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Ambiguity and Paradoxity of Time in Ali Jimale Ahmed's Poem "The Crest of Time"

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Abstract

The use of time as a poetic trope or metaphor in prose narrative has a long history. From ancient Greeks, Romans, Arabians to the contemporary scene of postcolonial era, time has been employed as a central theme of many poetic works. Some of these poems are created with a particular focus on time—in real, mythical or in metaphorical settings. Discussions of these works vary from events of disaster, horror, success, victory, defeat, heroism and topics poets select to deliver their messages. The poem in our discussion here, "The Crest of Time," was created by Ali Jimale Ahmed (2012), a poet with a history of employing allegorical phrases of time such as the title "Bastardized Time." In addition to quote-worthy statements of deep reflection as in the sentence "Time's work is undone by time" in the very poem titled "Bastardized Time" in the collection *Fear Is a Cow*, Ahmed (2002) has produced other time- and travel-related poems across 3 published collections. Some of his recent poems in his forthcoming "Vituperative" also deal with time in its multi-faceted, multi-pronged dimensions. In this essay, I present and discuss how Ahmed utilizes time as an ambiguous and at the same time a paradoxical factor in our life.

Keywords: *Horn of Africa, Literary Criticism, Somali Culture, Somali Literature, Somali Poetry*

Introduction

Our society is not the old society, but a new society enlarged by Islamic and Euro-Christian influences. A new ideology is therefore required, an ideology which can solidify in a philosophical statement, but at the same time an ideology which will not abandon the original human principles of Africa. Such a philosophical statement will be borne out of the crisis of the African conscience confronted with the three strands of present African society. Such a philosophical statement I propose to name *philosophical consciencism*, for it will give the theoretical basis for an ideology whose aims shall be to contain the African experience of Islam and Euro-Christian presence as well as the experience of traditional African society, and, by gestation, employ them for the harmonious growth and development of that society. (Kwame Nkrumah, 1964, 70).

Time is a very important constituent of our life. It is so much integral to whatever we do that it is one of the most reliable factors for measuring what we do within the framework of a time span. It guides in scheduling our duty and the chronology in which we arrange tasks and set priorities for their implementation. Yet, a discussion of time is one of the most perplexing and definitively controversial subjects in the academic circles. Scientists from various disciplines including philosophers, cosmologists and physicists are not only in controversy and disagreements over time with other scientists and scholars, but they do so much within their own specific disciplines that theories and counter-theories are proposed to run counter to each other. No doubt, therefore, that the problematizations of time and related studies have contributed substantially to human understanding of many aspects of phenomenon time and other matters not directly related to it. But the outcome of those debates did neither end the controversies nor did determine solutions to the topics in disputation.

However, considering time according to its relevance to the current literary discussion, I opted to focus on my observation of time from a simple logical understanding of the matter in front of me. This strategy of convenience allows me to draw my own discursive but uncomplicated mode of elaborating the subject. It also enables me to contextualize time within the precinct of the viewpoint of the poet's story. I present my discussion by commenting on the descriptions of time as written in the poem "The Crest of Time" by Ali Jimale Ahmed. In particular, my observation is centered on an analysis of time and the relationships that

might have developed between time as an entity and descriptions the poet has used to qualify it. These descriptions symbolize imagined situations, subjects, and other factors in the poem that take place at a time when the poet was “crisscrossing” various parts of the world while “riding the crest of time.”¹

I note that my interest in this poem partly derives from my personal enthusiasm for poetry and the fact that Ahmed’s verse presents both richness and subtlety in simultaneity. It succinctly portrays, with ardency, what Simala described as a “fine grain of events and experiences which otherwise tend to shrink to invisibility” the true sense of the social, cultural, social, political, philosophical and historical definition of the tensions of the Somalis at the domestic scene and those of the diasporic experiences laid in a poetic narrative (Simala 2004, 18). That is why in the Horn of Africa, like elsewhere in the continent and beyond, “poets are very prolific” individuals who obtained a “position of recognition through their artistry, variety, and relevance of the subjects which they consistently treat with great sympathy in their poems,” to borrow from Simala (p. 22).

