Subjectivity is one of those slippery concepts that can have different meanings in different contexts. The Oxford English Dictionary has numerous entries for it, including “The mind, as the ‘subject’ in which ideas inhere; that to which all mental representations or operations are attributed; the thinking or cognizant agent; the self or ego.”¹ The same dictionary provides this additional explanation of the origin and use of the word subjective in modern philosophy: “The tendency in modern philosophy after Descartes to make the mind’s consciousness of itself the starting-point of enquiry led to the use of subjectum for the mind or ego considered as the subject of all knowledge, and since Kant this has become the general philosophical use of the word (with its derivatives subjective, etc.).” Subjectivity is identified with a more intense consciousness of oneself as an individual and in this sense is a mark of modernity.²

Domination attempts to produce certain kinds of subjects and particular types of behavior depending on the overall context. Colonial subjectivity is a form of subjectivity produced in a colonial setting. It is characterized by a heightened consciousness of one’s colonial situation and the constraints imposed by it. Of course, domination also produces resistance in one form or another, covert or overt, and it is in the interaction between these two crisscrossing currents that colonial subjectivity is produced. Even when the direct colonial situation comes to an end, colonial subjectivity continues to exist in the form of post-colonial subjectivity. In this paper, I am focusing on the subjectivity that arose out of the interaction between Somalilanders on the one hand, and
European explorers as well as colonial administrators on the other. The formation of the subject is not one-sided but is bi-directional, meaning that in the encounter between two peoples, individuals or cultures, both sides of the equation, to a greater or lesser degree, have an impact on each other. I shall trace and analyze the contours, development, and consequences of the contact between Europeans and Somalis in the nineteenth century in what eventually came to be known as the British Somaliland Protectorate, and its later colonial and postcolonial manifestations. I argue that the Somali subjectivity that resulted from the contacts between Europeans and Somalis neither entirely fit the colonial ideology of trying to dominate Somalis nor completely matched the idea that Somalis had of themselves prior to their contacts with Europeans in the nineteenth century.

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European explorers in the Horn of Africa usually held certain beliefs, ideas and values which were predominant in their lifetime, and that included notions about themselves and others. Broadly speaking, British explorers in the nineteenth century subscribed to Victorian notions about themselves and about the people amongst whom they traveled. They often saw themselves on a quest to serve their nation or to advance the cause of science or to promote civilization or some combination thereof. News of their activities was followed through the press in their country of origin, and they were treated as heroes upon their return to their home countries.

Although, in general, the nineteenth century and early twentieth explorers and administrators had similar mindsets, yet there were also enough important differences between them that they could be put in three main categories: 1) hunters or explorers such as C. J. Cruttenden, John Manning Speke and C.V.A. Peel who had only briefly visited Somaliland or parts of Somaliland and who gave mostly prejudiced, inaccurate, and self-serving accounts about Somaliland; 2) Douglas Jardine (Secretary to the Administration of Somaliland from 1916 to 1921), Dr Ralph Drake-Brockman and A. Donaldson Smith who gave inconsistent and at times sympathetic portrayals of Somalis and Somali society; and 3) eccentric personalities like Sir Richard Burton whose observations regarding Somalis were prejudiced, even racist, yet provided some useful information about Somalis and Somali society.
Belonging to different categories, however, does not mean that the various explorers, hunters, and administrators did not have some commonalities. On the contrary, they had quite a bit in common. They were often sponsored, financed, and promoted by the same networks of patrons, government agencies and scientific societies. Not only were they usually affiliated with the same institutions, they also had similar cultural and historical preoccupations, one of which was concern with origins.

The British travel writer Richard Burton divided the inhabitants of the East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula into three principal categories:

1. The Aborigines, such as the Negroes, the Bushmen, Hottentots and other races, having such physiological peculiarities as the steatopyge, the tablier, and other developments described, in 1815, by the great Cuvier.
2. The almost pure Caucasian of the northern regions, west of Egypt: their immigration comes within the range of comparatively modern history.
3. The half-castes in Eastern Africa are represented principally by the Abyssinians, Gallas, Somal, Swahili, Hamitic, and Kafirs.4

