

# EXPLORING MESSAGING ON CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH THE SOMALI POETIC DRAMA OF THE POET PLAYWRIGHT HASAN GANEY (1982)

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper has been published as a result of Nasra's training in the Rift Valley Institute's (RVI) [Research Communities of Practice \(RCoP\) project](#). The paper therefore reflects the views of the author and not those or the position of the Rift Valley Institute. The RCoP is one of the RVI's flagship projects that supports the professional development of early career scholars in east and central Africa through training, mentorship and dissemination of research outputs. Building on RVI's long-term experience and presence in the region, the RCoP is a value-driven project that is built around a community of practitioners and academics with a common interest in the professional development of early career researchers. With funding from the Carnegie Corporation in New York, USA, and in partnership with the Open Society University Network-Hub for Connected Learning Initiatives, the RVI trained 27 early career scholars from Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya in the first and second phases of the RCoP project between August 2022 and January 2024.

This report was edited by Catherine Rosemary Bond.

### DESIGN

Designed by Maggie Dougherty.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper delves into the realm of climate change through an exploration of the Somali poetic drama of Hasan Ganey, focusing specifically on the *Calamities are the Best Educators in the Globe* drama, performed in 1982 by the renowned Waaberi group. The objective of this paper is to investigate the reasons behind the effectiveness of this drama in mobilizing awareness around climate change and how theatre serves as a tool for community awareness among Somalis. By incorporating discourse analysis, this paper aims to shed light on the unique aspects of Somali poetic drama that contribute to its successful dissemination of climate change messages. The research findings show that Somalis readily connect with theatre as it aligns with their cultural tradition of poetry, enabling them to develop a deep sense of ownership over the issues being portrayed. Moreover, the use of drama effectively eliminates language barriers, allowing for a broader audience to engage and understand the messages being conveyed. The significance of this paper lies in its contribution to the growing body of research on the role of theatre as a powerful medium for raising awareness of climate change issues. By highlighting the effectiveness of Somali poetic drama in mobilizing community engagement, this paper emphasizes the importance of cultural context and the utilization of local artistic traditions in climate change communication strategies.

# INTRODUCTION

The whole life cycle of Somali nomadic people depended on the environment, primarily on trees. Somalis used trees to construct houses, as mattresses, decoration items, and as household materials, such as dishes and spoons.<sup>1</sup> Everything they used before modern urban life was environmentally friendly and made from trees or grass. Maintaining a healthy environment was therefore a necessity. At the same time, poets served as the voice of the Somali community.<sup>2</sup> Their responsibility was to inform people about what was happening in their lives and raise awareness related to environmental preservation. Somali poets were like the Ministry of Information during the nomadic period. Even as Somalis transitioned to rural living, poets maintained their role and expanded it, and were the foundation of the Somali theatre that thrived in the mid-1940s because of the social changes taking place at this time.

Music and poetry reached the next level and became a means to inform the community of the socio-political situation in the country.<sup>3</sup> Using poetry as a form of transformation and as a mode of transmitting awareness was part of Somali culture. Post-1950, after the formation of the *Walaalaha* Hargeysa (the Hargeysa Siblings)—one of the first, modern-day Somali bands—Somali theatre was both a popular and a socio-political and cultural force.<sup>4</sup> From there, the formation of other musical bands started, followed by the rise of actors and composers who went on to become the stars of the Somali stage.<sup>5</sup> This marked the initial growth and development of Somali theatre.

Somali theatre was hugely popular within Somali-inhabited land, the present-day Republic of Somalia, the Somali Region of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya's former North Eastern Province. Its message was received across Somali-speaking communities, and sometimes further. In the 1960s, most Somali poems were pro-African independence, often with themes of how colonization was demeaning the identity of the African community.<sup>6</sup> Theatre was where these

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1 Kathryn McMahon, 'The Hargeysa Provincial Museum', *African Arts* 21/3 (1988): 64-88.

2 Kristin Langellier, 'Performing Somali identity in the diaspora: "Wherever I go I know who I am"', *Cultural Studies* 24/1 (2010): 66-94.

3 B.W. Andrzejewski, 'Modern and traditional aspects of Somali drama', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 23/1 (2011): 85-95.

4 Andrzejewski, 'Modern and traditional aspects of Somali drama.'

5 Kenedid Hassan, 'A pan-Somali Discourse and New Modes of Nationalist Expression in the Somali Horn: From Somali poetic resistance to Djibouti's *Gacan Macaan*,' in *Music and Dance in Eastern Africa*, eds. Maina wa Mütonya and Kahithe Kiiru, Nairobi: Twaweza Communication, 1998.

6 Jane Plastow, *A History of East African Theatre, Volume 1: Horn of Africa*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

messages were being broadcast and, as most of the poets were government workers and a large number of them were teachers, it was used by the government to communicate with people. Theatres in Hargeysa, Mogadishu, and other cities were places to impose policies through songs and poets.