Thus, similar to Ahmed (1995, 1996, 2015), Simala authenticates the notion that poets usually occupy a very remarkable position in society and attract admiration by the creativity bestowed upon them. It is due to the prestige of this “recognition” that in Ahmed’s home country poets are classified according to their talent, originality, passion of their poetry, soundness of the wealth of their inventiveness and participation in poetic debates and discussions of social concern (Eno, 2017, p. 143; Ahad 2007; Ahmed 1995, 1996). In the Somali society, which Ali J. Ahmed hails from, poetry is rarely composed, recited or created in the English language, which puts Ahmed’s work among the unique examples using foreign media. Again, unlike the prominent poets who create in the local Somali language, Ali Jimale Ahmed is an urban dweller who witnessed early in his life how much of the focus on the literary and cultural studies of the country, including poetry, was concentrated on nomadic pastoralism and to the disadvantage of the non-nomadic cultures, although Ahmed identifies himself with both (Eno 2017; Ahad 2007; Ahmed 1995).

In the following sections, I will begin the discussion with a classification of poets according to their importance or talent as articulated by Ali J. Ahmed in a poetry reading event in New York. I will continue from there my observation of the ambiguity and paradoxity of

time till I come to the impact of the occurrences before I conclude the discussion.

Classification of Poets: Is Ali Jimale Ahmed Af-Tahan Or Af-Garoc?

Although Ahmed placed himself in the 4th category, which I see as a symbol of Ahmed's typical humbleness, or may be humility, I leave it to the reader to read the 5 categories and read Ahmed's poetry before placing him in any of them:

1. AF-MAAL: which literally means "mouth of wealth"; that is the epitome of good, great poets, in the sense that they are generous but, at the same time, also they benefit from their poetry.
2. AF-TAHAN: which literally, really means "generous"; someone with a generous mouth. This is a powerful orator.
3. AF-MIINSHAAR: one whose mouth is like a saw, who really creates discord among people, and you stay away from those sorts of poets
4. AF-GAROC: one who is not really a good orator; you could live without them, you could live with them, because they are really unskilled poets. That is where I consider myself to be in; in a way
5. XAAFIDAYAAL: the ones who memorize; and memorization, after all, is really important...it is always...absorption really precedes reflection. (Ali Jimale Ahmed 2012).

Reversing the Ambiguity of Time into Reflectivity

The poet opens his story with a glimpse of what seems to be a time of fantasy when he seems to be at a peak moment of joy "Crisscrossing the world," sharing with the reader about how he was "carried on the crest of time." But the joyous moment, as indicated in the opening line of each stanza, is betrayed by time which alters the situation to a moment of gloom and unpredictability. The reader sees this when after the "crisscrossing" the narrator or the poetic voice admits, in the second line, and says: "I am deposited at the gates of a deserted dwelling." With such a sharp diversion, the reader notices how the verse portrays a mixture of good and bad omen. On the good side, to deposit is metaphorical for safe-keeping, protection, and in this case a safe landing. It is also indicative of accomplishment in that, as the protagonist admits, he arrived peacefully at a destination, protected from harm. I interpret the term as positive especially when compared to cases where the author

would have used words like ‘tossed’, ‘dumped’, or ‘bundled’; terms which the poet did, in my perception, intentionally avoid. The plural word “gates” implies multiple options of entry and access into the “dwelling”, which means freedom, protection, and recovery from any afflictions and anxieties encountered in the course of time past. So, the arrival at this place and the safe landing should presumably usher in hope for betterment and continuity of a pleasant life.

Analyzed polemically, a safe arrival at a “deserted dwelling” with no appearance of humans raises suspicion as it means isolation and aloofness, a situation any immigrant or traveler or explorer would feel very uncomfortable with. The main sentence of the stanza, which the poet placed artistically in the second line, reminds the reader who is speaker of the Somali language, of the variant Somali equivalents often raised in complaints such as: *cidlaa ley dhigay* or *cidlaa leyga tagey*; or in a more litigating manner: *waa ley daayacay*—all of them literally meaning, “I’ve been forsaken!”, “I’ve been abandoned”)—which embodies a very strong note of lamentation. In addition, the passivity of the verb “am deposited” dispenses a suspicion that the narrator is an inactive agent with little or no choice at all in the decision of depositing, despite not being dumped or bundled. The problem with this view is that it is quite unlike the behavior of a seasoned traveler “crisscrossing the world” who, supposedly, is expected to have acquired some experience in managing his way through the world. It denotes that the depositing might have been done by someone in greater authority, by whatever virtue; or possibly by time which, in this case, would mean fate and/or destiny, but all the same against his wish for arriving or being depositing at this particular moment and place.

Yet, depositing promises recess—relief to recuperate from the fatigue of travel, although this does not seem to be the case here. The arrival, which, considering the passive tone of the verb ‘deposited’ might have been involuntary, possibly caused to the crisscrosser the distress of being isolated in an unknown territory. Disentangling this new quagmire depends on the level of determination and motivation of the person laid harmlessly at the isolated structure—which in itself means a state of hopelessness far different from the expectations. For, in difficult situations, the determined mind is activated by a motivational impulse that challenges the brain to finding solutions to the encountered barriers; betterment for survival, something to tell a story about to later

generations or interlocutors after resuming the next step to the way forward.

