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SL2 SOMALI

The Somali live in the 'Horn' of Africa over a large tract of country in the Somali peninsula. They number around three to four million, of which the largest portion now live in the Somali Republic, which became an independent sovereign state in 1960. There are also many Somali in Kenya, French Somaliland, and Ethiopia, and others are scattered as traders throughout East Africa, Aden, and the Persian gulf. Their language belongs to the Cushitic group, itself usually classified as part of the Hamito-Semitic family (which also includes Arabic). As comes out in much of their poetry, the Somali are strong supporters of Islam and value their Arabian heritage and their claimed links with the lineage of the Prophet himself.

In Somali culture, interest in poetry is universal and the recitation and discussion of poetry is part of everyday life. Poets sing far into the night around the campfires in desert oases or gatherings under a shady tree, while in the town people gather in tea shops for poetry and song. Among the Somali, poetry is seen as having many effective *uses*, beyond just providing or commemorating private experiences. It is common for it to be used as a powerful weapon to win friends, revile enemies, praise traditional chiefs or modern political leaders, or broadcast public events. A number of these uses are illustrated in the selection here, ranging from the political exhortations of the Dervish leader (the 'Mad Mullah') early in the century or the recent propaganda poetry over Mogadishu radio, to complaints by an old man about excessive demands for bridewealth or a warning to a dictatorial sultan.

Poetic skill is particularly developed among the northern Somali, who are mainly pastoral nomads, roaming the semi-desert tracts of the north with their camels in search of pasture and water. Many of the poems in this section originate from this arid and inhospitable region where the nomads are involved in a continuous struggle for survival, a struggle which forms a back-

cloth to their many poems about love or death, clan feuds, the power of Allah, and the beauty as well as the harshness of nature. Poetry thus forms a deeply meaningful part of the life of this fiercely independent and egalitarian nomadic people. But at the same time it is not just a characteristic of some rural 'traditional' way of life, for poetry is also a living and effective force in the context of modern Somali life. Political and propaganda poetry flourishes, new songs and topical poems are continually being composed (often but not invariably in the traditional genres) and oral verse plays an essential role in the new urban theatre. Oral poetry is given an even wider circulation by travelling nomads meeting at wells or trading posts or by the drivers of trading lorries, as well as through broadcasts of oral verse - for a transistor radio is now a common part of the desert nomad's equipment.

There is no specialist category of professional poets among the Somali, but some individuals are recognized as more gifted than others, and well-known poets like Mahammed Abdille Hassan, Faarah Nuur, or Salaan Arrabey can gain nationwide prestige. The admirers of a leading poet learn his poems by heart and recite them from memory wherever they go. Because of the competition for the ear of the public and the high degree of critical appreciation by Somali audiences, most Somali poets do not try to improvise but prepare their poems beforehand over many hours or even days.

Somali poetry is a highly complex and developed art in that there are a large number of different genres recognized, all demanding a degree of skill and some involving complex technical exertions, particularly the extremely strict rules of alliteration which forms one of the most characteristic features of Somali poetry. The same alliteration must be maintained throughout a whole poem (which sometimes means a hundred lines or more): in each half line, at least one word has to begin with the chosen sound.

The Somali themselves classify their poems into various distinct genres according to both the rhythmic verbal pattern and the type of tune to which it is sung or chanted. These include various 'classical' types normally chanted solo without accompaniment. The *gabay*, of which 'Battle pledge' is an example, is the typical classical form for serious and important matters; it is

chanted in a slow and majestic manner and often reaches 100 lines or more. Light poetry, by contrast, is usually sung to lively tunes and accompanied by clapping, stamping, drumming, or chorus. There is also the *balwo* (or *belwo*), a short poem, often only two lines long and almost always on the theme of love. This particular form was an innovation by a lorry driver, Abdi Deeysi, in 1954: when his lorry broke down in a deserted place, he composed the first *balwo* song. The form is now widely popular, particularly with the young, and is often recited as a form of light entertainment both before large audiences who clap in rhythm and join in the chorus, and over the radio. A number of these short *balwo* songs are included here under the heading 'Modern love poems'. They often involve highly condensed imagery. Take the *balwo*

O Distant Lightning! Have you deceived me?

