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Appraisal of the Single-Parent Family in Nadifa Mohammed's The Orchard of Lost Souls

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Abstract: *This research documents the prevalence of single-parent families and the social and psychological challenges they face. Attention has focused on the adverse effects of single parenting on these families. However, this paper examines both the adverse and potential positive outcomes of single parenting for single-parent families. In* The *Orchard* of *Lost Souls, Aabbo is a single father who assumes sole responsibility for his daughter, Filsan, after his wife divorces him to be with her lover. The paper evaluates his performance as a single father and the effects of his parenting style on his daughter. It assesses Aabbo using Lamb et al.'s (1985) tripartite model of father involvement, which includes engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. The paper concludes that Aabbo is an accessible and responsible father but non-engaging. His strict parenting earns his daughter's hatred. However, his daughter becomes hardworking and morally upright in adulthood because of her father's training style. She becomes a useful citizen by becoming an extraordinarily hardworking military officer. The single-parent family embraced positive coping strategies, such as hard work and determination, to ensure success regardless of their predicament*

Keywords: appraisal, single-parent family, Nadifa Mohammed's The orchard of lost souls

INTRODUCTION

While single parenting appears to affect mothers more, single fatherhood is also rising. Shorey and Pereira's (2023) meta-synthesis of research on single fathers identifies single fatherhood as an increasingly significant family form and highlights the distinct challenges men face when they assume primary caregiving responsibilities. Although this study is global rather than specifically African, it broadens the conceptualization of single-parent families beyond the assumption that single parenting is synonymous with single motherhood.

Coles (2015) posits that "research on single fathers has mirrored the increase in single fathering, evolving over the years in quantity and quality." These findings show that some single parents are men. Single fathers face unique challenges in raising children. This is partly because society

traditionally assigns child-rearing to women, not men. Traditionally, "men were expected to provide for their families economically as breadwinners, whereas women's primary responsibility was the care of children and the home" (McGill, 2014). Men are seen as breadwinners, while women are expected to nurture children. Today, however, fathers are encouraged to care for children (Thunstedt, 2017). McGill (2014) notes that "in the context of the gender revolution, the current culture of fatherhood expects a man to be more involved in the home as well as the workplace, involved with children, and a more equal partner to his wife or partner." If men become more involved in child-rearing, the home could be a better place for the family. Therefore, complementary roles for both sexes are needed.

Due to the social and psychological dislocations that single parenting creates, there is a need for a comprehensive interrogation of the phenomenon to foreground the predicaments of the victims and equip affected individuals with better approaches to manage the situation. This study, therefore, examines the experiences of a single-parent family in Mohammed Nadifa's *The Orchard of Lost Souls.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although scholarship on the novel has paid considerable attention to female agency, trauma, war, displacement, and women's resilience, the representation of the single-parent family and the consequences of disrupted parent–child relationships remain an important avenue for further investigation. The novel repeatedly portrays the family not merely as a biological institution but as a social and emotional structure that can be destroyed, reconstructed, or replaced under conditions of war and patriarchal domination.

The Independent's (2013) review contrasts the emphasis on fathers and sons in *Black Mamba Boy* with the mother–daughter relationships in *The Orchard of Lost Souls*. It connects Kawsar's bereavement, Deqo's abandonment, and Filsan's separation from her mother. These experiences provide a starting point for examining disrupted families in the novel. This study builds on that observation by considering how different forms of parental absence shape care, security, and belonging. It also distinguishes single-parent households from bereaved and parentless households rather than treating them as interchangeable.

Kawsar's story shows how bereavement and political violence can compound one another. Having lost both her husband and her daughter, she lives with memories of a family that no longer surrounds her. Jaggi's (2013) review also draws attention to her suffering following an assault by the authorities. For the present study, Kawsar's experience raises an important distinction: although motherhood continues to shape her identity, her circumstances differ from those of a surviving parent raising a dependent child. Her story therefore broadens the discussion of family disruption without fitting neatly into the category of an existing single-parent household.