In addition to the desolation, the house seems disinteresting to the narrator, too boring to even provide further descriptions of it. Neither do we know for certainty whether it previously had or has not had occupants, nor is it discernable what might have happened to them, assuming that it has had. The indetermination is reflected by the vagueness of the adjectivized past participle “deserted” used here to qualify the noun ‘dwelling’ which, when read with the main clause “I am deposited,” does not seem to help us beyond its current state of being. Furthermore, the nature of the elusiveness surrounding the building ascertains time’s paradoxicality, not to mention its ambiguity, related to the reason for depositing its rider in an uninhabited/inhospitable place. If anything, it contradicts the protagonist’s eagerness for interaction with people and cultures and the tangible process of experiencing the outside world. In fact, it is at this point that the narrator’s criticism and cynicism of what he calls ‘cruel time’ comes to be justified, bringing in mixed sentiments of both ambivalence and melancholy. Is this isolation a form of punishment exacted by time to justify its being qualified as “cruel”, as discussed below under the subtitle *Cruel Time?*

As it seems, isolation poses a new perplexity which the poet has to deal with, which in my opinion suggests the commencement of a lonely life with inherent security and psychological implications. The ensuing situation of despair, I am tempted to imagine, is an indication that the safe arrival at a place does not necessarily give the assurance that the destination is a safe haven. In fact, the poetic discourse outlined in this stanza could be alerting us to a change in the poet’s storyline of the poem, though not fundamentally the narrativity, as set thus far to this point. Obviously, it introduces levels of events and images—which suggests a shift to a new form of reflection, a new scope of observing things. The isolation becomes a foregrounding for other scenarios that are unfolding as a result of the unanticipated reality as the poet begins to deal with the situation. At this juncture, the reader has to keep in mind that the depositing occurred not in the house but “at” it. . .

... That Time Is Not Trivial

The poet’s contemplation of time is unwrapped in each of the stanzas. His perception of whether it is trivial or not is furnished in the descriptions laid out in the poem. With the poet’s selection of alliterated

terms in specific phrases so cogent in their context, the readers easily grasp that the significance the poet attaches to them cannot be taken lightly. Instead, they depict his inner feelings, speak out his experiences, and reveal his emotions and perceptions relative to the engagements he has had during the long ride “on the crest of time.” Like a vivid account of archived historical events, these terms and phrases narrativize a chronicle of the natural occurrences during the ride. In part, they testify to the encounters he had with other agents and their socio-cultural worldview and how these have nurtured his experiential knowledge and shaped his ideological standpoint of issues that matter in life. For that reason, the poet’s contemplative arrangement of the descriptions he attributes to time with a variety of qualifiers needs to be illuminated for their significance and pertinence to the environment of the poem.

“Capacious Time”

The phrase capacious time is the first of four qualifications the poet makes of time. As an adjective, the term ‘capacious’ may be considered in two folds: (a) from its Latin origin as capability, and (b) ability to contain a voluminous quantity. I offer this classification because my concern about it is to not simply textualize the poet’s experience during the ride but, in addition, to texture it as one acquired through a “capacious” and voluminously sizable period of time of thinking, observation, and analysis of the interactions between him and the world he had so daringly encountered along the path and in the occurrences. That the poet characterizes time as capacious, or that he challenges us to problematize the phrase “capacious time” comes as no surprise to those acquainted with his works. For, he is a critic who, in his earlier essay titled “Beyond Manichean Poetics”, had linked “time and the passing of time” to delicate matters such as “faith”, “discursive practices”, and “political society”, before morphing the composite relationships of these factors as ingredients fanning the flames of “wars [which] are marked by subterfuges” (Ahmed 2004, 886).

Is Ahmed’s image of what he calls “capacious time” informed by the boundaries of specific time limits? Or is time in this context as voluminous as what Emily Dickinson (1995) in the poem “You left me – Sire – two Legacies” calls “capacious as the sea”? Or does it leave the person with “Boundaries of pain” to haunt him/her in a pendulum “Between Eternity and Time”, as Dickinson sings? Such is the depiction

of time, its nature as a phenomenon so vast but also within a comprehensible scope and boundary, as both Ahmed and Dickinson would concur. Examining it from another side of the discourse, time cannot in itself and by its sheer capaciousness produce any meaningful existence without accounting for the activities that are measured and evaluated within the precinct of the subject measuring it and the object measured or gauged against it. Without engagement of activities and complexities of agents involved, no results can be worthy of mentioning within the perimeters of time. To say the least, without such activities and agents and the results they produce, the significance of time would not matter much on its own—thus reducing it to what the poet himself would trash as a “beachcomber’s ragbag” (Ahmed 2012, 66).

