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Qualitative Methodology, the Historical Sociologist and Oral Societies: Re-assessing the Reliability of Remembered "Facts"

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Abstract: With qualitative methodology now taking center stage in social sciences research, historical information in oral societies that pervasively relies on remembered categories could be sometimes fragmentary, biased, and willfully mis-located to effect a preferred relationship that may disturb or sustain currently desired power relations among groups of people. This paper will attempt to examine specific problems and challenges that pertain to the role of the historical sociologist who must not only record and interpret recalled events, but must also beware of possible "conflicts of interest" in the informant's/expert's relationship with the rest of society. The paper will use select examples from Somalia (East Africa) to show some possibilities of how and why people could manipulate historical data which, when published or reported officially, may facilitate their claim on resources and/or other preferred economic and socio-political outcomes. The paper proposes several ways to strengthen the situational reliability of the information received.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The prevalence of qualitative methodology in educational and other social science research has become an established fact in the last several decades. This may have been hastened by the decreasing relevance of the positivist ideology selectively colored by the growing confidence of social science researchers in the capability of qualitative research to adequately respond to the needs of observing, interpreting and analyzing educational and social development data. The philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research generally advance the notion that, contrary to the logic of the experiment, there are multiple ways of observing and explaining social and other phenomena (HAMMERSLEY & ATKINSON, 1983). [1]

From my perspective in particular, the publication of Elliot EISNER's "The Enlightened Eye" (1991), has affirmed the point that people's perceptions of things, issues and relationships are generally influenced and even determined, not necessarily by a constant and concrete set of scientific rules, but by how we approach and view different and diverse life situations. It should be clear to most of us, therefore, that in the place of the purely test-and-control experimental method of the so-called empirical sciences (see KERLINGER, 1986), qualitative research would suffice the case and even serve better in almost all social science investigations. In corroborating the importance of the qualitative method for the multiple realities of the social world, MERRIAM and SIMPSON (2000, p.97) write:

> "The Key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based, is the view that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social world. Thus, there are many realities rather than one observable, measurable reality which is key to research based in the positivist paradigm." [2]

Collaterally and quite interestingly, the advancement of qualitative methodology might have also been aided by an ongoing philosophical evolution in the world of the physical sciences. This "softening" of positivism may be selectively but quite deliberately responding to the increasing pressures that are being exerted on scientific "logicism" to variably explain and diffusely situate the social needs, relationships and possibilities that their experiments deal with. As the Harvard Physicist Gerald HOLTON (1998) says, the culture, i.e., the social milieu in which any scientific experiment or a scientific breakthrough takes place heavily shapes initial objectives as well as the results and intended uses of any research project. More broadly, Amit GOSWAMI, another physicist, affirms in his book, "The Self Aware Universe" (1993), how matter and the physical instruments we employ to make sense of it are shaped by tradition or culture via the collective conscience that guides us, for better or worse, in a given epoch of our lives. [3]

In this paper, I would like to examine specific qualitative research concerns that pertain to the role of the historical sociologist who should not only record recalled events in oral societies such as the Somalis in East Africa, but should also beware of possible conflicts of interest in the informant's/expert's relationship with the rest of society. When that is not done, it is argued, unintended research results may exacerbate such problems as conflicting claims to land ownership as well as the distribution of social and other powers that could all disturb the delicate balance of group coexistence in a number of resources-deprived areas of our world. [4]

2. The Historical Sociologist in the Context of this Discussion

Generally, the most prominent methods of qualitative research would include ethnographic studies, interviewing, prolonged/introspective observation, narrative recording, and documentary analysis. In all these cases, some elements of using historical data to make sense of actual relationships or prospective analysis of future possibilities would be undertaken by the researcher. As such, the role of the historical sociologist will be widespread and applicable to the description as

well as the evaluation of events, relationships, mechanisms for expanding or contracting the circle of power, and any particular claims to physical, spiritual and moral "items" in a given social setting at a given epoch. [5]