Kawsar's attachment to her daughter remains central to her identity after the daughter's death. The study "Vacuum or Emptiness of Life of Three Women" (2019) is cited here for the argument that her bereavement leaves an emotional void that influences her responses to other children. Building on this argument, the present study reads Kawsar's relationship with Deqo as an opportunity to express care beyond biological kinship. Their connection suggests that family bonds can be rebuilt through protection and affection, even when earlier relationships are lost.Deqo's experience offers a contrasting portrayal of family fragmentation. Unlike Kawsar, who loses her family to death, Deqo is abandoned at birth. She is born in a refugee camp and abandoned by her mother, leaving her without the protection typically associated with a nuclear family. The novel's publishers describe Deqo as a nine-year-old girl who leaves the refugee camp for Hargeisa, drawn by the promise of a pair of shoes. Her movement from the refugee camp to the city demonstrates how the absence of parental care exposes children to exploitation and insecurity. Deqo's search for belonging is therefore also a search for family. She is temporarily cared for by women on the margins of society, particularly prostitutes, whose collective care challenges conventional definitions of respectable family life. A review in The National similarly identifies Deqo's abandonment by her mother and her subsequent search for belonging as key to the novel's representation of female experience.

Deqo's condition also broadens the concept of the single-parent family to include the parentless or alternative family. Her experience demonstrates that the absence of a biological parent does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of care, protection, and emotional attachment. Instead, care can be provided by socially marginalised women who collectively perform maternal functions. This representation is significant because it challenges the idea that the conventional nuclear family is the only legitimate site of child-rearing. Mohamed's narrative suggests that in contexts of poverty, displacement, and war, alternative networks of women can become crucial sources of survival. Deqo's eventual relationship with Kawsar further develops this idea by bringing together an older woman deprived of her daughter and a child deprived of her mother.

Filsan's history adds another important dimension to the study of fractured families. Although she is not a conventional single mother, parental separation shaped her childhood. Her mother leaves the marriage, while her father retains control over her upbringing. The Independent reports that Filsan is affected by her mother's abandonment and that her father conditions the separation on her mother's relinquishing of her daughter. Thus, Mohamed shows that the consequences of single-parent or disrupted families can extend into adulthood. Filsan's emotional instability, loneliness, and difficulty forming relationships can be read, in part, as stemming from the unresolved consequences of childhood separation. Her experience also complicates gendered assumptions about parenting: although she remains with her father, the absence of her mother creates an emotional deficit that material provision alone cannot resolve.

Existing scholarship on *The Orchard of Lost Souls* also offers an important framework for understanding these fractured families through female agency and resilience. Gagiano (2019) and

related scholarship situate contemporary African women's writing within national and historical narratives, while a study of Mohamed's novel argues that the female protagonists exercise agency to negotiate identities and challenge oppressive structures. This perspective is particularly valuable for examining single-parent families because Mohamed's women are not merely passive victims of family dissolution. Kawsar protects Deqo; Deqo develops strategies for surviving without parents; and Filsan attempts to construct an independent identity despite the psychological effects of parental separation and patriarchal authority. Family disruption therefore becomes both a source of vulnerability and a context in which women develop alternative forms of agency.

The literature further indicates that the novel's treatment of family cannot be separated from Somalia's political context. The three protagonists experience different forms of loss in a society approaching civil war. The British Council describes the novel as an account of ordinary lives disrupted by Somalia's collapse, while emphasizing the intertwined destinies of Deqo, Kawsar, and Filsan. Consequently, the family becomes a microcosm of the nation: just as the nation is fragmented by political conflict, families are fragmented by death, abandonment, displacement, and violence. The destruction of family structures becomes one of the most intimate manifestations of national instability. Mohamed's depiction of single-parent and parentless households helps readers understand war not merely as a political or military event but as a force that transforms everyday relationships.

Despite these valuable contributions, a noticeable gap remains in the criticism: the single-parent family has rarely been treated as the central analytical category for understanding the novel's characters and relationships. Existing studies and reviews discuss motherhood, loss, abandonment, trauma, female agency, and war, but these issues are often examined separately. A focused study of single-parent families can bring these strands together by examining how widowhood, maternal abandonment, paternal dominance, childlessness, displacement, and alternative caregiving structures interact. This perspective can show that Mohamed's novel is not simply concerned with individual women's suffering; it is also concerned with how historical and patriarchal forces reshape the structure and meaning of family.