As can be seen from the above outline, Burton considers Somalis as belonging to the “half castes” but his judgment is not conclusive because he also says, “The origin of the Somal is a matter of modern history,”5 then adds, “The written genealogies of the Somal were, it is said, stolen by the Sherifs of Yemen, who feared to leave with the wild people documents that prove the nobility of their descent.”6 This assertion goes against a fundamental belief of Somalis who pride themselves on knowing exactly their genealogy as a result of it being taught to them as children and then memorizing it by heart. Burton also confuses Berber with Somal and says, “they are descended from the Himyar chiefs Sanhaj (Sinhagia) and Sumamah, and they arrived in the epoch of the conquest of Africa by the king Afrikus (Scipio Africanus?).” He further elaborates that the Somali “are nothing but a slice of the great Galla nation Islamized and Semiticized by repeated immigrations from Arabia. In the Kamus we also read that Samal is the name of the father of a tribe, so called because he thrust out (samala) his brother’s eye.”7
Burton’s tortured discourse on Somali genealogy indicate that there is no single explanation or source of Somali origin. The accounting for origin is part of the larger phenomenon of nineteenth century racial science which also involves focus on body parts, for example the “Steatopyge,” or protruded buttocks, that he attributes to those he classifies as aboriginal women. Cuvier was one of the celebrated practitioners of this racial science, hence Burton’s praise of him.

This racial science aims to account for all humanity. And in this vein, Burton gives his own explanation for the origins of other ethnic groups and nationalities who live in geographical proximity to Somalis such as the Abyssinians and Gallas. By the Abyssinians, Burton seems to mean northern Ethiopians, chiefly Amhara and Tigriniya speaking northerners. He considers Gallas of separate yet related ancestry from the Abyssinians. A. Donaldson Smith follows a similar pattern for the classification of the peoples of the Horn of Africa but he sometimes uses the term Shoan interchangeably with Abyssinian.

Burton is also concerned with establishing “the shape of the country.” In other words, the Somali country cannot be just a generic space but must be mapped and its contents and contours defined. This is part of the mission of the explorer. To deploy what he already knows and what he is seeing around him during the exploration to begin the process of recording the natural features of the country, peculiarities of the landscape, customs of the people, their beliefs and religion.

During the mapping of the country and its people, explorers typically displayed what is commonly referred to as the “monarch of all I survey” syndrome. This mapping and surveying involves the creation of categories based on hierarchy and exclusion. While depicting themselves as heroic and noble, Western explorers often judged non-Europeans according to whatever Western values that would put Europeans in an advantageous position and would devaluate non-Europeans.

There are narrative techniques that are deployed to achieve this. One of these techniques is that of distancing through making the other exotic, different, or scary. Another technique is to conflate the native people with nature. Thus A. Donaldson Smith associates his Somali companions with the animals in the caravan: “The boys, as well as the camels, were in a ridiculous state of exhaustion, being enervated by
the long stay on the coast.” Speke even makes a stronger comparison between blacks and animals: “As soon as the morning was well aired with the sun, and the black men had recovered from the torpor which the cold seemed to produce on them as it does on lizards and snakes, I struck out for Jid Ali.” Richard Burton takes the association between Somalis and animals into the world of mythological creatures by describing one of his Somali acquaintances as “a little Polyphemous.” Furthermore, Somalis are portrayed as being able to comprehend only the surface of things, of being unable to see the crux of matters, and of being overly suspicious. It is this attitude that makes a Speke portray a very logical question asked by Somalis as unduly suspicious.

A third technique is to attribute Somali progress or amazing constructions in the country to foreigners or to foreign influence. Richard Burton, for instance, claims upon encountering an intricately designed formation in Somaliland, “The same authority declared it to be the work of the ‘old ancient’ Arabs.” It was also common among explorers to paint the relationship between themselves and their Somali employees as one between a master and his servant when there was evidence that the Somalis did not see it that way, and thought of it as relations between an employer and employee. Explorers often emphasized ad nauseam how they were served food by indigenous people, how their rifle was handed to them, and how they told their servant to get out of the way before they shot an animal. In addition, explorers such as Speke claimed that whatever efforts Somalis made to undercut or subvert European projects, Somalis would inevitably fail, as if their failure was preordained.