All researchers who use qualitative methodology may be classified, in one important way or another, as historical sociologists. This will be so, for the social phenomena these researchers are observing, inquiring about, interacting with, or through other means, learning about have specific and, sometimes, not so clear histories that are socially or psychologically situated. GALL, BORG, and GALL (1996, p.644) define historical research in education, for example, "as the process of systematically searching for data to answer questions about a past phenomenon for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of present institutions, practices, trends, and issues in education." As such, the historical sociologist's domain and general objectives of making sense about people's past to understand current problems, relationships and prospects with the latter potentially emanating from the actual situation, would, at least partially but, nevertheless, importantly, respond to the contextualization of temporal imperatives of change, consistency and progress or lack of all or some of these. This point is important in the sense that it involves the quasi-voluntary practice of interpreting a cluster of historical and social phenomena for current "consumption." [6]

Beyond the role as well as the objectives of the historical sociologist to inquire about a given situation, there are a number of problems that could arise in locations where people are facing acute shortages of such primary goods of life as food, water, and good pasture for their animals. These could also be complicated, more often than otherwise, by lack of security and stable relationships that are again indirectly perpetuated by the continuing shortage of primary goods. Let me contextualize my point here. The relationship between the competition for scarce resources in some parts of the world such as Somalia and the power of the Western historical sociologist legitimizing via their qualitative research is not a complex one to understand, especially for someone who is familiar with the situation, but it would be important to create a background sketch (a sort of a limited historical cartography) for the wider audience. [7]

The central point here is that many colonized populations such as the Somalis were historically oral societies with no written property laws or literature. With the arrival of European colonialism in mid to late 19th century, though, that was to be changed and the superiority of written colonial languages, via *la mission civilisatrice*, were to be established. This, of course, should not be construed as oral societies previously living in social spaces that were devoid of effective mechanisms to deal with property and rights claims and counter-claims. In fact, oral societies and especially the Somalis had, over centuries, relatively strong and selectively binding programs for resolving disputes over land and other resources (see SHEIK-ABDI, 1993; LEWIS, 1967). These may have even been undertaken with measures of assurance that were situationally stronger and fairer than the current culture of paper where "documents" are now, *willy nilly* fabricated on site. At any rate, the Kenyan writer NGUGI wa THIONGO (1998, p.108)

describes the change as well as the establishment of new power relations between written colonial languages and what was called the oral vernaculars of the natives:

> [It is the fact than otherwise] "that the privileging of the written over the oral had roots in the relationship of power in society and history ... The dominant social forces had become identified with the civilized and the written. With colonization, the same binary opposition was transported to Africa, with the written and civilized being identified with Europe as a whole, the oral, and the ahistorical being identified with Africa. The product of the oral no longer belonged to history because quite clearly the colonizer did not want the colonized to have any claims to history as a basis for their resistance and affirmation of their identity." [8]

The colonial legality as well as the life advancement power of the written word has fully established a post-colonial situation where natives tend to abide by the implications of the written text. For our purpose here, and based on international geopolitical considerations, the written text, whether it is an institutional document, a book, a research report or a graduate thesis, will still be regarded higher when its author is of European descent. This would be so in many corners of the former colonies and especially in Africa, where whites may still be perceived as the *de facto* governors of the old continent. After all, isn't the case that almost all African countries still depend on Europe and America for both monetary and institutional liquidities? What could happen then, is that while the oral version of the case could be true, the continuing supremacy of the written text by the Western researcher might create two attendant problems: a) the continuing devaluation of orally maintained facts and knowledges, and b) the potential contribution of the researcher's work to more volatile and, at times, very destructive campaigns of ethnic strife among contending groups. Here, a faction that orally knows that it owns a piece of land could be facing another one that is brandishing a written text which contains false information that its members might have given (with the deliberate objective of wresting the ownership of the issue from others) to the author of the report, the article or the book. Again, if the author of the text is a European man or women, the faction that is supported by its contents will most probably win the case. [9]

3. The Historical Sociologist in Turbulent Somalia

3.1 Introducing Somalia

Stateless Somalia has lately become famous for successive outbursts of de-institutionalizing and de-developing civil wars, famines as well as the de facto disintegration of any centralized national project (ABDI, 1999, 1997; SAMATAR, 1991). In elaborating on these problems, and for the sake of recent historical grounding, ABDI (1997, p.34) writes:

> "The distinction of Somalia and its people as achieving an unsurpassed state of statelessness during the [the 90s decade] and into the new millennium is a temporally well deserved, albeit, worrisome observation. Somalia in Today's interdependent,

