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EMBODIMENT AND MEMORIES: LITERARY ARTICULATIONS OF COASTAL WOMEN AND MANIFESTATIONS OF INDIAN OCEAN CULTURES

Ayan Salaad
University of Southampton

ABSTRACT

This article brings into conversation two pieces of Indian Ocean fiction about women, a Banaadiri wedding song, called 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa,' and Cristina Ali Farah's published work *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea*. I interrogate what constitutes female kinship, coastal identity, cultural heritage, and the ties between these phenomena through a comparative analysis of the two forms of literature. I assess how both works express kinship between coastal women and the ways in which their Indian Ocean and local cultural identities become embodied forms of knowledge. I then explore the differing ways that women in 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' and *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* use material culture as an act of female community making. I argue that in both literary works, women's bodies carry cultural meaning. However, while in 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa,' it is through women's bodies that Banaadiri Indian Ocean culture is expressed, affirmed, and continued, in *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea*, coastal women's bodies attest to a more uneven and contested Indian Ocean and diasporic heritage that registers historical losses as well as their everyday lived realities.

INTRODUCTION

This article brings women's relationships with other women more fully into focus within Indian Ocean literary studies. There is a lot of scholarship on women writers in the Indian Ocean world. Felicity Hand and Share Deckard have written extensively on the literature

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of Mauritian author Lindsey Collen.[1] Other scholarship has focused on writers such as Ananda Devi, Nathacha Appanah, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Igiaba Scego, and Cristina Ali Farah.[2] However, there is more to be examined in relation to female kinship networks and relationships.[3] This article uses this scholarship as a starting point to explore two pieces of Indian Ocean literature that focus on women's stories: 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa'[4] and *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea*. Cristina Ali Farah's *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea,* is a part-memoir, part-prose fiction, part-history, part-poetry which explores a plethora of tenuous disjointed female kinships in loosely overlapping stories and experiences about the sea and coast told through a series of vignettes. 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' is a *hees* (song) composed by *abwaan* (poet) Ali Osman Drog to promote and preserve traditional female Banaadiri wedding customs both within the Banaadiri community and wider Somalia. It is regularly performed during the female-only Banaadiri wedding tradition called the meel fadhiisis. Moreover, it was made famous when one of the most esteemed Somali female singers, Faduma Qasim Hilowle, performed it on Somali television in 1984.[5] In this article, I focus on a performance of this wedding song by Faduma Qasim's daughter, Aisha Karama in her home in London. Academic work on oral poetics from the Indian Ocean have been studied as part of local and regional ethnographic projects, while literary scholarship within Indian Ocean studies has tended to focus on written texts and print culture.[6] This article is a bridge between these two bodies of knowledge because it brings oral poetics fully into the remit of 'Indian Ocean literary studies.' I use a comparative methodology to explore local oral poetry alongside a globally circulating Indian Ocean text. I break down the barriers between orality and literacy by exploring oral narratives, voice, and expressive culture across both oral poems and written texts. This includes engaging with oral storytelling as well as melodic and lyrical narratives. In this context, it is important to note that Cristina Ali Farah is a novelist and scribal writer who privileges orality or oral narrative structures in her work, as her literary voice is 'profoundly shaped by the African oral tradition.'[7] When asked in an interview about the oral storytelling quality of her work, she asserted that she was looking for a mode of story-telling that 'could embody the throbbing power of the voice.'[8] A focus on this oral expressive culture in both oral poems and written texts enables an analysis that values the qualities of voice and listening even within a textual analysis.

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[1] See for example: Felicity Hand, *The Subversion of Class and Gender Roles in the Novels of Lindsey Collen (1948-): Mauritian social activist and writer* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010); Sharae Deckard, "Could it be everywhere?," *Interventions*, 16, 6, (2014), 837-53.

[2] See for example: Jacquelyne Kosgei, "Swahili seafarers' musings and sensuous seascapes in Yvonne Owuor's The Dragonfly Sea," *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, 8,1-2 (2022), 6-19; Kelsey McFaul, "Burcad badeed as grounds and method in literary expressions of Somali piracy," *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies*, 4, 1 (2020), 32-51; Lucy Rand, "Transgenerational shame in postcolonial Italy: Igiaba Scego's *Adua*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, 1 (2020), 4-17.

[3] There is some scholarship on female kinships, networks, and relationships in history and anthropology. See for example: Eugenia Rodrigues, "Women, land, and power in the Zambezi Valley of the eighteenth century," *African Economic History*, 43 (2015), 19-56.

[4] See Appendix.

[5] Author interview with Aisha Karama Saed, London, 21 Mar. 2018.

[6] See for example: Isabel Hofmeyr, "Indian Ocean lives and letters," *English in Africa*, 35,1 (2008), 11-25; Maria Olaussen, Maria, "The submerged history of the Indian Ocean in admiring silence," *English Studies in Africa*, 56, 1 (2013), 65–77; Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in slow reading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

A Dhow is Crossing the Sea is a work of fiction that confounds the reader from its beginning. It is a fiction that is both about disjunction and shaped by disjunction. All the stories are about disconnection, precariousness, and isolation, against which individuals make gestures of connection. *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea,* explores the narratives of a granddaughter grieving the loss of an estranged grandmother who died in Eyl, a group of Somali asylum seekers working on a project on memory and un-translatable words in Italy, the story of the daughter of a Somali seaman who lived in Cambodia, and the stories of Somali women who have made treacherous journeys through land and sea from Somalia to Italy. The form of *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* also lends itself to this disjunction. The entire work does not run smoothly but is divided into ten vignettes, and although the stories in each part share many of the same themes and ideas, they never completely connect or end with a resolution. Instead, each story ends on a moment of uncertainty or alienation.

Despite the cultural literacy needed to fully understand the situational intricacies of 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa,' it is a melodic and rhythmic oral song that draws the listener in from the onset. As a *hees* that is sung for and by a local community of women, 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' promotes social cohesion. Each stanza of the song explores the way that the community of women at the meel fadhiisis work together as a single unit for a common purpose: to celebrate the wedding of their kin and share their cultural knowledge. The form of the *hees* lends itself to this cohesion. Moreover, each stanza is sung by a main singer in the meel fadhiisis ceremony, but the last two lines of each stanza are then sung back to the main singer by the entire female congregation. This collaborative singing makes the stanzas of 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' blend into each other, creating a collective female celebratory practice.

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[7] Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto, "Translator's Preface," in *Little Mother: A novel*, trans. Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), xi.

[8] Claire Jacobson, "Between two worlds: An exclusive interview with Ubah Cristina Ali Farah," *Asymptote*, 15 May 2017, 1.