Somali poets took up the form and created a unique mode of theatre by using poetry, music and improvisation, which became hugely popular and influential across the region.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the Somali government used theatre to inform the community and spread news of important issues. An organic understanding of using Theatre for Development (TfD) emerged as a response to a need for alternative education and for new approaches to social transformation. TfD goes beyond traditional forms of entertainment and aims to actively involve the audience in the learning process. It recognizes that individuals are more likely to absorb and retain information when they are engaged emotionally and intellectually.<sup>8</sup> The theatre techniques used in TfD include various forms of participatory theatre, such as forum theatre, image theatre and playback theatre. These techniques encourage audience interaction, allowing them to participate in the performance. Spectators are often invited to share their thoughts, experiences and suggestions, an invitation which helps foster dialogue, critical thinking and collective problem-solving. TfD seeks to empower individuals and communities by enabling them to reflect on their own experiences, question societal norms and explore alternative perspectives. It seeks to challenge oppressive systems, raise awareness and inspire action towards positive change.<sup>9</sup>

Theatre as a pedagogical tool encourages active learning, empathy and social transformation. In the case of the poetic theatre by Hasan Ganey, one can argue that the poet playwright is seeking to educate the people, just as many poets did before him and continue to do today. Somali poets often use alliteration, which helps to make their messages more memorable. As the poet Haashi Dhamac ‘Gaariye’ explains, the use of alliteration (the repetition of a specific letter in each line) makes poems easy to remember and recall, as each line contains words starting with the same letter of the alphabet.<sup>10</sup>

In Somali society, poets hold a revered and central role in the theatre. They are not only the playwrights but also command immense respect and influence within the community.<sup>11</sup> Using their power and their platform, these poets play a crucial role in informing and educating the community.

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7 Plastow, *A History of East African Theatre*.

8 Angela Colantonio et al., ‘After the crash: Research-based theater for knowledge transfer’, *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions* 28/3 (2008): 180-185.

9 Brian Edmiston, *Transforming teaching and learning with active and dramatic approaches: Engaging students across the curriculum*, New York: Routledge, 2013.

10 As Mohamed Haashi Dhamac ‘Gaariye’, a well-known Somali poet, explains. See Somali Music and Culture, ‘Xasuustii Aun Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac Gaariye Horumarinta Afkasoomaaliga & Erayga Suugaan Qaybta 1aad,’ You Tube, 2018. Accessed 23 October 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zytYJZ6Pk9EQ&t=4s>.

11 Somali Music and Culture, ‘Xasuustii Aun Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac Gaariye.’

A distinctive feature of Somali poets is their dedication to speaking up for the powerless and shedding light on issues that affect the community.<sup>12</sup> Poets often keenly observe challenges and concerns faced by their society, such as climate change. Recognizing the impending threat that climate change poses, Somali poets have taken it upon themselves to enlighten their community, raising its awareness. Through the medium of theatre, these poets effectively convey the message that climate change is approaching and encourage the community to take action.

Environmental preservation is not exclusive to Hasan Ganey. In 1951, Ismaciil Mireh composed the poem ‘Hoopoe Bird’, a bird whose cries typically forecast the spring rains which, in this case, had failed.<sup>13</sup> In the early 1950s, another poet, Barkhad Cas, said in one of his poems:

From the weapons we use to defend ourselves to the robes we wear, from the houses that shelter us, to the fire that warms us, these trees do everything for us. Oh Somalis, come together and tell me, how can we repay the Galool tree?<sup>24</sup>

Environmental preservation is deeply intertwined with Somali community identity and Somali livelihoods. Many poets serve as vital advocates for environmental conservation, inspiring action and instilling a sense of responsibility among the people to safeguard their natural heritage. This demonstrates how the environment is important for the survival and thriving of the Somali community.

## WHY HASAN GANEY?

Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi, known as Hasan Ganey, is one of the most famous Somali poets. He is also known for his contributions to drama. What makes Hasan so important is that he has focused a portion of his poetic drama on environmental protection.<sup>15</sup> Hasan was born in 1947 in a nomadic area close to Bulahhar village in the Sahil region of Somaliland.<sup>16</sup> He comes from a large family with nine siblings—seven brothers and two sisters.<sup>17</sup> He is from a family of poets, with his mother creating a famous poetic form for women, the *Buraanbur*.<sup>18</sup> His father was also

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12 Judith Gardner and Judy El Bushr. eds., *Somalia-the untold story: the war through the eyes of Somali women*, London, Sterling and Virginia: Pluto Press, 2004.

13 Lee V. Cassanelli, ‘Towards an Environmental History of the Somaliland,’ *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 21/1 (2021): 6.

14 Interview with poet, Hargeysa, 15 October 2023.

15 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi ‘Ganey’, Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

16 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi ‘Ganey’, Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

17 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi ‘Ganey’, Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

18 Cabdiraxmaan C. Faarax, *Bad Macaan Murtidii iyo Miidii Hasan Xaaji Cabdilaahi ‘Hasan Ganey’*, Hargeysa: Sagal Jet, 2015.



a poet.<sup>19</sup> Some of his siblings are also poets.<sup>20</sup> Growing up in such an environment, Hasan was exposed to a rich and prominent culture of poetry and songs.

