Elmi Bodari and the Construction of the Modern Somali Subject in a Colonial and Sufi Context

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Abstract

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Elmi Bodari was the first Somali poet to compose poems exclusively about the theme of love. Many Somalis believe that it was his unrequited love that caused his early death. His personal tragedy and poems have earned him a unique place in Somali literature.

Most accounts of Elmi Bodari's poetry dwell on this aspect of his life and poetry. This study argues that his innovations were more far-reaching and that his poetry was instrumental for the rise of the modern Somali subject. An essential part of the modernism in Somali poetry that was launched by Elmi Bodari was the supplanting of the ideal of the traditional warrior hero by that of the lover as a hero. The study traces the trajectory and contours of this change in Somali poetry. It also scrutinizes the

colonial and Sufi context in which Elmi Bodari lived and composed his poems and his creative response to it.

Central to the new outlook pioneered by Elmi Bodari in Somali oral verse was inwardness and constant self-examination. The study probes into how these notions and techniques of self-fashioning were manifested in Elmi Bodari's poetry and in verses composed by others after him, and applies a comparative approach to delineate kinship and divergences between Elmi Bodari and the legendary Majnun Layla of Arabo-Persian poetry.

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TRANSLITERATION

Since a formal written script for the Somali language was introduced only in 1972, many different orthographies were written prior to that date, with the result that there are different written versions of the same word. In this dissertation, Somali poems are reproduced in the same orthography in which it was published. In the case of names, the most commonly used version of the name is used but other ways in which the name of the same person were written are indicated in the footnotes so that the reader will be aware of them. In Somali orthography the letter c stands for the Arabic letter 'ayn and the letter x is used in place of the Arabic letter ḥ. In the transliteration from Arabic to English, diacritics are used where the sound of the Arabic letter involved varies from the English sound.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In this chapter I will present an introduction into the life of Elmi Bodari and the context in which he composed his poetry. I will also offer a survey of the literature on Elmi Bodari and assess the information provided about the poet by various sources. Finally, I shall discuss the importance of Elmi Bodari's life and poetry in Somali literature and shed light on some of the fundamental concepts that undergird his poetry that will be elaborated in other chapters.

Elmi Bodari (1908-1941) is a Somali poet who grew up in the rural border area between what was then known as the British Protectorate of Somaliland and Ethiopia. The word Bodari is his nickname and is a Somali mispronunciation of the English word border. The nickname was given to him in order to highlight the fact that he was born and lived his early years at Somaliland's border with Ethiopia. His full name is Elmi Ismail Liban. In the Latin based Somali script, his name is written as Cilmi Ismaaciil Liibaan. It is also variously spelled as "'Ilmi Bowndheri" and "Elmi Bonderii."[1] I chose to write his first name as Elmi because it is the version used by the Canadian writer Margaret Laurence, the first person who wrote about him, and I transcribed his last name as Bodari because it is both simpler to write it this way and closer to how Somalis say his name.

Having grown up in a nomadic environment, Elmi Bodari had no access during his childhood and youth to modern schooling but he did receive Qur'anic education which taught him the basic tenets of the Islamic religion and exposed him to reading and writing in Arabic. The rural pastoral setting is however very rich in Somali oral literature, and Elmi Bodari imbibed

[1] Margaret Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty* (Kampala: The Eagle Press, 1954), 42.

much of that oral culture. In 1930, he left the countryside and moved to the city of Hargeisa in Somaliland. He stayed there for a year. Then he moved again, this time to the coastal city of Berbera, which was at the time the seat of the British colonial administration in Somaliland. He got a job in a restaurant in Berbera and after that he worked in a bakery. The story goes that one day while he was working in the bakery, a girl came to buy bread and once he saw her he immediately fell in love with her. The girl's name was *Hodan Abdillahi Walanwal* or *Hodan Abdi* for short.[2] Because of that love, he became a celebrity and a legend. What made him extraordinary was that although he was not known as a poet before he fell in love, that experience of love was so powerful, it resulted in an outpouring of great poetry from him to the point that when he died, most Somalis believed he died of a broken heart.

It is difficult to establish exactly what Hodan Abdi felt towards Elmi Bodari, since there is little information that came directly from her at the time, and also since the most detailed account about her views on the matter were transmitted through her son, Rashiid Shabeele, decades later after Bodari's death. Naturally, because of the delicacy of the subject of a mother being quizzed by her son, Rashiid M. Shabeele, about her past, which is the circumstances in which that account was recorded, the narrative's characterization of the nature of the relationship between Hodan and Elmi must be treated with caution. B.W. Andrzejewski posits that "one might suppose that she had affection for him"[3] but it is clear from the way he put it that this is more speculation than fact. Although a lot is known about Elmi Bodari's life after he relocated to

[2] The name Abdi is short for Abdillahi. Somalis usually shorten names that are a combination of the word ʿAbd (servant) and one of the ninety-nine names of God (ʾAllāh, al-Raḥīm, al-Raḥmān, etc.) to Abdi. Her full name is Hodan Abdillahi Walanwal.

[3] Mohamed Farah Abdillahi and B.W. Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri, a Somali Poet Who is Said to Have Died of Love," *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, iv, no.2/3, (June/December 1967): 199.

Berbera, there are few clues to his life before he moved to Berbera. The little available evidence about that period in his life indicates that he lived an ordinary existence and was not known to compose verse which means that it was the experience of seeing Hodan and falling in love with her on first sight that changed him and made him become a poet.

In Berbera, Elmi Bodari had several acquaintances but only two close friends, Musa Farah and Tabase[4], both of whom, like Bodari, belonged to the Eidagale clan. These two friends stayed loyal to him all through his ordeal. They acted as his counselors, confidants and protectors. He was particularly close to Musa Farah whom he mentioned in some of his poems. One of the most widely known versions of his poems and life was transmitted through Musa Farah. Bodari kept his love of Hodan a secret for a while, then he could not hide it anymore, so he divulged it to his two best friends Musa Farah and Tabase. Soon enough the news spread to their acquaintances, and after that to more people in Berbera and eventually it became known wherever Somalis lived and became a cause celebre.

Hodan Abdi was born in Berbera. There are varying accounts about how old she was when Elmi Bodari fell in love with her, with some accounts saying she was twelve years old, others saying she was fifteen, still others saying she was as young as eight years old. My estimate based on calculations from various references to her age and the chronological sequence of events is that she was around fourteen or fifteen years old when Bodari fell in love with her. There are two main reasons why I say this. One, if Hodan had not reached the marriage age for females in those days (which was about sixteen years old), Elmi Bodari would have been

[4] Muuse Faarah is another variant transliteration of his name, see Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri" , 203. He is also known by his nickname Muuse Carab, see Rashiid M. Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl wa loo Dhintaa?* (Muqdisho: Wakaaladda Madbacadda Qaranka, 1975), 5.

discredited as an old lecher and he would not have garnered any sympathy or support in the society. Two, it was only about two years after he fell in love with Hodan that she was married to Mohamed Shabeele (Mohamed the leopard). Three, there is evidence that he and a friend once went to visit her at home to talk with her without the knowledge of her aunt who was at the time her guardian, and when the aunt accidently returned earlier than expected to the house, she was clearly upset with him and his friend for being in the house without permission from her, but Hodan defended them, an unlikely occurrence if she were too young to receive visitors or too young to understand what their presence implied.

Hodan's father worked as an interpreter with the British colonial administration. Somali government employees at the time were not paid a lot of money but the fact that they had a steady income and their link with the colonial state made them part of the nascent middle class. As a baker, Elmi Bodari clearly belonged to a lower rung of the economic ladder than Hodan's family. Several scholars and the Somali public at large have seized on this economic disparity (not the age disparity) as the reason why Elmi Bodari could not marry Hodan.[5] But my analysis of the poems and my research into the lives of Elmi Bodari and Hodan shows that while economic wherewithal, or the lack thereof, was an important factor in preventing Bodari from marrying Hodan, it was not the main factor, and that the major obstacle that stood in Elmi Bodari's way was the fact that he composed erotic poems about her. That this was the case could also be inferred from the fact that Elmi Bodari despite the many poems expressing his desire to

[5] The economic disparity as the reason why Bodari did not marry Hodan was first mentioned by Margaret Laurence but then it was repeated for various reasons by many others after her, see Margaret Laurence's *A Tree for Poverty*, 42; see also Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl wa loo Dhintaa?*, 29.

marry her, never actually asked for hand in marriage. For if the problem was purely economic, perhaps, he could have taken his chance and approached her family and asked to be married to her, or he could have raised the required finance from his kinsmen who were obligated through the clan code to help a kinsman in need. Bodari did neither, which reinforces the idea that, as far as Hodan's family were concerned, the central problem was not merely financial and that it had more to do with the strong antipathy and sense of grievance that Hodan's family felt toward Elmi Bodari's for composing love poems about their daughter which cast a shadow of suspicion over their daughter's reputation and the family's honor. Bodari most likely knew of these strong negative feelings toward him, and that is probably why he made no attempt to approach her family.

There are three main works that deal with Elmi Bodari's life and poetry. The first one is Margaret Laurence's book entitled *A Tree for Poverty* which is on Somali poetry in general but discusses Elmi Bodari's life and poetry. The second is the article "'Ilmi Bownderheri: the life of a Somali poet who is said to have died of love," co-authored by Mohamed Farah Abdillahi and B.W. Andrzejewski. The third is a book called *Is it True that One Can Die of Love?* (Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa?), written in Somali by Hodan's son Rashiid Shabeele[6].

Margaret Laurence's book is based on information supplied to her by Hersi Jama who worked for her engineer husband, Jack Laurence, on a water conservation project in Somaliland (Somalis usually referred to Hersi Jama by his nickname Hersi Arrablow, literally meaning tongue-less Hersi, because he used to stutter). It is the earliest writing on Bodari and his poetry. But it has some gaps and incorrect information. For instance, she could not ascertain his full

[6] His full name is Rashiid Mohamed Shabeele, also written as Rashiid Maxamed Shabeele.

name.[7] Moreover, she claimed that Bodari never married but she was incorrect because Bodari did marry an Arab woman called Fakhira after he lost Hodan to another man, Mohamed Shabeele. The circumstances in which Bodari married Fakhira could call into question if it was a real marriage. Bodari had become so ill and weak with grief after Hodan married another man that his kin were afraid he would die. So they thought they could rescue him by arranging for him to marry Fakhira. Bodari refused to marry Fakhira but he was forced into it against his will, and by then he was too weak and distraught to resist. The story of the marriage is a sad and short one. Bodari would not acknowledge his Arab wife to the extent that instead of calling her by her name (Fakhira), he would call her Hodan. After three months in which he had shown no interest in her, Fakhira asked for divorce and left him.

The poem ”Qaraami” which Margaret Laurence cites as an example of Bodari’s poetry most probably does not belong to him, because even when one makes allowances for poor translation, it does not fit his style. It is verbose and does not have the grace and felicity of expression that are a mark of Bodari’s poetry. Neither is it mentioned in any of the other main collections. Furthermore, Margaret Laurence misunderstands or deliberately misreads the meaning of the verses from which the title of her book on Somali poetry, *A Tree for Poverty*, is drawn. The verses also serve as an epigraph for her book and they belong to the Somali poet Ali Ḥammal and the relevant line is “At the edge of Aul plain, poverty has a tree” (Gooddiga Ban Cawl buu fakhrigu geed ku leeyahay e). The poem does not mention shade or shelter but Margaret Laurence deduces the idea of shade from the common association between trees and

[7] Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty*, 42.

shade especially in warm climates, and thus portrays the function of that tree as a shelter from poverty.[8] Lewis and Andrzejewski too add the idea of shade or shelter to this line.[9]

To get a better grasp of the above line of verse, however, one should consider it in the context of the lines that are immediately before it and after it. The three lines in sequence are:

> Indeed I tried hard to avoid it but you forced me into it
> At the edge of Aul plain, poverty has a tree
> Alas, have I worn today the rags of poverty?[10]

Taken together, the picture that emerges is not that of the tree at the Aul Plain as a shelter from poverty but as symbol of destitution. The overall point of the poem is that there is a tree in the plain of Aul which is a gathering place of the impoverished and that despite the poet's reluctance to go to that accursed site, he had become so poor he had no choice but to go there. Thus the Aul Plain and that particular tree are metaphors for ill omen and suffering, not shelter and safety.

Although Margaret Laurence missed the point in this case, she is correct that the concept of shelter, or *dugsi*, is very important in the Somali view of life. The *geed* or tree in Somali culture can provide protection from the heat of the sun. Pastoral Somalis hold meetings under

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[8] See the epigraph at the beginning of her book *A Tree for Poverty*.

[9] B.W. Andrzejewski and I.M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 42.

[10] This is my translation from a Somali version which is slightly differing in wording from both Laurence's and Andrzejewski's versions but with a big difference in the overall meaning. The Somali verses which I translated above are:
Dhaaxaan ka gabangaabsadaye waygu geliseen e
Gooddiga Ban Cawl buu faqrigu geed ku leeyahay e
Gaajada hugeedii miyaa galabta la i saaray?

trees. But for the wider concept of shelter which has connotations of comfort and warmth, the concept of *dugsi* is used. Grammatical variations of the word dugsi are deployed to evoke this sense of shelter. For instance dugsiye is used as a proper name for males, and one of the most famous lines in Somali poetry is the one in which Tima 'Adde says: *Dugsi ma leh qabyaalad waxay dumiso mooyaane* "Tribalism provides no shelter, it only destroys."[11] Ironically, despite her above misreading, Laurence was very much aware of the possibility of misreading texts. For instance, she observed that some of the stories found in Somali literature were originally Arabic stories that were altered in the process of being incorporated into Somali literature.[12]

Rashiid Shabeele's book is based on conversations that he had with his own mother (Hodan) and father (Mohamed Shabeele) as well as interviews with Elmi Bodari's friend Musa Farah. He also did some research in Radio Hargeisa. Given the delicacy of the subject, no doubt it took a lot of courage and determination for Rashiid Shabeele to write a book about the love story of his own mother and Elmi Bodari, but the very fact that he wrote such a book is an indication of the far-reaching changes that Somali society had undergone between the time the love story took place in the 1930s and the time when he published the book in the 1975.

Despite these important changes, it cannot be said that the old traditional values have been totally vanquished, for even to this day I still occasionally come across people who when I mention to them that Rashiid Shabeele had written a book about his mother's love story, show

[11] Boobe Yuusuf Ducaale, *Maansadii Timacadde (*Muqdisho: Akademiyada Cilmiga Fanka iyo Suugaanta, 1983), 69. The concept of dugsi has lately been modernized and used to mean class or school.

[12] Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty*, 17-18.

immediate disapproval of what he did. But actually, the book served the interests of Hodan's family well. It gave Hodan an opportunity to distance herself from some of the erotic poems. A case in point is the poem in which he says he had seen her nude body. When Rashiid Shabeele asks his mother what Elmi Bodari meant by that poem she replies that he was referring to when he used to see her walking in the streets wearing clothes that left parts of her arms and legs bare since she was young at the time and there were less stringent religious requirements for her to cover up her whole body at that age.

However, there are a number of inaccuracies in the book, some of them clearly attributable to the fact that he was trying to protect his mother's reputation, such as when he says the woman whom the poet claims to have seen nude or semi-nude was not Hodan but a different woman.[13] Rashiid Shabeele's willingness to go to great distances to shield his mother from the

[13] Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa?,* 43. The opening line of the poem is "If the eye could be satisfied". Bodari uses the name Qadra as a substitute for Hodan for alliteration purposes, a practice which he follows in several other poems. Rashiid Shabeele focuses on this fact but insists that the poem was about an actual woman called Qadra and was not about his mother. His claim is untenable though because since Bodari used different female names than Hodan in several poems, it would mean that Bodari was in love with several other women which was not the case. The other names by which the poet calls Hodan are *Canab*, *Ladan*, *Qadra*, and *Waris*. Although the need for alliteration is an important factor in choosing a particular name, different names also invoke different images and qualities of Hodan that the poet wants to highlight.

erotic implications of some of Bodari's poems, however, does not extend to doing the same for other women. This comes through most clearly in his literal interpretation of the verse *Qariya laabtiina* as meaning that a group of women had uncovered their bosoms for the poet in order to arouse his interest in them and make him forget Hodan, when the more likely explanation is that the phrase was used in a metaphoric sense to refer to the enticing dresses with low-cut collars worn by some of the women who were sent by his kinsmen to woo him.

Rashiid Shabeele's book also has one additional quality that the other accounts of the love story do not have. There are several letters that appear in Rashiid Shabeele's account of Elmi's love of Hodan. No such letters appear in either the article co-authored by Abdillahi and Andrzejewski or in Margaret Laurence's various accounts. The letters can be divided into two sets. Those that were sent by Elmi from Buro after his friends exiled him to that city against his will just to get him away from Hodan, and those that were sent by Hodan's aunt to Hodan's father when he was in Las Anod informing him that Hodan had been betrothed to one Mohamed Shabeele, and that many of the elders had approved of this decision.[14] Moreover, although the letters mostly elaborate on the points already made in the poems, they also reveal Hodan's aunt as having played a decisive role in arranging Hodan's marriage to Mohamed Shabeele in cahoots with a group of Shabeele's supporters and that although the letters sound in one respect as if she is consulting with Hodan's father who was in Las Anod at the time, the fact of the matter was that the decision had already been made. Despite the valuable information that they contain, it still must be mentioned that there is a problem with the authenticity of these letters because there are no known copies of the originals. Moreover, perhaps because they were written in prose, they do not live in the poetic memory of Somalis.

[14] Ibid., 59-62, 68.

The interest in Elmi Bodari continues today more than in any other Somali poet. An example of this un-abating interest in his poetry is an article by A. A. Garas which appeared in the Somali language newspaper Haatuf on Feb.19, 2002, in which the author complains that the bakery where Elmi Bodari worked as well as other historic sites where the love story between Bodari and Hodan took place were being allowed to deteriorate and were not properly maintained by Somaliland's government. Somali poets have celebrated Elmi Bodari's life and poetry in a way that no other Somali poet has ever been celebrated. A particularly memorable event was a tour of the city of Berbera by the cast of the play *Aqoon iyo afgarad* ("knowledge and understanding") in 1972 which included the poets Saeed Salah and Hadrawi. The cast had come from *Lafoole*, a teacher's college, and every poet in the group was asked to praise a city which had caught his fancy and which he associated with a love experience. Saeed Salah chose Berbera and because it was where Elmi Bodari's love unfolded, and he dubbed Berbera as the city of love. As Hodan's son Rashiid Shabeele describes the event, the poet Saeed Salah answered the question which Elmi Bodari's death raised, and which forms the title of Rashiid Shabeele's book, whether one can die of love. Saeed Salah replied with a strong yes that love can kill, especially the love that takes place in Berbera.[15]

The poet Mohammed Warsame Hadrawi crowned Elmi Bodari as *Boqorki Jacaylka* ("the king of love.") Hadrawi also recited a poem called *Hud hud* (hoopoe) at Elmi Bodari's grave. The poem was addressed to the deceased poet and focuses on the great suffering that Bodari endured as a result of his love for Hodan. The poem also asks Bodari what it was like in the afterlife, and whether he was still in love with Hodan. Hadrawi gets the answer in a message that was in the form of a poem entitled *Haatuf* which comes to him in his sleep. In this poem, Bodari

[15] Ibid., 9.

says that he had been relieved of his former suffering and is now entertained by Ḥour al-'Ayn beauties.[16] More importantly, he says he no longer needs Hodan. Most probably, the reason Hadrawi proposes that Bodari had lost interest in Hodan in his next life is because Hadrawi felt sad for the great suffering that Hodan's love had caused Bodari. The poet Saeed Salah too, focuses on the pain and suffering of love. These are two examples of the great sympathy for Bodari and sense of guilt over what happened to him and how he died, that has come to permeate the Somali culture since Bodari's death. Here we see the image of Bodari as a wronged and misunderstood man, a martyr. Furthermore, it is not just his beloved that causes his suffering but as Saeed Salah put it, the vicissitudes of life ("Haydaarta waayuhu") take part in inflicting damage on him. In other words, what happened to him is no longer just an individual responsibility but has metamorphosed to a collective Somali guilt over his death. Again, no other Somali poet garners this level of sympathy.

When not being directly invoked, Bodari shows up in the works of Somali poets indirectly through their use of images and themes which were expressed by him in specific ways. These expressions were used by poets after him, often without those poets being aware of their indebtedness to him.[17] Part of his appeal to both poets and ordinary Somalis was the strong imaginative element in both his poetry and his life. This imaginative element has allowed people to add episodes to the story of his life and to twist it in places so that it would be even more

[16] Ibid., 11. For more on Ḥouris or virgins of paradise, see *The Encylopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, edited by B. Lewis, V. L. Menage, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht, volume III H-IRAM (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 581-82.

[17] For a good summary of these expressions which involve lightning, the theme of the heart that would not serve two, loyalty to the beloved till death, the vain efforts to achieve reciprocity with the beloved and many other themes and images most of which can be traced back to Bodari's poetry, see Andrzejewski and Lewis, Somali Poetry, 144-48.

dramatic than it actually was. An example of this is Bodari's death scene. Here is how Margaret Laurence was told it happened:

> Apparently, when Bonderii was on his deathbed, he sent word to Hodan, and asked if she would come to see him. She did come, and stood beside his bed, weeping. As he looked up and saw her, the story goes, he cried aloud and sank back, dead.[18]

The problem with this episode, as Margaret Laurence herself points out, is that it did not happen that way in real life. Yes Bodari did lose interest in life once Hodan was given away to someone else, but Hodan did not come to his death-bed. Nevertheless such dramatized version of the event makes it more interesting than just saying he died and that is it. The dramatization however is not forced but rather flows from the fact that like any good story, it lends itself to imaginative additions or modifications.

As Margaret Laurence has noted, although Somalis are Muslims, magic and the supernatural play a part in Somali culture. Supernatural elements are also present in Elmi Bodari's poetry.[19] In one such instance, Bodari sends a poetic message with the wind from the town of Zeila to Berbera where Hodan was because as he said this would be the fastest way for the message to reach her.[20]

The Somali fascination with Elmi Bodari and Hodan was noted by the journalist Emily Meehan who wrote in one of her dispatches for Slate Magazine, "Residents look to the sky with

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[18] Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty*, 43.

[19] Ibid., 22, 28.

[20] Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl wa loo dhintaa*?, 69.

wonder in their eyes when they speak these names."[21] Some of this Somali interest in Bodari and Hodan has apparently rubbed off on Western journalists, several of whom have covered the story on *NPR*, *BBC*, and other news outlets.[22]

That Elmi Bodari failed in winning Hodan's love is a fact. So it is only logical to ask: was it inevitable that he would fail in wooing her? What were the factors that made such an outcome inevitable? Could he have won Hodan's love had he followed a different path?

He was not devious or manipulative. He was straightforward and unconcerned with what others might think or say. It was this naiveté that made him proceed without taking full stock of the situation, without calculating the risks, without looking at the pros and cons, without evaluating whether he would win or lose. He had gone blind into this thing and stayed blind to everything except his goal. To win her he would have had to have much better social skills than he actually had, which means that he would have had to have the sort of abilities that would help him navigate through the obstacles. The irony is that despite his lack of social skills, or may be even because of this very lack, he changed Somali culture and added to its cultural capital in a way that few others had done. Moreover, it is true that blind determination without seriously studying a situation from various angles is usually a recipe for defeat. But then again, if he were

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[21] Emily Meehan, "Notes From a Failed State," *Slate*, Aug. 18, 2008, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/dispatches/features/2008/notes_from_a_failed_state/montagues_and_capulets.html (accessed Dec,24, 2013).

[22] Gwen Thompkins, "Somalia's Lovesick Baker And The Girl He Never Had," *NPR*, June 21, 2009. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105226981; Robert Walker, "Forbidden Love," *BBC World Service*, Feb 21 2006; for a brief note on the broadcast see http://somalilandtimes.net/sl/2005/214/9.shtml; Johanna und Mia, "Romeo and Juliet in Somaliland," July 09, 2007. http://happyunderthesun.blogspot.com/2007/07/romeo-and-juliet-in-somaliland.html.

the calculating type, he may never have dared to publicize his love or compose romantic and erotic poetry which challenged the social status quo.

Speaking about French culture, André Marlaux was reported to have said, "we are profiting from the suffering of Baudelaire."[23] The same could be said of Bodari with regard to Somali culture. Bodari's suffering has enriched Somali culture. His poetry rescued Somali poetry and culture from the danger of irrelevance to modern life. It strengthened it, made it more capable of handling issues and concepts that until then it could not handle in an effective manner (Similar moments have appeared in other literature, where a particular author or movement provided a much needed shot in the arm. Romanticism did this for German and English literature and culture).

Somaliland society was under strain during Bodari's lifetime. The interventions of the colonial state in the traditional social structure had made it impossible for the previous order to continue as it was. Bodari's poetry was both the reflection and internalization of a crisis in Somali poetry. The old sensibility was under assault. All of this became concentrated in Bodari's poetry. It is in his poetry that the crisis reaches its highest intensity until it was no longer tolerable and the old order broke up. Bodari's voice came through this. The old way of expressing love in poetry was abandoned. Bodari brought into being a new type of love poetry.