Beyond the import of its imaginative sense, the term “capacious time” is a loaded code which, when gauged through migration and human mobility across the world, represents a unique experience of what is a global reality. It is a “new reality,” as Ahmed analyzes elsewhere, that “engenders narratives of transition, which are, more often than not, marked by fear, consternation, and angst” (Ahmed, 2004, 886). Ahmed’s comprehensive engagement of time to the poetic discourse lays bare how “[s]uch narratives attempt to account for the dramatic collision between self and history” as well as endowments of cross-cultural harmony (Ahmed 1995). Yet, although the cosmic reality of a collision between self (agent) and history (diachronic time) cannot be disentangled from one another, a more serious dilemma is faced when “[i]n the process the collision produces ‘an unhappy consciousness,’” to use Ahmed’s (2004, 886) quote from Hegel. From this setting, and in accordance with my invocation of Ahmed’s earlier work, one may surmise that capaciousness, isolated as an individual property, does not bear significance on time, whether past or present. By that I mean, if the inherent role of the agent is suppressed for the sheer reason of giving prominence to history and only time per se, we seem to be denying the reality that historical collisions have not taken place on their own without due interventions by active agents.

Indeed, it is through the intensive process of the diachronic engagements between the agent and his outer world that an outcome, a consequence (‘collision’) of some sort is realized. The upshot of the “crisscrossing” and the “riding”, and the ideological interpretation of the occurrences (whether political, social, religious, military, or cultural) help us shape the discursive platform by which we determine how the

capaciousness of time affected or interplayed with other descriptions like “capricious”, “gracious”, or “cruel” at the specific moments of collision. My comment continues in the same sequence with an interrogation of what belies in “capricious time” in the context of the poet’s ride on the trail of time.

“Capricious Time”

When viewed with naivety, the word ‘capricious’, which has several meanings, may simply be assigned to a fanciful moment, associating it, in this instance, with synonyms like ‘fantastic’ or ‘whimsical’. But it also acquires strong literary meanings and interpretations when imagined or used in certain contexts and can mean ‘unreliable’, ‘untrustworthy’, ‘impulsive’ etc. In the case of this poem, ‘capricious time’ is used to demonstrate how, at certain moments, time can be unpredictably untrustworthy, considering the many unusual manners in which it can suddenly change inexplicably. The qualification of time as being capricious, unusual or unpredictable shows authorial sophistication as the poet attempts to dislocate any imagination of a specific timeframe, which in turn dislodges the possible localization of the events and experiences in focus. It imagines a different trend, a different reality—one occurring in a temporal timelessness which also, at the back of the inquisitive mind, brings forth an image of spaciousness without a particular space—occurrences unbounded by time. No wonder, therefore, that the poet tactically exploited linguistic talent by utilizing ‘capacious’ to emphasize the voluminosity of time before presenting the unreliability aspect of it.

Further, the poet’s delocalization technique regarding time and experience underpins the presupposition to be informed beyond one’s local homestead, be it the village or the country which one is a citizen of. According to this perception, delocalization/de-ethnicalization connotes open-mindedness toward the essence of learning/knowing and knowledge-acquisition (Ahmed 1995) via migration, migrant consciousness (Kusow 2006, 2014) and exposition to other cultures compared to locally/ethnically focused knowledge base deficient of cross-cultural contact and harmonization (Eno 2017; Ahmed 1996; Bhabha 1994). By advocating the concept of harmonizing multiple cultures, Ahmed validates (and I strongly claim) a core principle of African political forefathers; among them Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere (Tanganyika) and Sheikh Abeid

Aman Karume (Zanzibar) both of modern Tanzania, Egypt's Jamal Abdelnassir, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Al-Haji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Al-Haji Ahmedou Bella both of Nigeria, South Africa's Nelson Mandela, and Tunisia's son of the soil Habib Bourguiba.