Naming places is one the most common ways by which Europeans attempted to put their stamp on the territories they explored:

The entire British royal family came to be associated with the geography of central Africa. In addition to Victoria Falls, there were Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, Lake Edward, and Lake George. Some travelers humbly paid tribute to those who helped them realize their projects. Murchison and Ripon Falls thus made their appearance on the map, named after two presidents of the Royal Geographical Society in London. Other explorers, with less modesty, went as far as to name the sites they discovered after themselves: Henry Morton Stanley, for example (Mount Stanley and Stanley Falls).
British explorers did not only name sites in Africa and elsewhere after their royal family, “To impress African rulers, the British explorers John Hanning Speke and James Augustus Grant, among others, had no scruples in claiming to be her sons.”18 Of the explorers who are the focus of this paper, A. Donaldson Smith had “Lake Donaldson” named after him, Richard Burton had a lizard “Tiloquan Burton” named after him, and a rat “Pectinator Spekei” was named in honor of John Speke. While giving new European names to African sites, rivers, flora and fauna appealed to national and individual pride of the explorers, knowing the original native name at times proved to be crucial for the outcome of the exploration project, as happened when “Stanley learned from an African chief that the river was called the Congo. There was no more room for doubt.”19

The Explorers also relied not only on naming locations, plants, and rivers but also on making wide generalizations about Somalis and other peoples in the Horn of Africa. A. Donaldson Smith at times questioned what he saw. For instance, he observed about Somaliland’s Haud where “it seems to you that you are approaching a range of hills; but as you progress you find that these are only optical illusions.” He also notes that this optical illusion “is quite characteristic of the countries in Africa.”20 By generalizing, the author stakes a claim for wide knowledge that goes beyond a specific group. Sometimes generalization and implied expertise are projected through comparisons of landscapes such as Speke’s comparing of “the Nogal or white stone country” to “the Haud or red stoneless country.”

A cornerstone of the explorers’ efforts was the extensive documentation in the form of prints, drawings, photographs, and maps.21 Even in the midst of very difficult travel conditions, they continued writing. A. Donaldson Smith observed, “Gillett and Dodson now busied themselves writing letters, while I spent the next two days in preparing copies of my maps, and in writing articles for publication in the “Royal Geographical Society’s Journal” and other periodicals.”22 To carry out such extensive documentation, “in addition to books, the more talented travelers took drawing materials on their expeditions. Scientific equipment was packed for use in topographical surveys and orientation.”23
Through documentation, explorers erect a sort of monument to themselves and their country of origin. Isabel Burton, Richard Burton’s wife, noted the connection between writing, memory and national pride:

The memorial edition of the works of Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton is dedicated to all English-speaking peoples, who respect and honour the name of Richard Burton, the soldier, linguist, scholar, explorer and discoverer, poet, author, and benefactor to science; in recognition of the labours of a long and honourable life, devoted to the Service of his Country, and to the advancement of its knowledge and its literature.24

Isabel elaborates further on the relationship between monument and memory:

A material Monument to his memory has already been erected by his countrymen in the shape of a handsome contribution to the beautiful Mausoleum-tent in stone and marble to contain his remains; but I also hoped to erect a less material, but more imperishable, Monument to his name, by making this unique hero better known to his countrymen by his Works, which have hitherto not been sufficiently known, not extensively enough published, and issued perhaps at a prohibitive price.25

In a way, the trophies from hunting were also served as monuments. As Anne Hugon wrote, “No African expedition was complete without its shooting trophies.”26

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Documentation about Somaliland and Africa in general did not start with Victorian explorers. The African coast was well known to Europeans for centuries but the interior of the Horn of Africa was less known to them. There were already Jesuits in Ethiopia by the sixteenth century. Coastal cities along the Red Sea and in the Gulf of Aden such as Zeila and Berbera had association and relations with the Ottomans. The Italian traveler Ludovicus Arthema wrote about Somaliland. Somaliland was also part of the Indian Ocean Trade system that extended all the way from Egypt at the northern tip of the Red Sea to Indonesia and China. Therefore Somaliland was not an isolated outpost that was discovered by Victorian travelers. Somalis already had an economy based on the circulation of money when European travelers arrived in the
nineteenth century. A. Donaldson Smith stated that the Lafeki settlement was the last place where he could use money. Richard Burton too, attests that the country had a money-based economy when he visited Somaliland. He says about the mules secured for him by Sharmakay:

For the cheapest I paid twenty-three, for the dearest twenty-six dollars, besides a Riyal upon each, under the name of custom dues and carriage. The Hajj doubtless exaggerated the price, but all were good animals, and the traveller has no right to complain, except when he pays dear for a bad article.27

Burton also reported that Harar even had its own currency. Somalis were not only familiar with money, but some of them had already traveled to Europe in the nineteenth century. Smith said about his journey of exploration that six of his Somali companions had travel experiences before they joined him.