Lightning for the Somali is a powerful image of hope, for it is the herald of rain – a constant inspiration for poets of the parched north of Somalia where life and freshness and the beauty of nature depend so much on rain; but distant lightning sometimes disappoints and moves away without bringing the longed for rain: rain – likened in the evocative imagery of this one-line poem in miniature to the bitter experience of disappointment in love. Later the *balwo* developed into the longer *heello*, a sequence of short poems or stanzas linked together. In addition to these genres, there are a number of others, like the topical and political *hees*, the *daanto* (often used for marching but also adapted for the 'Prayer for rain'), as well as various dance and work poems.

Traditionally Somali material possessions are meagre and the visual and plastic arts little developed. In any case the amount of physical equipment a basically nomadic group can amass is clearly limited. But, as compensation perhaps, the Somali have developed the art of poetry to a high degree and it is not inaccurate to describe them in the words of more than one observer as 'a nation of poets'.

Battle pledge

A war chant in the classical *gabay* form. The poet's son has been killed by members of a different clan who have also refused his demand for double the usual compensation (100 camels). This is the poet's war pledge, addressed in the poem to his horse Aynabo, though really directed towards his enemy. As with many Somali poems there is alliteration throughout, partially represented by the alliteration in 'f' in the English translation.

If you, O Aynabo, my fleet and fiery horse,
Do not grow battle-worn, and slow of foot, and weak;
And if your shining flanks and finely arching neck
Do not grow gaunt and thin as the branch on the dry grey thorn;
And if your frenzied hooves do not flail through the dead,
The bodies piled as high as ever grew the grass;
And if a man among us can draw the name of peace
Forth from the deepest well where I have flung it down;
And if the strong-limbed spearmen of all the Bahawadleh¹
Do not now fight in fury, and fight unto the death;
And if our enemy's food is not scant meat alone,
With milk gone from the land, and their camels seized as loot,²
And if my dead son, Ali, is not greater in their eyes
Than his craven murderers thought when they stabbed away his
 life;
And if the sky in future does not its colour change,
Filled with the dust of death, reflecting the flare of the fray;
And if all that I swear does not, as I swear it, come to pass –
Then the warrior son of my father has become a witless fool.

1. The poet's group. 2. Depriving the enemy of camels, and hence of camel milk, would be a serious blow, since meat and milk are the two main foods of the interior; people sometimes live for months on milk alone.

A denunciation

Mahammed Abdille Hassan (1864-1920)

Extract from a poem by the so-called 'Mad Mullah', leader of the Dervishes in the revolts against the British at the beginning of this century. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest Somali poets and used his poetry, among other purposes, as a powerful propaganda weapon against his enemies. Here he denounces those who have gone over to the enemy.

Listen to the call of the muezzin – it calls people to prayer;
 Consider God, who created people, and the people who reject
 His commands
 The prophets, and those who do not follow the saints
 Those who took long, heavy spears against the elders of the Order
 Those who have become children of the Christians and look on
 Europeans as their relatives
 Those who of their own free will performed menial tasks for the
 infidels
 Those who, though not forced to do it, followed them and
 fawned on them
 Those for whom Menelik is like a father who deals with their
 affairs
 Those for whom Abyssinians have become God, and who babble
 prayers to them
 Those who have hunted me out of the land of my God like the
 wild game
 Those who have driven me into the dusty sands of the desert . . .

To a friend going on a journey

Mahammed Abdille Hassan

Leave-taking is one of the conventional topics for a Somali poem, in which advice is given and farewells said.

