



A LOOK AT SULTAN DEGHOW MUHUMED SAMBUL'S POLITICAL STRUGGLES

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Editor's Note: *WardheerNews proudly presents to its readers the historical struggles of the former leader of the now defunct Northern Frontier Districts Liberation Front (NFDLF) that fought for separation from the Republic of Kenya. Septuagenarian Sultan Deghow Muhumed Sambul threw in the towel in the early nineties after the collapse of Somalia's central government, and accepted defeat after combined fifty-years of struggle against British colonialism and against independent Kenya. In a long and ongoing exclusive research on Sultan Deghow Muhumed Sambul's historical struggles that touch on the political, social, and historical past of the former Northern Frontier Districts (NFD), WardheerNews editor, Adan Makina, shares with our readers, Part II of the upcoming historical text.*

Upbringing and Surrounding Natural Habitat

Sultan Deghow was born around Wakaab Xaarreey (Fecal Pond) in Garissa town that is currently nonexistent as the entire area has been transformed into a sprawling urban neighborhood. The result of human population explosion, town expansion, and drastic metropolitanization are some of the factors that brought about the unavoidable physical land feature transformations, ecological grafting or the unanticipated transfigurations visible to this day. At the time of his birth, the natural habitat was untouched having the semblance of an equatorial forest; it was purely an environment free from deforestation or desertization—unlike the current uncontrolled, human-enforced encroachment and fast-paced transhumance that has rendered the once natural picturesque denuded of the vital nutrients that could support the surrounding ecosystem.



The piece of land that he once called home during his childhood years is now a big farm producing mangos, bananas and other types of farm produce. The farm contains palatial houses owned by distant relatives while other portions have been turned into government offices. Gone

are the varieties of tree species he would climb and play hide-and-seek with his age mates in the olden days. Tree species such as the *Cordia sinensis* that is known in Somali as Mareer and the shady *Dobera glabra* (Garas), the thorny *Acacia Senegal* (Cadaad), and the incredibly towering *Hyphaene compressa* (Baar), and *Ziziphus mauritiana* (Gob)—a tree with substantial horticultural importance, provided edible fruits and nuts while *Acacia tortilis* (Qurac)—also known as Gum Arabic—whose dark and reddish sap had been a remedy for eye diseases for centuries, grew in abundance where the Sultan-to-be resided from birth to adolescence. For a long time, pastoral Somalis harvested Gum Arabic, an acacia species whose ophthalmological benefits is mentioned in the famous book, *Ten Treatises on the Eye*, written by the celebrated Nestorian Baghdadi Christian and Arab physician Abu Zayd Hunayn ibn Ishaq al-Ibadi (809-877 A.D.).ⁱ

Commiphora myrrha or simply Myrrh—a tree native to the Horn of Africa and known to Somalis as Malmal or Dheddin, alleviated female Dysmenorrhea—a gynecological terminology pertaining to menstrual cramps or painful periods during menstruation.ⁱⁱ In Somali nomadic pharmacology, Myrrh has been used as an analgesic (pain killer) to treat abrasions, bruises, tranquilize toothaches, and suppress sprains and other debilitating conditions. To control or contain young bachelor males showing signs of Hyperspermia—an abnormally excessive sex drive or voluminous semen ejaculationⁱⁱⁱ, conservative peripatetic parents consulted traditional herbalists to administer liquefied Myrrh to overcome the horrors of unanticipated rape and sexual molestation of innocent Somali girls and adult females.

Besides, *Salvadora persica* (Cadey), a natural toothbrush that has been in use since the time of the Babylonians as a preventive herbal medication against tooth decay and plaque—a species unique to the ecological environment of that time, has been replaced by the locally insignificant, little known *Prosopis juliflora*—an infuriating weed and a pernicious invader having dreadful economic and negative environmental influence in many parts of the world. Even to this present day where the majority of the urbanized global human population use toothbrushes that are made from nylon bristles and plastic and the varieties of irritating toothpastes that are readily available in every store, Sultan Deghow’s constant use of *Salvadora persica* before every salah (Islamic prayer) as admonished in the Hadith (Islamic tradition), has enabled him to keep sparkling white teeth and endearing, affectionate smile. *Salvadora persica* is a common toothbrush in regions where its use is widespread and customary. The historical significance of this natural toothbrush, has given it international recognition such that the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended its daily use for tooth cleaning.^{iv}



