the situation in most of the Islamic world is, as Ahmad Sikainga (1996,118), citing Bernard Lewis, writes: "The slave is not brother to the Godly freeman, even though he be born in the clothes of the free. Do not buy a slave without buying a stick with him, for slaves are filthy and of scant God."

The purpose of this paper is to examine this neglected area of Islamic slavery, particularly from the perspective of the diaspora within Africa. We specifically argue against the myth of integration and egalitarianism of the emancipated slaves in Somali society under the pretext of being adherents to the Islamic faith. The study employs the qualitative approach as its methodological guide. It also considers a triangulation of data

collection tools including interviews and study of available primary and secondary data obtained from various scholarly as well as archival materials and oral historians. Before we proceed to the essence of the paper, we will attempt to lay out a brief historical background on the origins of the enslaved, the slaver, and the slave trade in the Benadir coast of Somalia. This will be followed by an overview of slavery among Muslim societies and a discussion of the situation of slavery along the southern Somalia coast. This will be followed by a discussion on the impact of slavery on the enslaved and voidness of the integration literature before we present our concluding remarks.

Origins and Historical Background

Historically and ethnically, Somalia is like any other African nation that holds together diverse communities of distinct ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, for the purpose of this essay, we group the Somali community into three ethnic categories: (a) the mercantile coastal people of Arabian and Persian descent—the “Somali-Arabs”; (b) the sedentary agriculturalists consisting of indigenous and emancipated slaves—the “Somali Bantu/Jareer”; and (c) the Somali pastoral nomads of the interior—the “Somali Pastoralists or nomads,” likely of Ethiopian descent (Oromo). These three groups pursue distinct cultures, traditions, and languages, and are theoretically supposed to practice the same Islamic religion. Accordingly, the next section describes the three groups.

The Mercantile Coastal Dwellers of Somalia

Mohamed H. Mukhtar (1995, 1–27), in his essay “Islam in Somali History,” is one of the first Somali scholars who

observed that “Although Somalis claim they are homogeneous [of Arab descent], the exact origin of their race remains mysterious,” or rather remains an unsolved mystery in social history. Similar to that of the Somali society, the exact origin of the mercantile coastal people of the Benadir coast of Somalia remains somewhat ambiguous. Some writers have described them as immigrants from Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria. Some scholars suggest that they migrated to their present location in southern Somalia around the tenth century (Cerulli 1957). Others suggest that portions of these communities were traders from Shiraz in the Persian Gulf who settled in Banadir and later moved to other places on the Somali coast (Were and Wilson 1968, 18). One of the most recent comments about the origin of Somali coastal communities comes from Catherine Besteman (1999, 49). Based on information derived from some natives from Brava, Besteman suggests that “immigrants from the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf settled [around] the Benadir ports by the tenth century, intermarrying with Somalis to produce commercially oriented ‘Arab-Somali’ towns within a few generations.” While the Arab influence was growing in Somalia’s coastal cities, the Somali nomads from the interior had already wrested control of native Bantu land along the Shabelle River and parts along Juba River, attempting to establish themselves there (Hess 1966, 7).

The Sedentary Agriculturalists of Somalia

The Bantu people are predominantly sedentary agriculturalists who, according to many scholars (I.M. Lewis 1955, 45; Cerulli 1919), are indigenes who lived in the territory, especially along the Juba and Shabelle rivers and the interior, before the arrival of the pastoral Somalis. They consist of mixed groups of natives,

runaway slaves, and emancipated slaves. The runaway slaves established their own independent entity in Goshaland along the Juba River in southern Somalia. Most of the runaways were from the Wazigwa clan who were originally imported from parts of Tanganyika, Zanzibar, and Pemba (modern Tanzania), as well as others from parts of Mozambique, by Arab slave merchants (Grotanelli 1953, 249–260). Although there were locally captured slaves in southern Somalia, the number was insignificant because some of the local Bantu natives were already allied and incorporated into larger Somali groups for protection.