In conclusion, the literature on *The Orchard of Lost Souls* identifies family loss, motherhood, abandonment, and female resilience as key dimensions of the novel. Kawsar embodies the grieving widow and bereaved mother; Deqo represents the abandoned child seeking belonging; and Filsan illustrates the enduring psychological effects of parental separation. Together, their experiences reveal a spectrum of family disruption, from widowhood and childlessness to maternal abandonment and fractured parent–child relationships. A study focused specifically on the single-parent family can therefore make a significant contribution to scholarship on Mohamed's novel by showing how family fragmentation intersects with gender, war, displacement, patriarchy, and female survival. More importantly, such an approach reveals Mohamed's broader argument that when conventional family structures collapse, women and children develop alternative forms of kinship and care to negotiate loss and reconstruct a sense of belonging.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative textual analysis approach to appraise the single-parent family in Nadifa's The Orchard of Lost Souls. The novel was purposively selected because it exemplifies the positive and negative experiences of a single-parent family.
The analysis involved close reading and thematic interpretation, focusing on the single father, Aabbo. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles and critical essays, supported the textual analysis. Through critical analysis, the study identified the effects on, and coping strategies of, the single-parent family in the text. To interpret the data meaningfully, the study adopts Aabbo; the single father is assessed using Lamb et al.'s (1985) tripartite model of father involvement, which includes engagement, accessibility, and responsibility.

Synopsis of Nadifa Mohammed's *The Orchard of Lost Souls*

Nadifa Mohammed was born in Hargeisa (now in the Republic of Somaliland) in 1981. In 1986, her family moved temporarily to London, but they had to stay permanently because of the Somali civil war. She was therefore educated in London. She studied history and politics at Oxford and returned to Hargeisa in 2008. She published her first novel, Black Mamba Boy, in 2010. Based on her father's memories of his travels in the 1930s, it was longlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction and the Dylan Thomas Prize. It was also shortlisted for the John Llewellyn-Rhys Memorial Prize and the Guardian First Book Award, and it won the 2010 Betty Trask Prize. In 2013, Granta named her one of its Best of Young British Novelists. She published her second book, The Orchard of Lost Souls, in 2014. In 2014, The Root named The Orchard of Lost Souls one of the best 15 works of Fiction by Black Authors (literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/nadifa-mohammed).

The Orchard of Lost Souls follows three Somali women: Dego, Kawsar, and Filsan. Dego is a nine-year-old orphan born and raised in Saba'ad refugee camp. Kawsar is a widow in her fifties who has lost her daughter, while Filsan is a young soldier in her late 20s. The story is set in Hargeisa, Somalia, in the late 1980s, when civil war is devastating the country. It opens on October 21, the 18th anniversary of the military dictatorship, at the Stadium, where many people, including Kawsar and her friends, gather to celebrate.

Dego is one of the well-rehearsed dancers for the celebration, but unexpectedly, she cannot perform. The women in the Guddi unit drag her away to punish her, but Kawsar intervenes. Dego escapes, and Kawsar is made to pay for her action. Filsan is one of the soldiers overseeing the celebration to keep order. She arrests Kawsar and throws her into jail. Filsan beats Kawsar and breaks the hips of the older woman, and she becomes paralyzed.

The second part of the story, named after each of the three female characters, focuses on their struggles with losing loved ones. The parts of the story are. Kawsar is mourning the deaths of both her husband and her daughter. Dego's mother abandons her in a refugee camp after her birth, and prostitutes raise her. Filsan, on the other hand, is abandoned by her mother when her father insists that it is the only condition for a divorce.

The story ends with all three ladies coming together. Filsan and Dego take refuge in Kawsar's house amid violence in Somalia. Finally, the three embark on a journey from Hargeisa to Saba'ad to escape the ravages of the civil war. This analysis centers on Filsan and her father as a single-parent family.

Analysis

An Involvement Appraisal of Fatherhood in *The Orchard of Lost Souls (OLS)*

Aabbo is a single father in *The Orchard of Lost Souls* whose wife divorces him for her lover. Filsan's mother, Hayo, indulges in extramarital affairs because she is dissatisfied with her husband's financial status, so she seeks a divorce. Filsan's father is prepared to grant Hayo a divorce on the condition that she leaves Filsan in his care. Hayo agrees and abandons her child. Filsan is therefore left with her father, who assumes sole responsibility for her upbringing. In a letter to her mother, Filsan describes the pain and hardships she endures while living with her father. She writes: "I know that you have not had an easy life and that you believe I have, but that is not the case. In my own way I have suffered and paid the price for you and Aabbo's divorce" (180). Filsan suffers as a result of her parents' divorce.

