

Transmission of Islamic Knowledge¹

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*M*ana Siti Habib Jamaluddin (1219H-17 Shawal, 1339H),³ popularly known as Dada Masiti (Grandmother Masiti), was born in Brava. She was kidnapped at the age of six and taken to Zanzibar where she was sold into slavery. She was found after approximately ten years by relatives or family friends who recognized her and brought her back to Brava. Upon her return, Dada Masiti became immersed in religious studies. Few details are known about her stay in Zanzibar, but the kidnapping, servitude, and eventual return are mentioned in her poem entitled “*Ya Rabbi ya Muta’ali*” (O, My Exalted Lord).

Dada Masiti’s poetry is memorized, transmitted, and aesthetically quoted by the Bravanese people, and specifically by Bravanese women, both in Somalia and in the diaspora. Although she is the most prominent woman scholar in Brava, she is not the only one. The Bravanese traditionally trained young women to become Quranic school teachers.⁴ Some of the women acquired advanced religious education and Sufi mystical training. In the case of Dada Masiti, she became a symbol of the true mystical seeker.

Dada Masiti’s poetry is characterized by emotional eloquence and imagination. It is poetry that proceeds from a deep emotional desire for repentance, atonement, and spiritual connection to the Divine. Another recurring theme is her orientation towards the hereafter and a denunciation of the vain desires of this world. In this poem, for example, she says:

Nkarheente ka sabuuri
Ku rhiinda kaako umuuri
Kulava baytul ghuruuri
Keendha nuumba ya xalaali

I have settled down with patience
Waiting for your orders
To leave the abode of deception
And go to the abode sanctioned by
God

The Bravanese have a long tradition of using *stenzi* (religious poetry) to commemorate and praise distinguished *ulama*. But *stenzi* poetry is not limited to eulogies alone, they also allude to a body of religious principles, historical events, and moral wisdom. As in other areas of Africa, such as the Hausa region of Nigeria⁵ and the Swahili towns of East Africa, vernacular verse has had a major impact in spreading Islam among the masses of Bravanese and their immediate neighbors. These poems, to my knowledge, have not previously been published and are little known outside of southern Somalia. Outside of Brava, only a few members of the *Qadiria* brotherhoods in the southern coastal towns of Somalia have incorporated some of these poems in their *dhikr* sessions.

Around the beginning of 1909, Shaikh Nurein Al-Sabir (1829–1909), the eminent Bravanese jurist and scholar, asked Dada Masiti, the revered saint and poet from Brava, to compose a poem to console his followers and to prevent the people of Brava from weeping after his death. The Shaikh was in his early 80s and was apparently in poor health. He most probably chose Dada Masiti for this task because of her *baraka* as a pious *Ashraf* Sufi and as a distinguished poet. About ten days before his death, Dada Masiti composed an emotionally moving poem that has become the best-known eulogistic poem in Brava. Although this poem was intended to comfort people, and it certainly did that at the time, its beautiful depiction of the life and death of Shaikh Nurein can still move people to tears. It is said that Shaikh Nurein told Dada Masiti to start with the verse:

Bacda xayni ni mowti
Shaikhi chifa isilooowa

After life comes death
When the Shaikh dies, no one
should weep

The following are excerpts from this beautiful poem:

Bacda Hayyi (After Life)

<i>Bacda xayı ni mowti</i>	After life comes death
<i>Shaikhi chıfa isıloowa</i>	When the Shaikh dies, no one should weep
<i>Bısmıllahi Andika</i>	Write “in the name of God,”
<i>Nı awalı yakanzowa</i>	For everything begins that way
<i>Rabbi Rahmani Rahımu</i>	Our Lord is the Most Compassion- ate, the Most Merciful
<i>Rahmaye hurhombowa</i>	And we ask for His mercy
<i>Chırhombeni Rahmaye</i>	Let us beg for His mercy
<i>Shaikhi kunaxarisowa</i>	And that the Shaikh be granted His compassion
<i>Ukarhi wa sakarati</i>	May the Shaikh be spared
<i>Shaikhi kuchize kupowa</i>	The torturous agonies of dying
<i>Shaikh Nureini nasımu</i>	Shaikh Nureini, the Gentle Breeze,
<i>Rahma mba kurhombelowa</i>	Let us pray that God shows him mercy