At a young age, Hasan moved to Berbera and later started a small business in Hargeysa.<sup>21</sup> On 1 June, 1967, he joined the Somali army.<sup>22</sup> In 1971, he joined the military band *Janan Daa'uud*, where he composed his first song.<sup>23</sup> In 1974, he composed his first drama titled *Dab Jacay kari waa* (*Fire Can't Burn Love*), which the famous Waaberi group of actors and singers performed.<sup>24</sup> Hasan went on to compose more dramas, including: *Jini iyo Jacayl* (*Devil and Love*) in 1975; *Dumustii Aqalkayga iyo Arooskii inankayga* (*The Destruction of My Marriage and the Wedding of My Son*) in 1977; *Galbeed waa la xoreeyey Warsaw-se gaagixisay* (*We Freed the West But Warsaw Conquered Them*) in 1978; *Bidaari sibiq bay kugu Gashaa* (*Bald Comes Easily*) in 1980; *Masiibadu aduunyada iyadaa u macalin ah* (*Calamities are the Best Educators in the World*) in 1982; *Daajiyaba ka maal* (*Whoever Grazes Them Should Milk*) in 1987; and *Dhaqankeena iyo Dhaliisha Casriga* (*Our Culture and the Criticism of Modern Life*) in 2000.

*Calamities are the Best Educators in the World* is a kind of universal drama in approach. It is a mixture of poetry and drama in which most of the actors exchange poetic lines. There are some comedic scenes, as well as eight with themes, such as the protection of culture, environmental protection, love, anti-corruption, life lessons and the idea that a poor person can become rich, and a rich person can become poor. It also discusses anti-colonialism. Individuals sing the songs, and some songs are performed by groups of four, consisting of two men and two women.

Hasan is not only a poet but also an actor who has performed in several plays himself. He has participated in poetic chains, such as 'Deelley', which was a political poetry debate performed in 1979 and 1980. The poems in the 'Deelley' chain are composed in the form of *gabay* (poem) and, in this particular case, they all contain alliteration with the letter 'D'. These 'Deelley' poems were kept secret, memorized, and recited in secret; they greatly influenced President Siyad Barre's reputation, ultimately leading to his downfall in 1991.

Like many other poets, Hasan believes poetry is a way to inform and guide people, and that it is the responsibility of the poet to keep people informed. Somali poets have different specialties, and Hasan is well-known for his deep understanding of Somali culture and his description of the environment. As Boobe Yuusf Ducaale, one of this study's participants said during an interview:

Hasan is a pioneer in describing the Somali environment, and he grew up in a nomadic

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19 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi 'Ganey', Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

20 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi 'Ganey', Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

21 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi 'Ganey', Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

22 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi 'Ganey', Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

23 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi 'Ganey', Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

24 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi 'Ganey', Hargeysa, 02 October 2023.

life. Though environmental protection is important to every poet, Hasan has a deeper understanding. He is an environmentalist and is very talented when it comes to this topic. Regarding Somali poets on the environment, very few Somali people can challenge him [Hasan]. The reason is that he is very passionate about it and has a deeper connection than any other Somali poet. His songs are amazing when it comes to describing the beauty of the environment. I can say that every person has a talent for a specific thing, and Hasan's talent is the environment. He knows what beauty means to a Somali person.<sup>25</sup>

All the interviewees during research for this paper noted that Hasan is a pioneer in environmental protection and describing the environment. There are two main reasons for Hasan's deep knowledge and involvement in matters of the environment. First, he cares deeply about the environment and understands its importance, particularly the Somali way of life. Second, he spent many years in Somali-inhabited land, primarily among nomadic communities, and he was raised in the nomadic way of life. This upbringing provided him with extensive experience and a profound understanding of the environment.

### **A SYNOPSIS OF CALAMITIES ARE THE BEST EDUCATORS IN THE WORLD**

This play starts by telling the story of the beginning of humanity—how all humans came into this world at the same time, since we are all descending from Adam and Eve according to Abrahamic religions, such as Islam and Christianity, where Adam and Even were the first human creations. It also discusses how the development of human civilizations evolved from hunting and gathering to farming and then to cities. The drama features 17 characters, ten men and seven women. It has two acts: one features an old man and an old woman, portraying the roles of a mother and father, who are herdsmen; the other has a farmer, the father of two young men who do not assist him in farming. The video of the play that this paper focuses on was recorded in Hargeysa, as described by the person who welcomed the audience.<sup>26</sup> The name they gave it was *The Climate is Responsible for the World*, as Hasan himself mentioned during his interview:

Let me tell you how I gave this name to this play: At first, the name I gave this drama was *Maasiibadu waa Macalin*, which means *Calamity is an Educator*. They said I could not use the word 'teacher' because the leader of the country was deemed the only teacher. At that time in Somalia, we used to call the teacher 'Barre', and the word 'Macalin' was dedicated to the president only. Government officials asked me to change the name and not include the word 'Macalin' or 'teacher'. I said if that was the case, nobody would perform it, and I left the room. Another poet, Mohamamoud Abdilahi 'Singub', who was with us, suggested renaming it *Masiibadu aduunyada iyagaa Masuul ka ah*, which means *The Climate is Responsible for the Globe*. When the actors performed it for the first time in

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25 Interview with Boobe Yuusf Ducaale, Hargeysa, 21 October 2023.

