

DISCOURSE ON MORAL WOMANHOOD IN SOMALI POPULAR SONGS, 1960–1990

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ABSTRACT: This article is a study of Somali popular songs of the period 1960–90, which opened with the establishment of the Somali national state and ended with its collapse. It focuses on these songs as a discursive site in which a particular dilemma of the new Somali state clearly comes into focus, namely the desire to be ‘modern’, while at the same time turning to ‘tradition’ (i.e. a particular construction of Somali cultural authenticity and traditional religious morality) to mark and anchor a new Somali collective self-understanding and communal identity. The discursive push-and-pull of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ evident in the songs expresses itself specifically in debates about moral womanhood – that is to say, about what ‘good’ women should be like. Since the collapse of the state in 1991, Somali discourses about common public identity and gender norms have undergone dramatic change, with the sites of popular culture multiplying, especially outside of Somalia, and accessible through the internet. Although an interpretation of Islam that distances itself from Somali ‘tradition’ has been gaining importance as a source of legitimization, as is evident both in the struggle over the state in Somalia and in everyday life in Somalia and the diaspora, this is not a major concern in the Somali popular songs from the period after 1991.

It was born auspiciously this flag raised above us
We will not differentiate among any Somalis
Since none of us are closer to it than the others,
Let us be equal in front of our flag

(Waa samo ku dhalayoo calanka noo saaran
Soomaali oo dhan, kala sooci mayno
Uma kala sokeynno, ha loo sinnaado)

Somali popular song, articulating the hope of Somali unity and equality,
sung by Faduumo Abdillaahi ‘Maandeeq’ in the early 1960s

KEY WORDS: Somalia, gender, oral culture, women.

INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL struggles over conceptions and definitions of moral womanhood – of what it means in any time or place to be a ‘proper’ woman – often develop in dialectical relationship to other social and political movements and institutions. Thus, discourses about women’s rights and emancipation in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Middle East and elsewhere in the Islamic world were both enabled and circumscribed by the anti-colonial, nationalist movements for independence of which they were a crucial part. Both

movements – nationalism and women’s emancipation – were characterized by their will to be modern while ‘preserving’ their notions of cultural authenticity and authentic morality, and by their goal of ending Western colonial rule while emulating aspects of liberal Western philosophies and institutions.¹ Although it has been well established that nationalist victories rarely gave feminists what they had hoped and struggled for, it was not until the deep failure of the nationalist projects and their displacement by other social and political movements such as the Islamist ones that new conceptions of moral womanhood have increasingly become normative.

Somalia is no exception to these developments. However, there are several reasons why the Somali case is of particular interest. First, in few countries was the popular discourse about nationalism and nationalist moral womanhood as articulate and lively as in the Somalia of the 1960s–1980s. Second, in few countries was the failure of the nationalist project as absolute as in the Somalia of the early 1990s, when state and social order themselves collapsed in communal (clan-based) violence that took many Somalis completely by surprise. This cataclysm, which had been in the making for over a decade² and gave rise to diasporic communities of Somalis throughout the world, has transformed (and is transforming) the discourses about Somali communal identities and moral womanhood, as well as discursive sites in which these are debated and propagated. The genre of Somali popular culture that is central to this essay is increasingly produced outside of Somalia and reaches Somalis, wherever they are, through the electronic media.

The Somali popular songs analyzed here³ were part of the nationalist project of ‘modernity’ of the Somali nationalist movement and independent state from 1955 to 1991. After a brief overview of this period, I will analyze the contradictory impulses in the visions of moral womanhood expressed in the songs, as poets and song writers articulated a desire for ‘modernity’ in tandem with a particular notion of Somali ‘tradition’ (i.e. cultural authenticity and traditional religious morality) to mark and anchor the communal identity or collective self-understanding of the new Somali nation and national state. In conclusion, this paper will touch upon the dramatic changes in Somali common public identity and the new gender norms that have been developing since the collapse of the state in 1991. In this period, a bifurcation appears to have occurred between ‘traditional culture’ and Islamic morality as legitimizing discourses. However, as the (discursive) battle about the form and control of a new Somali state is in full swing, and as the sites and genres

¹ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, 1994); Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York, 1994); and Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State* (Philadelphia, 1991).

² Lidwien Kapteijns, ‘Disintegration of Somalia: a historiographical essay’, *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 3 (2003), 11–52.

³ The source base for this article is described in Lidwien Kapteijns (with Maryan Omar Ali), *Women’s Voices in a Man’s World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature, c. 1899–1980* (Portsmouth NH, 1999), 209–15. I expanded on it during research in Ethiopia and Djibouti (June–Dec. 2007), funded by a Fulbright-Hays fellowship.

of popular culture are multiplying as we speak, this analysis can only be partial and provisional.

THE NATIONALIST IDEALS OF UNITY AND MODERNITY

The nationalist movement that fought for Somali independence from colonial rule emerged in the years during and following the Second World War, when all of the Somali territories were united under British military rule. Although Western Europe's colonial empires were on the decline, international competition was still acute, with Italy, in spite of its defeat in the war, vying with Great Britain for the control of its former colony of southern Somalia. Moreover, the Soviet Union and the USA, then squaring off to confront each other in the Cold War, were also influential and jealous players, while Egypt maintained a strong interest in Somalia throughout. It fell to the Somali nationalist movement of the 1950s and 1960s and a new configuration of international realpolitik to shape the emerging national consciousness and propel the Somali nation and state towards taking (in nationalist terms) its rightful place among the nations of the world. Although some Somali parties objected to the establishment of a unitary (rather than federal) centralized state, on 1 July 1960, on a wave of popular enthusiasm, former British and Italian Somalilands came together to form the independent Somali Republic.⁴

In terms of political program, the nationalist movement organized and called upon Somalis to leave sectarian and exclusive clan-identities behind and embrace *soomaalinimo*, a national Somali identity.⁵ They regarded ignorance (lack of education) and the smaller-scale communal identities based on clan and sub-clan as their main internal obstacle to unity, but hoped that, under their own youthful, educated, modern and urban leadership, the commonalities of language, culture, religion and territory could form the basis of an independent, modern state for a unified Somali people. Of course, Somali society had cultural differences and social inequalities beyond those most explicitly addressed by the nationalists.⁶ However, gender had a modest place in their discourse about the future, about which more below.

⁴ See Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge MA, 1963), and Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope* (New York, 1999).

⁵ Abdirazak Haji Hussien, 'The Somali crisis: how did it happen and where do we go from here?' (public lecture presented at the Somali Institute for Research and Development (SIRAD) Public Forum Series 2004, Boston, 2 May 2004).

⁶ The nationalists combated, but with less emphasis, the discrimination against the so-called 'Bantu Somalis' and the so-called 'lower caste' Somalis called 'Midgaan', 'Yibir' and 'Tumaal'. For the racial discrimination against the so-called 'Bantu Somalis', see Kenneth Menkhaus, 'Rural transformation and the roots of underdevelopment in Somalia's Lower Jubba Valley' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1989), as well as several chapters in A. J. Ahmed (ed.), *The Invention of Somalia* (Lawrenceville, 1995). For the so-called 'low-caste Somalis', see, for example, www.midgaan.com and the fictionalized account of Mahmood Gaidoon, *The Yibir of Las Burgabo* (Lawrenceville, 2005).

