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CHAPTER ONE

Making Memories of Mogadishu in Somali poetry about the civil war

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What is dearest to us is often dearer than the truth

History is the poisoned well, seeping into the ground-water. It's not the unknown past we're doomed to repeat, but the past we know. Every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent, thrown into the future.

(Ann Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*)

Introduction

An incident - The power of Somali poetry was brought home to me at a conference of Somali Studies in London in 1993. A European expert on Somali poetry, who had collaborated with a noted Somali poet, stepped onto the podium to analyse some recent Somali poetry commenting on the current clan-based violence with all the venom and partiality of the moment. As soon as he recited the lines in Somali, a deadening silence fell over the large auditorium. Because this was London, a centre for Somali immigrants and refugees, there was a sizable Somali audience, from old men to young girls with neat *hijabs*, who had so far been engaged and animated. Now they became uneasy and quiet, and although the speaker, somewhat nonplussed and unnerved, completed his talk, the

eerie atmosphere made it difficult to concentrate on what he said. When he finished, a whole orchestra of voices swept over him: how could he bring these kinds of texts into a public place. They had come here to learn something scholarly, not to be insulted and humiliated. They had come as Somalis and had not come prepared to be addressed and insulted like this. And however strongly the speaker explained that these lines were only illustrations for his analysis, his defence fell on deaf ears.¹

The first point that this incident impressed upon me was the power of Somali poetry. Spoken before a Somali audience, the power of these lines as effective speech, in this case their virulence, as it were, could not be contained or bracketed by scholarly analysis; on the contrary, pronounced by a European scholar, its virulence might become even more dangerous. However, had the lines not referred to clan violence, their impact might have been different. The second insight that emerged was therefore about the emotive power of speech dealing with violence and about the relationship of Somali collective identities to space. Many Somalis in the audience were angry that, in this scholarly and public place, shared with other Somalis and non-Somalis, they were confronted with words that targetted their clan identity. Thus they suddenly found themselves differentially related both to the words spoken, and to the speaker and the people around them. Rightly or wrongly, they insisted that, in that particular context, their common identity as Somalis - their national identity - was the only relevant and appropriate one and that the speaker was out of line to address and construct them differently. The incident represents some of the themes of this chapter in condensed form, namely how Somali popular culture, that is to say Somali poetry, performed or disseminated in public (shared) space, mediates violence, that is to say, interprets, speaks about, and aims at intervening in violence.

This essay examines a particular set of Somali poems, namely texts that discursively use Mogadishu, the capital city of the independent Republic of Somalia since 1960, to mediate the violence of state collapse and reconstruction. Before turning to these specific texts, however, it is necessary to provide some background to the wider set of sources to which they belong and the violence with which they deal.

¹ London, School of Oriental and African Studies, European Somali Studies Conference, 1993.

The violence - There are two shifts in the discourses about violence that are at the centre of this analysis and Mogadishu plays a significant role in both of them. The first one is a ‘key shift’² whose destructive impact materialised in Mogadishu at the moment of state collapse in January 1991. It was a ‘key shift’ in the sense that it was a key or cumulative moment at which a particular kind of discourse - what I call ‘the clan logic’ - was burned into Somali bodies and minds through violence perpetrated in its name. This ‘clan logic’ is not simply the articulation of ‘the significant other’ as ‘other clan’, or ‘enemy clan’, but the articulation and implementation of an agenda for communal violence³ and the mobilisation of people around the idea that individuals and groups constituting this ‘other’ deserve to die and must be killed or expelled.⁴ The ‘key shift’ represents a new stage of clannist violence incited by leaders aspiring to take control of the state, in which Somalis who were *not* state actors and thus did *not* act as part of the institutions of the national state they shared (however unequally) with other Somalis proved ready to commit against other ordinary Somali civilians violence of such a scale and enormity that it fits the label of ‘clan cleansing’.⁵ Of course, this ‘key shift’ can only be understood in context, first, against the background of the Barre regime (October 1969-January 1991), which itself perpetrated large-scale clan-based violence (especially in 1988 in the northwest); second, in the context of Somalia as a whole, where scenes of violence comparable to those in Mogadishu at the time of state collapse were, with different perpetrators and different victims, seemingly endlessly played out (Amnesty International 1992).

Compared to this first ‘key shift’, the second discursive shift is in a different key. According to its advocates, an Islamic/Islamist discourse has the potential to wipe the

² For the Foucauldian term ‘key shift’, see Willemse 2007:19 and Mills 1997:26.

³ The concept of communal violence refers to violence for which civilians target other civilians on the basis of their group identity. See Kapteijns 1994:211-213.

⁴ This does not mean that other examples of mass violence are less horrifying or less significant. These other occurrences, such as in Somalia’s northwest in 1988, the Banaadir, the riverine area, Kismaayo, and so forth all deserve (further) study in their own right.

⁵ My use of ‘clan cleansing’ parallels that of ‘ethnic cleansing’, which entails using force or intimidation to eliminate or expel individuals of another ethnic or religious group from a particular area in order to make that area ethnically homogeneous.

slate clean and defeat clan thinking by articulating the Somali nation as a Somali *umma* inclusive of all Muslim Somalis. However, intimately intertwined with clan thinking and harnessed to the violent struggle over control of the state and the resources that are normally controlled by the state, this discourse is now used to justify further violence against civilians in the name of Islam. At the time of writing, Somalis throughout the world are being called to Mogadishu to engage in an armed struggle framed in religious terms. The clan militias of the 1990s have morphed into Islamist youth militias such as Al-Shabaab and Ahl al-Sunna wa'l Jamaaca,⁶ while old and new warlords now claim Islamic credentials and titles. In the capital and throughout the country as a whole, this 'Islamist (il)logic'⁷ has re-ignited large-scale communal violence, this time justified in the name of Islam rather than clan.

Popular culture, media, and public space - Somali poetic mediations of violence, including the texts that constitute the source base of this essay, are part of Somali popular culture, here defined both in reference to its content and its distribution and circulation. Thus popular culture is here understood as "culture that is widely disseminated, and widely viewed or heard and read" (Davis 1992:1411) and that constitutes, in Nadine Dolby's terms, "an important locus of public debate and of individual and community agency" with "important implications for the public spaces and social fabric of a society" (Dolby 2006:34). Somali poetry and popular songs fit these criteria. First, they are disseminated widely and in a variety of ways. The private exchange of cassette tapes, CDs and DVDs as well as their sale in local music shops from Jigjiga to Hargeisa and Toronto is still significant to distribution in- and outside of Somalia. So is their broadcasting on local and international radio programmes such as the Somali programmes of the BBC and the Voice of America, also accessible through the internet. There has also been an upswing in the publication of written anthologies and *diiwaans*

⁶ I follow Somali orthography to transcribe Somali names and phrases, even if they are based on Arabic. This means that the 'c' stands for the (Somali and Arabic) consonant *`ayn* and the 'x' for the aspirated 'h,' while long vowels are doubled.

⁷ I am using this term parallel to that of 'the clan logic' above.

(collections of one poet's oeuvre), and original poetry and songs also feature in recently established Somali Studies journals.⁸

The true revolution in communication and dissemination has been the emergence, in the course of the 1990s, of the 700 or so Somali websites, some of which specialise in the dissemination of poetry or songs and present these in the form of audio-, video- or written texts (Issa-Salwe 2005, 2006, and 2008). The fact that poetic messages and interventions are now "cast through new mass media or broadcast through new, transnational channels of communication" raises a host of new questions. Thus authors such as Bernal (2005), as well as Meyer & Moors (2006), ask about the construction and reconstruction of communities and audiences, the role violence plays in such constructions, implications for the concept of public space, inclusion and exclusion, what can be spoken and what not, what is kept secret and what made public, and so forth.

In the Somali context, these new electronic mass media have shaped, and are transforming, the architecture of Somali public space. There exists a digital divide between Somalia and the diaspora, although that divide is far from absolute, as even in small Somali towns there is often some internet access. Moreover, when we speak of Somali cultural production, Somali cyberspace, to use Bernal's terms, "overflows its electronic boundaries in a number of important ways" (2005:663), just as it absorbs and disseminates expressions of popular culture circulating in different electronic formats. Thus the broader source base from which this essay draws consists of poems that were composed and/or performed and disseminated in Somalia, in neighbouring East African countries such as Kenya and Djibouti, as well as in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and the United States. They represent recordings of public or private performances and are disseminated in audio-, audio-visual, and written form via radio, music shops, and private exchange, as well as on the internet.⁹ Somali cyberspace is becoming the single most comprehensive and continuously expanding depository and archive of Somali cultural production and, as such, increasingly generates the public

⁸ For example, *Halabuur: Journal of Somali Literature and Culture* (Djibouti).

⁹ My research association with the Halabuur Centre for Culture and Communication, located in Djibouti, from September to December 2007, played a crucial role in my ability to discover and access the texts analysed in this chapter. All the translations from Somali into English are mine.

sphere in which the kinds of mediations of violence studied here circulate. In this process, popular culture produced (or initiated) by Somalis in the diaspora (who form the majority of web masters for Somali sites) is becoming dominant. Although internet access is less available inside Somalia than in the diaspora, Somali cultural expressions and interactions are so intensely transnational and multi-media in nature that they bridge the digital divide and create, at least for the subject-matter and genre under study here, a differentiated but common public space.

Clive Barnett, commenting on recent revisions and expansions of Habermasian notions of the public sphere, refers in this context to the concepts of “cultural public sphere” (attributed to Nancy McGuigan) and of “weak public sphere” (attributed to Nancy Fraser), to suggest two points also relevant to this essay. First, in Fraser’s words, “a weak public sphere is constituted by those activities ‘whose deliberative practice consist[s] exclusively in opinion-formation and does not encompass decision-making’” (Barnett 2004:262). This insight helps to put the mediations of violence studied in this essay in perspective, for it provides, in Barnett’s words, “a means of understanding the political significance of cultural practices without collapsing the cultural and the political into one another in over-inflated notions of cultural politics” (idem:263). Second, the concept of “cultural public sphere” refers to how “a wide array of affective communicative and expressive practices of popular culture, in contrast to narrowly cognitive and rational understandings of deliberation”, may contribute to the public sphere and to “the cultural formation of democratic competencies” of audiences in it (idem:262-63). The poems and song studied here indeed constitute affective and expressive cultural practices of political opinion-making and thus a form of cultural politics in a ‘weak’, ‘cultural’ public sphere. In their intent to affect Somali political views of, and relations with, each other and thus to engage “issues of sociability and power”, they also fit into what Lutz and Abu-Lughod have called a cultural “politics of everyday life” (1990:2).

Poetry as effective and emotive speech - The poetry and song texts from which the texts presented here were drawn are mediations of violence related to the collapse and reconstruction of the state. It is striking how many texts dealing with this topic bring into

play this wider social context without emphasising personal suffering. This may be due to what Somalis regard as appropriate ways of speaking about suffering and death in public. Speaking about private pain in ways that do not make a socially, politically, or even universally relevant point is, according to the rules of the Somali literary canon, rarely effective or prestigious speech, even if in certain contexts - that is, in particular genres, when recited or sung by particular categories of people (especially women and young men), in particular physical locations - such 'non-prestigious' speech will find and emotionally affect its target audience and also be sanctioned (Kapteijns 1999:72-77). Christina Zarowski noted the following in the context of anthropological interviews with Somalis in Northeast Ethiopian refugee camps: "Somalis in Ethiopia ... stressed politics, justice and poverty, and not private distress, in their interactions with me about their experiences of collective violence and forced migration" (Zarowsky 2001:313). This does not mean that people do not feel private pain, she argues, nor that they are silenced by community pressures. Rather, she notes:

Individual experiences related to displacement and violence, including what may be glossed as 'emotions', are consistently interpreted not with respect to what they say about the interior state of an individual, but with respect to what they say about the situation of an individual vis-à-vis life circumstances and other social actors (idem:313-14).