Bodari's breakthrough laid the basis for the big leap in the early forties that resulted in the invention of the Balwo genre of sung poetry with the establishment of Radio Somali in Hargeisa in 1941, so that by the time Margaret Laurence visited Somaliland in the early fifties,

[23]Cited in Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is literature?* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 167.

"many thousands of Belwo verses" were circulating in the culture.[24] A split in public taste would develop between young people who became interested in Balwo and the older generations who were still attached to the classical *gabei* which is not sung but chanted.[25] I argue that the rise of the Balwo or sung poetry is the direct result of Elmi Bodari's life and poetry because it was through his life and poetry that romantic erotic poetry became acceptable in Somali culture.

As much as Elmi Bodari was apolitical in his real life, he had felt the weight and power of the colonial state and expressed how that power impinged on him in his poetry. Furthermore, the love theme which Bodari pioneered in Somali culture was later modified and was used to express patriotism in the form of love of land and country. In the poem *Murugo* (sadness) he clearly acknowledges the power of the colonial state and admits that he would have taken action to prevent his competitor from marrying Hodan but he did not do so because of his fear of the penal law of the colonial government.[26] Another factor that was standing in Elmi's way was that Mohamed Shabeele was under the protection of some prominent individuals who were not members of his clan. The word Elmi uses is *magan* which sheds light on the clan situation. Elmi never dwells on this topic. But it has some relevance in that it shows the openness and tolerance of Somaliland's society, for Mohamed Shabeele's clan the Warsangali reside in the far eastern part of Somaliland, therefore, he had no clan support in Berbera, whereas Elmi Bodari was from the same overall clan, the Isaq, as Hodan. Nevertheless, in this case other considerations trumped

[24] Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty*, 7.

[25] Ibid., 7.

[26] Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl wa loo Dhintaa*?, 65; the Somali verses are: Haddii aanan mahiig iyo ka biqin murabidka gala, Ama se aanan mashraqad lay sudhayn maalin ma hayeene, Alle magane sow dawladduna meesha kama dhoofto.

the clan card, and Hodan was given in marriage to Mohamed Shabeele rather than Elmi Bodari whose clan genealogy was closer to hers.[27]

The huge sympathy that Bodari received after his death and the establishment of his status as a Somali cultural icon did not change the mind of the older members of Hodan's family who saw him as an impertinent young man who wanted to force his way into their daughter's life, and who violated tribal codes of honor by composing irresponsible verses about their daughter. It is hard to pass judgment here because an important piece of information is missing, which is how Hodan felt about him.

Hodan's family were not the only people who were opposed to Elmi Bodari's brand of romantic love, for there are people even today for whom romantic love is synonymous with chaos and letting loose of emotions and destructive instincts. It may seem obvious that love is a positive, noble and private sentiment. But upon close examination or as it unfolds in practice such as in Elmi Bodari's life, it becomes apparent that love as an obsession has wider implications. One of these implications is that love is not just about the self. It is also about others. Another implication is that love, or the ideal of love, brings a re-ordering of the imaginary which makes the rise of the modern subject, and hence progress, possible.

An underlying issue in profane love is that of sexuality. It is the fear that Bodari's poems were spreading the impression that there were illicit sexual relations between Hodan and Elmi Bodari that turned Hodan's family strongly against Bodari. In other words, had he used the older type of poetry which dwelled on highlighting and praising the character and beauty of the beloved and avoided erotic elements, he would have stood a better chance. So there is love and

[27] Ibid., 65; the relevant line is: Muruq kuma kaxaysane rag buu magansanayyaye.

there is love, and each culture sanctions certain types of love at a particular moment in history and opposes other types. It so happens that in Bodari's lifetime, Somali culture did not approve of romantic love as we know it now. But paradoxically enough, it is largely due to the impact of his poetry on Somali culture, and the guilt many Somalis subsequently felt regarding his death that the modern concept of romantic love emerged in Somali culture.

Bodari's poetry initially divided Somalis by challenging the status quo, but with time, especially after his death, he became an iconic and a uniting figure. Still something about him remains disturbing and unassimilated. It cannot be said about him that he was too versatile in the themes of his poetry or that he had diverse interests. He was focused on one and only one thing: Hodan. This gave a great deal of intensity to his poetry. By the same token, this narrow focus limited the scope of his poetry. Instead of digging wide, he dug deep. Nevertheless, his poetic achievements are undeniable. He pointed the way, struck the spark that ushered in Somali modern culture. He set the standard. He opened up space for new currents to waft through.

Love is based on feelings or emotions, and emotions have to do with the heart. The lyrical beauty of Elmi Bodari's poetry comes from the longing in his heart. The centrality of the heart is best encapsulated in the Arabic expression qalban wa-qāliban, which associates the heart (qalb) and form (qālib). I am stressing here that the heart not only provides the substance but also the form of love because I noticed that while the idea of the heart as providing the substance of love is readily admitted by theorists of love, the idea that the heart also provides the qālib

(container) is often quickly passed over. This does not mean that love has no cognitive component.[28]

Even though formulaic expressions and cliches are a common staple of oral literature, Elmi Bodari often used those formulas in innovative and surprising ways which heightened the appeal of his poetry. To give one example, it is common to repeat the word "hoyaalayey" several times at the beginning of a poem. The word hoyaalayey is a nonsensical word that has no particular meaning and just alerts the audience that a poem is about to be recited. Instead of saying hoyaalayey signals the beginning of a poem as many would have expected him to say, he says hoyaalayey is used to prettify a poem.[29] This is an imaginative and surprising turn of phrase by Bodari.

Occasionally Bodari exhibits literary conceit in lines such as "my verse would have turned the drought stricken land lush and green" (abaaraha ku doogoobi lahaa eriyadaydiiye). But even when he is at his most conceited, his verse has a magical quality that covered for that shortcoming.

Although this dissertation follows a comparative approach, it is nevertheless pertinent to note that this goes counter to Bodari's orientation. Bodari thought of his love as so unique, it

[28] Mustafā ʾAbu al-ʿalaʾ, *ʾal-Mar'ah fi al-shiʿr al-ʿArabi: Qaḍāyā ʿAdabiyyah wa-Naqdiyyah* (al-Minyā: Dār al-Hudā lil-Nashr wa al-Tawziʿ, 2002), 125. The combined term of qalban wa-qāliban is often deployed in Arabic to signal strong commitment, deeply felt desires, etc., but I am using it here in a more specific sense.

[29] The full expression for *hoyaalayey* is used to start a poem is *hoyaalayey gabayga wa lugu bilaaba*. Bodari however did not use this commonly expected phrasing, instead he de deployed the pleasantly surprising formulation: *hoyaalayey gabayga waa lugu wanaaja*.

could not be compared with anyone else's love. When Elmi Bodari was invited to contribute to a poetic exchange in which each poet addressed poems to the woman that the poet fancied, Bodari declined the invitation saying that the his love could not be categorized with the love of the other poets because it was on a higher plane. But despite his objection, I think his poetry can be profitably compared to others.

CHAPTER TWO

Sufi influences on Bodari

The precise date of the introduction of Islam into Somaliland is not known. Some historians claim that Islam came to Somaliland with the Muslim refugees who fled to the Horn of Africa in order to escape persecution of Muslims in Mecca at the very beginning of Islam, while other scholars think that Islam came to Somaliland through waves of Arab immigrants in the seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and thirteenth century.[1] The overwhelming majority of Somalis belong to the Shafiʿī school of Sunnī Islam. But the Islamic religion that is practiced by Somalis is heavily influenced by Sufism, a form of mysticism. Scholars such as Nicholson have proposed that the term Sufi is derived from the Arabic word Suf (wool), though Sufis usually claim that Sufi comes from the Arabic word Ṣ*afa* (purity).[2]

There is disagreement on when and how Sufism rose. Sufis themselves often associate Sufism with the Prophet Muhammad, though some scholars say the word Sufi was not part of common usage until two centuries after the Hijra or the flight of the Prophet and his followers from Mecca.[3] Sami Yusuf Sami goes even farther and has argued that Sufism pre-dates Islam.[4]

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[1] Ali Abdirahman Hersi, "*The Arab Factor in Somali History: the origins and development of Arab enterprise and cultural influences in the Somali Peninsula*," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1977), 77-78; see also I. M. Lewis, *Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-based Society* (London: Haan Associates, 1998), 7; Margaret Castagno, Historical Dictionary of Somalia (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1975), 40, 82-84. J. Spencer Trimingham, Islam in East Africa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2-3

[2] Reynold A. Nicholson, *The mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Ken Paul, 1964), 2-3

[3] J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 2, 12; Reynold A. Nicholson, "Mysticism," in *The legacy of Islam*, ed. Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 211.

Sami Yusuf Sami and others has also proposed that Sufism rose in reaction to the tremendous wealth and extravagance of the early Islamic world which offended some people and made them turn toward asceticism and the renunciation of worldly pleasures.[5] So Sufism from its very beginning was an attempt to wrestle with the changes brought by the rise of Islam and the ensuing crisis.

This was not the only crisis that Sufism dealt with either. A bigger crisis in Muslim society was brought by the Mongol invasion and Sufism was instrumental in responding to it. G.E. Von Grunebaum wrote, "The disintegration of the Arab phase of the Muslim venture, marked by the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258, constituted the first great crisis of Islamic history…But Islam responded creatively to the disaster through a new 'and in some ways fuller expression' in its 'medieval' period, the most important of which is Sufism."[6]

Similarly, beginning in the fifteenth century when it was introduced into Somali society, Sufism played such an important role in Somali society that I.M. Lewis called it a "revitalizing current"[7] that "has left an indelible impression."[8] There are several studies on Sufism and Islam as they are practiced among Somalis. The most penetrating of them is I. M. Lewis's *Saints and*

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[4] Yūsuf Sāmī al-Yūsuf. *Muqaddima lil-Nifari: Dirāsah fī fikr wa-tasawwuf Muhammad bin Abd al-Jabbār* (Damascus: Dār al-Yanābiʿ, 1997), 20; W.H.T. Gairdner, *Theories, Practices and Training Systems of a Sufi school* (London: The Society for Sufi Studies, 1980), 12-13.

[5] Ibid., 21; see also A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 31-35; Reynold A. Nicholson, The mystics of Islam, 20.

[6] G.E. Von Grunebaum, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 44-45.

[7] I. M. Lewis, *Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-based Society* (London: Haan Associates, 1998), 9.

[8] Ibid., 9, 14.

Somalis. There are also a few studies on Sufism in Somali literature, the most detailed of which is Abdisalam Yassin Mohamed's Ph. D. dissertation *Sufi poetry in Somali*.

Sufis are organized in the form of orders (Tariqas). The oldest Tariqa among Somalis is al-Qadiriya which was established by Abd al-Qadir Jaylani (d. 1166) in Baghdad.[9] The Sufi chains of saints provided a model for incorporating the Somali lineage religious figures like the saints of the Sufi orders.[10] As a result of this connection between Somali genealogy and the Sufi orders, "attachment to these orders is practically synonymous with professing the faith."[11] Sufi orders brought Somalis from different clans together and thus allowed the formation of a wider community than that of the clan.[12] By providing the necessary cohesion and discipline, these Sufi communities contributed immensely to the emergence of towns, especially, Hargeisa, the largest city in Somaliland.

Although the religious orders solved the intellectual and practical problems of adapting the Somali lineage system to the Sufi religious genealogy, creating a sense of a larger community than the clan and developing the sort of skills required for a settled urban existence, it does not mean that this was a continuous and uninterrupted march forward. On the contrary, many hurdles came in the way. For example, *Sheekh Madar*, the leader of the *Qādiriya* order often had to function under Egyptian or British colonial administrations, but the biggest and most constant

[9] Ibid., 11.

[10] Ibid., 21.

[11] Ibid., 60.

[12] Ibid., 61.

threat was that of Ethiopian expansionism. That Ethiopian threat took crisis proportions when the British watched Somalis under British protection subjected to frequent attacks by Ethiopians and the British chose not to intervene and at the same time declined to arm Somalis to defend themselves.[13]

In the late nineteenth century, *Al-Qādiriya* was not the only Sufi order facing a crisis. The *Ṣāliḥiya*, a Sufi order which split from al-Rāshidiya appeared in Somaliland. The fact that al-Salihiya came into existence based on a break with another order meant that it was born in an atmosphere of crisis[14]. Moreover, its leader in Somaliland, *Muhammad Abdille Hassan*, instead of trying to engage one colonial power (the British) to blunt another (the Ethiopians) as the Qadiriya had done, decided to declare war on both of them, a strategic error which caused a lot of death and suffering in Somaliland and damaged relations between Sufi orders in the country.

Somaliland's Sufis were not an isolated group who lived in their own cocoon but had relations with other Sufis in the Muslim world. Somali scholars were part of the intellectual and study networks that existed, and, to some extent, still exist in many parts of the Muslim world. I.M. Lewis wrote, "Separated as they are by only a narrow strip of sea from the centre of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula, the Somalis have for over a thousand years participated at least in some degree in this universalistic literate culture."[15] With its substantial role in Somali spiritual and material life, it is not surprising that Sufism had a big influence on Somali literature. Not only Sufi terminology, concepts, themes, and images are part of Somali literature but Somalis

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[13] ʿAli Aḥmad Nūr, ʾAl-Nizaʿ al-Sumāli al-ʾIthyūbi (Al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat ʾAṭlas, 1978), 71.

[14] Lewis, *Saints and Somalis*, 12.

[15] Ibid., 47.

have produced Sufi literature in both Arabic and Somali. Furthermore, this "Somali Sufistic literature treats of divine ecstasy and appears to be similar to Sufi writing in general."[16] Given this acknowledged influence of Sufism on Somali literature, it would not be unwarranted to propose that there was Sufi influence on Elmi Bodari's poetry. Indeed I argue that there was such influence on Elmi Bodari's poetry and in the rest of this chapter, I shall trace the contours of this influence.

In addition to this indirect deductive evidence, there is biographical evidence from his own life as well as evidence in the poetry itself that supports my argument. The biographical evidence was revealed to me in a conversation with Muuse Gooth an elderly Somali who hails from the same clan lineage as Elmi Bodari and who is very familiar with the oral history of Elmi Bodari and who after answering many of my questions summed up his view that it was likely that the whole thing was not about Hodan but about some mystical experience. He then proceeded to tell me about how Bodari told his best friend, Musa Farah, not to show his grave to anyone. This incident was further confirmed in an interview with Elmi Bodari's sister who said that Elmi Bodari's friends used to show a grave of an Indian man (Baanyaal) and pretend it was Elmi Bodari's grave[17]. By keeping Bodari's grave a secret, Bodari and his friends were adding a new mystery, the mystery of his grave, to the mystery of his life. Since hidden knowledge (asrār) and mystic experiences are an important component of Sufism, in his life and after his death,

[16] Ibid., 14.

[17] The term Baanyaal is a corruption of the Gujarati word Vaniya which means the caste of traders. In a Tv program called *Hereri iyo Hargeisa*, Elmi Bodari's sister, Xaliimo Ismaaciil Liibaan further confirms the story of Elmi Bodari's request to hide his grave from people who seek it, see *Hereri iyo Hargeisa*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6i31eHEj9HI.

Bodari acquires a Sufi significance. Some even call Sufism *dayānat al- sirr ʾaw al-jadhb*[18] (The religion of secrets or attraction).

In Sufism the notion of *Sirr* (secret) is related to two of the fundamental concepts of Sufism, namely, that of *bātin* (hidden) and *zāhir* (manifest). Sufis are not satisfied with manifest meanings and seek the hidden meaning of things. It is important to note here that the preoccupation with hidden messages in Somali poetry pre-dates Sufism. John Johnson has addressed the art of the hidden message in his book *heelloy.*[19] Similarly B.W. Andrzejewski published an article about it.[20] But the nature and the purpose of the hidden messages in Somali secular verse are different from that of Sufi or Sufi-influenced one. Whereas the hidden message in secular verse tends to be some sort of a riddle embedded in the poem that is solved through rational analysis and knowledge, the mystery in the Sufi poem is revealed in an ecstatic emotional experience. The Sufi adept goes through such mysterious experiences as he moves from one stage (*maqām*) to another, and from one spiritual condition (ḥal) to another. Annemarie Schimmel observed:

> The mystical path has sometimes been described as a ladder, a staircase that leads to heaven, on which the Salik slowly and patiently climbs toward higher levels of experience. But the Muslim mystics knew of another way of reaching higher experience:

[18]Ḥassan Ṭalab , *ʾAl-Muqaddas wa-al-Jamīl*, (al-Qāhirah: Markaz al-Qāhirah Li-Dirāsāt Hūqūq al-ʾInsān, 2001), 98.

[19] John William Johnson. *Heelloy: Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali* (London: Haan Publishing, 1996), 38.

[20]Andrzejewski, B.W. and Muuse H. I Galaal, "The Art of the Verbal Message in Somali Society*,"* (Hamburg: Neue Afrikanistische Studien, 1966), 29-39.

> it is the jadhba, "attraction," by which a person can be exalted, in one single spiritual experience, into a state of ecstasy and perfect union.[21]

In Somali literature, Elmi Bodari's poetry offers a good example of this Sufi-like pattern of stages of development. But in Bodari's poetry, these Sufi-like ideas and motifs are deployed within the context of constructing the self. In the rest of this chapter I shall examine in more detail the parallels, similarities, congruencies and divergences between Elmi Bodari's construction of the self and Sufi themes of the self. Pertinent to this is the question of whether there is an assumption here that Bodari's poetry is Sufi since Sufi aesthetic and philosophical categories are being used to evaluate it. This is a difficult question to answer categorically because of the metaphoric nature of language. The Somali saying *hadal wa margi* (speech is ambiguous) captures this sort of difficulty. In her book *The Mystical Dimension of Islam*, Annemarie Schimmel made the following observation about this same problem in Persian literature:

> It seems futile, therefore, to look for either purely mystical or a purely profane interpretation of the poems of Hafiz, Jami, or Iraqi-their ambiguity is intended , the oscillation between the two levels of being is consciously maintained (sometimes even a third level may be added), and the texture and flavor of the meaning of a word may change at any moment, much as the colors of the tiles in a Persian mosque varies in depth according to the hour of the day.[22]

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[21] Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimension of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 105.

[22] Ibid., 288.

As mentioned earlier, like the Sufi process of seeking closeness to the ultimate reality, Elmi Bodari's process of self-construction, too, goes through different stages (maqāmāt) and states (aḥwāl). In Sufi philosophy, al-Maqām marks the stage that the Sufi has reached in his spiritual quest, whereas al-Ḥāl denotes the quality of his spiritual state. The first stage is that of fresh new feelings of love pouring out almost effortlessly, in a state similar to that of the Sufi novice. It is during this stage that he composes his poem *Caashaqa Haween* (The love of women) where he puts forward his view that there is nothing wrong with falling in love and that it is actually ordained by God that humans should love each other. Bodari is here using a Sufi argument that God himself is a God of love as evidenced by the fact that one of his names is *al-wadūd* (the loving one) and that love is a central concept of Islam.

The erotic element which runs throughout the poems is more pronounced here as Bodari describes the sexual play culminating in sexual conquest among livestock, then advises women who were trying to lure him away from Hodan not to waste their time for "the heart can never love two!"[23] At this point there is an almost worshipful idealization of Hodan with hardly any criticism directed at her. And though he shows strong desires for her, these are interspersed with what in Arabic is called *sūmū al-ʿātifah* (elevated or spiritualized emotions). The language used is more positive reflecting his more positive mood. This is also when the muse that inspires the poet appears and takes shape for the first time in Somali poetry, for although there were women who inspired poets to compose poems about them prior to Hodan, there was no poet who made his love of a woman the sole subject of his poetry. But gradually Bodari's mood begins to darken as he becomes aware of the discrepancy between his desire for her and the fact that his chances

[23] Andrzejewski and Abdillahi, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri," 198.

of winning her were getting slimmer and slimmer. The tension between his desires and his reality become unbearable and he blames himself saying "I am at fault, O Hodan Abdi, that I have not given up on you."[24] In this poem we see his transition to the second stage, a stage of intense suffering. Paradoxically, the articulation of those desires in verse only makes things worse for him, for although it brings him temporary relief, it intensifies his suffering. That does not stop him however, for as the Sufi poet Farid al-Din al-Attar noted, by definition "Love loves the difficult things."[25]

In addition to loving "difficult things", Bodari shares with Sufis poets experiencing a sense of intoxication and bewilderment which makes him ask:

Surely she must have been imprinted in my heart
How else could I be so intoxicated with her? [26]

This sense of wonder and bewilderment is a signal of Bodari's entrance of the third stage of his love experience. By now he has been transformed or "cooked" as Rumi put it by the love experience. Whereas Sufis are transformed by divine love, Bodari is transformed by the love of a woman.

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[24] This is my own translation. The Somali version is: Gardariyaa maxaan Hodan cabdaay kaaga goi waayey, see Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl wa loo Dhintaa?*, 76.

[25] Farid Ud-Din Atttar, *Conference of the Birds*, trans. C.S. Nott (Berkeley: Shambala, 1971), 33.

[26] B.W. Andrzejewski, trans., *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, with Sheila Andrzejewski, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 67.

In this final stage, he is not afraid of his approaching death, and worries more about losing his mind as he declares:

Brothers, I'm afraid I will lose my mind

I now intend to cross the river.[27]

With these lines Bodari indicates he is moving the way Sufi mystics or the elect (khassat al-khāṣsa) who have crossed to the other side. His state at this point is akin to what A. Nicholson called "The enraptured Sufi who has passed beyond the illusion of subject and object."[28]

The river here is a symbol of journeying into the unknown, and could be referring to Bodari's awareness of his approaching death. Some oral tradition says he meant that he was going to move to the neighboring country of Djibouti, but that is probably not the case because Somaliland and Djibouti are linked by land and people who are traveling from Somaliland to Djibouti usually travel by land, although Djibouti can also be accessed by sea. And in case there is any doubt about what he meant about who and why he is leaving, he concludes with:

I am taking leave of this our Somaliland.

I am going away from confusion among men and defenselessness among women.[29]

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[27] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri," 203.

[28] Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Kegan Paul, 1975), 160.

[29] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri*,"* 203.

CHAPTER THREE

Tracing the Modern

This chapter traces some of the psychological states and attitudes evoked in Bodari's poetry that will be pertinent to the development of modern consciousness in that poetry. Some of these experiences are human experiences that can take place under various circumstances and are not unique to modernism, nevertheless, the combination of Bodari's psychological state at the time as well as the overall objective societal condition have given these experiences a modernist flavor. It is the interaction between his subjective condition and the objective ones that accents his experiences in such a way that gives his verse a modernist bent, but there is nothing deterministic about this. The chapter has four sections: one, a discussion of the theories of modernity and modernism; two, the crisis that attended the emergence of modernism; three, a discussion of the psychological states and moods found in Elmi Bodari's poetry using Freud's theory of psychoanalysis; four, the paradox of how his attempts to deal with the pain of his unrequited romance paradoxically gave his poetry a modernist dimension.

I will begin with a discussion of modernism in general then move into how it manifests itself in Bodari's poetry as well as the significance it holds for Somali poetry. This is a further elaboration of the position that I have argued through much of this dissertation that Elmi Bodari's poetry was the spark that launched modernism in Somali literature.

There are varying definitions of modernism, but generally speaking, as Lisa Tickner points out, modernism is the cultural articulation of the changes in society that were prompted by the industrial revolution; therefore, modernism is related to both modernity and modernization.[1]

Barry Smith holds that the term modernism is related to the Latin term modernus which was used to identify Christians as opposed to pagans. He also notes that the contemporary use of the term has its roots in Kant's conception of a universal history, which would be a distinctive break with the past.[2] There are, however, certain traits that are commonly attributed to modernism that together give a reasonably clear idea of what it is. Lisa Tickner wrote:

> By the 1870s, 'modern'- a term first used in distinction to 'classical' or 'medieval' - was increasingly applied to 'the way we live now': to 'the age of evolution, plutocracy, gaslight, and feminism, rather than the long sweep of European civilization. 'Between 1875 and 1900 there was something like a quantum leap in scientific discoveries and new technologies, and an acceleration in existing processes of secularisation, rationalisation, imperial expansion and state intervention.[3]

In Europe, modernism came in conjunction with the great technological advances of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century as well as the imperialism and two world wars; whereas in Africa modernity in general and modernism in literature emerged in in a colonial context. Despite this important difference, European modernism and modernism in

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[1] Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern subjects* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 184.

[2] Bryan Turner, ed., *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* (London and Newbury: Sage Publications, 1990), 3.

[3] Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects*, 190.

