



The Bitter and Poisonous Pen of Yusuf Garaad: What happened to one of Somalia's most Talented Journalist?

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April 3, 2018

'47 Nin oo beel ahaan loo beegsaday oo habeen lagu dilay Xeebta Jaziira iyo dhallinyaro Xabsiga loo taxaabay oo ku eedeysan Qaran-Dumis ayaa ka mid ah Qaybta Labaad ee Taxanaha 1989 – 1990' (Y. Garaad, March 18, 2018).

Roughly translated to: 'Clan-based killing of 47 men in one night on Jazeera beach and the imprisonment of youth accused of anti-state activities, are part of my second 1989-1990 sequel instalments'.

The above title belongs to one of Yusuf's latest venomous salvo, taking no prisoners-so reckless that you will not believe to be the pen of a man who few months ago, was Somalia's top diplomat, entrusted with the task of overseeing the external affairs of the Republic?



Yusuf Garaad is not one of your ordinary pseudo analyst tea shop-based futile chitchat trader of Somali politics. (Fadhi ku Dirir). He is or was until now to be precise, an accomplished journalist. A product of good schools- graduate of Fletcher School of Law and diplomacy, a multi-lingual, a former editor in chief of the BBC Somali section and mere few months ago the top diplomat entrusted with the external affairs of the Somali Federal Republic.

I ink this piece with an aim in two folds, one is (*and I can't help*), to express a grief over a misused talent- one that has never been without flaws and/or betrayals but without a question a real talent. The second aim is to warn against almost assembly-line type production of salvos of venom, of division and of recklessness in Yusuf's animus that have the potential to spark old and an unsettled atrocities.

What is not my aim in this piece is, to stifle creativity, stop history lessons, and attach personality without laying down a rationale building blocks - the critique of Yusuf's callous writings is timely and one that should be engaged by those with sincerity.

BBC Somali Service- Era of Betrayals and Controversies

In early 1990s Yusuf got an opportunity to join the BBC Somali section as a non-UK based correspondent, initially reporting from Italy and later from various locations in Africa. Fate dictated he would end-up not too long after his recruitment in the UK, joining the rest of the team working in London. Rumor has it, he hit the ground running in no time to the astonishment of his seniors both Somalis and none-Somalis. The usual stagnation of the BBC's Somali Service continued at a lower and painful rate, top newsreaders started to get tired a bit of their day jobs, confounded by an era of radio proliferation and decline of audiences. On the contrary, Yusuf was building a reputation for himself as a reporter with a can-do attitude and one that is not fazed by anything even if it means leading the service at his colleagues' costs.



A decade would elapse, when again a fate decided that he would become the head of the service after an unexpected retirement of its head.

After assuming the editorial and managerial role of the BBC Somali Service just before the dawn of the second millennium (i.e. late 1999), Yusuf Garaad embarked on a campaign of witch-hunt to drive his old colleagues out of the service in the name of reform and streamlining the service. While he was making redundancy of the existing staff left, right and centre, he was accused of recruiting from his kith and kin with zero broadcasting experiences to fill the shoes vacated by more experienced and household name journalists.

In addition to the betrayals of his old colleagues, he was constantly accused of favoritism, micro-management and sometimes bullying the new and inexperienced recruits. The criticism of Yusuf Garaad's unpopular leadership at the BBC's Somali service did not stop at the above, but it moved to a more serious allegations of biased reporting, of giving unwarranted airtime to his political alliance and misappropriation of funds paid by European taxpayers to train journalists in Africa.

The accumulative of the above accusations and further drop of audience's numbers owing to competitions from services such VAO Somali service and the Internet-based news bulletins, sounded the final nail in the coffin for Yusuf Garaad's career with the BBC- in early 2012 was when he announced he was resigning without giving much away as to the reason.

The Talent and the Career Ambitions that cannot be denied- the rise to the Top

Despite the multitude of short-comings and of a character flaws, Yusuf has a talent that cannot be taken away from him. In a prizefight and pound for pound context- Yusuf would stand no chance against the veteran Abdullahi Haji and late Ahmed Hassan Owke. However, it was well-known among senior leadership of the BBC, that soon after he made his home in London and truly settled down with a career at the Bush House, he was the one who would go through the ranks faster than any other employee. This was later to become true- he had gone through the ranks quicker and reached at the pinnacle of the service. One rumored talent of Yusuf is his quick strategy to move and adopt before push comes to shove and his ability to be flexible.

Another well-known talent of Yusuf Garaad- *if you can call this a talent*, is his ability to suck up to his employers by doing all he can to win their hearts and minds.

Whatever pictures are painted by his friends and foes, it is undoubtedly true that Yusuf reached where he reached at the BBC through sheer determination and well-cultivated career ambition to be a top dog.

The failed Presidential Candidacy- The start of Bitterness

After resigning from the BBC in 2012 and painfully bringing the curtain down on his tumultuous career at top of the Somali services' Bush House Empire, he set his eyes on another ambitious prize- to become the president of Somali Federal Republic. The smooth mover and shaker of business broadcasting is (*as Yusuf would discover*), much different from the Somalia's political horse-trading of today's friends then tomorrows arch enemy's environment.