This insight is also relevant to Somali poetry. Zarowski is right in concluding that Somali society does not force individuals to be silent or suppress expressions of individual suffering and emotions. However, she does not consider that there exist rules that govern what can be appropriately said. The form speech takes - poetry or prose and, if poetry, which genre - as well as the identity of the speaker and the context of speaking, influence what speech is considered prestigious, legitimate, and effective in a particular context.¹⁰

Like the interview responses Zarowski elicited, much Somali poetry about the impact of violence on individuals has the intent of being effective speech, that is to say

¹⁰ See Samatar 1982 for the classical (male) poetic genres and Kapteijns 1999:72-77 and 154-157 for the so-called non-prestigious ones and for the "muting" of women's voices.

speech that affects change and forwards solutions that go beyond the individual alone. It might be argued that, in the Somali context, this poetry is the form of effective and emotive speech *par excellence* and is created to move its audience in purposeful ways. Conceived of by men in the most prestigious genres; pressed into the formal constraints of alliteration, metre, rhythm and melody; sharpened in meaning by poetic virtuosity and creativity; emotionally charged by the use of metaphors, memories, and ethical impulses that are often intensely inter-textual and inter-discursive and thus Somali to the core, poems and songs are intended to persuade and change the minds and hearts of their audience.

Song texts are also poetic texts but they can be, and often are, shorter and less complex in form than other poems, as they can bring to bear on their listeners a much wider range of the sound effects of voice, melody, rhythm, and musical instruments. The emotive power of songs thus lies in their aesthetic and sensual appeal as much as their moral reasoning. No wonder, then, that when poets create a song, they often use shorter poetic genres, while other poets use the traditionally most prestigious ‘male’ poetic genres of *gabay*, *jiifto* and *geeraar*, which, in their ideal form, express, the Somali poetic canon holds, the well thought out intellectual arguments of wise and competent men.¹¹

Men’s voices in a man’s world - In *Women’s Voices in a Man’s World* (1999), I showed in which traditional genres of Somali orature (or aurette) women could speak effectively, even if not necessarily prestigiously, and how their voices were muted by the conventions of the Somali literary canon and a social hierarchy that made public affairs the business of men. Given that the poetry studied here is poetry that circulates in shared public space and mediates a subject-matter as public and central to the political sphere of men as war and violence, in the male genres traditionally regarded most suitable for the topic, it is perhaps not surprising that the vast majority of poetic mediations of violence are authored by men.¹² This does not mean that women never author poetry addressing

¹¹ For more information about the genres, see Orwin & Riiraash 1997 and Johnson 2001.

¹² Charlotte Hooper 2001 argues that the academic field of international relations is dominated by men and particular constructions of hegemonic masculinity and also produces such masculinity. Similarly, the authors of the poetic genre studied here, as a

the violence associated with state collapse. For example, some female poets performed at most of the national reconciliation meetings and, like men, a few women have begun to publish their poems (Amina Said Ali 2005 and Xaawa Jibriil 2008).¹³ However, when poets are women, their poems often do not get disseminated in the public sphere - nor are they transcribed and published on the best known literary websites - in the same ways as those of men.¹⁴ Thus, as was true for the songs analysed in *Women's Voices in a Man's World*, in the kinds of texts studied here it is the voices of men that are most commonly heard in shared public space, for even the songs that provide women's perspectives and are in their voice, are still most often authored by men.

The popular culture texts studied in this essay are only one kind of Somali mediation of violence. There are other such literary mediations, private and public, that are not examined here in detail but whose mention here helps to delineate the mediations that are central to this essay. First, there is a vast and scattered body of poems dealing with violence, circulating mostly in the form of audio-cassettes, that is produced and performed for an audience of like-minded people (relatives, friends, political allies). This includes what may be called virulent and incendiary poetry, often produced in the heat of the moment, in which men and women praise their own families/clans, vilify enemy clans, and jeer at the violence and abuse inflicted upon the latter. Such poems belong to the genre of *gubaabo qabiil* ("egging on the clan"). This kind of poetry draws on widespread and long-standing hate-narratives that are based on historical fact and fiction and form an archive of half-lies and rumors that are, and have been, used to justify acts of communal violence. Few Somalis would tolerate such poems in simultaneously shared public space and such texts would, minimally, provoke a display of anger similar to that in the London incident described above. However, as a phenomenon, they are widely

part of the everyday politics of the cultural public sphere, articulate their genre and its subject-matter as masculine and their own masculinity in terms of competence in it.

¹³ In this chapter (and bibliography), I refer to Somali authors who have published under a last name (often their third or grandfather's name) by that last name. In all other cases, Somali authors are referred to by their first, father's, and grandfather's name, in that order.

¹⁴ Thus the few poems by women included in the literary Somali website www.aftahan.com (accessed March 2008) are poems in which women, as women and especially as mothers, comment on women's issues.

known among Somalis and occasionally ‘leak’ into print. For example, Mohamed-Abdi’s *Apocalypse* (1994:17-8) includes some hateful and gloating taunts at the victims of the communal violence unleashed in Mogadishu in January 1991. Strikingly, Somali webmasters, even those specialising in literature, have *not* incorporated them into the mainstream Somali websites (Issa-Salwe 2005:153-54).

Second, there have emerged other kinds of popular culture that deal with the violence of the Somali civil war (Somali-language short stories and novels, Somali sitcoms on DVD, Somali and Somali-English rap songs, and so forth). These represent relatively new genres, also fully deserving of further study. However, by the standards of the (changing) Somali literary canon, they barely exist and are regarded as irrelevant, linguistically mediocre and non-prestigious. While I refer to such texts in my analysis, the focus here is on a particular genre (men’s prestigious poetry), about a particular topic (the violence of state collapse and reconstruction), making reference to a specific theme (Mogadishu), in shared public space (including Somali cyberspace).

Mogadishu as *lieu de mémoire* - There are two reasons why Mogadishu is the discursive site around which this essay is constructed. First, from 1960, when it became the capital of the new Somali state and the icon of Somali cosmopolitanism, modernity, and unity, its centrality to Somali history, for better or worse, has continued to increase. Today, nowhere in Somalia is the difference between pre-civil war and current realities more stark and grim than in Mogadishu. Second, in the Somali context, Mogadishu is a *lieu de mémoire*, a site for memory-making in the sense proposed by Pierre Nora. Nora sees a “fundamental opposition” between memory and history. He sees memory as an organic, spontaneous, unselfconscious, ongoing remembering of particular experiences. History, on the other hand, is “the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer” (Nora 1989:8). *Lieux de mémoire* arise, Nora argues, at the intersection of history and memory, “at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of history” (idem:11). Thus, one reason why Mogadishu has become a *lieu de mémoire* in Somali mediations of violence is that the Mogadishu of before civil war destruction is irrevocably gone.

Moreover, there is in this context, as de Certeau phrases it, a “double alteration” at work, for not only is the Mogadishu of before the civil war no longer in existence but those who invoke its memory in mediations of violence do so prompted by very specific circumstances in the present, especially as exiles engaging with the city from far away. De Certeau’s use of the term ‘memory’ has more in common with Nora’s definition of ‘history’ than that of ‘memory:’ it is not the spontaneous, ongoing remembering that, at the moment of its disappearance becomes the vacuum that history fills and transforms (as according to Nora), but an act in and of the present and thus by definition at a remove from the past and thus ‘other’ to it. Thus de Certeau says, “Memory is played by the circumstances, just as a piano is played by a musician and music emerges from it when its keys are touched by the hands. Memory is a sense of the other” (Behar 1996:81 and de Certeau 1984:86-87). In the space opened up as a result of this “double alteration”, Somali poets and songsmiths, moved by the violence of state collapse and reconstruction, fashion Mogadishu as a *lieu de mémoire*, a ‘site of memory’, from which they speak to the present about the violence of the past and construct memories of the past to advocate for a particular future.

As articulated by Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe (1993:10), a *lieu de mémoire* is a site of collective memory around which individuals and groups generate memories in such a way that these recollections make sense to them and ‘work’ for them, for example by allowing them to see themselves in a particular way or by allowing them to persuade others of something. A “site for memory” does not just hold but also shapes collective memory, and, as Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe argue, “collective memory is a means of producing meanings that belong to the political field”. As a result, they write, “collective memory does not signify facts about the past: it is above all a semantic code for retrieving memories, for making sense out of historical details in direct relation to political legitimacy” (idem). It is this political and collective dimension (and intention) of memory-making in the sources of this essay that is pertinent here. Somali poets and songwriters have taken Mogadishu as a *lieu de mémoire*, as a discursive site *of* and *for* memory making, as they comment on the fate and future of the Somali people and their government.

The structure of this essay - The following focuses on Somali poems authored between 1991 and 2007 - a period that witnessed both shifts to violence outlined above - with some comparative reference to earlier poems and English-language texts. It examines a small set of Somali poems (including one song) that construct memories of Mogadishu as part of their mediation of the violence of state collapse and reconstruction. In doing so, it documents and provides a historical context for aspects of this violence and shows that the poetry mediating it constitutes a genre of speech that intends to shape and change the political subjectivities of its audience. The analysis of the changing political dimension of the poems is a central theme of this chapter and prepares for a re-visiting, in the conclusion, of the nature of the poetry under study and the shared Somali public space in which it situates itself.

Making memories of the background to violence

“Mogadishu, what happened?” - This essay begins with a relatively recent poem, called “Mogadishu, what happened?”, in which the author directly addresses the city and asks it what has happened to it. The poem takes a historical approach and evokes memories of the events that took place in the city in three periods – the era preceding and following independence (from 1955 to 1969), the time of the Barre dictatorship (from October 1969 to January 1991), and the moment of state collapse and its aftermath (from late 1990 to the present). Thus, even though it is not the oldest poem analysed here, it provides a basic chronology of events and presents a background against which the other mediations of violence studied here can be discussed.

“Mogadishu, what happened?” (*Muqdishooy maxaa dhacay?*), one of the hundreds of poems published on the Somali websites,¹⁵ was written and posted to the web in October 2003 by a young Somali engineer called Cumar Cabdinuur Nuux

¹⁵ For the Somali text, see www.aftahan.com accessed on April 22, 2008. This poem is a *jiifto*, alliterating in ‘m.’ A *jiifto* is one of the prestigious male genres. It is shorter than the *gabay* and thus more like the *geeraar*, but often two lines are combined into one long one. Personal information from Martin Orwin, June 10, 2008. Also see Orwin & Riiraash 1997:90. This poem consist of fifteen stanzas, all of which will be presented (in translation) in the course of this chapter.