26 The narrator of the play/drama starts with the fact that this drama would be acted in Hargeysa. See Qaanso, 'Masibada Adunyadaa', You Tube, 2017. Access 23 October 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NViNojEHJc0&t=307s>.

Mogadishu, they used this name.<sup>27</sup>

This drama is performed both in everyday Somali language, capturing slang in the 1980s, and poetic language. It illustrates the conflict between the ‘modern slang’ of that era and the traditional Somali language. Additionally, it sheds light on the fascinating mix of Somali with other languages, such as English and Italian. The play has 37 scenes and seven main stories and all of them have connections with each other. The first story revolves around a group of cultural activities involving two men and women. The second story focuses on a nomad and an agricultural man criticizing each other’s way of living. The third story follows two friends, one of whom is a government official being encouraged to engage in corruption, ultimately leading to his imprisonment. The fourth story depicts the troubled relationship between a husband and wife, where the wife is considered inadequate (by Somali cultural norms), resulting in frequent arguments. The fifth story is a comedy, while the sixth presents a love story between a young man and a woman. Lastly, the seventh story portrays the problematic relationship between two sisters, where the older sister is not seen as a good role model.

In this drama, the transformational potential of knowledge and its effects on nations are the main themes. It emphasizes the idea that people can advance if they learn things and use them to get by in life. The poet playwright emphasizes how lack of education has caused African countries to become victims of the developed world. Several poems within this drama describe problems afflicting society and potential solutions:

SOMALI	ENGLISH
Taariikhdu waa mudan Waa jiraa markhaatilee Marbay ahayd aduunyadu Mugdi lagu halaaboo Mahadhooyin badanoo Dadku ayda magansado Ka tashaday miroodkii Qarni waliba si u maaree (casri waliba si u maaree) Hadba meeris laga gudub Dunidii malaasnayd	Of History, oh how important it is, A testament to the existence, a proof amidst, Once, a world was engulfed by darkness To lose one’s way Unforgettable problems, people face, Living like wild animals, in nature’s embrace, But the wise devised clever plans, And generations contribute, hand in hand. Dealing with problems, one by one, The human mind, complexities undone, Foreseeing the future, with wisdom’s might, Using strength, and muscles, to bring forth light.
Maskax lagu furfurayiyoo Muruq in uu u sahan tagoo Waxa baray mushkiladaa Masiihbadu aduunyada Iyadaa u macalin ah	For all of this, calamities played their part, The best teacher, stirring growth in every heart, Through trials and tribulations, we learn <i>Calamities are the best educators in the universe.</i>

27 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi ‘Ganey’, Hargeysa, 2 October 2023.

In the drama, the playwright focuses on human development and how Africans stagnate, unable to develop. The playwright suggests that, because Africa did not progress like other continents, other people were able to colonize it and explore its natural resources. Many researchers agree that the over-exploitation of natural resources has a huge impact on climate change. Natural resources could contribute to the development of a nation, yet they cause environmental problems and climate change.<sup>28</sup> Though Africa has so many natural resources, it benefits least from its resources. Instead, its resources tend to create more problems.<sup>29</sup> According to Hasan Ganey, this is no accident; it was planned:

And a society  
Kept scraping a wound,  
That I am trying to heal  
They kept opening it  
Reusing my weak point  
Tribalism, and the use of ethnicity  
To divide us.

The poet's main argument in the poetic drama is that most of these divisions and wars within Africa are based on natural resources, and that these wars are backed by foreign countries, which need these resources for their industries. The play has three main themes: One is the transformation from a nomadic lifestyle to agriculture, as the global climate is changing and droughts becoming more common; raising awareness about the environment in the community; and encouraging Somali governments to have more effective awareness policies.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this paper is to underscore the significance of using theatre as a platform for raising community awareness of climate change in Somaliland. Theatre is easily understood by Somalis, evokes a sense of ownership, incorporates their cultural tradition of poetry, and eliminates language barriers. Specifically, the paper examines how, as a play, *Calamities are the Best Educators in the Globe* by Hasan Ganey mobilized awareness around climate change in the early 1980s.

This poetic drama had not been written before. The poet imagined it, then memorized it, and the actors also memorized it and performed it.

The author of this paper accessed this play in video form, which is the only way it was archived (as a performance). Other than analyzing the drama, the author conducted 13 interviews with individuals from the Somali community—government officials, historians, environmental

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- 28 Babagana Gutti, Mohammed M. Aji and Garba Magaji, 'Environmental impact of natural resources exploitation in Nigeria and the way forward,' *Journal of Applied technology in Environmental sanitation* 2/2 (2012): 95-102.
- 29 Michael Ross, 'The natural resource curse: How wealth can make you poor,' in *Natural resources and violent conflict: Options and actions*, eds. Ian Bannion and Paul Collier, Washington D.C: World Bank Group, 2003.

activists, cultural activists, individuals who watched the play in the 1980s, and other poets. The interviews were transcribed and subsequently translated from Somali to English. Additionally, the author transcribed the drama in Somali and translated it into English. During one of the interviews, Ahmed Awgeedi, who is a poet, became inspired by the research and composed the following lines:

