

Intellectualism amid Ethnocentrism: Mukhtar and the 4.5 Factor

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I. Background

The prolonged, two-year reconciliation conference held in Kenya and the resulting interim administration, implemented under the dominant tutelage of Ethiopia, are generally considered to have failed to live up to the expectations of the Somali people. The state structure was built on the foundation of a clan power segregation system known as 4.5 (four-point-five). This means the separation of the Somali people into four clans that are equal and, as such, pure Somali, against an amalgamation of various clans and communities that are unequal to the first group and, hence, considered “impure” or less Somali. The lumping together of all the latter communities is regarded as equivalent only to a half of the share of a clan.

In spite of the inherent segregation and marginalization, some scholars of Somali society, like historian Mohamed H. Mukhtar, believe that the apartheid-like 4.5 system is an “important accomplishment.”¹ In a book chapter titled “Somali Reconciliation Conferences: The Unbeaten Track,” Mukhtar chronicles this episode as one of various “success stories”² that have emerged from the Sodere factional meeting of 1997. As the historian posits it, this could be called an achievement, particularly considering the fact that “for the first time Somali clans agreed about their relative size, power and territorial rights.”³ Then the professor emphasizes that, “the conference also recognized another segment of the Somali society which included minority groups not identified with one of the above clans, i.e., the Banadiris and the Somali Bantus, just to

mention some.”⁴ In what is a concluding thought, he sounds more firm in his suggestion and writes, “After Sodere, the question of clan composition of any future Somali ‘conference’ should not be a problem.”⁵

Despite our high esteem for Mukhtar, we must elucidate a different version of the 4.5 factor, which, unlike his opinion, brings to the surface sharp disagreement and displeasure from certain communities. To do so, we will quote contrasting views by other scholars as well as notable Somalis from various kin-affiliations who have criticized and denounced the 4.5 method as a divisive technique; one which is perceived to be unharmonious to the tenets of equality and mutual coexistence among the diverse communities in the country. In addition, one of the authors (Mohamed Eno) was an official participant in the conference while Omar Eno (the co-author) paid several visits, studying the nature of the conference and particularly interviewing participants on their view regarding the 4.5 system. To this effect, the writers also conducted two workshops at Sports View Hotel in Kasarani, on the outskirts of Nairobi, on separate occasions, and made a video film of the discussions that ensued.

II. Contentions about the 4.5 Formula

Mukhtar’s discourse should be analyzed from varying perspectives in order to get at the value of the essay, examining points that might contradict what he actually intended. From the outset, the 4.5 system represents absolute discrimination and severe ethnic marginalization. Upon its introduction as an instrument for power sharing, the affected communities protested against it forthwith as well as in many other forums, and indeed continue to do so to this day.

Apart from the Bantu Jareer voices of protest, non-Jareer and concerned Somali groups of various kin-identities and social backgrounds have proactively analyzed the magnitude of the bigotry underpinning the 4.5 clan system. We introduce these views with the account given by Fatun Mohamed Hassan and Abdalla Hiram who, as early as October 2002, expressed how visionary sections of the society “have disagreed with the so-called ‘4.5-formula,’ which they feel leaves out the ‘Jareer Weyn’ as a major clan in Somalia.”⁶ In their argument, Hassan and Hiram contend:

It is our strong belief that ‘clanism’—which is the value that the so-called ‘4.5-formula’ could only, and would definitely, encourage—is almost

always counterproductive...the '4.5-formula' should never be used to account for the principle of 'equitability,' which is—must be—the basis for the distribution of political power, economic benefits and development resources in the future of Somalia.⁷

In their view, Hassan and Hirad sum up the 4.5 principle as one that, "is not definitely a smart approach to running the affairs of a state."⁸

Another Somali commentator, Mohamed Abdullahi, argues, "The 4.5-clan formula has no base in Somali reality."⁹ Abdullahi does not see the clanist arrangement as a solution to the Somali impasse. Although Mukhtar acknowledges the 4.5 system as a unique accomplishment (convenient for running state affairs), analysts like John Prendergast suggest that, despite the wide representation of the major clans in the new Parliament, "the transitional government in its current form concentrates power and positions in the hands of some constituencies and clans while marginalizing or excluding others."¹⁰

The Gabooye/Baidari community protested with a strong and loud voice against this Apartheid-like formula. In a long statement of condemnation (copied to the United Nations, several European embassies, the United States, and a number of international organizations), the Supreme Council of the community denounced the social segregation blueprint as a "neo-colonialist tool...an oppressive formula."¹¹ The community dismisses it because it "will only entrench evil; and to show support for this formula is to express support for the continuance of oppression."¹²