Early in the twentieth century, Italy emancipated all the slaves in southern Somalia, some of whom joined the local Bantu natives along the Shabelle River. In general, however, most of the emancipated slaves moved to reside with the runaway slaves in Goshaland and their indigenous Bantu/Jareer hosts along the Juba River before becoming assimilated into the dominant culture there. The assimilation of the emancipated slaves into the native Bantu/Jareer along the Shabelle River seems to have created ambiguity on the origins of the local Bantu/Jareer natives, and probably led to the indiscriminate labeling of all as ex-slaves, mainly because of their similar physical characteristics and the avoidance of Somali scholars in their attempts to investigate the phenomenon. As for the authenticity and differences between the Gosha Bantu (runaway slaves) and the native Bantu in Somalia, a group of anthropologists from the United Nations who studied the origins of the Bantu/Jareer people in southern Somalia writes:

According to their origin, we may distinguish between the two types of Somali Bantu [Jareer]. To the first belong those tribes (e.g., Liberti Gosha) who grew out of cores of fugitive slaves, either run-away or liberated, who had been transported north over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Previously, their home would have been Tanganyika, their affinity Yao, Zegua, etc. To the second group, we may reckon those tribes that, in all probability, represent remnants of pre-Somali populations going back to the first millennium of the Christian era. ("Bulletin of the International Committee" 1960, 28–29)

The Pastoral Nomadic Somalis

Although the Somali ethnic groups of the pastoral type trace back and claim a genealogical lineage that links them to Prophet Mohammed's family, the *Quraishite*, a disagreement recently emerged, possibly as a result of the Islamic faith, among those who study Somalia over the link between Somali origin and Arabia. A majority of them suggest that Somali nomads migrated from parts of present day southern Ethiopia around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to their present location in Somalia before migrating to the north and then back to the south (Schlee 1994, 33; Kusow 1995). These were predominantly pastoralists who, as certain scholars suggest, originally migrated from Ethiopia (Murdock 1959). However, Turton, citing H. S. Lewis, writes:

... Somali traditions concerning their origins are suspect: first, because of the great time-depth involved; secondly, because the contention that they came from the north can be seen as a necessary accompaniment to their myths of descent from Arabian migrants. People who trace their ancestry back to the Prophet's uncle are not likely to admit that they came from southern Ethiopia. (Turton 1975, 521)

Regardless of their origin, however, and as soon as they gathered enough power, they expropriated the existing

Bantu/Jareer land between the rivers Juba and Shebelli in southern Somalia. According to Hess, “as early as the [thirteenth] century, the Somali ethnic groups of the interior had begun to wrest control of the land from its Bantu ...” (Hess 1966, 9).

A Glimpse at Slavery and Slave Trade in Islamic Societies

Slave markets in East Africa were scattered all along the coastal towns of Cape Guardafui, Merca, Mogadishu, Brava, Lamu, Malindi, Pangani, Bagamoyo, Dar es Salaam, the islands of Pemba, Zanzibar, and Madagascar, as well as Qualimane and Sofala in Mozambique (Harris 1971, 19). In fact, during the middle of the nineteenth century, a significant part of the economy of Somalia’s southern coastal cities came from their participation in the Indian Ocean slave trade as a transit point between southeast Africa and southern Arabia and the Gulf regions. According to A. I. Salim, (1973, 20), “Slaves were run into Port Durnford, Tula and other offshore isles, and later shipped to the Benadir ports, from where they were smuggled across to Arabia and the Gulf.” Salim further states that the Somali-Arab merchants played an important role in the slave business as middlemen for Indian traders, thus enjoying large profits from the barter system of trading (18).

We should note here that slaves from East Africa were used not only in the Benadir coasts of Somalia but also in the Arab Islamic world, Persian Gulf, and India. Most of the slave suppliers to the Arab Islamic world were Omani merchants. According to Abdul Sheriff, the slave demand was only from the seventh to the ninth century in the Persian Gulf, where slave labor was badly needed to reclaim the marshlands of southern Iraq. He also acknowledges severe exploitation and oppression

of a large number of slaves in Basra that led to a series of slave revolts beginning at the end of seventh century, which culminated in the famous Zanj rebellion (1987, 13). Despite this acknowledgment, however, Sheriff argues that the Persian Gulf economies did not rely on slaves and that the region did not import large or growing numbers of slaves from East Africa with the exception of the period from the seventh to the ninth century. According to Jwaideh and Cox (1988, 50), the involvement of blacks in nineteenth century Mesopotamian agriculture was minimal and incidental at most, and in no instances did they actually work the land. Jwaideh and Cox further maintain that slaves had become fully integrated into their respective tribes, except that local Arabs would not intermarry with them [blacks]. In fact, slaves were an integral part of the household (53).