“Nabaddoon”, then based in London. It was written towards the end of the tenure of the Transitional National Government, during the extended Mbagathi peace talks in Kenya that, in 2004, gave birth to the current Transitional Federal Government, now under its second president. In this text, the poet interrogates the city about its past from the perspective of the lamentable present. Thus, after giving a glimpse of a war-torn Mogadishu split into hostile sections and strewn with dead bodies, the poet confronts the city first with its own image in its prime, the long decade following independence in 1960.

Making memories of Mogadishu in the long decade after independence -The memories Nabaddoon invokes at the beginning of his poem (stanzas 2-5) are all positive. They speak of natural beauty and people with the leisure and freedom to enjoy it; of security and prosperity, stable administration and economic development. As capital, he tells the city, you were the head and heart from which the whole country was governed. Thus he calls up memories of ‘the good life’ in Mogadishu in the 1960s (and perhaps even the early 1970s), when Mogadishu was loved and revered as the capital of the independent Somali state - a time when its infrastructure was improving, its harbour functioning, the agricultural production of its hinterland sufficient for both local consumption and export, its religious and secular education booming, its bureaucracy functional. However, interwoven with these positive memories, in the last lines of three of the four stanzas devoted to this time-period, the poet harshly destroys the idyllic picture he had just painted, for, at the time of writing, *qaat* and marijuana had taken the place of fruits and grains, he says, and unsophisticated countrymen were grazing their camels where there once were public institutions and roads. Addressing the city directly, he asks, who raped you, who defiled you?

The sadness I feel for you, the unforgettable events,
the cannons, mortars, and gunfire that struck every part of you,
the dead bodies of your inhabitants that lie scattered everywhere -
what do you think caused your fall from the high stature you had
to where you are now, Mogadishu?

Your beautiful seascape matching the colour of the sky,
the fish, the ships travelling on and under the water,
places to swim, tourist sites to visit,
a central harbour, stable administration, security,
you were graced with everything beautiful.

Bananas, papaya, fruits of all kinds bearing our name
reached many parts of the world.
Mangoes and citrus fruits were growing everywhere,
as well as maize and corn-cobs we gave to our livestock -
have all these now been replaced by a range of mind-altering drugs?

The centre of education, organised administration, and general supervision,
institutes, Qur'anic and other schools, mosques to pray in,
Mukarama road, so beautiful to the eye -
what is the cause that now country hicks graze their camels there?

Mogadishu, you are the Capital of our country.
If, as such you deserve respect,
if you are the place from where all other towns are administered,
if you are the heart, head, and nerve centre,
what caused you to be defiled? What happened, Mogadishu?

The good old days of the nationalist era, symbolised by Mogadishu, are the launching pad for Nabaddoon's memory-making about violence. However, his poem contains no explicitly nationalist metaphors, especially in comparison to a second poem, to which it was a response, by another young poet, Maxamed Cabdiqaadir Maxamuud "Stanza", also published on the web in October 2003. Stanza's poem, in the genre of *geeraar*, is called "Mogadishu" ("*Muqdisho*"). Its refrain addresses the city as the mother of the nation, represented in the popular culture of this era by a she-camel named Maandeeq, which symbolises an idealised, unified, sovereign Somali nation. Thus Stanza says: "You, mother of Maandeeq, Mogadishu, do you deserve the way you are today?"

Like Nabaddoon, Stanza actively engages in memory-making about Mogadishu's 'good old days', and does so with imagery that is even more emotional than that of the

former. He is moved by sadness and a sense of gratitude, he explains, for Mogadishu is “the capital city, the home and technical centre of Maandeeq”. After describing the city in metaphors of flowers, rain, thunderstorms, lightning, and particular conditions of the sky “for which everyone longs”, he further addresses the city, in the second person, as follows:

You, “mama” of our country,
you, prayer mat of the finest,
you, brain of the country from which the nation is administered,
you, bridge of unity,
you who are indispensable to peace.....
you who carried the twins on your shoulders after their birth,¹⁶
a home for guests and
centre of learning¹⁷ in which we were raised,
you, mother of Maandeeq,
Mogadishu, do you deserve to be the way you are today?

Even when he goes on to describe the violence perpetrated on and in Mogadishu, Stanza, indirectly, further invokes the city in its prime by listing the kinds of people who were violated in it: gifted creative writers and playwrights together with their enthusiastic audiences who would attend evening performances in the National Theatre; men of religion, including those who taught about Islam at all different levels; schoolteachers; migrants coming to town seeking work; children in school uniforms, respectable ladies, and pretty young girls. Thus Stanza calls up the effusion and cultural effervescence of the newly independent, sophisticated, modern Mogadishu of the long decade following independence.

The term indicating urbane civility in Somalia in this period was *ilbaxnimo*. It encompasses a set of meanings associated with the sophistication of people living in urban communities made up of different kinds of people, open to other ways than their

¹⁶ The twins refer to British and Italian Somaliland that came together in 1960 to form the unified Republic of Somalia. The concept of *gardaadis* refers to carrying a new-born on the shoulder during a coming-out ceremony forty days after birth. It is hoped that the baby will resemble the person who carries it on that occasion.

¹⁷ Conjectural reading for *mucrab*.

own, and aspiring to modern education and to an ideal of gender relations that were both more relaxed, gentle, and refined than city people believed country ways to be. Indeed, the long 1960s were in Somalia an era of ‘modernity’, that is to say, as Donham puts it, an era animated by the desire to be modern (2002:244). The discourse of modernity in Somalia encompassed many hopes and beliefs, including a liberal belief in constitutional democracy and a representative, accountable government; individual rights and freedoms; social progress derived from formal, modern education, based on European models, and economic development inspired by scientific and technological progress. In the arena of culture, especially in the popular songs that came to epitomise the urban youth culture of this era, the discourse of modernity was dominated by the ideals of greater equality in gender relations and that of modern personhood. The idea of a “modern subject”, in Lutz and Abu-Lughod’s sense (1990:6), with intense personal emotions and desires, is a core feature of the new genres of the popular culture of this era. Ideals such as romantic love, erotic sensuality, and companionate marriage were revolutionary, modern values at the time, as they emphasised individuality and the autonomy of the individual, challenged the traditional authority of family and clan, as well as narrow definitions of Islamic morality, and constructed new self-representations and selves (Kapteijns 2009:103, 109].

Mogadishu of the 1960s and early 1970s came to embody this ideal modernity, both in the sense of an easy cosmopolitanism in the form of a mingling of Somalis and non-Somalis of different backgrounds,¹⁸ and in terms of a sensual, carefree and, in many ways, quite innocent youth culture.¹⁹ The epitome of this cultural ideal is one of the first Somali novels in Somali, Maxamed Daahir Afrax’s *Maanafaay* (1981), which creates a picture of the urban youth scene from the perspective of a young schoolgirl, named Maanafaay, who falls in love and is forced to steer a precarious course between new freedoms and old rules. Of course, in Afrax’s *Maanafaay*, Mogadishu is not a ‘site for memory’, as the life Afrax describes was not yet a thing of the past and he himself was still a part of it. The same is true for a famous poem from this same era that resonates in title and theme with those by Nabaddoon and Stanza, Hadraawi’s “Mogadishu, how are

¹⁸ Compare Farah 2007, in which Mogadishu serves as *lieu de mémoire* for a lost cosmopolitanism.

¹⁹ Compare Barnes 1994.

you?” (*Xamareey, ma nabad baa?*).²⁰ Yet, for Hadraawi Mogadishu was, in a way, a thing of the past, for, while the Mogadishu he imagined still existed, he himself was barred from it.

Hadraawi composed his poem in the 1980s from one of Barre’s jails, fashioning his own memories of it as a site of great natural beauty, of glorious and patriotic history, and of sensual modernity. The lines, “You, umbilical cord of my country, nerve centre of my people, Mogadishu, how are you?” form the refrain in a poetic narrative that largely praises the city in the heavily nationalist rhetoric of the time. Hadraawi begins his poem by invoking Mogadishu as the shining star of a partially realised Somali unity. He speaks of the tree of freedom watered by the blood of those who died fighting colonialism, referring to the “flag that anchors our common birth”. Mogadishu is to him “the sacred place where the tribulations of colonialism were washed away”, the “place where those who embraced a rightful death” while fighting against colonialism “were honoured”, and “the place where collaborators and colonisers were taught a harsh lesson and put into the grave”. This nationalist, anti-colonial emphasis is quite different from that of Nabaddoon and Stanza’s poems, which nevertheless celebrate the city’s position as capital of a politically and economically functioning country, beloved by its people. However, the last, lyrical, part of Hadraawi’s poem takes a very different approach and evokes Mogadishu as a symbol of modern Somali gender relations and sexual mores, that is to say, of the relaxed and sensual youth culture referred to above. Here Hadraawi first describes the beauty and sensuality of a Mogadishu night, comparing the moon to a seductively half-dressed woman, and then imagines himself catching a glimpse of the young couples whispering about love on the city’s beach:

Like a young girl only hears about death from hearsay,
I, Mogadishu, have grown thin longing for you.
Last night I woke up with a start, the night sparkling with stars.
the cool rain falling, the earth covered with pools of rain water
and lush, untouched grass, in the season of prosperity,

²⁰ The Somali text is from www.farshaxan.com (accessed on March 3, 2008). *Xamar*, perhaps a colour reference (“red” or “reddish”), is one of the Somali names for Mogadishu.

while your moon's gossamer dress had come undone,
showing the outline of her body,
the top of her head the colour of henna.
Gorgeous people formed pairs and, after smoothing the tiny stones
of your wonderful beach, put down their elbows
and whispered softly about love's conventions,
calculating their options.
I, meanwhile, interested in finding out about
the love play and the bright star of passion
that make up the six letter word of *jacayl* (love)
would every now and again steal a glimpse of
the down on an arm, elegant finery, and
the soft curve of an inner-arm.

....

You, life-blood of my country, nerve centre of my people,
why do you remind me in prison of my agonised yearning?

There is no reference to the embodied *ilbaxnimo* (urbane sophistication) and dating habits of Mogadishu's beaus and belles in Nabaddoon's evocations of the city in its prime. The memories he dreams of the future are a far cry from the fashioning of the self that symbolised the dreams of modernity of Hadraawi's generation: the self as a secular, educated, 'desiring' individual, struggling to free mind and body from the dictates of the past. In the present era, with its strong Islamist influence, one gets a glimpse of the sensuality Hadraawi invokes only in the hard-hitting English-language rap of the Canadian-Somali rapper K'naan. The memories he makes in "My Old Home" are largely those of violence, but he contrasts these with the energy, pride, hope, joy, and stability of the 1960s and early 1970s:

...the raindrops cool
neighbours and dwellers spat up in the pool,
kids playing football where the sand is suck,
we had what we got and it wasn't a lot,
no one knew they were poor,
we were all innocent to greed's judgment.
The country was combusting with life like a long hibernating volcano,

with a long-term success like Jay Lo,
farmers, fishers, fighters, even fools had a place in production,
the coastal line was the place of seduction,
the coral reefs make you daze in reflection,
the women walked with grace and perfection...²¹

All the memories evoked in the poems presented here, old and new, are selective and in some sense romanticised. A very different picture of Mogadishu emerges, for example, from Nuruddin Farah's novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), in which a penniless young girl, fleeing an arranged marriage in the countryside, gets manoeuvred into a number of exploitative sexual relations. . The same is true for urban studies of Mogadishu. These speak of Mogadishu's vast slums and the sub-standard housing of many inhabitants, especially recent rural migrants, as the city's population increased from 70,000 in 1950 to one million in 1984 (Arecchi 1984:211, 227), reaching two million on the eve of state collapse in 1989. However, in the recent poems (those by Nabaddoon, Stanza, and K'naan), the nostalgic memories of Mogadishu are qualitatively different, first, because they are directly and dramatically juxtaposed to violence, making the violation of people and places during the civil war all the more shocking and, second, because, with Mogadishu as their *lieu de mémoire*, they serve as a springboard for a particular imagining of the future, about which more below.