Similar bouquets of appreciation can be bequeathed upon academics in the class of Ali A. Mazrui, Homi Bhabha, Ayo Bamgbose, Simon Gikandi, Taban Lo Liyong, Achille Mbembe, Micere Mugo, Monica Mweseli, Mahmood Mamdani, Chris Wanjala, Edward Said, Austin Bukonya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and V. Y. Mudimbe, to highlight but just a few examples. With their varied intellectual perceptiveness, these scholars advocate against the lack of cultural harmonization—locally as well as globally—making their contributions “no longer possible to ignore” in one way or another (Said 1993, 239). Despite their acclamation of the prominence of African indigenous cultures, common among these leaders and scholars is the embrace of also the place and presence of the Islamic and Euro-Christian influences that had contact with the locally adored traditional values in places where these have contacted and interplayed. It is from this accommodative perspective that the poet/scholar Ali Jimale Ahmed mainly traces the emotional foundation of his polygonal philosophical views on matters under his intellectual critical scrutiny.

According to this multilateral concept of harmonization, the verse, in retrospect, corroborates Ahmed's belief that both ‘gracious time’ and ‘cruel time’ pronounce the reality of multiculturalism which the poem's protagonist has to negotiate with. In the imagery of Ahmed, the protagonist put all odds behind by daring himself to face the challenges of the time, engaging to deal with time's subtleties. In the subsequent sections I will discuss about time's graciousness and cruelty in their respective order in the original poem.

“Gracious Time”

The description presents time (which I treat in this study as a figurative term for ‘patience’ or ‘perseverance’) as cordial, in fact, as a congenial friend who persists painstakingly the burden of carrying on its “crest” a commuter in an intense voyage “crisscrossing” the universe. Therefore, to consider the graciousness of time, viewed hyperbolically or metaphorically, implies an intrinsic attachment to a host of emotional and psychological conditions that exemplify a progressive mindset. Such a progressive mind, I am imagining, is one that resonates with changing

states of affair, seeks factually the truth of issues, and considers that which represents a proven reality. This positive psychological view affirms behavioral aspects that foster interpersonal relations among humans as well as between humans and their living and non-living counterparts that make part of a given ecological system, whether of an immediate environment or in a distant part of the world. Time's congeniality in such an atmosphere holds together vital factors that are pertinent to human success—including, but not limited to, the awareness and accommodation of cultural differences and the human potential to flourish happiness and admirable attitude towards nature and humans.

William James (2003, 68) explains the value of harmony thus: "...for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure" are based on "[h]ow to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness." From this point of view, fostering an appropriate cultural communication, developing interpersonal relationship, and embracing tolerance all manifest admirable etiquettes that advance human contentment. They constitute some of the core elements of positive psychology whose main focus rests upon a culture of human wellbeing and happiness (Ryan and Deci 2000, 2001; Melchert 2002; Seligman 2011). Positive mindedness has its orientation on the pursuance of achievement, fulfillment in a life worthwhile living, and all that pertains to the nature of a good life, as Aristotle (2004) presents variably in editions of *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

Nussbaum (1993, 245) turns our focus to pragmatic situations realized in human experience "in which more or less any human being will have to make *some* choices rather than others, and act in *some* way rather than some other" (p. 245; emphasis in original). Through these choices and interactions, humans pursue betterment in life with a purpose to discover and participate in the meaningfulness of the "shared conditions of human existence" (248). The same observation is maintained in Antonia Macaro's (2005, 5) apt analysis of some of the constituents of good life as derived from Aristotle:

Our provisional 'recipe' for a good life, therefore, could involve enough basic goods, some success and recognition, some pleasure and enjoyment, some love and friendship, but most importantly learning/understanding choosing wisely and developing the virtues of character.

Creating, problematizing and contextualizing such a fascinating linkage of descriptions of time, Ahmed draws our attention to the volatility of time to which we then associate situations and consequences developed from our exposure to related circumstances but within the framework of a temporal span. He is challenging the purview of our judgment as a society—how favorable or unfavorable our judgment becomes to a situation or a particular piece of experience. It is the kind of judgment that further informs the learning that is worthy retaining in memory and that which is worthless and to be unlearned. So, when Ahmed describes time as “gracious” or “cruel”, I get the assumption that he is contemplating particular situations and experiences attached to the descriptions comparative to others—a nuanced thought of the ups and downs humans go through in life. In a sense, therefore, he is swaying us away from the erroneous assumption that time is actually the agent; tempting us instead that human emotions and feelings matter when engaged with his characterization of time. That is why he is telling us to consider time (temporal span) and exposure (experience through time) as one composite unit but which at the same time espouses fragmented episodes and encounters (historical, cultural, social, political, etc). Although according to his view these factors seem to be independent of each other as single entities of their own, he nevertheless displays how they share a timeline as a sense of measurement with which we can associate certain experience/s and not with others. To conclude this section, I move the discussion to “cruel time”, the last of the four classifications Ahmed charted in his poem.