Before endorsing Jwaideh and Cox's argument that integration was successfully accomplished, one should seek an explanation of why the local Arabs would not intermarry with these members of society if genuine integration actually was accomplished. This is because accomplishment theoretically should be gauged according to the value of satisfaction each sector of the society feels in its accommodation with the others. Our contention is that the rejection of free intermarriage probably was based on the theory that the superior should not mingle with the inferior. Analyzing the superficial nature of such integration, Sikainga (1996, 101) hypothetically coins what he calls "the family metaphor," which in theoretical terms would suggest "that slaves were treated as members of their masters' families," with a societal belief that "former slaves were still considered inferior members of the lineage and still found it hard to marry freeborn women" (105).

Looking at the nineteenth century Persian Gulf, Thomas Ricks's study attempts to confront one of the pertinent conundrums of slavery in the Islamic world. Disagreeing with Sheriff (1987) and Jwaideh and Cox (1988), Ricks (1989) argues that slavery and the slave trade were central to the economic transformation of the Persian Gulf. In the nineteenth century, Ricks asserts, the region did indeed import increasing numbers of slaves. Profiting from the slave trade, Omani merchants expanded the enterprise by becoming the financiers of the Gulf. This move encouraged other merchants, as well as landowners and officials, to purchase slaves and exploit them in a wide range of agricultural, artisanal, maritime, military, and commercial activities.

Although Jwaideh and Cox (1988) and Sheriff (1987) oppose the hypothesis that many African slaves were used on date farms and other agricultural and economic activities in the Persian Gulf, Harris (1971) clearly indicates that slaves were used in the Arab Islamic world, including Mesopotamia. Harris contends that between the 1780s and 1870s slaves were vigorously imported from East Africa to fill the growing labor shortage in Iran, Ottoman, and in the Arabian lands of the Gulf coastal villages. Detailing the specific nature of slave activities involved, Harris corroborates that demand for slaves in Asia was for workers on the date plantations in Basra, Bandar Abbas, Minab, and Lingeh in the Persian Gulf. Slaves also were used in the army and as pearl divers, dock workers, dhow crews, and so on (Harris 1971, 5). Ricks (1988) adds that slaves were even sold to Indian and Turkish merchants. He says that these slaves belonged to Omani merchants and came through Oman's major towns of Masqat and Sur, where they benefited the Omanis directly.

In support of Ricks, Cassanelli's (1988) work on slavery in Somalia contributes an important point that around 1903, Salemi, a runaway slave in Somalia who sought refuge and safe haven to the Italian abolitionists, said he and about forty companions were captured on the Mrima coast of Mozambique and transported into Somalia through the port of Merka some twenty years earlier by Arab traders of Sur. This speaks to the fact that slaves had a good idea about the ethnicity of their captors, and supports Ricks's argument that Omani traders did not benefit only from slaves sold to Arabia, the Persian Gulf, India, and Turkey but also benefited from slaves sold within Africa itself.

According to Bernard Lewis (1990), "Black slaves were brought into the Islamic world by a number of routes—from West Africa across the Sahara to Morocco and Tunisia, from Chad across the desert to Libya, from East Africa down the Nile to Egypt, and across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean to Arabia and the Persian Gulf." Lewis in fact maintains that the black slaves in the Arab Muslim countries experienced, "a much harder life, they used to drain the salt flats of southern Iraq, and the blacks were employed in the salt mines of the Sahara and the gold mines of Nubia" (14). However, the ultimate benefit of slaves would stay with the actual user of their physical services for agriculture, domestic, and industrial purposes. In sum, therefore, the benefit of a slave goes to both the seller and buyer who, in the Somali and other Islamic contexts, exploited slave labor of Muslims for gain.

The immorality of the Arab Muslim slave traders knew no bounds. It was so extreme that pretty slave women were recruited for prostitution, an immoral decadence that, like slavery itself, is contrary to the Islamic doctrine. The stigma attached to this crime was permanent because the children

begotten from a concubine or from the practice of prostitution were rejected as bastards; while so called Muslim people justified one vicious immorality with another. According to Harris, wealthy Arabs even ordered pretty Ethiopian women for concubinage and prostitution through Omani slave traders (1971, 14; 40), which is a strong contradiction to Islamic doctrine, specifically the rules of enslavement within the Islamic context, as elaborated below by Hunwick (1993, 292). Harris's comment about pretty women being ordered by wealthy Arabs is supported by Michael Le Gall, who pointed out that "Abyssinian women were more liked in many areas in the Islamic Arab world than the Negresse with wide flat nose [and] thick upturned lips" (1999, 77).