Making memories of Mogadishu under the Barre dictatorship (1969-1991) - Many of the roots of the violence accompanying state collapse lie in the twenty-two year regime of Maxamed Siyaad Barre. Nabaddoon's "Mogadishu, what happened?", with its chronological approach, analyses this era by interrogating the city about its past during the military dictatorship (stanzas 7-12). Before he does so, however, the poet comments on this approach and its authority (stanza 6). Invoking the sanction of history, he promises to be methodical, truthful, intelligent and learned, balancing a poet's thoughtfulness with fairness and common sense.

Let's think this through and carefully, and

²¹ K'naan, transcribed from "My Old Home" on the CD Dustyfoot Philosopher. "Jay Lo" refers to the US celebrity Jennifer Lopez.

step by step, evaluate what happened, Mogadishu.

Let us consider this truthfully,

with sound judgment, knowledge, and a poet's thoughtfulness,

with a fair mind and even-handedly.

History will tell whether we acquitted ourselves of this satisfactorily.

Then the poet begins his moral indictments. In each stanza he lists a number of unconscionable acts that were committed in the city, to then conclude with the rhetorical question whether Mogadishu would not have fallen so deeply if such things had not been allowed to happen, if its residents had been less conformist and cowardly, and if the city itself had been more ethically aware and God-fearing. The recurring mention of the murdered sheikhs in the following stanzas refers to 1975, when the dictator Maxamed Siyaad Barre executed ten sheikhs for resisting the Family law his regime was imposing by force, promising women more rights. To the minds of many Somalis, this incident, together with increased political (self-)exile and labour-migration to the Arab oil states, marked the beginning of a more intense and strict Islamic devotion at the individual level and the emergence of a set of Islamist movements in Somali society as a whole (Abdurahman Abdullahi n.d).

First the poet reminds the city of the religious leaders (sheikhs) and poor people who were killed in it while unbelievers were feasted and criminals applauded. Why did its residents approve or look away when Barre acted as if he were God and abolished the Holy Book; when he executed the sheikhs who had opposed the "godless family law" imposed by force; when his 'scientific socialist', 'revolutionary' regime fell foul of devout people who refused to conform to his corrupt norms, and why did the city gracefully welcome godless ministers and other unbelievers who made it their home? Were these not the reasons, the poet rhetorically asks, why Mogadishu was destroyed - its moral decline complete, a symbol of lasting conflict and hatred among Somalis?

If, in days past, sheikhs had not been executed in you,

if, in days past, poor people had not been killed in you,

if, in days past, godless infidels had not been regaled in you,

if, in days past, criminals had not been admiringly applauded in you,

would disasters this severe perhaps not have struck you?

Even worse, when your President,
the one responsible for the country,
said “I am to be worshipped” “I am abolishing the Qur’an” ...
If, on the day he said that,
people had not ululated for him and been happy about that,
would disasters this severe perhaps not have struck you?

When the religious leaders were slaughtered
and our way of life was uprooted
and he [the president] imposed a family law on you with godless conceit,
if people had not ululated and been happy about that,
if people had not pretended not to see or know,
would disasters this severe perhaps not have struck you?

When those who, though they never stood in the way of anything good,
refused to join the revolution,
and when those who, because of religious conviction, refused to take bribes,
were cast out and called names,
when they were called “useless to their clan” and “ignorant of what is good for them”,
what was on people’s minds when they hid from the truth?

When from anywhere in countryside or town
anything good, any wage, anything useful was given only to you.
When our she-camel Maandeeq [the nation] was milked only for you,
What was on people’s mind when they hid from the truth?

Mogadishu, when malicious, unbelieving, lying people,
ministers who never prayed, and everyone who was corrupt
made you their home, slept in your dwellings,
and killed the poor, while you ululated and
said “fine”, “well done”, were you not well aware of all this?

It is striking that the vast majority of the poet’s indictments are articulated as moral and religious lapses and transgressions. There is only one exception to that, in the eleventh stanza, where he asks why Somalis did not protest when all progress and development of

any kind became concentrated in Mogadishu alone, while the rest of the country was neglected and remained completely undeveloped?²² Overall, however, Nabaddoon interprets the city's past in terms of its religious shortcomings only. The next section will sketch in greater detail the historical background to the violence that accompanied the collapse of the Somali state in January 1991.

Background to violence: the Barre regime - The history of the military regime and the 'scientific socialist revolution' of Maxamed Siyaad Barre was characterised by violence against some groups and individuals from its very beginning in October 1969 (Samatar 1991 and Laitin & Samatar 1987). However, state violence and ruthless divide-and-rule policies against families and clans increased over time and sowed and deepened dissension and distrust. Most historical surveys of the period 1969-90 only report the most horrendous and massive crimes against humanity the regime afflicted, especially those in the Mudug region of central Somalia in 1979-80 and those in the northwest in 1988. But even on a smaller scale, the government's devious and purposeful creation and intensification of clan-antagonisms actively promoted clan consciousness and clan hatred.

For the Barre dictatorship, the enemy was first of all anyone who threatened its monopoly on power. However, it used clan-based divide-and-rule to undermine the potential unity, effectiveness, even the very self-image and identity, of all those who opposed it. For most of the leaders of the armed opposition fronts the enemy was the Barre regime, but they too increasingly used clannism as a strategy towards securing their own personal power. Towards the end of the Barre era, when it became clear that the end of the Cold War had left the dictator hanging by a thread, the stakes for the opposition leaders became even higher, while the top echelons of the Barre regime had to begin to face the very real possibility of having to stand trial for war crimes, mass murder, and gross violations of human rights.

The brutality of the last years of Barre's rule has been amply documented. The devastation by land and air of Somali National Front (SNM), which had ensconced itself

²² Here the poet echoes a well-known poem by Cabdi Muxumed Amiin, who in 1986 addressed this very theme in a song entitled "Does Mogadishu constitute the whole country?" (2006:106-107).

among the civilian population of the northwest, led, according to Amnesty International (1990:22), to the flight of hundreds of thousands of people and the death of tens of thousands (Amnesty International 1990). In 1989, as popular protests intensified, arbitrary arrests, releases, and re-arrests, as well as summary executions were the order of the day. According to a U.S. army analysis, “the Siad Barre’s strategy of using one clan to carry out government reprisals against a disfavoured clan had the effect of intensifying both inter- and intra-clan antagonisms”.²³ Many Somalis believe that Barre and some of his top government officials purposely tried to provoke clan warfare so as to divert the popular anger that would inevitably be turned against them if the state fell; even that some death squads pretended to have a particular clan identity when this was not the case (Issa-Salwe 1996:103, 107). Though he gradually lost control of a country increasingly plagued by violence of many kinds, Barre still refused to step down.

By 1990, with foreign aid almost completely at a standstill (Rawson 1994), the country was economically ruined, abandoned by its former Cold War suitors, and politically completely destabilised. The armed opposition fronts proved unable to come together and put out a joint programme; instead, some of them began to plan to take the war into Mogadishu and to grab the power for themselves alone by any means necessary (Issa-Salwe idem:104). Moreover, no foreign power or international organisation succeeded in guiding the transition process and help Barre to leave. In May 1990, a group of 114 prominent Somali citizens, from diverse backgrounds and including former political leaders, major businessmen, intellectuals and religious leaders, sent Barre a Manifesto and called for his abdication, for the constitution of a transitional government consisting of representatives of all the armed opposition fronts, and the setting of a date for general elections (Bongartz 1991:101-114). Barre refused. When members of the Manifesto group were brought to court, inhabitants of Mogadishu of many different backgrounds came together for a mass demonstration and were jubilant when the accused were cleared of the charges raised against them. However, those who could have turned back the tide of civil war did not do so.

²³ See www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/horn_sml.html (accessed on April 23, 2008), U.S. Department of the Army: Analysis of Somalia, December 1993.

By the time the dictator was driven out of Mogadishu on 27 January 1991, the city and the country were swept up in deadly communal violence during which ordinary civilians were robbed, raped, mutilated, abducted, expelled, and killed on the basis of the clan-family into which they had been born. In Mogadishu, this ‘clan cleansing’ began with the United Somali Congress (USC) campaign to exterminate and expel all those who were considered to be Barre’s clan family - a targeting for violence that was almost immediately extended to other groups that were regarded as outside of what it considered its clan base. This campaign, which lasted into 1993 and covered the territory from Mogadishu to Galkaacyo to Gedo and Kismaayo, almost immediately sparked a cycle of war crimes, gross human rights violations, and ‘clan cleansing’ by other militias associated with friends and foes of the USC, including militias reorganising around Barre. This violence caused destruction, human suffering, and famine²⁴ that rippled across most of southern, central, and (to a lesser extent) even northern Somalia. At the time of writing, large parts of Somalia are still in the grip of violence.

The discursive and political ‘key shift’ that marked the fall of the State was one by which the dominant political antagonism was no longer constructed in national terms (government against political opposition) and no longer mediated by national government institutions, however unequally shared. Instead, political leaders outside of the framework of the state (though in pursuit of control over it) mobilised, in the name of clan and outside the framework of national institutions, ordinary civilians for violence against other ordinary civilians. This key shift was achieved and buttressed through enormous violence. Those who wanted the state for themselves alone - vainly, it turned out - consciously decided on violence to wipe out and permanently expel hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps as much as one half of the population of the capital alone, drawing and reinforcing in blood what for many urbanites had been permeable and politically insignificant clan boundaries.²⁵ By the time ordinary people fell victim to this

²⁴ This is the very famine that in December 1992 led to the U.S./U.N. intervention called Operation Restore Hope.

²⁵ This violence also allowed those who had committed crimes against the people during the Barre regime - some of them occupying the highest and most influential government positions until the very last moment - to simply step away from their compromised pasts to re-emerge and make a new bid for power as the leaders of their clans.

‘clan logic’ and killed (and were killed) in its name, the key shift had occurred and a new alterity based on clan had triumphed. In Mogadishu this key shift, the resounding victory of the logic of clan hatred, took place in December 1990-January 1991. The next section will return to the poetic texts that engage this violence.

Making memories of the violence surrounding state collapse

The violence surrounding the collapse of the state takes up a small part of Nabaddoon’s “Mogadishu, what happened?” (stanzas 1, 13, 14), but his evocation of it is concise and powerful, even though somewhat general. He first evokes a Mogadishu divided into hostile sections as a result of mortar and artillery fire. He shows us the dead bodies of its residents lying unburied in its streets and laments the brutalisation of vulnerable civilians such as women, children, travellers, guests, and those who had hoped to find a safe haven in the city. He reports the rape of virgin girls, whose modest dress (implying their religiosity) underlines the viciousness of their violation (stanza 13). Addressing Mogadishu in the feminine and in direct speech, the poet asks, rhetorically, whether ‘her’ failure to protect ‘her’ own honour as well as that of ‘her’ most vulnerable inhabitants was not due to religious unawareness or indifference.