In the first part of this article, I provide a detailed context for 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' by outlining Banaadiri wedding customs with a particular focus on women's wedding traditions. Although 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' is sung during a particular female ceremony that forms part of a Banaadiri wedding, the *hees* references many of the other female wedding ceremonies that come together to create the wedding celebration. It is important to a reading of the song to gain an understanding of these traditions, the way that they cultivate a strong kinship between Banaadiri women and how the community both embody and perform their culture during these ceremonies. I then move onto to the main part of the article where I interrogate what constitutes female kinship, coastal identity, cultural heritage and the ties between these in both 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' and Cristina Ali Farah's *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea*. I explore the ways that female kinship is presented in both pieces of literature and how women's bodies carry different forms of coastal and Indian Ocean culture. I then assess the differing ways that in 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' and *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* women use material culture as an act of female community making.

BANAADIRI WEDDING TRADITIONS[9]

The main Banaadiri wedding celebrations that women take part in are the *cillaan saar*, *meel fadhiisis*, *nikaax*, *waaq dhacin*, *guuris* and the *shaash saar*. Banaadiri wedding traditions take place over a three-day period except for the *shaash saar*, which takes place seven days after the *guuris* tradition. The *cillaan saar*, is a pre-wedding, woman-only tradition attended by the younger generation of the bride's family and her friends during which henna is put on the bride's body to beautify her for the wedding day. The tradition provides an opportunity for the bride's sisters, cousins, and friends to celebrate her impending marriage. While the bride's body is being adorned with henna designs, the guests sing traditional songs.

The day after the *cillaan saar* is the *meel fadhiisis*, another woman-only celebration in which the older generation of female family members – the mothers, grandmothers and married women – come together to celebrate and bless the bride. These female guests wear the traditional cloths that their community weaves and which reflect their *hiddo iyo dhaqan* (tradition/heritage and culture) called Alindi, known more globally as the Futa Benaadir. The bride wears a *guntiino* and a *garbasaar* made from *subaacal xariir*: one piece of the *subaacal xariir* cloth is knotted around her body and the other is put over her shoulders and she is covered in gold.

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[9] Much of this section is based on: Author interview with Aisha Karama Saed, London, 21 Mar. 2018.

The *meel fadhiisis* begins with the female guests taking the *subaacal xariir* and covering the bride's head and shoulders with it. They burn *cuud* (incense made of granules of ground grain) and/or *luubaan* (frankincense) around the bride's head. They then recite a surah from the Quran called Al-Fatiha and make supplications for the bride. After this, they perform Aw Barqadle (Aw Barkhadle), which is also an act of praying for the bride to have a successful marriage. Finally, they make a form of supplication called Allah Bari, in which they pray to Allah s.w.t for the bride and her married life. After the older generation of women finish praying and blessing the bride, the younger generation of female members of the bride's family and the bride's friends, who are also dressed in *subaacal xariir*, join the *meel fadhiisis* celebration. They sit either side of the bride and all the women collectively sing 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' to uplift and celebrate the bride and show their support for her impending nuptials.

The day after the *meel fadhiisis* is the *nikaax*, an Islamic legal marriage contract where the groom and bride agree to be husband and wife. After the *nikaax*, a wedding lunch called *waaq dhacin* is served to all the male and female wedding guests. Before and after lunch, the guests perform a range of different dances. On the evening of this day after the *waaq dhacin* celebration, the *guuris* ceremony will take place.

Guuris is a custom where the family, friends, and neighbours of the bride and groom sing traditional songs and perform dances while they escort the couple to the marital home after the wedding ceremony. In the Banaadiri community, the bride and groom are escorted separately to the marital home with the bride going first. Traditionally, the bride would be carried on the back of a woman called the *koobirow*, who was from a lower social economic class but attached to a particular family, while the wedding party would walk alongside her. The groom would make the journey from his parent's home to the marital house on foot with his family and friends alongside him. Once the groom reached the marital home, he is refused access by the *koobirow* until he has paid her for her labour in carrying his bride home.

The *shaash saar*, which translates loosely as 'putting on the headscarf,' takes place seven days after the *guuris*. This women-only custom is a celebration of a woman's rite of passage from being a maiden to married woman. The *shaash*, which is a special scarf, is a symbol of a married woman, and is never worn by an unmarried girl. During the *shaash saar* custom, the *shaash* is held above the bride's head while her female kin and friends dance and clap in celebration. The *shaash* is then fastened on the bride's head by a mature married kinswoman who is particularly chosen because she has never been divorced and her marriage is renowned for being a successful and long one. After this, the kinswoman puts the *shaash* on the bride, then the other women also put a *shaash* on her head. These wedding traditions help bring the Banaadiri people together as a community and provide an opportunity for them to express their localized and distinctive culture and heritage.

FEMALE KINSHIP NETWORKS: COHESION VERSUS DISJUNCTION

'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' begins with a close-knit community of Banaadiri women who have all come together for a common purpose: to celebrate a Banaadiri bride and her impending wedding. The first line of the *hees*, 'Gabar iyoone garoob' 'A maiden and a previously married woman,' welcomes the range of different women who make up the wedding party. *Gabar* refers to a young unmarried girl whereas *garoob* refers to a divorcee or widow, an older more experienced woman. Through addressing both the *gabar* and *garoob,* the *hees* creates this inviting atmosphere where all women of different ages and life experiences are welcome. These women are referred to in relation to their marital status rather than their age to emphasise the importance of marriage in the Banaadiri tradition. The second line in the stanza speaks to the reason that they have gathered together, 'Gogoshan intii soo gableeyeen/Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa.' 'Those of us who have attended this meeting, have affection for the bride.' *Gacaltooyo* refers to a platonic 'affection' or 'close relationship' between family members, relatives, or friends, and thus highlights that there is a strong kinship between the female guests and the bride. The *hees* makes it clear from the onset that the women have congregated together because of this kinship and that they want to celebrate the bride's impending nuptials with her.

This celebration of Banaadiri female kinship continues through to the final line of the first stanza, 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa,' 'We are taking her to the marital home.' The word *guuri* has a dual meaning. On one level, it can mean to 'arrange a marriage' or 'marry off': It highlights that although the female guests have come together because they have a personal affection for the bride and want to celebrate her wedding nuptials, they also have an impersonal duty to ensure that all the wedding customs are carried out properly. It shows that the Banaadiri wedding is not only about the bride and groom, but also about the community, and that the female guests are not mere spectators of the wedding celebration and instead are actively involved in the cultural practice. This is further compounded by the second meaning of *guuri* which refers to the Banaadiri tradition, in which the bride and groom are escorted by friends and family members to the marital home. As mentioned, during the *guuris* ceremony the bride would be carried by the *koobirow* who would carry the bride on her back until she reaches the marital home, while the rest of the wedding party, friends and neighbours sing cultural songs and perform cultural dances.[10] Thus, when the *hees* states 'Gogoshan intii soo gableeyeen/Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa/Waa Guuriheeynnaa,' 'Those of us who have attended this meeting, /have affection for the bride/We are taking her to the marital home,' it articulates the important role that the Banaadiri community have in participating in the wedding traditions and ensuring that all of the various customs are carried out until the *guuris*, when they would ensure that the bride is literally carried to her new home to begin her married life.