Documents obtained from Italian archives also indicate the slave traders' preference of Ethiopian women for prostitution, as noticed by the Italian colonial officials in Somalia who said:

"Le donne Galla sono le piu` ricercate. [Perche`], tutte le schiave, se il padrone non se ne serve in casa, debbono fare le prostitute per procurarsi il tributo ..." (ASMAI 1903, 256)

Translation by authors:

Ethiopian women of the Galla clan were the most sought after because when they were no longer needed by the master's household for domestic use, they could be recruited into prostitution to generate income be used as payment for the masters' tribute.

This explains why the slave women's beauty was necessary to the slave owners in Somalia and elsewhere, partly because of the type of service, in this case prostitution, which these women had to perform to boost the master's income.

Although beautiful slave women were more valuable than slave men in Somalia and also in other parts of the Islamic

world, enslaved women's problems were considerably more serious. As Sikainga (1999, 62) reveals, "If a concubine was manumitted, she could not have a legal status as a wife; she would be living with her master as his mistress and her children would be regarded as bastards." Mernissi, citing the Encyclopedia of Islam, enlightens us further regarding the ways that slaves were obtained in the Islamic world and clarifies the commercial factors underlying the institution: "Slavery in Islam could only subsist through 'the constantly renewed contributions of peripheral or external elements, either directly captured in war or imported commercially, under the fiction of Holy War, from foreign territory'" (1991, 151).

Merchants brought almost all imported slaves from East Africa into the Arabian Islamic world for profit. It would be rather ironic and simplistic to trust that these merchants were importing into the Persian Gulf or even from one country to another within Africa human cargo of "unbelievers" captured for proselytization and subsequent integration into their societies. Commenting on the moral guidance of the slave traders, Hunwick (1999, 63), citing Ahmed b. Khalid al-Nasiri, states: "One should not put any confidence in what the slave merchants say for they are 'men of no morals, no manly qualities and no religion,' and the evil nature of the age and wickedness of its people are apparent." The scholarly analyses here provide a reflection that the legalities of enslavement against blacks from East Africa who were transported to the Arab Islamic world or elsewhere within Africa under Arabian domination is a subject that cries for further study. In view of those realities, it becomes necessary to delve into the symbolic significance of slave ancestry in modern Somalia. In the next section we will analyze the various historical circumstances that contributed to the continuing social and political marginalization of

those suspected and/or accused of being slave descendants among the Somali Muslims.

Islam and the Stigma of Slavery in Somalia

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Somali clans who lived along the coastal cities of Benadir increased their trade in ivory, cattle, hides, woven clothes, gum, and other commercial goods. However, the main product in demand—in fact, greater demand than the available supply—was grain. Being the traders in the region, the Benadir coastal tribes were expected to respond to this strong regional demand for grain (Menkhaus 1989). Apart from other economic factors, grain production was probably one of the main economic factors that lay behind the expansion of the slave system on the East African coast, and its influence on the southern coast and the inter-riverine area of Somalia as well (Sheriff 1987, 71).

The inter-riverine area in southern Somalia comprises the fertile land between the rivers Juba and Shebelle. It is the only area in Somalia where irrigated agriculture is possible, indeed with the potential for surplus production. Because the yields of other regions, which depend on rainwater, are not sufficient to satisfy the food demand of the local markets, it is safe to assume that the settlements in and around the inter-riverine area assured abundant supplies of agricultural produce to the local towns. They also supplied caravans, which crossed this region in considerable numbers to transport their goods to the nearby towns on the coast.

Late in the nineteenth century, the increased demand for agricultural produce on the world market boosted production in the inter-riverine area. The towns along the Somali coast (Mogadishu, Merca, Brava) had always been important sites for

the export of ivory, aromatic gums, woven cloth, and other products, but the importance of these goods was superseded by the export of grain to South Arabia, Zanzibar, and other parts of the world (Christopher 1844). The agrarian tradition is centered on the periodic twice-yearly high-water level of the river on which the gravitation-based irrigation system relies. By this means, water can be guided along canals through the agricultural plains.