If you are a tree cutter,  
There are trees that you cannot cut,  
And you must leave some.  
There is Gob and Dheen  
That people did not to cut.<sup>30</sup>

The poet further noted that,

Environmental protection and climate change prevention are important to talk about. We have discussed it, but sometimes we feel like we lack government officials who can implement our messages. As a result, we [poets] become demotivated.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the fact that a poet could get motivated to create a verse while being interviewed demonstrates the importance of adding the voices of poets to academic conversations. By this act, the poet was saying they are intellectuals too, and their knowledge matters in the academic world.<sup>32</sup>

In many academic disciplines, there is focus on written texts and scholarly research as the primary sources of knowledge. However, in Somali culture, poetry holds a central place as a form of oral tradition and cultural expression. By acknowledging the intellectual capacity of poets, and valuing their contributions, we expand the boundaries of academic knowledge to encompass diverse forms of expression and ways of knowing. The semi-structured interview format employed in this study allowed flexibility in the questioning process, enabling both the interviewer and the interviewee to engage in detailed discussions. The use of key informant interviews proved to be particularly effective, as it prompted interviewees to reminisce and reflect on their memories. As one participant said of *The Climate is Responsible for the Globe*:

At that time, I was young, in my late teens, but I vividly remember the play and the songs that were featured in it. ...Like many other Somalis, I used to visit the rural areas during the holidays and, after watching the play I began to observe the state of trees and the frequency of rainfall year after year. Before that experience, I had never given much

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30 Interview with Ahmed Awgeedi, Hargeysa, 15 October 2023.

31 Interview with Ahmed Awgeedi, Hargeysa, 15 October 2023.

32 Lee Cassanelli, 'The partition of knowledge in Somali Studies: Reflections on Somalia's fragmented intellectual heritage', *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies* 9/1 (2009): 4-17.

thought to anything related to the environment.<sup>33</sup>

This interview approach facilitated a clear and reflective expression of participants' thoughts and allowed them to delve into their recollections of the days when Somalis had access to theatre. It also prompted them to reflect on their initial encounters with their favorite singers and relay the sense of longing they felt for the intimate connection between the arts and the general public. By encouraging such reflections, this interview method provided a valuable opportunity for participants to share the experiences and memories they associated with the cultural impact of theatre in the Somali community.

As Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi 'Ganey' said during his interview, what he wanted to achieve through his compositions was to preserve Somali culture because, based on his evaluation, it was heading in the wrong direction:

I felt the need to do it because I saw that the community was heading in the wrong direction. I wanted to guide them towards the right way of solving their problems. As a poet, it is my responsibility to show the community the right path. My main focus is protecting Somali culture, which I love. I have made it my mission to preserve it and also to address the issues that can harm Somali culture. I am also responsible for raising awareness about the social issues that our community faces. That is why I composed this play.<sup>34</sup>

The desired impact could be to foster a sense of active learning, where individuals within the Somali community are engaged in the learning process and take ownership of their education. This could lead to increased knowledge, the improvement of critical thinking skills and the ability to apply learning to real-life situations. Intermediate outcomes may include increased empathy, where individuals develop a greater understanding and compassion for others, as well as a commitment to social transformation.<sup>35</sup> The theory of social change within an African context recognizes that drama can be a powerful tool for addressing social issues, promoting dialogue and challenging existing norms and structures. It acknowledges that African societies are diverse and complex, with different cultural practices, languages, and histories.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, drama as pedagogy in Africa focuses on engaging local communities, traditions and knowledge systems to facilitate transformative learning and social change.

In the Somali context, a good example from the 1970s is the song 'Hoheeh Afrikaay Huroddooy!' ('Oh, Africa, the sleepy one'), written in 1974 by lyricist Sulub Cumar and sung by Xaliimo Khalif Magool. It was released during the 1974 African Union (AU) Summit in Mogadishu. The message

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33 Interview with Aisha Elmi, Hargeysa, 01 November 2023.

34 Interview with poet, Hargeysa, 15 October 2023.

35 John O'Toole, Stinson Madonna and Tiina Moore, *Drama and curriculum: A giant at the door*, Dordrecht: Springer Science & Business Media, 2009.

36 Chukwudi T. Maduka, 'The African writer and the drama of social change,' *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 12/3 (1981): 1-18.

to African leaders attending the summit, and the wider audience, was strong: ‘You are sleeping, wake up’. The song emphasizes the dangers of neocolonialism, with a provocative message to leaders: ‘If you believe the colonizer has left you, think again! He just has changed the name to imperialism, and it is foolishness when you remain lost from the right path—always ruined, like a domesticated animal you kept in a pen overnight!’

Drama as pedagogy in Africa also focuses on engaging local communities, traditions and knowledge systems to facilitate transformative learning and social change. Theatre for development is a powerful tool that uses theatrical performances to engage and empower communities, addressing social issues and promoting positive change. Within the Somali community, TfD has emerged as a valuable approach to tackle various challenges and foster community development.