Garcia et al. (2022) examine father involvement and child development in rural Kenya. Their study is particularly useful for the present research because it shows that fathers can influence children's well-being not only through direct interaction but also by supporting mothers and participating in household decision-making (ScienceDirect). This finding can be used comparatively to analyze Filsan's father, whose paternal involvement is characterized more by control and regulation than by emotional support.

Lamb et al.'s paternal involvement model, which comprises engagement, accessibility, and responsibility, is used to assess Aabbo's involvement as a single father.

Engagement

Engagement involves a father's direct interaction with his child. It refers to how much time fathers spend interacting with their children (Pleck, 244). Pleck defines interaction as caregiving and other shared activities. Aabbo cares for his daughter, Filsan, when her mother leaves her. According to Filsan, her father "had shown her both tenderness and contempt, cruelty and honour, a glimpse of the world through the bars of his love" (140). This suggests that Aabbo nurtures his daughter with a sense of uprightness. He expects her to grow into a respectable person, hence his pitiless treatment. In his interactions with his daughter, Aabbo ensures that Filsan responds quickly to instructions. He instills in his daughter the habit of doing things well and quickly. His father's training has a positive effect on her in adulthood. At work, she ensures she completes her assignments well. Her superiors recognize this quality and recommend her for a training program at the border. At her appointment, Lieutenant Hashi gives her a stare meant to intimidate her, but

the narrator says, "it is nothing in comparison to her father's" (156). The training Filsan receives from her father toughens her.

Her father trains her aggressively because he is a military man. Though Aabbo gives his daughter the care she needs, evidence suggests they do not communicate directly as father and daughter. To show that Aabbo has little direct interaction with his daughter, Filsan remembers how she and her father used to eat in hotels. She remembers this when the General asks her to accompany them to a hotel in Hargeisa. The narrator reiterates:

> She has never set foot in this place but was practically raised in Mogadishu hotels, eating her meals there while her father drank coffee and networked all day. After her mother left and before they found their housekeeper, Intisaar, they barely lived in their villa, returning only at night to sleep. She is deeply intimate with hotels – their structure and schedules, the smell of the blue soaps found in every hotel bathroom. (21)

The quote indicates the level of interaction between Filsan and her father. When they are together, they are expected to communicate. Still, Aabbo is always occupied with networking; they spend most of their time outside their villa and return at night to sleep.

Accessibility

Accessibility concerns the father's availability to the child. Aabbo demonstrates his availability to Filsan by insisting that he will grant Hayo a divorce only if she leaves Filsan with him. He takes his daughter and provides the necessary care. However, Filsan is lonely because her father becomes unavailable to her, both physically and psychologically. Intisaar, the housekeeper, is readily available to her.

Like Idris in Lyrics Alley, Aabbo instills fear in his daughter by physically abusing her whenever he is at home. The narrator confirms Aabbo's availability at home only when he savagely beats Filsan for going out with men and locks her up for two days. His attitude toward Filsan reflects a father who is inaccessible to his child. Locking a child up for two days amounts to neglect.

Filsan's father forces her to obey rules, and she fears breaking them. In the end, she complains that her father's attitude has made her grow "unsuited for the real world" (160). If her father had been available, she would have grown up seeing herself as someone nurtured to fit into society. She also blames her mother for leaving the marriage, which left her future in her father's hands.

Responsibility

Pleck (2010) defines responsibility in the paternal involvement construct as the ability to ensure the child is cared for and to provide and arrange resources for the child's upkeep. Aabbo provides a house help who looks after his daughter. Although Aabbo is not available to his daughter, he

provides a substitute who is always there for her. She cooks and provides the help she needs. When Filsan moves to Hargeisa, the narrator reveals that:

> She craves Intisaar's cooking: crispy lamb sambuusi, grilled fish served with spiced and sweetened vermicelli, and hot, oily bajiye dipped in green chili sauce. Intisaar, the maid paid a thousand shillings a week, has been everything a mother should be to her; while Intisaar's own children were raised by their grandmother, she labored in the malign atmosphere of their silent house. (174)

This quote shows the care and motherly love Intisaar provides to Filsan. Aabbo's responsiveness leads him to provide a helper for his daughter.

Besides, Aabbo provides a study environment for her child. To ensure her daughter has a bright academic future, he gives her her own room. Her father insists that she concentrate on her studies at the expense of learning domestic activities. However, this idea affects her in adulthood. Through hard work, she becomes a soldier, but she cannot do any chores. Aabbo feeds his child even when there is no maid. He usually sends her to hotels for their meals. When Instisaar arrives, she takes over cooking for the family.