Africa both rose in critical contexts. In Europe, modernism did not arise at the same time in all countries but it rose sometime between the late nineteenth century and the Second World War. Modernism in Europe rose in the shadow of world wars at home and imperialism abroad, whereas modernism in Somaliland rose in the context of British colonialism, growing urbanization, and the deepening of Somaliland's links with global markets. In other words, in both Europe and Somaliland, modernism rose in a context of crisis. An essential part of this crisis in Somaliland was the weakening of the old social order which was based on a careful balance between Somaliland interior and coastal areas which regulated contacts with foreigners and beyond Somaliland's coast; the change also put a strain on the clan system as the locus of power shifted from Somalis to foreigners. Moreover, Somaliland suffered a devastating twenty-year war (1900-1920) between what came to be known as the Dervishes led by Muhammad Abdille Hasan and the British, a war in which about a third of the Protectorate's population perished.[4]

Modernity in Somaliland, like modernity in most other countries was an urban phenomenon, for both Bodari and Hodan whose love story forms the central episode in the rise of modernism in Somali literature both lived in the city of Berbera. Aside from businessmen, people who live in an urban environment sell their labor in the labor market and do not usually work as a family unit as pastoralists and farmers do. This produces a different organization in the family unit as well as the adoption of new values that reflect class hierarchies. Modernism in literature also has certain characteristics such as an emphasis on the unusual, the strange, the new and even the perverse. It privileges the individual who is alienated from society, the melancholic figure and the maladjusted. This is an indication of the changes in the culture. The hero in this

[4] Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 198.

new setting is not someone who is at ease with his culture but is someone at odds with it. Thus the new hero embodies the conflict between the old and new values and is born in an atmosphere of crisis.

The Somali psychologist Hussein Bulhan observed about the crisis caused by introduction of colonial rule into Somaliland:

> To summarize, Somali society entered a stage of unprecedented social and cultural crisis beginning in the late nineteenth century when Europeans imposed colonial rule and partition on Somalis. In time, the crisis seeped into almost every domain of life and turned chronic to the point that today Somalis accept all crises as the natural order of life or as divine damnation insoluble by human intervention.[5]

Bulhan is not entirely accurate when he says European rule in Somaliland was imposed because the British entered Somaliland based on treaties with Somaliland's communities. Furthermore, Somalilanders at the time saw it more in the nature of an alliance with Britain to prevent what they saw at the time as the bigger threat of the appropriation of their land by their Ethiopian neighbors.[6] Bulhan is also exaggerating when he writes "Somalis accept all crises as the natural order of life," nevertheless, he is correct in asserting that the British advent into Somaliland triggered a crisis in Somali society.

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[5] Hussein Bulhan, *The Politics of Cain* (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International, 2008), 433.

[6] For the maneuverings between Britain, France and Italy, see Enid Starkie. *Arthur Rimbaud in Abyssinia*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1937; for the Somali point of view see Cabdirisaaq Caqli, *Sheekh Madar,* 156-79; see also *The Somali Peninsula*, 22.

In addition to experiencing the overall societal crisis, Bodari went through his own personal crisis due to his unrequited love. So he actually was the subject of dual crises. Bodari expresses this sense of crisis by declaring, "Alas, alas, what a disaster has befallen me."[7] No doubt he is referring here to his personal ordeal, but this ordeal takes place within a colonial context that naturally has in impact on him. On the other hand, although his poems are personal expressions of his anguish, they have substantial effect on Somali culture. One of the ways in which this takes place is that through his poetry, his grief and suffering are transferred to the Somali culture.

Freud identified two kinds of grief or sorrow: mourning and melancholy. Mourning, according to Freud, is a result of the loss of an actual love object whereas melancholy is more of a psychological loss; it lasts longer, and its emotional effect on the person is more debilitating.[8] Bodari's predominant emotional state does not fit exactly into either of these two categories. He could be said to be in a state of mourning because he lost something physical but it does not go away and instead stays with him till the very end of his life. Moreover, he does constantly feel the pangs of guilt and remorse not because of anything he did but he does feel dejected and sometimes he blames himself for being involved with her. So he experiences both the sense of loss of mourning and the self-doubt and self-criticism of melancholia. Moreover, his mourning and melancholy were not things that happened in the past and that he was looking back at but was something that went on until he died. Furthermore, he is not only mentally affected by it but also physically. His sleep becomes irregular. He would fall asleep when he was supposed to be awake and be awake when he was supposed to be asleep. The simple act of taking a nap becomes

[7] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 67.

[8] Peter Gay, ed., *Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 584-89.

problematic when it causes him to miss meeting her and leads him to conclude that there must be some force larger than him that is behind his predicament, perhaps a curse, or as he put it: "Unless there is a curse on me, what else has made me miss Hodan?"[9] This constant struggle leads to serious divisions within him, between his life before he met Hodan and what he turned into after meeting her, between his desire for her and the reality of her physical absence from his life, between the rich and multi-textured world he constructed in his poetic compositions and the limitations and barrenness of his actual life.

The divisions make his problem more complex and render the possibility of finding a solution even more remote. But despite its trauma and pain, the crisis also takes him into areas of the psyche that he probably would not have ventured to, had he not fallen in love. In other words, the crisis is also a process of self-discovery. But an integral part of that self-discovery is his deepening alienation from society. When he says "do not trouble yourselves, any one of you, about me"[10] is an indication of how far he has come and how cutoff he feels from others that there is little they can do to change his mind or alter his situation. At this point he is a man who has reached his limit and is in a liminal state where ordinary time and space are out of joint, so to speak. But that liminal state is not just a state of pain and suffering, it is also a state of possibility and the self-discovery that was mentioned earlier.

An example of this is his reference to the cloth that had to be cut in order to make a cloak and a kilt for him where the negative act of cutting produces the positive result of clothes that he

[9] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri," 199.

[10] Ibid., 198.

could wear. The line is "As if you were my cloak and my kilt which I had cut for myself"[11] and implied in it is the contrast between the two states of the body being covered versus its being nude. That contrast, however, only works before the threshold has been reached and crossed but once it is crossed and a new state is established, it does not work because the elements that were previously juxtaposed have been transformed and are now different. Innovation is part of this process of transformation. Among Bodari's innovations in Somali poetry is the introduction of a new type of hero who is passive rather than active in his approach to life. Bodari reflects in many ways this type of passive hero. The paucity of action by the hero and his overall passivity is related to another characteristic, that of inwardness. By looking inward, the poet tries to enlarge the scope and extent of his freedom to handle new themes or push existing themes to their limits. Similarly, he experiments with existing forms or invents new ones. Poetic experimentation in the case of Bodari takes the form of composing poems whose musicality and lightness makes his anguish and sadness more bearable. It is also found in the element of surprise. The fact that Bodari was passive in real life and let things happen to him without taking action to alter his situation does not mean that his poetry is characterized by passivity. On the contrary, the turbulence in his psyche is reflected in his poems and gives them a disturbing and unsettling effect. For example, he says:

Among those on earth you are the top

Come closer dear, you are a treasure.[12]

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[11] Ibid., 199.

[12] My own translation; the Somali verses are Inta samada hoose joogta waad ugu sareeysaaye, So soco sidciyo qaaliyey saanad baa tahaye; see *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*?, 50.

Distance in this case is not static. First Bodari focuses on all those under the sky and on earth then he says that out of all those, Hodan stands taller than all of them, meaning she is better than all of them. So distance is looked at from top down and then from bottom up. But in both cases distance is being measured. Moreover, distance is being used to describe something higher. During that movement and expansion of one's visual field new objects reveal themselves for the first time, become visible. But these attempts are never completely successful. There still remains some hidden spaces, some pockets that remain invisible. Time and space are experienced in a different way than in the past. They are experienced as a new category, as a bewildering absence.[13] For example, he likens Hodan to a clock that "tick-tocks" in his heart as if she literally has carved space for herself in his heart. At the same time the tick tocks are a constant reminder of her absence. The verse brings together space and time in a different way than was the case in Somali poetry until then. It is an indication of the erosion of the old order and the emergence of a new one. But the experience itself is difficult and raises questions about the very idea of order. It is a disorienting experience in which the old order does not give way easily but struggles to maintain itself intact. There is no resolution, however, and things stay open. The poem is open to new interpretation and Bodari is open to new experiences.

This activity is continued at night when she visits him in his dreams. "At night when I sleep she comes to sport with me,"[14] he declares. It is not just his psyche that is cracked open but his consciousness. The image of "dust" is important. The body normally decomposes and turns

[13] Lawrence Rainey, ed., *Modernism: an Anthology* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), xxiii.

[14] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 67.

into dust after death, But Hodan "turns into a rising pillar of dust"[15] meaning she disappears into thin air and he has to start all over again. The dust left behind means that the disappearance is not into total nothingness and that traces are left behind. It does however indicate that a transformation had taken place. The transformation from one state to another is not limited to what happens to the body during the dream state. It also happens in the psychological realm. From a closed and claustrophobic state, he opens up toward the unknown, though the leap is not aimless but is aimed at trying to possess her. Ultimately though despite his willingness to take the challenge she remains beyond his reach, but in that process he learns many things. In other words the effort has a pedagogical import.

But in the end all the knowledge that he has learned from this experience, including sacred knowledge, fails to save him. Even seeing Hodan does not work completely in his favor. Though the knowledge he acquired does not empower him, it does empower Somali society in general as that knowledge becomes part of the Somali historical memory and a catalyst for change. The course followed here is consistent with Foucault's description of genealogy as the "union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allow us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and then make use of this knowledge tactically today."[16] Knowledge in this sense is not something set in concrete, ready to be deployed but something along the lines

[15] Ibid., 67.

[16]Cited in Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity Without Subjects* (Lanham, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 116.

suggested by Thomas Teo who wrote "that knowledge was not a reflection or a map of the world but an artifact of interaction."[17]

The experience of seeing Hodan and all that it entails is relevant here because modernism privileges the visual. But in the case of Bodari there is one visual experience that matters to him the most, seeing Hodan, which rarely happens in reality, especially once she gets married, and is more of a product of his imagination. But these imaginary experiences do not alter the fundamental fact of her absence from his life. On the contrary, they highlight that absence and his failure to be with her. Bodari's failure extends to the process of seeing and perception. Viewing the object of his desire becomes a catastrophic experience instead of an occasion of enjoyment and "contentment." Furthermore, the depression caused by his unrequited love functions as a force that pushes him toward composing poems in which he expresses his suffering, and thus spurs his creativity.

A. Alvarez has explained how negative emotions such as despair acted as an impetus for the creative efforts of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and other writers:

> Despair was for Kierkegaard what grace was for the puritans: a sign, if not of election, at least of spiritual potentiality. For Dostoevsky and for most of the important artists since him, it is the one common quality that defines their whole creative effort. Although it seemed limiting, it became finally a way through to new areas, new norms and new ways of looking from which the traditional concepts of art-as a social grace and ornament, as

[17] Thomas Teo, *The Critique of Psychology: From Kant to Postcolonial Theory* (New York: Springer, 2005), 141.

an instrument of religion or even of Romantic humanitarian optimism-themselves appeared narrow and bounded.[18]

Experiencing despair, however, as Paul Tillich channeling Kierkegaard, observed is not always an incentive for creativity, and is part of being human.[19] Just as despair is part of the human condition as Paul Tillich averred, for Bodari, love is not an abstraction. It is not a light matter that one can easily "wash away" but something that almost has a physical presence, a material reality. Love is part of what makes Bodari who he is. It does not only define him but it also defines his relations with others. So when Bodari proclaims, "Do not trouble yourselves, any one of you, about me, for the heart can never love two!"[20] he is defining his relations with others. He is telling others how unshakeable is his commitment to Hodan. But at the same time he is also sending the message that he does not want to be a burden on others. Here we get a glimpse into his personality, a personality that stresses independence and individuality. Furthermore, we also see how this personal uniqueness is being constructed, for as Derek Hillard wrote in his discussion of Celan, "Individuals do not simply exist. They must be created."[21] The creation of the self, however, does not take place in a vacuum but in relation to others, and the other through whom Bodari mainly constructs his self is Hodan.

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[18] A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (New York: Random House, 1972), 216-217.

[19] Paul Tillich, *Shaking of the Foundations* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 96.

[20] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri," 198.

[21] Derek Hillard, *Poetry as Individuality: The Discourse of Observation in Paul Celan* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010), 15.

It is in dealing with others that the contours of a personality and the extent to which it is individuated become apparent. Bodari's high degree of individuality comes through clearly in his relations with others. But his developed individuality and sensitivity also made his experience of the Sartrean "hell is others" even more intense. Bodari blames himself and others for his condition. To be more precise, he blames the words that came out of his mouth, including his poems. So his own mouth as well as his poems are part of his predicament. The verse I am alluding to here is "By God how much do I suffer because of my own mouth and ill-treatment by others."[22] His mouth is the instrument that mediates between him and Hodan. But it is the Hodan that is embodied in his poems that is his other, not the real Hodan. It is this to some extent "fictitious" Hodan that provides him a mirror in which he could look into himself and engage in self-reflection, a prominent quality of his poetry as well as of modernist verse in general. Thus Bodari's focus on Hodan does not stand in the way of focusing on the self but supports it and enhances it. At the same time his self-reflexion does not diminish his obsession with Hodan. It is a dialectical relationship that can make his spirit soar but that can also plunge it into despair. These changes in mood could happen unexpectedly. An example of this is:

Then suddenly I was shown her in a vision

And she was radiant in hue, like a lighted lantern.[23]

Here we see the element of surprise, even shock, and he feels ecstatic. The fact that she appears to him in a vision and not in reality does not seem to matter to him much. What matters

[22] The Somali verse is Allahayow afkaygiyo sideen aadmiga u eeday? see *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*?, 19.

[23] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 67.

is that he saw her in her resplendent glory. But then soon enough comes the letdown: "Alas, alas, what a disaster has befallen me!"[24]

The heavenly vision turned into bitter experience. And just as it did not diminish his sense of joy that he saw her in a vision and not in reality, his bitterness was not mitigated by the fact that it all happened in a vision or dream. Bitterness and joy form the opposite poles that contain his experience. The wounds inflicted on him by Hodan's absence are lethal whether it took place in a dream or reality. But for this to happen, the wall separating dreams and reality had temporarily weakened to the point it could not do its job, hence dreams and reality become somewhat indistinguishable. Similarly the joys he experiences due to her become a new reality where truth and illusion are not so clear-cut. But regardless of whether the new reality is based on truth or illusion, it is marked by an undeniable gap: Hodan's absence from his life.

Interestingly enough, it is the image of the wall that Bodari uses to describe the lack of response from Hodan. "You are a wall,"[25] he says, meaning she is being cruel and has no feelings since walls are usually made up of stones, bricks or some other hard substance. In addition to hardness and lack of feelings, walls also block interaction and communication. But unlike the wall between dream and reality which at times dissolves, the wall separating him from her does not dissolve or fade, leading to frustration and bewilderment. All that pent up anger and frustration becomes the stuff from which his poems are made. Paradoxically, because of the wall blocking him from her, Bodari turns his gaze inward and is able to get a clearer view of himself, his

[24] Ibid., 67.

[25] The whole line of verse is: You are a wall. What then has put me by your side? See "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri,"199-200.

moment of blindness turns into an occasion of insight.[26] Such blindness and insight, as Paul de Man has shown is part of the "enigma" or "ambivalence" of language. Roland Barthes finds this ambivalence in the fact that the same language that "wounds" him also "seduces" him.[27] But regardless of whether the contraries posed by language are between blindness and insight or between wounds and seduction, the underlying reality is that ambivalence involves conflict within language itself, a mark of modernism. According to Paul de Man, this was also Yeats's view of language. As Paul de Man wrote, "Modern poetry is described by Yeats as the conscious expression of a conflict within the function of language as representation and within the conception of language as the act of an autonomous self."[28]

Bodari experiences this conflict in language as he uses different expressions to draw Hodan into him by trying to make her feel guilty, by trying to cajole her, or occasionally even by composing verses critical of her. These contradictions in language are sometimes found in the same poem. The conflict in language destabilizes the poem, shows emotions that are in collision. To plead with Hodan at one moment and then to show defiance the next, gives it a sense of dislocation and desperation, the sense of a man who will try anything to reach her. This is an example of language's ability to execute different tasks, an ability captured by Barthes's apt phrase "the fires of language"[29] that can either illuminate and provide insight or hurt and destroy.

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[26] Paul De Man, "Lyric and Modernity," in *Forms of Lyric: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Reuben A Brower (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 173.

[27] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 38.

[28] Paul De Man, "Lyric and Modernity," 157.

[29] Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 16-17.

The constant disappointments and the lack of positive response does not deter him, and he continues on that same course of pursuing Hodan. It is this single-minded, seemingly irrational determination to keep it up, to keep in her tracks, that makes the course of his life so extraordinary. His commitment seems beyond justification or reason. He had crossed into another reality. But in that crossing, he moved the needle of Somali culture, nudged it forward.

The paradox here is that he tried to establish a relation but the more he tried to reach out to her, the more isolated he became. That isolation, however, proved to be productive. The mechanism through which this happens is intricate. It consists of three movements that are often repeated. The first move is his gaze toward Hodan, then his gaze is turned toward himself, but even when he is looking deep within himself, the subject of his look is Hodan. She is the axis around which his thoughts, feelings and his whole being revolves. From his gaze toward her and then toward himself, arises a third force, a creative force that results in the emergence of his poetry and his future survival through the legacy of that poetry. In other words, poetry for him is not a luxury but a necessity, a means of survival, of escaping the threat of death and extinction.

A. Alvarez noted the connection between modern literature and the obsession with death when he wrote, "If the new concern of art was the self, then the ultimate concern of art was, inevitably, the end of self-that is, death."[30]

Bodari does not consciously seek death, nevertheless, the proximity of death and the overall theme of death does cast a long shadow over him with expressions such as, "I shall go with it under the tombstone."[31] His view of death like his views on so many things was colored

[30] A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: a Study of Suicide* (New York: Random House, 1972), 217.

[31] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, *The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri*, 198.

by his desire for Hodan, so that despite the conditional phrasing that he uses when he exclaims, "as if you could rescue me from the pit of the Other World and death"[32] it is clear he thinks only she can rescue him from the claws of death. Hodan does rescue him in an indirect way from death, for it was because of her that he composed verse, thus ensuring that his memory among Somalis will live as long as those verses are recited and sung. As Paul Ricoeur wrote, "To a large extent, in fact, the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models and heroes, in which the person or community recognizes itself."[33] Somalis recognized in Bodari a different type of hero, a new modern hero, and his poetry helped them imagine a new type of community, and that is why he lives even in death.

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[32] Ibid., 199-200.

[33] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 121.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bodari and Qays: comparison and contrast

In this chapter I shall compare and contrast the life and poetry of Elmi Bodari to that of Qays ibn al-Mulawwah (Majnun Layla). Naturally, any attempt to compare and contrast Elmi Bodari's life and poetry with that of Qays (Majnun Layla), must keep in mind the long time span (about thirteen centuries) which separates the two poets, for Qays is believed to have lived in the seventh century A.D. whereas Bodari lived in about the first half of the twentieth century (1908-1941). Furthermore, Somali literature should not be confused with Arabic literature. Although both Somali and Arabic belong to the Afro-Asiatic family of languages (Somali is classified as Cushitic and Arabic is Semitic), nevertheless, they are distinct languages. With this said, it should also be mentioned that because of Somaliland's geographical proximity to the Middle East, there has been much interaction and mutual exchanges between the people of Somaliland and the peoples of the Middle East, especially Arabs. The religion of Islam is the most important commonality that Somalilanders (and Somalis as a whole) share with Arabs and other Middle Eastern peoples.

It is this shared Islamic culture, and more particularly the mystically-inclined variety of it that provides the basis for much of the commonality that is found between Elmi Bodari's poetry and Majnun's poetry. In this case, the comparison of Bodari's poetry with that of Qays is further justified by the fact that Qays occupies a very special and popular place among Somalis as a paragon of love. It is difficult to establish exactly when Qays became incorporated into Somali literature, but Jama Mohamed noted that one of the earliest Somali plays which was

performed in the 1940s was about Qays and Layla's love story.[1] Qays is not the only Arab love poet who made his way into Somali poetry, ʿAntar bin Shaddād's love for ʿAbla and his extraordinary courage is also another example of Somali literary borrowing from Arabic.[2] One of the best contemporary Somali poets acquired the name Abdi Qays after performing in a play about Qays and Layla. The presence of these two love poets in Somali poetry is an indication of Somali literature's selective borrowing of themes, images and ideas from Arabic literature. A comparative approach helps in shedding light on the commonalities and the peculiarities of the two poets.

This comparative study shall be conducted by establishing three sets of what Walter Benjamin calls constellations.[3] The first set of constellations contains predominantly positive elements; the second constellations are mostly of a critical orientation whereas the third set of constellations are flexible and are used in a variety ways depending on the poet's objective.

Positive constellations:

Chaste love

Qays is considered an ʿUdhri poet because his poetry is based on the idea of chaste love which was upheld by ʿUdhri poets. So he is a major figure in what is a larger phenomenon, that of ʿUdhri poetry. Bodari too had some contemporaries and predecessors who addressed the topic of love but their love poems were just a side show, a break, from glorifying heroism and

[1] Jama Mohamed, "Constructing Colonial Hegemony in the Somaliland Protectorate, 1941—1960" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1996), 123.

[2] Andrzejewski and Lewis, *Somali Poetry*,132.

[3]Cited in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, introduction to *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 128.

upholding the traditional values of clan solidarity which they saw as the main business of poetry, and did not have the depth and intensity of Bodari's poetry. In other words, Bodari's poetry was not so much a continuation of the poetic tradition but was rather an innovative break with it.[4]

Bodari is not just the composer of his poetry, he is also its protagonist. The same is true of Qays. When it comes to comparing Hodan and Layla, one major difference between them is that Layla occasionally shows that she has poetic talent and responds with her own verses,[5] whereas there are no poems that have been attributed to Hodan.

Major poem

Bodari has a major poem *Caashaqa Haween* that stands above all others in expressing his outlook. In this poem he makes the case for love, "how it existed before him, will always exist, and the suffering it caused him."[6] Qays also has one poem "*al-Muʾnisah*"[7] which is longer and more wide-ranging than all other poems and which he recited often and preferred to all others.

Symbols of love

After his death, Majnun became a symbol for the lover par excellence in Arabic culture as well as throughout the Muslim world. al-Ghazali mentions that someone saw Majnun in a

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[4] Since Qays's love of Layla occurred at a time when there were other similar contemporaneous 'Udhri love poetry in Arabia, one could surmise from this that the impact of Qays's poetry on the Arab society of that era, was not as immense as the impact of Bodari's poetry on Somali society.

[5] Majnun, *Dīwān Majnün Laylā*, ed. 'Abd al-Sattār Ahmed Farrāj, (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat Misr, [1973]), *239.*

[6] Audio Cassette tape on Bodari's life and poetry recited by Haji Wareer.

[7] According to Farraj, this was Qays's favorite poem and he recited it often, see Diwan Majnun Layla, 292-305.

dream and asked what God had done with him? Majnun answered by saying that God forgave him and made him "ḥujjah ʿalā al-muḥibbin" [8] (a leader of lovers). Majnun also became a central figure in Sufi teachings.

Subsequent to passing away, Bodari, too, became a symbol for the lover in Somali culture. He came to co-exist with, and to some extent supplant Qays who already exemplified the lover in Somali culture. Bodari however does not become an important figure for Somali Sufis. Instead he becomes a central figure in Somali poetry, music, and songs. Actually, through his life and poetry, Bodari facilitated the birth of modern Somali music. Likewise, Hodan co-exists with Layla in Somali culture, but in contrast to Elmi's displacement of Qays (the figure of Qays still exists in Somali culture but he no longer plays the dominant role that he had played before Bodari came on the scene), Hodan has not displaced Layla to the same extent as Bodari has displaced Qays.[9] This could be because there is an ambiguity about whether she was in love with him or not, and this works to her disadvantage in comparison with women who were loved and who also loved back, such as Layla and ʿAbla.

Wind as a messenger

The wind is a symbol that is found in both Bodari's poems as well as Qays's poems. Bodari sends a message with the wind to deliver to Hodan. Qays and Layla exchange messages that they send with the wind. There are differences however between Bodari's message to Hodan

[8] Ibid., 318; The Arabic phrase "hujjah ʿalā" can mean both "an authority on" or "an argument against."

[9] This may have to do with the uncertainty surrounding how Hodan felt about Bodari. However, Hodan's family still carries the mantle of love in Somaliland, as one of her sons, Abdisalam Mohamed Shabeelleh, acts as a counselor for lovers these days and considers himself the "Sheikh of Love", see Gwen Thompkins, "Somalia's Lovesick Baker And The Girl He Never Had," *NPR*, June 21, 2009. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105226981.

and the messages exchanged by Qays and Layla. First, only a single message was sent with the wind from Bodari to Hodan whereas the messages exchanged between Qays and Layla were numerous. Second, the message from Bodari is a one-way street (from him to her), whereas the messages between Qays and Layla is a two-way street and go back and forth between the two of them. Third, the message from Bodari is an oral message that is recited orally and is expected to be delivered orally, whereas the messages between Qays and Layla, though delivered by the wind, are written messages.