A *Dhow is Crossing the Sea* begins by exploring a different cross-generational female kinship: a granddaughter mourning the loss of a grandmother with whom she has had an estranged relationship for many years. Even though the narrator has had no contact with her grandmother since she has moved to Europe on the night of her death, she has a strange dream in which her 'grandmother was rinsing her fabrics in the sea and she was serious, as serious as she had always been when alive.'[11] The granddaughter realising that it was 'not quite right' to have no connection with her grandmother prompts this memory/vision of her grandmother, but this dream is also 'not quite right.'[12] The image of her grandmother in her dream is not a distinct memory but a two-dimensional flashback that resembles 'a posed photograph' with the grandmother standing 'motionless on a long pole with the sea all around her, even though she had always hated the sea.'[13] In many ways the grandmother's 'serious' and 'hard' demeanour in the sea reflects the way that she is resisting being remembered in this inauthentic way.[14]

The grandmother is from Eyl, a Somali coastal town, which was a vital trade port during the height of the Indian Ocean trade network: 'boats would set off from Eyl Badey laden down with their cargo of hides and cattle and return full of dates and rice.'[15] The reader learns that the grandmother's husband was a young trader who worked on dhows that traded goods with other countries in the Indian Ocean world. However, he died in a shipwrecked dhow while the grandmother was 'pregnant with her first daughter,' and afterwards the grandmother renounces the Indian Ocean, and everything connected with it.[16] After the loss of her husband to the ocean, she chooses Eyl Dawaad, a village 'up in the mountains' because it has 'nothing to do with the sea.'[17]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ubax Christina Farah, "*Un Sambuco attraversa il mare* (A Dhow is crossing the sea)," *Wasafiri*, 26, 2 (2011), 18.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 19.

Despite her grandmother rejecting Eyl Badey and its coastal history, the granddaughter imposes it upon her by continuing to remember coastal Eyl through her grandmother. In the protagonist's dream, memories of stories of Eyl Badey and its history as a cross-cultural trade hub are represented through a vision of her grandmother mourning her husband while holding her first born daughter and singing her grief into a familiar song about the dhows: '*doon bad mareysa, badda doon baa mareysa, mayddi bay sittaa, mayddi iyo malmal bay sittaa*, a dhow is crossing the sea, carrying incense and perfumes, carrying incense and perfumes.'[18] Moreover the protagonist best remembers her grandmother through the smells of goods that were exchanged through the Indian Ocean trade network: 'Her *guntiino* had the scent of sugar and resin, her skin that of sesame oil.'[19] 'Sugar,' 'resin,' and 'sesame oil' were highly coveted products that were traded amongst countries across the Indian Ocean rim.[20]

By the end of the vignettes about the grandmother and granddaughter, the reader understands that the grandmother's association with Eyl's Indian Ocean history is an uncomfortable and unchosen imposition of memory by a granddaughter whose belonging to Eyl is mediated through these memories. It is through these memories that the granddaughter continues to clutch onto a sense of belonging to a place that she left as a child and has not returned to. The grandmother's imposed embodiment of the Indian Ocean is brought into fuller relief when contrasted with 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa's evocation of a chosen embodiment of the Indian Ocean world through local wedding customs.

WOMEN'S BODIES AS MEDIUMS OF INDIAN OCEAN CULTURE

In 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa,' Banaadiri women actively choose to embody their Indian Ocean heritage through traditional wedding practices where their Indian Ocean and Banaadiri cultural identity is shown through their skin. The second stanza of the *hees* shifts the narrative from talking about the community of women who have gathered together to celebrate the bride and her wedding to the bride herself. The first two lines of the second stanza describe the bride's body 'Gibilka nuurayo/Giir giirka fuulo iyo guduudkan,' 'The glowing skin, this reddish brown and layered dappled design.' 'Gibilka nuurayo' refers to the bride's luminous skin while the second line in this stanza 'Giir giirka fuulo iyo guduudkan' refers to the henna design that adorns the bride's body. The phrase 'Gibilka nuurayo' refers to the anointing and cleansing ritual of the bride's body that takes place a few days before the wedding ceremonies. During this custom, the bride's friends anoint and cleanse her body with a mixture made from *timir* (dates), *cusbur* (beautifying dye similar to henna), *huruud* (saffron), and *qasil* (ground up powdered leaves of the Gob tree).[21] The bride's body is massaged with this mixture and then washed a few times in the days preceding the *cillaan saar* tradition. The 'Giir giirka fuulo iyo guduudkan' refers to the *cillaan saar* tradition during which friends decorate the bride with henna to beautify her for the wedding.[22]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

It is not only Banaadiri cultural traditions that are written on and reflected through the Banaadiri bride's body. Amina A. Issa has written about the ways that 'wedding rites and ceremonies' in one Indian Ocean port city reflect a wider Indian Ocean cultural influence.[23] In her article, Issa explores the way that the '*singo*,' an important pre-wedding process during which a bride-to-be is anointed, rubbed, and massaged to beautify her for the wedding day, was influenced in this location by the movement of both goods and people from the western Indian Ocean.[24] She argues that although in Zanzibar, the *singo* 'process has always involved massaging (kusinga) the bride to make her skin soft, clean and attractive, using pleasant and sweet-smelling cleansing materials,' prior to the Indian Ocean trade network gaining ascendency, local materials were mainly used.[25] Traditionally 'coconut milk' and 'maize chunks' were used to scrub and massage the bride.[26] However, with the dominance of the Indian Ocean trade network, many of the materials used for the *singo* in Zanzibar came from across the Indian Ocean. Dried cloves which were introduced to Zanzibar in the 1800s from Mauritius and Reunion Island were incorporated in a paste used in the *singo* and, from the 1850s, when British imperial connections prompted ever greater numbers of Indian women to migrate to Zanzibar, aromatic flowers and plants were brought from India and cultivated in Zanzibar to be added to the clove powder to make the paste. The *singo* tradition is performed in many other Indian Ocean countries where many of the same materials are used.

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[21] Author interview with Aisha Karama Saed, London, 21 Mar. 2018.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Amina A. Issa, "Wedding ceremonies and cultural exchange in an Indian Ocean port city: The case of Zanzibar Town," *Social Dynamics*, 38 (2012), 468.

