

more powerful people around the throne. These struggles not only help us understand how he came to head such a comparatively obscure ministry as the Ministry of Mines, but on a broader level they illustrate (from an insider's viewpoint) how power was exercised in Haile Sellassie's court. Though the emperor was officially sovereign, we see clearly that he was forced to compromise to please many powerful people in order to maintain his power. One of the clearest examples of this is seen when Patriarch Tewofilos of the Orthodox Church accused Ato Emmanuel before Haile Sellassie. Trapped between his desire to maintain both religious freedom and also to maintain good relations with the Orthodox Church, "the atmosphere grew rather tense and the Emperor appeared to be ill at ease. Noticing this, one of the ministers remarked, 'Your majesty we have understood the problem; if the discussion could be stopped, we would go out and try to bring about an agreement' " (p. 258).

During his days as ambassador to New Delhi, Rome, and London, Ato Emmanuel was involved in ongoing discussions through correspondence with the emperor. It is interesting to find lengthy quotes from this correspondence on such topics as a possible plan to settle displaced Indians from South Africa in Ethiopia, the British plans for "Greater Somalia", relationships with larger powers, and the post-war attitude of Italy toward Ethiopia. Of wider interest, Ato Emmanuel wrote to the emperor about his perception of causes and circumstances of the deposing of the monarchies in Egypt and Iraq. "I reported in such detail not only for its news value but because I had the feeling that . . . it might serve as a grave warning to Ethiopia's political leadership and governance . . . but judging from the two grave political crises that engulfed Ethiopia later on, it did not appear to me that he gave the matter serious thought" (p. 162).

Chapter 15, entitled "In the Service of the Church", is a collection of 24 briefer sections on different phases of his work in EECMY, ranging in length from a half page to nine pages. These are not as strictly chronological in that some of them follow topics through several decades, for example, section 21, titled "The State of the Synods." Though some are narratives of events in which Ato Emmanuel himself was only marginally involved, the point of view is usually first person.

The perspective of the latter part of the book, dealing with his service in EECMY, remains the memoir of a leader. He served as President of the

EECMY while also a minister in Haile Sellassie's government; consequently the two functions occasionally overlapped, such as when on several occasions he contacted the emperor on behalf of the church for the granting of land for building projects. He was still serving in the church when the Derg seized power. Ato Emmanuel captures the climate of the period as illustrated by his first person account of the seizure of the EECMY central office building and his arrest, with other church leaders, in Bako as they discussed synod administrative plans.

There is much interesting information here for contemporary church historians, especially regarding the evolving relationships between EECMY and various missions, the organization and initial growth and struggles of synods within the church, the incorporation of the Bethel church into EECMY, Ato Emmanuel's statement of the proper relationship between "development" and "evangelism", and his perception of Ethiopian Christians' contribution to church unity in Africa. One minor point of correction: the Finnish Mission Society was renamed the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission; the Finnish Lutheran Mission is a different group (p. 272).

Beyond church historians, this book is of considerable interest to those who study the inner workings, policies, and intrigues of Haile Selassie's court, especially from 1935 through 1975. What emerges is a portrait of a man who, because of his innate intelligence and educational opportunities, rose from humble origins and strove to serve his country, his emperor, and his God to the best of his ability. Much can be garnered from this autobiography which so thoroughly comments on such a critical period of twentieth-century Ethiopian history.

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Aman, the Story of a Somali Girl

Aman (As Told to Virginia Lee Barnes and Janice Boddy)
London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995. Pp. xiv + 349.

This successful book was first published in 1994, and has seen one hardcover and at least two paperback editions. This British Bloomsbury edition features a Somali veiled girl on the cover who is probably the opposite of Aman, the woman who describes her adventurous and outrageous life in these pages. But the picture (like the one on the

hardcover edition, where a hardly visible woman sits on a high bed in a room where the morning light has just filtered in) serves to draw Western readers into the unknown world of women in a ravaged, stateless, but still mysterious African country they know mainly from dramatic television coverage and newspaper headlines.

The book makes for absorbing reading as a tale of a Somali woman recounting her youth in a colonized country, gaining independence, and edging into the modern era. Through the story, in which the vulnerability of women in a thoroughly patriarchal and divided society is convincingly and painfully shown, we see the prelude of the breakdown of Somalia into crisis and chaos. The story covers the period up to about 1970, that is, before the deterioration and final demise of the Siyad Barre regime in January 1991. The narrative style is personal, lively, and fast-moving. There are detailed descriptions and dramatic stories about her circumcision, her impossible relationship with an Italian boy, leading to tragedy; her failed first marriage concluded by her for money; her first intercourse (rape); unhappy love; night-life in Mogadishu; and the affairs, sexual relations, infidelity, and struggles experienced with men. There is no doubt that the author is a good storyteller with a great memory, although many details appear not to refer to actual fact but were filled in during the dramatic run of the story as it was told. The story of an abused woman—though from a very different socio-cultural setting—also fits in with current preoccupations in Western society.

The text as presented is an assemblage of different sessions of narrative, edited by the late Lee Barnes, who first “discovered” Aman, and Janice Boddy, who finished the work after Lee’s premature death. Both these anthropologists have done a great job in collecting the story and seeing it through to publication.