The obstacles to the goal of unity were daunting.⁷ First, in spite of geographical contiguity, colonial boundaries, it turned out, could not be undone, so that the Somalis of the Northern Frontier District, French Somaliland and the Ethiopian-occupied Somali territory remained outside of the Somali Republic. This caused an irredentist program whose failure was to have huge political costs for the new country. Moreover, whatever the commonalities between Somalis might be, in reality, the nationalist movement and the civilian administrations (1960–9) inherited a country that had been deeply marked and divided not just by colonial rule but, more importantly, by differential (British, Italian, Ethiopian and French) experiences of colonial rule. In both British and Italian Somaliland, nationalist ideals ran up against the suffocating administrative legacy of a system of governance that had largely failed to build modern institutions and that, to the extent that it had institutionalized Somali administrative practice at all, had made clan (and thus clan rivalry) into the only mode of access to the colonial state and the primary focus of administrative interaction with the people. In other words, at independence, the nationalists, buoyed by the unconditional support of the people, had to hitch their project of inclusion, unity and modernization to deeply tribalized administrative habits and institutions.⁸

There is no doubt that the desire to become modern, in Donham's sense,⁹ was an integral part of the nationalist project of the 1960s and after. Many of the dimensions of this discourse are well known. They included a liberal belief in constitutional democracy and representative, accountable government; individual rights and freedoms, including equality before the law and freedom from government oppression; social progress derived from formal, modern education, based on European models; and economic development inspired by scientific and technological progress. Here too the nationalists faced major obstacles to their hopes for modernization and the gap between discourse and reality remained vast. Before the Second World War, public educational institutions in both Somalilands had been practically non-existent, with private schools few and far between and

⁷ Abdi Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northern Somalia, 1885–1985* (Madison, 1989).

⁸ See Lidwien Kapteijns and Mursal Farah, review of I. M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa* (3rd ed., 1999), *Africa*, 4 (2001), 719–23, and Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, 151–7, for a brief analysis of the colonial transformation of Somali kinship. See also Lidwien Kapteijns, 'Women and the crisis of communal identity: the cultural construction of gender in Somali history', in Ahmed I. Samatar (ed.), *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* (Boulder, 1994), 211–31, and Abdi Samatar, 'Destruction of state and society in Somalia: beyond the tribal convention', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30 (1992), 625–41.

⁹ Donald Donham argues that '[t]o invoke the modern involves a particular rhetorical stance and a way of experiencing time and historicity, with a certain structure of progressive expectation for the future'. 'On being modern in a capitalist world: some conceptual issues', in Bruce M. Knauft (ed.), *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies* (Bloomington, 2002), 241–57, 244. Constructing views of the 'traditional' is, therefore, in his view, intrinsic to modern projects. For a recent discussion of modernity and nationalism in colonial Sudan, see Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley, 2003).

limited to small numbers of students.¹⁰ The economic policies the nationalist inherited were equally undeveloped. Apart from a small plantation sector in the south, which even after independence continued to be in Italian hands, the colonial state had not seriously invested in, or developed, the economic sectors on which the majority of the population depended: live-stock herding and farming. Beyond heavy import and export taxes (and smaller levies such as tax stamps on legal documents), the colonial powers had not developed a system of taxation on which the new state could draw. Thus, independent Somalia inherited an economically deeply underdeveloped state.¹¹ The dependence on colonial handouts and, after 1960, foreign aid made the new state vulnerable to international manipulation and, in the end, during the second half of the Barre regime, not accountable to its own subjects.¹²

However, if the nationalist project was intrinsically modern in that it wanted to catapult Somalia into the ranks of other modern nation-states, it also had to distinguish Somalia from the latter by articulating a uniquely Somali national identity – a communal identity that drew on the past in order to mobilize Somalis for a modern future. In Somalia, as in other (post-independence) nationalist contexts, modern articulations of culturally authentic communal identities proved to be deeply intertwined with conceptualizations of gender relations and moral woman- and person-hood. Indeed, it was in this area, about which more below, that the tensions between modernity and traditional culture (*hiddiyo dhaqan*) became most contested. The task of articulating much of the public and popular discourse about *soomaalinimo* fell to the (organic) intellectuals and artists,¹³ who took this on themselves and were also actively encouraged to do so by state institutions. Undoubtedly, the schoolbooks, scholarship, literature and journalism that were produced in Somalia in this era also contributed to the construction of a national identity. However, given the context of very limited literacy,¹⁴ at the popular level this discourse about *soomaalinimo* – about how to be a modern yet moral (for culturally authentic) Somali – took shape particularly

¹⁰ For education during the colonial period, see Samatar, *The State*, 59–81. Lewis, *A Modern History*, 97–8, 103, 133, 148–9.

¹¹ Samatar, *The State*; Lewis, *A Modern History*, pp. 142–3.

¹² For the failures of leadership, see David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State* (Boulder, 1987), and Ahmed I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality* (London, 1988). For dependence on foreign aid, see Ahmed I. Samatar and Abdi I. Samatar, 'The material roots of the suspended Somali state', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 25 (1987), 669–90; and Ozay Mehmet, 'Effectiveness of foreign aid: the case of Somalia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 9 (1971), 31–47.

¹³ More research is needed on the group of artists whose creative genius gave shape to this dimension of the Somali nationalist narrative. Kapteijns (*Women's Voices*, 104–6) may overstate the level of formal education of this group and understate the impact of state institutions (such as the radio stations of Hargeisa and Mogadishu) in promoting and commissioning socially relevant songwriting. However, artists were certainly urban people who had strong ties to, or roots in, the rural areas and thus served as cultural brokers between the city and the countryside (*miyi iyo magaalo*).

¹⁴ Somalia did not have an official Somali orthography until 1972. Even though the massive literacy campaigns that followed this dramatically raised basic literacy levels in city and countryside, Somalia remained in many ways an oral society.

in a new, modern, genre of oral poetry, that of the popular song (*hees* or *heello*).

SOMALI POPULAR SONG: MOBILIZING THE PAST FOR
A NATIONALIST FUTURE

The Somali popular song developed in post-Second World War Somalia both in interaction with older forms of oral literature and in response to Somalia's self-conscious encounter with the world. Born as a love-song in the social space opened up by those who moved and mediated between the countryside and the town (such as truck-drivers and school teachers), the popular song came of age as a genre – that is to say, gained wide social acceptance and importance – when it became a vehicle for nationalist, anti-colonial sentiment and argument.¹⁵ Moreover, as political parties used songs to spread their message and appeal to the masses, as the towns of Hargeisa in the north and Mogadishu in the south established radio stations and as – after independence, and especially after 1969 – state institutions (such as the Ministry of Information) put increasing numbers of Somali artists and bands on their (however meager) payroll, the popular song gained a strong institutional basis.¹⁶ The popularity of the popular song was paralleled by that of plays (*riwaayad*, *masrax*), which, at least into the mid-1970s, often combined a focus on major political and social issues confronting Somali society with simple, and sometimes bawdy comedy.¹⁷ Premiering in the new National Theatre in Mogadishu, or in Hargeisa, these plays then toured the country, often for months at a time. Songs both marked the major episodes of the plot and articulated the underlying political, social or philosophical themes of these plays. Because of both their compelling artistry and social relevance and the new mass media technology of radio-broadcasting and audio-cassettes, they thus gained wide popularity in the urban areas and the countryside alike. Until today, there are few Somalis who grew up anywhere in Somalia in this era (1955–91) who do not remember – often having