Whom does the poet blame and hold responsible for the assault on the city and its residents? The trigger-happy, *qaat*-chewing Mooryaan, the young men who formed the bulk of the clan-based militias and gangs during the fighting, are explicitly mentioned as perpetrators (stanza 14).²⁶ However, the poet also accuses and expresses sorrow for the city of Mogadishu itself both for its moral demise and the lasting legacy of hostility that has marked the city in the aftermath. Even though Nabaddoon depicts the godless acts of the Barre regime as the roots of the evil that befell Somalia, it is Mogadishu that, even as it is blamed and pitied, symbolises the violence that destroyed nation and state. The only thing remaining for the poet, Nabaddoon says in conclusion, is to record for history its past glory and present pain (stanza 15).

²⁶ Mooryaan is one of the terms used for the young gunmen who perpetrated much of the violence in Somalia. See Mohamed-Abdi 2001 and Marchal 1993.

With the citizens of the nation, expecting women and children,
guests, travellers, and those looking for a refuge all residing in you,
Mogadishu, when, in your midst, veiled girls had their clothes ripped off
and were robbed of their secret treasure,
were you not aware of the Lord above, their Lord?

Even worse, when arms-bearing Mooryaan,
men high on drugs, out of their senses even before,
took control of you, all that remained in you was
qaat-chewing,²⁷ artillery battles,
a moral standard to be ashamed of,
and endless discord.

Since I cannot support or help you today,
since I moved away from you and the African continent
long ago, what can I do for you today?
To record for history your anguish and memorable past,
in perfect meter and enduring literary form
is something of which, through the talent God has bestowed on me, I am capable
and will never tire.

In Stanza's "Mogadishu", the transition from the Mogadishu of the glorious days of national unity and cultural flourishing to that of civil war violence is equally abrupt. This poem too emphasises the corpses lying in the streets and the destruction brought about by heavy arms and, here too, women (both married matrons and innocent girls) figure prominently in the evocation of the human losses caused by the violence. However, Stanza lists the many different honourable categories of civilians who were targetted for violence, especially men of learning. That Mogadishu, at this inauspicious moment, failed to find competent political leadership is a source of astonishment for the poet. In his view, 'the mother of the nation' did not deserve to be destroyed in this way.

But you were struck by disaster.

²⁷ *Qaat*, *qat* or *khat* (*catha edulis*) is a leafy plant whose leaves, or the bark of whose twigs, are chewed as a stimulant. It gives energy and keeps sleep away, but can also make people reckless and impulsive.

Every afternoon and evening,
every day and night,
one made one's way through you,
wading through dead bodies.
Brainless men from the countryside
disrespecting life itself,
made mortar shells rain down on your inhabitants:
on the poor soul who did no harm to anyone,
the wife representing the honour of womanhood,
the gifted author,
the much-needed leader (man of courage),
the precious verbal artist,
the sheikh who calls for prayer,
from whom people learn about religion
in the mosque,
and the excellent educators, who
teach mathematics in the schools
You, place where migrants found a new livelihood,
you, mother of Maandeeq,
Mogadishu, do you deserve
the way you are today?

Millions of top intellectuals,
actors who provided entertainment
in evening theatre plays
which allowed people to laugh,
as well as students in their uniforms,
the mufti, and the religious scholar
died at the hands of
brutal, criminal killers
- not something to take lightly.
They aimed mortars at
a million beautiful, long-haired girls,
going about their business
unsuspectingly -
in the belief that nothing more would be heard about this.
[Mogadishu], where are your notable men?

Can they give advice concerning the common good?
Can the vulnerable civilians be saved?
Have your men gone mad?²⁸
Is anyone competent out there advocating for you?
You, mother of Maandeeq
Mogadishu, do you deserve
the way you are today?

Although both poets refer to the actual perpetrators of the violence - Nabaddoon calling them Mooryaan and Stanza “brainless men from the countryside” - it is striking that neither assigns any political responsibility for the violence, nor even mentions the political leaders in charge of these gunmen, or gives explicit details about who killed whom at what time. However, both poets present the violence of the State collapse in terms of a moral breakdown and as an injury caused to Mogadishu as a symbol of what once was the sovereign Somali nation.

How much Mogadishu, which had symbolised the birth of Somali nation- and statehood, came to symbolise its death, is evident from one of the first songs created about the violence surrounding state collapse in 1991, “Lament for Mogadishu” (*Baroordiiqda Xamar*). It was written, composed and sung by Axmed Naaji, an artist of long-standing fame who symbolises the rich, Creole cultural heritage of the Benaadir coast to which Mogadishu belongs.²⁹

Several features of the song’s text, a poem alliterating in ‘x’ (the Somali aspirated h), are by now familiar to us. To begin with, Mogadishu is again presented as a woman and, as in Nabaddoon’s poem, here ‘she’ is a raped woman. Full of sorrow, the poet wonders who would be willing or able to restore the raped city’s honour and pay the customary compensation for such an offence. He seems to ask, ‘how could one pay compensation for the rape of a whole city?’ and to wonder ‘how can the concept of compensation even be relevant when the rapists are the very male relatives who should have protected the city and should have collected the compensation for ‘her’ rape?’ Moreover, praising the city as the heart of the nation is familiar to us from both

²⁸ Conjectural reading of *majneen*.

²⁹ The text is from an audio-cassette of a live performance held in Geneva, 12 July 1992.

Nabaddoon's and Stanza's poems, as is the rhetorical technique of invoking this glorious image only to introduce the violence with great suddenness - suggesting that the violence in Mogadishu took many people by surprise. The singer evokes the speed, furious force, and military might with which violence was unleashed on the city, and then takes his listeners back to how the city used to be, and to how safely and freely they once lived in it.

Mogadishu, you have been violated,
who will restore your honor?
You are the place where my umbilical cord was buried
- Mogadishu, you have been violated -
the centre of my kin folk and siblings
- Mogadishu, you have been violated -
Great was your stature on the Horn of Africa's coastline
- Mogadishu, you have been violated -
The fire they opened on you came down like a hot wind
- Mogadishu, you have been violated -
With furious force they plundered your neighbourhoods
- Mogadishu, you have been violated -
snatching away your beauty all at once.
We used to reside in you calmly, safely and freely.
Mogadishu, you have been violated, who will restore your honour?

In the second stanza, the poet explicates the violence further by naming the social relations that were violated in its course. The poet criticises the 'clan logic' discussed above - the definition of a lethal alterity that results from the politicisation of kinship and its reduction to the bonds between patrilineally related groups of men - by lamenting how, in their violence, men ignored their relationships with their relatives on their mothers' and wives' sides. Thus he underlines how impoverishing 'the clan logic' is compared to customary Somali kinship loyalties, which he sees as extensive and inclusive and without which the Somalis as a people would have nothing in common but a vague memory of distant common descent. The poet highlights the illegitimacy of the violence that defiled the city by contrasting it with historical memories of what was, in the poet's eyes, good and ethical. He does this by tapping into a nationalist discourse that

connects the city both to the prestige of Somalis' unique, common customary law, and to the glory of anti-colonialist struggle and nationalist victory. He first invokes Mogadishu's patriotic past – the fact that the heroes and great thinkers of the anti-colonial struggle found their death there. Then he refers to the legitimising power of Somali customary law, by whose ideals in-laws and affines and mother's kin are considered an intrinsic and essential part of the kinship system (and clan group) and by whose logic the wisdom of deserving elders and religious leaders is to be observed. What happened to Mogadishu, the singer laments, is the rape of Somali nationhood itself. The subdued and slow beat of the music, the sad and measured diction, the emotive power of the references to the national past and the principles of Somali custom, all make the memorial that Naaji constructs in the field of memories called Mogadishu one that is capable of moving many Somalis deeply.

Maternal relatives and in-laws became enraged with each other;
Mogadishu, you have been violated;
Those who freed you from the spiteful [collaborators] and the unbelieving foreigners;
Mogadishu, you have been violated;
as well as our great thinkers were put into their graves;
Mogadishu, you have been violated;
and the wisdom of our political and religious leaders was rejected;
Mogadishu, you have been violated;
The families you sustained crossed the borders;
Mogadishu, you have been violated.
We used to reside in you calmly, safely and freely
Mogadishu, you have been violated,
who will restore your honour?

Making memories of the past to legitimise a vision of a better future - In Naaji's construction of Mogadishu as a *lieu de mémoire*, he celebrates it as a symbol of nation- and statehood by recounting and lamenting its fate at the very moment at which it was destroyed. Even though the poet does not suggest a specific solution, his elegy advocates a return to idealised, culturally authentic and 'traditional' common institutions - an idealisation that was integral to the nationalist project of the 1960s-1970s and still

resonates powerfully with Somalis. In other words, to the extent that this sad song projects any future at all, it does so in terms of the past it mourns.

In his “Mogadishu”, authored about twelve years later, Stanza is more explicit about his hopes for the future. Before he concludes his poem with an entreaty to God, he describes how he, in a glorious dream, walked through Mogadishu and saw the following scenes:

I got a glimpse of the *umma* united,
without any military salute,
during memorable games at which
the creative lights of the nation performed;
at a time when the name ‘Somali’
carried a dignified meaning again,
clannism had been gotten rid of,
and troubles and animosity did not exist;
during a national holiday, on the occasion of the ‘Id,’³⁰
while the national parliament was passing motions,
and I was writing poetry about it all;
and with our Somali girls, with their long hair all done up,
as their beauty deserves,
ululating and festooning me with flowers,
honouring me as a national poet,
and not as Mohamed of such and so clan.
Dear Lord, bring your estranged people back together;
And you, mother of Maandeeq,
may God find a solution for the problems that weigh down on you
and remove from you the gloom,
the imminence of war, and the darkness of the eclipsed moon.

What is striking in Stanza’s ending is that, while he realises that his dream of the future depends on God’s help and speaks of the Somali people as “the Somali *umma*”, emphasising the common bond of their faith, the dream itself takes the shape of the sovereign, united, Muslim, Somali people, at peace, free from clannism and military rule,

³⁰ ‘Id al-Fitr or the Feast of Fast-Breaking at the end of Ramadan.

engaged in democratic processes, with the religious sheikhs officiating at holiday celebrations that encompass poetry and beautiful girls with uncovered hair.

In contrast, in “Mogadishu, what happened?” Nabaddoon constructs Mogadishu and memories of Mogadishu differently. In his text, Mogadishu symbolises both the (now destroyed) sovereign nation and the moral failure of the Barre era. Even though the parties the poet blames for the violations of the period are the regime and its active and passive supporters, the city represents the main culprit, whose most grievous sin is, in Nabaddoon’s view, the failure to be God-fearing and to resist those who were not. Indeed, in his poem, Mogadishu is a *lieu de mémoire* for memories that show how insufficient religiosity produced the city’s demise. As we saw above, Nabaddoon explicitly asserts himself as a reliable memory-maker (stanzas 6 and 14) and it is in invoking this authority that he retrieves memories of Mogadishu and ties the past to the present in such a way that the solution to Somalia’s woes is - proves to be - the proper observance of religious morality. By remembering the past in narrowly religious terms, Nabaddoon imagines a future that also takes this form.