> technologically advanced and selectively post-industrial world, is no longer a state, no longer a nation, no longer a nation-state, and for all practical purposes removed from the political agenda of major global actors and global international bodies." [10]

The situation of present day Somalia is not very difficult to understand, especially from the perspective of any informed and historico-culturally sensitive social science research. The British traveler-cum-explorer Richard BURTON has called the Somalis, about a century ago and by directly observing them, "a fierce and turbulent race of republicans" (BURTON, 1910). Historically, the Somali society has been culturally cohesive, but institutionally diffused with no centralized governing bodies. This institutionally quasi-anarchic situation was sustained by the reality of nomadic pastoralism where communities were always on the move seeking better grazing lands and good water holes for their livestock. This lack of long-term and enduring settlements which are still common of the rural areas in Somalia are hardly conducive to the development as well as the establishment of across-the-board applicable property laws. Generally, the area one occupied and any natural provisions thereof, belonged to him or her. [11]

Because natural provisions (in the form of good pasture, water, etc.) were generally scarce in semi-desert Somalia, acute competition for these resources was generally stiff, and was, in the process, capable of inducing a continuous struggle over resources. These realities have actually helped spread the widely accepted assumption that Somalis are war-like and generally prone to violence. LEWIS, while cautioning us to accept that description at face value, still sees that possibility in the context of a harsh ecology where a continuous pressure for daily survival was (is) ever present. He says:

> "A dependence upon common pasture and water creates underlying currents of hostility, and when pressure is acute, these are readily touched off by quite trivial incidents, *or from the perspectives of the natives, and contrary to what might look so minor to the Western observer, a 'do-or-die' actual situation*" (LEWIS, 1967, p.242; emphases mine). [12]

Because these dangers were ever present, a reliance upon one's clan or sub-clan for protection, indemnity, and unconditional support was cemented. Hence, the entrenchment of what LEWIS (1967, 1994), among others, has called segmentary nationalism or, for our purpose here, sub-national physical (in the sense of close as well as distant blood relatives) and emotional attachment to a genealogically defined primordial category that one will always belong to. All these issues, when complemented by the anarchy-like structure of gender-biased Somali social egalitarianism, created a system of life management that would only respond to, and survive on the solidarity of a given ethnic group vis-à-vis the rest. That itself has historically (with no tangible changes up to the writing of this paper) induced a situation where the metamorphoses of the maxim "me and my clan are always right" thrives. Said SAMATAR (1991, p.26) describes it this way: "In the operation of [Somali] traditional politics, one's kinsman was always right even if the latter was responsible for killing innocent people." These points are also immortalized in Somali popular culture where an important Somali proverb

reads like this: "*tol wa tolane*"—literally, you are stitched to your clan, or figuratively, you die or live with your clan. Another proverb says: "*ninna tolkii kama janna tago*"—literally, no one will go to paradise without his clan, or again figuratively, you can only win when your clan wins. When this was the case in dealing with the social as well as the physical environment one had to reside and function in, the opportune nature of arbitrarily claiming land or other resources for primary survival should be clear. [13]

It would also be safe to say then, that Somalis came into the formation of the new nation-state when the country was liberated from colonial rule in 1960 with the above stated cultural and social dispositions still intact. Actually, many observers (ABDI, 1997; SIMMONS, 1996; LEWIS, 1994) saw the political problems that were plaguing Somalia in the last two decades as primarily emanating from the fact that national institutions were being managed with a tendency to take anything one wanted for himself or herself, and for the clan. This, "just like old times" attitude has exacerbated the fall of the Somali state in 1991, and has also been a catalyst in keeping Somalia stateless since then. For the non-Somali, this may be difficult to understand, but for those who are both historically and culturally familiar with the situation, the central point is that since the country will not become self-sufficient in the foreseeable future, whoever, or more starkly, the clan that controls foreign aid will, *ipso facto*, use it not only to prosper at the expense of the rest. In addition, goes this twisted logic, those who attain power will use any available resources to subjugate others so as to prevent the latter from questioning the status quo. Talk about the enduring problems of African development and here you have a presumably simple but existentially complex case with no procurable remedy in sight. [14]