# READING THE PLAY: IN SEARCH OF THE STORY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

This play has never been written; it is only performed. Hasan Ganey, the playwright, memorized the play and narrated it to the actors, and they performed it in different cities of the Somali Republic at the time. As he said during interview, one of the reasons he made it a poetic drama and play was because it is easier to memorize poems than dialogue.<sup>37</sup> Memorizing is a huge part of Somali culture and Islamic teaching; many Muslims believe that memorization increases the cognitive intelligence of the children.<sup>38</sup> So memorizing a play or drama is not something strange for Somalis.

In *Calamities Are the Best Educators in the World*, songs and poems tell the Somali society that the climate they are familiar with is changing and they need to adopt the idea of climate transformation. Climate change had become a global issue by the 1980s.<sup>39</sup> But, until indigenous Somali intellectuals, such as poets and others involved in the retelling of weather lore, recognized—in the 1970s—that droughts were occurring more often than they used to, Somalis had been used to major droughts once every seven years.<sup>40</sup> The duration of time lasting between one drought and the next shortened after the 1970s. Somali pastoralist communities were concerned about the well-being of their livestock. They realized that weather patterns were changing fast and not giving them a chance to adapt.

In *Calamities Are the Best Educators in the World*, the poet playwright focuses on how this adaptation can happen and what strategies people can use to mitigate the impact of climate change. In certain lines of the drama, the actor Kayd states:

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37 Interview with Hasan Haaji Abdilaahi ‘Ganey’, Hargeysa, 2 October 2023.

38 Zulkarnin Zakaria et.al, ‘Quran Memorization as a Vital Identification Process of Gifted and Talented Muslim Students,’ *Creative Education* 14 (2023): 810-829.

39 Susanne C. Moser, ‘Communicating climate change: History, challenges, process and future directions,’ *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 1/1 (2010): 31-53.

40 Muusa H.I. Galaal, *Stars, seasons and weather in Somali pastoral traditions*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.



SOMALI	ENGLISH
Marka roobku noo da'oo Mahiigaanku hibitiqo Baliyadu milaalmaan Moqorada biyaha gala Gunta aan ka moosnoo Durba yey inaga madhana	For When the rain comes And constantly drops its heavy drops, And water is everywhere, Let us make lakes, And keep them there for more months.

Soil and water conservation are considered an effective method of mitigating climate change. Many observers<sup>41</sup> agree that soil and water conservation can help address the problem of climate change.

Participants in this research all agreed that the poet playwright, Hasan Ganey, seeks to educate the Somali community that the improper use of water and soil could prolong drought. The author is using drama and theatre as a means of educating people at the time. Using drama and theatre as an educational tool has been frequently employed.<sup>42</sup>

## POETIC COMMUNICATION

This approach of poetic communication is successful at conveying messages to communities effectively because Hasan possesses a talent for communicating in a manner that resonates with individuals and leaves a lasting impact on their lives. As stated by one respondent:

...he also knows how to transmit his messages and send them through a channel and language that people can understand and digest.<sup>43</sup>

That is one of the factors that makes drama and theatre an excellent method for raising community awareness. The power of theatre lies in the direct interaction between actors and the audience. In the past, plays were performed in different cities of Somalia, enabling personal connections to be formed.

While other forms of media can be impactful, theatre has a distinct advantage because of the personal connection between individuals and the poets, singers and actors involved.

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- 41 Edward Kato et.al, 'Soil and water conservation technologies: A buffer against production risk in the face of climate change? Insights from the Nile basin in Ethiopia', IFPRI Discussion Paper 00871, June 2009. Accessed 13 November 2024, <http://environmentportal.in/files/Soil%20and%20Water%20Conservation%20Technologies.pdf>; Jorge A. Delgado et.al., 'Conservation practices to mitigate and adapt to climate change,' *Journal of soil and water conservation* 66/4 (2011): 118A-129A.
- 42 Joseph Idogho, 'Drama/theatre in education and theatre as an academic discipline: A question of nomenclature, techniques and effects,' *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 2/3 (2013): 228-248; Gavin Bolton, 'A history of drama education: A search for substance,' in *International handbook of research in arts education*, ed. Liora Bresler, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2007.
- 43 Interview with cultural activist, Hargeysa, 20, October 2023.

Traditionally, poets have been regarded as spokespeople and role models.<sup>44</sup> The poet can skillfully summarize entire histories and deliver important messages in just a few lines. Somalis recognize the power of language and its capacity to convey impactful messages through simple lines, which is evident in the artistry displayed in this play.

Poets have been highly respected throughout Somali history, most especially during the colonial era, within Somali governments and, notably, after the transformation of Somali into a written language in 1971. During this time, poets reached the pinnacle of their influence, traveling internationally and elevating the status of the Somali language. This demonstrates government recognition of the power of poetry as an effective communication tool, leading to its sponsorship of poets.

To make use of that tool, the performers of this play and the playwright are using this platform to talk about mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change, even though eastern Africa produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions than many other regions of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, Somalia included, is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, despite itself having relatively low carbon emissions.<sup>45</sup> Some of the ways Somalis can contribute to climate change mitigation include tree planting, water and soil conservation, better land use management and more community awareness. When it comes to adaptation, ecosystem restoration and the implementation of Early Warning Systems (EWS) are important.