The wind, however, does not always play a positive role. Qays even accuses it of being unfair to him.[10] Bodari, however, does not blame the wind, but praises it instead for its extraordinary speed and the ability to overcome physical obstacles in delivering his message to Hodan.

Ecstasy

The ecstasy of love is found in both of them. Qays calls it "ladhdhat al-ḥubb" [11] (the ecstasy of love). Bodari expresses this ecstasy of love by describing Hodan walking towards him:

"Of those on this earth, you are the best

Come to me my treasure."[12]

[10] Ibid., 84; my own translation of the Arabic verse is: "Oh wind your judgment is unfair to me but I accept it." The Arabic is: ʾAlā yā nasīm al-rīḥ ḥukmuka jāʾirun ʿalayya ʾidha ʾarḍaytanī wa-raḍitu.ʾ

[11] Ibid., P.116.

Although Bodari insists that love has been with human beings for a very long time and is thus part of life, he does not equate love with being human as Qays who says: Only those who love are fully human, and nothing good can be expected from those who never loved (Wamā al-nās īllā al-ʿashiqūn dhawū al-hawā, wa-lā khayrā fiman lā yuḥibbu wa-yaʿshaq.) [13]

Qays even goes farther than that and asserts:

Life is not worth living if you have not loved and were not loved (Falā khayra fi al-dunyā ʻidha ʻanta lam tazur ḥabīban wa-lam yaṭrib ʻilaykā ḥabīb.)[14]

Healing

When Bodari's friends, Musa Farah and Tabase, first became aware of his condition, they could not understand what was wrong with him and berated him for saying he was dying for a woman when the country was full of women. Then they tried to dismiss it as a transient problem that would go away, but gradually it became clear it was not going away and concluded they had to do something, and so they took him to *wadaado* (religious healers) who used traditional and Islamic methods of curing the sick such as pronouncing incantations and prescribing *qardhaas* (amulet) for him to wear.[15] Part of the reason Bodari's friends were at a loss what to do, was that nothing like this had happened before in Somaliland or among Somalis in adjoining territories. Qays's family had reacted in a similar fashion when Qays fell in love with Layla. After initial

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[12] My translation of these lines recited in Haji Wareer audio cassette; the Somali lines are: Inta samada hoos joogta waad ugu sarreysaaye, so soco Sidciyo Qaaliyey saanad baad tahaye.

[13] Ibid., 205.

[14] Ibid., 53.

[15] This is confirmed by Bodari's verses: The amulets written by men of religion failed to stop the sickness, I sought the sacred knowledge and medicines but failed to find a cure, see Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of ʿIlmi Bowndheri," 197.

confusion, they finally decided to seek the help of traditional doctors who used *taʿwidh* (incantations) and *al-ruqya* (amulets) in order to expel or keep away the evil spirit that they thought was behind his malady.[16]

Critical constellations:

Poetry as critique

After Layla is married to another man, life becomes meaningless to Qays. The only thing that mattered to him was Layla and she was living with another man. This had a devastating impact on him. His connection to his family, his tribe, and all his social connections suffered from the impact of him losing Layla. He began to leave his home and wander around the Arabian Peninsula all the way to the Levant, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Escaping the scene of his humiliation seemed to be the best solution. But at least in the beginning he would return sometimes and attempt to see Layla.

However, regardless of where he was at any given moment, something fundamental had changed in him. His relationship with the land, with people, all of that had changed. The glue that held him to the social order as well as to the land had disappeared. The area where Bani ʿAmir lived had become a symbol of his humiliation. In the general state of disintegration that he was going through, the poems acquire greater significance. They become the embodiment of his experiences. Here one could see through his own perspective what happened to him, how he felt about it, how the tribal laws and regulations had conspired against him, and how his psychological connection with friends and family were severed. The poems become a chronicle for what he had lost and the devastating impact of that loss on him.

[16] ʿAbd al-ʾAmīr Mahdi Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī, ed., *ʾAshwāq al-ʿUshshāq fi al-ʾAdab al-ʿArabī* (Baghdad: Manshurāt wa-Tawziʿal-Maktabah al-ʿĀlamiyyah, 1985), 83.

In addition to expressing his own predicament, his poems also contained a critique of the values and norms of his society; and it was this critique or unwillingness to play by the rules of society that made him lose the chance to become Layla's husband.

The poems, to some extent, reflect the world in which the poet lived, but that is not all that the poems entailed, for through the poems, the poet offers a critique of that world as well as constructs an alternative world. The poems also become a means for recuperating all that he lost. Through the poems he could not only record what happened, but also re-live what happened. Thus the poems become a repository of everything he felt about what he had lost. By losing her, he lost his sense of being connected with others. All his feelings became intensely focused on one person: Layla. Beyond her, there was an immense void. Through Layla he felt real, but through her loss, he experienced nothingness. Without Layla in his life, the flow of time becomes meaningless or even takes a more menacing aspect. Alienation, separation and exile are punishments that are inflicted on him by *āl-dahr* (Time) or *āl-zamān* (Time).[17] ʾAydī al-zamān (Time's hands) carry him away on a means of transportation that has neither teeth nor claws. He covers much territory: Najd, al-Hijaz, al-Yaman, Hadrawmat, al-Iraq, Mecca, Damascus. But even when he is away, his heart and mind were still occupied with her.[18]

Qays is only too aware of the instability and changes (zamānin ʾamsā bina qadd taqallaba) that are brought about by the passage of time. Some of those changes have hurt him

[17] This is expressed in such verse as: Laqad ḥamalat ʾaydī al-zamān maṭiyyatī, ʿalā markabin mustaʿtili al-nābi wa-al-ẓufri. Majnun, *Diwan Majnun Layla*, ed., ʻAbd al-Sattār Aḥmed Farrāj, 153.

[18]Ibid., 55; see Hajartuka mushtāqan wa-zurtuka khaʾifan, wa-manā ʿalayya al-dahra fīka raqīb.

deeply and he does not want to have anything to do with those who rejoice at his misfortune.[19] He accuses al-Dahr (Time) of being unfair to him.[20]

Bodari too was at odds with the law, except in his case, it is the colonial law and order that stood in his way. Bodari toys with the idea of taking the law into his own hands but decides against it. Instead, he rails against it and says if it were not for the colonial apparatus and its penal laws, his rival (Mohamed Shabeele) would not have succeeded in marrying Hodan. The implication here is that if there were no colonial authority and Somaliland was still just a clan society with no central authority to answer to, he could have used force or the threat of force to prevent his rival (Mohamed Shabeele) from marrying Hodan. It was this implicit and explicit critique of their respective societies in their poetry by both Bodari and Qays that is one of the reasons (if not the main reason) for their troubled relationship with their societies. By criticizing society's underlying values, they were highlighting its weakness and undermining it, and that is why the relevant power structures were hostile to them.

Qays and Bodari do not only criticize society in general, they also criticize their own friends. Qays says, "My friends, if I were healthy and you were ill, I would not have done what you did."[21] And whenever his two best friends put pressure on him and try to dissuade him from

[19]Ibid., 323; the full line of verse is: Fa-lā marḥaban bi-alshāmitīn bi-hajrina, wa-la zamanin amsā bina qad taqallaba.

[20] Ibid., 126, see Wa-tallāhi īnna al-dahru fi dhāti baynanā, ʿalayya lahā fi kulli ḥalin laja'iru.

[21] Ibid., 303, the Arabic verse is Khalīlayya law kuntu al-saḥiḥa wa-kuntuma saqīmayn lam afʿal ka-fiʿlikumā biyā.

pursuing Hodan, Bodari often responds by telling them that they do not understand him, and at times he even mocks them.[22]

Families and obstacles

Hodan's family used to guard Hodan because they were afraid she would be abducted by Elmi or his kinsmen.[23] Layla's family, too, made concerted efforts to prevent contacts between her and Qays, although their efforts were not successful. Layla's family and tribe even acquired legal permission from the Sultan of their area to kill Qays because his love poems on Layla were considered gross violations of the tribal code of honor that could be avenged by death.

Conflict

Despite their love for each other, Qays and Layla's love was not free of conflict. For instance, the two of them clashed over the issue of secrecy where Layla claimed that she kept their love a secret but he had revealed their love to the public.[24] Although Qays sometimes says that he, too, had kept their love a secret, this claim flies in the face of the many poems in which he openly describes how deeply he loved her. At times he even seems to reject this whole notion of secrecy and equates it with terminating his love of Layla. Thus when someone tells him that love is only good if it is kept a secret, he replies by saying he would never forget her and that his love of Layla has no end.[25] Even if the poet succeeds in overcoming the urge to compose poems

[22] Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa?*, 45, 51.

[23] Ibid., 55-56.

[24] al-Ṭā'ī, ed., ʾA*shwāq al-ʿUshshāq*, 80.

[25] Ibid., 9; Qays's attitude to secrecy is inconsistent, for there are instances in which he claims, despite much evidence to the contrary, to have kept their love a secret. The problem with secrecy is that it contains an internal contradiction in that for secrecy to be successful means

or speak about his love, he could still end up involuntarily betraying his secret. Thus keeping love a secret is not a question that can just be settled through will power, for the secret may be betrayed by the body when it shows signs of its lovesickness[26] or by the eyes.[27]

Bodari managed to keep his love secret for only a few months. During that time his friends began to notice the changes that occurred to him and after insistent questioning he told them what was going on.

Extremes

Qays engages in extreme behaviors such as kissing the ground that Layla had walked on and kissing and the walls of the house where she used to live.[28] At times he is found even naked in public.[29] He even confirms in his verse that this was the case and says his love of Layla had reduced him to that.[30] Bodari does not carry out such extreme behavior, nevertheless, he too

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nobody or only a select number of individuals should know the secret, which means the secret should be kept from the public, but composing poetry about it ensures that the public either comes to know the secret or at least becomes aware that there is a secret. In other words, the audience has a vested interest in the failure of the protagonists' attempts to keep their love a secret because that makes it possible for them to know the content of the secret.

[26] Ibid., 17, the pre-Islamic poet complained that his own body had revealed his secret love.

[27] Ibid, 16; Ibn Nubātah al-Misri bemoaned that the tears in his eyes had betrayed him and uncovered his secret love.

[28] Majnun, *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*, ed., ʻAbd al-Sattār Aḥmed Farrāj, 170.

[29] Nizami, *Layla and Majnun*, ed.and trans. R. Gelpke (Boulder: Shambhala, 1978), 161.

[30] Majnun, *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*, ed. Farrāj, 305; the Arabic verse is Muʿadhdhibati lawlāki ma kuntu saʾilan, ʾaduru ʿala al-ʾabwāb fi al-nāsi ʿāriya.

became a public spectacle. He was an object of public curiosity, and wherever he went individuals questioned him about his love to satisfy their curiosity and to seek entertainment.[31]

Love as war

Qays often portrays love as war. Qays says that he was invaded by the soldiers of war from every direction "Ghazatnī junūd al-ḥubbi min kulli jānibin."[32] In a similar vein, Bodari describes himself as someone who was ganged upon and who had to hide his face in shame. He also says he is like someone whose livestock were taken by force and who could not defend his property.[33]

Love as slavery

Qays follows the literary convention that portrays the lover as a slave of the beloved. He calls himself "ʿabdin mutayyamin", whereas Bodari admits that love has overpowered him, but he does not go as far as calling himself a slave of love.

Alienation

The experience of love alienates Qays from his community so much that he becomes a stranger in his own country.[34] He then leaves his domicile and roams the Arabian Peninsula and

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[31] Shabeele, Rashiid, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa?*, 58-59.

[32] Majnun, *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*, ed. Farrāj, 98. This is a clever deployment of the analogy between love and war, and it is the opposite of the depiction of the poet as a hero who engages in war, invades, or conquers.

[33] The relevant lines are: U hagoogtay sidii geesi ay niman ka hiisheene, U hiloobay sidii wiil la dhacay kadin ay haysteene, U hiloobay sidii wiil la dhacay kadin ay haysteene, in Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*?, 62.

[34] Majnun, *Dīwān Majnün Laylā*, ed. Farrāj, 53; the Arabic verse is "ʾAzallu gharīb al-dār fī ārdi ʿamir, ʿalā kulli mahjurin hunaka gharīb."

beyond to the Levant (al-Sham) and Iraq which only worsens his situation and he becomes "a stranger who is humiliated in every country."[35]

Later, he abandons the company of human beings altogether and lives in the desert with animals. Bodari, too, retreats from public life, loses his appetite for food and becomes bed-ridden. Even his death could be considered a form of suicide because it was most probably linked to his loss of appetite for food, which in turn, was related to loss of the appetite for life. Similarly, Qays's ability to enjoy life hinges on Layla. Once he loses her, he loses interest in life.

Wound

Both Qays and Bodari believe that love wounds. Qays declares, "love in which the lover is not wounded is not love."[36] Furthermore, Qays depicts love as a creature with claws that hurt and bloody him.[37] Tapping into a similar vein, Bodari responds to the girls who wanted to dissuade him from paying too engrossed with Hodan by telling them how much their words hurt him:

"Oh girls, you have touched and torn my wound.
You have buffeted the heart which I was nursing back to health."[38]

Death

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[35] Ibid., 60; the original line in Arabic is "Gharīb yuqāsī al-dhulla fi kulli baldatin."

[36] Ibid., 280; in Arabic: Lā khayra fi al-ḥubbi laysat fīhi qariʿatun, kaʾanna sāhibuhā fi nazʿi mawtuni.

[37] Ibid., 254, 247.

[38] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri," 198. The Somali version which is in Haji Wareer's audio cassette is Idinkuna halkii qoomanayd baad i qabateene, Qalbigaan bogsiinaayey baad qac iga siiseene."

According to Qays, love inevitably leads to death, as when declares: "Love that does not lead to death is not love."[39] Elmi Bodari, too, associates love with death on more than on one occasion.[40]

Failure

A common denominator between Qays and Bodari is that all the attempts to unite with their beloved in marriage ended in failure. Instead of Qays uniting with Layla, she was forced to marry Ward bin Muhammad al-ʿUqayli (sometimes he is referred to as al-Thaqafi after his tribe Thuqayf).[41] That she was forced into marrying him is clear from the way the marriage proposal was presented to her. She was told by her family that both Qays and Ward had asked for her hand in marriage and she has to decide which of the two would be her husband, but she was also explicitly told to choose Ward and was warned if she did not choose him, she would not only be put to death but her corpse would be mutilated.[42] In the case of Bodari, it is he, rather than Hodan, who is forced into marriage. There is a role reversal here because, usually, in Somali and Arab cultures, to the extent that it happens, it is women, not men, who are forced into marriages, and the main reason his relatives succeeded in forcing their will on him was because by then he was so weak physically and psychologically and so vulnerable from prolonged suffering that he

[39] Majnun, *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*, ed. Farrāj, 165; the Arabic verse is: Famā khayru ʿishqin laysa yaqtulu ʻahluhu, kama qatala al-ʿushshāq fi sālifi al-dahri.

[40] Examples of this are his verses Iftiinka uma soo baxo ninkii iilka jiifsadaye, wixii kaa adkaadaaba waa aakhiro kale e, Rashiid Shabeele, *Ma Dhabbaa Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*?, 19.

[41] Nizami calls him Ibn Salam instead of Ward bin Muhammad al-ʿUqayli and says he belonged to the Asad tribe, see Nizami, *Layla & Majnun*, 59.

[42] Majnun, *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*, ed. Farrāj, 122, see also ʾAbu al-Faraj al-ʾIsbahāni, Kitāb al-Aghāni (Bulak Edition, A.H. 1285/ A.D. 1868) v.1, 171-172.

was not in a position to resist (the deterioration of his health continued until he became completely bed-ridden in his final days).

The parallels are not just between Qays and Bodari but also between Layla's father and the man who marries Hodan (Mohammed Shabeele). After Qays's death, Layla's father gives the real reason why he rejected Majnun's offer which is that as an Arab man, he was afraid of 'ar or scandal and "qubh al-uhdhutha" (disgraceful talk) about his family, and had he known that it would end this way, he would not have rejected Qays's marriage offer.[43] By giving priority to social considerations in deciding who will marry Layla, her father doomed Qays and Layla to great suffering and an unhappy life. Similarly, the decision by Hodan's family to marry her to Mohamed Shabeele had horrendous consequences for Bodari even though when judged strictly from the angle of the prevalent values and mores of Somali society, Mohamed Shabeele had played by the rules. This is the point that Shabeele uses in his own defense when he is asked by his own son why he married a woman when he knew there another man was in love with her, his answer was basically that Hodan was at the time a bachelorette who was eligible for marriage and he followed the marriage protocols of Somali culture and had not done anything wrong. Which means that unlike Layla's father, Hodan's husband, even in hindsight, expressed no regret about what he did.[44] Qays calls Layla's husband a dog but he only does it after Layla's husband insults him.[45] Bodari is more restrained in his verbal jabs at Hodan's husband and does not call

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[43] ʾAbu al-Faraj Al-ʾIsbahāni, Kitāb al-Aghāni (Bulak Edition, A. H. 1285/A.D. 1868) v.2, 15.

[44] Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa Loo Dhintaa*. 81-82.

[45] Farraj, Diwan Majnun Layla, 308.

him a dog, but portrays him as a weakling who had to rely on the clout of some of the more powerful denizens of Berbera in order to achieve his goal.[46]

Sexuality

Qays claimed he had kissed Layla eight times.[47] He also often mentions the sweet taste of her mouth which reinforces his claim.[48] There is less evidence in the poems of physical contact between Bodari and Hodan than between Qays and Layla, even though in some of his poems Bodari insinuates that he had seen her hands and legs unclothed and perhaps even had intimate physical contact with her.[49]

Flexible constellations:

Conventional characters

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[46] Ibid., 65, The verse in which he says this is: Muruq kuma kaxaysanine, rag buu magansanaayaaye.

[47] Majnun. *Dīwān Majnün Laylā*, ed., Farrāj, 308.

[48] al-Ṭaʾi, ed., *ʾAshwāq al-ʻUshshāq*, 83.

[49] The relevant verses here are recited in Haji Wareer's audio cassette:

Hadday ili wax qabanayso oo lagu qaboobaayo
Oo qurux la daawado mar uun aadmi ku qancaayo
Hablayahaw, qadraba soo arkiyo qaarakii Hodane;
See also Shabeele, *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*?, 42-43.
Abdillahi and Andrzejewski provide this translation:

If the eye catches sight of something that brings it solace and coolness
And if a human being can achieve any contentment at all in the beauty
which he beholds, Then I have seen it in Qatra and in the limbs of Hodan;
Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of ʿIlmi Bowndheri," 198; Whatever opinion Hodan's family might have held of Bodari in the beginning, it was these lines that suggested he had seen Hodan naked or partially naked that probably turned them against him and extinguished any possibility that they would agree to him marrying their daughter.

One of the conventions of Arabic Ghazal or ‘Udhri poetry is that it involves a number of characters who can be divided into two main categories. There are those who play a positive part in the love story and support the two individuals who are in love and help them in their attempts to see each other and develop their relationship. These are *al-Khalīl* (friend), *al-Sadīq* (companion), *al-Rafīq* (comrade), *al-Nasīh* (advisor).[50] Then there are those who are opposed to the love between the two individuals (it could also be that they are simply executing the instructions of those who want to derail the relationship). These characters include *al-Raqīb* (the spy), *al-Wāshī* (the slanderer), *al-Ḥāsid* (the envious), al-ʿAdhīl (the blamer), and al-Gharīm (the opponent).[51] Both types of individuals are also found in Somali poetry, sometimes the names of these characters are borrowed from the Arabic while other times, a Somali word is used. Despite the problems they faced from many quarters, Bodari and Qays had some very loyal supporters who tried to help them. Musa Farah and Tabase are two examples of steadfast Bodari loyalists. Another example is the group of Berbera women who made several attempts to bring him together with Hodan, and when that failed, gave him the opportunity to choose any one of them for marriage.

Qays received help at least initially from the chieftain Nawfal, but Nawfal withdrew his help once he found out that the Sultan had given permission to Layla’s tribe to kill Qays. Nizami cites three other characters who were sympathetic to Qays and who tried to help him. One was

[50] ‘Al-Ṭā’ī, ed., *ʾAshwāq al-ʿUshshāq*, 148.

[51] The above convention, and consequently its technical vocabulary, is less theoretically developed in Somali literature than in Arabic literature.

his maternal uncle Salim Amiri.[52] Another one was the rider who delivered to him a letter from Layla.[53] The third one was the youth from Baghdad.[54]

Seeing and talking to the beloved:

Elmi Bodari used to like to talk with Hodan very much. If talking with Hodan was not possible, then the second best thing he liked was to hear stories about her. The same was true of Qays with regard to Layla. But the language that Bodari uses is not only literally different (Bodari uses Somali while Qays uses Arabic), it is also qualitatively different from Qays's. Bodari's language is more restrained than Qays's and contains a lesser number of mystical themes. Bodari's verses are also less contradictory and are conveyed in a lower emotional register than Qays's. (However, Bodari's poetry is on a higher emotional register than the poetry of his Somali contemporaries and predecessors).

Despite the mystical and religious influences on his poetry, Bodari's poetry still has a distinct Somali flavor. Surely, he has not invented the balancing of these elements in Somali poetry, nevertheless, his work is a fine example of such a balancing act. For restraint is a fundamental mark of traditional Somali culture and poetry and he had, to a significant degree, broken that restraint. But he did not go too far. As it was, he was already testing the Somali culture, stretching it beyond its usual parameters. To have gone too far (as far as Majnun for example) would have hurt his credibility. Still, Bodari was criticized for losing control of himself, for emotional instability, and for weakness (weakness here means his unconformity to

[52] Nizami, *Layla & Majnun,* 160.

[53] Ibid., 141.

[54] Ibid., 180.

the masculine heroic ideal of Somali culture), but even though barbs were directed at him which questioned his emotional and mental fitness, he was not looked upon by the rest of the society as a mad man, the way Qays was looked upon by the rest of society.

The supernatural

Both Bodari and Qays refer to supernatural experiences. In the case of Qays it comes in the form of ṭayf (apparition, phantom, fantasy). He also refers to Hatif (a voice from an unknown source). Bodari, too, is visited by apparitions in his sleep. Moreover, he mentions towards the end of his life that he does not care for this world any more, and that there is another world that has seized his attention.[55]

Life and poetry

Qays at times expresses inconsistent, even contradictory ideas. Bodari sticks to a narrower range of ideas which makes his poetry tight and well-knit, while Qays's poetry seem at times amorphous and bursting at the seams. There is also much less dispute regarding the historical facts of Elmi Bodari's life. Though various versions of some of the details of his life were given, the overall contours of his life are known. Besides, there is no doubt that he is a real person who actually lived.

[55] Haji Wareer audio cassette.

CHAPTER FIVE

The colonial encounter and the emergence of the Somali subject

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Somaliland's society went through an experience that it had not gone through before, namely to be governed by a European country. Although this was not the first time that Somaliland was dominated by a foreign power, for Somaliland was under Egyptian administration before the British arrived, the Somali encounter with the British was different from the Somali encounter with the Egyptians in that as Muslims, Somalis shared religious and cultural affinities with the Egyptians that they did not share with the British. The subjection of Somaliland to British rule, therefore, had greater impact and more far-reaching consequences than the brief Egyptian administration. The fact that the British entry into Somaliland took place as a result of treaties that were signed between Britain and coastal Somalis does not diminish the importance or the effects of that entry.[1] Somali society was faced with a new reality, an alien power that could call on much bigger resources than any Somali clan or combination thereof, was now in their midst. The old balance of power between the clans was disrupted, and the initiative with regard to making collective political decisions slipped to British hands. The full impact of the British administration was not felt immediately but took some time to gather and take effect, for initially, British presence in Somaliland was confined to the coast and the British had a policy of running the protectorate with a light hand. So even though the British position in Somaliland looked strong, it was in fact not as strong as it seemed. The language, culture and much of the geography of the country was unfamiliar to

[1] For the texts of these treaties and discussions of their contents see Cabdiraxaman C. Faarax "Barwaaqo", *Sooyaal: Ina Cabdalla Xasan Ma Sheekh Buu Ahaa Mise…?* (Ottawa: Hal-Aqoon Publishers, 2012),56-84; see also Cabdirisaaq Caqli, *Sheekh Madar: Asaasaha Hargeysa* ([Hargeisa]: Cabdirisaaaq Caqli, 2005?], 149-179.

British administrators, which often resulted in confusion and misunderstandings in dealings between Somalis and British officials.

There were also some obvious contradictions. The treaties signed between various Somali clans and the British explicitly stated that they were for protecting and maintaining the independence of Somalis, yet in reality, British administration of the protectorate meant that important political and economic decisions were now being made by the British, not Somalis. Furthermore, although the British had no doubt about the strategic importance of Somaliland on the route to India and was committed to preventing its falling in the hands of a rival power as well as its valuable role as a source of livestock for feeding British military garrison in Aden, it had doubts about whether the costs of managing the protectorate was commensurate with the benefits derived from it. It was in this situation of British doubts and uncertainty regarding their level of commitment to the Somaliland project and the Somalilanders' unease with losing control over their own affairs that Muhammad Abdille Hassan's rebellion took place.