Despite the overall constraining context of European journeys of exploration, Somali assistants gained some new experiences from those journeys. A. Donaldson Smith observed up close the roles that some of his eighty-two Somali companions performed during his journey:

Each European was usually accompanied by four boys, Fred’s boys escorting him when shooting, while the boys I gave Dodson, and reserved for myself, I trained to assist in the work of collecting natural-history specimens. They soon became very keen in their quest for insects and butterflies and anything they thought might be of interest to me.28

Somalis particularly played a crucial role as interpreters for European explorers. It was the Somalis who interpreted for A. Donaldson Smith with so many different nationalities: the Shoan military leader, the Gallas, and the Masai. Since Smith’s Somali companions were recruited from Aden, they probably also knew Arabic, and of course they must also have known English, the language of the European for whose benefit they were doing the translation. The following anecdote narrated by A Donaldson Smith gives a sense of the extent of Somali assistants’ participation in European exploration: “When Somalis ran into Prince Boris’s journey, they found their relatives among his companions.”29

As a measure of how far Somalis were already being integrated into the colonial apparatus, even before their own country was colonized, it is worthy to note that several of Burton’s assistants during his journey through Somaliland had worked for the British as policemen in Aden.
In his book Dark Companions, Donald Herbert Simpson, highlights some of the Africans who played crucial roles in European exploration of Africa, and some of them were Somalis.30

Aden was a usual stop in the preparation for travel to Somaliland. In Aden explorers would buy “cloth, brass wire, and beads for trading purposes” whereas “Provisions for the Europeans of the party, and the fancy articles for trading, ammunition, and all the rest of the impedimenta” were sent from London.31

It was not only a matter of buying supplies, for the British administration in Aden as well as in Somaliland (for explorers like A. Donaldson Smith who came to Somaliland after its takeover by Britain) were involved in assisting, advising, and directing the activities of the explorers. This division of labor was designed to make the most effective use of Western assets in the region. Some of the officials that A. Donaldson Smith dealt with in Aden were Lieutenant-Colonel Sealy, Political Agent for the Somali Coast at Aden, Captain L. Z. Cox, Acting Resident at Berbera, and Mrs. Cox. A. Donaldson Smith acknowledged the assistance he received and said, “Captain L. Z. Cox - Acting Resident at Berbera - and Mrs. Cox did what they could to make our stay as agreeable as possible.”32

Lieutenant-Colonel Sealy also played an important part in the signing of the contract between the Somali employees on the exploration journey and A. Donaldson Smith. A. Donaldson Smith described the agreement and what it involved this way:

I had an agreement drawn up binding my men, in as strong as I was able, to go with me where I wished and to obey my commands, - I agreeing to pay for one month’s wages in advance, and no further sum until the return of the expedition to the coast (except in certain cases where the men had families, and I arranged to pay these a small sum monthly). In case of a man’s death, his heirs were to receive the money due up to the time of his death, but no more; and any deserter would lose all claim to wages. Lieutenant-Colonel Sealy, Political Agent for the Somali coast at Aden, kindly had the agreements properly witnessed, and it was impressed upon the men that any case of desertion would be severely dealt with.33

In trips to Somaliland’s interior, the next important stop after Berbera, a center of trade, usually was Hargeisa which A. Donaldson Smith described as “a large, important settlement of Somalis, governed by a
very intelligent and friendly old chief.”34 A. Donaldson Smith’s obser-
vation showed that despite British presence in the country, Somalis at
this point had a measure of local autonomy. Hargeisa’s chief provided
Smith with “a tamasho, or equestrian exhibition” which included
“Somalis, mounted on gayly caparisoned ponies.”35

The explorers had certain assumptions and ideas which they con-
sidered European and therefore valid and superior to “native ideas”
which could be assigned whatever place seemed advantageous to the
Europeans. An example of “native ideas,” according to Smith was that
of natives getting a few cheap items from Westerners and thinking
they were worth a lot.36

A. Donaldson Smith had his own “European” ideas but he was also
aware that Somalis had their own ideas which were different from his.
He classifies the ideas of Somalis in the general category of “native
ideas.”37 Speaking about one of the camps during their journey from
Somaliland to Lamu, he stated that “Everything was in order in the
camp.” This is an indication of how important having order was in
the camps, for things often seemed to be on the brink of falling apart.
In this case, the only two constituent parts of this order were Dodson’s
collection of “rare birds” and “hard work.” The word “everything”
here was probably an exaggeration but it was a sign of the difficulties
of the situation.