In this play, the poet playwright mentions the traditional practice of forecasting as a form of early warning system that Somalis used in the past. This is depicted in a scene where Hasan predicts the future, with actors Abdiqadir ‘Juba’ and Mahamed ‘Busi’ exchanging the following lines:

SOMALI	ENGLISH
<p>Juba:                      Wuxuu idhi xaydho daye                      xiligu wuu yaahab yabay                      xiddigo way kala dhinteen                      Muxuu xagal dhamanayaa,                      Aduunyadu waa xaniban,                      Xaajadu way murugsan tahay                      mala xeef bay sidaa,                      xar baa lagu taamayaa,                      hubuu xaydale u yahay,                      aduunkuu wada xulee</p>	<p>Juba:                      I make predictions and                      I discovered this last night                      The result that is coming,                      As the predictor ‘Xaydho-daye’ said.                      The number is very small and                      The stars are in a sea of blood.                      What is coming is not good,                      We will face a shortage of grass.                      The weather is uncertain.                      What is it bringing to us</p>

44 B.W Andrzejewski, ‘The literary culture of the Somali people’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 23/1 (2011): 9-17.

45 Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change, ‘Climate Change Synthesis Report’, 2023. Accessed 13 November 2024, [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_LongerReport.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf).

SOMALI	ENGLISH
<p>Busi:                      Dhamaan isku xeerariyo,                      xasaradaa lagu gartaa                      Xidaarada gooxayee                      burciida Xariiqayee                      Xalaan faalada ogaa                      Xogtoodana waan ogahay                      Wuxuu idhi Xaydho daye                      Tiradu way xubin yartahay                      Xibruhu dhiig buu u baxay                      Saadaasha xaraarsan iyo                      Wakhtigu waa xaaluf daaq                      Xiligu wuu yaabanyee                      muxuu xagal li'inayaa</p>	<p>Busi:                      The predictor man foretold,                      The weather is uncertain.                      The stars are distant,                      A surprise awaits, unforeseen                      The world is stuck,                      The outcome is concerning.                      Perhaps it brings something new.                      We must find a solution.                      It marks a new beginning,                      Uncertain of what it may be.                      But it won't be good,                      As violence leads the way.</p>

For a nomadic person, speaking their language through poetry helps them to understand and relate to things more effectively. In the line above, the poet discusses how the Somali weather lore explains what is coming. He is showcasing the understanding and importance of the local people.

Using theatre as a platform for community awareness, with faces and voices the audience knows, makes it easily understood and accepted by Somalis, evokes a sense of ownership, incorporates their cultural tradition of poetry, and eliminates language barriers. Government officials should acknowledge these advantages and make use of theatre to engage and inform the Somali community in effective ways. This sentiment is echoed in other lines:

SOMALI	ENGLISH
<p>Cader:                      Xiid gabay waayahana faro gali                      Gocashana wax uun arag</p>	<p>Cader:                      Crowned Lapwing writes poems about life's challenges                      Notice something that made him ponder.</p>
<p>Juba:                      Aboor guray                      Godka cawska kula carar                      Jilaal gunno u dhigay                      Waana gaajo ka hortagid</p>	<p>Juba:                      Termites collect, and create holes in the grass,                      Storing food for the winter, their goal is to prevent hunger.</p>
<p>Haldhaa:                      Guuree waraabuhu                      Loo nuuri geerida                      Gurxanyoo galaydhyee</p>	<p>Haldhaa:                      In the darkness, hyenas roam,                      Seeing death as something to embrace,                      They start running, seeking what's unknown,</p>

SOMALI	ENGLISH
<p>Busi: Idinkuna gantaalaha Guudkiina ma ogide Ma gurtaad u socotaan Mise gacanta midigta ah</p>	<p>Busi: Oh people, do you understand life's race? Do you know where you're headed,</p>
<p>Cadar: Gadaal iyo midkuu hore Gamaankiinu u ordaa</p>	<p>Cadar: Moving forward or taking steps back? Are your horses running towards the beach, Or the land with trees? You don't know what is going on Where are you going, backward Or the right side?</p>
<p>Juba: Guban iyo midkay hawd Geeduhu ku yaaliin</p>	<p>Juba: By the beach or in the Hawd's embrace, Where trees sway, which side do you chase?</p>
<p>Haldhaa: Keedese guuldaraantiyo Gobanimada jeceshiin</p>	<p>Haldhaa: Tell me, dear heart, which one did you adore? Victory's triumph or being a loser, forevermore?</p>

All the interviewees agreed that in this passage, the poet is discussing what is now referred to as an early warning system. Hasan Ganey has found a way to teach the Somali community about protecting the environment in a simple, easy-to-understand manner. He uses an old, traditional method, which worked well. Other modern ways of raising awareness of environmental issues are based on foreign values and are difficult for many people, especially nomadic people, to connect with.