As one of the contributors to the 4.5 forum, Mahad Sheikh laments, "The parliament is based on the [abhorred] clan formula 4.5. Ministers are elected on clan allegiance."¹³ In his view, the "despised 4.5 tribal power sharing is a system that is designed [by] and [for] a few among the society that are unqualified to govern."¹⁴ Sheikh does not hesitate to categorize it as "a mockery to the democratic nation-state"¹⁵ and even "genocidal."¹⁶

Other Somalis have similarly deplored the decisions encouraging the discriminative policy, including author Omar Eno who, on various occasions and with other protestors on Voice of America, denounced it as "nothing but discrimination."¹⁷ In the same panel discussion with Omar, Abdiaziz Mukhtar (Qariidi), an able analyst of Somali politics in the Barre and post-Barre periods, proposed that 4.5 was conceived by Hawiye/Darod elders and an exercise "based on discrimination."¹⁸

III. Contrasting Scholars' Analysis of the 4.5 Formula: Abdi Samatar vs. Mohamed Mukhtar

Contrary to Mukhtar's notion of the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula and clan federalism as an accomplishment, leading Somali scholar and professor of Geography and Global Studies, Abdi Ismail Samatar, defines the recipe as "compartmentalized political order."¹⁹ Detailing the intrinsic bias and adverse consequences grounded in this approach, Samatar views the 4.5 formula not as a solution, but instead as a balkanizing strategy "driven by rent-seeking (corruption) rather than providing an efficient service to the citizens."²⁰

Mukhtar does not reveal whether what he wrote represents his own personal view or whether it is a reflection of the sentiments of his kin-group or any of his informants. His article is short on providing sources to that effect. It is obvious, nonetheless, that Mukhtar's and Samatar's arguments are based on two divergent "realities" that represent the attitudes of the Somali people towards the 4.5 power-sharing formula.

The contention, it seems to us, is bi-focal and needs to be looked at from the angle of: (a) a section of the population that seems to find legitimacy in this concept, and (b) an opposing segment of the same society that finds fault in the nature of the concept itself. Here lies the central difference between Mukhtar and Samatar.

Although we belong to the view characterizing the 4.5 phenomenon as a misleading and pernicious concept that could only yield marginalization of important communities, Samatar's argument draws much-needed attention to the dispensation itself and the consequences for leadership and governance. On the other hand, Mukhtar's position suggests that the 4.5 clan classification is necessary. This might be partly explained by the nature of what Mukhtar's community has been through: as a community counted earlier among those slighted by the other three groups with whom it has now been made equal. The point had previously compelled Mukhtar to describe his Digil-Mirifle community as "Silent Sufferers." Because the Reewing have now been "promoted" to equal status with their former marginalizers, the learned historian seems to have quickly forgotten the pain of discrimination and, thus, finds comfort now in the 4.5 system. Furthermore, by celebrating this arrangement as a sound measure for distribution of the portfolios of the state, Mukhtar seems to have chosen to disdain the plight of those who continue to suffer, not only under the three groups,

but what has now become four due to the inclusion of Mukhtar's Reewing kin-group.

Our argument is that it is better to propose a concept that does not rob any group of its honor. What the 4.5 system offers is a mere continuation of the injustice to the other section of what used to be a constituent part of Mukhtar's "Silent Sufferers." To put it another way, that which is not based on justice will always be a breeding ground for future trouble. In comparison, Professor Samatar condemns the 4.5 formula as a strategy that, "has no chance of leading to political stability and economic development."²¹ He went so far as to criticize it in a Somali seminar in Lenana House in Nairobi, describing its dehumanizing divisiveness and tendency towards "clanocracy" rather than meritocracy. For Samatar, "The charter grounds public affairs on genealogy rather than common citizenship."²²

Samatar's argument rests on direct observations from the field.²³ He was present during the crucial debates and discussions when the marginalized communities were pushing their case against the discrimination embedded in the 4.5 formula and contesting the myth of the existence of four major clans. In contrast, Mukhtar's reasoning is based on the assertion that "the Sodere participants agreed that there are four major equal clans."²⁴ Because it was agreed in Sodere by certain participants, Mukhtar wants us to believe that the 4.5 formula cannot be challenged. This somewhat ill informed rationale makes axiomatic a decision concocted by tribalists, some of them even participants in gruesome violations of human rights.