[24] Ibid., 472.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

The *singo* tradition is not the only pre-wedding tradition that is practised in the wider Indian Ocean world. Issa states that 'the same practice of beautifying brides with henna has long been observed throughout many western Indian Ocean towns and in Muslim countries.'[27] In East Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, there is a tradition called the *Lailat al henna*, the henna night, in which female family members and friends come together one evening to apply the henna on the bride and have a pre-wedding celebration. In addition to the bridal henna custom revealing a shared Indian Ocean tradition, henna designs that adorn the bride also reflect a heritage of cross-cultural exchange. Issa states that in urban Zanzibar up until the early 1980s henna 'patterns were inspired by local flowers and plants' which included the 'dates leaves,' 'the lotus,' and the 'jasmine leaf,' as well as patterns that were 'adopted from *khanga'* cloth that was worn by many women on the East African coast.[28] However, from the late 1980s, the henna designs 'from the Gulf and India were introduced' into Zanzibar, resulting in designs amalgamating Gulf 'geometric patterns,' Indian 'intricate' floral designs and traditional Zanzibari patterns.[29]

There is an abundance of scholarship on tattooing, scarification, and other forms of body elaborations. Anthropologist Jennifer Biddle argues that when academics explore inscriptions of identity they assume 'the existence of an ontologically prior, pre-cultural and thus natural medium (body or surface of skin).'[30] Biddle argues that this 'inscriptive model' is problematic because it presents culture as 'literally superficial' something which occurs 'on the "surface" of an already assumed stable, unified and natural "thing" as well as presenting 'culture as inherently distinct from this pre-given "natural" material.'[31] Rather 'than assuming that "skin" provides a natural surface for cultural elaboration, or that discrete, individual bodies pre-exist the social,' Biddle argues that 'the "skin" itself may well be involved in the production of the very distinction we call "human".'[32] The skin is a form of material culture in its own right. Biddle contests and disrupts 'notions of the "human body" and' also 'refigures the role "skin" inscription plays from the superficial to the constitutive in the production of cultural identities and differences.'[33]

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[27] Ibid., 474.
[28] Ibid., 475.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Jennifer Biddle, "Inscribing identity: Skin as country in the Central Desert," in *Thinking Through the Skin*, eds. Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (London: Routledge, 2001), 177.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

This idea that the skin is not a nominative medium upon which cultural identity is written, but a form of material culture that produces cultural identity in its own right is reflected in 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa.' In the context of Banaadiri wedding traditions, the bride's skin is a cultural medium rather than a blank canvas or 'natural' surface upon which culture is inscribed or elaborated. In the recording when Asha Karama sings the second stanza, she raises the pitch of her voice when singing the word *nuurayo*. The singing of the *hees* emphasises the word *nuurayo,* 'the glow' or 'shine,' emitted through the skin rather than *gibilka*, 'the skin' or 'the complexion,' to highlight the importance of the anointing tradition as a key form of material culture. 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' shows that the Banaadiri bride's body is not a bordered, bounded self-contained unit, but something that can be recognised as an embodied expression of the Banaadiri community's Indian Ocean heritage. Through the use of vivid language, the *hees* highlights that, throughout the Banaadiri wedding celebrations, the bride is a moving embodied form of material culture which attest to the Banaadiri people's heritage as part of the Indian Ocean world, with its history of cross-cultural exchange of materials and customs.

However, in 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' it is not just through the cleansing ritual that the bride's skin produces a particular kind of cultural identity. The *hees* suggests that the bride's henna designs are not *on* the skin but *part* of her skin: 'Giir giirka fuulo iyo guduudkan,' 'The glowing skin, this reddish brown and layered dappled design.' *Giir,* like its English translation 'dappled' and 'piebald,' is a term often used in relation to the way that animal's skin tends naturally to be a patchwork of two different colours, or one colour extensively marked with round patches or round spots of a different colour, such as the coats of horses or the male goat. Through the use of the word *giir,* the *hees* highlights the way that the reddish-brown designs of the henna are decorated all over the bride's body to such an extent that they become part of her skin. The henna designs are long-winding images that stretch across the bride's hands, arms, soles of feet, legs, and back, and once the bride is dressed, her skin is so dominated by the colours and designs of the henna that it would give the impression to an onlooker that it is the natural design of her skin.

'Giir giirka fuulo' is a beautifully evocative phrase used in the *hees* to refer to the layering of the henna designs, which reflect images and symbols native to the Banaadiri coast as well as symbols and designs brought over from different parts of the Indian Ocean world.[34] These patterns are not positioned side by side, but rather on top of one another: *Fuul* is a verb which means to 'get on top of' or 'climb up.' Describing the bride's body as a layering of designs, 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' evokes a Banaadiri heritage that is inextricable from Indian Ocean cultural exchange. When the bride is sitting in the *meel fadhiisis*, her skin would be covered by layer upon layer of designs and the guests would be unable to identify the Banaadiri designs from those that come from other parts of the Indian Ocean world.

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[33] Ibid., 178.

As the second stanza unfolds it becomes clear that although 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' explores the various ways that the bride's Indian Ocean and Banaadiri heritage is materialised through her skin, the focus is on the way that the community of women present at the *meel fadhiisis* are part of creating these cultural identities. Repeating 'Gabdhahan golaha jooga/Gacantooda ku saareen' 'these girls at the meeting place, /put it on with their hand' emphasises the female kin at the *meel fadhiisis* as instrumental in creating their cultural heritage. Through the use of the plural of the word for girls *gabdhahan*, 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' alludes to the fact that the anointing and henna placing ritual are collective cultural practices performed by the younger generation of the bride's female kin. The singular rather than plural is used for 'hand.' It is *gacantooda* 'their hand' rather than *gacmohooda* 'their hands' that undertake the rituals to show that, through undertaking the cleansing and anointing custom followed by the adornment of the henna designs on the bride's body, the female kin become 'one.' They morph into one body united through these cultural practices.

The final two lines in the stanza also show the way that although the ritual anointing and henna adorning are part of the Banaadiri people's heritage and have been performed for centuries, every performance is particular and specific. The henna tattoos are temporary skin elaborations that are constantly re-applied at every wedding celebration, and it is the process of application rather than designs that emerge as significant. 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' highlights that it is the responsibility of the women at every *meel fadhiisis* ceremony to perform the anointing and henna ritual in such a way that it carefully negotiates both heritage and ritual as well as contemporaneous specificity.

Whilst 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' shows that women's skin can become a medium through which Indian Ocean Banaadiri heritage is expressed, *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* disrupts the notion that women's bodies carry their culture in an unproblematic way. The narrator was born in Mogadishu, and so like her grandmother she has spent many years of her life on the Somali coast: ‘the sound of the ocean, its crashing roar, is the leitmotiv of my childhood.’[35] She remembers Mogadishu in the years prior to the civil war when the city was beginning to break-down and collapse. She describes the loss of a place to which belonging was simple and easy and how ‘over a period of time, the natural habitat of the coast had been torn apart and ravaged. Resources swept away, the balance broken.’[36]

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[34] Author interview with Aisha Karama Saed, London, 6 Aug. 2018.