Now you depart, and though your way may lead
 Through airless forests thick with *hhagar* trees,
 Places steeped in heat, stifling and dry,

Where breath comes hard, and no fresh breeze can reach –
 Yet may God place a shield of coolest air
 Between your body and the assailant sun.

And in a random scorching flame of wind
 That parches the painful throat, and sears the flesh,
 May God, in His compassion, let you find
 The great-boughed tree that will protect and shade.

On every side of you, I now would place
 Prayers from the Holy Koran, to bless your path,
 That ills may not descend, nor evils harm,
 And you may travel in the peace of faith.

To all the blessings I bestow on you,
 Friend, yourself now say a last Amen.

Our country is divided

Faarah Nuur (died about 1930)

The British, the Ethiopians, and the Italians are squabbling,
 The country is snatched and divided by whosoever is stronger,
 The country is sold piece by piece without our knowledge,
 And for me, all this is the teeth of the last days of the world.

The limits of submission

Faarah Nuur

The poet's clan had for long lived in submission to a stronger group, but were driven in the end to rebel.

Over and over again to people
 I show abundant kindness.

If they are not satisfied
 I spread out bedding for them
 And invite them to sleep.

If they are still not satisfied,
The milk of the camel whose name is Suub
I milk three times for them,
And tell them to drink it up.

If they are still not satisfied,
The homestead's ram,
And the fat he-goat I kill for them.

If they are still not satisfied,
The plate from Aden
I fill with *ghee* for them.

If they are still not satisfied,
A beautiful girl
And her bridal house I offer them.

If they are still not satisfied,
I select livestock also
And add them to the tribute.

If they are still not satisfied,
'O brother-in-law, O Sultan, O King!
These salutations I lavish upon them.

If they are still not satisfied,
At the time of early morning prayers I prepare
The dark grey horse with black tendons,
And with the words 'Praise to the Prophet' I take
The iron-shafted spear,
And drive it through their ribs
So that their lungs spew out;
Then they are satisfied!

Poet's lament on the death of his wife

Raage Ugaas

Like the *yu'ub* wood bell tied to gelded camels that are running
away,
Or like camels which are being separated from their young,

Or like people journeying while moving camp,
Or like a well which has broken its sides or a river which has
overflowed its banks,

Or like an old woman whose only son was killed,
Or like the poor, dividing the scraps for their frugal meal,
Or like the bees entering their hive, or food crackling in the
frying,

Yesterday my lamentations drove sleep from all the camps.
Have I been left bereft in my house and shelter?

Has the envy of others been miraculously fulfilled?

Have I been deprived of the fried meat and reserves for lean
times which were so plentiful for me?

Have I today been taken from the chessboard [of life]?

Have I been borne on a saddle to a distant and desolate place?

Have I broken my shin, a bone which cannot be mended?

An elder's reproof to his wife

Abdillaahi Muuse

A stream flowing steadily over a stone does not wet its core,
But on fertile soil water brings forth fresh grass,
Termite mounds when spoken to give no response,
A fool's mind is like a house barred,
When one tells people something, they profit by it,
But you, may God change you, are made worse by advice.
There is some remedy for the fools who listen to you,
But there is no medicine for a bad wife who refuses good advice;
And I was born with nobility of mind and am not readily dis-
turbed by trifles.

My dissatisfaction goes back even to the times that I visited you
after our engagement.

Sometimes a fully laden vessel founders with great loss of
property,

And certainly I received no return at all for the rifles and camels
I gave [as bridewealth],

Again and again you wearied me, when the word 'obey' brought
no response.

Neglect, beating, or divorce

On one of these three I am resolved: make your choice!

To a dictatorial sultan

Extract from a poem addressed to a sultan trying to ignore
his clan assembly. The sultan was subsequently deposed.

The vicissitudes of the world, O Olaad, are like the clouds of the
seasons

Autumn weather and spring weather come after each other in
turn

Into an encampment abandoned by one family, another family
moves

If a man is killed, one of his relatives will marry his widow

Last night you were hungry and alone, but tonight people will
feast you as a guest

When fortune places a man even on the mere hem of her robe,
he quickly becomes proud and overbearing

A small milking vessel, when filled to the brim, soon overflows . . .