¹⁵ For the history of the Somali popular song, see John J. Johnson, *Heellooy, Heelleellooy: The Development of the Genre Heello in Modern Somali Poetry* (Bloomington, 1974), and Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, Part Two. The label 'popular song' or 'pop song' is mine, but it is based on the Somali term for the *hees*, or 'modern song', which consists of love songs (analyzed in Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*) and explicitly political songs (analyzed in Johnson, *Heellooy*). The discourse of *soomaalinimo* and Somali unity informs both genres, but is most explicit in the political songs, so much so that there is a whole sub-genre called *waddani* or 'patriotic' songs. For the term *hees* and its thematic sub-division, see Maxamed Daahir Afrax, *Fan-Masraxeedka Soomaalida: Raad-raac Taariikheed iyo Faaqidaad Riwaayado Caan-baxay* (Djibouti, 1987 [published by the author]).

¹⁶ Interviews with Faduumo Qasim Hilowle and Ahmed Ismail Hussein Hudeidi, by Ahmed I. Samatar and Lidwien Kapteijns, St. Paul, 18 and 20 July 2004. The state purposely promoted a national popular culture through the radio stations of Mogadishu and Hargeisa, as well as the National Theatre, and put large numbers of artists on the payrolls of these institutions.

¹⁷ For Somali drama, see Hassan Sheikh Mumin, *Leopard Among the Women (Shabeelnaagood)*, trans. with intro. by B. W. Andrzejewski (London, 1974); Afrax, *Fan-Masraxeedka Soomaalida*; and Maxamed Daahir Afrax, 'Theatre as a window on society: opposing influences of tradition and modernity in Somali plays', *Halabuur: Journal for Somali Literature and Culture*, 1 & 2 (2007), 74–82.

memorized – hundreds of these songs, and even still listen to them in their cars and homes, growing nostalgic when they hear them. During its heyday in the period 1960–90, the popular song provided a major site of public discourse in Somalia and helped fashion the ideals of a modern Somali national consciousness or nationalist ‘imaginary’.¹⁸

To understand the social significance of the popular song in Somali society of 1960–1990, one must understand how it used the power of the past to mobilize Somalis for a particular vision of the future, namely, a modern, nationalist vision. According to Said Samatar in his book *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, oral poetry in (pre)colonial Somali society had three characteristics relevant to us here: it was ‘utilitarian’, in the sense that the poet aimed ‘to inform, persuade or convince’ others of a particular point of view or proposal; it was ‘committed’, in the sense that it was ‘composed and chanted in relation to a specific occasion or for the purpose of achieving a specific end’; and it aspired to have an impact on two kinds of moral universe, that of the immediate present and the timeless one of larger, universal, moral truth.¹⁹ The popular song inherited from traditional oral poetry the utilitarian urge and commitment to persuade, inform, educate and bring about action and change. Moreover, and this perhaps explains how deeply the songs moved (and still move) contemporary Somalis, the popular songs often had multiple layers of meaning, from the anecdotal to the symbolic, the particular to the general, and from the ‘immediate’ to the ‘transcendental’. Like Samatar’s ‘good poem’, the well-conceived and well-crafted popular song, ‘once its immediate point is appreciated, passes into a secondary phase whereby it ... becomes a part of the people’s spiritual heritage’.²⁰

However, the new genre of the Somali popular song also incorporated radically new features. First of all, they were accompanied by an increasing range of musical instruments, among which the lute, drums and flute initially figured most prominently. Second, they were sensual and sometimes risqué, with romantic passion and physical desire constituting a major theme. While *tatrib* (being transported, or ecstasy) was nothing new to traditional Somali dances (which almost always had a verbal dimension), unlike the latter the modern song was not restricted to specially demarcated social occasions and was performed and enjoyed by men and women, privately, in mixed company, with people sitting down. It was socially simply a very different phenomenon. Even if it derived many aspects of form and function from traditional, and thus rural, genres, the Somali popular song was a child of urban life that was raised on the heady diet of nationalist popular fervor. As such, it came to mark the youth culture of the new era. In a context of limited literacy, and with the support of formal institutions, the popular

¹⁸ Kelly M. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania* (Chicago, 2002), 273, uses the term ‘national imaginaries’ for ‘the multiple and often contradictory layers and fragments of ideology that underlie continually shifting conceptions of any given nation’. Here ‘the nationalist imaginary’ stands for the socio-cultural dimension of the nation-building project and its impact on notions of Somali public identity.

¹⁹ Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mahammad ‘Abdille Hasan* (Cambridge, 1982), 56–7. Samatar says this about what nomadic society regarded as its most prestigious genres of oral poetry – precisely the genres that had the greatest influence on the popular song.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 58.

song came to constitute a social commentary that captured the mood of its time.²¹

It was in this context that Somali popular songs – more than any other genre or discursive site – came to express and shape the popular debates about how to be a ‘modern’ and yet ‘moral’ ‘Somali’. In this search for moral and modern *soomaalinimo*, traditional cultural concepts, which included aspects of religious morality, took on the power of a legitimizing discourse, while women and gender roles became a major focus.²²

GENDER AND NATIONALIST CONCEPTIONS OF MODERNITY

Although there are no comprehensive and detailed histories of Somali women, it has been well established that women played a crucial part in the nationalist movement for independence and the political parties that competed in the political arena after independence. They became members *en masse* and held office, recruited new members, sacrificed their scant personal financial resources such as jewelry, raised funds from friend and foe alike, fed and housed young nationalists who were denied jobs because of their affiliations, organized and helped find resources for major congresses and demonstrations, composed poetry to raise awareness and keep up spirits, translated the lofty words of party programs into action and, at times, even paid for their convictions with prison terms and death.²³

Women did gain the vote, a major milestone and reward, first in the municipal elections of 1958 and then in the general elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1959.²⁴ However, while male nationalist leaders of various parties appealed to women for support, depended on them and acknowledged their contributions, they regarded women largely as supporters and, when independence and unity were achieved – as happened in Egypt and elsewhere – no woman was given a major position in the new administrations.²⁵ Partly this was because women generally had even lower educational qualifications than men, although for men such lack of formal education turned out to be much less of an obstacle to obtaining positions of political leadership. If it proved difficult for the generation of men who inherited the mantle of

²¹ This was the case in spite of the reification of nomadic tradition that is evident in the popular culture of this period. I have analyzed this in Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, 151–7. See also Ali Jimale Ahmed (ed.), *The Invention of Somalia* (Lawrenceville, 1995), which diagnoses the problem well but does not do justice to its historical genesis.

²² This is the burden of the second part of Kapteijns' *Women's Voices*.

²³ Zeinab Mohamed Jama, 'Fighting to be heard: Somali women's poetry', *African Languages and Cultures*, 4 (1991), 43–53, and Maryan Muuse Boqor, 'Somali women's roles in the movement for independence' (oral presentation at the celebration of Somali National Week, Somali Women's and Children's Association, Boston, 29 June 2001). It is precisely because of our limited historical knowledge of Somali women's lives, including their role in the nationalist movement, that I have turned to the songs as a source, if not for women's lives, then at least for discourses about women.