“Cruel Time”

Etymologically, ‘cruel’ or its noun ‘cruelty’ connotes harshness of feeling, a form of internalized inhumanity displayed in actions and attitudes that dehumanize objects by incurring them pain, regardless whether the recipients/victims are humans, animals or nature. Operable at individual and societal levels, cruelty can range in degree and scope while extreme forms of it can lead to massive scales of atrocity in peacetime and in wartime. It is a trend which attracted intellectual curiosity among scholars and experts from diverse academic and professional backgrounds to debate and advance human understanding of the subject. According to experts, cruelty is characterized as having its roots in matters fueled by hatred, with denigration and intolerance as among its symptoms. The

resultant actions or reactions from cruelty are often displayed by way of hatred, prejudice, and punishment or a combination of them, which in return has widened the theoretical observation of the phenomenon from scholarly perspectives. “Cruelty (from the Latin *crudelem*, “morally rough”) is the deliberate infliction of physical or psychological pain on a living creature ...” (Nell 2006, 211). The harshness of the remark cannot be justified without agency and actions of pain, physical, psychological, emotional, or an amalgamation of two or more of them to another object. Elaborating the expression, Mayes (2009) obtains, “Cruelty is a creature’s disposition to be rewarded by the perception of injury.”

In conditions of uncertainty, in anguish and in anxiety, a person finds himself overwhelmed with thoughts and becomes, as Stevie Wonder would say in his song “Lately,”: “...a man of many wishes.” Such is a man who is aware of the reality that the unpleasant (pain, despair, sorrowfulness etc) is imminent, despite the displeasure with the consequence. Hence, Stevie Wonder’s lyrics reveal the likelihood of this a situation of discontentment, though in the context of love and affection. Admitting that in his song, he sings:

I am a man of many wishes
I hope my premonition misses
But what I really feel inside
My eyes won’t let me hide
'Cause they always start to cry
'Cause this time could mean goodbye

Indeed, it is my belief that time as a factor takes no grudge against anyone and treats or rather presents itself fairly to everyone. It is also my belief that blaming time for ill fate is sometimes caused not directly/actively by time but by a person’s perception of a situation and the conditions prevailing at the given time the person is pleased or not pleased with. This shows how and why humans misplace their aggression (from psychological perspective) and displeasure with the situation—blaming time as the cruel culprit. Contrasted with grace or graciousness, cruelty denotes absence of appreciation, accommodation, and tolerance, the tools expressed above as fostering positive psychology and human wellbeing. Therefore, unlike compassionate attitude and acceptance of others, cruelty stems from behaviors of dehumanization often eager to unleash forms of disgust against others. However, reality teaches us that all sorts of cruel acts take place in the course of time; hence the poet’s

dubbing 'cruel time' which actually time had no performance in the evil act—apart from the act being executed at the particular time when the narrator is riding on it because it is ever in motion. In fact, we need to note keenly that since gracious attitude conceivable from one's empathy, compassion and other emotions of positive nature; cruelty also requires some kind of performance; some actions that identify it with iniquity, immorality, hate, prejudice, denigration etc.

Again, while some cruel actions are premeditated and, in many cases, explicitly justifiable from the nature of the individual's action, certain types of cruelty remain implicit in that they are not easily visible either by emotion or deed as influenced by malice. That said; a theorization of the concept of cruelty, as a force driven by an internal feeling of hatred, illuminates the inseparability of an action attributed to be cruel from the agent performing that action and who, relative to that action, becomes subject to the description cruel. As Kekes (1996, 237) argues, "To say that an action is cruel is to say that it is the kind of action that would be performed by a cruel agent." So, in the case of this poem, the narrator's criticism and cynicism of what he calls "cruel time" can be justified along the lines of the attributes mentioned here. Nevertheless, the situation of hate here brings in sentiments of ambivalence and melancholy in relation to the state of isolation, though requiring a clarification as to whether the isolation is meant to be a form of punishment exacted by time to justify its being adjudicated as cruel. I use 'adjudicated' in the sense that the use that as long as a qualifier/adjective is a form of characterization given to a subject, it is a verdict and therefore a form of adjudication.