Besides grain, the inter-riverine region produces items like durra, sesame seeds, peanuts, cotton, and a variety of fruits and vegetables in quantities sufficient to meet the needs of the local market and, to an increasing extent, to those of the foreign market. Production of almost all of these items in the Shebelli and the Juba valley economy was facilitated by the tapping of the large reservoir of male and female labor supplied by the slaves of the inter-riverine and its environs. As a result, in the first half of the nineteenth century, slave plantations were established along the Shebelli River to meet the increasing demand for grain, particularly sorghum, maize, and sesame seeds (Cassanelli 1982, 166). By the 1840s, European travelers were amazed at the large amount of grain produced along the Shebelli River, which was destined for markets in Zanzibar and in Arabia.

The transformation of the Shebelli valley economy was simplified by the continued supply of paid labor provided by the resident Bantu population (Menkhaus 1989, 103–104). Moreover, part of the profits generated by the exploitation of these lands was used to purchase more slaves, which in turn led to a further expansion of the cultivated lands (Bricchetti 1904, 63; 107). Unlike in Mombasa, where production of grain in the plantations was limited because of the scarcity of arable land (Lovejoy 1983, 226), cultivable land was abundant in the

Benadir. Apart from their involvement in the lucrative commerce of slave trade, the coastal people of southern Somalia also maintained two types of slaves for their own personal gain, domestic and plantation slaves. As a result, plantation workers were further divided into two groups; cultivation and weaving were assigned to the men and the easier tasks of gathering the seeds and cleaning the husks were for the women (Luling, 1971). Frequently, though, beautiful female slaves were used as household domestics and concubines (Besteman 1991, 67–78).

Although Italy in theory had abolished slavery and the slave trade in southern Somalia early in the twentieth century, the use of slave labor lasted until the end of the first quarter of the century. Sikainga (1999, 65) aptly points out that “as elsewhere in Africa, the official abolition neither led to the sudden death of slavery nor brought a substantial change in the relationship between freed slaves and their former owners. In Muslim countries, the problem was compounded by the fact that servitude was sanctioned by the *Shari’a*.” That is probably why the Somali slave traders and slave owners, bearing in mind that servitude was sanctioned by the *Shari’a*, grew more resentful toward Zanzibar and the British authorities for stopping the slave trade (Morton 1990, 29). While both the Somali Arabs of the coastal cities and the Somali nomads from the interior were slave owners, slave trading was dominated almost entirely by the Somali Arabs of the coast. The slaves in Somalia also included small numbers imported from the interior of Ethiopia through Lugh, Doolow, and the Baardere area; most of the slaves came into Somalia through Benadir and the coastal cities of southern Somalia—Merca, Brava, Kismayu, Mogadishu, and Warsheek. More about the situation of slavery in the context of Somalia will be discussed in the following section.

The Myth of Integration and Egalitarianism in Somalia

In the background of all these commercial transactions, including the sale and purchase of humans, is this question: What does Islam say about slavery and enslavement? According to Hunwick (1993, 292), "...a person could be enslaved only if he/she were a non-Muslim whose people had no pact (*'ahd*) with the Muslims and had been taken captive in a *Jihad* [holy war] launched after a rejection of the summons to Islam." The reasons used to capture and enslave the Bantu/Jareer people were contrary to Islamic law because they were already Muslims. Furthermore, most of the locally renowned religious scholars in southern Somalia belong to the Bantu/Jareer ethnic groups; this includes Sheikh Nur Hussein, Sheikh Farhan, Sheikh Ooyaaye, Sheikh Murjian, and Sheikh Muhiddin among others, as well as the distinguished scholar Sheikh Uways Al-Barawi.