Whereas Mukhtar presents a summation of the 4.5 system as an indisputable formula agreed upon by credible delegates, Samatar's perspective is enriched by the insights gained from his intimate encounters with the social emotions of the participants at the conference, and particularly members of communities that feel undervalued. Hence, his study "derives particularly from symbolic interactionism,"²⁵ by providing "experiences in real situations."²⁶ The nature of his analysis concurs with social science methodologists like Wellington, that qualitative data is best "collected in a real-life, nature setting."²⁷

Despite our respect for Professor Mukhtar as a learned compatriot, we must assert the fact that his thinking deliberately discounts the rightful claims of equality of those he refers to as "another segment of the Somali society which included minority groups." After reporting what the "four major clans" have "agreed to" in Sodere, Ethiopia, and Arta, Djibouti, he does not provide a balanced study that portrays

the contrasting views related to the 4.5 issue. As a substitute, Mukhtar chooses to contaminate scholarship with ethnocentrism, implying that as long as the Digil-Mirifle (Sab) kin confederacy is elevated to equal status with their former marginalizers, the Samale, the Sodere conception of the 4.5 formula is a worthy accomplishment and should, therefore, be accepted as it is. Upon introduction of the 4.5 system, the Dir group, which represented many northern Somalis, immediately pulled out of the conference and adamantly rejected the 4.5 formula. Unlike the Dir, though, the southern Digil/Mirifle clan, which was supposed to be “*paesano*” with the so-called “minorities,” enthusiastically embraced the apartheid system. This perception leaves us with the belief that the Digil/Mirifle conveniently forgot about the similar status that they suffered from over the years preceding their elevation to equal status with the other three.

Telling experiences (which Mukhtar avoids acknowledging), occurred on two different occasions at the annual African Studies Association meetings in 2002 and 2004. One of the two authors brought forth the unfairness of the 4.5 policy.²⁸ He underscored the consequent abuses—psychological, political, economic, and ethnic—inherent in it. As a scholar, Professor Mukhtar should have been aware of the intense heat emerging from the 4.5 debate since he, too, presented both times in the same panel. With that reality in mind, therefore, for the history professor to suggest a nation-wide endorsement of the 4.5 system sounds insincere, if not ethnocentric.

The issue has now become the object of emerging strong voices of protest—voices that directly challenge Mukhtar’s bold statement that, “clan composition of any future Somali ‘conference’ should not be a problem.”²⁹

By extending the topic of clan composition a bit further, and even closer to the Mrifle-Sab constituency where the Jareer presence is heavy but unacknowledged,³⁰ neither Mukhtar nor any other individual can factually and statistically determine “the numerical portrayal”³¹ of even the “sub subgroup” in which they hold ascribed membership. Here, a consideration of “rival explanations” would have been profitable.³² Scholars of the qualitative method of research advise practitioners “to look for rival or competing themes and explanations both inductively and logically.”³³ Therefore, by simply replicating what has been known over the years about the Somali clans’ self-made concept of the four major clans, Mukhtar overlooks the wisdom bequeathed to us by qualitative analysis.

IV. The Reality on the Ground

Elsewhere in the same article, Mukhtar notes that the Reewing Resistance Alliance's liberation of Bay and Bakool "opened up a Pandora's Box" which, in our view, may bear multiple implications. Regardless, a more complex Pandora's Box might be opened sooner or later when:

- a) The Jareer, masked and oppressed under the treachery of the Digil-Mirifle confederation, finally determine to stand independently and as an entity with a separate identity; or
- b) Accurate counting reveals the true number and significance of the Jareer people currently under the domination of the Mirifle-Reewing.

Professor Mukhtar's statement about the RRA's promise regarding the liberation of "the last piece of the Digil and Mirifle land"³⁴ is an over-glorification. It is a declaration with a political motivation. For many, at the time it was made, the real objective was to lure Jareer support for the RRA mobilization.³⁵ After the liberation of the immediate territory of the Mirifle-Sab (Bay and Bakool) was achieved, the full truth was exposed.

What sounds cynical about the essay is how it at once bemoans the aggression of "foreign" clans with whom, according to Mukhtar, the local Digil-Mirifle people shared neither "historical common experience"³⁶ nor "social contracts,"³⁷ and evades the plight of the Jareer. In this context, if the "armed militiamen whose interest and actions placed them outside the pale of the Somali customary law,"³⁸ have sinned against Mukhtar's kin-group, one wonders how he would explicate the silent occupation and marginalization of the Jareer among the Mirifle-Reewing, or whether the alienation and derogatory epithets, such as "*boong*," "*meddy*," and "*Ooji*,"³⁹ used against the Jareer have any justification in the customary law of the Mirifle-Sab or the Jileec Digil-Mirifle portion of that community. In other words, is customary law protecting the rights of the Jareer aborigines, who admittedly share a common historical experience and (selected) social contracts with their Reewing counterparts, the Jileec? Social reality shows that the Jareer are not accorded their rightful recognition. In fact, they are treated as "outside the pale" of Mirifle-Reewing customary law. Daily practice clearly shows that within the Reewing cluster of cultures, the Jareer aborigines are considered lesser citizens than even the Leysaan,

the most recent to be incorporated into the social fabric of the Digi-Mirifle.