The way in which humans infringe on nature to advance their own needs is shown when the narrator discusses a tragedy where, in order to ‘make way for wider ships,’ ‘a large part of the coral reef was destroyed.’[37] Simultaneously, a ‘hyper-modern automated slaughter house’ was set up and blood from the slaughtering of cattle was directed into the sea with devasting consequences: ‘from the shattered reef, driven by the smell of blood, ravenous sharks swam raging in, pushing right up to the beach.’[38] The ‘ocean, once swelling with sponges and shells, full of pools rainbowed with butterfly fish, now only threw back amputated bodies and the smell of death.’[39] The destroyed coastline foreshadows the collapse of Somalia during the civil war and the ‘amputated bodies and the smell of death’ the immense death toll caused by the bloody conflict.[40]

These coastal memories burrow into the narrator’s body. In the sand, her bones ‘grow from salt and silica,’ her feet ‘turn into roots of water and iodine’ and the ‘molten lead’ ocean deforms her ‘heart.’[41] Even when the narrator has been living in Italy for years, a visit to the Sabaudia coast evokes these painful memories. She worries that, like the ocean from her childhood, the Italian sea will consume everything with devastating consequences.[42] She instructs her husband and child to not put their belongings near the water because ‘the sea will sweep it away.’[43] Nevertheless, she soon discovers that in Italy, ‘waves don’t swallow everything up.’[44]

In *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea,* the protagonist is not the only woman who carries the coast and the sea through her body as painful memories. She also discusses a project that she worked on when she moved to Italy with a ‘group of Somali asylum seekers’ on

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[35] Farah, “A Dhow,” 20.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 21.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

'memory.'[45] During the project one of the female participants tells the story of her 'long' and treacherous journey from Somalia to Italy through exploring its impact on her body. During the journey, her 'shoes split open,' tearing 'at the skin of her ankles.'[46] She 'has nothing to replace them, so she wraps her feet in cloth and bark, wraps them tight and walks across damp ground, dry ground, walks across everything.'[47] However, after a while her feet 'wrappings get wet, so she frees her feet for a little while, wrings the rags out, slips her bruised and numbed feet into two plastic bags, then fills the bags with dried leaves and cloth.'[48] By the end of this gruelling journey her feet are 'bruised,' 'numbed,' and 'lump-swollen.'[49]

When this young woman joins the project on 'memory' in Italy, 'many years have gone by since she entered the journey,' but she can still feel the remnants of that traumatic journey in her feet.[50] She 'can still feel something lodged deep in the sole of her foot, inside, right inside her foot.'[51] She would often use a 'blade, or pliers, or something sharp' to try to extract 'thorns and glass shards that she can feel lodged deep in her feet.'[52] The journey from Somalia to Italy was so arduous that the trauma has become psychologically carved into her body.[53] *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* shows women's bodies carrying a different form of coastal and Indian Ocean culture to 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' – one defined by isolation, disconnection, and everyday lived trauma rather than unity, cohesion, and cultural heritage.

MATERIAL CULTURE: ADORNMENT VERSUS NECESSITY

In the third stanza of 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa,' the community of women at the *meel fadhiisis* continue an age-old tradition performed in many different Indian Ocean communities in which a bride is adorned in an abundance of gold jewellery made from coinage. However, although many Indian Ocean communities enact this cultural practice, it signifies something different within each local and communal context.

In many Indian Ocean communities, gold jewellery made from coins has an important function for brides that is beyond the decorative. Patricia W. Romero explores the importance of gold jewellery to women in the many ethnic groups that come together to make up Lamu, a highly stratified Indian Ocean Island off the coast of Kenya, which included the 'Bohra Indians, Afro-Arabs and the Hadramis.'[54] For the Bohra women of Lamu, gold jewellery was important because it provided a financial security net. It was important for them to collect as much gold as possible because, in keeping with their Hindu ancestors, women in their community did not inherit any wealth or property from their husbands. Thus, gold jewellery provided economic security and acted as a 'life insurance' in case of widowhood.[55]

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 22.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 21-22.
[51] Ibid., 22.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

By contrast, Lamu Afro-Arab and Hadrami women consider gold jewellery as an economic commodity with 'social implications.'[56] Despite members of the Lamu Hadrami community being significantly less wealthy than the Bohra Indians, gold jewellery was also integral to brides in their community. Romero asserts that 'as the Hadrami community prospered,' their daughters would wear more gold jewellery on display, which in turn would mean that they would rise 'socially in the eyes of the old Afro-Arab community.'[57]

The third stanza focuses on the way that the female community at the *meel fadhiisis* celebrate the Banaadiri bride-to-be by working together to adorn her in gold jewellery made from guineas: 'Geniyaal oo dahab ah/Gumuddeeda hoos luqunta loo geliyay. /Waa gaartayee. /Guulle ugu soo gargaaray.' 'Guineas that are gold were put on her ankles until the neck for her. /She achieved it. /God supported her with it.' This stanza from the onset focuses on the Banaadiri women working together to place the gold all over the bride's body, and it highlights that it is an important cultural practice that is not just about financial security or social advancement. Although when the *hees* states 'Geniyaal oo dahab ah/Gumuddeeda hoos luqunta loo geliyay' it literally means 'Guineas that are gold were put on her ankles and neck,' it actually suggests that the community of women work their way up from her ankles *to* her neck, putting the jewellery all over her body. It creates a decadent image in the listener's mind of a bride being covered from head to toe in an abundance of gold jewellery.

When the Banaadiri women at the *meel fadhiis* adorn the bride, the jewellery becomes imbued with new forms of signification. It becomes a means through which to transform the Banaadiri woman into a bride. It is through the community putting this gold coinage jewellery on her body that she gains a higher status and worth. The *hees* illustrates this when the second part of the stanza is repeated ‘Waa gaartayee/Guulle ugu soo gargaaray,’ ‘She achieved it. /God supported her with it.’ There is a play on the word *gaar* which as a verb means to ‘reach,’ ‘attain,’ or ‘achieve,’ but which also as a noun can mean ‘singularity,’ ‘specialness,’ and ‘individuality. It suggests that the Banaadiri woman reaches a special or unique stage of womanhood and thus becomes worthy of becoming a bride.

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[54] Patricia W. Romero, "Possible sources for the origin of gold as an economic and social vehicle for women in Lamu (Kenya)," *Journal of the International African Institute*, 57, 3 (1987), 364.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 370.

In traditional Banaadiri weddings, the bride would be covered in gold jewellery.[58] She would wear specific items which were commonly worn by the Banaadiri community *such* as the *luqundhajis* (a short necklace or choker necklace), *xirsiilow* (gold with a particular design), *gabalaalow* (a large necklace that covers the chest), *buufbuuflow* (gold bangles).[59] It was usually the groom’s responsibility to provide the gold but in situations where the groom is not affluent, the bride would borrow her mother or grandmother’s jewellery for the day. In many cases the gold that a bride wears would usually be an amalgamation of both family heirlooms (her grandmother and mother’s jewellery) preserved from generation to generation and new pieces bought specially for the bride to wear on her wedding day.[60] Thus, the Banaadiri bride’s adornment symbolizes both her familial legacy and the new chapter in her adult life on which she is about to embark.

In ‘Waa Guuriheeynnaa,’ the gold jewellery made of guineas not only transforms the Banaadiri woman into a bride, but the Banaadiri bride through wearing this jewellery also transforms it by imbuing it with new meaning. When the Banaadiri bride wears the gold coinage jewellery, composed of family heirlooms and new modern pieces, she transforms it from a currency or a mode of aesthetic decoration into a form of material culture, through which both the Banaadiri people’s heritage and their future can be reflected. It is only once they are put on the bride’s body that they can take on this new role. The bride’s body becomes a moving living museum through which the women at the *meel fadhiisis* can see their heritage and future embodied in the gold coinage jewellery. Moreover, through singing while adorning the bride, the gold coinage necklaces are brought to life. The sounds of the *hees* mingle with the sounds of the gold coin jewellery clattering every time that the bride moves during the wedding celebration.