²⁴ Touval, *Somali Nationalism*, 87.

²⁵ Maryan Muuse Boqor, 'Somali women's roles'. Compare Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*; Naomi Chazan, 'Gender perspectives on African states', in Jane L. Parpart and Kathleen A. Staudt (eds.), *Women and the State in Africa* (Boulder, 1989), 185–201; and Gisela Geisler, 'Troubled sisterhood: women and politics in southern Africa: case studies from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana', *African Affairs*, 94 (Oct. 1995), 545–78.

leadership in 1960 to regard and treat the women with whom they actually collaborated as equals, their vision of modernity encompassed such equality in theory and in the long run. This was evident, for example, from their support of education for Somali youth of both sexes. While women in the 1960s were politically active alongside men, to what extent an organized women's movement spearheaded changes in gender ideology is still unclear and requires further research.

In the popular songs of this era both the concept of greater equality in gender relations and that of modern personhood, in Abu-Lughod's sense, are strikingly evident.²⁶ The idea of a 'modern subject', with intense personal emotions and desires, is a core feature of the genre of the modern song and gives rise to two intrinsically modern themes: the ideal of romantic love – with all its symptoms and outcomes and all its variations and degrees – and that of a companionate marriage, that is to say, marriage based on romantic love, mutual respect, partnership and shared decision-making.²⁷ By emphasizing the mutuality of love and desire, the concept of the love match differed radically from traditional marriage – or at least from public articulations of traditional marriage – which was presented as a marriage that was often arranged by (and in the best interest of) the families of the couple and in which the husband's authority over (the labor of) his wife (or wives) and children was paramount. These were revolutionary, modern, ideas at the time, as they questioned the traditional authority and conventions of family and clan, challenged narrow definitions of Islamic morality, and constructed new self-representations and selves. In the songs at least, romantic love and companionate marriage became the ideal of the Somali youth of the nationalist era, and they inspired many young people to defy their families in order to marry whom they wanted.²⁸

This is reflected in the popular songs, which legitimized these new social institutions of love match and companionate marriage by imbuing old cultural concepts with new meanings and applying them to new contexts. Thus the old concept of *nabsi* (avenging fate), the leveling force ensuring that all human beings get their share of fortune and misfortune, became in the songs the social sanction an ill-starred lover invokes against the one who does not return her/his love. The word *axdi*, meaning 'solemn pledge' or 'agreement', became in the love songs the private agreement reached by two young lovers, often irrespective of the wishes of the parents. Many more examples exist.²⁹

²⁶ In 'Modern subjects: Egyptian melodrama and postcolonial difference', in Timothy Mitchell (ed.), *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis, 2000), 87–114, Lila Abu-Lughod gives as characteristics of modern personhood 'a rich inner life and an intense individuality' (p. 94), as well as being 'autonomous, bounded, self-activating, [and] verbalizing him/herself' (p. 95). Lutz and Abu-Lughod argue as well that such 'modern subjects' are also characterized by particular constructions of emotionality, quoting Foucault as arguing that 'emotion discourse might represent a privileged site of production of the modern self' (p. 6). See Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Introduction: emotion, discourse, and the politics of everyday life', in Lutz and Abu-Lughod (eds.), *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge, 1990), 1–23.

²⁷ Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, 111–49.

²⁸ Maryan Muuse, interviewed in Boston, Ramadan (Jan.–Feb.) 2001.

²⁹ Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, 121–40.

An example of the use of traditional cultural concepts to legitimize and sanction the modern ideals of love marriage is the song ‘The Yearnings of Our Love’, from the play *Xuskii Jacaylkii* (The Celebration of Love), which became, and continues to be, a popular wedding song. Three things are worth noting about this song. First, the text makes clear that the wedding it celebrates is a love match. As the bride puts it in the song, ‘the memory of our love and our long-standing desire ... make me shiver, make me bite my lips, my fingers’. Second, the song states that this love match is sanctioned by both Somali tradition, in the form of customary law and the approval and blessing of the couple’s fathers and family elders, and the religion of Islam, in the form of the sheikh, religion and God. Third, it is worth noting that Islam and Somali tradition are mentioned in one breath and regarded, if not as mutually constitutive, at least as inseparable.

‘The yearnings of our love’³⁰

Sung by Mohamed Ahmed and Saaddo Ali

Words by Mahmud Abdullahi ‘Sangub’

She:

The yearnings of our love, this wonderful marriage, and our living together ever after. Like Adam and Eve the Lord has chosen us for each other.

[Our marriage] is a condition more powerful than us, written for us in heaven.

The elders who know customary law as well as the sheikh and his students have given us their protective blessing. Because our Lord, the Judge, has made me your spouse, I thank Him a thousand times.

He:

The way we respect each other and the angelic beauty of which the Prophet had his share. Like [the legendary Somali lovers] Haydar and Faduumo,³¹ the Lord has chosen us for each other. It is an account that has been settled, a limit that cannot be overstepped. It is our fathers’ rightful authority and blessing and the decision reached by the elders, which deserve respect. Because our Lord, the Judge, has made me your spouse, I thank Him a thousand times.

(She:

Xiisaha kalgacalkeenna, xaasha ee guurkeenna, beryo samo ku waarkeenna
Sidii Xaawo iyo Aadan, Rabbi baa isu keen xulay. Waa xaal innaga weynoo, xagga
samada laga qoray. Duqay xeer aqoonliyo, xer cilmiyo sheekh baa, xirsigana inoo
xidhay. Rabbigeenna Xaakim ahee, xilo iga kaa dhigay baan kun jeer ku xam-
diyayaa.

He:

Is xaqdhawrka labadeenna, xuralcaynta quruxdeeda, xabiibkii u helay qaybta.
Sidii Xaydar iyo Faduumo, Rabbi baa isu keen xulay. Waa xisaab dhammaatiyo,
xad aan laga tallaabayn, xuquwaalid ducadiyo xaajo odayo gooyeen baa, xurma lagu
muteystaa. Rabbigeenna Xaakim ahee, xilo iga kaa dhigay baan kun jeer ku xam-
diyayaa.)

³⁰ See also *ibid.* 141–2, 203.

³¹ Faduumo and Haydar, a couple of legendary fame, believed to have lived in sixteenth-century Zeila and to have died of love. See *ibid.* 162.

In a number of popular songs of this era, modern, 'feminist' or emancipatory articulations of gender roles and relations can be seen to hold their own against more conservative ones, with the latter basing themselves on Somali cultural tradition. The following three famous songs take the form of a poetic debate between men and women. The first two texts are part of the play *Shabeelnaagood* ('Leopard among the women' – produced in 1968 by Hassan Sheikh Mumin).³² In the first fragment, a debate between two teachers, who represent modernity in the play, the female teacher raises the issue of male–female inequality, while the male teacher soothes her with references to the unique love and closeness that characterize a couple.

'By God, men are ...'.³³

Sung by Hibo Mohamed and Abdi Muhumed

Words by Hassan Sheikh Mumin.