Note the suffix “wa” at the end of every verse. This signifies a sound of deep sadness and gives the poem even more poignancy. Dada Masiti tries to celebrate the Shaikh’s life and mourn him at the same time. She goes on and asks why people should mourn when the Shaikh is going to heaven to join and stay with the people most beloved by the Lord:

<i>Yiiko Jannatul Cadni</i>	There is the paradise called Eden
<i>Ndaawo weena Hu pendoowa</i>	Reserved for the beloved of our Lord
<i>Nda weena wa peenzela nto</i>	It is for those who are very much beloved and pious
<i>Ruuxu zaawo Hu taloowa</i>	And whose souls have been specifically selected
<i>Jamaca ya Muqarribiina</i>	Those who are closest to God
<i>Wonte wa takunganyoowa</i>	Will all be assembled
<i>Nasuxba ya Nabiyyi</i>	And the Prophet’s Companions
<i>Qariibuye Hu wekoowa</i>	Will all stay by his side

Dada Masiti here is referring to the Sunnah belief that the souls of the virtuous will join other pure souls in the transitional abode of *Barzakh*.⁶ Her poetry clearly shows the depth of her knowledge of the Quran and

Sunnah. She continues the verse and stresses how important Shaikh Nureini was as a scholar and as a shaikh:

<i>Sheekhi fadhiye ni faayda</i>	We can benefit from sitting next to the Shaikh
<i>Kurhombowa hupatoowa</i>	And we pray for this,
<i>Kaake hupatoowa diini</i>	To acquire religious knowledge
<i>Kanzi Ya kuxafidhooowa</i>	And treasures worth preserving
<i>Kaake hupatoowa cilmu</i>	As well as other knowledge
<i>Manfaca yakhtumiloowa</i>	Of practical use ⁷
<i>Kaake hupatoowa caqli</i>	We gain wisdom from him
<i>Nijohari humeroowa</i>	Precious stones worth looking for
<i>Xayyi yasheekhi pendaani</i>	Value the Shaikh's life
<i>Daa'imu Ha ipatoowa</i>	Since eternal life is impossible
<i>Daa'imu Ha ipatoowi</i>	Eternal life is impossible
<i>Kufa ina yaqinoowa</i>	And death is a certainty

But Dada Masiti does not give up hope that the Lord could spare the Shaikh for a few more years so that he might keep disseminating and sharing his knowledge:

<i>Rhombani Sheekhi ku raaga</i>	Pray that the Shaikh may live on
<i>Cumriwe ku zidoowa</i>	And that his life be extended
<i>Cumriwe ujiziida</i>	For if his life is extended
<i>Cilmu ina fafishoowa</i>	He will disseminate more knowledge
<i>Cilmu Fafishaani</i>	The dissemination of knowledge
<i>Diini Ina dhisatoowa</i>	Will strengthen our religion
<i>Koodhi Ya Sheekhi Kodheerho</i>	And whatever the Shaikh says
<i>Suura kurhangaliloowa</i>	Warrants careful consideration

If the Lord does not extend the Shaikh's life, then Dada Masiti insists that people should not weep. On the contrary, they should celebrate:

<i>Sheekhi chifa ha ilooowi</i>	When the Shaikh dies, no one should weep
<i>Ita ku dhikirishoowa</i>	Instead people should recite <i>dhikr</i>
<i>Ita kuwuma dhikiri</i>	<i>Dhikr</i> will echo from all corners
<i>Na quraani khsomoowa</i>	And the Quran will be read

*Sheekhi Chifa Hulowaayi
Nimuunti wa khfurhoowa
Ndiwo muunti wa furaha*

Ita kurharhisanyoowa

Why should people weep,
As it is a day of joy
[The day he dies] is actually a day
of joy
And a day to visit each other in
celebration

Dada Masiti then describes what the funeral rites for the Shaikh will be like; how his body will be washed, how it will be perfumed with incense. The deceased Shaikh will be dressed in his long white *hanzu*⁸ and his turban, and then wrapped in a white shroud. She describes the sadness of his followers during this process:

Wasimeemo kumnuurisha

*Maatozi ya takitikoowa
Yatakiitika maatozi
Nguwo sta kolozoowa*

Wote watakuraasha

*Muuyi uta kulatoowa
Wenye muuyi nawageeni
Ntaku khtamburhanooowa*

Those who are standing and
reciting *dhikr* and Quran⁹
Tears will flow down their cheeks
Tears will keep flowing
And wet their clothes
All will follow the funeral
procession
And the town will be deserted
Local people and visitors
Will be indistinguishable in this
crowd