‘Waa Guuriheeynnaa’ is performed in a warm and safe environment; a space where the female kinship group feel comfortable enough to come together to celebrate another woman who is their kin. When the women at the *meel fadhiisis* dress the bride according to her cultural heritage, it is about adornment and enhancement. They use the henna, silk cloth and gold to draw out her combined Indian Ocean and Banaadiri cultural identities. In *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea*, on the other hand, there are no safe spaces. The Somali civil war created an environment where neighbour turned on neighbour causing the 'implosion' of all safe spaces.[61] As a result, throughout *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea*, whenever a woman reaches out to dress another woman it is not about adornment or enhancement but about restoring a basic humanity to someone who has not only undergone immense physical and mental trauma, but has also lost their home and cultural identity.

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[58] Author interview with Aisha Karama Saed, London, 6 Aug. 2018.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

In the story about the unnamed woman who experiences acute physical injury to her feet during her long 'journey towards the sea' because 'she has no proper shoes,' it is another unnamed woman who 'like her has entered the journey' that helps her.[62] This other woman 'sees her with these bruised, lump-swollen feet wrapped in plastic and cloth, and 'opens her rucksack and digs out a pair of shoes for her, a pair of shoes from her own rucksack.'[63] Although there are no words exchanged, through the medium of worn 'shoes' they show they understand each other perfectly.[64] When the woman gives the other woman her 'shoes,' she not only provides practical support but also demonstrates empathy.[65]

In another of the stories intertwined in this narrative, a woman named Dahabo saves a woman, who subsequently becomes her closest friend, when they are 'shipwrecked together in the ocean' during the journey from Somalia to Italy.[66] When the dhow that Dahabo and her friend were on capsizes, many of the passengers drown. However, Dahabo's strong swimming ability saves her and her soon to-be-best friend from the same fate: she manages to get them both to some rocks where they are rescued by patrol boats. When Dahabo and her friend are extracted from the sea, they are 'freezing' and so the patrol men remove their water drenched clothes.[67] However, Dahabo feels 'ashamed because she wasn't wearing her bra' and thus feels exposed in front of these men.[68] She states 'her breasts no longer were a young woman's breasts and there she was, no bra, in front of the patrol men.'[69] This shame becomes etched into her memories, and despite many years lapsing since the capsizing of her dhow, she ruminates over it and warns other women that 'if any one of them should ever journey across the sea, whether on a dhow or otherwise, she'd better remember to put on her bra.'[70] In this story, the 'bra' becomes more than an object which supports and covers a woman's breasts.[71] It is an object with the power to offer strength and dignity to the wearer.

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[61] Farah, "A Dhow," 23.
[62] Ibid., 22.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 23.
[67] Ibid., 24.
[68] Ibid.

In 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' the traditional cloth that the women wear on their bodies is also part of a ritual which promotes female community making. In the fourth and final stanza of the *hees*, the female congregation as a collective celebrate a silk cloth, called *subaacal xariir*, that the bride and the younger generation of women wear during the *meel fadhiisis* tradition. The presence of silk within this *hees* signifies a local wedding celebration that bridges localised and regional Indian Ocean materialities. Anthropologist Sarah Fee has worked extensively on textiles in East Africa and textile trade between East Africa and the wider Indian Ocean world. In her most recent work, she explores the way that pure silk and cotton and silk blend clothes 'handcrafted in western India, and in the Southern Arabian nation of Oman' have been instrumental in building 'commercial and socio-political networks' in East Africa.[72] Fee argues that trading elites in East Africa, which included both Swahili traders and Indian merchants, used silk cloth as gifts to create and maintain trading partners in the East African interior. They would gift the many rulers that they encountered on the journeys into the interior luxury silk or silk blend clothes 'in return for permission and protection to trade in, or simply cross, their territory.'[73] Moreover Fee asserts that, while 'merchants employed' these luxury cloths to 'create and sustain social relations on which trade depended,' 'leaders – and ultimately the wider population – relied on them to mark and expand their own networks.'[74] Fee argues that after having received these luxury silk cloths, leaders in the East African interior would redistribute them to members of their family as well as their followers to strengthen the ties between them.

However, it was not only through imported cloth that the Indian Ocean played an important role in silk textile trade in East Africa. The Indian Ocean was also integral to silk cloth that was traditionally woven in East Africa. Fee explores the ways that the *akotifahana* cloth, woven entirely from sumptuous silk 'in the Merina Kingdom of Madagascar's central highlands,' was influenced by India and Southern Arabia with which 'the island enjoyed strong commercial ties from medieval times.'[75] Fee notes that silk imported from these countries that were part of the Indian Ocean trade network were in high demand in Merina but 'rather than dampen local weaving, textile imports stimulated production and innovation.'[76] Throughout her article, Fee explores the ways that '*akotifahana* production grew from professional weavers' ongoing experimentations' with imported Indian and Southern Arabian 'fibers, dyes, and patterns in response to a phenomenal expansion in trade and wealth and changing consumer demand.'[77]

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Sarah Fee, "'Cloths with names': Luxury textile imports in eastern Africa, c. 1800-1885," *Textile History*, 48, 1 (2017), 49.
[73] Ibid., 77.
[74] Ibid., 80.

This connecting of the regional Indian Ocean world with local communities in East Africa through silk cloth is also evident in 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa.' The final stanza of the *hees* begins by discussing the *subaacal xariir,* a cloth made either exclusively of silk or a silk blend referred in the *hees* as 'Gambaaladaan,' 'this cloth'. In wider Somali society, *gambo* refers to a head-cloth or headscarf worn by women, but in Banaadiri culture it is a cloth used to cover the entire body from head to foot. When the *hees* states 'Gambaaladaan,' it refers to the way that women at the *meel fadhiisis* are not only wearing a small amount of the silk cloth on their head to signify their heritage, but a copious amount that covers their entire body. They are literally drenched in the silk cloth and thus also drenched in their Indian Ocean heritage.

However, the women depicted in the oral song take the *subaacal xariir* and its rich Indian Ocean tradition, and they render it in such a way that they can also celebrate their Somali heritage. When in the stanza it states 'Gambaaladaan guntanee/Garbasaar xarirkan garabka fuulo' 'This knotted cloth, /This silk shawl on top of the shoulder' it refers to the traditional way that Somali women wore cloth in the form of a *guntiino* and a *garbasaar*. *Guntiino* is 'a long-stretched cloth that is tied over the shoulder and draped around the waist' while *garbasaar*, refers to 'a women's stole or shawl' that covers her shoulders and was traditionally worn by married women.[78] Thus, through taking the *subaacal xariir,* a cloth from the Indian Ocean world and wearing it in a traditional Somali way, the women in the *hees* honour both their Indian Ocean and Somali heritage through creating a material expression of their dual heritage.