She:

Women have no share in the arrangements of this world
and the laws governing it were made by men to their own advantage
By God, by God, men are the enemies we ourselves raised
and nursed at our breasts, but they have crippled us
and we cannot share peace with them.

He:

Men and women are like two beings
that grew from the same first cell and share life
Listen, you women, men are the green grass, the comfort,
the sustenance of women. We are like a she-camel and its calf
that share in the same radiance.

(She:

Nagaadiga adduunyada qayb ku ma leh naaguhu
Xeerkii sidaa naqay nimankaa sameystee
Alla, Alla, nimanku waa nacab aan korinnoo
naaskeenna nuugoo naafeeyay dumarkoo
nabad lama wadaagee.

He:

Nimanka iyo naaguhu waa laba nafood oo
nuday qudh ah ka beermoo nolosha wadaagee
Naa hoy, naa hoy, nimanku waa naq iyo raaxiyo
nafaqada haweenkoo. Waxaan nahay hal iyo nirig
midba mid u nuurtee.)

In the second song, the same two teachers blame the other sex for the sorry state of marriage. In the scene of which the song is a part, these accusations include seducing, deceiving and being unfaithful, with women allegedly giving their favors to the highest bidder and men impregnating innocent girls. In the song quoted here, however, he attributes the decay of marriage to women's modern and indecent dress and non-traditional social freedom,

³² Hassan Sheikh Mumin, *Leopard Among the Women*.

³³ My translation, but with reference to *ibid.* 174–7.

while she asserts the rights and freedoms of all women and blames the problem on men's abusive treatment of women. Striking in this song is how the male teacher associates modernity with indecency and frivolity, while the female teacher bases her argument on women's rights and solidarity.

'Is this just?'³⁴

Sung by Hibo Mohamed and Abdi Muhumed

Words by Hassan Sheikh Mumin.

She:

We have gained our freedom and achieved our rights. That you should bridle us and tie us down – Is this just, and do custom and religion permit you to act this way? You have committed a punishable offense and are overstepping the limit – concede a point to us!

He:

That you should tuck up your dresses, bare the backs of your knees, put on clothes as transparent as a spider's web, and break all moral bounds – Is this just, and do custom and religion permit you to act this way? You have committed a punishable offense and are overstepping the limit – you, women, shame on you!

She:

If a controlling husband cannot stomach [our newly found freedom, it is] all women [who are hurt]. That we should be abused – Is this just, and do custom and religion permit you to act this way? You have committed a punishable offense and are overstepping the limit – concede a point to us!

(She:

Annagu xorrownoo xaqayagii midhaystay. Inaad na xakamaysaan aadna xidhxidhaan, xaq miyaa, xeer miyaa, ma idiin xalaal baa? Idinka xujooboo xuduudkii ka talaabsanaayee. Xubin na siiya!

He:

Inaad marada xayddaan, xaglaha na qaawisaan, xuub caaro huwataan, xeradii ka baxdaan, xaq miyaa, xeer miyaa, ma idiin xalaal baa? Idinka xujooboo xuduudkii ka talaabsanaayee. Naa xishooda!

She:

Xilagube haddii uu hanan waayey tiisa, xaawaley dhammaanteed, in nala xumeeyaa, xaq miyaa, xeer miyaa, ma idiin xalaal baa? Idinka xujooboo, xuduudkii ka talaabsanaayee. Xubin na siiya!

The third song, called 'In the Old Days', also takes the form of a debate between a man and a woman, this time explicitly about moral womanhood. To the male, a good woman is a traditional woman: beautiful and well groomed, quiet to the point of being invisible to men, obedient and accepting of a marriage arranged for her by men. Modernity is cultural transgression, characterized by untraditional dress, mobility and visibility in the public sphere, and the rejection of familial authority. But she has other ideas and the songwriter lets her gain the upper hand. Unafraid to couch her ideas in

³⁴ My translation, but with reference to *ibid.* 92–5. See also Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, 144–5.

untraditional, modern terms, she asserts the importance of leaving backward customs behind, actively participating in leadership and public life, and getting an education. She suggests that God created men and women as different but not unequal beings and depicts men who marry off girls as thieves handling stolen property. Although in the three songs presented here women's morality and modernity are not represented as contradictory terms, the conservative equation of moral womanhood with traditional womanhood is powerfully articulated.

'In the old days'³⁵

Sung by Mohamed Jama Joof and Maryan Mursal

Words by poet currently unknown (late 1960s).

He:

In the old days it was custom that a girl perfumed her hair and braided it. She wrapped around her waist a wide cloth belt with fringes and an ornamental cord, and wore a white dress. But something has changed. Something weird with long horns they wear as hats on their heads and run all over the market. [Refrain:] You women have destroyed our culture. You have overstepped the religious law and destroyed our religion. Girls, won't you behave?

She:

What was custom in the old days and a hundred years ago and what has been left behind, don't make us go back to that well-worn road, for we have turned away from it with effort. Now we expect to run and compete for the sun and the moon and to lead people. [Refrain:] First get some education and learn how to read and write. Don't try to turn back, you country hick, people who have woken up!

He:

In the old days it would happen that a girl would not address you for one or two months, and the men who went out looking would not see her for days. But something has changed. In the evening a whole gang of them goes out, carrying fat purses, wandering about outside like robbers. [Refrain]

She:

God calmed the waters of sea and river and made them flow together. Then he put in order the wide earth and the mountains and created his human beings each in a different way. You are a loser. No one is asking you to come along. [Refrain]

He:

In the old days it was custom to pay as bride-wealth for a girl a whole herd of camels and the most exceptional horse, and a rifle on top of that. But something has changed. You are self-absorbed and ignore the advice of the family in which you were born. [Refrain]

She:

Girls used to be exchanged for a herd of camels and short-legged goats. But the religion we learned and the Qur'an do not allow this. Today we have no need for those who deal in what they do not own and for this old-fashioned dividing up of women. [Refrain:]

³⁵ Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, 201–2.

(He:

Beri hore waxaa jiray, inan timaha diibtoo, baarkana u tidhicdoo,
boqorkiyo dhaclaha iyo, maro baylah xidhatee.

Wax beddelay kuwii hore, balo geesa dheeroo, buul madaxa saarto,
suuqa baratamayee.

Naa bi'ise dhaqankii, sharcigii ka baydhoo, diintii burburisee,
hablow maad is badh qabataan?

She:

Boqol sano horteed iyo, beri hore wixii jiray, ee layska baal maray,
budulkii dib ha u qaban, laga soo baqoolee.

Hadda baratan iyo orod, bisha iyo cadceeddiyo, beesha loo horseedoo,
aannu beegsanaynaa.

Horta baro tacliintiyo, buuggiyo dhigaalkoo,
badowyahow dib ha u celin dadka soo baraarugay

He:

Beri hore waxaa jiray, inan aan bil iyo laba, hadal kaaga bixinoo
raggu baadiggoobaa, beri arag ku weydaa

Wax beddelay kuwii hore, casarkii dar baxayoo, kiish buuran qaatiyoo
budhcad dibedda meertee.

Naa bi'ise dhaqankii, sharcigii ka baydhoo, diintii burburisee,
hablow maad is badh qabataan?

She:

Ilaahii bad iyo webi, biyahooda dhaarshee, meel kula ballamayee,
dhulka baaxaddaliyo, buuraha rakibay baa

bani aadmigiisana, ruuxba cayn u beeree
waad baafiyoodde, cidi kulama baydhinee.