To a faithless friend

Salaan Arrabey

Salaan Arrabey, who died in the early 1940s, was one of the
most famous and prolific of Somali poets. He is said to have been able to
turn out poems 'like the rain'. This is an extract from a poem in the *gabay*
form.

A woman in childbirth, fainting with cruel pain,
May swear this suffering never to forget,
But when her menstrual time has come again,
Birth's agony has faded from her mind.

There was a man who once knew great distress,
And lost his wealth, his power, his tribe's respect.
But now, restored to eminence, he forgets
His former anguish, and my assistance then.
Ah, friend, your memory is short as any woman's!

Lament for a dead lover

Siraad Haad

You were the fence standing between our land and the
descendants of Ali,
(Now in your departure) you are the sky which gives no rain
while mist shrouds the world,
The moon that shines no more,
The risen sun extinguished,
The dates on their way from Basra cut off by the seas.

A woman sings of her love

Oh, you are a kilt which a young dandy set out to choose,
Oh, you are like a costly ring for which thousands were paid,
Will I ever find your like – you who have been shown to me
only once?
An umbrella comes apart; you are [as strong as] looped iron;
Oh, you [who are as] the gold of Nairobi, finely moulded,
You are the risen sun, and the early rays of dawn.
Will I ever find your like, you who have been shown to me only
once?

Fortitude

Like a she-camel with a large bell
Come from the plateau and upper Haud,
My heat is great.

Birds perched together on the same tree
 Call each their own cries,
 Each country has its own ways,
 Indeed people do not understand each other's talk.

One of my she-camels falls on the road
 And I protect its meat,
 At night I cannot sleep,
 And in the daytime I can find no shade.

I have broken my nose on a stick,
 I have broken my right hip,
 I have something in my eye,
 And yet I go on.

The best dance

The best dance is the dance of the eastern clans,
 The best people are ourselves,
 Of this I have always been sure.
 The best wealth is camels,
 The *duur* grass is the best fresh grazing,
 The *dareemo* grass is the best hay,
 Of this I have always been sure.

As camels who have become thirsty . . . the poet's lament

Ilmi Bowndheri

Ilmi Bowndheri was an oral poet who is said to have died for love shortly before the Second World War. His tragic love is famous among all the Somali – even in Somali cafés in Aden, London, or Cardiff. In this extract he has discovered that his love Hodan has already been married to another man, and is explaining to his friends the bitterness of his grief and his deep love for Hodan. His verse is composed in the classical alliterative style but was innovatory in that it was applied to what had previously seldom made up the sole theme of a classical poem: love.

As camels who have become thirsty after they have been grazing
 in the Haud for a long time
 And who are stopped in front of the well,³ while a youth sings
 to them

And while the word '*hoobay*'⁴ is chanted and voices inter-
 changed,

So I grow wild with impatience when you say 'Hodan'.
 What seems to you so simple, to me brings grief and woe.
 Until people tread earth into her grave, I shall not give her up.
 Rapt in a deceitful trance I thought I was sleeping with her
 But it was only that a jinn counterfeited the image of her sister.
 I aimed to snatch her by her hand – the place beside me was
 empty.

When I discovered that I was striving but that no one was there
 I woke up abruptly, having tossed from side to side.

I rumped my bed, like a prowling lion
 I attacked and pounded the bedclothes as if it were they who
 had caused my deprivation.

I lowered my face, like a hero against whom men have combined.
 I was humbled like a boy from whom a herd of camels, which
 belonged to the clan, were looted.

I felt disgraced like a woman to whom the words 'I divorce you'
 had been spoken.

It is degrading to yearn for what you cannot have.
 Alas, alas, what a disaster has come upon me!

