

## Editorial: The Mad Mullah Revisited

Abdirahman Farah 'Barwaqo's latest book "Sooyaal: Ina Cabdalla Xasan Ma Sheekh Bu Ahaa Mise...?" is on Muhammad Abdille Hassan and starts with an intriguing title. It asks the question whether Muhammad Abdille Hassan was a religious sheikh or something else. That something else is not spelled out in the title and is left to the reader to guess. The implication is that by reading the book one will find the answer. One however, does not have to get too far into reading the book to know the answer which is that Muhammad Abdille was far from being a sheikh, and was in fact a ruthless killer who consistently violated Islamic principles as well as basic human morality. Mr. Barwaqo builds the case against Muhammad Abdille Hassan in a very methodical fashion beginning with showing how the people of Berbera initially welcomed him and helped him settle there but when he started making provocative claims and they found out that his religious knowledge was deficient they rejected him and that was why he left Berbera. Mr. Barwaqo also compares Muhammad Abdille Hassan with other Somali religious leaders and finds him wanting by showing that while Sheikh Madar and his fellow members of the Qadiriya Sufi order at Jameecoweyn laid the basis of the city of Hargeysa and established the first Somali city that was governed according to Islamic law, and while other religious leaders such as Yusuf al-Kawdayn, Sheikh Ibrahim Abdalle Mayal, Sheikh Muhammad Abdi Makahil, Sheikh Abdirahman Sheikh Nur, and Sheikh Uweys Bin Muhammad al-Barawi contributed to Somali knowledge by devising orthographies, Muhammad Abdille Hassan was busy bringing death and destruction to Somalis. Furthermore, Mr. Barwaqo provides plenty of evidence that Muhammad Abdille Hassan did not respect religious laws as indicated by many of his heinous actions such as his habitual use of obscene language and defaming of women, let alone men and entire clans, in his verses. Among the women who became victims of his foul language were Asha Kenadid the sister of the Majerteen leader Boqor Osman Kenadid whom he accused of fornication and the sister of Richard Corfield, but his most pitiful victim was his Dhulbahante wife Dhiimo Ise whom he executed after accusing her of having an affair with his own maternal uncle Loyan seed Magan. The use of filthy language, especially, against women, was, and still is, considered an egregious and unacceptable act in Somali traditional culture but Muhammad Abdille Hassan seemed to actually revel in giving what can only be considered pornographic portraits of women and men in his poetry.

The use of trashy language however becomes a secondary issue when one looks at his murdering and mutilation of individuals on the least pretext and his execution of entire families including women and children. Some of the famous murders committed by Muhammad Abdille Hassan that stand out were those of the Dhulbahante Garad Ali Garad Mohamoud, the wife and children of Ali Shehari (Muhamamd Abdille Hassan's former representative in Aden), Sheikh Uweys Bin Muhammad al-Barawi whose killing he celebrated in a poem, and his Dhulbahante wife Dhiimo Ise.

All of this has been public knowledge but this is the first time that it is brought together in one book. And in that sense Mr. Barwaqo has done Somalis and Somali studies a great service. It is also a first step in bringing scholarship on Muhammad Abdille Hassan into a proper perspective. For if we trace this scholarship we will see that it started with the various accounts by British officials which, overall, gave a negative view of Muhammad Abdille Hassan. When it came to Somalis, the majority of the people in Somaliland (where most of Muhammad Abdille Hassan's activities took place), saw that era as a time of too much pain and suffering and wanted to leave it alone and move on. But with the independence and the merger of Somaliland and Somalia, some of the new Somali elite began to concoct for clan reasons a project to rehabilitate Muhammad Abdille Hassan and portray him as the father and source of Somali nationalism. This idea was opposed by most Somalis in Somaliland as well as in Somalia. But that did not stop the supporters of Muhammad Abdille Hassan and their efforts culminated in the construction of an equestrian statue for him in Mogadishu by the military dictator Muhammad Siyad Barre. Two individuals who played an instrumental role in trying to create a new mythology that projected Muhammad Abdille Hassan as a nationalist, despite much evidence to the contrary, were Aw Jama Omar Isse and Ahmed F. Ali (Idaja'a). Mr. Barwaqo effectively exposes Aw Jama Omar Isse and Idaja's distortions of Muhammad Abdille Hassan's history.

One shortcoming of the book is that it has not subjected the works of the other two purveyors of the Muhammad Abdille Hassan myth, namely, Said S. Samatar and Abdi Sheikh Abdi, to similar scrutiny. This may have something to do with the fact that the book was written in Somali, but it is still something that needs to be done. For Said S. Samatar and Abdi Sheikh Abdi's accounts of Muhammad Abdille Hassan's history are no less fabricated or distorted than those of Aw Jama Omar Isse and Ahmed F. Ali Idaja'a.

Barwaqo's book, however, has two things going for it. One, the fact that it was written in the Somali language means that it would be able to reach more Somali-speaking people than if it were written in English. Moreover, the fact that it was published in Hargeysa is by itself an achievement and a signal of the restoration of Somaliland's freedom and ability to tell its own story after the dark days of the union with Somalia, where Somalilanders were not only dispossessed of their territory but also of their history. Finally, if we put all this intellectual stuff aside for a moment, those who claim that Muhammad Abdille Hassan was a nationalist need to ask themselves a simple question: How can Muhammad Abdille Hassan be a nationalist if he is not considered a nationalist in Hargeysa or Mogadishu (where his statue was toppled because it was seen as a symbol of oppression rather than liberation)?