Natural Toothbrush

Heavy livestock and wildlife concentration metamorphosed the once crystal clear manmade dam where young Deghow was born and raised by his loving parents in to a pulverulent, murky, and fecal-soiled water catchment devoid of human glance and praise. Thus, Somalis who are masters of nicknaming pejoratively gave it the peculiar, funny name that became a permanent, irreplaceable epithet or mark of distinction. In the olden days, Deghow's birthplace teemed with friendly and ferocious wildlife and untouched natural botanical gardens that were a delight to the sightseer. Succulent roots and tubers that relieved the hunger pangs of the obstreperous kids on exploratory missions experimenting on the techniques of miniature wild game hunting, flourished in their natural habitat. Using bows and arrows crafted from wood, kids hunted the Dik-dik, Guinea fowl, and smaller antelopes. Beautiful sceneries and plenty of water and pasturage for the wild and domesticated animals created an environment akin to the African equatorial jungle.



The Endangered Hirola

The endangered, often mispronounced Hirola antelope or the Hunter's Antelope whose scientific name is *Beatragus hunter*, burgeoned in their thousands around the Sultan's neighborhood in his heydays. Carawle, as it should be rightly called in Somali, is now an endangered species secluded in a conservation resort far away from human trespass. In modern times, the demand for select exotic fauna by wealthy magnates living the affluenza lifestyles and the dwindling food supply chain among poor communities have accelerated the sudden rise in wildlife poaching. Small arms infiltrations from broken nations, unguarded porous borders, and the unrestrained massive exodus of refugees fleeing civil wars, corrupt bureaucratic regimes and maladministration in conservation efforts could be blamed for the deplorable extinction, endangerment, conservation dependency and declination of select taxonomies or biological classifications.



Somali Gerenuk

Besides the Hirola Antelope, the white-stripped, irascible Somali skunk thrived along the Tana River which was a stone throw away from the young Sultan's pastoral residence. Though primarily carnivorous, the Somali skunk—an animal that feeds on select fauna—has the tendency to supplement its diet with insects, birds' chicks and even mice and cherries when beset by food scarcity. Polygamous in nature, the skunk, whose scientific name is *Mephitis mephitis*, is an animal despised by Somalis for its vociferous and ferocious attacks and braggadocious approaches when agitated. Somali myth has it that the Somali skunk applies explosively ballistic fart to blow up and fumigate the colonies of bees from their hives before embarking on the strenuous effort of sucking honey out of trees.

While the ecology of those days teemed with varying wildlife sharing identical or opposing phylogenetic specifications, one exemplary animal that is worth mentioning for its gripping appearance and graceful look is the giraffe-necked Gerenuk or the *Litocranius walleri*. Undoubtedly, this animal is endemic to Somali inhabited regions and surprisingly, it is the

intimate friend of the reticulated giraffe. Since the Gerenuk browses with the Somali *Giraffa Camelopardalis reticulata* and that its position to the giraffe makes an onlooker envision an act of feeding or suckling, the name Gerenuk should be replaced with Geri-Nuug—which simply means suckling a giraffe.

Less than a mile from the meandering Tana River that split the former NFD from the Tana River District, Deghow's neighborhood teemed with mammals of varying colors, shapes, sizes and distinct taxonomies. The Tana River, Kenya's largest and longest river that originates in the Aberdare Mountains, drains into the Indian Ocean near the town of Kipini. Somalis and the Orma or Oromo and other ethnic groups, call this river Webi Galana or Galana Maro. Overgrazing and deforestation were uncommon those days; domesticated and wild game, amphibians and reptiles and a plethora of bird species flourished in their thousands. The deadly spitting cobra and the venomous puff adder zigzagged through the forests and surrounding arid areas while the massive hippopotamus and the crocodile waded through the reddish waters of the nearby river.



Somali Ostrich

The largest and the most beautiful flightless bird in the world—the Somali ostrich (*Struthio molybdophanes*)—a bird species phylogenetically portraying distinct heritable traits after mitochondrial DNA testing in 2014^v separated it from other living and extinct species—danced in the wild while the gregarious Marabou Stork or *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*, either flew heavenwards or hideously perched on select acacia tree species to evade alien encounters. By hiding its eggs and newly-hatched chicks from human and animal infiltrations, the

Marabou Stork has experienced exponential growth in numbers in recent years.