Nabaddoon’s poem shows how prominent religion had become in Somali mediations of violence by 2003. The next section will first examine this trend and then turn to two more recent poetic interventions in which Mogadishu plays a central role, both authored in 2006 as commentaries on the second ‘shift to violence’ referred to above, that of the ‘Islamist logic’.

Islamism in Somalia and the rise of the Islamic Court movement - One way of defining the discourse of Islamism, is to equate it with ‘Islamic activism’ of a particular kind, namely one inspired by, and aiming at the promotion of beliefs and prescriptions, based on particular interpretations of “traditions and teachings of Islam as contained in scripture and authoritative commentaries” (International Crisis Group (ICG) 2005:2). The ICG’s report on “Somalia’s Islamists” distinguishes between three types of Islamist movements and organisations: missionary types, which strive to increase the religious observance of other Muslims through teaching and example; political types, which pursue political power, and, finally, jihadist types, which do not shy away from violent means to reach their goals (idem). Somalis do not have a single term for the phenomenon

of Islamism but refer to Islamist individuals and groups - whether they advocate only a heightened personal piety as expressed, for example, in dress, or whether they have further political or even militant goals - as *wadaaddo* (sing. *wadaad*), traditionally a word referring to ‘men of religion,’ that is to say men who teach religion at whatever level of expertise.

Violence in Somalia has ebbed and flowed ever since the collapse of the state. Of the fifteen or so large-scale Somali peace talks, two produced transitional governments: the TNG (Transitional National Government, 2000- 2004) and the TFG (Transitional Federal Government, 2004 – present), now under its second president. With their early roots in the late 1970s, Somalia’s Islamist movements , now including missionary, political, and militant (jihadist) groups, have gained political influence since the collapse of the state in 1991. Al-Ittixaad al-Islaami, the first major jihadist movement that aspired to establish an Islamic state and had adherents in and from many regions of Somalia, suffered a number of military defeats in each area where it tried to establish itself (Kismaayo, Bosaaso, and Gedo). Since 1996, smaller branches and remnants of the Ittixaad movement have combined and recombined with other jihadist groups and organisations, including the Islamic Courts movement that caught the attention of the world in June 2006 (ICG 2005, Marchal 2001, 2004, and Menkhaus 2004).

The roots of the Islamic Courts movement lay in the violent and unstable conditions in post-state Mogadishu’s various neighbourhoods. From 1993 onwards, small local Islamic law courts in different parts of Mogadishu, authorised by local elders to maintain a militia, arrest criminals and apply Islamic law (*shari`a*), began to form little islands of law and order in a city rendered ungovernable by competing warlords. It is believed that most courts were initially “less a product of Islamist activism than of Somalia’s two most common denominators: clan and the traditional Islamic faith” (ICG 2005:19). However, this situation changed as the courts came together in a coalition and hard-line jihadists gained more influence. On 4 June 2006, this coalition, which had thousands of militia men working for it, ousted a coalition of Mogadishu warlords who were on the secret payroll of the United States.³¹ The Courts movement got an enormous

³¹ For a history of the Islamist movement in Somalia, including the Islamic Courts, see Menkhaus 2004 and the International Crisis Group 2005.

boost from this victory in the form of popular Somali outrage at U.S. support for this unlikely group of anti-terrorists, as well as world media attention.

However, in expanding their rule and threatening the very physical survival of the TFG, that was still the officially elected Somali government, they both overestimated their own capacity and alarmed the U.S. The latter, convinced that the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), as it came to be called, harboured terrorists connected with al-Qaeda, belatedly threw its support behind the TFG, which brought in a (small) African Union peacekeeping force as well as Ethiopian troops. These entered Somalia formally in late December 2006 and helped the TFG defeat the ICU in early January 2007. The Ethiopian intervention was, and continued to be, highly controversial. It split the TFG's parliament and sundered and reshuffled political loyalties and alliances more generally. Even if one leaves aside the conflicts between highland, Christian Ethiopia and the lowland, Muslim principalities of medieval times, it is well documented that Ethiopia has brutally colonised the Somali-inhabited regions of Ethiopia ever since their annexation by Emperor Menelik in the 1880s and has continued to target the Somali people of this region by committing a slow genocide against them even until today. With Soviet aid, it defeated Somalia in the war of 1977-78, and it has played a highly ambiguous role in the reconstruction of the Somali State. Many Somalis, therefore, regard Ethiopia as the primary enemy of Somali nationhood and deeply resented and distrusted the Ethiopian military intervention in their country.

In the view of many others, however, Ethiopia also stands to benefit from stability on its border and, in any case, its approval of any political settlement in Somalia appears inevitable. However this may be, those who were already set on undermining the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) could now use Ethiopia as a foil - Somalis used the term *maqarsaar* - to rally various groups with widely diverging political goals in opposition to the TFG and in support of the Islamic Courts Union. This infusion of nationalist, anti-Ethiopian sentiment into the Islamist anti-TFG agenda proved to be politically quite powerful. Re-emerging in Asmara, the ICU became part of a new umbrella organisation, the Alliance for the re-liberation of Somalia (ARS),³² which

³² Somali opponents of the ARS quickly changed the Somali word for 're-liberation' (*dib-u-xuraynta*) to 'renewed brutalization' (*dib-u-xumaynta*).

fuelled further violence by calling for what may be called an Islamic jihad for liberation from Ethiopia's military presence in Somalia and the TFG leadership of the moment. Its goals were indeed achieved in December of 2008. The following two poems, however, were composed as part of the campaign to oust the Ethiopian military and TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf, and they speak to this situation.

Mediations of Islamism in the context of violence – Engineer Maxamed Cali Cibaar, a young poet who publishes his poems on the internet, authored two poems with Mogadishu in their title, both in 2006. On 26 August 2006, about three months after the Islamic Courts' victory in Mogadishu, Cibaar released a poem celebrating how the Courts had driven out “the Mogadishu warlords”, restored law and order to the city, and taken down the checkpoints and barricades set up to extort money from passers-by. His title, “*Happy,*” or “*How wonderful! Are people not strolling through Mogadishu?*”, expresses his joy at these developments. In his brief introduction to the poem, Cibaar explains how happy he is to share the joy of “the Somali people” in welcoming the changes in Mogadishu. In his first stanza, he addresses himself to God:

If I begin [my] poem in Your name, Lord,
it is because you are indispensable to
the believer who worships you, the infidel who lost his faith,
Zoroastrians, Christians, the Jews who are out of hand,
and even the hypocrites.
That Mustafa, the trustworthy Muhammad (pbuh) is Your Prophet
and that You are the One we worship is something to which I testify.
Only a fool is not aware of your great generosity.

He then explains how long he suffered, waiting and beseeching God for something to happen. Now the time had come: “Has the ruined city ... begun to wiggle itself free? Has the power of the people today become clear? Have the disaster-mongers not been swallowed up by the abyss?” Without naming “the Mogadishu warlords”, he proceeds to describe what kinds of people had terrorised the city and what their transgressions had consisted of: how they snatched people's clothes, including women's scarves; how they

broke into houses at night, and how they accepted money to kill and harass innocent civilians, especially women, children, orphans, and old people. He goes on to list the changes resulting from their removal: that the drugs (he may mean *qaat* but possibly also stronger drugs) and the decadence associated with them were rooted out; that the Mooryaan, fattened on their illegal gains, had been captured; that the harbour and airport had been cleared from warlords and were now flourishing and productive; that the checkpoints and barricades had been cleared so that civilians could enjoy the fresh air outside: “Are people not passing along streets without rusty barricades and have the check-points from which some profited not been removed? Is it not wonderful that people are strolling through Mogadishu with a smile, as on a holiday?”

Cibaar explains how this could have happened and, while he does not mention the Islamic Courts by name anywhere, he phrases his explanation in religious terms:

You must all turn towards what God has revealed to us
I swear that working in unison means victory
Its fruits are being reaped within just a few days
Are people not welcoming the sheikhs and religious scholars?
Are people not filling the mosques and the places of worship?
Are the enemies who used to taunt us now not despondent?

But he also reproaches the people of Mogadishu for being distracted by greed, and for failing to notice that different groups were fiercely competing for the ownership of the ground under their feet. He asserts that the international powers are against them, but that this is not significant:

Moscow and America do not want this, and Europe does not accept it,
its talk consisting of worn out and stale words.
We are independent; we are not their protégés.
They attach importance to hiding what they are secretly planning.
Let them not give us a million in aid or other wealth.
Every man for himself, let us move our own cause forward.

The poem concludes with advice on what the people of Mogadishu need to do in order to safeguard their future. If we are true and observant Muslims, forget about discrimination based on clan and strive for unity, and take responsibility seriously and not as a way of personal enrichment, then security will be restored, schools will multiply, and poor people will find relief without foreign aid:

Even though we bear responsibility, He is the one who governs this world,
if we take refuge with the Almighty and listen to His words,
if we become true Muslims and follow the sunna,
- clannism is darkness - if we get rid of it,
unity is beneficial - if we do not spoil it through discrimination.

If we abandon talk about family and “this one is related to me”,
if we give the one who works for our well-being the respect due to him,
if responsibility does not become like a sweet a fool sucks on or an entertaining pastime,
or wealth scooped up by the millions in profit,
if justice appears, fairly dispensed by a judge,
that love and kindness will come is something of which I am sure.

That people will not say to each other ‘are you armed’ is something of which I am sure.
That emaciation will become something extraordinary is something of which I am sure.
That the poor will get urgent aid is something of which I am sure.
That the schools will multiply is something of which I am sure.
That the vulnerable civilians will all invoke God is something of which I am sure.
That outsiders will be dispensable is something of which I am sure.
That I will find the Lord on my side is something of which I am sure.
Being a Muslim is our right, fight for it and pay no attention to mere man-made things! (3x)

This very last line of the poem is an encouragement - a militant motto, repeated three times - that not only presents the struggle in Mogadishu as a Muslim one but also casts Islam as embattled, as in need of defence. It is interesting that this poem, with its embattled mood, preceded the military ousting of the Islamic Courts from Somalia at the end of December 2006 by two months. Cibaar further developed some of his ideas in a poem he composed more than a year later.

“Mogadishu, you have a Lord, do not forget to be patient” (*Muqdishaa, mawlaad leedahay, samir ha moogaanin*),³³ is a commentary on a very different political situation and dates from 23 October 2007 or, as Cibaar gives the Hijra date as well, 12 Shawwal 1428. As he explains himself in his lengthy introduction to the poem, his *gabay* marks the 300th night since the “evil alliance led by the Ethiopian government and the U.S.” had invaded Mogadishu, a night he describes as having “a special and painful memory for the Somali *umma* and Muslims wherever they are”. In this introduction, Cibaar makes his political position, as an opponent of the TFG and its Ethiopian ally and supporter of the Islamic Courts Union, now at least temporarily defeated, abundantly clear, although he does not mention either by name. The poet laments that the Somalis supporting the TFG (“hired criminals who call themselves by the same name we do”) attacked the capital with the world looking on in silence or even rewarding them. However, he sees a silver lining, for “the Somali people, especially those in Mogadishu”, offered resistance. These “heroes”, he says, “deserve to be praised, prayed for and encouraged”. The poet concludes his introduction with wishing the “Somali *umma*” a quick victory.