One primary responsibility of a father is to discipline a child. In a study by Olmstead, Ted, Futris, and Pasley (2009), they list a disciplinarian as one of the seven fathering roles. Aabbo fulfills his fatherly role as a disciplinarian; as a result, Filsan's life revolves around him. The narrator concludes that her father's judgment carries weight. Therefore, whenever Filsan goes astray, her father disciplines her, sometimes to an extreme. Her father's disciplinarian attitude may contribute to her success in life.

Effects of Single Parenting in *The Orchard of Lost Souls*

The single-parent family in *The Orchard of Lost Souls* faces challenges with lasting effects. Aabbo experiences hatred from his daughter, while Filsan faces the challenges of performing domestic activities, socializing, and enduring physical abuse.

Hostility from Daughter

Aabbo transfers his anger to his daughter by physically and verbally abusing her. Because of these experiences, Filsan has no love for her father. When she grows up, she travels to Hargeisa and never considers returning to her father. She misses Mogadishu, but the need to escape from her father keeps her from returning.

Challenge of Performing Domestic Duties

After her mother abandons them, Filsan's father trains her. He does not allow her to go to the kitchen. Intisaar, their housekeeper, does all the chores. Her father insists that she focus on her studies and not do any domestic work. Filsan does not know how to cook because no one teaches

her. In adulthood, when she moves out to live on her own as a military officer, she cannot cook for herself, so she only drinks tea for breakfast. She reminisces about how her father allowed only Intisaar to cook. She wishes she had been allowed to help because it has negatively affected her in adulthood. She has to depend on take-out food. For this reason, "Filsan feels like an orphaned child rather than just a motherless one" (146). If her mother had stayed in the marriage, Filsan might have had the opportunity to learn how to cook.

Inability to Socialise

Filsan's father trains her up indoors. He never allows her to make friends in the neighborhood. As a child, she is lonely because no child is allowed inside their house. Filsan lacks social skills, and this affects her in adulthood. She is not able to make friends with her colleagues. The narrator states that:

> She ignores her comrades as they ignore her, but what would she say to them if she could? She would tell them that she has never been good at making friends, that Intisaar's children had seemed kind but had not been allowed inside the house by her father, that the neighbourhood kids had scorned her, that she found it easier to talk to her father's friends, that her face was closed because she did not know how to open it. Silence takes the place of all those words and her loneliness remains as dense and close as a shadow. (147)

Her inability to socialse in her adult life is evidence of her childhood training. In adulthood, she wishes she could reverse this attitude.

Physical Abuse

The abandonment by Filsan's mother makes her father transfer aggression onto Filsan. He physically abuses her when he assumes that Filsan's character traits stem from her mother's bad behaviour. Filsan's cousins, Rahma and Idil, visit them from Washington, DC, along with her uncle. Filsan takes them out to enjoy the environment. They make friends with young men who keep them company. Filsan says she wants to go home early before it gets dark, for fear of her father. However, the young men convince them to go to the cinema, and they return home late. Filsan's father sees the young men with the girls as they are being seen off. As soon as Filsan enters the house, Aabbo gets hold of her and starts beating her. The narrator describes:

> It was almost a release when the first blow came, a backhanded slap to the side of her head that pulled out the Minnie Mouse clips her cousins had bought her. She heard their screams from far behind. She was limp, like a doll, as he took her arm and threw her up the steps to the veranda. 'Throw the devil off your back, Adan,' called her uncle from the doorway. 'Let the girl go.' 'Aabbo, stop him!' one of the girls shouted. 'She did nothing wrong!' a boy's voice

> yelled. Filsan could no longer tell them apart; her senses were shrouded, as if parts of her mind were shutting down, faculty by faculty. Uncle Abukor tried to pull her away from her father's grip, but he shouldered him out of the way. Rahma and Idil were inside the house now too, all five of them struggling in the narrow hallway. Intisaar watched from the kitchen door, her eyes wide as she wiped her hands repeatedly on a cloth. Her father's hand was wrapped in her hair. 'Where have you been?' His spittle landed on her neck as he shook her head from side to side. 'Is it time for you to follow in your mother's footsteps? I shouldn't have kept you! You scorpion, you whore, you do not deserve to carry my name or my father's. You were going to bring those boys, those dogs into my house? You thought while your uncle was here that you could do what you liked? Idiot! I should throw you out! Let you live in the gutter with your filthy mother.' (167-168)