However, the book should neither be read for a deep insight into Somali culture and values, nor as an ethnographically informative account. First of all, apart from the mere rhetorical assurances by Aman that Somali Islamic society is admirable, and from her account we get only glimpses of how it actually works and then only on the margins of a life which is exceptional in its careless flouting of almost all Somali moral codes. Second, the story is fairly egocentric and self-possessed, the author trying *retrospectively* to show that she “could not help it” and was the “victim of

circumstances.” The latter is partly true, but one also can clearly see how she, in her younger days, purposely broke all the rules. Aman does not emerge from these pages as a particularly admirable person. There are many details which illustrate this, such as her manipulating relatives and girlfriends who try to help her (pp. 161, 171-72), her obsession with money, her cultivation of lying into almost an art (pp. 139, 202, 217-20), not making any effort to understand or appreciate Somali social and family values, and putting her family to shame while not caring about it (p. 204). Indeed, the person who impresses the reader most is probably Aman’s *mother*, a strong and dignified woman who fights to make a living for herself and her children against great odds, abuse, and insult and who does not budge or sacrifice her dignity. Aman budes, gives in, and sells out frequently, and she brings herself into unnecessary trouble many times. Although the reader recognizes her underlying courage and her desperation, one is inclined to think that maybe she was indeed, as the Italian doctor who once treated her said, “simply a terrible girl” (p. 135).

Nevertheless, there are telling episodes on the social and cultural conditions of Somalia: on the social instability created by arranged marriage and/or hasty divorce; the decreasing power of relatives over the young generation; the domineering and exploitative sexual behavior of Somali males; the calculating, manipulative behavior of women in response to that behavior (present in every more-or-less serious relationship that Aman enters into); the perceived divisions and tensions between “superior” and “inferior” clans (Aman herself is from a “superior” one; my guess is the Haber Gidir Hawiye); and, perhaps as the general underlying theme, the problematic entrance of “modernity” into a traditional society, as evidenced in the urban economy with its “freedom,” its emerging night life, cinemas and bars, which change the sensibilities of a whole generation.

There is not much direct information on political matters such as the moment of independence in 1960, or the regime that followed. Aman was not the kind of person to develop any interest in politics. But after the coup of 1969, political matters enter deeper into the private life of even the most superficial person, and in chapter 23 (p. 246f.) we see the reflection of this. One cannot expect a sociological analysis of socio-political development in the account of a young girl, but one becomes curious

about how the common people in Somalia talked about the future and about the political and socio-economic problems of the country at certain crucial junctures. However, good contextual information about Somali society is provided in the Afterword (pp. 289-336) by Janice Boddy. Here, many aspects of the history, social organization, culture, and political development in Somalia are carefully described. Her clear explanations on the place of the mother-centered household and the various kinship obligations in a patrilineal society give more insight into Aman's story.

The genre of (female) autobiography in social anthropology and social history is well established, and one is reminded of books like *Nisa* (1983) by Marjorie Shostak (on a Kung San woman) and earlier examples like *Baba of Karo* (1951) by Mary Smith (on a Muslim Hausa woman). Aman's book is perhaps a better read than these two, but less thought-provoking. It is a much more self-centered personal story of an independent, stubborn woman trying to justify her life. Like these two books, *Aman* also contains contextual information on the society of the protagonist, but one suspects that the impact of this book on anthropology and gender studies will not be as great as Shostak's book. While *Nisa* may still have been fairly representative of her culture, the same cannot be said about Aman, who seems exceptional. This aspect could have been explored more in the Afterword, or perhaps it will be in future research on the text of Aman compared with others. Catherine Linde's valuable book *Life Stories. The Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) could be of methodological value here. Reading Aman's story we get curious about the young woman who went through the same period but stayed in Somalia (Aman herself, born in 1952, left the country at age 17 for Kenya and Tanzania, and has lived in the US since 1985) and who tried to survive in a changing Somali society in the countryside or in the city. Aman reacted by throwing herself fully into the urban, modernizing society of Mogadishu, neglecting the traditional values, family solidarity, and education. She was basically an uprooted country girl, without education, unfit for city life except as an outcast or "girl on the run," as she called herself. Janice Boddy rightly remarks in her Afterword that Aman is "equivocal about her culture" (p. x). That is a big understatement. In her behavior, as described, Aman shows little concern for Somali values. Only

in this actual narrative, told many years later to a non-Somali audience, does she refer to such values.

But, in comparison with the two books mentioned above, the tragic and chaotic story of Aman reveals the very different, more disintegrated, and more aggressive nature of African societies of today. Aman is the issue of a generation spoiled by irresponsible colonialism, careless post-colonial elites, and failed modernization. The continuing male chauvinism and "control of women"—directed against the actual independence and the vital contributions they make in daily life—and the deep and violently expressed divisions between politicized kinship-units have, meanwhile, further undermined the social fabric of this country.

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The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u

Jean Boyd
London: Frankcass, 1989. Pp. xx, 168.

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Jean Boyd has drawn on her nearly three decades of experience in Nigeria to write this biography of Nana Asma'u (1793-1865), who was the daughter of jihad leader Shehu Usuman dan Fodio (d. 1817), the sister of Shehu's successor Muhammad Bello (d. 1837), and a prolific and influential scholar in her own right. It is as a work of history rather than a biography that this book succeeds. Boyd manages to rescue from oblivion the important career of a seminal figure in the jihad, as well as bring to light the much-ignored role of women in the Sokoto Caliphate. The author readily admits that this is an introductory treatment of her subject: Nana Asma'u's voluminous writings remain unpublished and largely unstudied by specialists, as do indeed many of the works produced by the Sokoto jihadists. Yet it seems certain that this book will encourage further studies of Nana Asma'u as well as the roles of women in the jihad movements in general; hence, whatever its shortcomings, it represents a valuable and much appreciated contribution to the historiography of Sudanic Africa.

Nana Asma'u's life makes for fascinating reading. Born in the village of Degel the very year the Shehu composed his famous *Ihya' al-Sunna*, she was raised in an environment of scholarship and Sufism and witnessed the evolution of the Shehu's movement from its earliest conflict with Gobir,