3.2 Some implications of conducting social research in Somalia

At this juncture, let us bring back the role of the historical sociologist who is conducting social research in enmity-ridden, war-torn 21st century Somalia. Needless to reiterate that any written record that may come out of these relationships could have a lot of weight in settling property claims and counter-claims, even in courts of law, in any united future Somalia. Once again, the power of the written text and who actually wrote it (with Europeans and Euro-Americans overwhelmingly favored in this regard) will play a crucial role in any final settlements that may be reached. [15]

To clarify this more, let me provide a couple or so observational glimpses on today's Somalia. The first one concerns Somalia's former capital, Mogadishu, which is now mostly inhabited by former nomads who overtook it when most of the urbanites left it during the 1990/91 civil war. In FINNEGAN's words, these newly urbanizing former nomads are "enjoying their first sojourn in the city" (FINNEGAN, 1995, p.68). While the hundreds of thousands of people who previously owned the buildings in the city may not have still given up on reclaiming their properties, it is now clear the new occupants have fabricated all the papers they will need to fight any challenge from anyone who may attempt take "their new properties" from them. Yes, one day a sensible legal recourse may come

into effect, but the crucial point in the case is that when and if documents presented by different groups of Somalis are procedurally exhausted, a single text written by a former colonial officer or by an existentially alienated graduate student from the West could, *willy nilly*, nullify everything else and possibly arbitrarily settle the case in favor of the wrong individual or group. [16]

To strengthen the probability of the point, let me state a recent precedent that although no documentation is available, is, nevertheless, well known to the Somali public. In the important southern Somalia port town of Kismayo, different groups have been fighting to control it since the inception of the civil war in late 1990. And while the town has changed hands many times since then, the point on who "owns" Kismayo, at least in the psychology of the people, has been settled. In the mid 1990s, it was found that British colonial officers have written, in early 1900s, that the city was inhabited by a specific group of Somalis. Without taking into account all the migrations and population movements that have taken place since then, the case was seemingly solved once and for all. Why is that the case? What about if Somalis, and not the British, wrote a similar text in 1915? Would all Somalis still have adhered to it? The answer, at least from my perspective, is multi-located. First, the credibility of the British and others of European descent is dependent not entirely on what they did previously, but also and as importantly, on their current position in world affairs vis-à-vis the African people. Karl MARX was definitely right when he said that the ideas (or the written texts) of the dominant group are always the right ideas. Second, if the same text was written by Somalis, then logically speaking, no one would have accepted it in the current state of affairs because among Somali groups, the practice of trust is not only non-existent, it is also, for lack of a better term, foolish, for it could herald the end of a viable life for many. [17]

3.3 Narradigm vs. (post) colonial live

So what could happen when the Western historical sociologist "joins" the presumably "good natured" Somali people in East Africa and engages in the delightful world of qualitative research (in the form of ethnographic studies, interviewing, introspective observations, etc.) to make sense, to himself or herself and to the institutions supporting him or her, of the history as well as the present of these natives. [18]

When a historical sociologist relies upon information that is orally transferred from people in the context we are describing, there is a sense of biographical or autobiographical relationship that the locals are forming with the environment or the relationships they are defining. TELLES (2000) presents lived experiences as important, and will accept them as sources of legitimate knowledge in qualitative research. Some even emphasize these as more authentic than other forms of qualitative research inquiry. DHUNPATH (2000, p.544) says:

> "Autobiography, biography and other forms of life history, each dedicated to the significance of individual experience, have become increasingly popular methods in educational/[social science] inquiry ... I want to suggest boldly, therefore, that the life

> history approach is probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world." [19]