The proposed order did not exist in a vacuum but was undergirded
by certain views, attitudes, and beliefs. Training their Somali compan-
ions in the use of rifles and taking a specific position in defense forma-
tions in case of an attack on the camp, the collecting and skinning of
animals were all part of establishing a certain order during the journey.
Smith gave a sense of the prevailing order during exploration:

> I led the column, with Dodson and twenty-five boys spread out in line
> abreast, while Haji Idris, with twenty-five more men, brought up the
> rear, the camels, oxen, and mules being massed together in the centre
> and guided by the remaining Somalis.38

As much as some Europeans downplayed it, they clearly benefited
from Somali expertise in long distance travel by foot and with little
water. Smith himself attested to the tremendous physical endurance
of Somalis. An important point worth reiterating about these caravans,
was that the Somalis did not see themselves as servants but as employ-
ees doing a job for a fee, whereas Europeans would try hard to portray
this relationship as that between a servant and his master. A European may have led the column, but the Somalis had an advantage in that they were often traveling within their own territory and were much used to travelling by caravan, while caravan travel in the desert or the jungle was not part of European traditions. Still, an essential component of the order championed by European explorers was that “European aspirations must be represented as uncontested.”

In general, Victorian travelers followed a certain template that was started by earlier travelers and that accumulated until it became a standard way of describing foreign peoples, but within this uniformity there were individual differences in terms of emphasis, attitude, and to some extent, even style of writing. The net-effect is that a distorted sense of the other as an inept, morally flawed and dangerous entity was produced which by implication made it seem inevitable, even necessary, that he should be handled and managed. In this sense it could be said that travel writing paved the way for the imposition of colonial administration.

The former Governor of Somaliland Sir Geoffrey Archer, who later became Governor of Uganda and then Governor of Sudan, wrote about the colonial officer’s ability to handle men:

Three names stand out as the architects of a magnificent British achievement – Cromer, Kitchener, Wingate – and it fell to Wingate during the course of seventeen years as Governor General of the Sudan, from December 1899, to December, 1916, to build up an administration second to none in our Colonial Empire. In those early years the means at his disposal were small. The whole of the higher administrative personnel in the Sudan were composed of British officers attached to the Egyptian Army. Though none of them had any previous administrative training they were all experienced in the handling of men, having had large bodies of Sudanese and Egyptian soldiers under their command. They were put in charge of the provinces as governors.

The attempts by the explorers and later the colonial administrators to impose their will on Somalis often triggered a counter reaction by Somalis which included various degrees of complicity and resistance. It also resulted in an unstable outcome where, through contacts with
Europeans, the old order was disrupted and the new situation was full of contradictions. For example, many of the Europeans operated under an assumption of European superiority, yet they relied on Somalis for carrying out very important tasks such as guiding them, feeding them, interpreting for them, and protecting them. In other words, there were indications in the travel writing itself that the indigenous people, or at least some of them, had positive qualities and that the Europeans were not supermen.

Due to these contradictions and inaccuracies, the writings of explorers have a serious credibility problem. Sensationalism designed to cater to the audiences back home in the European metropolis is a prominent contributing factor to that loss of credibility. The credibility of the explorers is an issue that is of concern to both their defenders and detractors. In fact Tim Jeal argues that the famous explorer, Henry Stanley, had exaggerated the violence he committed on Africans in order to sell more books. In other words, Jeal uses Stanley’s words to show that what Stanley wrote was untrue and, therefore, Stanley should be exonerated from the crimes that were attributed to him.41 James Bruce who explored Ethiopia used to be referred to as “the lying Abyssinian.” In addition, the authors of the book *The Africa that Never Was* propose that much of what the explorers wrote was inaccurate or outright false.42 According to Geoffrey Archer, Count Teleki of Lake Rudolf fame called all explorers liars, including Speke and Burton, and said that he himself would have lied if it would have served his purposes.43

The explorers’ accounts could be called lies in a deeper sense than that meant by Count Teleki, in that they claim to discover something that is already known. The explorers’ discoveries are true for Europeans who did not know about them prior to the “discovery” but that act is of immense importance because of its consequences, as the discovery was often followed by dispossession and colonization.