Then Dada Masiti, referring to the *Hadith*, describes how God will reward those who follow the funeral procession:¹⁰

*Naako itakuuya Naada
Khalqi ina kirimoowa
Wa takuuyo nimalaayka
Wiingi wakhtumishoowa*

Watakaawanya thawaabu

Jisa buni hawanyoowa

Hatta waako zorhokooni

Baraka wa takhpoowa

And then a divine call will be made
For the crowd to be rewarded¹¹
Angels will descend
To perform this service
They will distribute heavenly
rewards¹²
Much like roasted coffee beans
are distributed¹³
Even those watching from the
windows
Will receive this blessing

<i>Hatta waako zidankaani</i>	And those looking down from the rooftops
<i>Wa taku latililoowa</i>	It will be thrown to them
<i>Wa chaawanya wachimarha</i>	Only after they have been blessed this way
<i>Teena ina inendoowa</i>	Will people start to walk back

Now sadness will overtake the people and everything that the Shaikh has touched:

<i>Hu xuzuniko mpeengele</i>	The pathways along which he walked daily
<i>Kutta schinendhroowa</i>	Will feel sad,
<i>Hu xuzuniko ni darsa</i>	As will his daily circle of students
<i>Fadhi schitalicoowa</i>	And the lessons he used to teach
<i>Miskiti huwa miinza</i>	The Mosque will be dark
<i>Ataa tarha ichashoowa</i>	Even when it is lit
<i>Tarha waarhiko niyeeye</i>	For he was the light
<i>Nuuru ya ku rhangaaloowa</i>	A bright light we all watched
<i>Sawarataani turhaani</i>	Calm down and be consoled
<i>Sheekhi siwo wakhpatoowa</i>	For the Shaikh is out of our reach
<i>Sheekhi karheente Jannaani</i>	He is residing in Heaven
<i>Na kurhiindra kendreloowa</i>	Waiting for us to join him

The most popular religious poems in *Chimbalazi*,¹⁴ the northern Swahili dialect of Brava, have been composed by poet-*ulama* such as Dada Masiti, Shaikh Qassim Al-Barawi, and Mu'allim Nuri. Their poetry provides an insight into the Bravanese outlook on the world, their beliefs and value systems. In composing these poems, the Bravanese *ulama* in some cases followed the classical religious works of Arabic, at least in literary style. However, many poems show an impressive degree of originality and finesse. The poems composed by Dada Masiti cover both areas of *Shari'a* and *tariqa*.¹⁵ Her poetry also deals with fundamental principles of Islam, with Prophetic panegyrics, and with the Sufi Islamic concepts of the purification of the *nafs*¹⁶ (self or soul) and the *suluk* (spiritual journey). In one of her poems, Dada Masiti discusses the reproaching *nafs*, saying:

<i>Nafsi ichi daghaloowa</i>	When the Soul is blessed with repentance
<i>Naku rhiindha ku bigoowa</i> <i>Jisa veerho ntakiwoowa</i>	Without being castigated No one can understand [this reform]
<i>Ilazirhe ka Jalaali</i>	For it has been decreed by God, the Majesty
<i>Nafsi ka Mooje tubiirhe</i>	My soul has repented in front of the Lord
<i>Wacdi na goondi tiyiirhe</i>	Due to warnings and promises it has become fearful
<i>Na nrimize zi hadiirhe</i>	And it hereby pronounces [its repentance]
<i>Za kinaaya na sonkaarhi</i>	Both implicitly and explicitly ¹⁷

Today, Dada Masiti is remembered as a woman saint and mystic to whom many miracles are attributed. Little is known about her initiation into the mystic path, although Dada Masiti mentions in a poem that she was introduced to it by the people who brought her back to Brava. Like many Islamic women mystics,¹⁸ Dada Masiti was also an accomplished poetess and her poetry is a living treasure for all Bravanese gnostics¹⁹ and religious disciples. But her major impact has been on Bravanese women, who see her as a model of piety and chastity. Although women in Bravanese society are generally segregated from men and excluded from performing many formal religious activities such as leading congregational prayers, performing religious rituals, and acting as judges, yet their involvement in Islam is not marginal. Almost all of them are literate and the majority of Quranic school children are taught by them. They were the main people who memorized the *Stenzi* and, in some cases (like Dada Masiti), became religious poets and saints.