3. Camels have to wait by the well until the herders draw the water for them. During the wait the camel herders sing special songs which the camels know well and associate with water, thus intensifying their thirst and expectation still further. 4. '*Hoobay*' is a frequent refrain in the watering songs and helps further to evoke the familiar scene of thirsty camels at a well.

Modern love poems

The following group of love songs are of the *balwo* genre, characterized by condensed imagery and 'miniature' form. Because of this the poems present special difficulty to the translator. In the first group given here the translator, Margaret Laurence, has felt forced to lengthen the translations slightly in her attempt to convey the images involved, while the later translations, mainly by B. W. Andrzejewski, approximate more nearly to the length of the originals.

Many of these poems are typical of the modern love songs sung in the towns and broadcast over the radio. They are also widely appreciated in the interior of the country too, whether listened to over the radio or heard through the singing of lorry drivers, a group particularly attached to this form of verse.

Since, when you die, delight
By earth's silence will be stilled,
Then let not now the priest
Drive you from your song.

I long for you, as one
Whose dhow in summer winds
Is blown adrift and lost,
Longs for land, and finds –
Again the compass tells –
A grey and empty sea.

Woman, lovely as lightning at dawn,⁵
Speak to me even once.

Your body is to Age and Death betrothed,
And some day all its richness they will share:
Before your firm flesh goes to feed their lusts,
Do not deny my right to love you now.

The curving of your breasts
Like apples sweet and small,
Tolmoon, I will know again
When night turns dusk to dark.

5. Lightning at dawn heralds rain, hence suggests happiness and good fortune.

The merciful will not ignore
A man whose death draws near:
Before the earth receives my bones,
Show mercy unto me.

Your bright mouth and its loveliness,
Your fragrance, the look of you –
Ubah, flower-named, for these
My journey is forgotten.

Turn not away in scorn.
Some day a grave will prove
The frailty of that face,
And worms its grace enjoy.
Let me enjoy you now –
Turn not away in scorn.

All your young beauty is to me
Like a place where the new grass sways,
After the blessing of the rain,
When the sun unveils its light.

Do not the eyes draw one towards that which one
likes
But which is near a precipice?⁶

Like a sailing ship pulled by a storm,
I set my compass towards a place empty of people.⁷

6. The poet fears disaster if he gives way to his impulses – just as in the mountainous regions of Somalia deep ravines present constant danger to grazing animals. The poem recalls the Somali proverb 'Camels see a delectable bush but do not see the precipice behind it'.

7. It was not uncommon for the many sailing ships along the Somali coast to be blown off course by a storm – a much-feared experience to which the forsaken lover likens his own situation.

•
 You are like a place with fresh grass after a
 downpour of rain
 On which the sun now shines.
 •
 Don't pass me by with your firm body,
 Old age and death will have it in the end!
 •
 If I say to myself 'Conceal your love!'
 Who will conceal my tears?
 •
 She passed me by, muffled,
 And people forbade me to give her my last words.⁸
 •
 One does not hurry past a dying man,
 Before I enter the grave, spare a word for me.
 •
 A flash of lightning does not satisfy thirst,
 What then is it to me if you just pass by?
 •
 The girl for whom I have withered like a stick,
 Are you telling me to despair of ever attaining?
 •
 My heart is single and cannot be divided,
 And it is fastened on a single hope; O you who
 might be the moon.
 •
 Until I die I shall not give up the love song,
 O God, forgive me my shortcomings.

8. The poet, dying of unrequited love, is prevented both from speaking to his love and even from seeing her face. She has covered it up with a shawl, with only the eyes showing.

Prayer for rain

Sheikh Aqib Abdullahi Jama

This poem was recited during a bad drought in 1956, when the local inhabitants requested Sheikh Aqib to lead them in prayers for rain. The poem is in the traditional *daanto* genre, often used for marching songs though with certain innovations in the system of alliteration used. Each couplet opens with an invocation of God using the praise names common in Muslim worship.