It is not by accident that the accounts of the travelers have serious credibility problems. The writers felt compelled to find ways to keep their audience back home interested. They also had to advance the aims of the individuals and institutions that sponsored them. Even when they were privately financed, expeditions still needed acceptance and cooperation from several institutions, including government agencies. It was not always exclusively European individuals and institutions who were involved in, and benefited from, African exploration but sometimes these projects included Americans. A. Donaldson Smith
Jamal Gabobe

was himself American, and in addition to British authorities, his travel to Somaliland was assisted by the United States Consul in Aden, and the natural-history material he collected during his travels in this area was donated to the British Museum as well as the Academy of Natural History in Philadelphia.

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The planning for the voyage usually began at the home country in Europe, and in the case of Somaliland, Aden in the Arabian Peninsula, across the water from Somaliland, was usually a transit point in the preparation of the trip. As part of their preparation for their journey, explorers read the writings of other explorers (sometimes these were armchair explorers who had actually never been to the places they were describing) to establish a sense of continuity but more importantly to critique their predecessors and establish their own authority.

A. Donaldson Smith notes that “Two expeditions, that of Captain Swayne, and the one led by Counts Hojes and Cudenhove, had passed south from Lafkei, on their way to the Shebeli River, above Ime; but towards the west nothing was known of the country, and I had to trust entirely to native guides.”44 Explorers also compare themselves to previous explorers and often either draw parallels, critique them or highlight how they have surpassed them. Again A. Donaldson Smith observes: “It was here that Count Teleki’s expedition suffered so much from thirst, but we fortunately succeeded in finding water in two places near Mt. Longendoti.”45 Smith also mentions that an island that was noted by Lieutenant von Hohnel was overflown by water and had disappeared by the time Smith’s caravan got there: “At this point Lieutenant von Hohnel described a little island, on which a settlement of Elmolol; but the island, as well as the road Count Teleki took along the shore, was submerged, and we had to make a great detour, as the bay extended so far inland.”46 Moreover, Smith makes a point of having gone beyond one of his predecessors, Prince Ruspoli, who accepted the word of the residents about the lake being situated beyond the mountain and did not actually make it to the lake himself. This information was told to A Donaldson Smith by the African residents of the area. This is what he said they told him:
They told me that Prince Ruspoli had ascended the mountain on the Konso range without going nearly so far as we then were, and had been satisfied with simply taking their word for it as to the position of the lake. I was obliged now literally to shove the porters along, and hard work it was getting down the mountain side over rough loose rocks hidden in wet grass up to one’s waist.”

If A. Donaldson Smith merely corrected the record of predecessors, the British explorer of Ethiopia, James Bruce, went much further than that. Anne Hugon wrote in the Exploration of Africa:

Bruce tried to discredit his predecessors. A convinced Protestant, he felt nothing but contempt for the Catholic fathers, puppets of Rome. His religious prejudice was compounded by an element of national chauvinism. It was vexing to have been preceded by the Portuguese when he dedicated his own “discovery” to his sovereign, King George III.

In addition to the religious and nationalist chauvinism exhibited by Bruce toward Catholics, exploration took place in a context of heightened racial awareness. In explaining what motivated him to engage in his journey through Somaliland, A. Donaldson Smith lays out the racial ideology that underpinned his exploration activities:

The keen love of sport and adventure that is innate in most of the Anglo-Saxon race had always prompted me to go into the remotest corners of the earth, and I suppose it was my seven years’ medical training in America and Europe which taught me never to lose a chance of doing scientific work when it presented itself. An exploring expedition offered me an opportunity for gratifying all my desires and ambitions.

It was this racial ideology that also allowed him to engage in taking native Africans as hostages until they divulged information about the environment or the people he thought vital for proceeding with his journey. Granted, he gave instructions to his Somali crew that they should do “no bodily harm” to the victims; nevertheless, there was no doubt that the operation inflicted psychological violence. The explorers did not only set Somalis against other Africans but also manipulated clan divisions within Somalis. True, the explorers did not create the divisions but they were only too willing to magnify them and use them. A. Donaldson Smith provides an instance of this when he writes of the minority group the Midgan: “They are very cunning and treach-
erous, and are never permitted to intermarry with the Somalis of better blood.” In addition to not having “better blood,” Smith accuses the Midgans of having stolen four camels from him which he then uses as an opportunity to show his “magnanimity” by declaring that he had not flogged them for their transgressions.