Cibaar opens his poem by addressing Mogadishu and praising it, both in terms of its importance to Somalis and his own personal memories, especially of his childhood education – now remembered from across a distance of time and space, that is to say from Western Europe in 2007. Later in the poem he also praises Mogadishu for its natural beauty and rich resources (stanza five):

You honorable one, city I love and long for in my heart,
 shining light that reaches as far as the countryside and protects against darkness,
 the mirror in which we can be seen, the stage of the Somalis,
 indispensable part of our country as well as its brain;
 your attractive beauty, your radiant looks,
 the 'Id holidays and the leisurely strolls we took in you,
 when I remember this, I wake up with a start in the middle of the night.
 I would be happy if I could live in you once again,
 for, listen, the love that has lingered in my heart makes me long for you.

³³ The Somali text is from www.aayaha.com (accessed on November 9, 2007).

Before I could even distinguish between the right and wrong path,
if I had not gone to the Koran school and had not been taught the alphabet,
if your teachers had not taught me *miim* and *waaw* [the letters ‘m’ and ‘w’],
if I had not been taken to a well run school like the one called “The 15th of May”,
if the difference between what is acceptable and what not, had not been explained to me,
if I had not been given the key to [further] learning, and
if my own knowledge had not been measured by a scientific standard,
I might not have aspired to the level I have reached.
You are a spring that never runs dry and sweet honey,
You, my teacher, are the school that gave me my very first education.

Although I now live at a great distance from you, in a distant place,
although I physically travel all over Europe,
my mind is with you day and night.” ...

Your moderate weather and temperate climate,
the Indian Ocean’s waves perfect for seaside tourism,
fruits and vegetables of every kind, bananas and citrus fruits,
the papaya groves, the river visible in the distance,
livestock to be milked, a blessing to us,
a large number of business establishments,
goods changing hands, all kinds of waged work,
and, on top of this, oil and ores -
these are things you cannot find on a map, I believe.
You, rare gift that good luck bestowed on us, we thank you!

After calling up these memories of the city, the poet turns to the current violence taking place in it. He names as perpetrators Mooryaan, mercenaries, crazy men, and low servant-folk, while he lists as victims vulnerable civilians (women, children, old people, orphans), and young girls molested by shifty youths - millions of people all “imprisoned in you, Mogadishu”.

Cibaar puts the violence committed against Mogadishu in the context of an explicitly Islamic history. He asserts that the enemies want to turn Mogadishu into a city of sin and that they make toilets out of mosques, burn holy books, and attack all Muslims.

He calls up memories of early (or actually pre-) Islamic history, equating his enemies with: “those who were envious of the Ka’ba and hoped for its destruction”, and - in reference to 521 CE, the year of the Prophet’s birth, in which Abyssinian troops marched on Mecca - “those who are comparable to the troops that brought along elephants in suicidal brinkmanship and madness”. Then he extends the comparison to show that Mogadishu’s hardship is neither new nor exceptional in the context of what has befallen Muslims in general. It therefore behoves Mogadishu to show forbearance and be patient.

Rivulets of blood flow among the sheikhs and the places of worship.
Prominent people are hunted down, muezzins stabbed.
Those who sought refuge in you are annihilated and killed.
If you are subjugated today, in the past, Mecca,
the home of the Prophet (pbuh) too was burned down.
You heard what the Mongols did to Baghdad in its time.
Even today the youth of Jerusalem is burned alive by gangsters.³⁴
You are not the only one who is having the foot on the neck.
Wherever God is worshipped people are attacking in the night.
Even if they are cutting you in pieces with saw and scissor,
Mogadishu, you have a Lord, don’t forget to be patient.

Thus Cibaar gives the Courts movement an illustrious and global religious context. He goes on to characterise those Somalis who are not on the side he advocates as those who betrayed the city that had raised them (“you were their mama and carried them on your back”) and as ‘hypocrites’ - people who only pretend to be Muslims - receiving monetary rewards for their help to the U.S. and Ethiopia. However, he assures his audience that the sacred texts of Islam and the folk wisdom of the Somalis show that evil will not triumph:

The Americans who are engaged in transgressions and that pig-headed Bush,
the schemes of Ethiopia and those who pledge allegiance to the cross,
and the hypocrites they use to help them, who are licking their lips for bribes,
and are paid to raze you to the ground -
their conspiracy and their secret plans are well known,
for there are angels at the ready who do not miss even a minute.

³⁴ His reference is here to the Israeli government.

As the Qur'an and the Sunna have shown us many times
and as our proverbs, the wisdom of our literature, also say,
the wrongful criminal will not succeed and will be swallowed up by the abyss.
Mogadishu you have a God, don't forget to be patient.

The poet ends his poem on a positive note, telling the city that, as droughts pass and
make way for a reawakening of nature, so Mogadishu will recover. If people live as true
Muslims, Mogadishu will see unity, justice, security, and peaceful co-existence. It will
become a political and economic power to be reckoned with – its power extending deep
into Ethiopia.

You [Mogadishu], who are so generous to guests,
if you are now sad and angry,
the day will come, God willing, that you will ululate....
One day, people will all refuse to engage in clannism of any kind
and they will forget that pig-headed and unprincipled individuals ever even existed.
Mogadishu you have a Lord, don't forget to be patient.

Whatever is evil in your society results from the deception of dishonest people.
If you understand the deceit of the enemy and what it means,
and if the Almighty God brings about the good things for which you hope,
if you will be washed with holy water and become one,
if people take their cases to just courts,
where those responsible for judging you are honest and straight,
if the oppressed citizen gets what he deserves,
if forgiveness spreads and people interact justly,
when the people who were barred from each other become like twins again,
and the baby animals are freed from their small enclosure and pen,
your future is victory and pure unity.

Ma sha' Allah, with your wealth greatly increased,
with rich finances and productive factories,
with ships that you send everywhere and airplanes in the skies
protected by soldiers who are feared and can command compensation,

with you ruling the whole area from the residence of the conceited Tigreans to which Meles belongs up to Maqalla,³⁵
Mogadishu, you have a Lord, do not forget to be patient.

That Cibaar mediates and thus recasts the violence of the Somali civil war in Islamic terms is obvious. He presents a Somali *umma* as facing an international anti-Muslim enemy, with Mogadishu as site of this battle, and “the people of Mogadishu” in the role of the true Muslim soldiers. The enemy, who had been cast in terms of the ‘clan logic’ during the first shift to violence at the time of state collapse, is now defined in Islamic terms as hypocrites and paid stooges of the enemies of Islam. How does Mogadishu figure in these (highly partisan) commentaries on current politics? Does it still function as a *lieu de mémoire*?

In “Are people not strolling in Mogadishu?” (*Maashaa-Allee, Sow Muqdisho Laguma Mushaaxaayo!*) this is perhaps doubtful. Its introduction refers to Mogadishu as “the capital of all Somalis”, but the emphasis does not lie on the national identity of the Somali people but on their religious dimension - the Somali *umma* - symbolised by the people of Mogadishu who thus become a symbol for the Islamist cause. However, in Cibaar’s second poem, Mogadishu indeed serves as a site *of* and *for* memory. The memories invoked of Mogadishu’s past are somewhat ambiguous. Cibaar may depict Mogadishu’s past and future in terms of its leading position in Somalia and beyond, but he makes no explicit references to a common Somali national past. Rather, he speaks of his own childhood memories, purposefully sidestepping - a comparison with Nabaddoon’s poem appears to suggest - the national memories so common in other poetry. Yet, in his imagining of Mogadishu’s future power, he speaks of forgiveness (for the clan-based violence Somalis perpetrated against each other), and of unity and an end to clannism (both also nationalist goals). However, in his vision, it is a particular commitment to Islam that will produce this result, not a common national identity, dream or destiny.

³⁵ This reference is probably to the Ethiopian city and not the Yemeni port city of al-Mukalla. The poem alliterates in ‘m,’ so the geographical reference should perhaps not be taken literally.

Instead, Cibaar attempts to make Mogadishu into a special symbol of a different kind, not one of national unity and liberal modernity but of Islam, and constructs a mythological and heroic Islamic present for the city whose national past is of little use to his Islamist agenda for the future. Here he sets himself a difficult task, for there is (as yet) no Islamic narrative at hand that is unique to Mogadishu and common to Somalis. To fashion Mogadishu as an Islamic symbol, Cibaar therefore presents it as the site of a current, local battle over Islam with global significance. However, this is only possible if he excludes from his definition of the ‘Somali *umma*’ and his synecdochic construction of ‘the people of Mogadishu’ all those Somalis who at that moment represented and supported the TFG under President Abdullahi Yusuf in Mogadishu.

In Naaji’s “Lament for Mogadishu” and Stanza’s “Mogadishu”, the city was ‘the site of memory’ in which the Somali independent nationhood of the past served to inspire national unity and state reconstruction in the future. Nabaddoon invokes that past to mark the immorality of its betrayal. However, in his dream of a more Islamic future, Mogadishu plays no special role except to have its past lovingly recorded for history. In Cibaar’s poems, Mogadishu no longer symbolises the birth and death of Somali nation- and statehood but marks the contemporary local site of a global battle for Islam that is generating glorious memories that are to legitimise an Islamist future. An Islamic imaginary might, in principle, indeed be able to transcend the divisions caused by the communal violence of ‘the clan logic’ that marked state collapse. This is why it has gained so much support among Somalis. However, in Cibaar’s Islamist memories, Mogadishu survives as a symbol of only one side of the conflict - the side that claims Islamic legitimacy for itself and excludes from this discourse those Somalis who did not, and do not agree with its particular political agenda. It became a divisive symbol, as the poetry in which it figured sided with, and promoted the cause of the ICU (Islamic Courts Union) and ARS (the Alliance for the re-liberation of Somalia) against Abdullahi Yusuf’s TFG (Transitional Federal Government).³⁶

³⁶ On April 21, 2007, in a highly partisan lecture mobilising Somalis and raising funds in support of the jihad of national liberation from U.S.-supported Ethiopia and the TFG in Mogadishu, Prof. Abdi Samatar made positive mention of Cibaar (<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-8642058014906262487#> (accessed January 18, 2010); www.newsomalia.blogspot.com (accessed on March 1, 2008)).

In December 2008, Abdullahi Yusuf was forced to resign from the presidency of the TFG and Ethiopia began to withdraw its troops. At the end of January 2009, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former spokesman of the ICU became the president of Somalia. He has not been able to unify or pacify the Islamist militias that continue to wreak havoc in large parts of Somalia. The Islamist logic has become the dominant discourse in which the violent struggle over the control of the state is being justified and pursued. However, if we imagine a barber's pole, a kind of glass or plastic tube in which three (red, white and blue) vertical stripes turn around and upwards, then we can imagine the three intertwined discourses of (anti-)clannism, nationalism and Islam(ism) as those three stripes; in continuous movement and continuously appearing to take each other's place, these three discourses constitute, and will constitute for a long time to come, the shape of Somali politics.