In any case, it is probably the pastoral Somalis' persistent claim of Arabian descent that has reinforced the ties among the Arab slave traders from the Islamic world such as Yemen and Oman, the local Somali coastal immigrants allegedly from parts of Arabia, and the Somali nomads themselves. Therefore, this superficial ligament of Arabized brotherhood assumedly led to Omani Arab political control and trade of the Omani sultan of Zanzibar in the coastal cities of southern Somalia in the 1840s, under the leadership of Sayyid Said. In accordance with this notion of same Arab ancestry, the Omanis "... exerted no authority [against non-Bantu/Jareer Somalis] but that of the influence of their name and character as Shariffs. Every Arab, young or old, poor or rich, receives this designation from the credulous and ignorant Somali community; they are also the

wealthiest in the land” (Christopher 1844, 284–291). Cassanelli’s (1988, 312) analysis that “most slaves in Somali towns belonged to wealthy Arabs ...” tends to validate the firm alignment between the non-Bantu groups controlling slaves and slave markets, despite distinct levels of participation in the slavery enterprise.

In 1842, the Arab intervention in the coastal cities of southern Somalia came through the invitation of one of the ruling Somali factions, which later became allied to the Omanis as a means to gain supremacy over Mogadishu (of then Banadir) and their rival factions (Alpers 1983). Three or more factions struggled for control of the coastal cities and its environs at the time such as the inhabitants of the Shingaani area, the Hamarwein/Biyamal community, and the sultanate of Geledi established in the town of Afgoye.

Among the rival elders, those from the Hamarwein (Arab descent) area invited the sultan of Zanzibar, Seyyid Said, to intervene and put to an end to the rivalry between the aforementioned factions by taking control of the Banadir region and incorporating it into his sultanate. Consequently, the Banadir coastal cities fell under the protectorate of the sultan of Zanzibar. The takeover took place under the pretext of forming an alliance with the Hamarwein elders for their support and protection against more powerful enemies (Shingaani, Biyamal, and the Geledi sultanate). But in reality it was territorial expansion by Sayyid Said of Zanzibar.

According to Hunwick (1999, 44), Islamic law is clear, “once the black slave had been manumitted, he or she was [should have been] received into the community of the faithful and shared, at least in legal theory, in both the privileges and the duties of other believers of whatever color or race.” To discover whether or not Hunwick’s explanation is in practice in the

Islamic world, one needs to examine the social histories of a few individual Muslim communities. While doing so, David Ayalon (1999) noticed discrimination within the Mamluk military ranking of the Ottoman Empire between those from Central Asia and the black Africans. Ayalon (44) says that because the Mamluks from Central Asia were fair skinned, they could ascend to high ranks while those with darker skin could not form part of the Muslim military elite. They often were kept to perform menial labor.

In the case of Somalia, although discrimination and the denial of integration was not official, demeaning actions and degrading attitudes of Somali society against the suspected emancipated slaves speak louder than the rhetoric of egalitarianism under the pretext of being brothers within the Islamic framework. Catherine Besteman (1999, 113) argues, "Despite [some] touted indications of equality, assimilation, and homogeneity, however, Goshu villagers [of Bantu origin] and other slave descendants continued to hold marked identities which stigmatized them in Somali society. Overt signs of inequality, status distinctions, and social differentiation were readily apparent to any visitor in the 1980s." Martina Steiner (1994) similarly argues that the Jareer people in southern Somalia are a stigmatized and marginalized group that is ostracized and not allowed to intermingle or intermarry with the other Somalis because of their deemed inferior status to the Somali nomads.

As stated by Virginia Luling (1983, 39), "Traditional Somali society is famous for its egalitarian character, and yet it is known that some of its members were much less equal than the rest. [The] category of people whose status was traditionally inferior was the farming villagers of inter-riverine [Bantu] area." Examining the anomalous situation of concentrating

Somali studies on the ethno-cultural learning of the nomadic groups, Mukhtar (1995, 20–21) criticizes:

Efforts were made to carefully glorify nomadic language, culture, and history and destroy or denigrate the history and culture of the sedentary societies. Institutions were created to propagate the nomadic tradition, ascribing to it a greater antiquity ... Efforts have been made to discourage scholars from studying other Somali themes. Valuable sources for the study of Somalia's past were ignored, among them, Arabic, Italian, French, and German sources ... 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 had been insignificant ... The aim was, under the guise of nationalism, to safeguard the interests of certain clans and suppress the aspirations of others. [emphasis in original]

After examining harsh situations against emancipated black slaves in the Islamic world, a similar situation of oppression of slaves is mirrored in the modern-day Somalia as elsewhere. According to Hunwick (citing Bernard Lewis), "... although Muslims of the Middle East never practiced the kind of racial discrimination and oppression that persons of European descent practiced in apartheid South Africa, and 'until recently in the United States,' Muslim societies were never idyllic havens of racial innocence" (1999, 43). Supporting the above argument, one of our interviewees, an elderly Jareer woman from the town of Afgoye in Somalia who was living in Tilbruq, Holland, at the time, explained in detail about the agonizing and unbearable racial discrimination that she had experienced in Somalia: "... we, the Jareer people, do not need to commit a crime for punishment because being born as a Jareer is a sufficient crime in Somalia."