About three pages later, DHUNPATH hints some of the problems associated with depending upon life history information, but immediately dismisses the suspicion as ill-informed. He writes: "an enduring critique of life history research is the relativism of truth associated with the construction and analysis of biography. Narrative research challenges the notion of there being no truth but a series of subjective views." To a large extent, DHUNPATH has a point, especially in validating the role of what he calls, with interesting and almost elucidating post-empiricist intentions, narradigm (or affirming the fact that our lived experiences are intrinsically narrative in quality) as opposed to paradigm which he indicates would fit more the so-called scientific experiments of the so-called hard sciences. But the biography, autobiography as well as any "narradigmatic" possibilities and conclusions in Somalia and other areas like it may present a cluster of deliberately misconstrued narratives that are intended to correct an assumed historical error, to level a set of power relations that are deemed uneven, to prepare the stage for different, long-term as well as short-term outcomes in the distribution of material and emotional resources, or even to, possibly illegally and perforce, wrest property from its rightful, or based on who you talk to and across long expanses of time and space, its wrongful owners. A concrete example of this could be a native's answer to a Western researcher's question about water well ownership in the dry harsh lands of central Somalia. In this case, it could very well be possible that the interviewee's group have been engaged in an internecine fighting with other clans over the ownership of the well whose water may not suffice the livelihood needs of all which itself precipitates an intense competition for this scarce resource with direct "survival of the fittest" implications. While this example is about nomadic life, problems of this nature could also happen in urban areas where people could still manipulate information about socio-economic, political and power based relationships. So despite the progress of the qualitative method, the historical sociologist in this regard may have to think more than twice before he or she involuntarily disturbs the delicate social ecology that Somalis precariously live in. As ROPERS-HUILMAN (1999, p.21) so cogently observes, "telling one's stories [in qualitative research] is fraught with complexities, and questions." [20]

The danger here is that while many of us are excited about the inter-subjective world of the qualitative method, and are savoring the descriptive as well as the analytical reconstitution of the first person singular, the "good natured native" in the promised land where he is or she is finally and emotionally speaking for himself or herself, may actually have a number of urgent, but unannounced aims in mind. To counter, for example, DHUNPATH's assumption that we are all residing in a postmodern world, the Somali interviewee may not have yet crossed over, especially in the complex contours of his or her social genealogy, into any modern space. Here, while the postmodern assumption that all natives have eventually escaped from the "prison" of modernity, and are, therefore, defining their world to themselves and to the world would be, at best hollow, if not outright

pretentious. In fact, Somali nomads and others in similar or quasi-similar social structures are not even minimally aware of the complex verbal and conceptual dexterity that European scholars have been using to advance the trendy theories of postmodernism supposedly, and quite peculiarly, on behalf of the former. Instead, what you have to deal within the Somali context are clan and sub-clan-based social arrangements that have been pre-colonial, were not noticeably modified by colonialism, and are even refusing to conform to any postcolonial platform. These are, more often than otherwise, continuing counter-currents (in methodological and research terms) that are refusing to be conscribed by any reliable and/or concretely definable theoretical and experimental foundations. As such, the Somali case is an enduring phenomenon that might opportunistically refuse to be categorized even when it still wants to take advantage of any good "stuff" that modernity or postmodernism will be willing to supply. [21]

With these warnings and points in place, and perhaps to strengthen the analytical base of my arguments, let me re-introduce a term I have used at least twice in the preceding pages: genealogy. Genealogy, in the Foucauldian use of the term, will speak of the history of the present. In that regard, MEADMORE, HATCHER, and MCWILLIAM (2000, p.463) point out that "genealogy seeks to inquire into processes, procedures, and techniques through which truth, knowledge and belief are produced. As a task, a method, and a politics, genealogy takes up the challenge to emancipate historical knowledges by giving them legitimacy." Ironically, while the likes of Michel FOUCAULT and other apostles of postmodern thought may employ any reconstitutable threads of the present to accord legitimacy to diverse genealogies of knowledge, Somalis would gladly use *clan genealogy* to actually disempower others, and to selectively (apparently with the distinguishing categories of modernity) bestow the best of all categories upon others. [22]

If genealogy in the Foucauldian sense concerns itself with the constituency elements of power and body in the lived milieus, let me extend the implications as well as the etymological "particles" of the term and render it *au courant* in present Somali studies. That is, what might represent an important liberating terrain in postmodernism could actually be used by the Somalis, via their kinship genealogy or presumed descent from a common ancestor, not only to circumvent what is true and/or right, but even to undertake a cluster of behaviors and actions with potential deadly possibilities. Hence the important distinction between what the researcher accepts as the historical truth (factual, verifiable truth), and narrative truth (a general perspective by a writer or a story-teller; see LINCOLN, 2000). In certain instances the dividing line between the two "truths" could actually be blurred in the interest of a given segmentary lineage or another. And that will not be uncommon in most oral traditions, for as PERERA (cited in STROMQUIST, 2000, p.140) notes, societies "rooted in the oral tradition favor collective experience and impassioned subjectivity over documentary accuracy." [23]