Dada Masiti's biography is remarkably similar to that of Rabi'a Al-'Adawiyya (CE 717–CE 801),²⁰ who is considered to be "the saint par excellence of the Sunnite hagiography."²¹ Rabi'a was also kidnapped, sold into slavery, and set free after many years. She then committed herself to a life of devotion and "occupied herself with works of piety." Both Rabi'a and Dada Masiti lived to a ripe old age and never married. Like Rabi'a, Dada Masiti is said to have been blessed with the power to work miracles. Dada Masiti's poems show that she constantly grieved for her sins and believed that repentance was a "gift from God." This is

very similar to Rabi'a's outlook as reflected by her works. Did Dada Masiti know about Rabi'a's works and history? Only further investigations into the life and work of Dada Masiti will reveal this.

Dada Masiti's poetry is a good example of how vernacular verse was used to transmit Islamic knowledge in Brava and its vicinity. These vernacular verses reached their intended audience through the *Makhadimu*, the servants working in the mosques, or through the *Wal-imu*, the teachers of the Quranic schools. Although the poems were composed for everyone in the community, the main audience was the local, non-Arabic speaking population of the town, particularly the Bravanese women.

The following is a further example of Dada Masiti's poetry. It is one of the best-known Chimbalazi poems. It shows the emotional warmth and beauty of Bravanese Sufi poetry and gives us a brief insight into the religious ethos that was being discussed and transmitted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries on the Benadir coast of southern Somalia.

Ya Rabbi Ya Muta'ali (O My Exalted Lord)

<i>1. Ya Rabbi ya Muta'ali</i>	O my Exalted Lord
<i>Mawla peeke sho mithaali</i>	The One and Only, Unique to Himself
<i>Khu rhoombave si sahaawi</i>	I never forget to pray to you
<i>Xamiidi na kula xaali</i>	Gratefully and otherwise ²²
<i>2. Bismilaahi hanzoowa</i>	We begin in the name of God,
<i>Barakaye hu rhoombowa</i>	And ask for his blessing
<i>Ndiye ya ku cabudoowa</i>	For He is the One to worship
<i>Ismu ya Mowla Jalaali</i>	Whose name is the Majestic One
<i>3. Rabbi Rahmani Rahiimu</i>	Our Lord is most Merciful,
<i>Veeshelho nti na kuzimu</i>	most Forgiving
<i>Dhekheerho ka ukariimu</i>	He, who has created the earth and the sky
<i>Nicmaze ha zi marhi</i>	And sustained them with generosity
<i>4. Ndiyo yangu maqsuudi</i>	His abundant grace is never-ending
<i>Kum rhomba macbuudi</i>	It is my objective
<i>Na Rasuuli maxmuudi</i>	To pray to the Lord
<i>Mtume manye iqbaali</i>	And to Mohamed, the Prophet ²³
	The friendly and accessible messenger ²⁴

5. *Maxamadil Mukhtari*
Menye siifa na fakhari
Na nuuruze anwaari
Zarhiko ntagu awarhi
6. *Mtume nrhoberha sacaada*
Ndio yangu maqsada
Miinso inawe shahaada
Sacya ya kuuya ajarhi
7. *Rabbi ni ka u saciidi*
Naa kufa ya u shahiidi
Miinso kuwa toxxiidi
Ndio danabu na baarhi
8. *Ni yaqiini i hadiila*
Aminaani kuwa lila
Mowti huuya ka ghafuula
Sho sababu na sonkaarhi
9. *Numayiitu sakaraati*
Hu dhilhira ka gohaati
Shidaye hay chilati
Ya ulaazo na ukali
10. *Nti ya xaqi shta keendha*
Mooya ntana yakhteendha
Na miinsave hiineendha
Sehena shpooove hataarhi
11. *Yiiko sehe mberhe yaawo*
Veema xayri va tendaawo
Hulatoove ruxuzaawo
Wa vekela Jana caali
12. *Kamu waami ni va veeno*
Ma amiiri ya rhingeeno
- Mohamed, the Chosen one
[has] wonderful characteristics
and dignity
And his light is
A light that was always there
O Prophet, pray for my eternal
happiness
For that is my objective
And that I may end my life with
the *shahada*²⁵
At the time of death
O Lord, may we live in happiness
And die as martyrs [for the faith]
To die reciting the *tawhid*²⁶
Is my whole purpose
It is definitely true
And you should believe it as a fact
That death comes unexpectedly
Without an obvious reason or
rationale²⁷
At the end mortal illness
Manifests itself, accentuated
[by pain]
An unrelieved anguish,
Pain and agony
We will go to the land of the Just
Where mortals have no say
And where they will proceed at
the end
Without any provisions [from this
world]²⁸
There are supplies ahead of them
And they look forward to the
virtuous²⁹
And their spirits are relieved
For a higher level of heaven is
reserved [for them]
How many mighty princes
I have seen [congregate]