Mernissi (1991, 151) censures the hypocrisy of the Muslim society and asserts, “Muslim society remained a slave society for centuries and only renounced it under pressure from the colonial powers in the twentieth century,” and that despite all the Qur’anic revelation and the guidance of Prophet Mohammad against slavery and mistreatment of Muslims. In the Somali situation, when the Italian colonial authority gave an ultimatum to end the practice of slavery in the country, some of Somalia’s religious leaders, who were themselves slave owners, protested against abolition and the treatment of emancipated slaves as equal to other Muslims. In fact, abolition was denounced by many slave-owning Somalis who felt their status and commercial enterprises threatened. In particular, Sheikh Hagi Hassan,² the religious leader, argued that he and his followers would:

... not accept your [un-Islamic] order. We will not come to you at any cost because you have broken our pact. All our slaves escaped and went to you and you have set them free. We are not happy with the [abolitionist] order. We abandoned our law, for according to our law, we can put slaves in prison and force them to work. The [Italian] government has its law and we have ours. We accept no law other than our own. Our law is that of God and the Prophet. (De Vecchi 1935, 25–27)

Surprisingly, the law that Sheikh Hagi Hassan is invoking is the Islamic law; yet, “although Islam forbids, among others, any kind of violation of another Muslim’s basic civil rights to freedom and equality, both in principle as well as in practice, a tremendous malpractice and misinterpretation is evident among most of the Muslim communities,” as stated by Sheikh Maxamed Abuukar, known as Maxamed Alooweey, a Somali vicar and Imam of one of the mosques in Ras As Khaima, United Arab Emirates. Because Sheikh Hagi Hassan was a

Koranic teacher (*Mu'allim*), he was considered one of the Somali *Ulama*, clergymen, whose duty it was to guide and usher the Somali society toward the right path of Islam. Instead, he preferred to pursue his own personal gains to exploit free human labor from slaves. Noting a similar situation in Islamic Morocco, Sikainga (1999, 61) stresses that "although the role of the '*Ulama*' may be compared with that of Gramsci's intellectuals, who play a major role in shaping the cultural norms that ratify the structure of the society, yet the '*Ulama*' were not a monolithic group," especially those of Sheikh Hassan's mentality. The Somali nomads not only mimicked the behavior and attitude of Arab slave owners but actually claimed to be descendants of Prophet Mohammed's family, Quraysh.

In Somalia, the elders are the vanguards of communal settings and societal systems in general and have conspicuously indicated their lust for superiority to the African identity (Eno and Eno 2009; Eno 2008; The East African Standard 1930). This imperceptive ideology makes integration and egalitarianism among communities within the country difficult and has left a far-reaching legacy in the perception of young generations. This perception was to look down upon all black Africans as *Adoon* (slaves), which has been modified these days as *madow* (black), an equally pejorative epithet that has an undertone of slave or descent from slaves. Michael Maren provides a perfect example of Somalis' feeling of superiority over black Africans in an episode concerning Victor Gbeho, a Ghanaian national who was UN Special Representative to Somalia. Maren (1994) comments:

Gbeho, who is from Ghana, has another problem not of his making: Somalis in general show little respect for Africans. When speaking English, people around Aidid and Ali Mahdi refer to Gbeho as "that Ghanaian." When speaking Somali they use the word *adon*, which

means slave, a term in common use to describe Africans with darker skin and coarser hair.