In the Somali context specifically, collective memory is generally a central component of group's collective survival. Hence, the contextual plausibility that when one segment of the society deliberately provides a non-factual information

that historically favors its collective memory, this simply becomes a logical step, under the circumstances, of assuring that group's survival and, where possible, current and future prosperity. The case, therefore, at least as far as practical realities in Somalia are concerned, has nothing to do with trust, honest, or truth, which are, in non-conflictual and non-competitive situations, highly regarded and unconditionally accepted virtues and morals. It is, *ipso facto*, a continuously strategic re-arrangement of emotionally charged historical and contemporary events that are taking place in a zone of the world where people are presumably facing never ending conflicts that shape their thought processes and life possibilities. [24]

3.4 Possible ways to strengthen the relative rigor of the researchers findings

So by extending the conceptual as well as the theoretical "particles" of genealogy from the speculative realm of Foucauldian analysis to possible qualitative research exercises in the Somali peninsula, the points of emphasis will definitely dramatically shift. In the latter context, the whole conventional mechanisms (in the qualitative method) of meaning making, and interpreting that meaning for social consumption become questionable. Again, and regardless of problems under discussion here, the qualitative method will not abandon and can not abandon, in one given location or another, its analysis or explanatory focus for that matter. MERRIAM and SIMPSON (2000, p.97), once more, remind us as that

> "the overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives; to delineate the process (rather than the outcome or the product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret their experience." [25]

Merriam and Simpson's point should, once again, concisely but comprehensively represent for all of us, the liberating philosophy of qualitative methodology. As such, it adds so much to the subjectively celebratory contours of an important relationship between the historical sociologist and people's lived experiences which are, after so many years, being accepted and validated as "real" knowledge. But a potential point of both basic research and ethics conflict is that in the world of constitutionally and institutionally diffused and currently dissolved cases, the programs of many presumably innocent natives may have a cluster of quasi-unfathomable implications for the notebooks of the expectedly unsuspecting historical sociologist. In the face of these research problems that may be specific to societies with the history as well as the social structure of the Somalis, three possible achievements may strengthen the relative rigor of the researchers findings:

1. Having a deep and topically expansive grounding in the human geography as well as the general social history of the country will be indispensable. The extensive knowledge will facilitate a reliable understanding of pattern settlements, population movements, any verifiable primordial attachment to space, and the frequency as well as the character of previous/current conflicts

over land or other resources that may be deemed essential in that given environment.

2. Being Fluent, both oral and written, in the local languages complemented by a competent but sensitive understanding of people's cultures, religions and general life outlook. These points will facilitate a deeper and mutually trustful relationship between the researcher and others who may now be more hesitant to claim land or other property that may not be theirs. In all life situations, people may be less careful with information they give to those who they might see as more uninformed or ill-informed simply because the latter understands them only via an interpreter. In such cases, people may actually see themselves as talking to the interpreter who is generally from the same area as the interviewee, and could, therefore, be in agreement with the misrepresentation. On the contrary, when the communication is directly between the researcher and interviewee, the situation could improve very dramatically.
3. A comprehensive understanding of current power relations among the groups, including political and economic discrepancies or congruences in the context of the research will be important. That will generally give the researcher the necessary tools to identify a number of "misfit" cases in the data that could be directly extrapolated to actual events on the ground. An example of this would be if the researcher already knows that the government in power is forcefully and "illegally" taking land away from people. While most of those in the affected areas may, in confidentiality, tell the researcher that the land is rightfully theirs, and they do not agree with the actions of the state, others who are in the same area but are "genealogically" related to people in power may actually misrepresent the facts. [26]

When the historical sociologist is endowed with these achievements, he or she can, for example, strengthen his or her research methods and results by examining and counter-examining the historical information against current field notes. When and if there are still gray areas that could disturb the reliability of the findings, then the researcher may have to go back and directly interview (without the potentially hindering presence of the generally partial interpreter), not only the group that are the source of the observed discrepancies, but also others who (these could be an entirely uninvolved control group) through the historical sociologist's expertise could be the most probable in conveying the most impartial information about the situation. [27]