The immediate effect of the rebellion was to exacerbate the sense of doubt and uncertainty among both British and Somalis, but paradoxically, the long-term effect of the rebellion was that it led to greater British involvement in Somaliland. In other words, doubts and uncertainty became a full-blown crisis. By the time Elmi Bodari appears on the scene in the early nineteen thirties, Muhammad Abdille Hassan was defeated but the crisis was not over. On the contrary, the crisis had become deeper, for with the greater military involvement came the realization that the British needed to do more in order to win the peace, which required convincing Somalis that the British presence among them did not mean continuous and

devastating military conflict but progress and development. But though they realized the need to do more in developing the protectorate, they also knew that one of the lessons of the war with Muhammad Abdille Hasan was for the British administrators to tread lightly and refrain from too much interference in Somali affairs. It is this British vacillation between the need to do more and a policy of self-restraint that the defined the interaction between the British and Somalis. It is also in this context of British vacillation and uncertainty that the Somali colonial subject emerged, and this uncertainty will cast its shadow over the Somali subject for a long time to come.

The international situation also contributed to this sense of anxiety. The British expansion into Somaliland was brought about by the withdrawal of the Egyptians from Somaliland and Harar, which was precipitated by the Mahdi rebellion in Sudan. Furthermore, the Indian Mutiny (1857) which was a traumatic experience for both Indians and the British was still a recent memory and a reminder of the potential for unexpected upheaval. The fact that Somaliland was initially administered from India further underlined this point. The uncertainty and improvisation in British policy toward Somaliland can be glimpsed from this statement by Douglas Jardine, Secretary to the Administration of Somaliland from 1916 to 1921:

> Responsibility for this newly-acquired possession devolved upon the Government of India; and, like Aden, the Somali Coast was administered by the Government of Bombay. But on the 1st October, 1898, owing to Somaliland's intimate connexion with the political situation in Abyssinia, and with a view to the development of the resources of the interior, the administration was transferred to the foreign office.[2]

These doubts, however, did not stop Britain's takeover of Somaliland, which was part of the phenomenon of global European expansion. As Edward Said wrote,

[2] Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 35.

> "from 1815 to 1914 European direct colonial dominion expanded from about 35 percent of the earth's surface to about 85 percent of it. Every continent was affected, none more so than Africa and Asia."[3]

Needless to say different countries and locations were affected in different ways and Britain often followed conflicting policies, and in addition to the fact that British policies were contradictory, it took some time for British power to penetrate deep into Somali society.

In this chapter I will trace the process and the discursive shifts that led to the emergence of the modern Somali subject. I will also delineate how this process was marked by crisis and how both the British and Somalis adopted definitions of Somali character and identity that met their needs and rejected those that did not accommodate those needs.

One of the major characteristics of the age of Western expansion was the prominence of classification. The urge to categorize and classify which always existed took a much bigger role when western explorers, hunters and colonialists came in contact with non-Western societies some of them for the first time. The instruments, techniques, and methods of classifying flora and fauna, minerals, and human beings underwent major development. When the British explorers, and later on, British hunters and administrators, arrived in Somaliland in the middle and late nineteenth century, they faced some difficulty in racially classifying Somalis. Many of the British travelers and officials gave the accounts of the origins of Somalis believed by most Somalis themselves that they were the product of intermarriage between Arab noblemen and the indigenous people of Somaliland. Although there is agreement among most of these accounts that the Somalis came about as a result of intermarriage between immigrants from Arabia and the indigenous people, there is less agreement about who were the indigenous people with whom the

[3] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 41.

Arabs intermarried.[4] The genealogies of Somali clans in Somaliland are mostly vague on this point. Only the Darood clan genealogy explicitly mentions that their paternal Arab ancestor intermarried with a woman called Donbiro who belonged to the Dir clan, which means that by the time the Darood arrived in Somaliland, Somalis were already established there. The Habar Jeʿlo section of the Isaq clan is another sub-clan that explicitly states that they are the progeny of an indigenous Abyssinian woman and Sheikh Ishaq bin Ahmed, the progenitor of the Isaq clan. Apparently, the undefined clan or racial identity of their maternal ancestors did not present to Somalis a problem that needed to be resolved. But with the arrival of the British the question of Somali identity assumes bigger importance and Somali genealogy becomes of the focus of much attention.

Douglas Jardine for instance claims that Somalis came about as a result of two migrant groups intermarrying with the autochthonous people; first, the migration of Gallas from Arabia to Somaliland sometime B.C., and later, the immigration of Arabs into Somaliland during the rise of Islam early in the seventh century. Regardless of who intermarried with whom, all of these accounts agree that Somali people were born out of mixing of Arabs or Middle Easterners and the indigenous inhabitants of Somaliland. This hybrid Somali identity posed a problem for the British system of classification which, despite the fact that the English themselves are a mixed people of the indigenous Britons, the Angles and Saxons who are believed to have arrived in Britain in the 5th Century A.D., the Normans who conquered the country in 1066, as well as others, preferred to classify people as discrete racial groups that will occupy clearly demarcated sites in the colonial racial order. The problem that Europeans faced in classifying Somalis can be seen from the references to Somalis in early colonial writing which varied from including

[4] Abdi Sheikh-Abdi agrees that the Dir clan is the earliest known Somali clan, see Abdi Sheikh-Abdi, *Divine Madness* (London, New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1993), 21.

Somalis in the general category of Oriental to that of black, African, or just plain Somali. One of the reasons this posed a problem was that in the colonial system of classification, despite some overlap in the qualities associated with these categories, they were, at least in theory, supposed to signify different qualities and different positions in the colonial pecking order. The challenge that Europeans faced in categorizing Somalis could be seen from Judith Thurman's account of Isak Dinesen's reaction upon first meeting Farah Aden who would later become her employee and the manager of her farm, "Unfamiliar with the variety of African physiognomies, she first mistook him for an Indian, but he was a Somali of the Habr Yunis tribe."[5]

An essential step in the attempts to correctly place the Somali in the European racial classification system was to establish the Somalis' relations with other racial groups, especially their neighbors, and more specifically Ethiopians (sometimes called Abyssinians or Gallas) and Bantus. Let us take relations between Somalis and Ethiopians first. As was indicated above, there is a general belief among Somalis and some Ethiopians that Gallas (an Ethiopian ethnic group who prefer to be called Oromos and who share linguistic affinity with Somalis) once lived in the lands now inhabited by Somalis and that the Oromos were pushed further south and west by Somalis.[6] In the nineteenth century, with the Ethiopian state growing stronger by acquiring arms from France and Italy the historical pendulum swung in the other direction and Oromos and

[5] Judith Thurman, *Isak Dinesen: the Life of a Storyteller* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), [114].

[6] Somali expansion from north to south is the oldest theory of how Somalis occupied the part of the Horn of Africa where they live now. There is a new theory that says Somalis actually originated in south-west Ethiopia and from there migrated north, see Ali Abdirahman Hersi's PhD dissertation "The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1977), 17-27.

other Ethiopians began expanding into Somali territory.[7] Some of the British travelers saw the Ethiopian expansion into Somali territories first-hand. Discussing the tense relations between Somalis and Ethiopians, and how Somalis got ready for military conflict when they came in contact with Ethiopians, the British hunter C.V.A Peel wrote, "I noticed that my men, fearing Gallas, carried their rifles more than usual."[8] Peel also notices how the Ethiopians had set up a command center from which to take over Somali lands[9] and their tactic of waiting next to watering holes so that they would expropriate livestock from Somali nomads when the latter arrived to water their livestock.[10]

There was no direct documented competition about land with Bantu speakers in Somaliland since there were hardly any Bantus in Somaliland, but other Somalis further south of Somaliland had come in contact with Bantus and there was conflict between them, and the sense of Bantus as a rival ethnic group probably had filtered into the consciousness of people in the British Somaliland Protectorate even before the territory became a protectorate. Furthermore, members of the Somaliland diaspora had settled and worked in various East African countries which brought them in contact with Bantu communities. As a matter of fact one of the earliest Somali modern organizations was set up in Kenya by Somalilanders in that territory.[11] So the

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[7] *The Somali Peninsula: A New Light on Imperial Motives* (Mogadishu : Information Services of the Somali Government, 1962), 8-9.

[8] C.V.A Peel, *Somaliland: Being an Account of Two Expeditions into the Far Interior, Together with a Complete List of Every Animal and Bird Known to Inhabit That Country* (London: F.E. Robinson and co., 1900), 96.

[9] Ibid., 130-31.

[10] Ibid., 131.

[11] See "The Isaq Somali Diaspora and Poll-tax agitation in Kenya," E .R. Turton, *African Affairs*. 73, no. 292 (1974).

Somali's relations with their neighbors, the Bantus and Ethiopians was marked by hostility, and with the latter group seen as an existential threat to Somalis, so much so that when both British Somaliland and Italian Somalia became independent and united in 1960 and formed the Somali Republic, that Republic immediately got embroiled in conflict with both Ethiopia and Kenya over the Somali-inhabited border with these two countries, which is in many ways a continuation of the conflicts that Somalis had with Ethiopians and Bantus before Somalis had a state. Somaliland was subjected to British governance in a context of competition and hostility between Somalis and both Ethiopians and Bantus (the majority in Kenya), and out of these two conflicts the one of immediate relevance to Somaliland was that between Somalis and Ethiopians.

Besides the political, economic, and military matters, in order to consolidate their rule in Somaliland, the British colonial authorities also focused on two main areas: understanding the geography of the country and the culture of its people. Some of this gathering of knowledge was already in progress through commercial contacts and the activities of explorers like C. J. Cruttenden, Charles Johnston, Richard Burton, John Manning Speke, and others, before Somaliland formally became a British Protectorate. The British administrators of the Protectorate built on the information provided by these travelers and contacts, and also used the experiences they acquired from colonialism in other parts of the world. But this was a long and painstaking process of accumulating information and constructing an archive of knowledge about Somaliland. In the meantime, views and positions regarding Somalis had to be articulated and decisions were taken and implemented. Underpinning all of this were certain basic assumptions about the Somali character.

"I have made an attempt to give the reader an insight into the character of the Somalis, so as to enable him to form his own opinion,"[12] wrote the doctor Ralph Drake-Brockman in his book *British Somaliland*. Ralph Drake-Brockman had lived for several years in Somaliland, and for him, the Somali character was clearly a subject worth studying and dissecting. In this he was following in the footsteps of other British explorers, hunters, and administrators before him who tried to nail down the essential qualities of Somalis. However, this was not a search for understanding for its own sake but rather an attempt to figure out Somalis in order to make the task of managing them or governing them easier and more effective. Ralph Drake-Brockman himself made this point clear when he stated that, "it can only be by means of a better understanding of the ethnology and character of a native race that the complex problem of administration can be solved."[13] Since this is not knowledge for its own sake, but as admitted by its proponents, is knowledge for colonial administration, then the efforts to establish the content of Somali character is an attempt to elucidate aspects of this character that are likely to have impact either positively or negatively on the colonial project.

The British explorer Richard Burton was one of the earliest commentators on Somali character which he said was marked by harboring passions that can easily be aroused. Richard Burton advanced the theory of Somali susceptibility to being overwhelmed by its passions in order to explain the assault on his expedition in Berbera which resulted in severe injuries to him and to John Speke and the death of Lieutenant Stroyan, a member of the expedition. The gist of Richard Burton's explanation was that the attack on his expedition did not occur because

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[12] Ralph Drake-Brockman, *British Somaliland* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1912), viii.

[13] Ibid., vii.

Somalis were opposed to the expedition, but because Somalis wanted to loot the belongings of the members of the expedition, then once their passions were aroused, they lost control of themselves and committed murder. Thus Burton attributes the attack on him to the Somali's inability to control his emotions once those emotions are excited.

The Colonial Secretary of the Somaliland Protectorate, Douglas Jardine, too, stresses this same point about the excitability of Somalis, and says it posed a problem for governing them:

> In civil life the Somali's excitability is a constant cause of anxiety to the political officer. Mercurial in temperament, he will be happy and contented, loyal and malleable for months on end; and then suddenly some incident, be it small or great, will rouse him to an almost uncontrollable state of excitement in which he is not responsible for anything he may say or do.[14]

Jardine adds that Somali excitability did not only present a problem to the civilian administration but also to the military one: "During the earlier expeditions against the Mullah, the Somali's excitability was always regarded as greatly detracting from his undoubted value as a soldier."[15]

Moreover, Jardine did not consider Somali emotionalism or excitability as having solely negative consequences but also held that it had its bright side because as he put it, "if his excitable temperament still tends to unsteadiness in action, it also gives him a tremendous elan."[16]

Most importantly, even though according to these British accounts the tendency to excitement was a deep-seated and natural characteristic of Somalis, it was not an unsolvable problem, and

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[14] Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, 28.

[15] Ibid., 27.

[16] Ibid., 27.

the solution lay in colonial administration of Somalis and teaching them discipline whether in civilian life or the military one. Jardine cautions however that in order for the tutoring of the Somali to work, the British tutor himself must have particular qualities and should follow a specified approach:

> The officer, civil or military, whose duty it is to control Somalis, must bring a special aptitude to his task. He must be tolerant and good tempered; quick-witted and gifted with the right sense of humour; sympathetic and in close touch with native sentiment.[17]

To the depiction of Somalis as an emotional people later was added the idea of Somalis as a people who are easily motivated and easily discouraged. The quality of being easily encouraged and easily discouraged when displayed in a context of war is only one more piece of evidence of the Somalis' urgent need to be ruled by an outside power that has a more effective form of organization. Excitability, the need for discipline, and being easily discouraged were only part of a host of tropes that were attributed to Somali character, society, and even the physical environment in Somaliland.

My analysis of early British writings on Somalis shows three categories of writers: one, those hunters or explorers such as Cruttenden, John Manning Speke and C.V.A. Peel who only had briefly visited Somaliland or parts of Somaliland and who gave mostly biased or inaccurate accounts about Somaliland and its people; two, Individuals who actually lived in Somaliland such as Douglas Jardine and Dr Ralph Drake-Brockman who give a more complex and more accurate albeit colonially-tainted, portrayals of Somalis and Somali society; and three, eccentric

[17] Ibid., 28.

personalities like Sir Richard Burton whose observations regarding Somalis and Somali-inhabited areas falls in-between the above two categories.

One of the earliest surveying accounts of Somaliland was that of C.J. Crutttinden who wrote a report on his visit to the Somali coast on the Gulf of Aden.[18] Cruttenden visited Berbera, Zeila, Bulhar and from there he proceeded to northeast Somaliland and then further on to Majeerteen territory. He seemed to be on an information gathering mission and wanted to know about Somaliland clans and the geography of the country. Western travelers who were on information collecting missions often hid their real agenda, Cruttenden, however, admitted in his report that he passed the information he collected to the British government.[19] But while in this respect he was unusual, in many other respects he fit the model of the biased European. For instance, he described a whole clan, the Habr Awal, as thieves.[20] Even if it were true that some items were stolen from him, he does not see any problem with tarring a whole group of people as thieves. Setting Manichaean oppositions between people is so ingrained in him that he is not satisfied with depicting the Somalis as an alien and in many ways deficient other but extends this approach to contrasting Somali clans with each other, praising some clans and condemning others, all apparently based on how much they accommodated him and catered to his ego. To give an idea of the sort of behavior that won his approval, consider what he wrote about the Warsangali or "Ahl Oor Singally" as he called them: "A second night of cloud and fog prevented

[18] J.C. Cruttenden, "Memoir on the Western or Edoor Tribes, Inhabiting the Somali Coast of N.-E. Africa, with the Southern Branches of the Family of Darood, Resident on the Banks of the Webbe Shebeyli, Commonly Called the River Webbe," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 19 (1849).

[19] Ibid., 74.

[20] Ibid., 54.

again our communication with the brig by rocket or blue-light, but the "seraj" or light of the English will long be held in remembrance by the Ahl Oor Singally, who could not sufficiently admire the one or the other."[21] And if such expression of admiration for the English by the Warsangali was not enough, he quotes a member of that clan to provide him with even more flattery: "You are the kings of this world in wisdom," said solemn Mohamonood Abdi, "And what are we in comparison! Thank heaven, our world is to come!"[22]

While such obsequious behavior won his endorsement, any show of self-respect by Somalis or Hararis irritated him, and he went to ridiculous extremes to undermine it. For example, the fact that Somalis and Hararis are very much attached to their religion and hold it in great esteem did not sit well with him and he criticized this attitude as unwarranted by pointing to the backwardness of the living conditions, as if only technologically advanced countries have a right to be proud of their religion.[23] Neither does the fact that he had not been to Harar deter him from passing judgment on life there. Cruttinden also warns about the veracity of Somalis who claim that there are ancient artifacts in Somaliland because as he put it, "an illiterate savage" could not tell "an inscription from an ornamental border on a stone."[24] But as he discredits Somali reports of archaeological sites or objects, he reveals that one of the aims of his journey was to find such sites or artifacts. So he is contradicting himself, for if the Somalis were not to be believed, the reasonable reaction from him would be to dismiss their claims as fabricated tales and leave it at that instead of spending time and effort in investigating them. And

[21] Ibid., 71.

[22] Ibid., 71.

[23] Ibid., 51.

[24] Ibid., 50.

here we come to the crux of the matter. The real reason he is discrediting Somali reports about the existence of antiquarian items in Somaliland is so that he would be the one who "discovers" them. In other words, these objects do not exist until he has proven that they exist. Cruttenden pretty much admits to this when he says that antiquarian artifacts did not exist in Somaliland because he had not found any, a claim that is undercut by his announcement that the nine mile long Berbera aqueduct was an ancient construction. His acknowledgment that Berbera was a center of trade for centuries further undermines his statement that there were no locations or objects of archaeological importance in Somaliland. The fact that he seems to think the Berbera aqueducts were not built by Somalis without providing any evidence also shows his prejudice which was a common European prejudice towards Africans who were portrayed as incapable of building architecturally complex structures.

If Cruttinden's mission in Somaliland was the gathering of information on the political, economic, social situation as well as the geography of the country, C. V. A. Peel's declared objective was the collecting of specimen to advance natural history research in his country but other motivations could not be ruled out given how the activities of hunting and exploring often advance political and colonial goals. Peel held a strongly negative opinion of Somalis and he rarely had anything positive to say about them. His hostile attitude was displayed in Aden before he arrived in Somaliland where he describes Somalis who came to apply to work for him as "black ruffianism, begging to be engaged"[25]; he takes part in a physical fight with Somalis over their passenger fees[26] and mocks their prayer ritual by falsely claiming that spitting was the last

[25] Peel, Somaliland, 3.

[26] Ibid., 4-5.

step in the ritual.[27] His negative views are not just limited to Somalis but also apply to the Arab porters in Aden whom he dismisses as "careless coolies" when one of his pieces of baggage falls into the Aden harbor.[28] He criticizes Aden itself upon first arriving there for robbing him of night sleep because of the "shrieks and howls of innumerable cats"[29] and later describes it in even more unflattering terms:

> A more odious place than Aden can hardly be imagined. Here I was obliged to remain three weeks, as I just missed a boat, and the next was taken off. I had not been here a week before I got fever, and felt generally ill. People affirm that there is only a bit of tissue paper between this spot and the nether regions. Although several people have no doubt fallen, we have as yet no record that they ever came back again to verify this assertion.[30]

He continues to display his antagonistic view of Somalis when he gets to Somaliland. Once the process of hiring Somalis for his expedition has been completed, he announces in very disrespectful language, "at length I collected a rabble of 23 men."[31] The men he is calling a "rabble" include the guide, headman, syce, trackers, as well as many others without whom his journey to the interior of Somaliland would not have been possible. But despite his admitted great reliance on Somalis for almost every aspect of his expedition he accuses them of being a hindrance to his work.[32] He also charges them with incompetence. Explaining hunting and trapping activities in Somaliland, he states, "This latter operation you must do entirely by

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[27] Ibid., 5.

[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Ibid., 3.

[30] Ibid., 159.

[31] Ibid., 8.

[32] Ibid., 101.

yourself. Natives will never take enough trouble to set them properly, and nearly always end by trapping themselves."[33]

Peel's purpose is not just to show Somalis as incompetent but to project himself as a "Mr. know-it-all", a take-charge person, a leader who makes decisions and carries them through. According to Peel, Somalis are not only incompetent but also cruel to animals. To support his point, Peel gives as examples, his observation of a Somali who cut a donkey's ear. The other example is the Somali method of slaughtering animals. The first act was definitely a case of gratuitous animal cruelty, if it happened the way he said it happened, whereas in the second case as Muslims, Somalis feel duty-bound to follow the Muslim ritual of slaughtering animals. Whatever criticisms that may be leveled at these two instances, however, pales in comparison with the mass slaughter of animals large and small, ranging in size from rhinoceroses and elephants all the way down to birds, insects, and butterflies that Mr. Peel carried out in Somaliland. The extent of the slaughter that Peel committed can be discerned from part of the subtitle of his book which says that it is "a complete list of every animal and bird known to inhabit that country, and a list of the reptiles collected by the author." The word "list" in this context is a bit misleading for it diverts attention from the fact that much of that list was accumulated through killing the creatures in the list; and Peel makes clear his intention in the introduction of the book when he wrote:

> …it seems to me odd that, considering the number of men who visit Somaliland, that no attempt has hitherto been made to make a list of the beasts and birds contained therein. This want I have endeavoured to supply in the following pages, being perfectly

[33] Ibid., 271.

> conscious of their many shortcomings, yet hoping they may be of some little use, help, and amusement to the hunters and collectors who may enter the country.[34]

Here too, the word "list" is as misleading as its previous use in the subtitle for it covers up the massive animal slaughter committed by him and other hunters. This paragraph also indicates that Peel's trip to Somaliland was not an isolated incident but was part of a larger enterprise where Westerners, mostly British, went to Somaliland on hunting and exploring expeditions. On his way to Somaliland, Peel met two officers in Aden who were also headed to Somaliland for hunting.[35] When he arrives in Somaliland, he avers that "there were no less than four separate shooting-parties just then in Berbera."[36] Peel also reported that while he was in Berbera "the fourth white man mauled in the last six months" was brought back to Berbera, a statistic which in addition to illuminating the dangers involved in hunting in Somaliland also indirectly provides a sense of the extent of hunting. It was not just men that took part in these trips, but women too.[37]

These expeditions were often backed in different ways by scientific or government institutions. Peel for instance was a fellow of the zoological society, a member of the Oxfordshire natural history society and field club, etc. Furthermore, British Government representatives had to give permission to these expeditions to proceed otherwise they could not take place. The government could even interrupt these trips and order them not to go to certain

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[34] Ibid., vii.

[35] Ibid., v.

[36] Ibid., 6.

[37] Ibid., 7, 165, 170.

locations as happened when a message from the British authorities ordering Peel not to proceed further to the Shabeelle river was delivered to him in Somaliland's interior.[38] The order came from the British Consul in Aden, but it is to Berbera that Peel heads upon receiving the order, Berbera being the center of British operations in Somaliland. Berbra is also where the Mad Mullah first showed signs of rebellion and also where Elmi Bodari fell in love with Hodan and a focal point in the constitution of the new Somali subject.

The description of Somalis in certain ways and the attribution of specific characteristics to Somalis were attempts produce a particular Somali subject that fulfilled certain tasks in the imperial project. These attempts were fraught with doubt and uncertainty and were not always successful but nevertheless they were real and tangible. Peel's claim of Somali cruelty to animals is best explained in this context, for it is soon extended to cruelty to human beings which is really the main issue here. That this is the case could be gleaned from the fact that even Ralph Drake-Brockman, the British doctor who actually lived for several years among Somalis and understood them better than most of his British contemporaries extended Somali cruelty to gratuitous killing of human beings, when in fact killing human beings in Somali society, as in many societies, is allowed only in a situation of war or to avenge murder. Furthermore, the fate of prisoners is regulated by customary law (xeer) and the Islamic religion, and abuse of prisoners through mutilation or wrongful death were a violation of Somali law and religious law. Ralph Drake-Brockman is however correct in associating the Somali rebel Muhammad Abdille Hasan

[38] Ibid., 175.

with the mutilation of prisoners but this was a violation of the rules of both the traditional and religious rules of war rather than applications of those rules.[39]

British travel writers and officials skip over the rules of war in Somali society, partly because of their little knowledge of Somali culture and the Islamic religion but also because projecting this picture of Somalis sat well with some of the basic philosophical and psychological premises of the empire. Muhammad Abdille Hasan excessive cruelty is generalized to all Somalis and this way the rebellion itself is used to make the case for British governance. It was not just in Somaliland that rebellion was used by the British to solidify their rule either. The same thing happened in India after the Sepoy rebellion, where the British replaced the East India company's rule with more direct government control. The British also used the rebellion to politically discredit opposition to British rule by describing the rebellion as an attempt to bring back the tyrannical rule of the Mughal. Jenny Sharpe wrote in *Allegories of Empire*:

> All Muslims were believed to be rebels, and the popular base of the uprisings was rationalized as the desire of an enslaved race for the despotic rule of a Mogul emperor."[40]

Cruelty and incompetence are part of an arsenal of values by which some of the British try to establish Somali difference from the British. Another epithet that is used is that of Somalis

[39] Drake-Brockman, *British Somaliland*, 94.