Education and Mental Healing

As the Sultan reminisces, education in the former NFD collectively started in 1946 in all the six districts that included Garissa, Wajir, Mandera, Moyale, Marsabit, and Isiolo. However, according to Turton, Wajir, which falls to the north of Garissa where the Sultan was born, had its first primary school in 1948. ^{vi} The year 1946 corresponds to an era when Somalis in Kenya were marginalized by the British colonial administration—a year after the end of the Second World War—a period of pan-Somali upheaval that was rejuvenated after the recommendations of the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, who proposed the creation of a 'Greater Somalia' state to seal undeterred Somali pastoralists' movement across unguarded colonial borders. ^{vii}



Deghow recalls starting his formal education at an intermediate colonial government school that same year. After eight years of hard work and dedication to his secular education, Deghow successfully completed his primary education. On the other hand, while pursuing his primary or intermediate education—a trend common among modern Somali school-goers, young Deghow

attended an Islamic school that was run by his father who was a Maalim—a term originating in Arabic that translates to a ‘teacher’. Besides specializing as a teacher, Deghow’s father was a man of scholarly repute and as well one who memorized the entire Qur’an at a tender age—a uniform tendency that was unique to Somalis practicing sedentarization—a term interchangeably used in this book to connote pastoralism, nomadism or mobility that is mainly practiced by people whose lives were dictated by changing weather patterns, rivalry, cattle rustling, territorial competition and transhumance.

Such living conditions consequently lead to the search for water and pasturage for the herds of livestock that sustained people falling under such social category. Even at this time and age, Deghow, who is a few years short of attaining the feeble octogenarian age, quotes specific Qur’anic verses when explaining major subjects under discussion—an indication he has a good grasp of Qur’anic exegesis, Islamic jurisprudence, empyreal or stratospheric knowledge and other divine thoughts and principles.

Life father like son, it is the ingrained spiritual limpidity inherited from his spiritual father that gave him unfathomable outspokenness and adeptness of vulnerary remediation between pastoral conflicting parties. His tenderness of heart and compassion for innocent humans besieged by the inflicting horrors of European colonialism gave him the human resolve to embark on a political path of self-determination through armed struggle that lasted almost half a century in later years. Since the colonial administration practiced divide-and-rule tactics, majority of the teachers who taught in secular and religious schools in Garissa District were primarily Muslim teachers brought from as far as Zanzibar. Zanzibari pedagogues managed and operated the few Madrassas in the district using Arabic as the medium of instruction.

People of Bantu extraction—whether pedagogues or others espousing distinctive educational backgrounds—regardless of whether they were males or females, were not allowed in the former NFD. On the other hand, Somalis and the Oromo were restricted from crossing the Tana River to other parts of Kenya for fear of exporting hostilities to peaceful southern regions that were haven for European settlers.

Ironically, rather than instituting novel administrative measures and injecting visionary leadership styles, the same stringent restrictive measures that were borrowed from the departing colonial master continued unabated even after Kenya’s attainment of independence in 1963 up to the Jomo Kenyatta and Arap Moi eras. Prior to taking office in the volatile, segregated NFD, British colonial administrative designates sent to the region to take over from their counterparts would exclusively be provided with Somali or Oromo cooks, drivers, and security guards, as the Sultan recalls.

Thus, the exclusive transfer of Zanzibari Muslim teachers to NFD was a way of enticing people belonging to the Hamito-Cushtic race to embrace British Colonial system of education while allowing Islamic education and Christian missionary activities to run side by side unrestrained. While Christian education and missionary activities were inessential in areas heavily populated by people of Somali ethnic origin in the former NFD, traces of Christian evangelical activities remained visible among people practicing paganism and other African religious beliefs. The

Somali disdain for other religious beliefs and their ardent desire to hold on to their Islamic beliefs, rendered Christian missionary proselytization efforts an impossible task.

After wrapping up his intermediate education, the youthful Deghow enrolled for secondary and university education through correspondence in Nairobi as it was the only way to enlighten his quest for higher education. While the Portuguese missionary activities were the first to inject formal schooling in Africa in the middle of the sixteenth century, the British and the French and later on the Americans, laid down the foundations for some form of authoritative European system of education in the nineteenth century.^{viii}

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