Conclusion

This chapter examined memory-making about Mogadishu in a genre of Somali poetry as it dealt with the violence of state collapse and reconstruction in shared public space. With regard to memory-making, it showed that, in the most recent texts studied here, Mogadishu, which had symbolised the birth and death of Somali sovereign nationhood, itself died as a symbol of that nation. But what can we conclude about this genre of poetry as effective, legitimate, and prestigious speech when it mediates violence? How does such speech situate itself in public space, shaping and being shaped by it? This is the burden of this conclusion.

The public space of Somali poetry -The incident with which this essay opened suggested that there was a relationship between poetry as legitimate speech about violence, the space in which it is expressed, and the way in which it addresses Somalis and constructs their collective identities. The public space subscribed to - and fashioned - by the poetry studied here appears to be very similar to a - by now greatly criticised - Habermasian public space, one in which allegedly rational men speak rationally about

matters of common interest.³⁷ This public space is, moreover - most of the poems examined here suggest - conceived of as national space, in which Somali national identity, or Somaliness (*soomaalinimo*), is respected and protected. This would explain - a subject that I will pursue elsewhere - why poetic mediations of violence that claim to be legitimate and prestigious speech in this public space show aporia when it comes to denouncing specific clan-based violence, or holding specific war criminals accountable. In other words, such an interpretation of public space means, in effect, that the mediations of violence studied here have, in the end, not found a way of making the communal dimension of the violence discussable, and thus do not actually get to mediating concretely how violence *was differentially perpetrated and experienced*. It would be easy to criticise such aporia, such an unwillingness or incapacity to come to terms with the specific violence experienced by Somali individuals and groups; however, perhaps this limit to speech is a measure of the enormity of the violence that has befallen Somalis and the depth of the loss of trust and confidence in 'Somaliness'. In Ann Michael's novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, the protagonist describes the attitudes towards life of his parents, both Holocaust survivors. While, for his mother, the horror of the experience enhanced each moment of life in the aftermath, he says, for his father it diminished everything that came after: "Loss is an edge; it swelled everything for my mother, and drained everything from my father. Because of this, I thought my mother was stronger. But now I see it was a clue: what my father had experienced was that much less bearable" (Michaels:223).³⁸

As mentioned above, Somali websites, overwhelmingly hosted by Somalis in the diaspora, constitute an increasingly important part of Somali public space. Though their political perspectives and biases are often immediately clear, as far as the poetic mediations of violence studied here are concerned, the most respected ones have upheld a notion of national space, and have largely kept off-line (refused to publish) poetry and songs that divide Somalis by engaging them differentially as individuals belonging to

³⁷ Habermas 1989 believed that such a bourgeois public sphere developed in Europe from the seventeenth century onward.

³⁸ Some such coming to terms occurs in other genres and works of Somali popular culture such as Osman 1996 and Faysal Axmed Xasan 2000, which are the focus of my ongoing research.

clans (Issa-Salwe 2005:153-54). It is fascinating that the avoidance of specific references to (and verbal attacks on) the clan(s) of the poet and his audience is relatively recent; for example, this was still common practice in the cycle of poems called “the Hurgumo series” of 1978 (Samatar 1989). The reason for this is unclear. Perhaps it is a measure of how the popular culture of the nationalist era captured the Somali imagination. Or, perhaps, the communal violence of the ‘clan logic’ has raised the stakes to such an extent that what was brilliant and humorous political polemic then has now, because of the communal nature of the violence of state collapse and reconstruction, become a matter of life and death. It is possible, as Issa-Salwe proposes, that the collapse of the state has inspired Somali poets and their web hosts to try to protect whatever is left of national space and to work towards new commonalities. If the latter is correct, then, in the context of this particular mediation of poetry and song, those websites that constitute shared Somali cyberspace are a force for preserving and rebuilding national identity and a national public space (Issa-Salwe 2005:153-154).³⁹

In 1991, at the time of the first shift to violence, that of the clan logic, there was no Somali internet and cyberspace therefore played no role in the construction of what poetry was appropriate in the shared public space. Somali websites emerged in the course of the 1990s. Even though the regional and clan backgrounds of their founders and target audience are often very obvious, when it comes to the poetic mediations of violence studied here, they appear to have sensors that exclude specific references to clan-based violence. At the time of the second shift to violence, in 2006, more than 700 Somali websites were flourishing. What is striking about the Islamist poetry of Cibaar is that he advocates violence (in his view, violent resistance) and is nevertheless included in the literary websites and thus gets away with it; that he claims Islam for one side of the civil war and gets away with it; that he presents the city as symbol of jihad, even though it was also the capital of the official government (the TFG) under Abdullahi Yusuf and contained many Somalis who supported it - and gets away with it. Does this mean that Somali literary cyberspace as national space is changing and less able or willing to preserve and promote peace? Or does it really not have sensors defending itself against

³⁹ The conscious nature of this effort was confirmed to me by Abdelkarim Hassan, one of the founders of www.wardheernews.com, during a conversation in San Diego on January 8, 2010.

the ‘Islamist logic’, bristling only at the divisiveness of the ‘clan logic’? Time will have to tell. Somali literary websites do not feature the same kinds of instant response options that are available to readers and listeners of opinion pieces posted to some popular Somali on-line news sites. There, that is to say in the spaces allocated for reader responses, clan slurs and hate speech do figure, though no one would consider them in any sense prestigious or effective speech.⁴⁰

However, there are signs that, in contrast to the simultaneously shared academic public space represented by the incident at SOAS with which this essay began, shared Somali literary *cyber space* cannot easily protect itself from politically divisive speech and calls for violence when they couch themselves in men’s prestigious poetic genres and engage the legitimizing discourses of anti-clannism, nation, and Islam.]

Public space as man’s space - I argued above that the public space nationalist poetry and prestigious mediations of civil war violence construct for themselves is a space in which allegedly rational men speak rationally about matters of common interest. This also explains why women’s poetic speech on matters pertaining to, and circulating in this public sphere is not registered or acknowledged (that is to say, valued, memorised, or disseminated) to the same degree. When it comes to mediations of the violence of state collapse, legitimate speech turns out to be men’s speech, and the poets, the genres in which they express themselves, the public space they construct and share, and their primary audience are all gendered male. While Somali women have, to an extent, bought into these unwritten rules of the male literary canon about what constitutes for them appropriate speech, genre, and space, it is clear that, when they transgress these rules, they are largely ignored.⁴¹ However, the muting of women’s voices is only one aspect of the gendered nature of ‘prestigious’ and ‘legitimate’ mediations of violence, for the latter

⁴⁰ There is also a burgeoning number of unstudied list-serves and electronic sites that are restricted on the basis of clan or sub-clan membership.

⁴¹ See Amina Said Ali 2005 and Xaawa Jibriil 2008. Like their male counterparts, women poets in the ‘prestigious’ public sphere mediate violence as if they were not part of it as victims, perpetrators, or bystanders; appeal to the same discursive triad of nation, anti-clannism, and Islam, and demonstrate the same aporia about the specifics of the violence of ‘the clan logic.’

have resulted in very particular representations of women. This is also visible in the texts focusing on Mogadishu that were examined here.

With the exception of the last poem analysed above (Cibaar's "Mogadishu, you have a Lord"), all texts present women exclusively as victims. Women, as young virgin girls, as pregnant mothers-to-be, and as mothers with children, consistently figure as vulnerable, defenceless, and passive individuals who are in need of, and have a cultural right to the protection of men. Moreover, in several poems (especially those of Naaji and Nabaddoon), women bear exceptional burdens of symbolic representation: their brutalisation, especially rape, symbolises the breakdown of the nation and national unity, as well as human morality itself. The city of Mogadishu too is gendered female and is in some of the texts studied here presented (even blamed) as a woman (and woman-as-nation) who was raped. From a comparative perspective, loading women down with the burden of symbolically representing the morality of the group is typical of nationalist discourse. In Somali nationalist discourse, women, constructed symbolically as the custodians of authentic Somali cultural values, saw their modernity (and thus their social freedom and personal agency) defined and limited in terms of the new nation's 'traditional' culture and morality. Thus, the representation and morality of the nation was increasingly compressed into women's symbolic duty to reject modern frivolity in favor of 'traditional' morality, and this made women who failed to live up (or appeared to live up) to the expectations of this nationalist discourse socially vulnerable.⁴²

When the war broke out, such symbolic representations of women 'invited' and intensified the violation of women. As in Bosnia, the targetting of women for violence, especially also sexual violence, was a deliberate USC policy as it tried to 'cleanse' a particular clan family from large areas of central and south Somalia. Like their male counterparts, women were members of the targetted clans. However, because they were women, the sexual violence perpetrated on their bodies carried two special symbolic charges. First, rape (often gang-rape committed in public) targeted women's own moral

⁴² As Pettman puts it: "[i]n a complex play, the state is often gendered male and the nation gendered female'. Women, that is, are commonly constructed as the symbolic form of the nation whereas men are invariably represented as its chief agents" (Cited by Wilford 1998:1). See also Yuval-Davis 1998:31-32 and Kapteijns 2009 for the tensions between women's actual social and economic roles and their symbolic burdens.

personhood for destruction. Second, because they symbolised and presented both the human dignity of their male protectors and the physical continuation of the wider group, their rape was intended to undermine the continued dignified existence of their families and clans. Given that it was fellow Somalis who violated them, this sexual violation struck at the essence of Somaliness and at the common national identity, shared morality, and common future that had been imagined in its name.⁴³

As they had borne the burden of symbolical representation of the morality of the nation before the civil war, for the poets studied here women now came to embody the immorality of the destruction of the nation during the war. For these male poets to acknowledge that the violence of the civil war was initiated and perpetrated largely by men, and to support women's claims on and against men as legitimate claims, is a significant and valid position to take. Moreover, that respect for women as traditionally protected, vulnerable civilians remains a powerful cultural ideal that structures Somali women's citizenship is a positive cultural value. The problem lies in the fact that women, in the texts studied here, *only* feature as such weak and vulnerable beings and victims. Even in "Mogadishu, you have been violated", which laments the inclusive kinship relations that 'the clan logic' violated, this older kinship code, which after all treated women as unequal and thus relegated them to secondary citizenship, is unduly romanticised.

In reality, during the fighting and when and where violence died down, women's agency was exceptional. Women survived, saved their children and other relatives, friends and neighbours. At times they participated in the violence, urged the killers on, and blindly supported their clan, while at other times, they actively brought about peace, demonstrated for it, brought about reconciliation, and served as men's conscience. In the aftermath of violence – where one can speak of an aftermath – in Somalia and in the diaspora, some women participated in the many international peace talks, even if, in this context, they often toed the lines drawn by related men rather than advocating women's agendas (Bryden & Steiner 1998). Finally, as a result of the war, both in Somalia and in the diaspora, women were compelled to take on ever more of the family's labour in- and outside of the home. None of this is reflected here (Gardner & El Bushra 2004). The

⁴³ Compare Wobbe 1995.

poets studied here (whether nationalist or Islamist) perpetuate and do not break away from representations of women that ignore their agency and, at least in some cases, present them as embodiments of the morality and unity of the Somali nation and *umma*. This, indirectly, maintains men in the position of arbiters of proper womanhood - and of what this, in their view, implies with regard to women's dress, social movement, educational ambitions, economic activities, and so forth - in the aftermath. Thus, the mediations of violence examined here can truly be called "men's voices in a man's world".

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