Some had argued that his decision to run for the presidency was nothing short of stupidity- he had no strong geo-political connections, neither real friends in neighboring countries, nor the clan-based political capital required to secure enough votes to put him in Vila Somalia.



Against all odds he marshaled just under two digit votes, which surprised many political observers including this author. After the votes were cast and results announced that Hassan Sh Mohamud is the new president of Somali Federal Republic, rather embolden Yusuf emerged from the context as a good candidate for a cabinet position in Hassan Sh. Mohamud's administration. Sadly, for Yusuf this too has slipped from his grasp- basically President Hassan was not convinced that Yusuf would be a minister material- so to speak. I would argue that this disappointment is to be blamed for being the genesis of his today's bitterness.

The short stay at the UN- the diplomatic Career that never came to fruition

The saga of disappointment of missing out from Hassan's cabinet ministers would appear to have had no decisive damage on the political ambitions of Yusuf- he lingered around close proximity to Vila Somalia and somehow after number of years convinced president Hassan Sh. Mohamed, a career in the Somali diplomatic cohorts would suit him just fine. He was offered a job to represent Somalia at the UN- in New-York.



After just a year or under, the roller coaster experience of politics again caught Yusuf off guard, rumor has it, he was put in an office in New-York with barely basic furniture, let alone with a budget to run- experience that are regularly part of the reality of the current Somali diplomats stationed abroad.

Sadly, for Yusuf again this was a mere holiday without a good package to go with- his diplomatic career in New-York failed before it even started.

Convinced this was not what he had in mind, Yusuf swiftly returned to Mogadishu buzzing with politics and ready to deliver another shock result for the presidential contest between the incumbent Hassan Sh. Mahamud and other hopefuls.

The Short-lived Cabinet Career- the Catalyst of the current Bitterness and Poisonous Pen

February 8th 2017 was when Mogadishu delivered her new president in the name of Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo. This was one of the biggest political upsets in generations- Farmajo easily defeated the well-entrenched and highly financed Hassan Sh. Mohamud.

Yusuf as usual dug his deep pocket to adjust himself with the new reality of Farmajo being the unexpected commander-in-chief. He started what he is good at, which is writing in linguistic panache about everything and anything under the sun- from his family history to his university days and to how wonderful and capable he is. The new president (Farmajo) needed this juggernaut of the Internet blogger- he needed his support and spreading the word-so to speak.



Following the smooth and historic handover of power from the defeated Hassan Sh. Mohamud to the victorious Farmajo, Yusuf was at some point rumored as the anointed new PM under Farmajo-

this of course did not happen, but what happened was- Yusuf had at last secured a cabinet position in the new administration- a minister responsible for the external affairs of Somali Federal republic.

After few months of being in charge of the ministry, it become apparent according to a source within the ministry, Yusuf was out of his depth- his amassed experience and education apparently stood no chance against the wheeling and dealing of diplomacy while representing a country in a post conflict stage.

Despite his linguistic skills perfected during 30 years' career in broadcast journalism- he struggled to be analytical and hard hitting while attending at international forums. This surprised many including this author. Another ailment which hamstrung Yusuf at the Ministry was his inability to transition from career in journalism to politics and diplomacy- he would still write blogs and news bulletins that sounded as if he was still reporting from the Bush House- again this surprised many people including this author.



It will nonetheless be completely disingenuous to suggest that he had not recorded any meaningful milestones during his long year leadership in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation- indeed there were a number of high-profile achievements including but not limited to a number of prisoners releases from various countries, he had championed hard for many embassies to be opened abroad and above all he refrained from politics of distractions by toeing the line behind Farmajo and Co.

Then out of nowhere came the sack- one that was conducted in an uncivilised way on the part of the government. Yusuf took this dismissal very badly and I would argue never psychologically recovered from it- hence his unwarranted bitterness and the poisonous pen that takes no prisoners.

Angst over wasted talent and warning against venom that has the potential to spark an old unsettled atrocities- The final thought from the author.

The two reasons that pushed me to author this piece were; to express a genuine grief over a wasted talent- one that could (*if marshaled well*) have produced one of the most exciting Somali journalist of our generation, and second to warn against a factory-line type production of selective excavation of one of the egregious legacy of Somali civil war.

The selective excavations and reporting of killings in the name of clan and/or for political reasons, without a context and appropriate ethical safeguarding mechanism, is callous in any society- to do this in a post-conflict Somalia, where the wounds and scars of the civil war are as visible as daylight- is tantamount to incitement and call to arms.

Yusuf Garaad is not one of your ordinary pseudo analyst tea shop-based futile chitchat trader of Somali politics (Fadhi ku Dirir), he is a highly educated professional, he took (not *long ago*) an oath of minister to safeguard the interest of all Somalis- this included to maintain sincerity and be responsible with his tongue, pen and actions.

Surveying his latest salvos of his animus writings, he has fallen short of what a healthy society demands of its educated and responsible citizens.

My critique on Yusuf's writings particularly the one in question (see above) is not aimed at stifling his creativity, stopping him to give history lessons on wars and atrocities, but it is intended to encourage him to be fair, balanced, refrain and responsible when inking such a text.

Going forward, to Yusuf Garaad and others with narcissistic tendency, who may be tempted to output such a callous and heartless garbage- history has the tendency to be particularly unforgiving to such a people.

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