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[75] Sarah Fee, "The shape of fashion: The historic silk brocades (akotifahana) of highland Madagascar," *African Arts,* 46, 3 (2013), 26.

[76] Ibid., 31.

[77] Ibid., 26.

[78] Author interview with Aisha Karama Saed, London, 21 Mar. 2018.

While anthropological scholarship shows the way that silk imported from the wider Indian Ocean world into East Africa was instrumental in building networks in the male world of commerce, 'Waa Guuriheeynnaa' shows the ways that the wearing of the *subaacal xariir* creates deep bonds between women at an intimate wedding celebration. In the first line of the stanza, the focus of the line is on 'guntanee.' *Guntan* is a verb which means 'get tied into a knot' or 'wrapped around.' When the *hees* states 'Gambaaladaan guntanee,' it highlights that during the *meel fadhiisis* ceremony the women would knot or tie the *subaacal xariir* around the bride's as well as each other's bodies to reflect the ties between them as kin. Moreover, they support each other in continuing their heritage through the wearing of the *garbasaar*. The second line of the stanza states 'Garbasaar xarirkan garabka fuulo,' 'This silk shawl on top of the shoulder,' and so refers to the way that the community of women take the *garbasar* and cover the bride's head and shoulders with it. *Garbasaar* consists of two words *garbo* (shoulders) and *saar* (put on top of, or 'place'). Through its name, it highlights that it should be worn on the shoulders, but they reinforce this when they state 'garabka fuulo' in the *hees*. *Garab* is a noun which means 'shoulder' and *fuul* is a verb which means 'get on top of' or 'climb up' to emphasis the physical act and choice that they make in 'putting' the cloth on their shoulders. They make a distinction between the *garbasaar*, the material item that is supposed to be worn on the shoulders, and the choice they make in continuing to put it on their shoulders in every wedding from the past to the present. While the first line of the stanza is in the past tense, this line is in the general present to highlight that they are continuing to perpetuate their Indian Ocean and Somali heritage every time that they place the *subaacal xariir* on their shoulders.

The closing two lines of the final stanza continues to consolidate the Banaadiri people's interconnected Indian Ocean and Somali heritage. The *hees* states 'Gaanuunkii oo hore waaye/ Ka gaarsan maynee,' 'It is the law that is previous /We do not divert from it.' *Gaanuun* derives from the Arabic loan word *qaanuun*, which means 'rule,' 'law,' 'or 'regulation.' The composer of the *hees* changed the spelling from *qaanuun* to *gaanuun* to fit into the rhyming scheme and the alliteration of 'g' sound throughout the Banaadiri song. The choice of an Arabic loan word is deliberate; the composer could have chosen other Somali words for law such as *xeer*. Instead, the composer bends an Arabic word to fit into this Banaadiri song, mirroring the way that the women at the *meel fadhiisis* have taken the *subaacal xariir* and tied or wrapped it in a Somali style. When in the *hees* it states ‘Gaanuunkii oo hore waaye,’ it highlights that the wearing of the *subaacal xariir* is not merely a tradition or culture but a ‘previous’ or ‘former’ law something which they are enforced or obliged to do. There is a juxtaposition between this line, which discusses the fact that the wearing of the *subaacal xariir* is a previous ‘law,’ and the final line of the *hees*, ‘Ka gaarsan maynee,’ ‘We do not divert from it,’ which is about choosing to continue the tradition into the present times. The *hees* shows that, for the Banaadiri women, choosing to continue both their Indian Ocean and Somali heritage through the wearing of the *subaacal xariir* is a choice and an obligation.

CONCLUSION

Although ‘Waa Guuriheeynnaa’ and Cristina Ali Farah’s *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* differ greatly in form and setting, both pieces of fiction explore the strong kinship networks between coastal women and how they use material culture as an act of female community making. In ‘Waa Guuriheeynnaa,’ it is through the rituals where the Banaadiri kinship group cleanse the bride’s skin with herbs and spices, or adorn the bride with henna or gold jewellery that the women articulate their kinship. These rituals require them to work in symbiosis and harmony; each leaning on the other to ensure that their cultural heritage is expressed and continued. In *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea*, it is through the sharing of old shoes, or advice about the wearing of a bra that the women are able to create bonds where they can be vulnerable with one another in an overwhelmingly precarious, alienating, and harsh environment. Both ‘Waa Guuriheeynnaa’ and *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* show the way that Indian Ocean and local cultural identities can be embodied forms of knowledge. In ‘Waa Guuriheeynnaa,’ Banaadiri women actively choose to embody their Indian Ocean heritage through enacting traditional wedding practices where their Banaadiri Indian Ocean cultural identity is shown through their skin, and the materials they wear on their body. The rendition of the song highlights the idea that culture is something that is created through the body rather just written-upon it. The evocative language used in the *hees* demonstrates the way that during the Banaadiri wedding customs the bride’s body becomes a moving embodied form of material culture that reflects the Banaadiri community’s Indian Ocean heritage and history of cross-cultural exchange of materials and customs. In contrast, *A Dhow is Crossing the Sea* complicates the idea that women’s bodies carry culture in an unproblematic way. In the narrative, women’s bodies carry a form of coastal and Indian Ocean culture which is defined by their past trauma of escaping the civil war and their collective isolation and loss associated with being refugees in a new country. These traumatic memories burrow into their bodies, etching into their psyches, and resulting in them reliving it perpetually in the diaspora.

APPENDIX: WAA GUURIHEEYNNAA

Gabar iyoone garoob [i]	*A maiden and a previously married woman,*
Gogoshan intii soo gableeyeen[ii]	*Those of us who have attended this meeting,*
Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa.[iii]	*have affection for the bride.*
Waa guuriheeynnaa.[iv]	*We are taking her to the marital home.*

Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa	*We have affection for the bride.*
Waa guuriheeynnaa	*We are taking her to the marital home.*

Gabar iyoone garoob,	*A maiden and a previously married woman,*
Gogoshan intii soo gableeyeen	*Those who have attended this meeting,*
Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa.	*have affection for the bride.*
Waa guuriheeynnaa.	*We are taking her to the marital home.*

Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa	*We have affection for the bride.*
Waa guuriheeynnaa	*We are taking her to the marital home.*

Gibilka nuurayo[v]	*The glowing skin,*
Giir giirka fuulo iyo guduudkan[vi]	*this reddish brown and layered dappled design,*
Gabdhahan golaha jooga[vii]	*these girls at the meeting place,*
Gacantooda ku saareen[viii]	*put it on with their hand.*

Gabdhahan golaha jooga	*these girls at the meeting place,*
Gacantooda ku saareen	*put it on with their hand.*

Gibilka nuurayo	*The glowing skin,*
Giir giirka fuulo iyo guduudkan	*this reddish-brown and layered dappled design*
Gabdhahan golaha jooga	*these girls at the meeting place,*
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Gabdhahan golaha jooga	*these girls at the meeting place,*
Gacantooda ku saareen	*put it on with their hand.*