Horta baro tacliintiyo, buuggiyo dhigaalkoo,
badowyahow dib ha u celin, dadka soo baraarugay

He:

Beri hore waxaa jiray, inan baarax geeliyo, faraskii Baxdow wada,
yarad looga bixiyaa, bunduqana la raacshaa.

Wax beddelay kuwii hor, isu bogan badh maqanoo,
bahdii ay ka dhalatiyo, baylihisay waanee.

Naa bi'ise dhaqankii, sharcigii ka baydhoo, diintii burburisee,
hablow maad is badh qabataan?

She:

Baarax geel iyo faras, iyo boqonyaraha adhi

hablihii lagu beddeli jirey, diintaynu baraniyo

ma bannayn kitaabkuye, booliqtuyaashii

beecsan jiray haweenkiyo, baaxadsoorihii tegay,

maanta loo ma baahnee,

Horta baro tacliintiyo, buuggiyo dhigaalkoo,

Badowyahow dib ha u celin, dadka soo baraarugay.)

However, although the poets and songwriters of the popular songs – and the society they reflected and tried to shape – had a vision for women that had modern aspects, the concept of moral womanhood that was articulated and legitimized in terms of authentic cultural tradition came to be more and more constrained by such constructions of tradition. Thus, as occurred in other

nationalist contexts,³⁶ when applied to women, the traditional legitimacy that was constructed left little room for modernity. In the songs, and thus in public, popular discourse of this post-independence era, women's modernity became increasingly synonymous with inauthentic, untraditional, Western immorality and frivolity, while women's morality was articulated in terms of 'traditional' dress, limited freedom of movement, respect for male authority and a de-emphasized sexuality.

The following songs are an example of this narrowing of the public discourse about women's roles and gender relations. The first song, 'Truly marriage causes hardship', is sung by three women. Each describes her favorite way of being treated by the other sex. The first woman likes men to indulge her senses through music, dance and (indirectly) sex. The second singer likes rich men who can keep a woman in luxury. But the third one advocates for a proper (although, nevertheless companionate) marriage, engaged in with the approval and support of the family:

'Truly marriage causes hardship':³⁷

Sung by Maryan Mursal, Fadumo Ali 'Nakruuma' and Hibo Mohamed
Words Mahmud Tukaale, from the play *Girls, When Will you Get Married?*
(*Hablayohow, hadmaad guursan doontaan?*)

Maryan:

Truly marriage only causes hardship. It is impossible to build a family. To become an obedient wife means being left behind by one's age-group. What I prefer, when you and a man want each other, is to go out in the early evening and dance to rock and jazz, hang out together and enjoy yourselves, just the two of you. What do you think?

Faduumo:

Everyone has his own preference and taste is what sets people apart. One cannot tell who is wealthiest from how someone presents himself. I prefer rich men, who turn over lots of wealth and have capital; who, while you live with them, put you in a huge house and give you a luxurious life. What about you?

Hibo:

Dear sister, Ruun, don't get rid of the culture in which you were born or run away from your cultural heritage. Don't throw away the ways of your ancestors. What I prefer is a man who establishes a home with you, receiving you from your male relatives, with their blessing. You will live together honestly, blessed by the Lord.

(Maryan:

Guurkii runta ahaa waa lagu rafaado. Reer lamaba dhaqan karo.
Raalliya kuu noqon karaa qayrkaa lagaa reeb
Waxaa aniga ila roon, ninka aad is rabtaanee
fiid kastaa is raacdaan, Roog iyo Jaas la tumataa,
waqtiga isla riixdaan, keligiin wada riyaadaan.
Bal aadna?

³⁶ See, for example, Lata Mani, 'Contentious traditions: the debate on "sati" in colonial India', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Dehli, 1989), 88–126; Peter Knauss, *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender and Ideology in Twentieth-Century Algeria* (New York, 1987).

³⁷ Kapteijns, *Women's Voices*, 199–200.

Faduumo:

Qofba wuxuu jeclaystiyo, dookhii dada kala reeb
 Qofba awr u raraneey, raynta aan la garan
 Waxaa aniga ila roon, ragga taajiriintee kala rogaya,
 maalkiyo raasamaaliyiinta, rug intaad ninkaas la joogto,
 raar weyn ku geeyoo, raaxana kula aroosaa
 Bal aadna?

Hibo:

Ruuneey, walaaleey, hiddaha yaan dhalan rogin, laga roorin dhaqankii,
 raaskii awowgeen, bohol yaanan lagu ridin,
 waxaan anigu ila roon, ninka kugula koray raas,
 reerkiinu kuugu daro, ducana laguugu raacshaa,
 iskula dhaqantaan run, Rabbina kuugu dar khayr.)

A second song deals explicitly with women's clothing. Four girls are singing here, two favoring modern and two traditional dress. In this song, traditional dress is associated with beauty, morality, virginity, dignity and authenticity, while modern dress is represented as the opposite of all this.

'History has a direction'³⁸

Sung by Kinsi Adan, 'Adar Ahmed, Khadija Hiiraan, Fadumo Elbai 'Haldhaa'
 Words by Hasan Gini (1982).

Kinsi:

History has a direction people try to catch on to. The world is a journey towards a beautiful dream that is guided by modernity. Don't shortchange yourself. It is a curse to stay behind one's age-group. People have emancipated themselves from these rags and heavy clothes you wear. Follow us on this path. Shall I help you move forward and show you the way to the benefits it will have?

'Adar:

Foolish one, a docile camel that does not protect itself from [other] sucklings and does not kick away calves that are not its own, is left behind in the dry season when its udders run dry. No one likes leftovers. Know the meaning of my words. I do not spend the night with any man I may like in the daytime. My treasure is untouched. I am a paragon of modesty and represent the decency of all Somali girls.

Khadija:

Putting yourself down is fatal. Even those who covered themselves used to get into trouble, while those who disliked this clothing – as I have heard tell – did not go wrong. It is better that you follow the person who takes your side. One covers things only if there is something bad. Sleepy one, the encampment has moved on. I am beckoning you to move forward. Follow us on this path. Shall I show you the way to the benefits it will have?

Fadumo:

They call me beautiful like the male ostrich. I still wear the finery and am the leader of the tradition everyone knows is mine, of the ways in which my mother reared me, of our cultural heritage. I love to support this way of life. Contempt and dishonesty cannot undermine me, for I know these always cause problems and destruction. You, lost soul, I tell you, of your dress and mine, which of the two is more respectful, which one covers the body best?

³⁸ *Ibid.* 200–1.

(Kinsi:

Taariikhdu wax bay hagtaa, dadkuna u haybsadaa
Adduunkuna waa hayaan hir dooglaa lagu socdaa
Hoggaanku waa casriga. Naftaadana lama hagrado
Qayrkaa ka hadh waa habaar. Heeryadan aad sidatiyo
haylahan waa laga ilbaxay. Sallaanka aad halabsatidee
ma kuu gacan haadiyaa? Haaneedka ma kuu qabtaa?
Hoobaanta ma kuu guraa?