Stereotypes of this nature are not unique to Somalia. An obvious similarity also exists in Arab Islamic North Africa, where blackness is synonymous with servitude. As Sikainga (1999, 63) comments, "... the association of blackness and unbelief with servitude was deeply rooted among North Africans." The ideology is also one firmly rooted in Somali social culture where superiority to Africanness is proudly sung by even Somali poets such as Ali Dhuux, who glorifies Somalis and mocks *madowga*—blacks or black Africans—in his verse:

*Suldaan caadil ah, cuqaal talisa, iyo culumada diinta Ilaaha caadiloow
kaaga cabanmeyno, Annagu caddaankaanu la loolannaa madow ma cisayno.*

Translated:

Wise kings, governing intelligentsia and religious clergymen, Oh Wise Almighty! You blessed us with them and have no dearth of that for, we race with the white men and give no respect to the black men.

An examination of the attitudes and stereotypes of other Islamic societies toward their compatriots of African descent discloses similar types of discrimination. As Bernard Lewis states, a demeaning "... kind of discrimination is well attested in Arabic literature; so too is the resentment of its victims, [blacks]" (1990, 39). In a similar way, William John Sersen (1985, 92–105): tells us that there is a series of derogatory and demeaning proverbs in Arabic literature against blacks such as: "I love my friend, though he be a black slave," "Your friend (darling) is he whom you love, though he be a Nubian slave," "Dear to a slave is he who overworks him," "Do not caparison

the mule, and do not pamper the black slave,” and “The secret of the mistress is in the box, and the secret of the slave girl is in the market.”

Further examining the myth of integration and egalitarianism in the Islamic world, Sikainga (1999, 59), citing Ennaji, picks Morocco and says: “while some scholars have held the view that Moroccan slaves were treated well and were integrated into the owner’s household, Mohamed Ennaji has argued that the condition of slaves in Morocco was a complex web of paternalism and oppression.” In the same way, today’s Muslim society in Somalia can be seen as anything but egalitarian and integrative because in many Somalis’ minds reverberates the idea that slaves are less valuable than camels.

Traditionally, discrimination comes in different forms, the major one being based on color. In the case of Somalia, where everybody is black, the dominant groups, the slavers and their descendents, discriminate based on ethnic background and physical appearance. To validate claims of ethnic supremacy, such groups have developed a set of low status related corpus to qualify the Bantu/Jareer. We present some of them here: *Jareer* is a derogatory name for the Bantu people in Somalia; it refers to the texture of their hair. *Adoon* means slave, a common and more open term. *Xawash* denotes a negroid type of person and *Qabaan* refers to servitude. *Bidde* is the equivalent of slave, one who serves the royal household; the term is commonly used only in the nomadic north of Somalia. *Sankadhuudhi* and *Beylasanbuur* are other terms popular among northern Somalis and refer to the broad and flat nose (that Somalis associate with ugliness) with the connotation of a slave, or one of black African descent. Among the Digil-Mirifle confederation of clans in southern Somalia, because the language is Af Maay and quite distinct from the Af Maxaa spoken in the north and even some

parts of the south, they too have developed their own codes to symbolize the Bantu/Jareer people as inferior. They use such expressions as *Boon*, *Meddo*, and *Ooji*, among many more, all of which are not only derogatory and demeaning but are explicitly designed to corroborate ethnic inferiority related to black Africanness.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the gap between the theoretical belief of equality within Islam and the pragmatic realities that contradict the ideals of that philosophy. The study used various examples of situations in which emancipated blacks within an Islamic society, particularly in Somalia, have been and still are alienated and mistreated as unequal, despite the fact that their free labor was used commercially for the prosperity of dominant communities among which Islam was supposed to be the unifying as well as equalizing factor. This paper has also tried to show that slaves in the Islamic world were required to perform tasks that were not only for economic but also for military purposes. Although more study is needed, it seems that the desire to maintain a superior idiosyncrasy and a “status quo” among slave owners has always been apparent. As a result, egalitarianism among Muslims will continue to be a myth and an inaccessible phenomenon because former owners do not tend to respect the egalitarian doctrine of their faith. To explore more about the hidden inequalities of the communities suffering under dominant former slave owners, we recommend more research and straightforward practice of Islam rather than continuing to maintain a false status quo.

Note

1. The words Bantu and Jareer are used interchangeably as they both describe the same category people in the discussion.
2. The sheikh in discussion is Sheikh Hassan Barsane, after whom, for calculated political and nationalist interests, the military regime of Mohamed said Barre named a school. He has been described as a national hero who resisted colonialists when actually his resistance was not against colonialism but against their abolition of slavery and the slave trade which, according to his words, he sounds to be a strong stakeholder.

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