[40] Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 59.

as untrustworthy liars. For Peel, the Somali is not only a thief but also "a champion liar."[41] He even gives advice about this to other hunters who may venture into Somaliland:

> In your intercourse with Somalis there are two maxims I would impress on the would-be sportsman: firstly, never believe what you hear; and secondly, never do what you are told.[42]

In a way there was nothing unique about Peel's vile descriptions of Somalis in the colonial context. Similar smears were leveled at Indians, Africans and other colonized people by some of the British colonialists. In his book *Masks of Conquest*, Gauri Viswanathan mentioned how the very idea of the Orient in British eyes stood for "a history of perfidy and calumny."[43]

But while they describe Somalis as liars and thieves, some of the British officials and explorers do not shy away from using blatantly deceptive and underhanded methods in dealing with Somalis. A relatively minor example of some of the methods deployed by the British is revealed by Lieutenant Eric Wilson who in order to appease racist Rhodesian troops who were being deployed in Somaliland tried to induce Somali soldiers to replace their traditional headdress the pugarees with the flat-hat that other African Askaris wore. Wilson knew that Somalis would reject such a proposal because it would signal the reduction of their status to that of other Africans who were at the bottom of the imperial racial ladder, so when he received a few hats he deliberately lied to the Somalis and used the scarcity of the number of hats as a ploy to convince Somalis of its value. Here is how he described the situation:

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[41] Peel, *Somaliland*, 135.

[42] Ibid., 93-94.

[43] Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest* : *Literary Study and British Rule in India.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 111.

> Somalis of the camel Corps wore the headdress, the pagri, with pride. Confident of their own superiority they were quick to resent anything that might be seen as tending to bring them into line with Bantu Africans. The machine gun company would be operating in support of the Northern Rhodesian Regiment whose askaris wore large bush hats, so I was told that I must get the Somalis to wear these. By good luck a first installment arrived of only four hats; I announced that I was sorry that there were enough of these splendid hats for the senior NCOs, so the rest would have to wait. To my relief the bait was taken and I saw Omer Kujog looking handsome and pleased with himself, parading with the hat worn at a striking angle. When the rest of the hats arrived they were eagerly grasped.[44]

It is important to note two things here. One, Lieutenant Eric Wilson was following military orders at a time of war and only lied out of necessity. Two, he valiantly fought in the battle to defend Somaliland from being overrun by Italian Fascists and fell prisoner to the Italians when Somaliland's defense crumbled. The falling of Somaliland to the Fascists in 1940 was one more instance which contributed to the sense of uncertainty around British rule over Somaliland, as other instances such as the policy of withdrawal from the interior during the war with Muhammad Abdille Hassan, a policy that had dire consequences for Somalis, and the British acquiescence in Ethiopian expansion into Somaliland even though Somaliland was by then a British Protectorate. Still, however, the fact remains that Eric Williams knowingly misled Somalis. This might be considered a white and relatively harmless lie, but in a way it was not so harmless in its implications because the order was issued probably to accommodate racist Rhodesian military officials who during deployment in Somaliland introduced discriminatory practices that constitute Somaliland's fleeting brush with overt racial discrimination.

A more serious example was the game that Liuetenatn Coghlan, the British resident in Aden, played on the Emir of Harar. The Emir had asked for help with a medical doctor but instead of sending him a doctor, Brigadier Coglan sent him "a Sayyed, who pretends to some

[44] Eric Wilson, *Journal of Anglo-Somali Society*, no.35, (Spring 2004): 7.

slight medical skill to him" along with some presents. Brigadier Coglan was aware that the Emir had tuberculosis but though that this fake doctor would serve English purposes well in that if the Emir died under his care, he (and by extension the British) would, because of his pedigree as a Sayyed, be unlikely to be accused of poisoning the Emir.[45]

It is not only British administrators and military personnel who engaged in these deceptive games, but also some of the harshest critics of Somalis. Peel for instance, upon the completion of his first trip Somaliland files a complaint with the British authorities for "dishonesty and general bad conduct" against four of the Somali members of his expedition including the headman, the very people who made his trip possible. What is even worse was that he did it behind their back with the object that they would never find work again on other expeditions.[46] In doing this, Peel was following in the footsteps of John Manning Speke who waited until his journey to Somaliland was over and when he was safely back in Aden he then filed charges against his translator and Abban (protector) Mr Sumutner of having committed acts of trickery and dishonesty. "As a result Sumunter was jailed for two months, fined 200 rupees, and banished with his family from Aden forever."[47]

The overall principle that regulated these types of deceptive behaviors was that the ends justified the means. Richard Burton, for instance, claimed he was a Muslim in order to be able to enter Mecca. Similarly, he claimed he was a Muslim, at least initially, in his journey to Harar, even though he later said that he abandoned that masquerade and revealed that he was a non-

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[45] Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in Africa*, edited by Gordon Waterfield (New York, Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 304.

[46] Peel, *Somaliland*, 158.

[47] Fawn Brodie, *The Devil Drives* (New York: Norton, 1967), 116.

Muslim upon entering Harar. A double standard was clearly in operation. One standard for the British and Europeans and another standard for Muslims, Somalis, and other non-Europeans. Cruttenden, Peel and Richard Burton could condemn Somalis for the most trifling incidents while they saw nothing wrong with their own breaches of elementary moral codes. But it is one thing to try to subject an ethnic, national or racial group to certain practices and ideas and quite another for those practices and ideas to become the dominant modes of dealing with and perceiving those groups. In this case, and for a variety of reasons ranging from Somali resistance and rejection of the harsh and demeaning ideas about Somalis that were put forward by Cruttenden, Peel and Burton, to the greater knowledge about Somali beliefs and way of life acquired by the British, to the unsuitability of those ideas and practices to the type of governance the British wanted to establish in Somaliland, led to the re-configuration of that model and eventually its replacement by a new model championed by British administrators and government personnel who lived in Somaliland several years and had better knowledge of Somali beliefs and ways of life. In other words, the imperial characterizations of Somalis had to fit the type of new subject that the empire needed in Somaliland, and the previous model espoused by the earlier travelers could not do that so it had to be replaced.

This new subject could not be defined without also touching on the issues of sexuality (male and female), and women. Based on their writings, the early travelers to Somaliland were not much interested in women or sexual matters. Other than passing comments here and there, they generally did not dwell on the subject with the notable exception of Richard Burton. The general reticence of British writers on the subject of sexuality could be explained by Ronald Hyam's observation:

> …whenever and wherever imperial rule became serious, as in India from the late eighteenth century or Africa from the late nineteenth century, British administrative and moral standards were tightened up , Protestant codes of behavior were asserted more importunately and 'social distance' between ruler and ruled were remorselessly widened. By 1914, in conjunction with the domestic triumph of Purity and prudery, the whole tone of the British empire had become radically different from what it had been only thirty years before."[48]

By the time that Somaliland became a British protectorate in 1885, the changes in British attitudes toward sexual relations with their colonial subjects were already underway and had moved in the direction of censuring sexual contacts. Another factor that had an even more important bearing on the situation was the fact that Somalis are Muslim, and the Islamic religion specifically bans pre-marital sex, adultery, and the marriage of non-Muslim men to Muslim women. The issue of sexual liaisons between various races and religious groups and nationalities is a controversial subject. Ronald Hyam views the adoption of more conservative Victorian attitudes and policies and the movement away from sexual relations between British and colonial subjects as a negative development. He also disagrees with the view that sexual relations in a colonial context necessarily privileges whites, particularly white males. Margery Perham, one of the British Africanists early in the twentieth century, and the author of *Major Dane*, a novel set in Somaliland, points out that there were differences in European attitudes toward sexual relations between Europeans and inhabitants of the colonies, and that this difference was also related to larger issues of governance, especially between the British and the French.[49]

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[48]Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: the British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 214.

[49] Margery Perham, *West African Passage: A Journey Through Nigeria, Chad, and the Cameroons* (London, Boston: Peter Owen, 1983), 140; also cited in Ronald Hyam, Sexuality and Empire, 170.

But despite this overall conservatism, on the part of both the British and Somalis, Gordon Waterfield mentions that while gathering information about Somaliland in preparation for his journey, Richard Burton had "consulted Arabs and Somalis, including prostitutes,"[50] from which it appears that there may have been Somali prostitutes in Aden in mid-nineteenth century. Richard Burton did not only collect information (and God knows what else, he was suffering from syphilis that was already in its secondary stage during his trip to Somaliland[51]), from prostitutes but he also attempted to give a scientific aura to his activities by claiming that he had measured the penis of a native of Somaliland[52]. He also believed that white men were not well versed in the art of sexuality "and hence it is said abroad that the English have the finest women in Europe and know least how to use them."[53] Moreover, he held that only debauched white women liked black men.[54] While Burton links sexual relations between black men and white women to an innate depravity of the white women who engage in such liaisons, Ralph E Drake-Brockman about half a century later, rejects such relations for threatening the position of whites in the imperial ladder, "I should here like to remind those ladies who try to correspond with these Somalis when they have left Europe, that they are not only doing themselves harm, but also Europeans in general, by thus putting themselves on the same level as natives."[55] As if that were not enough to make his point, the good doctor claims that Somalis could not understand the

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[50] Burton, *First Footsteps*, 29.

[51] Ibid., 260.

[52] Richard Burton, *Love, War and Fancy*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 10.

[53] Ibid., 143.

[54] Ibid., 10.

[55] Drake-Brockman, *British Somaliland*, 101.

refined sentiments that the European women were pouring into those letters, or as he put it, "The semi-savage mind cannot possibly appreciate the tender messages which invariably fill the greater portion of these letters."[56]

The Somali men and women that Ralph E. Drake-Brockman is referring to were ones who used to be taken from Somaliland and Aden to Europe along with Somali huts and other traditional artifacts and were put on display for Europeans to get a taste of the inhabitants of Africa and their lifestyle. But by the time of his writing, there were already Somalis, mostly seamen, who had not only been to Europe but even lived there. And while it was easier to police racial, social, and sexual interactions in the Somaliland Protectorate, it was much harder to do so in Britain itself and that was the apparent source of frustration in Ralph E. Drake-Brockman's comments.

Colonial travel writers and administrators did not only aim to educate European women about the truth of the Somali men. Their audience was wider, and to make it easy for that audience in the mother country to easily grasp the message, they used an image much closer to home, that of the Irish, so Somalis were dubbed the "the Irishman of Africa."[57] By drawing parallels between Somalis and the Irish, the British were invoking a set of images and associations that in the British minds were already linked to the Irish, images that were both positive and negative. The positive images included being handsome, sentimental, and having a gift of the gab. But the negative depictions could go beyond incompetence and irresponsibility into some really ugly depictions. The similarity between the Irish and Somalis is not limited to

[56] Ibid., 101.

[57] Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, 23.

the portrayals of both groups by the British, but also in their responses to British portrayals, in that both groups adopted some of those portrayals while rejecting others, and for very much the same reason, a reason which in the case of the Irish was explained by Angela Bourke:

> It was in the interest of members of the "Celtic" races, particularly the more privileged among them, to accept part of this model. Irish writers could reasonably collude in fostering an image of their essential nature as ethereal and fey when the media alternative was the apelike image propounded in Punch and other periodicals.[58]

Like the Irish, Somalis, too, embraced some of the positive British portrayals of them and, as in the case of the Irish, they did it because the alternative would have been much again worse. But what where were these positive descriptions and how did they replace those peddled earlier by Cruttenden, Peel and to a lesser extent Burton?

Jardine provides a good example of these images:

> A Somali with aquiline nose, small lips, large glittering brown eyes, flashing white teeth, stately carriage, and the aristocratic look common to so many of his race, makes an arresting picture when clad in gaily coloured turban and fair white tobe, with a criss-cross patterned shawl of orange and blue thrown casually over the shoulder.[59]

Clearly this is an exaggerated picture and not every Somali fits this description, nevertheless, such picturesque and folkloric depiction of Somalis was something the British were comfortable with, and at the same time the portrait was appealing enough to Somalis that they started quoting it as well as other similar descriptions themselves. The acceptance of these images by Somalis to some extent reinforced British racial theories, however, Somalis did not accept British images wholesale, but rather picked and chose the ones that suited them. It is in this process that counter-images to those of the earlier travel writers began to emerge. Neither were all the counter-images produced only by the later writers and officials but sometimes they

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[58] Angela Bourke, *Feminist Studies*, 21, no.23 (Fall 1995): 566.

[59] Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, 25-26.

could be found even in the writings of the more prejudiced earlier writers; it is only later however that they became a trend. These positive generalizations, like the negative ones, are inconsistent and sometimes contradict each other. But while folkloric images were handy in creating aesthetic images that also had some practical implications, there were other images that dealt with the core of the colonial project, that of war and bravery. Somalis came to be considered as brave fighters. Jardine described Somali military prowess thus:

> His other qualities as a fighting man include great personal bravery, amounting to foolhardiness in the heat of battle; resourcefulness as a scout; abnormal endurance on the march despite his poor stamina; cheerfulness under privation, and fair horsemanship and marksmanship.[60]

The new image did not always supplant the previous one but sometimes existed side-by-side with it. For example the new image of Somalis as practical and unsentimental people co-existed with the previous image of Somalis as an easily excitable people. Practicality, un-sentimentality, stoicism as well as excitability and being easily encouraged or discouraged all become part of a constellation of ideas that could be used to portray the Somali character. This was a development in the direction of accepting the multi-dimensionality and contradictions in the Somali character, and showing that the Somali character was not represented by a few negative qualities.

The fact that colonial administrators, travelers and government personnel rejected the previous crude and negative portrayals of Somalis did not negate their colonial agenda; on the contrary the new images were part of an attempt to erect this agenda on something more tenable than obvious and blatant prejudice. In other words, the British had to improve their rhetoric in order to achieve their objective more effectively but this also had side benefits for Somalis because it catered to their self-respect. This schemata undermines the argument that western

[60] Ibid., 27-28.

writings on non-westerners are just prejudiced or racist and that is all there is to it. Instead it shows that there was a change in the portrayal of Somalis and although this happened primarily in response to colonial needs, Somalis used the potential in those new images to their own benefit. This also widened the range of the available images from those that were hostile to Somalis to those that were neutral all the way to those who are very sympathetic and idealized Somalis.

In his critique of European colonialism, Edward Said berates colonial officials and scholars who had domineering "imperial egos" and wanted to impose their will on the world.[61] This description does not accurately reflect the situation of the British colonial officials and personnel in Somaliland, who, as a whole, usually saw themselves as servants of the empire with limited authority and operating in an uncertain environment. Even the aggressiveness of the most rude and insulting characters such as Peel did not come from a situation that reflected relative strength but weakness, especially in the interior of Somaliland where he was the only British man traveling with the help of Somalis in Somali territories. Edward Said wrote about western dominance but he underestimated how much colonial administrators had to adjust their messages to the reality of the situation in order to produce favorable results. He used broad strokes when in fact the rhetoric deployed differed depending on the situation and the location despite many underlying similarities. It is this concern with addressing the realities in Somaliland that Douglas Jardine, Ralph Drake-Brockman, and H.F. Prevost Battersby engaged in point-by-point refutation of the negative characteristics that were attributed by their British compatriots to

[61] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 173.

Somalis, especially, avarice, vanity, and excitability.[62] Ralph Drake-Brockman said these claims originated with Richard Burton who did not know enough about Somalis.[63] In order to prevent false descriptions of Somalis, Ralph Drake-Brockman suggests that the only opinions on Somalis that should count, should be those of people who have lived among Somalis for a substantial amount of time. Jardine turns the usual criticism of Somali vanity into a positive attribute, an occasion to show the Somali as a modern aesthete and a dandy. He does this by focusing on the Somali's sartorial taste. The overall effect of the description is to excuse the Somali for spending much of his income to embellish his physical appearance. Neither is the meticulous attention to one's attire an isolated individual case but a general phenomenon. Here is how Jardine puts it:

> The sophisticated Somali is also very vain in his personal appearance. A man earning good wages will spend most of them on the adornment of his person. Bright turbans, shirts, handkerchiefs, and coats, all of silk, and imposing walking sticks are most popular with the wage-earner of Berbera or Aden; and a Somali dandy will devote hours to combing his hair before a looking-glass. Nor are his efforts in vain: for the general effect of all this adornment is most attractive.[64]

Jardine, however, makes it clear that this positive picture only applies to the modern Somali wage-earner in the urban centers of Berbera and Aden but not to the unemployed in those cities. As a matter of fact Ralph Drake-Brockman warns that "one must be careful not to engage

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[62] For H.F. Prevost Battersby, see his book *Richard Corfield of Somaliland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), 52-61; for Ralph Drake-Brockman see *British Somaliland*, 86 -107; and for Douglas Jardine see *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, 15-35.

[63] *British Somaliland*, 86.

[64] *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, 25-26.

a bazaar loafer from Aden or Berbera."[65] Jardine even opines that those who criticize Somalis should try living under the tough conditions in which Somalis live and find out how they fare.[66]

The construction of the Somali subject was based on portraying Somalis as both same and different from the Europeans. Many of the British administrators were fascinated by the Somalis' deep attachment to their freedom and held it as a point of commonality between Somalis and the British. The depiction of Somalis as a people who loved freedom meant that the British could not claim that they came to Somaliland to teach Somalis the true meaning of freedom. Some British colonial writers stated that they, too, had experienced a sense of freedom in Somaliland. Gordon Waterfield, an editor of Richard Burton's *First Footsteps in East Africa*, speculated on how Richard Burton must have felt about this freedom when he visited Somaliland a century earlier. Love of freedom, therefore, became a point of commonality between the British and Somalis.

Another characteristic which the Somali was said to have in common with the British was his love of his native country so that no matter how long he had sojourned abroad, he would make sure he came back home. British travelers and administrators were often surprised that someone who seemed so well adjusted to the situation in the country, as if he had never been anywhere else, would suddenly speak in English and reveal that he had lived in the United Kingdom or Australia or some other part of the empire. But it is one thing to resemble the British but quite another to think of yourself as good as them or may be even better. This last Somali characteristic was a source of amusement, frustration, and even admiration for the British. This is how Jardine relates one of these instances:

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[65] Drake-Brockman, *British Somaliland*, 93.

[66] Burton, *The First Footsteps*, 24.

> During the Great War, a travelled Somali was asked by a British officer which he thought were the greatest races in the world. He promptly replied that the British were the greatest. Asked which he would place next, he said the Somalis were equally great. The Arabs he placed third, and the Germans fourth; but he resolutely declined to accord places to any other nation. Asked why the British ruled over the Somalis if both were equally great, he replied that he supposed it was because the British possessed so many rupees.[67]

There are several similar incidents that were narrated by British travelers and government officials. Jardine's exposure to the Somalis' firm belief in his self-worth leads him to conclude:

> No man can hope to dragoon a proud, independent, and sensitive race; and any attempt to do so must most certainly lead to failure and possibly to disaster.[68]

But in colonial eyes, the Somali's healthy ego does not obviate his need for good government but on the contrary makes that need even more pressing. Jardine wrote:

> It is the considered opinion of many who know the country that, given able and sympathetic leadership, a definite policy, and a settled existence as a unit, a Somali regiment would be as good in every way as any coloured troops in the Imperial army.[69]

Edward Said pointed out that one of the most insidious effects of Orientalism was that it limited people's horizons. Jardine's rhetoric though sympathetic to Somalis is exhibiting the sort of limitations that Edward Said was referring to. According to Jardine's view, even when provided with the proper leadership and excellent training, a Somali can only rise to that of the best "coloured" troops and not any higher. Similarly, Ralph Drake-Brockman vouches for the

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[67] Jardine, *The Mad Mullah*, 26.

[68] Ibid., 28.

[69] Ibid., 28.

honesty of Somalis by saying, "I have found them superior to most natives known to me."[70] The implication of the statement is that Somalis should be compared with other natives, thus setting a ceiling on Somali honesty just as colonialism set a ceiling on so many other things for what can be thought and done. The differences between Somalis and the British becomes the basis for limiting the opportunities of Somalis in various spheres of life. But while the emphasis on difference proves detrimental to Somalis, colonial administrators and writers also engage in differentiation which works to the advantage of Somalis. Difference sets limits but differentiating Somalis by employment status, degree of urbanization (or lack of), and the division of Somalis into categories like the "sophisticated", "unsophisticated Somali in the bush" , the townsman, the loafers and the *Jangli* indicate an increasing complexity in Somali society with which the colonial discourse was grappling.

In this changing picture of Somaliland and Somalis, the economic picture of the Protectorate was also changing. Jardine described the financial situation of Somaliland just before Muhammad Abdille Hasan's revolt and how it was altered as a result of the rebellion:

> At the time hopes of peaceful and prosperous development in Somaliland ran high; for it was the only country in our East African empire that was then self-supporting. But in the following year all such hopes were frustrated by the Somali who soon became known to the world as the Mad Mullah. Douglas Jardine.[71]

The decline in Somaliland's finances were further described by Ralph Drake-Brockman:

> British Somaliland, a small and imperfectly known outpost of the Empire, has for many years been a thorn in the side of successive Governments. Money has been freely spent, and advice asked for and as freely given, yet the great bar to progress still remains.[72]

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[70] Drake-Brockman, *British Somaliland*, 93.

[71] Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, 35.

[72] Drake-Brockman, *British Somaliland*, 9.

Although there is no doubt about the disruptive effect on Somaliland's economy of the Muhammad Abdille Hasan's war that went on and off for twenty years, this does not answer the question of why the Protectorate could not revert to its previous position of being self-supporting after the war. The answer most probably had to do with the fact that it was a Protectorate, and that was also probably why neither Jardine nor Ralph Drake-Brockman pursued the question, and to that extent their description of Somaliland as a drain on the British economy was a self-serving argument.

They also played up the idea of the lack of economic viability of Somaliland which later was referred to as a "Cinderella of the Empire"[73], in order to put Britain in the position of seeming to do a favor to Somaliland by colonizing it. This way they could have it both ways: keep the protectorate under British control, spend very little on it, and yet constantly complain about how much it was costing Britain to run it. Paradoxically, as we have seen before, these same men who were producing these self-serving statements were also capable of going beyond that and offering more complex depictions of Somalis. This is the mixed legacy of colonial writing on Somalis.

Colonial writing on Somalis began with a preponderance of negative images about Somalis but later moved to a more complex posture which contained a variety of messages that were positive, negative, and in-between. So images of Somalis as brave, poetic, generous and freedom-loving to take a few examples jostled with those of Somalis as haughty, belligerent, undisciplined and anarchic. It is in this mixed and contradictory context that the modern Somali

[73] Douglas Jardine, "Somaliland: The Cinderella of the Empire," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 24, no. 94 (Jan., 1925): 10

subject emerged. Somalis often selected the positive images about them but the negative ones never totally disappeared, a process that eventually resulted in mixed representations of Somalis. This was a partial solution, and so the crisis in Somali consciousness continued. The focal point of the geographical location where these changes in the Somali subject were taking place was the port city of Berbera which was the site from which the British administration governed the rest of the Somaliland territory. As a resident of Berbera, Elmi Bodari experienced these changes first-hand.

CHAPTER SIX

Process and techniques of Self and Subject

In his seminal book *The Discovery of the Mind*, Bruno Snell postulated that in the *Archaic age* (750-490 B.C.) a crisis occurred in Greek Society whereby the experience of Eros that failed to reach its goal led to the birth of the Greek subject. Snell cited Sappho's term "*bitter-sweet Eros*" to indicate this state of unfulfilled desire turning inward and leading to self-discovery.[1] Anne Carson sheds light on Snell's proposition by pointing out that the Greek term used by Sappho to describe this phenomenon is *glukupikoron* which literally means sweetness-bitter, and that although this expression correctly orders the sequence of the experience of love which usually starts as sweet but ends as bitter, yet it is not the preferred translation because it does not sound right in English, and instead it is rendered as bitter-sweet in most English translations. Anne Carson further points out that what is important is not the sequence in which the sweetness and bitterness are experienced but the fact that they occur at the same time and engender mixed and ambiguous feelings.[2] I am arguing that a crisis similar to the one adumbrated by Bruno Snell and echoed by Anne Carson, occurred in Elmi Bodari's poetry and that this crisis, in addition to the crisis brought about by the advent of colonialism in British Somaliland, which I discussed in the previous chapter led to the emergence of the Somali subject. I shall start this chapter with a brief discussion of the colonial impact on Somalis that helped in the emergence of the Somali subject then move to a more detailed analysis of the

[1]Bruno Snell, trans. T.G. Rosenmeyer, *the Discovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1953), 53, 60.

[2] For further discussion of this point and the origin of this concept, see Anne Carson, *Eros: the Bittersweet, an Essay* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3-9.

complex process and techniques in Bodari's poetry, processes and techniques that involve contradiction, eroticism, lack, substitution, dreams, and the emphasis on the here and now and the body in the struggle to forge the modern Somali subject.