You who give sustenance to your creatures, O God,
 Put water for us in the nipples of rain!

You who poured water into oceans, O God,
 Make this land of ours fertile again!

Accepter of penance, who are wealthy, O God,
 Gather water in rivers whose beds have run dry!

You who are steadfast and act justly, O God,
 Provide us with what we want you to grant!

You who are glorious, truly bounteous, O God,
 Our cries have undone us, grant a shower of rain!

You who are clement, truly worshipped, O God,
 Milk water for beasts which are stricken with thirst!

Creator of nature who made all things, O God,
 Transmute our ruin to blessing and good!

Eternal rewarder of merits, O God,
 Let that rain come which people used to drink!

We have done much Remembrance,⁹ O God who remember,
 Loosen upon us rain from the clouds!

You who are merciful and compassionate, O God,
 Milk rain from the sky for Muslims in need!

Giver of victuals at all times, O God,
 Who can do what you want, bestow on us rain!

9. A special ceremony consisting of long invocations accompanied by clapping, stamping, etc.

You who are peace and a curtain, O God,
Provide us with what we want you to grant!

Recorder of merit, who requite us, O God,
Into scorched empty ponds pour us water of rain!

You who are truthful, creator, O God,
We accept in submission whatever you say!

You who mete out good and evil, O God,
In this land we are broken, milk the clouds from above!

The earth and the sky you constructed, O God,
We cannot get water, bring forth drops of rain!

The darkness of night you transfigure, O God,
And make daylight follow; milk the sky lavishly!

You who gave brightness to sunshine, O God,
And know its principles, give us brown water from rain!

You who are rich and ward off cares, O God,
Milk temperate rain! help us with rain everywhere!

You who open all and give sustenance, O God,
People have scattered; send forth healthy rain!

Almighty, perfecter of counsels, O God,
Pour for us rain which would make the land wet!

You who are bounteous, the protector, O God,
We cannot survive drought, send us rain from your store!

You who drive the air which sways the trees, O God,
It is you whom we praised, grant us the goodness of rain!

You who are worshipped and answer prayers, O God,
Make the rain spread over the whole of the land!

Bestower of victories, benefactor, O God,
Bring us faultless rain which makes us dwell where it falls!

You who are one and are trusted, O God,
Provider of all, give water to man!

You who spark off lightning from clouds you have loaded, O God,
It is you who have power over rain which satiates!

You who fill water-holes dug in wadis, O God,
Milk rain on this land, cream-giving rain!

Who used to relieve the strangest plights, O God,
It is to you that I have turned for help!

The Suez crisis

A broadcast poem.

O men, the beautiful world is going to be spoiled
The nations assembled in London have brought about this
trouble
The West and East have approached each other ready for war . . .
See the pride of Nasser, the Chinese, the yelling Arabs,
Nehru negotiating with all ingenuity,
Whenever the sun sets, the Russians bring equipment;
Power has been launched on the sea.
See Eden, proud and strutting
And Dulles, inciting him to conquest yet unwilling to take part
himself;
The French, driven by jealousy and zeal, yearning for the din of
an explosion.
If the United Nations make no decisions with mighty pens
A great explosion will come from the Suez Canal.
The people who have done this do not know the value of their
lives;
If planes drop the equipment entrusted to them,
If cannons, resounding, fire without ceasing,
If the hidden submarines come to face each other
It is certain that smoke will billow and boil there!
Certainly, of the two sides, one will subjugate the other, as with
a burden saddle;
How horrible is the smoke and perdition which they pursue:
O God, the Powerful, save us from the roaring thunderbolts!

Women and men

Hassan Sheikh Mumin

A dialogue from the play *Shabeelnaagood*. Shallaayo, who has been betrayed by Shabeelnaagood (Leopard among women), condemns all men while Diiddane, represented as a man with the good of society at heart, defends them.