These physical and verbal assaults on Filsan leave her without emotions for others. Her father allows her no freedom at all. As punishment, he locks her in her room for two days. Intisaar, their housekeeper, is forced to check her underpants. Filsan pulls them for Intisaar with trembling hands. Intisaar sympathizes with Filsan, sighing, "Oh, what a life" (169). Intisaar's comment shows that Filsan is going through hell at the hands of her father and has no one to save her. The presence of her uncle and cousins does not prevent Aabbo from physically abusing her. In protest, the visiting uncle and cousins move to stay at Al-Uruuba Hotel, but Aabbo is not bothered.

Emotional Effect

Filsan endured physical abuse from her father in childhood, which toughened her. As a result, as an adult, she has no sympathy for others. She arrests Kawsar for intervening in the Guddi unit's affairs with Dego. Filsan sends her to the police station. The narrator reports that:

> Filsan watches as Kawsar is escorted to a group cell. She walks slowly but shows no emotion; she moves like a tourist on a tour of the place, looking left and right as if to say, 'Yes, yes, everything is as it should be.' The barred doors click behind her, and then she is gone, swallowed up in the guts of the police station to be digested and excreted out another day. (15)

Instead of pitying the poor woman, she makes sure that they escort Kawsar into the cell. Filsan's lack of sympathy for people is apparently due to her childhood experiences, when she had no mother to show her love. Later, she returns to the cells to interrogate Kawsar, and Kawsar's responses to her questions only make her angrier. She reacts in a way that shows she feels no emotion for others. The narrator describes:

> The blows come one after the other. The first to her ear as loud as a wave hitting a rock, then to her temple, cheek, neck. For a moment they stop as Kawsar clutches Officer Adan Ali's hands in hers, but after a few heartbeats they resume. A swirl of sound and sight engulfs her until a punch to the chest knocks her from the chair onto the cement floor. Landing on her hip, Kawsar hears a crack beneath her and then feels a river of pain swelling up from her stomach to her throat, obstructing her breath. Resting her weight on one hand, she lifts an open palm to the soldier. 'Please stop!' she cries. (31)

Filsan savagely beats Kawsar and breaks her hips. If Filsan had been properly trained and raised with a mother's love, she might have behaved differently.

Behavioural Effect

Despite Filsan's attitude toward Kawsar, which makes her seem wicked, her upbringing in a single-parent home keeps her morally upright. Her father trained her to be morally upright; therefore, even in adulthood, she responds quickly to orders, as her father taught her. She becomes courageous and able to insist on her rights, irrespective of the consequences. General Haruun, the regional division governor, makes advances towards her when he asks her to accompany them to a hotel. On their way back, he tries to fondle Filsan, but Filsan refuses to give in as she insists, "My father wouldn't like this" (25). General Haruun refuses to listen to Filsan as the narrator describes the scene:

> General Haaruun holds her chin and turns her face to him. 'I can make your life so easy, whatever you want is yours.' 'My father wouldn't like this.' He moves his hand down, brushing her thighs and then squeezing her knee. 'You think your father doesn't do this to girls he meets?' He pushes his hand up her thigh and against her crotch. 'You're a virgin, aren't you? A clean girl,' he whispers in her ear. Filsan is deep underwater now, unable to breathe or even swallow; she will never make it to dry land. 'Please stop, my father …' she hears herself mutter. 'Who cares about him? He is an old drunk. Think about what is good for you.' Both his arms wrap around her, one hand padding around for her belt and zip. The driver's eyes are still on them. Filsan grabs General Haaruun's hand and throws it away. 'No! No! No!' She hits his chest with both palms at each word. 'Don't touch me.' (25)

Filsan's training has made her courageous. She boldly throws General Haruun's hands away, unconcerned about the consequences. General Haruun throws her out of the car into the darkness, but she manages to walk to the nearest light.

Concentration on Her Studies

Filsan focuses on her studies, as her father taught her; she becomes more interested in books than social life, which benefits her in adulthood. She is employed in the army and achieves excellent results through hard work. According to the narrator, Filsan is the first woman to engage the enemy in battle since the Ogaden War (117). She also receives a medal from the president early in her career when she teaches Rural workers in Dhusamareb during the literacy campaign. Her students pass the state literacy test at a higher rate than any other group. She also excels in the army because she takes her work seriously (178); that is why she is promoted to Hargeisa.