## EXPLORING THE SOMALI COMMUNITY'S CONNECTION WITH NATURE: A UNIQUE HUMAN-NATURE BOND

This poetic drama tries to address the issue of understanding the connection between humans and nature. In one segment, the poet explains the significance of trees in human life and the interdependence of the two:

SOMALI	ENGLISH
<p>Juba: Duud yahay balaadhani Damashaada waawayn Kula daalka qaba ee Diihaal la jiifsada</p>	<p>Juba: Ooh, forest, With your large trees, When humans grow weary, They sleep under your shade,</p>

SOMALI	ENGLISH
<p>Marna aad dugsi u tahay Marna aad dawo u tahay Marna duunyadoodo Waraabuhu daldalan laa Duda ooda leedahay Dhacanta loo daruuree Dayr iyo u tahay gaadh</p>	<p>Forgetting their fatigue. You are home to them, Providing shelter and solace. You also offer them remedies And protect their livestock once more, From wild hyenas that would have eaten them.</p>
<p>Cadar: Marna dogob yadaadiyo Dunqulaalka lagu shido Dura dhaxanta jiilaal Wakhtigay daliilyada tahay Kaa daarta xaabada Marna midhaha dayrtii Da'a malabka kaa cuna Marna daawashiyo qurux Kugu qaba il doogsiga</p>	<p>Cadar: Once again, you have bestowed them with fire From your branches, they find warmth in winter No longer shall they suffer from the bitter cold. For you, dear tree, have sheltered them.  During the rainy season, you gift them sweet crops Nourishing their Burned bodies and soothing their hopes. With each passing day, you bring calm to their eyes, And peace to their hearts.</p>
<p>Haldhaa: Iyaguna dareen lihi , Haldoorkaa madiga ah Jirdihiisa diiretee , Dabna hoosa kaa sudha In dirkaagu ba' iyo , Dabar goyna kula raba Misa duunka kala shiray, In ay kaa danbeeyaan</p>	<p>Haldhaa: Cluelessly, though you are the only thing that is helping, They peel your trunk, And burn you, And want to genocide you, And ignorantly think they will have a life after you.</p>

The entire existence of the Somali nomadic community relies on a healthy environment. Consequently, Somali are eager to protect their surroundings, and they closely observe other living organisms, such as ants, birds, trees and wild animals. By learning from these creatures, they can make predictions about forthcoming rain, often relying on signs from nature or the stars. Their understanding reflects their awareness that the survival of humanity depends on the interdependence of all living organisms and the crucial role of ecosystems. One interviewee said:

Let me give you an example of how the connection between Somalis and the environment used to be. In the farming community of Galibey, before trucks came, people used ox-cows for farming. The farmers loved their ox-cows and would sing to them, motivating them to work. They had a strong connection with the soil, as they would protect it by removing unwanted trees and maintaining it daily. When it rained, they could farm while the soil

was still wet because they owned the oxen. As a result, their production was higher, and they had a deep love for their soil. However, now they use trucks, which lack a connection to the soil. The farmers have become lazy and wait for trucks, sometimes for days. By the time the trucks arrive, the soil has become dry, leading to a reduction in production.<sup>46</sup>

One of the main themes of this play revolves around the relationship between human beings and nature, highlighting the potential consequences of losing that connection, such as environmental destruction. The play also explores the significance of rainfall and its connection to the natural world. It emphasizes the importance of preserving the environment to ensure the continued existence of human beings, as well as the role environmental preservation can play in mitigating the effects of rapid climate change.

The play implies that modern community awareness, particularly on climate change, needs to be dramatized because artistic talent and the power of storytelling engage and captivate audiences, ensuring that the vital message of climate change reaches the wider community. Somali poets not only entertain but serve as agents of change, using theatre as a means to impart awareness and empower their community. Their dedication to addressing important issues, such as climate change, through theatre, demonstrates the role that art and culture can play in creating positive social impact. The inclusion of historical evidence of climate change in Somali culture, depicted through rock art, underscores the long-standing nature of these changes and the urgency of adaptation.

# CONCLUSION

Hasan Ganey's play, *Calamities Are the Best Educators in the World*, serves as a powerful medium for educating and raising awareness about climate change in Somali society. Through songs, poems, and dramatic performances, the poet conveys the message that the climate is changing and emphasizes the importance of adaptation and mitigation. The use of drama and theatre as educational tools proves to be highly effective, engaging the community and resonating within it, facilitating direct interaction and fostering personal connections. The poet's skillful artistry in summarizing histories and delivering impactful messages in simple lines further amplifies the play's power.

This play showcases the poet's ability to communicate important messages through language and through cultural traditions that resonate deeply with the Somali community. Theatre, in particular, provides a platform for community engagement and overcomes language barriers, making it an exceptionally effective means of communication.

Through this unique approach, the poet aims to educate and inspire the Somali community to take action in addressing climate change and its impacts. Recognizing the benefits of theatre in the Somali context, government officials should embrace and use this medium to engage and inform the Somali community about climate change and its consequences. By doing so, they can encourage collective action and work towards mitigating the effects of climate change on Somali society. Theatre, easily understood by Somalis, evokes a sense of ownership, incorporates their cultural tradition of poetry, and eliminates language barriers. Ultimately, this paper seeks to inspire the further exploration and use of theatre as a transformative tool for climate change awareness, not only within the Somali community but also in other socio-cultural contexts worldwide.

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