- Wa fariqeenno zungeeno
Viingi wa ruuxu na maali*
13. *Wa lasirho marhiyaawo
Imarhiize tamayaawo*
- Ichu chiiko cho si chaawo
Xayi hu rhiindha dhaxali*
14. *Chi langala wa jowmuunti*
- Wa show hadali na sowti
Bacda xayni ni mowti*
- Ni yaqiini si rhiivarhi*
15. *Siti sahawu na kiiza
Na khowfu ya dhanbiza
Niigi ziiko ni rhiiza*
- Sina yaambo ya camali*
16. *Dhanbi hu niskitisha
Na zamaniza na kiisha
Viingi vaangu wa maciinsha
U ma rhiize ka shalaayi*
17. *Rabbi ka naxarisizo
Khaansa zina kunilizo
Ka dhanbi zaawe ntukiizo
Nteeshela kana xamaali*
18. *Nakh tamaca ku cafoowa
Na dhanbi ku ghafiriloowa
Iyo kaako hu rhomboowa*
- Raxmazo za sahali*
19. *Duniya ni khadayoorhe
Hawayo i sin zoorhe*
- Miba in latirhe woorhe*
- Ka xuzuniye si rhaarhi*
- And then go their separate ways
[men] wealthy and full of vitality
- They have left their wealth
And their desires and aspiration
are no more
What is left is no longer theirs
For it is the living who inherit all
- If one reflects on the dead [in their
graves]
Who are without sound nor noise
[one realizes that] after life comes
death
This is a fact that I never forget
- I, Siti, reject any excuses³⁰
And [live] in fear of my sins
I am prohibited from a multitude
[of distractions]
And I do not claim to have done
enough good deeds
- My sins worry me
And my time is almost running out
Nearly all my life
Has transpired in regret³¹
- O Lord, I pray for Your forgiveness
What makes me weep especially
Are the sins that I still carry
And that are weighing me down as
if I were a coolie³²
- I hope that my Lord will forgive me
And pardon my sins
You are the Only One to whom we
pray
And for You forgiveness is easy
- This world is a deceitful place
May I not be tempted by its
pleasures
For it has already thrown me far
[afield]
And I cannot sleep from sorrow as
a result

20. *Duniya in khada' iirhe*
Hawaye in tukiirhe
Kuwa muuya in sahwiiirhe
Naarhiko raqi dhamaadi
21. *Naarhiko raqi nzamiirho*
Nrasirho hanti nchimbiiirho
Mpete vaantu wan rudiirho
Wan nreeserho ka dadhaarhi
22. *Wan rheserho ka wacadi*
Umati ya Muxamadi
Veema wanye kishitadi
Nafsi inpeerhe daghaarhi
23. *Nafsi ichi daghalooowa*
Naku rhiindha ku bigoowa
Jisa veerho ntakiwoowa
Ilazirhe ka Jalaali
24. *Nafsi ka Mooje tubiiirhe*
Wacdi na goondi tiyiiirhe
Na nrimize zi hadiirhe
Za kinaaya na sonkaarhi
25. *Karhantani ka tartiibu*
Meendho iweerhe khariibu
Ntakuwalata wa xibu
Ka duca na fil maali
26. *Duca nrasirhe numbaani*
Ka waana waamo tacaani
- This world has deceived me
Its temptations have carried me
away
I forgot to be [an obedient] servant
And hence became a destitute
slave³³
I was a slave on the verge of
drowning
But then I left all [entrusted]
property and escaped
Met people who brought me back
Who succeeded in bringing me back
with much effort
They promised to take me back
For they were from the Prophet
Mohamed's *umma*
Virtuous people of strong faith
Then my soul blamed me [for all my
sins]³⁴
When the soul is blessed with
repentance³⁵
Without being castigated
No one can understand [this
reform]
For it has been decreed by the
Majesty
[My] Soul has repented in front of
the Lord
From promises and warnings it has
become fearful
And it hereby pronounces [its
repentance]
Both implicitly and explicitly
Sit down quietly
For the time to go is approaching
I am leaving my loved ones
With blessing and wealth³⁶
I am leaving all my blessing at home
[for I am giving it] to my obedient
children