A more recent and vivid prejudice etched into the customary law is reflected in the allocation of the parliamentary representatives of the Digi-Mirifle major clan. Of more than sixty representatives, the Jareer were allocated less than four percent.⁴⁰ Yet a numerical estimate of the Jareer population suggests it is on par with the Jileec Mirifle-Reewin. Those of the Digi-Mirifle Boong-Bilis self-same school of thought avoid the question of whether the allocation of parliamentary seats and representation of this nature are grounded in another 4.5 system within the context of the Digi-Mirifle Boong-Bilis divide. Or is there any other statistical or categorical basis, such as the “ethnic purity” of the Mirifle-Reewin? Or does customary law of this nature embrace the sharing of “historical common experiences and social contracts,” as Mukhtar wants us to believe?

It is our conclusion that ideologies of segregation and exploitation, coupled with the ill intentions of the 4.5 clan categorization method, are misconceptions detrimental to any creation of a justice-based Somali society. More immediately, the Somali attitude of “use, exploit, and dump” is long overdue for critical examination in Somali Studies.

Notes

1. M. H. Mukhtar, “Somali Reconciliation Conferences: The Unbeaten Track,” in *Somalia at the Crossroads: Challenges and Perspectives in Reconstituting a Failed State*, edited by Abdullahi A. Osman and Issaka S. Souare (London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers, 2007).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Fatun M. Hassan and Abdalla Hirad, “Somalia: The World Stampedes to Renew its Commitment for Restoration of Unity, or, Is It for Dismemberment?” (2002). Online at http://somaliiwatch.org/archivejuno2/021010201.htm#_ftn2.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Mohamed Abdullahi, “National Revolutionary Struggle: The Only Natural Path Open for the Somali People.” Paper presented at Arab Center for Studies and Research, Doha, Qatar, 2007)
10. Ibid.
11. Madhibaan Supreme Council, “The Clan Formula 4.5 Is a Neo-Colonial Tool,” Press Statement signed by Hersi Jama Yassin Jangoan Jr. (2004), accessed online on 24 July 2007 at <http://www.madbibaan.org>.

12. Ibid.
13. Mahad Sheikh, "Transition from Nomadic System to Modern Nation-State," accessed online on 24 July 2007 at <http://newsomalia.blogspot.com/2007.01.07/archive.html>.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Omar Eno, "The 4.5 Debate," Voice of America talk show released on 26 June 2007.
18. Abdiaziz Mukhtar in Ibid. "The 4.5 Debate," 2007.
19. Abdi I. Samatar, "Somalia: Warlordism, Ethiopian Invasion, Dictatorship and America's Role" (2007), online at www.zmag.org. (Note that this article is widely published in numerous online journals.)
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Mukhtar, op.cit.
25. P. Woods, "Successful Writing for Qualitative Researchers." 2nd ed. (2006), p. 2.
26. Ibid.
27. J. Wellington, *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. (Continuum, 2006), p. 133.
28. The first one was at the African Studies Association (ASA) meetings in Washington, D.C., December 2002, and the second at the ASA meeting in New Orleans, 2004. Despite the argument in his article, Mukhtar was very well aware of the debate surrounding the 4.5 formula, particularly considering that he was a panelist in one of the meetings and a chair in the other.
29. Mukhtar, op.cit.
30. Mohamed A. Eno, *The Bantu—Jareer Somalis: Unearthing Apartheid in the Horn of Africa* (London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers Ltd., 2008).
31. Hans Raj, *The Fundamentals of Demography: Population Studies with Special Reference to India* (Surjeet Publications, 2001), p. 11.
32. Lokesh Koul, *Method of Educational Research*. 3rd rev. ed. (New Delhi: Vikas Publication House Pvt. Ltd., 2004), p. 204.
33. Ibid.
34. Mukhtar, op.cit.
35. Ureng Ebdiyoow Maalang, personal discussion in Nairobi, Kenya, July 2003.
36. Mukhtar. op.cit.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Eno 2008.
40. Nuuroow Hassang Nuuroow (alias Wanjaale), personal discussion in Nairobi, Kenya, July 2003.