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The tactic of divide-and-rule was one of the ways of implementing the ideology of European racial superiority. Somalis, in general, however did not accept Western claims of superiority. And this was a constant source of frustration for Europeans, especially the English once they took over British Somaliland. But just as the British had their tactics, Somalis, too, had their own ways of resisting foreigners who wanted to impose their agenda on them. John Speke put his finger on one of these tactics which consisted of withholding information: “As before, I had many conferences about the Wadi Nogal, which Lieutenant Burton had desired me to investigate, but could obtain no satisfactory information.” Speke also admitted that his reliance on his Abban (sponsor) was so total that he could not get anything done without him: “Most of the time the Abban was away, stopping at his home, and no business could be done.”

It is not always that Speke and other travelers do not get the information they want. It is rather at instances when such information would be injurious to them that Somalis withhold the information from foreigners. In other words, there is time for cooperating with explorers and time for not cooperating with them. Moreover, it is not only Somalis who are often caught in a dichotomy. The explorers too face a conflicting situation. They are well-armed, have food supplies and money, and yet they are constantly under the mercy of Somalis and other Africans who guide them to their goal and help protect them. The explorers claim to subscribe to a higher morality yet their actual behavior often does not support this claim. So the construction of the Somali subject took place in a contested context whereby Westerners were trying to translate their economic, military, and technological superiority over Somalis into psychological superiority, something that the British failed to achieve. And this is one of the marks of the Somali subject: economic and political underdevelopment operating side-by-side with a healthy ego and a strong sense of self-worth. In other words, the Somali subject refuses to be defined by the prevailing economic and political conditions.
Perhaps this Somali resistance was instrumental in producing a measure of grudging respect for Somalis by Westerners. A. Donaldson Smith for instance, was impressed by the Somalis’ refusal to eat food that was not approved by their religion even under very dire conditions. He also noted how Somalis kept track of the Islamic calendar and knew it was the month of Ramdan (the month of fasting) even though they were deep into non-Muslim territory. More strikingly, at one point, A. Donaldson Smith was so moved by the utter sincerity of the religious devotion of his Somali companions, he confessed, “and although Dodson and I did not follow their example, it is certain that I never in my life felt more in sympathy than I did this morning with the religious feeling that led my boys to get on their knees and chant their long supplications to the Invisible.”

Because A. Donaldson Smith went to Somaliland when the Abyssinian state was expanding to Somaliland and farther south, he was able to document some of the terrible atrocities that accompanied the Abyssinian conquest and through that, he did Somalis a historical favor. It was a chilling account in which European expansionism ran into a centralized expansionist African state (Abyssinia). In this conflict between Abyssinians and Somalis, A. Donaldson Smith took the side of Somalis, which is ironic given that Abyssinia was Christian and Somalis were Muslims – an obvious contradiction one might say, but contradictions are the crucible in which Somali subjectivity was forged.

Notes
3. A. Donaldson Smith was an American but I lumped him with the Europeans because he was part of a European project and identified with Europeans.
5. Ibid., 86.
6. Ibid., 87.
7. Ibid., 87.
8. Ibid., 85
9. Ibid., 126.
13. Ibid., 213.
14. Ibid., 54.
18. Ibid., 38.
19. Ibid., 97.
21. It is worth noting A. Donaldson Smith’s great regret upon finding out that his photographs of Sheikh Hussein were ruined while crossing the Ganana river, and his relief that his photographs of Somalis were not damaged; Ibid., 158.
22. Ibid., 110.
25. Ibid., xv.
29. Ibid., 114-116.
32. Ibid., 8-9.
33. Ibid., 7-8.
34. Ibid., 18.
35. Ibid., 18.
36. Ibid., 46.
37. Ibid., 46.
38. Ibid., 196.
45. Ibid., 332.
46. Ibid., 331.
47. Ibid., 228.
50. Ibid., 15-16.
52. Ibid., 84.
54. Ibid., 196.

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