A hypothesis of time's culpability in our current discussion further prompts several questions than we may have answers for. First, is the poet assuming the cruelty as a deliberately undertaken malicious action by time in which "the goal [was] not to inflict pain, but to cause the adversary's flight, submission" in a deterrent mode? Second, is the poet referring to a type of cruelty and "pain that is a by-product of treatment intended to cure or heal" a persistent ailment? (Nell 2006, 213). Third, how possible is it, in the latter case, to convince the victim that time had neither intent nor unequivocal responsibility to inflict purposeful harm to the plaintiff? Fourth, can we hold time at fault simply for being the temporal sphere in the context of which the victim experienced a certain type of pain/injustice? Fifth, could the poet's accusation/indictment of time for the crime of 'cruelty' be a form of misplaced accusation (in psychological terms) because the poet could not determine (or feels

reluctant to expose) the actual source and perpetrator of the heinous spite? Finally, should we wait until “time’s work [will be] undone by time”, as the poet affirmed elsewhere in another poem?

Supposing that ‘cruel time’ is unleashing punishment onto the rider/victim/narrator in the poem, one would ask: has it been executed under a legal jurisdiction? Or is it happening simply because “it is virtually impossible to go through life without ever punishing anyone”? (Zaibert 2006, 23). If so, what “nasty thing” or unconventional manner has the victim engaged in to deserve this punishment of isolation? (Vlastos, 1991, 190). Strangely, time is not helping us to know whether it assumed the role of the educator to rebuke the rider (learner) on grounds of “moral education” as Rousseau (1993) and Locke (1693/1996) would educe and the poet Ahmed would apparently agree as a teacher. The absence of either legal jurisdiction or moral education, or both, does not exhaust all possible options to rationalize the cruelty on grounds of personal punishment. Neither can it be taken merely as one of those “interpersonal exchanges outside of the legal system” (Hershenov 1999, 90).

The jeopardy of personalized punishment is that the victim may never get justice. Wallace (1995) explains how it tends to be “legally ignored no matter who suffers them.” At the same time, it is often justified as requital for damages such as “personal betrayal, humiliation and the like ... that are no concern of the law” while offering “no redress for the victim” (374, 375). Hobbes (1660, section XXVII) similarly senses the legal anomaly when he underscores that a person “receives words of disgrace, or some little injuries, for which they that made the laws had assigned no punishment.” However, Hobbes advises that such injuries should not necessitate contravention of the law and the infliction of injuries which make the revenge harsher and consequently a crime. Yet, by its capriciousness (aggressiveness), time, as the accused in our current discussion, must have been not only aware of these ‘legal’ loopholes but it as well exploited them effectively as requital, before going scot-free with any liabilities to the victim.

Even if, in the course of seeking remedy, we consider invoking Sidgwick (1874, book III, chapter viii.1) that “effective requital is often possible” for certain injuries to people which are uncovered by the law, it would still be difficult measuring whether the punishments would not contravene the “limits of legality.” Unfortunately, in our case here, neither time (as the carrier) nor victim (as the rider) has exhibited either

the nature or volume of injuries time is seeking requital for, or the injuries the victim has suffered in the course of time's requital. Without confirmation of these crucial factors, the victim's injuries will remain an example of what Stebbins (1993) has termed "predicaments", and Suzan Yasemin Poyraz (2014) explained as a category of the "painful exchanges with other people that are unfortunately common in daily life." The impact of the atrocities blamed on time is revealed in the next section, especially, in a verse in which the poet raises his complaint.

The Impact

As given above, the poet presents time with mixed images; while some are ordinarily neutral in effect, others feature it contrastively as good or bad. Although the poet felt the vagaries of time, his strong will power prevails as he resumes yet again his "Crisscrossing the earth" while still "carried on the crest of time." But the problem now is that he realizes the impact of isolation as he starts to "hallucinate" because he feels disturbed, threatened by unstable "silhouette mirages" that keep "zigzag[ging]" in order to avoid being tracked.

Summating how the narrator is haunted by illusions, this stanza depicts a condition of deliriousness, a situation of desperation during the ride. Despite the worrisomeness raised in the referent words "hallucinate", "silhouette", and "mirage", the protagonist does not seem distracted from the pursuance of his mission as exhibited in the next verse that his "crisscrossing the earth" continues. The resilience indicates the person's determined state of mind as he is not dismayed by the appearance of odd images. On the other specter, it is a manifestation of the importance of whatever it is that he is aiming to achieve, though till now it is not clear. He seems unprepared at this stage to either state it or even let it go and redirect his focus on another project with easily attainable goals.

In fact, considering from the disturbing image of "mirages" that "zigzag", the effects of hallucination, and the uninhabited dwelling seen above, one may (mis)perceive that the protagonist might have been lost in a situation of ignorance and blindness, even one of failure. If this misperception endures, it may lead to a misreading that the poet's anticipated success has yielded nothing but failure. And the justification of the misperception would be defined from the poet's shock and disappointment with the status quo as symbolized by the hallucination.