While the three above-stated suggestions are not at all exhaustive, they should, at least, be seen as preliminary points that would encourage the historical sociologist and others in qualitative research to beware of the "factedness" of information from oral societies that may have a number of complex agenda to re-arrange, or even scores to settle. In terms of why I have emphasized these categories and not others in the context of Somalia, for example, I would say that, perhaps, the two most successful Western scholars in Somali studies have been Ioan LEWIS (1967, 1988, 1994, 1998) professor emeritus, London School of Economics and Political Science, and the late Bogumil ANDREZJEWSKI (1964,

1993; see also ANDREZJEWSKI & LEWIS 1964; ANDREZJEWSKI, PILASZEWICZ, & TYLOCH 1985), formerly of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Both of these men learned the Somali language exceptionally well, acculturated themselves fully into the Somali milieu and exhaustively researched Somali history in the context of both war and peace as well as in literature, customs, inter-group relationships and in diverse rivalry schemes among different settlements and clan families. While even a minority of us may not have the time or the patience to achieve such feats, it will, nevertheless, be ethically imperative to know more about the Somalis and other "natives" in Africa or elsewhere so as to situate ourselves as researchers on a theoretically more reliable platform in making sense of the complex world of the peoples we are studying. [28]

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to raise a point of concern about the reliability of primary information that may be obtained by the historical sociologist from some societies like the Somalis with strong oral traditions, but who through colonialism adapted to a sort of adherence to written European languages. I have submitted a preliminary argument that despite the "wonders" of qualitative research, one should be cautious of what he or she accepts as the final version of the narratively deduced information he or she intends to publish. Generally, it may be difficult for the Western ethnographer, for example, to realize that tribal peoples in the developing parts of the world will deliberately manipulate the historical points of conjecture that they are sharing with the researcher. But that could exactly be done with the calculating long-term objective that what the "European expert" gathers and eventually produces in a text will legitimize certain claims to land and movable property while de-legitimizing others. I have pointed out how, based on needs for survival and power, even current events and perceptions could be interpreted differently by diverse stakeholders to see divergent results that may serve one group while actually or potentially marginalizing others. To deal with these qualitative research problems, I have suggested an initial and ongoing in-depth understanding of the history, the languages as well as the cultural and political economy priorities that are in place. Again, there is no assurance that mastering important aspects of people's lives will negate or at least neutralize the type of problems we are discussing, but that would, undoubtedly, eventually lead to a more refined and, at least, situationally more reliable understanding of the social science project that is being undertaken. In addition, I have specifically discussed the possibility of the qualitative researcher being "taken for a ride" while attempting to gather and analyze situationally reliable historical and contemporary data on people's lives, experiences and expectations in the East African country of Somalia. In this case, I have emphasized how acute competition for scarce resources could involve the deliberate eschewing of what people say in favor of a given group who know how any data that is "immortalized" in a Western researcher's written text would, *ipso facto*, assure their claim over, and eventual ownership of the issues under consideration. [29]

Finally, it would be important to note that both the research as well as the reliability problems we have delineated in this paper are not, and should not be construed as limited to the work of the historical sociologist or to the general domain of the qualitative method *per se*. We know that even in fully empirical, lab-based experiments where any objects/subjects-of-study induced problems could be relatively controlled, the human researcher's own biases could still manipulate not only the design, but also the results of the experiment. In addition, there could be, potentially in all cases but especially in the work of the social science researcher in places like Somalia, the problem of familiarity when the Western historical sociologist may be seen as favoring one group or region of a country over others. Actually, that has been the case in Somalia where because prominent researchers such as LEWIS and ANDRZEJEWSKI (see above) have heavily studied certain areas of the country which presumably benefited from this, the new crop of Western Somalists (mostly from the United States of America) may be seeing themselves as righting a historical wrong (see, for example, BESTEMAN, 1998). In sum, the work of the Western historical sociologist in resources deprived, segmentary lineage based, oral societies like Somalia is more complicated than what one might have liked, and, above all else, requires a lot of patience and continuous checking and counter-checking of the information provided by the locals. As such, the extra time that is needed to undertake these programs must inform the budgeting of the projects, for they cannot be completed in the time that other field based works would require. [30]

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