Bodari experienced the bitter-sweetness of love in the ancient port city of Berbera in the 1930s and early 1940s which coincided with the fourth and fifth decades of the British colonial administration of Somaliland. Berbera was also the center of the colonial administration, the site where the two major crises mentioned above that resulted in the emergence of the Somali subject took place. The importance of Berbera to Somalis could be seen from the widely known Somali saying "Berbera is too valuable to be exchanged for pieces of cloths stuffed with money.[3]" Similarly, it was in Berbera that the seeds of Muhammad Abdille Hassan (a.k.a. The Mad Mullah) rebellion were sown. Ismaaciil Mire's (c1860-1951) poem *A Hoopoe Rebuked* provides a pertinent example of the impact of the colonial state that helped in triggering the emergence of the Somali subject. In this poem, the Hoopoe makes some moaning sounds in which he expresses his apprehension regarding the drought that hit country and the shortage of water. Ismaaciil Mire alludes to the fact that the country was dominated by a foreign power and that the only reason holding back thieves from stealing was the presence of modern guards protecting

[3] The Somali expression is Berberi wax go' lagu qaado ka weyn, which literally means Berbera is too big for what could be contained with a piece of cloth. According to Somali oral tradition the expression originated as a response to Europeans who had asked Somalis to bring pieces of cloth, and when the Somalis asked them why they wanted the cloths, they answered that they wanted to fill them with money in exchange for setting up a colonial administration in Berbera, to which one of the Somalis:"Berbera is too valuable to be exchanged for what could be contained in a cloth." The saying may also be referring to the European explorers' use of cotton cloths as gifts and items of exchange in Somaliland. These cloths, especially the American variety, were valuable in Somaliland because the traditional Somali dress consisted of two large pieces of cloths, one for the upper part of the body and one for the lower part of the body.

merchandise and the thieves' fear of ending up in Berbera's "tin-roofed jail."[4] Moreover, Ismaciil Mire directs the Hoopoe's attention to the much worse fate of the locust:

> See, a band of men has been despatched
> Against the locusts that live here in this land.
> Soldiers in trucks appear from every side,
> Poison is scattered on the grass
> And there is death abounding.
> But had those locust done anything
> To bring this fate upon themselves
> No, a decision was made one day to kill them![5]

After giving this chilling picture of the extermination of the locust through what seems like an arbitrary decision by the colonial authorities and the overall specter of death hanging over the country, he concludes the poem with the following advice to the Hoopoe:

> So, Hoopoe, stop your wailing and your moaning
> Or you may be soon hunted in your turn –
> Stay quiet, speak softly, and you may yet escape arrest![6]

As someone who lived and worked in Berbera, Bodari too felt the power of the new colonial state in his daily life. For example, he cites the capability of the colonial state to punish him as the reason why he abstained from taking retaliatory action against Muhammad Shabeele, his rival for Hodan's love. The punishment that he is scared of is not a minor one either but is death by hanging. But the pressure brought to bear on him by the colonial state and its various instruments of punishing and disciplining was only one of the ways in which Bodari's colonial subjectivity was constituted. The other way and which will be the focus of this chapter is his deep desire for Hodan, an experience that was the other major factor that engendered his

[4] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 52.

[5] Ibid., 53.

[6] Ibid., 53.

subjectivity and in the process transformed Somali culture. This new subjectivity does not mean a total abandonment of Somali culture but it does involve a re-interpretation of Somali culture. To give further legitimacy to the transformation that was about to take place, Bodari stresses that his outlook on love is based on Islamic principles. Some of these principles which are referred to in his poem *Caashaqa Haween* are: that God himself not just approves of love but ordains it, that leading religious personalities including prophets had loved, and that the very logic behind creating opposite sexes is so that they would be attracted to each other and have progeny so life would continue on earth[7]. More specifically, the religious leaders that he cites as justification of his philosophy of love are: the Prophet Muhammad, Jesus and the fourth Caliph Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib. Although he does not explicitly state it, the reference to the Prophet Muhammad could be an allusion to his love of Ayesha, the youngest of his wives, while the invocation of Jesus could be based on the prominence of love in Christian teachings, whereas the reference to Ali ibn Abi Talib though not a direct reference to love possibly serves as an example of the necessity of conjugal sexual relations for the continuation of the species since Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib married the Prophet's daughter Fatima and sired from her sons thus ensuring the continuation of the Prophet's genetic line.

The influence of Islamic ideas and beliefs on Bodari are not just limited to broad theological principles but they also include the very idea of the self which Bodari inherited from the Sufi tradition in Somali culture. Bodari, however, further developed this Sufi idea of the self, an activity which involved breaking away from traditional attitudes toward love which had until then relied on clichés and formulaic expressions of praise of various aspects of the beloved.

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[7] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, The Life of Ilmi Bowndheri, 196; see also *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*?, 36-37.

Bodari ‘s break with traditional descriptions of the beloved comes through especially in his attitude towards the human body. The relevance of the body to the emergence of the subject was touted by Bruno Snell who proposed that in the Attic age the body was split from the soul in the process of the emergence of the subject.[8] Although I argue that a similar process took place that resulted in the emergence of the Somali subject as the one delineated by Bruno Snell for Greek society in the Attic age, I disagree with him on the question of the relation between the body and self that leads to the emergence of the self. My position which is informed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the relation between the body and the mind, is that, at least in the case of Elmi Bodari, there is no complete separation between self and body in the process that leads to the emergence of the subject.

The body has a strong presence in Bodari’s poetry, not as a mere decoration but as a vital part of the poems. One of the ways in which Bodari’s body is affected is through loss of appetite for food which make him loudly wonder, “will anything pass my gullet?”[9] He even reframes his loss of appetite for food and makes it seem as if he was denied particular dishes that he liked when in fact it was he who often rejected all types of foods that were presented to him, “What I would wish to chew, I was refused, and I can do nothing but brush my teeth.”[10] Looked at literally, this is an attempt to blame others for his poor appetite, but when interpreted metaphorically it could be a reference to the refusal of Hodan’s family to let him have a relationship with Hodan. The only dish he desired becomes a symbol for the only woman he desired.

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[8] Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, 60.

[9] Ibid., 197.

[10] Ibid., 197.

Symbolic substitution also works at other levels. One usually brushes one's teeth after eating, but in this case, Bodari brushes his teeth as a substitution for actually having a meal. The brushing of the teeth is both a diversion from eating as well as a reminder of the cause behind his poor appetite for food. Behind both the act of eating and the simulation of the act of eating in the form of the brushing of the teeth is another unmet desire, the desire for Hodan. His desire for her is the one constant thread that runs through these and many other diverse situations. It is an overwhelming desire that does not let up and is not pacified by diversionary tactics such as the "brushing of the teeth", and since this desire remains unsatisfied and Hodan remains physically absent from his life, his health deteriorates. But although Hodan is absent from his life, she is not absent from his psyche. On the contrary, she is constantly present in his psyche and consciousness which creates an immense tension between what he wants and his reality. This condition of lack of the object of desire, of psychic tension, of fragmentation and split consciousness is not only an apt description of Bodari's condition but it also a mark of the modern subject. The modern subject is defined to some extent by an absence or lack of some qualities or objects. That lack in turn intensifies the search for those objects or their substitutes. This process brings Bodari in touch with religious healers who prescribe for him the wearing of an amulet. Amulets are usually made by putting verses from the Qur'an in the middle of a piece of leather, then sewing the sides of the leather together. The purpose of the amulet is to protect the person wearing it from the evil-eye and illness caused by certain looks that are engendered by envy, jealousy, ill-wishes, and bad luck. The power of an amulet resides in the religious verses that are hidden within the leather. So it is its hidden aspect, this hidden power of the sacred texts that is supposed to protect the person wearing the amulet. But in the end the amulets do not produce the desired results, and he announces in despair, "the amulets written by men of religion

failed to stop the sickness."[11] In other words, only Hodan could restore his health and there is no substitute for her.

It is not only Bodari who utilizes substitutions but others sometimes deploy the same tactic against him. One such instance was the arrangement made by a group of attractive and unmarried young women who tried to seduce him with their charms and good looks hoping that he would fall for one of them and thereby be cured of Hodan's love. Bodari rebuffs the young ladies and their attempt to steer him away from Hodan not only fails but backfires, as "the tinkling of the trinkets"[12] with which they decked themselves only reminds him of Hodan and leads him to admonish them: "Oh girls, you have touched and torn my wound."[13] No amount of sweet talk or fine clothes could change his mind. It was only Hodan that he wanted, and no replacement or substitution would do. Substitution works also at a literal level in this episode. Instead of Bodari pursuing them, they pursue him; and instead of being the seducer, he is the one who is being seduced, a situation which he acknowledges by lamenting, "with your little smiles you lead us men astray."[14] Furthermore, it is usually he who violates Somali cultural traditions, but in this case, it is the group of women who cross the boundaries of Somali culture by exposing more of their bodies than is allowed by Somali culture under those circumstances. But also like him, they fail in winning the object of their desire.

Contradictions, reversals and paradoxes are some of the ways in which the subject is constituted. The contradictions and conflict extend to the internal organs of his body that instead

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[11] Ibid., 197.

[12] Ibid., 198.

[13] Ibid., 198 .

[14] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, *The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri*, 198.

of nourishing each other and working together cannibalize each other, a situation which he describes as his "bones swallowing its own marrow."[15] Sometimes the contradictions are not clearly stated but are implied by the images he uses. An example of this is his various deployments of the image of light in his poems, such as his description of the first time he sees Hodan as akin to witnessing a lightning bolt strike the ground near her.[16] The image invokes that experience with all its complexity, not just its positive aspects; whereas the very image of light brings to mind the opposite image of darkness and the contrast between the two images suggests conflict within the poet's psyche. Similarly his description of Hodan as "light without blemish"[17] (tiriig saxan) only intensifies his sense of deprivation since she means so much to him and is yet physically absent from his life. The sense of harmony he attributes to her when he says she is "without defects" offers a sharp contrast with the pain and disharmony caused by his desire for her.

In the same vein, we also find similar contrasts in the relationship between him and his poetry. For example, when he calls his own poetry "impeccable verse"[18] (tixdii saaniga ahayde), it also reminds one of his troubled psychological condition. Although defects, deficiencies, and overall lack are brought into focus through this method of implied or explicit contrasts, this method does not positively and unambiguously identify the lack itself. Anne Carson calls this lack a "hole" and proposes a triangular relationship between the lover, the beloved and the hole

[15] *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*?, 36. The expression Bodari used is Ma cidaamkanaan jebinayaa cunaya dhuuxooda. Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa?, 36.

[16]Ibid., 59. The verse is Hillaac baa Berbera iiga baxay Hodan agteediiye. It is in the poem that starts with the line Inadeer hagaagtaye.

[17] Ibid., 50. The whole line is Aan sifeeyo inantii tiriig saxan la moodaayay.

[18] Ibid., 50. The verse is Ma samaynin waayahan tixdii saaniga ahayde.

in the beloved, in the constitution of the subject. Moreover, she posits that Plato's theory of love as motivated by the desire to unite with one's missing half is further illustration of desire as a lack, absence, or incompletion.[19] There is much in Bodari's poetry that fits this view of desire, for although Bodari does not explicitly adopt Plato's theory of love and provides an Islamic justification for love, it is also true that the Islamic view of love articulated by Islamic scholars is basically in agreement with Plato when it comes to the idea of love as being based on the desire for completion. In addition, Bodari's experience of love shares Sappho's emphasis on the contradictory nature of love and its bittersweetness (*glukupikoron).* In the poem *Vision* Bodari elucidates the different moods love engenders in him, from the excitement he feels upon hearing her name to the pain that same name triggered in him. Bodari draws the audience into his construction of the self by using the second person pronoun :

> her name seems to you so simple
> but to me it brings grief and woe.[20]

Once he has the audience's attention he then informs them of his absolute commitment to her:

> I shall never give her up,
> not till the day they tread earth into her grave.[21]

As it happened, he did not actually have to "tread earth into her grave" because he died before her, but the overall stance that only death would put an end to his love points to the dichotomy between love and death. The stress on dichotomies such as those between love and

[19]*Plato's Symposium*, trans. Avi Sharon (Newbury Port: Focus Philosophical Library, 1998), 35-40.

[20]Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali poetry*, 66.

[21] Ibid., 66.

death, excitement and grief, and poet versus audience helps the poem proceed forward. For others, her name is just another name, but for him the very mention of her name shakes him to his core. The experience of falling in love itself has its own contradictions. The lover wants to possess the beloved but possessing someone changes both the possessor and the possessed and threatens their freedom.

Another paradox is that the pursuit of the beloved is a more emotionally charged experience than actual erotic consummation or as Anne Carson put it, "pursuit and flight are a *topos* of Greek erotic poetry and iconography from the archaic period onward. It is noteworthy that, within such conventional scenes, the moment of ideal desire on which vase-painters as well as poets are inclined to focus is not the moment of the *coup de foudre,* not the moment when the beloved's arms open to the lover, not the moment when the two unite in happiness. What is pictured is the moment when the beloved turns and runs.[22]" The lover oscillates between the fear of losing his freedom and the fear of being rejected and abandoned, what in Arabic is called "Lawʿat al-hajr."[23]

In Bodari's eyes, Hodan is so unique and special, the very idea of being involved with another woman is anathema to him;[24] she is imprinted in his mind and could not be erased from it[25]; her image constantly appears to him,[26] so much so, it could even be said that he sees the

[22] Anne Carson, *Eros: the Bittersweet, an Essay* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988)., 19-20.

[23] Mustafa Abu al-'ala', *Al-Mar'ah fi al-shiʿr al-'Arabi* (al-Minyā: Dār al-Hudā lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawziʿ, 2002), 165.

[24] The verse is Gabadh kaloon haasaawiyaa wayga haniyaade, see *Ma Dhababa Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*? 59.

[25] Ibid., 36; the poetic line is Caqliga yaa ka biin tuu Ilaah ku circadaayeeyey.

world through the prism of Hodan's image. In other words, the world becomes a picture to him in a manner akin to Heidegger's description of the world becoming a picture in the constitution of the subject.[27] As Heidegger puts it when describing the process of the formation of the world picture, "What is decisive is that man expressly takes up this position as one constituted by himself"[28] and "that the very essence of man itself changes, in that man becomes subject."[29]

Dreams play a vital part in Bodari's poetry. Events that took place in his dreams acquire a sense of reality once he composes poems referring to them. By describing or referring to a dream in a poem, what happened in the dream moves from his private unconscious to public consciousness. Nietzsche said that the Greeks formed their Gods in a dream thereby noting the role of dreams in the construction of identity.[30] Bodari's life and poetry provide a good example of this Nietzschean idea of the part played by dreams in the formation of identity. Dreams offer him an opportunity to tap into what resides in his unconscious and he mines it extensively. The focus of his dreams is of course Hodan. In one dream she visits him but when he wakes up he realizes it was not her but someone else who visited him, "a jinn made in the image of her sister." The image he sees in this dream combines three identities: Hodan, her sister, and a jin (genie or supernatural creature). But even before he wakes, there are signs of trouble as he

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[26] The line is misspelled in the book *Ma Dhababa Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa?*, as Way lay horjoogaa sidii horudhacdii geela, 59, but the correct version is in the tape and it is, Waxa lay horjoogaa sidii horudhacii geele.

[27] Martin Heidegger, *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 128.

[28] Ibid., 132.

[29] Ibid., 128.

[30] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1956), 19.

"tosses from side to side". Furthermore, when he extends his hand to touch her, thinking that she is sleeping next to him, she is not there. Enraged by what happened he wakes up and upon not finding her next to him, he turns his ire against his bed and bed covering:

> I rumpled my bed like a prowling lion,
> I attacked the bedclothes and pounded them,
> as if it were they that had caused my loss.[31]

The transformation of the identity of the woman in his dream can take place because such things do occur in dreams and because a supernatural creature is involved. But these transformations allow Bodari to present in his poetry the complex psychological processes taking place within him. The dream shows the thin veil that separates reality from illusion. Bodari sometimes took the genie to be Hodan and sometimes took it as Hodan's sister. Moreover, he does not dismiss it as a mere dream but reacts to it seriously as if it were a real event. When he tries to touch her hand and fails to do so, he is "humbled" and draws the wider lesson that "it is degrading to yearn for what you cannot have."[32] The terrible toll that all of this has taken on him is summed by his words: "alas, alas, what a disaster has befallen me!"[33]

The disaster he is talking about is of course the absence of Hodan from his life. His life is defined by the tension between his struggle to win her love and his utter failure to achieve that goal. It is also a struggle between the intense presence of his love and her physical absence from his life. This tension is evident in such lines as:

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[31] Andrzejewski, *An anthology of Somali Poetry*, 66.

[32] Ibid., 67.

[33] Ibid., 67.

I found I was striving in vain
for there was no one there.[34]

She was present in his dream but she was absent from his real life. But both dreams and real life bring him painful experiences. However, these painful experiences do not totally crush his spirit. On the contrary they energize him to compose his poems. Humiliation, despair, and the knowledge that the woman whom he desperately wanted was deliberately kept away from him. As Bodari himself noted, things are not as they "may appear."[35] He was referring to his total commitment to her and saying it was stronger than was apparent. He also calls that dream experience "a deceitful trance."[36] Out of desperation, he occasionally resorts to playing games with himself when the stress becomes unbearable and momentarily persuades himself not to take his situation too seriously. As he put it:

At times I made light of it
And I was free.[37]

This usually happens in his wakeful moments, but it does not last for too long. Soon enough, he sees a vision of her and all his usual feelings rush back and he is so overwhelmed he thinks she never left him in the first place. Reality is replaced by visions and imaginary scenarios. Similarly visions and dreams break on the shores of reality. This double movement or back and forth interface between reality and the world of dreams and visions though painful,

[34] Ibid., 66.

[35] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, *The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri*, 198.

[36] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 66.

[37] Ibid., 67.

enriches the poet's experience. The unconscious being a repository of sensations and feelings that lay submerged and reality where those newly discovered feelings can be expressed and the latent could become manifest. "I have not composed for a while my impeccable verse" is one such poem that arose out of the interplay between illusion and reality. The urge to compose the poem comes to him while he was asleep. He does not know exactly what caused this urge, all he knows is that it was there, and that it affected him so deeply he had to carry it out: "Last night, something stirred me as I was asleep."[38]

The urge is there, the poem created out of this urge is there, but the object of the poem is not there. This is the complex matrix in which Bodari's poems inhabit, a matrix of strong desire clashing with an obstinate reality of the beloved's absence and the only time she is present is in dreams and visions, and once those dreams and visions are over, she disappears "And turns into a rising pillar of dust."[39] As Bruno Snell avers with regard to Sappho and Anacreon, "the present moment itself contains the seeds of discord."[40] These seeds eventually trigger an upheaval, but paradoxically, this harrowing experience brings him in touch with himself. It is in this emotional turbulence caused by his love of Hodan that his new self is constituted. Bruno Snell provides the valuable insight that an intense emotional experience of Greek lyric poets led to the discovery of individuality.[41] Bodari's experience is very much akin to what Snell alluded to in the case of

[38] This is my own translation. The original line in Somali is "Xaluun ba saqdii dhexe, hurdada wax i salaameene", see *Ma Dhabba Jacayl waa loo Dhintaa*? 50.

[39] Ibid., 67.

[40] Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, 59-6

[41] Ibid., 60-61.

Greek lyric poets, so when Bodari said "the heart can never love two" he was essentially referring to his discovery of his own individuality.

The now, the moment that "contains the seeds of discord" is not only associated with the erotic experience but also with the lyric form. Stephen Bertman's schema in which he contrasts the lyric and the epic genres offers a cogent explanation of lyric poetry's suitability as a medium for self-discovery. He cites four main differences between epics and lyrics: one, epic poetry usually deals with the past while lyric poetry deals with the present; two, epic poetry deals with a large number of people but lyric poetry usually deals with one individual; three, epic poetry is about war whereas lyric poetry is about peace, and four, epic poetry focuses on the feelings of other individuals while lyric poetry deals with the feelings of the poet himself.[42] But although the lyric is usually associated with individuality, it also leads to transcending the individual. This is because as Anne Carson pointed out, reading and writing, to which I add composing and reciting oral verse, or the practice of literary activity in general involves "the play of the imagination,"[43] and in that process the person's intellectual horizons are widened and deepened. So the same process that opened a path to self-discovery also leads to the transcending of the individual. Bodari's emphasis on the now, on the avenues opened by the ecstatic experience charts a path for acquiring a new knowledge of the self but once that knowledge is acquired, it does not have to be confined to that sphere and can move on to wider areas. This is one of the reasons why the

[42] *Erotic love poems of Greece and Rome: a collection of new translations,* trans. Stephen Bertman (New York: New American Library, 2005), 26-27.

[43] Anne Carson, *Eros: the Bittersweet,* 109.

emergence of the modern subject is important, for although it is a process that fundamentally marks the rise of the individual, it has wider societal implications that go beyond the individual.

The lyric form does not only lead to the "discovery" of the subject, but also by supplying a suitable form for the poem, it makes the expression of individual subjectivity even more effective. The use of the word "discovery" does not mean that there is anything passive about it. This is an active process in which the person's existing psychic order is first subverted in order to catapult what is unique about him. It is a process of confrontation, a process in which the self is actively created. The resulting poem encapsulates the struggle in the heart of a single individual, but that struggle transcends that individual and stands at odds with a whole culture. It repudiates certain beliefs and codes that were part of the culture. It also inscribes new principles. It is a process of destruction and construction.

Bodari did not only launch modern Somali love poetry but he also took the existing vocabulary and gave it such depth and breadth that through him Somali poetry developed the sort of vocabulary and the sensibility that is needed for the modern age. Many of the words and phrases that he used already existed in the Somali language before him but he deployed them in such a creative way that made it possible to access the mystery of love. This was not just another instance of the adaptability of the Somali language but also of the poet's extraordinary ability to transmute his chaotic emotional state into highly crafted verse.[44] The strong and unapologetic link that he established between sexuality and verse imparted a liberating energy to the Somali culture. Before him, sexuality was hidden behind proper phrases, was veiled by allusions; Bodari brought sexuality into focus without descending to uncouthness and vulgarity. He also provided,

[44] Andrzejewski and Lewis, *Somali Poetry*, 36.

to borrow Elizabeth Meese's phrase, a "fluid lexicon"[45] which could adapt to various situations, which in turn made it possible for later poets to use it for their own purposes. But although his vocabulary proved adaptable, there is no doubt about the break with the former type of traditional poetry.

An example of Bodari's break with tradition and his adoption of modern values is that he does not shy away from confessing to his financial distress and his inability to send his beloved a gift worthy of her.[46] His behavior in this instance is a break from traditional values because according to the traditional outlook the poetic hero is not supposed to be destitute, let alone advertise his destitution. Another indication of this change in sensibility is that he calls the person with whom he wanted to send a message and a gift a hero "halyey."[47] His use of the term hero is different from the traditional Somali use of the term. The hero in this case is not the traditional Somali warrior but a messenger sent by the poet. Furthermore, the personal qualities of this new hero are different from those of the traditional Somali hero, instead of being praised for his martial prowess, he is praised for his trustworthiness and sound judgment "Mid hubsiimo badan baad tahoo."[48] By bestowing the term hero on a messenger and emphasizing qualities of character that were not emphasized in the past as part of the hero's psychological makeup, Bodari has expanded the categories of people who could qualify for being called heroes. In addition since the poet himself who is the prime example of the new type of hero lacks the

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[45] Elizabeth A. Meese, *Crossing the Double-Cross: the Practice of Feminist Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 79.

[46]This is in the poem whose opening line is "Inaadeer hagaagtaye", and the relevant verse is "Maxaan kula hagaagaa yartii way hanwayntahaye", see Ma Dhabab Jacayl Waa loo Dhintaa?, 59.

[47] Ibid., 59.

[48] Ibid., 59.

wherewithal to offer his beloved an appropriate gift, the poem itself becomes the gift. This is not just a new attitude towards the self but also toward poetry, for whereas before him, poems were recited to praise and honor somebody now the poet is honoring himself even when admitting his own shortcomings.

"Every new day, when I wake up it is for you that I gird myself."[49] Every day is a day in which he readies himself for her. As far as he is concerned, what makes the day new is not just the passage of time but also the possibility that it brings with it meeting Hodan, talking with her, or receiving a message from her. It is more hope than reality but that does not diminish its importance. Bodari's association of Hodan with the new day is translated in Somali culture as a desire for the new. Thus his poetry becomes both an embodiment and a symbol for the new. One of the ways in which the new is highlighted is by forming a sharp contrast with the old and traditional. The fact that he did not approach her family and ask them to let him marry her and instead he openly announced that he was in love with her, is one such clear contrast between Bodari's approach and the traditional one.

Another way in which the new becomes visible is by revealing what was suppressed, hidden or excluded. The girls deliberately wear attires through which he glimpses parts of their body that, because of Islamic prohibitions, adult males who were not the females' spouses should not see, thus exposing what according to the culture should have been hidden, which means a threshold was crossed and a new relationship with the body was in the offing. The verse "And I also cannot pluck out from my bosom the love for Ladan,"[50] is a third example of this new

[49] Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'llmi Bowndheri," 199.