- Rabbi na wape liivaani
Ka rizqi na cayaali*
- May the Lord make them successful
In earning their livelihoods and
having offspring
27. *Duca nratilile wote
Baraka inawa toshe*
- I am leaving my blessing to all
May [my] blessing be enough for
everyone
- Na ghammu na ondhoke
Khaasata ibnul khaali*
- And may all worries disappear
Especially those of my maternal
cousins
28. *Kula zamani izchiya
Hudaraawa nafsiya*
- As time goes by
I begin to have doubts about my
abilities
- Ka udhaciifu waaziya
Narhikooyi jisinaali*
- And take note of my weaknesses
And [wonder] how strong I used
to be³⁷
29. *Jisinaali ipisirhe
Midibu ya gadishirhe
Hinzizi zote spiirhe*
- My physical strength is gone
And my complexion has changed³⁸
*And all by blood vessels have
dried up
Like the Jilaal grass³⁹*
- Kana maanyi ya jilaali*
30. *Narhiko muuntu shabaabu
Kacafiya na garabu
Chipisa kula jawaabu*
- I was young once
Healthy and strong
Able to accomplish everything
I undertook
- Kana caqiidi na waali*
- Like a commander or governor⁴⁰
31. *Ushabaabu u marhiize
Ziya ku rhuungana ziize
Mpumuzi zinaqisiize*
- [Now] youth is gone
And [my] joints are stiff
Rest and relaxations are things
of the past⁴¹
- Sina qaylo na qalali*
- And I neither speak nor shout⁴²
32. *Narhiko muuntu macruufu
nchituma nchitarufu*
- I was a prominent person
Who used to give orders and make
decisions
- Isa nteete u lhaciifu
Nkarheente ka tawakali*
- But now I have become weak
And have resigned myself to
tawakkul [trusting in the Lord]⁴³
33. *Nkarheente ka sabuuri
Ku rhiinda kaako umuuri
Kulava baytul ghuruuri
Keendha nuumba ya xalaali*
- I have settled down patiently
Waiting for your orders
To leave the abode of deception
And go to the abode sanctioned
by God

34. *Numba yaangu ya qubuuri*
Ndiyo yangu ka uzuuri
Ya mtaanga na mabuuri
Sho saxabu na warhaarhi
- My home is the grave
For it is better for me
A place of sand and sand hills
Where there are no friends nor
siblings
35. *Maqubuuri na mtaanga*
Nuumba hendoowa na mchaanga
Isho weerhu na chirhaanga
- Graves and sand
Places that are visited by mourners
Where there is no light or
brightness⁴⁴
[but] darkness and loneliness
- Na miinza zisho wahaarhi*
36. *Siti bintul amiini*
- Heavenly lady, daughter of the
Trustworthy [Prophet],⁴⁵
- Mtume nveelela muciiini*
Mpa weerhu wa qabriini
Na khafifu ya su'arhi
- Come to my assistance
Give me light in my grave
And ease the "questioning" [that
awaits me] there⁴⁶
37. *Siti mbakula dhamaana*
- Heavenly lady, who is the
guarantor of all
- Nshiika kana amaan*
- Protect me like someone entrusted
to your care
- Ndive wa ruxuma saana*
Sku ya xari na su'arhi
- You are the merciful one
In the difficult days of questioning⁴⁷
38. *Sheekhi qubuuli ducaye*
- The Shaikh's prayers find
acceptance with the Lord
- Mi teete barakaye*
Rabbi ntirha safaye
- And I have acquired his blessing
May the Lord allow me to line up
with him [at the Day of
Judgment]
- Bi xaqi Sheekhil xakali*
- By the succor of Shaikh
[Abdul-Qadir]⁴⁸
39. *Sheekhi ye ni taqiyi*
Aba Calawi Zakiyi
Meema Abal Haashimiye
- The Shaikh is very pious
The father of 'Alawi, the pure⁴⁹
[He descends] from the virtuous
Hashimi [clan]
- Itimiirhe ya camali*
- And has completed all his religious
obligations
40. *Camaliye itimiirhe*
Sheekhi peeto livaniile
- All his duties have been completed
Whoever receives the Shaikh's
blessings will be successful