Cadar:

Habeenooy hebedka geel, hashaan maqasha iska celin
harratiyin kaanay dhalin, markay hiigaamisooy,
jilaalkii bay hadhaa. Hambana waa layska nacay.
Higgaaddana igu afqaro. Dharaartii ninkaan ka helo,
habeenkii kuma dhaxee. Hantidu waa ii dhantahay.
Xishood hodan baan ka ahay, xayihii baan soo huwaday
hablaha Soomaaliyeed

Khadija:

Hanyari waa loo dhintaa, hagoogtana waxaa lahaa
kuwii waa heermi jiray, dharka hayruufayana,
sidaan sheekada ku helay, hafsi lama qaadan jirin
Ruuxii kuu hiiliyana inaad yeeshaa habboon
Haraaga nin la dedee. Hurdaay reerkeenni guur
horseed kuu baaqayo, ku soo helay baan ahee
Ma kuu gacan haadiyaa? Hoobaanta ma ku guuraa?

Fadumo:

Haldhaa baa la i yidhaah. Heensigii baan weli sitaa
Hiddihii la i wada yiqiin, asluubtii hooyaday
hormood baan dhaqan u ahay, inaan hirgashaan jeclahay
Huf iyo been kuma luggo'o, xirtaaqa wanniga dhalay
in lagu hoobtaan ogahay. Habowdayee waxaan ku idhi
hugaadiyo kan aan xidhnahay, labada kee haybad wacan,
hilbana keennee astuuran?)

Thus, the modernity of the nationalist vision and the public discourse about moral womanhood had its limitations. Definitions of authentic tradition and notions of moral womanhood became more and more mutually constitutive. Articulating national identity in terms of cultural authenticity (sanctioned by Somali tradition and Islam), cultural authenticity in terms of women's morality, and women's morality in terms of women's behavior and dress in public space (and thus their sexuality and obedience or respect for authority) severely foreclosed – on the level of public discourse – the possibility for Somali women to be modern.³⁹

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND NEW STRUGGLES OVER COMMUNAL
IDENTITY AND MORAL WOMANHOOD

While, at the level of popular discourse, achieving moral modernity thus became more difficult for women, the Barre regime's introduction of the

³⁹ *Ibid.* 156–7.

Family Law of 1975, which brought women equality with men in divorce, inheritance, custody and other personal status laws, turned out to be a mixed blessing for the cause of women's emancipation. When the regime, fortified by strong Soviet support, proved itself ready to brutally crush any opposition, by executing ten religious sheikhs who had spoken out against the Family Law, the concept of women's emancipation – already controversial in this period of rapid change – became associated with a regime that was ever more obviously oppressive.

Nevertheless, throughout the period 1960–90, many women, especially those who, in spite of the deteriorating political and economic conditions, managed to get an education and aspire to middle-class status, led modern and moral lives. Especially under the Barre regime, women received government scholarships to study abroad, obtained graduate degrees and found work in practically all sectors of government, even if rarely at the highest levels. Women also played key roles in voluntary and state-mandated community organizations at all levels, in which they worked with, and often outperformed, men. However, as occurred in many military regimes, the government created and used a national women's organization for its own ends.⁴⁰ Thus a narrowing of the public discourse about women's social freedom did not foreclose their economic and educational, or even political, opportunities. It did, however, mark a social moral unease and fortified conservative critics then and later.

The nationalist project foundered well before the state collapsed in January 1991. However, the violence incited by power-hungry warlords masquerading as national leaders, and perpetrated by many ordinary Somalis, marked its demise, at least for the foreseeable future. With it went the collective self-conception and gender discourse that had been part of it. Although many Somalis resisted the call to commit violence in the name of clan, during the civil war there were many lapses of morality – traditional or modern – with Somali women paying an especially high (and gender-specific) price. Women became victims of abduction, sexual abuse and assault, maiming and murder, as well as man-made hunger and disease. This was true in Somalia, as well as during the massive exodus and in the refugee camps in neighboring countries. While there were some women among the initial perpetrators of violence, and while many women, after the violence had started, supported it in word, deed or thought, it was through their leadership in saving others that women distinguished themselves. Somali families in the diaspora often comment on how Somali women – young and old, in or outside of Somalia – came to the rescue of their family, friends and neighbors. 'Which daughterless family even survived?' is the hyperbolic, rhetorical question often asked.⁴¹

⁴⁰ We do not have a comprehensive history of women during the Barre regime, but see Abdurahman Abdullahi, *Women, Islamists and the Military Regime in Somalia: The Reform of the Family Law and its Repercussions* (McGill University: working paper, 2007); Somali Women's Democratic Organization (SWDO), *Women in the SDR [Somali Democratic Republic]: An Appraisal of the Progress in the Implementation of the World Plan of Action of the United Nations Decade for Women, 1971–85* (Mogadishu, 1985); Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, esp. 103–7 and 113; and Laitin and Samatar, *Somalia*, esp. 86–7, 95.

⁴¹ Oral Information, Somali community of Boston, 2001.

The studies of how Somali women's lives changed in Somalia in the wake of the civil war are still very few. As happened elsewhere in parallel circumstances,⁴² it is reported that Somali women continued to take on exceptional leadership roles. They often became the breadwinners of their families and restored the basic institutions of communal life and survival. They also participated, jointly, as women, at all levels, in peace-making, as has been attested to by a number of recent reports and publications, including a book largely written by Somali women themselves: *Somalia – The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women*.⁴³ However, neither in Somalia nor in the diaspora have women as yet developed a common agenda and a public voice.⁴⁴

It is perhaps too early to try to discern the new gender ideologies that have begun to take shape since the civil war. However, it appears that the common conceptualization of a moral public identity in terms of Somali tradition described above has fallen casualty to the fratricide. *Soomaalinimo*, the shared sense of being Somali, proved unable to protect Somalis from each other – not even Somali women from Somali men. Moreover, during the war, unscrupulous agitators resorted to clannist instrumentalism and a denial of the validity of *soomaalinimo* to incite people to violence, while some post-war writings have denied that national feeling and a nationally minded, inclusive state project ever even existed!⁴⁵ Therefore, the sectarianism (clannism) in whose name people had been incited to violence and that is currently an organizing principle of the new Transition Federal Government is a powerful challenge to *soomaalinimo*, even though it is highly questionable whether it can provide a moral common and public identity for Somalis in their interactions with each other and the world.⁴⁶ As the discourse on the solidarity of *soomaalinimo* broke down, appeals to an Islamic morality have become increasingly explicit. Therefore – this essay provisionally posits – although Islam was always an integral part of *soomaalinimo*, and although *soomaalinimo* – especially if it can respond to the rightful critiques from the minorities – is far from a spent force among Somalis, the articulation of a common public identity in Islamic terms has gained strength, including in the context of prescriptions for moral womanhood.

⁴² See, for example, Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa, 'Women waging peace', in *Foreign Policy*, 124 (May–June 2001), 38–47; and Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution* (Washington, 1997).

⁴³ Judith Gardner and Judy El-Bushra (eds.), *Somalia – The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women* (London, 2004).