“Shock, as Rita Felski observes, affronts ‘our moral or aesthetic sensibilities’ through ‘an encounter with the unexpected, an experience of being wrenched in an altered frame of mind’” (113; qtd in Kahyana [forthcoming]). And shock is what the narrator faces here. Whatever the causation, the delirious outcome appears to be the antithesis of the poet’s expectations of real-world situation of images of industrious agents in control of vibrant life than “a deserted dwelling,” and therefore an allusion to emptiness. The “dwelling,” representing the home to nurture knowledge as the epitome of civilization, has nothing to contribute to the profile of the traveler’s collection of experience. It is not astonishing, therefore, that when the anticipated hopes crashed, the traveler was struck with distraught, the kind that would be called *beer baaqati* in Somali Bantu agrarian culture, meaning vanished hopes.

This stanza speaks to the fact that the safe arrival at the new homestead, rather than provide serenity of environment and tranquility of the psyche, increased the chain of challenges of survival, necessitating the prolongation of hope and continuation of the riding and not celebration of accomplishment. Meanwhile, the precarious sights of the interlaced shadows and phantoms kept haunting the dweller-to-be of this isolated house as the poet acknowledges: “I hallucinate as silhouette mirages zigzag.” The sensory experience that arises at this point in time, when aspiration was high for the attainment of consciousness, may create complications in the actions presumed to be taken upon return of the rider’s awareness. It is worrisome that the visual falsehoods are now tantamount to causing preoccupation of the mind, which can render the consciousness inefficacious to stimulate a drive for action. The state of enchantment, of spiritual possession, now affecting the mind with no exorcist around to help, poses a threat that the rider’s thinking capability might be inhibited. If this happens, achievements made in “capacious time” and experiences gained during “capricious time” stand to be wasted in the encounter of a reality of phantoms so unreal. But to the “hallucinated”, these are displayed as real images and mobile, a denotation of instability, because they zigzag—which informs a misdirection that can lead to disorientation of focus.

This is to argue that lack of a fast recovery from this state of delusion endangers the consciousness the poet had realized before the arrival of the “deserted dwelling”. The effect of the zigzagging images will therefore compromise the efforts consolidated to overcome the unconsciousness prior to the commencement of the ride. The instability

of the images frustrates the ability to engage with them, thus risking disentanglement from tasks already in progression. With reflection, however, the surrealism of hallucination and its related visual and aural effects can eventually be overcome. The key factor will be how fast and how appropriately the now mesmerized commuter develops the reflection, which is dependent on how realistic and resilient the rider is as well as dealing with the factor which originally triggered the hallucination.

But there seems to be some solace here that, the reality of the hallucination notwithstanding, the voyager does not seem to have been withered. The continuation of his “crisscrossing the earth and riding the crest of time,” as recited in the succeeding verses, provides testimony to both his strong motivation and restoration of his consciousness. Conceivable from the narrative is the significance of learning (self-education through experience) that has paved the way for self-reflection (consciousness) in dealing with the ambiguity and paradoxity of time.

Conclusion

This paper presented a discussion of how Ali Jimale Ahmed describes time as ambiguous and, in a not much less way, a controversial phenomenon directly or indirectly entangled with our daily life activities, interactions as well as emotions. It attempted to lay out an analysis of four descriptive phrases (“capacious time”, “capricious time”, “gracious time”, and “cruel time”) which the poet had used as part of the core narrative contextualized in the poem “The Crest of Time”. Despite the descriptive narrative analysis of the poet’s four categories of time, the paper further raises several questions regarding whether time can be held accountable for the ills and evils by agents operating (or activities operated) within the range of time for the sole reason that at these have occurred within a context of a certain time. Finding answers to these questions will make it suitable for conducting further studies that analyze the poem from other perspectives as realized in our social space. As a result, the contextualization of the intellectual debate will not necessarily focus on the expansion of the ambiguous and/or paradoxical nature of time but rather how humans are able agents to negotiate with both the ambiguity and paradoxicality of time based on different socio-cultural contexts. Thorough investigation of crosscultural issues paves the way to a better understanding of who we are and what we stand for. Thus art, whether poetry or in any of its varied genres, “leads us to constantly

question ourselves and in the process evaluate our relationship to our surroundings – social reality” (Ahmed 2015, 219).

Notes

1. Another study focusing on the journey aspect of the same poem “The Crest of Time” is underway.

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