<i>Kheerize mu wafiqiile</i>	His munificence finds acceptance with the Lord
<i>Sheekhi hupeenda xalaali</i>	For the Shaikh loves [only] what is sanctioned by God
41. <i>Meendo waake ni fayda</i> <i>Na fadhiye nda cibaada</i> <i>Zaazila ka u sacaada</i>	When he walks, it is with purpose When he sits, it is for worship He was born to find happiness [in the hereafter]
<i>Ndiye Abaa Iqbaali</i>	And his blessing finds acceptance with the Lord
42. <i>Sheekhi barakaye mpeerhe</i> <i>Iimaaniya idegeerhe</i> <i>Kheeri niigi zi ndekheerhe</i> <i>Niya mbovu ha itaarhi</i>	The Shaikh has granted me his blessing And my faith has been reaffirmed I have been sufficiently blessed And this cannot be taken away by any malice ⁵⁰
43. <i>Sabri mpeete na mapeema</i> <i>Nduciliilo Mtuma meema</i> <i>Miinso wa khaatima njeema</i> <i>Huwa kheeri ya camali</i>	Early on I was given patience And I was blessed by the virtuous Prophet To conclude my life with a felicitous ending ⁵¹ Will be the supreme accomplishment

Transliteration

For the poetry the Somali alphabet is generally used except for

v, z	As in English
ch	As in English <i>church</i>
dh	Arabic ض ظ ذ
gh	Arabic غ
rh	A very light (l), peculiar to Chimini, for example, <i>rherho</i> (today)

Notes

1. I am grateful to Professor Lidwien Kapteijns for improving the draft of this article with her thorough review and helpful comments. I would also like to thank Bana M. S. Banafunzi, Zen Jeylani Sheikh, and my father Munye Qassim Sheikh for helping me with the translation of many of the verses. This article is based on my ongoing thesis research that focuses on the local production and transmission of Islamic knowledge in southern Somalia in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

2. Copyrights by Mohamed M. Kassim.

3. Equivalent to (1804–24 June 1921).

4. Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), "Dirasah Mas'hiya 'an al-Madaris al-Qur'aniyah fi Jumhuriyah al-Sumal al-Dimuqratiyah (January 1983), p. 5.

5. Hiskett, Mervyn, "The Origin, Sources, and Form of Hausa Islamic verse," *Spectrum* 3 (Atlanta, June 1973), p. 151.

6. *Barzakh* is defined as a state that is between death and the Last Day. Refer to Sabiq, as-Sayyid, *Fiqh-al-Sunnah* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1991), Part IV, pp. 95–97, which states that the souls "will join some souls with others in the abode of *Barzakh* and on the Day of Resurrection, placing the believer's soul with other pure souls, that is, other pure souls kindred to his soul. A soul, after separation from the body, joins other kindred souls who in their nature and deeds are similar to it and stays with them."

7. Shaikh Nurein was the Chief *Qadi* (Judge) of Brava and was considered an expert in Islamic Jurisprudence.

8. *Hanzu*: The long dress gown.

9. Standing outside or standing in the area where the funeral preparations are being made.

10. Sabiq, as-Sayyid, p. 37, states that: Abu Hurairah narrates that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Whoever follows a funeral procession and offers the prayer for the deceased, will get one *kerat* of reward. And whoever follows it and remains with it until the body is buried, will get two *kerats* of reward, the least of which is equal in weight to 'Mount Uhud' or he said 'one of them is like Uhud.'"

Sabiq notes that a *kerat* is a measure, one-sixteenth of a dirham.

11. Literally: to be honored.

12. *Thawab*: reward ???

13. *Bun*: roasted coffee beans usually distributed in religious congregations.

14. The Bravanese language is called *Chimbalazi*. It is also called *Chimini*, which is a derivative of *chi muyiini* (literally, the language of the town).

15. The Path of mystical education, also the Sufi order.

16. Mir Valiuddin, *Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism* (London: East-West Publications, 1980), p. 26.