Geniyaal oo dahab ah[ix]	*Guineas that are gold*
Gumuddeeda hoos luqunta loo geliyay.[x]	*were put on her ankles until the neck for her.*
Waa gaartayee.[xi]	*She achieved it.*
Guulle ugu soo gargaaray.[xii]	*God supported her with it.*

Waa gaartayee.	*She achieved it.*
Guulle ugu soo gargaaray.	*God supported her with it.*
Geniyaal oo dahab ah	*Guineas that are gold*
Gumuddeeda hoos luqunta loo geliyay.	*were put on her ankles until the neck for her.*
Waa gaartayee.	*She achieved it.*
Guulle ugu soo gargaaray.	*God supported her with it.*
Waa gaartayee.	*She achieved it.*
Guulle ugu soo gargaaray.	*God supported her with it.*
Gambaaladaan guntanee.[xiii]	*This knotted cloth,*
Garbasaar xarirkan garabka fuulo[xiv]	*This silk shawl on top of the shoulder,*
Gaanuunkii oo hore waaye[xv]	*It is the law that is previous*
Ka gaarsan maynee	*We do not divert from it.*
Gaanuunkii oo hore waaye	*It is the law that is previous*
Ka gaarsan maynee	*We do not divert from it.*
Gambaaladaan guntanee.	*This knotted cloth,*
Garbasaar xarirkan garabka fuulo	*This silk shawl on top of the shoulder,*
Gaanuunkii oo hore waaye	*It is the law that is previous*
Ka gaarsan maynee	*We do not divert from it.*
Gaanuunkii oo hore waaye	*It is the law that is previous*
Ka gaarsan maynee	*We do not divert from it.*
Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa	*We have affection for the bride.*
Waa guuriheeynnaa	*We are taking her to the marital home.*
Gacaltooyo aan u qabnaa	*We have affection for the bride.*
Waa guuriheeynnaa	*We are taking her to the marital home.*

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[i] *Garoob* means a woman who has previously been married so encapsulates both a 'divorcee' and 'widow.' The word *gabar* can mean 'a girl,' 'a maiden' or 'a virgin.' It is most commonly used in day to day Somali speech to refer to 'a girl' but I have chosen the translation of 'a maiden' because in the context of this song it is being juxtaposed with the 'garoob,' the previously married woman.

[ii] *Gogol* as a noun refers to a 'meeting' or a 'discussion.' Interestingly as a verb *gogol* refers to the 'spreading out' of something (mats, cloth, material) upon which people can sit or lie on. In the song it implies that the meeting is taking place on the floor and the group are sitting on a large cloth, or material or mats. Soo is a directional word which refers to movement in the direction of the speaker or 'towards the speaker.' *Gableeyeene* means attended.

[iii] *Gacaltooyo* refers to 'affection' or a 'close personal relationship.' The verb *qab* can mean to 'have,' 'hold,' or 'possess.' *Qabnaa* is the general present tense of the verb *qab*. This line literally means 'We have affection for her' but I have used the word bride instead because when the song is being performed it is clear that they are referring to the bride. I want to reflect this clarity in the translation.

[iv] *Guuriheeynna* derives from the verb *guur* which can mean 'to move' or 'drive people to migrate.' *Guuriheeynna* means to take the bride or groom or both to the marital home. In a different context *guuri* can also mean 'arrange a marriage,' 'give in marriage' or 'marry off.' There author is playing on the multiple meanings embedded in this word.

[v] When the author states 'gibilka nuurayo' 'The glowing skin,' he is referring to the anointing and cleansing ritual of the bride's body which takes place a few days before the wedding ceremonies begin. *Gibil* means 'skin' or 'complexion.' Although *nuur* in the dictionary is a verb which means to 'give light,' or 'shine,' I translated it as 'glow' as it is referring to the way that the anointing ritual draws out the Banaadiri bride's Indian Ocean heritage from within her body and emits it through her skin.

[vi] *Giir* refers to a 'dappled,' 'piebald' or 'two coloured item.' *Fuul* is a verb which means 'get on top of' or 'climb up.' *Guduud* is a noun which can mean both 'red' or reddish-brown depending on the context. As the author is referring to the henna design on the bride's skin, I have translated it as 'reddish-brown.' The demonstrative suffix *kan* attached to the word g*aduud* is the equivalent of the English word for 'this.'

[vii] *Gabdho* means 'girls.' *Gabdhahan* means 'these girls.' *Gole* has a myriad of meanings. It can mean 'enclosure,' 'chamber,' 'verandah,' 'meeting place,' 'council,' 'committee,' 'national assembly,' 'contest' and 'match.' In the context of the song, which is performed at a wedding celebration, it means 'meeting place.'

[viii] *Gacantooda* means 'their hand.' *Saar* is a verb which means 'put on top of,' or 'place.'

[ix] *Geni* is a noun which refers to the 'Guinea.' The conjuction *oo* in this context is the head of a relative or subordinate clause and depending on the context can mean 'which,' 'that,' 'who' or 'while.' In the context of this line, I translated it as 'that.' *Dahab* means 'gold' and *ah* is the general present reduced paradigm form of the verb '*yahay*,' 'to be.'

[x] *Hoos* can mean the 'lower part,' 'underneath,' 'bottom,' 'under,' 'below,' 'down,' 'low,' 'lower,' 'inferior.' *Luqun* is 'a neck.' *Gumud* is a Banaadiri word that refers to the elbows, knees flap, and ankles. When the author says 'Gumuddeeda hoos' he refers to her ankles. *Geli* is a verb which means 'put in,' 'put on,' 'put into,' 'insert,' 'cause to enter.'

[xi] *Gaar* is a verb which means 'reach,' 'attain,' or 'achieve.'

[xii] *Guulle* literally means 'giver of victory.' When Somali people use the word *Guulle* they are referring to 'God.' *Gargaar* is a verb which means to 'help,' or 'support.'

[xiii] *Gambaala* is a Banaadiri word for a cloth that can be used to cover the head, body and shoulders. *Guntan* is a verb which means 'be knotted,' or 'get tied into a knot.'

[xiv] *Garbasaar* is a noun which literally consists of two words *garbo* (shoulders) and *saar* (put on top of, or 'place'). *Garbasaar* refers to 'a women's stole or shawl' which covers her sholders. *Xariir* is a noun which means 'silk.' *Garab* is a noun which means 'shoulder.' *Fuul* is a verb which means 'get on top of' or 'climb up.'

[xv] *Qaanuun* is a noun which can mean 'rule,' 'law,' 'ordinance,' or 'regulation' and dervies from Arabic word for law. The author of the poem changed the spelling from *qaanuun* to *gaanuun* to keep with the alliteration of *g* which features throughout the poem. *Hore* is an adjective which depending on the context of the sentence can mean 'first,' 'former,' 'previous,' earlier,' 'forth,' 'fro,' 'forwards,' or 'before.' I have chosen 'previous' as it best suits this context and reflects the old traditions that the song is referring to.