⁴⁴ It has been evident at all major national reconciliation meetings that Somali women also allow themselves to be used as instruments for the sectarian pursuits of their menfolk. See also Matt Bryden and Martina I. Steiner, *Somalia between Peace and War: Somali Women on the Eve of the 21st Century* (African Women for Peace Series) (Nairobi, 1998). The volume edited by Gardner and El-Bushra (*Somalia – The Untold Story*) suggests that the women's movement in the (as yet not internationally recognized) Republic of Somaliland appears to be one of the most developed.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia*. For a critique of such a-historical revisionism, see Lidwien Kapteijns, 'Review essay: state and clan in Somalia', *African Studies Review*, 3 (2002), 52–8.

⁴⁶ See for a discussion of the post-war historiography on Somalia, Kapteijns, 'Disintegration'.

As we saw above, when the popular songs and public discourse of the period 1960–90 legitimized moral modernity in terms of authentic Somali tradition, this did not mean that Islam was absent, for it was ever-present, both implicitly, because traditional Somali morality was seen as coterminous with Islamic morality, and explicitly, as the discursive sanctions of Islam and tradition were invoked in tandem. Moreover, while the nationalist generation of the 1950s and 1960s had not isolated or foregrounded Islam in its emphasis on cultural commonalities, they had remained, with very few exceptions, strongly rooted in Islam. As was the case for many of their contemporaries, their Islam was a strong, liberal Islam, constituting an intrinsic part of their hopes of modernity. However, after the civil war, this shifted dramatically – so dramatically that one might argue that the bifurcation of Somali culture and Islamic religion in the discourses legitimizing Somali moral personhood is a significant marker of the end of the nationalist era and the beginning of a new one.

The bifurcated view of culture and religion as legitimizing discourse and the shift to Islam as the focus of a new, common, public morality predates the civil war and was, from its inception, closely related to women and gender ideology. While this shift was part of the emergence of Islamist and jihadist⁴⁷ movements worldwide, in Somalia it may be traced back to 1975, when, as mentioned above, ten religious sheikhs were executed because of their opposition to the Barre regime's Family Law. The 1980s, when large numbers of Somalis became labor migrants in the Middle East and were directly exposed to Islamist trends and regimes, also formed an important milestone. However, popular awareness of the contradictions between *dhaqan* (Somali traditional culture) and *diin* (the religion of Islam) appear to have become acute and general only after the intense civil war violence of 1988, 1991 and after. Thus, the violence of the civil war, including the experiences of refugee camps that often became rape-centers, marked the most dramatic transformation of Somali – including Somali women's – self-understandings and self-presentations.⁴⁸ As has been argued above, Islam was an intrinsic part of the legitimizing discourses of Somali communal identity and the contestations about moral womanhood. It is just that the nature of Islamic discourse and its relationship to the discourse on tradition has been changing. For women, adopting – or being forced to adopt – a Somali *Muslim* identity, with an emphasis on *diin* or *islaannimo*, instead of a Muslim *Somali* one, with an emphasis on *dhaqan* or *soomaalinimo*, allows for new constructions of social space for Somali women. This has, as Salma Ahmed Nageeb has shown for the Sudan, the potential of being both oppressive and emancipatory

⁴⁷ For different kinds of Islamisms (including jihadism), see Alex de Waal (ed.), *Islamism and its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (Bloomington, 2004). For Somalia, see Abdurahman Abdullahi, 'Recovering Somalia: the Islamic factor' (paper presented to the Ninth International Congress of Somali Studies, Aalborg University, 6–7 September 2004).

⁴⁸ For women, the new emphasis on Islam as a marker of moral womanhood was born from the experience of violence, flight and resettlement in a new and alien context (Boston, participant observation, 2001). See Awa Abdi, 'Refugee camps in Kenya: where is the light?' *Journal of the Anglo-Somali Society* (Spring 2004). Awa M. Abdi, 'In limbo: dependency, insecurity, and identity amongst Somali refugees in Dadaab camps', *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 5 (2005), 17–34.

(especially where alternative models of moral womanhood retain power and women have real powers of choice).⁴⁹ Moreover, while the discourse on gender norms seems to be narrowing due to the increased power of Islamist discourses, the actual lives of Somali women in Somalia and in the worldwide diaspora have undergone (by force of circumstance or by choice) more and more widely diverging changes than ever before. Thus, Somali women are continuing to recalibrate their conceptions of how to be 'good' women because, and in spite, of Islamist and other discourses on moral womanhood.⁵⁰

The Somali popular song, the central discursive site in which nationalist modernity and moral womanhood were articulated and contested, has also been transformed.⁵¹ Increasingly produced outside Somalia and disseminated digitally through the internet, CDs, DVDs and MP files, Somali popular songs have survived and have continued to celebrate and grieve over love won or lost. They have also continued to comment on common Somali experiences such as the hardships of the civil war, flight and the experiences of being refugees in foreign climes, and occasionally comment on political issues, such as support for the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland or a call for war against the Ethiopian troops in Somalia. Male and female singers perform a variety of identities in their music videos – with a particularly impressive creative space opened up by Somali- and English-language rappers such as the famous Somali-Canadian artist K'naan.⁵² The relations between men and women (especially young men and women in love) continue to figure prominently in many lyrics, but there appear to be few explicit references to the new Islamist discourses and the moral womanhood imagined in their image.⁵³

As the expressions of a changing youth culture, the new songs continue to be significant. However, and this is a major shift, the popular songs are no longer the central – even iconic – site of public discourse they were in the era 1960–90. This role has now been taken over by the internet, where hundreds of Somali websites compete to promote and disseminate the interests and interpretations of their (often clan-identified) target groups.⁵⁴ For the many Somalis who do not have access to the internet, this function is fulfilled by

⁴⁹ Compare Salma Ahmed Nageeb, *New Spaces and Old Frontiers: Women, Social Space, and Islamization in Sudan* (Lanham, 2004).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Hamdi Mohamed, 'Multiple challenges, multiple struggles: a history of women's activism in Canada' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2003).

⁵¹ The following is provisional, as it is the subject matter of my current research.

⁵² For K'naan, see www.dustyfoot.com.

⁵³ However, in Djibouti, Somali poets and singers have modernized the older genres of praise songs for the Prophet and the women of his family to great success. The most important groups are those of Omar Aadan (which has a special women's section called Kooxda Sitti) and Sheikh Dandaawi. See Lidwien Kapteijns, 'Ramadan in Djibouti: Daily Life and Popular Religion', *ISIM Review* (International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden), 21 (Spring 2008), 46–7.

⁵⁴ Abdisalam M. Issa-Salwe, 'The internet and the Somali diaspora: the Web as a new means of expression', *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 6 (2006), 54–67. According to Salwe there were over 400 Somali websites as of mid-2004, and c. 700 in spring 2008. There are some sites specifically dealing with Islamic perspectives on Somali matters (e.g. www.daralhijrah.com and www.islaax.org) while other sites have sections devoted to religion.

Somali-language radio programs such as those of the BBC, the Voice of America, and the radio stations of neighboring countries such as Djibouti and Kenya, as well as, on a smaller scale, those that have sprung up in all regions of Somalia.⁵⁵ It is here that the discursive battles about communal identity, the nature of the state, the role of Islam and Islamism, and (often implicitly) gender norms are waged. This will be the subject of future research.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the left columns of the home pages of Somali websites such as www.hiiraanonline.com or www.wardheernews.com. The local music store in each middle-sized town is also a significant center of distribution.