17. To show repentance both in feeling and behavior.

18. Emine Gursoy-Naskali, "Women Mystics in Islam," in *Women in Islamic Societies: Social Attitudes and Historical Perspectives*, Bo Utas, ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1983), p. 241.

19. Mystics who are considered to possess deep knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of Allah.
20. Rabi'a al-Adawiyya was born in Basra, Iraq.
21. Margaret Smith, *Rabi'a: The Life and Work of Rabi'a and other Women Mystics in Islam* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1994), p. 21.
22. Literally "in every state," meaning either in happiness or in despondency. Remembrance of Allah in all situations is mentioned in the *Hadith* (i.e., the sayings of the Prophet). Refer to Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, *Gardens of the Righteous (Riyadh as-Salihin) of Imam Nawawi* (London: Curzon Press Ltd., 1989), p. 241.
23. One of the Prophet Mohamed's names. The name literally means the one for whom we thank God.
24. *Iqbaal*: approachable with easiness, amicable.
25. *Shahada*: Profession of faith. To die with the *shahada* on my lips.
26. *Tawhid*: To say *Kalimat al Tawheed*, i.e., "There is no God who deserves worship except God." To say this in my last breath before death.
27. Excuse or valid reason: that is, without justification such as a prior sickness.
28. They proceed to the Hereafter without any provisions from this world. *Sehe* are the provisions/supplies that a traveler takes along on a trip. Here, the poet says that we leave this world to go to the Hereafter without carrying any wealth with us.
29. The virtuous are the Prophet, *Asa'haba* (followers who lived during his time), and all the blessed *Awliya'* (friends of Allah).
30. This verse has two possible translations since *Siti* is usually used to refer to the Holy Prophet's daughter Fatima, in which case the poet is saying that Siti Fatima rejects excuses such as "I forgot" or "I did not know." The poet may also have used *Siti* to refer to herself and hence mean that she does not want to make excuses for her mistakes.
31. There is another version of this verse (with some families in Brava) that reads: For nearly all my life has transpired in merriment.
32. *Hamaali*: means coolie or porter, i.e., an unskilled laborer.
33. *Raqi*: slave, from the Arabic *riq*. *Dhamaadi*: a Somali loan-word which literally means "to end." Here, the poet means someone at his rope's end.
34. As a result of their preaching and admonitions, my soul blamed me for past sins.
35. To feel remorseful and repentant is a blessing.
36. There is a difference between *Nakuwalata*, which means I am leaving, and *Ntakuwalata*, which means It has not spared. Reading *nakuwalata* for *ntakuwalata*.
37. *Jisinaali* is an abbreviation for *Jisi yaami naaliko*, which means the way I was physically, i.e., young and healthy.
38. *Miidibu* is a Somali loan-word that means color.
39. *Jilaal* is the dry season.
40. *Aqiidi*: from the Arabic, *Aqiid* means a commander. *Wali* is also from the Arabic and means a Governor.
41. Literally: rest and relaxation have gradually waned. The poet is stressing the pain suffered from aching joints and ailments due to old age.
42. *Qaylo* is a Somali word that means loud voice or noise.
43. *Tawakal*: *Tawakkul* means accepting what the Lord has decreed for you.

44. *Chirhaanga* means a beam of light that enters a room through a small opening.
45. *Amin* is one of the Holy Prophet's names. In Arabic, *Siti* means lady. Here, *Siti* refers to the Holy Prophet's daughter Fatima.
46. The questioning of the grave: According to Islam, the dead in their graves will be questioned about their lives by two angels.
47. Another version of this verse is: "*Sku ya xari na zuhaarhi*," which means in the very hot days when the sun is at its zenith.
48. The Shaikh referred to here is Shaikh Abdulqadir Al-Jilani, one of the most revered saints in the Muslim world. It is reported that Dada Masiti dreamt about Shaikh Abdulqadir blessing her.
49. The Father of *Alawi*, most probably the poet's reference here is Shaikh Abdulqadir al-Jilani who is a *Ba Alawi* and a *Hashimi*: The descendants of Ali bin Abi Talib. *Zakiyi*: Sinless, pure.
50. Another possible meaning is: there is no place for malice in my heart.
51. Literally: pleasant ending (as a pious Muslim), from the Islamic term *husnul khatimah* (felicitous end).