Plays are nowadays one of the most popular entertainments in the towns. They are a relatively recent innovation and are a development both from traditional oral poetry and drama introduced through foreign influence. The art involved remains an oral one in the sense that the playwright teaches the actors their roles orally and not from a script. Though the themes are often highly topical, most of the dialogue is conducted in the traditional metres of alliterative verse.

SHALLAAYO: Women have no share in the encampments of this world

And it is men who made these laws, to their own advantage.
By God, by God, men are our enemies, though we ourselves nurtured them.

We suckled them at our breasts, and they maimed us:
We do not share peace with them.

DIIDDANE: Man and woman are two creatures
Who grew from the same first fibre, and they share this life.
Listen, listen, O women! Men are the green grass, the comfort,
The very sustenance of women: man and woman are a she-camel and her baby
Who take their radiance from one another.

SHALLAAYO: Men are hateful, and the women who love them
Suffer endlessly at their hands, yet are held spellbound by them.
By God, by God, men are our enemies, though we ourselves nurtured them

We suckled them at our breasts, and they maimed us:
We do not share peace with them.

DIIDDANE: You can find rest in a man, with him you can breathe freely,
He will hew for you a rock to find the honey of wild bees, he will give you to drink from the waters of contentment.

Listen, listen, O women! Men are the green grass, the comfort,
The very sustenance of women: man and woman are a she-camel and her baby
Who take their radiance from one another.

SHALLAAYO: A man has no pity, and resentment is what he plants in us
And when we make our promises to him he turns away from us to follow his own destiny.
By God, by God, men are our enemies, though we ourselves nurtured them.

We suckled them at our breasts, and they maimed us:
We do not share peace with them.

DIIDDANE: You cast your spell over a man who has compassion,
You cleave to evil and there is no goodness in you.
Listen, listen, O women! Men are the green grass, the comfort,
The very sustenance of women: man and woman are a she-camel and her baby
Who take their radiance from one another.

Colonialism

Cabdullaahi Qarshe

Composed in 1967.

The colonialist governments
Of the whole of Africa –
When they coveted it –
The meeting¹⁰ they arranged for this,
The city where they sent delegates,
In the exact section where they debated –
Look at Berlin,
All of you look!
A wall is splitting it –
Look and be entertained!

10. The Berlin Conference of 1884–5, seen as the starting point of the scramble for Africa.

As soon as the colonialists invaded us,
They shackled our men's legs,
And loaded them like donkeys,
And whipped them,
They filled the trough with them,
And made the camps to overflow.

When the black men felt the pain and revolted:
The drums which they beat,
The bells which they rang,
The poems which stirred them,
And the songs which they sent to each other:
All this they remembered one afternoon,
And they drove most¹¹ from Africa.

O Nabsi,¹² you who never tarry,
And who never get exhausted,
And whom no one directs,
And whom no one instructs,
And who never know haste,
And yet who sometimes are not late;
O you who can be as slow as a tortoise,
And yet whom airplanes can never overtake;
From time immemorial
Our lands have not been our own –
O Elder,¹³ how is it that you do not act?
Is our right¹⁴ to be forfeited?

The point on which I end,
And on which I would terminate my discourse,
And what I mean by it,
I will reveal to you:
The birds which are flying
And gliding about above
Will some day tire
And descend to earth.¹⁵

11. Most colonialists. 12. Avenging fate. 13. i.e. Nabsi.
14. i.e. to Somali land outside Somalia. 15. Nabsi will come; the colonialists and their acts (i.e. the division of Somalia) cannot last for ever.

Independence

A song celebrating the unification of the British Somaliland Protectorate and ex-Italian Somalia to form the independent Somali Republic.

Freedom and dignity have reached us,
We have brought together the two lands.
Glory to God!
Say: 'It is God's victory,
It is God's victory!
We are victorious.'
Beat the song, join the dance!
Everyone, with all your might!
And now let us finish, cease!
It is God's victory!
It is God's victory!