[50] Ibid., 198.

relation with the body. Love has become something that is imprinted deep in the body. It is not something that can be easily rejected or even disavowed bur rather something beyond one's individual will that over overwhelms him and he is unable to remove from his body. He tells the girls who offered themselves to him in order to lure him away from Hodan how he was absolutely committed to her. Moreover, he advises them not to waste their time "for the heart can never love two!"[51] meaning that the human heart can really love one person, and that in his case that person is Hodan.

A crucial idea that is emblematic of the new attitude pioneered by Bodari was that of love as a struggle. This idea of love as a struggle already existed to some extent in the mystical Sufi tradition. But it was Bodari who first applied it to the intense experience of one human being loving another human. The lines expressing this attitude are interspersed in Bodari's poetry but just for the sake of illustration I shall cite the verse, "Oh Hodan 'Abdi, why did I not break away from you, on account of wrongs and indignities?"[52] in which he delineates the conflict that his love of Hodan and the lack of a positive response from her generated within him and his internal struggle with that conflict. Later poets and singers would popularize this notion even further in Somali culture. The Singer Axmed Gacayte, for instance, poses several questions to his beloved and asks her :

> O Umal has love ever lived next-door to you?
> Have you ever taken walks with him?
> Have you had meals with him
> Have you ever engaged in Jihad with him?

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[51] Ibid., 198.

[52] Ibid., 199-200.

Umaley jacayl weli jaar ma noqoteen?
Jid ma wada lugayseen?
Ma la cuntay jidiin wali?
Jihaad ma isku aragteen?

Axmed Gacayte's use of the word "Jihad" which can refer to religious or secular struggle as well as to external ritualistic struggle, or, inward psychic struggle, shows the ambiguity of the love experience and the different and conflicting moods it engenders. Conflict is the sign under which love lives, whether it is expressed by Axmed Gacayte's questions to his beloved or Bodari's questioning of himself and blaming himself for not breaking away with Hodan, a conflict that leads not only to the emergence of the modern Somali subject but also to the emergence of the body as a subject. So when Bodari urges the girls to cover up their breasts in order, as he put it, not to displease God, it is not a sign of prudery on his part but a declaration of his disinterest in them, or any other woman except Hodan. The girls do not arouse his interest, let alone his passion. They do not stir that bittersweet struggle within him, so he tries to embarrass them by reminding them of the religious injunctions that they were violating as they tried to seduce him. But when it came to Hodan, he had no qualms about breaking those societal and religious conventions. He experiences no shame in announcing that he saw Hodan's nude body or composing poems about him engaging in "erotic play[53]" with her. What brings feeling of shame and embarrassment to him is losing her, and he has no problem divulging that he felt

[53] Cited in Milton Scarborough, *Myth and Modernity: Postcritical Reflections* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 126; Milton Scarborough says Terry Eagleton offered this expression as indicative of Barthes's attitude toward analyzing texts, 126, 144. I am not using it in Barthes's sense but in its straightforward literal sense. The original quotation is in Terry Egaleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 142.

"disgraced" and "humbled"[54] by the fact that she was not with him. These negative feelings of hurt and humiliation, of guilt and anxiety, when juxtaposed with feelings of ecstatic pleasure crystallize into a mood of bitter-sweetness, a feeling that like the modern experience itself, is composed of heterogeneous and even contradictory elements. What we have here is not a Whitmanesque celebration of self and body, but rather the emergence of the Somali body as a subject. And when Bodari says, "Every new day, when I wake up it is for you that I gird myself," he is getting ready for this new subject that he was instrumental in fashioning.

[54] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali poetry*, 67.

CHAPTER SEVEN

From the poetry of fire and embers to that of Bitter Sweet

Since the time when it was first introduced to the public in the mid nineteen sixties until this day, the poem *Qadhaad iyo Macaan* "Bitter and Sweet" by Ahmed Ismail Diriye, popularly known as "*Qaasim*" (d. 2006), has drawn the attention of academics, intellectuals and the Somali public as having an usual flavor that makes it stand out from poems by other poets of his generation as well as from Qaasim's own verses. To give an idea of this growing interest in the poem, B.W. Andrzejewski translated it from Somali into English.[1] Joseph John reviewed it.[2] Martin Orwin published a study on its stylistics.[3] Former Somali Foreign Minister Ahmed Yusuf Duʿale was impressed by it as was the poet Mohamoud Togane whose wife translated it to French.[4]

Bitter and Sweet is indeed unusual in that Qaasim openly admits in it that his psyche is wracked with contradictions. The reason this was unusual when the poem first appeared, and still is so to some extent even today, is because Somali poets until then restrained themselves from delving too deep into themselves and laying bare their psyche, warts and all. It is my contention here that this new attitude was made possible by Elmi Bodari's poetry which had undermined the

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[1] B. W. Andrzejewski, trans., *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*.

[2] Joseph John, review of *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, by B. W. Andrezejewski, with Sheila Andrezejewski, 68, no.2 (Spring 1994): 413-14 http://www.jstor.org/stable/40150307 (accessed Jan. 25, 2014).

[3] Martin Orwin, "A literary Stylistic Analysis of a Poem by the Somali Poet Axmed Ismaciil Diiriye 'Qaasim'," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 63, Issue 2 (January 2000) : 194, doi:10.1017/S0041977X00007187.

[4] See "Xasuus," http://somalilandhorta.com/literature.htm (accessed Jan. 28 2014).

old idea of heroic and martial Somali poetry and shifted the focus into the internal drama taking place in the poet's psyche, and with emphasis on the psyche, divisions in the psyche began to take place, which in turn undercut the old cut and dried view of things and instead presented a more nuanced, ambiguous and bitter sweet view of the world. The moment of the emergence of the bitter sweet is significant because it also the moment of the emergence of the modern Somali subject.

To make my point, I will proceed by first examining the poetry of Muhammad Abdille Hassan (1865-1920) as an example of the old heroic poetry. Then I will show how Elmi Bodari diverged from traditional heroic poetry and introduced a new type of literary heroism which affected the works of later poets, especially Hadrawi. And finally I will demonstrate how these developments were given their fullest and most thoroughgoing expression in Qaasim's poem *Bitter Sweet*. I have named this trajectory as the journey from the poetry of fire and embers to that of bitter sweetness.[5] This is not an easy or mechanical progression but rather a journey full of twists and turns.

Muhammad Abdille Hassan and the break-up of the Heroic model:

In traditional Somali culture all males are divided into *Wadaad* (religious man) and Waranle (Spear Carrier).[6] Religious figures are exempted from taking part in war and their duties are restricted to religious matters, whereas in times of conflict, all adult able-bodied males in the spear carrier category are expected to contribute to the war effort.

[5] I have borrowed the expression Fire embers from B.W. Andrzejewski's periodization of Somali poetry; see B.W Andrzejewski, "Somali literature," in *Literatures in African Languages: Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys*, eds. B.W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz, and W. Tyloch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 339.

[6] B.W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry*, 30.

With the advent of the British colonial administration, the Somali heroic ideal received a jolt because for the first time they had to contend with a European power on their land. But this was not the first time that Somalis in what came to be known as the British Protectorate of Somaliland had to deal with a superior military force, for a decade before the British arrived in Somaliland, the Egyptians had taken over the Somali ports of Berbera, Bulhar, Zeila and the city of Harar further inland in 1874. With the rise of the Mahdi revolt in the Sudan, the Egyptians had a struggle much closer to home and decided to withdraw from Harar and Somaliland in 1884. At this point, the British decided to sign a series of treaties which built on previous trade treaties that they already had with some of the coastal Somali inhabitants, and the cumulative effect of these treaties was that they "established the protectorate in 1887, with Berbera as the center of government."[7]

From a British perspective, there were two main reasons for signing these treaties. One, to prevent the Somaliland coast from falling under the influence of rival European powers; and two, to ensure a steady supply of Somali livestock to the British garrison in Aden.[8] Somali coastal clans had their own reasons for signing treaties with the British, chief among which was that the treaties established friendship with a major European power, and at the same time committed Britain to maintaining the integrity of Somali territories, and specifically banned the transfer of Somali land to any other power. This last point is important because of the expansionist policy of Ethiopia which claimed Somali territories. Of course by entering into these treaties with Britain, Somali clans were taking a risk, because although the clauses in the treaties clearly stated that the land belonged to Somalis there was the possibility that Britain

[7] Margaret Castagno, *Historical Dictionary of Somalia* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975), 27.

[8] Ibid., 27.

would renege on the treaties or interpret them in a different way from how Somalis did. But whatever the long-term fears and risks and dangers of signing protection treaties with Britain, these concerns were trumped by the more immediate threat of Ethiopian expansion and possession of Somali territories.[9]

This was how coastal Somali clans who had a long tradition of dealing with foreigners handled the situation. About fifteen years after these treaties were signed and with Britain in the earliest stages of establishing an administration for the Somaliland Protectorate, Muhammad Abdille Hassan (1865-1920), a man from the Ogaden interior who belonged to a clan with little tradition of dealing with outside powers (other than perhaps being continuously raided by Ethiopian peasant armies), initiated a rebellion against the British and their Somali allies.

Some intellectuals and academics though have tried to give Muhammad Abdille Hassan's wars a nationalistic orientation. This is an anachronistic interpretation and does not square with the available evidence.[10] Be that as it may, what is more relevant here than the historical record

[9] Caqli, Cabdirisaaq, *Sheekh Madar: Asaasaha Hargeysa* ([Hargeisa]: Cabdirisaq Caqli, [2005?]), 156-179.

[10] The idea that Muhammad Abdille Hassan's wars against the British had nationalist motivations was promoted by successive Somali governments after the independence and union of the ex-British Somaliland and Italian Somalia but became specially pronounced during the military regime of Muhammad Siyad Barre. To cement the image of Muhammad Abdille Hassan as a nationalist hero, an equestrian statue of him was constructed in Mogadihu. Ironically, the idea that Muhammad Abdille Hassan might be considered a romantic hero by some future Somali was first broached by Douglas Jardine, the British Secretary to the Somaliland Administration, in his book *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*. For the nationalist and often hagiographic interpretation of Muhammad Abdille Hassan's revolt, see Jama Omar Isse's *Taariikhdii Daraawiishta*, Saʿid Samatar's *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, and Abdi Sheikh Abdi's *Divine Madness*. The canonization of Muhammad Abdille Hassan as a symbol of Somali nationalism was a conscious ideology adopted by the dominant section of the post-independence Somali elite, but with the collapse of the Somali state other voices that were previously suppressed by the Somali state and that have rejected the mythology built around Muhammad Abdille Hassan have come to the fore. *The Invention of Somalia* a book edited by

is that Muhammad Abdille Hassan was a poet, and that he utilized his poetry to rally his supporters, demoralize his enemies, and make the case for his cause. It is this poetic aspect of Muhammad Abdille Hassan that will be the focus of this chapter, and more specifically the notion of heroism in that poetry.

Saʿid Samatar who undertook a detailed study of Muhammad Abdille Hasan's poetry wrote:

> "Although many themes underlie the poems of the Sayyid, it appears that his major topics relate to diatribe, exhortation and curse. Poetic diatribes are by far the most numerous and best remembered. Produced during war, these poems are belligerent in tone and incisive, reflecting the spirit of war."[11]

This belligerent and violent content of Muhammad Abdille Hasan's verses, and his determination to exterminate entire clans can be seen in such lines as:

> "Until I had driven long spears into the shameless Reer Hagar,
> And until the shedding of their thick blood had been celebrated with rejoicing."[12]

In one sense, Muhammad Abdille Hassan's bloodthirsty poems were not new and were a continuation of a long-standing Somali tradition of giving literary expression to clan feuds. However, Somali traditional heroic poetry adhered to certain ethical codes which were encapsulated in Somali traditional law (xeer), whereas Muhammad Abdille Hassan often broke those regulations both in his verse as well as in his conduct. His consistent violations of Somali

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Ali Jimale Ahmed, and *Sheekh Madar* by Cabdirisaq Caqli are two examples of the latter view of Somali history.

[11] Said Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mahammad Abdille Hassan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 152.

[12] Ibid., 152.

ethical codes made Muhammad Abdille Hasan a villain rather a hero in the eyes of the majority of the people of Somaliland Protectorate.[13]

Muhammad Abdille Hasan started his political career by preaching a puritanical message at the coastal city of Berbera but he was unable to win supporters there. After debating him on religious matters, he was dismissed by Somaliland's learned religious leaders as a lightweight with an inadequate understanding of Islamic theology. Others even went on to ridicule him as "Wadaad Waalan" (a crazy or idiotic religious pretender). Clearly the urban and sophisticated ambience of Berbera was not a hospitable place for his message. Unable to make headway, he retreated in frustration into the interior and ensconced himself within the territory of the Dhulbahante clan in south east Somaliland with whom his own paternal Ogadeen clan shared the same Darood eponymous ancestry.

Admittedly the fact that Muhammad Abdille Hassan was from a different clan than the majority of the people who inhabited Berbera and adjoining areas may have been a factor in his inability to gain recruits. The fact that he belonged to a different Sufi order (the Salihiya) than most of the people in the protectorate who belonged to the Qadiriya order. But differences in cultural orientation due to differences in areas of origin within the Somali world also played a role. For example, most of the things against which he railed at the beginning of his career such as the French Christian mission, moral laxity, and the chewing of the stimulant *Qat* were associated with the city of Berbera. So the clash between him and the people of Berbera and

[13] Laurence, Margaret, *A Tree for Poverty*, 3.

adjoining areas was a cultural clash between a people in contact with modernity and in the process of being urbanized and a man of the interior who was rejecting the new realities.[14]

In addition to his violations of traditional Somali law (*Xeer*), Muhammad Abdille Hassan was criticized on religious grounds by both Ali Dhuux and Ali Jama Haabiil.[15] The net effect of Muhammad Abdille Hassan's abuse of the traditional heroic model was that the model lost its glamor and was shown to be inadequate to deal with the modern world.

Bodari, the new Heroism:

Though the path down which Muhammad Abdille Hassan took Somali poetry, the path of rejecting modernity and using poetry mostly for propaganda and settling tribal scores was the prevalent one during the first two decades of the twentieth century, it was not the only path, for there were attempts led by the poet Salaan 'Arrabey, to chart a different course which was more accepting of modernity. Salaan 'Arrabey however was not a full-blown modernist but a proto-modernist because although he had traveled and lived for many years abroad and his poetry encapsulated many phrases and attitudes that he picked up through his extensive contacts with foreigners, he was in many ways still a traditional poet.[16]

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[14] Said Samatar reverses the relative importance of these two spheres. He treats the coast as marginal and the interior as more important, when in fact it was the other way round. One easy way to tell which side was on the ascendancy and which side was in decline is to look at which side won and which side lost in this conflict, and it was Muhammad Abdille Hassan's side which lost. For Said Samatar's view see his book *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism,* 113.

[15] Ibid., 163-165.

[16] He lived from the middle of the nineteenth century to early nineteen forties, *Somali Poetry*, 58. See also Margaret Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty*, 37-38.

This was the situation when Elmi Bodari first appeared on the literary scene; a situation of crisis brought about by Muhammad Abdille Hassan's exhaustion of Somali poetry and where Salaan Arrabey's tenuous attempts to respond positively to the challenges facing Somali poetry, though salutary, were not enough. Bodari while moving in the direction set by Salaan Arrabey, did so with full blast thus intensifying the crisis of Somali poetry and ushering in the birth of modern Somali poetry. Fundamental to this modern poetry is a new definition of heroism which can be observed in verses such as:

Like a hero against whom men have combined

I covered my face, all but my defiant eyes.[17]

In these lines Elmi Bodari compares himself to a hero who was unfairly beaten by a band of men who ganged up on him. A group against one is clearly an unfair fight, but what is important here is that, notwithstanding his defiance, he was not only defeated, but more importantly, he was willing to admit his defeat. This was new, for in Somali traditional verse, a poet would trumpet his accomplishments and either play down his setbacks or not mention them at all. Furthermore, the fight that Bodari is describing is not a physical one but his struggle to win Hodan's love.

This new attitude whereby love becomes an important arena for inter-personal contests and where the possibility of failure is real is picked up by later poets who came after Elmi Bodari. For further elaboration of this point, let us look at Muhammad Warsame Hadrawi's poem *At the grave of Cilmi Bodari*. In that poem Hadrawi crowns Bodari as a prince of poets and

[17] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 66.

calls him a hero.[18] But in the same poem, Hadrawi also focuses on how much Elmi suffered in his life from mistreatment by people who did not understand him and how he eventually died of grief from his unrequited love. So Hadrawi clearly considers Bodari a victim of love as well as a victim of the cruelty of people. The image of the hero who is also a victim was something that first appeared in Somali literature with the personality of Elmi Bodari, for before him, the traditional Somali hero had to engage in acts of physical bravery in order to be called a hero. With Elmi Bodari, love became a standard for courage.

The new hero embodied by Elmi Bodari in Hadrawi's poem is different from the traditional hero of the past in other important ways. The new hero does not uphold the status quo but challenges it. Bodari definitely challenged the status quo. Moreover, this new hero as defined by Hadrawi, ends up in paradise not for his religious piety, or his fastidious adherence to religious commands, but for suffering in the cause of love which implies that this new dispensation to which love is so central was sanctioned by divine justice itself. The victim becoming a hero is not the only paradox in Bodari's love. Another paradox is that although love is dangerous and can kill, it has become essential ingredient for modern life. In fact love or the experience of love has become so essential that Hadrawi even attempts to banish the idea that love can kill despite the evidence available to him regarding Elmi Bodari's death.[19]

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[18] Ibid., 90, The Somali expression that Bodari uses is Boqorkii Jacaylka (literally the King of Love) which Andrzejewski translates it as "king among poets", 90; The verse is *The message that the hero sent me*, 92.

[19] Ibid., 93; the line of verse is:

Love! May you live evermore!
It can't be true – It's a lie, I say,
That it was you who killed Bowndheri!

The new hero also holds a more open sexual attitude. Even Hadrawi, a relatively conservative poet, feels enough at ease to engage in an imaginary dialogue with Bodari and asks him probing questions about life in the next world and whether he was enjoying himself with Houris in paradise who were fulfilling his desires.[20] Being overall a conservative poet, Hadrawi provides an excellent yardstick of how far Somali poetry has travelled after Elmi Bodari's initial breakthrough. We can see this when Hadrawi says about himself "I am a man who has been bewitched"[21] a transgressive thing for a traditional Somali poet to say given the obvious association of the expression with magic and sorcery. He is possessed and being directed by someone else. His will is no longer his own. In other words, he is an alienated hero declaring, "I long to be not here, but there."[22]

Hadrawi's alienation is however mild compared to that of Elmi Bodari. With the latter, alienation from Somali culture is so deep that he calls Somali customs "evil."[23] But this alienation was also a creative force, a bitter sweet experience that helped Somali literature move forward.

Qaasim's continuation of Bodari's work:

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[20] Ibid., 93, see the verses:
Now there are houris to engage in amiable talk
Houris who are commanded to sing for me
And who encompass me with the inner borders of their robes.

[21] Ibid., 96.

[22] Ibid., 96.

[23] The line of verse is: *Evil is the custom of Somalis – otherwise they would not revile me*; see Abdillahi and Andrzejewski, "The Life of 'Ilmi Bowndheri," 196.

The crisis in Somali poetry which was brought to a head by Elmi Bodari was bitter sweet in that although it saved Somali poetry from atrophy and decay, it also exposed Somali poetry to the danger of descending to chaos. Both the danger of descending to chaos and the emergence of the new sensibility which were triggered by Bodari are most lucidly expressed in Axmed Diriye Qaasim's poem Bitter Sweet, which is also the most commented on Somali poem.

The threat of chaos is real because the poem does not uphold the traditional values but is advocating new values. But these new values are also contradictory. And Qaasim skillfully uses the tension stemming from the contradictions in these new values to keep the threatening chaos at bay. To put it differently, the contradictions become a source of strength rather than a mark of weakness. For example when the bitter aloe "seems like honey in your mouth[24]", this contradiction does not reduce the value of aloe but enhances it. The same is true of the poet's ability to:

switch from sweet to bitter

And back to sweet again.

It is not just the contradictions that become a source of strength for the poem, but the new values too play a similar role. Foremost among these new values is Qaasim's frank admission of his weaknesses and foibles. He says about himself that he is a mere "townee", "a no good lay-about", and a "a crazy libertine."[25] These are clearly negative values, and though they initially draw the interest of the audience because of their shock effect, left by themselves, they

[24] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 88.

[25] Ibid., 88.

could make it hard to sympathize with a person who displays such characteristics. But they are not left to themselves, for he also reveals that he is kind, giving, and "with best of natures." The opposing qualities lend his character complexity. Furthermore, the poem resists closure and is constantly pushing toward openness and new possibilities. He is not a man who is satisfied going down the trodden path but is willing to try something new.

As he says:

> Do not suppose I am the kind of man
>
> Who walks along one path, and that path only.[26]

Taking different paths of course brings new adventures which enrich his experience. But it also has a downside: instability, disharmony, and lack of commitment. These are the same attributes for which modernism and the modern self are criticized. But it should not come as a surprise that these attributes are prominent in Bitter Sweet for as was mentioned at the outset of the chapter, this poem is the quintessential modern Somali poem, the poem in which what Bodari started comes to full fruition. However, there is one major difference between Bodari and Qassim. Notwithstanding the psychological blows he suffered and the consequent fragmentation of his psyche, Bodari was totally and unequivocally committed to Hodan. He also was obsessed with one theme, that of love. Qaasim, on the other hand, is a man of many themes who does not want to commit himself to a single cause and who "can't be balanced on a pair of scales"[27] or be pinned down.

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[26] Ibid., 88.

[27] Andrzejewski, *An Anthology of Somali Poetry*, 89.

Ultimately, despite Qaasim's divided self, there is one aspect of him that is the key to his personality, and we find a clue to this in the following lines:

> And now, my friends, each man of you –
> If either of the paths I follow
> Takes your fancy and delights your heart
> Or even if you cannot bear to lose
> The entertainment I provide,
> Then come to me along that path –
> You're free to make a choice![28]

Here Qaasim first invites members of his audience to relate to him according to the aspect of his personality that suits them the most. This is a clear departure from the traditional Somali outlook which expects individuals to accept certain values that are deemed worthy and to reject others that are considered objectionable by the culture. In other words, Qaasim is upholding diversity and the individual's right to choose his own path in life. Qaasim however is not only interested in those who take him seriously, but is also willing to accommodate those who do not take seriously any of the paths he is offering, and instead look at his poetry as entertainment. By accommodating this latter group, Qaasim is validating the view that his poetry is to some extent entertainment, a view that goes counter to the classical notion of the Gabay genre as a vehicle for only serious poetry.

The individual's right to choose one's path in life was of course championed by Elmi Bodari and in this sense Qaasim was continuing Bodari's work. Similarly, the use of poetry as light entertainment in the form sung poetry (the Belwo, heello and hees) owes its rise to Elmi

[28] Ibid., 89.

Bodari's poetry. Therefore, Qaasim's sanguine attitude toward poetic entertainment could be said to be a continuation of Bodari's work, which shows the long and abiding reach of Bodari's poetry.

APPENDIX A

MACAAN IYO QADHAADH

Dacartuba marbay malab dhashaa ood muudsataa dhabaqe

Waxan ahay macaan iyo qadhaadh meel ku wada yaalle

Midigtayda iyo bidixdu waa laba mataanoode

Midi waa martida soora iyo maata daadihise

Midina waa mindiyo xiirayiyo mur iyo deebaaqe

Masalooyin talantaalliyaan maandhow leeyahaye

Nin majiira keliyuun qabsada hay malayninae

Marbaan ahay muddeex camal san oon maagista aqoone

Marna macangag laayaanahoo miiggan baan ahaye

Marbaan ahay muftiga saahidnimo mawlacaw gala'e

Marna Mukhawi waashoo xumaha miista baan ahaye

Marbaan ahay nin xaaraan maqdaxa aan marin jidiinkise

Marna tuug mu'diya baan ahoon maal Rasuul bixinne

Marbaan ahay maqaam awliyaad maqaddinkoodiiye

Marna mudanka shaydaanka iyo maal jinbaan ahaye

Marbaan ahay murtiyo baanisaba madaxda reeraaye

Oo ay weliba muuniyo dulqaad igu majeertaane

Marna reer magaal Loofaroon muuqan baan ahaye

Waxan ahay nin midabbeeya oo maalinbays rogae

Muuqaygu gelinkiiba waa muunad goonniyahe

Miisaanna ima saari karo nin i maleeyaaye

Muslinka iyo gaalada dirkaba waan micna aqaane

Malaa'iigta naartiyo jannadu waygu murantaaye

Ninkii maalmo badan soo jiree madaxu boosaystay

Ee inan rag maamuli yiqiin waa I maan garanne

Ninkasta halkii kuula mudan ee ay muhato laabtaadu

Ee aanad madadaaladeed ugala maarmaynin

Iska soo mar waa kuu bannaan marinkad doontaaye.

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