Coping Strategies of the Single-Parent Family in *The Orchard of Lost Souls*

Coping strategies are the thoughts and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of a stressful situation. (Stephenson & DeLongis, 2020). Single parenting is stressful and requires effective coping strategies. Single-parent families must find ways to address their challenges. They cope in many ways. Some individuals adopt either positive or negative coping strategies, depending on their situation. Filsan and her father resort to repression and displacement as coping strategies.

Repression

This is when a thought, idea, or wish is pushed out of consciousness. These thoughts are traumatic to the self and are therefore stored in the unconscious so they can be kept far from the mind. This storage can make a person forget such disturbing thoughts (Pervine et al., 2005).

Filsan tries hard to keep her pain out of her consciousness. She does this by accepting Intisaar, their housemaid, as a mother substitute, working hard as an adult, staying away from her father, and writing a letter to her mother.

Housemaid as a Substitute for Mother

As a coping strategy, Aabbo provides a substitute for Filsan in the person of Intisaar, their housemaid. She comes to the house to play the role of a mother to Filsan, and Filsan accepts her as well. When Aabbo beats Filsan for going out with her cousins, Intisaar helps Filsan bathe her wounds. The narrator affirms:

> It was two days before her bedroom door was unlocked and she hadn't moved from the crouched place she had found on the floor. When she finally stood up her eyes darkened and her knees gave way. Intisaar hooked her under the arms, kicking away the untouched plates of yoghurt-soaked rice she had made for her, and guided her to the bathroom where she gently washed her bruised body. (169)

If Intisaar had not been around, no one would have helped her, because her uncle and cousin had moved out to Al-Uruuba Hotel, and her father was not available to her.

Filsan's acceptance of Intisaar as a mother helped her cope. While in Hargeisa, she remembers the motherly role Intisaar played in her life and writes down things to buy for Intisaar on her way back to Mogadishu. The narrator mentions:

> Filsan writes down a list of things to buy Intisaar from Hargeisa, things that show she knows her and has been thinking about her – a silver necklace, or even a gold one if she can afford it, imported Taarab records, support bandages for her swollen knee. The last item might be the most appreciated now that Intisaar has crossed the border from middle age into old age; at fifty-seven the marrow starts to dry up, she had said in her musical Bajuni accent, and from then on you are just waiting for your bones to turn to dust. She would hold Intisaar's bones together with splints and tape if she had to rather than lose her. How much better would her life have been if she had been born to her? Sleeping huddled with her siblings in a mud and stick, falling into whichever arms lay nearest, tasting love in her mother's milk, when she returned smiling at night. (174)

Filsan develops a bond with Intisaar, and she wishes Intisaar were her real mother. She does so to express her gratitude toward Intisaar.

Hard Work and Determination

As a child, Filsan's father makes her focus on her studies. Determined to become a great person, Filsan obeys her father and grows more interested in her books than in social life. As an adult, Filsan becomes a soldier and volunteers to work in the North. At her workplace, she works hard to prove that a woman can be more committed "to the revolution than any of her male peers" (4). She is engrossed in her career, which helps her earn promotions. Among the lot, Filsan's superiors select her to educate the nomads at the border. Captain Yasin tells Filsan:

> Now don't get too excited, Miss Corporal. Still, I spoke to Major Adow a few days ago and he asked me if I could recommend a persuasive graduate to go on a mission to educate those troublesome nomads at the border. I looked high and low and then I remembered you, crouched over your little desk. Such efficiency! Such honesty! (149)

She works efficiently at Sahahley, where she determines to do a decent job. She faces the "whole village" (156), who seem to have crowded around her. She faces them, and she kills three of their leaders, single-handedly. The radio station in Hargeisa invites her for an interview, making her achievement known nationwide. Filsan describes herself as a serious soldier when she informs

Captain Yasin that she takes her "work more seriously than anyone else in the office." Her source of motivation could be that she wanted to forget about the childhood trauma that she went through. This explains her focus on her work.

Writing a Letter to Her Mother

Filsan grows up and lives independently, away from her father. She therefore tries to reconcile with her mother. As a coping strategy, she writes a letter to her mother to express her emotions. The contents read:

> I have been thinking about you a lot and wondering if it is not time that we changed the way we behave towards each other. I know that you have not had an easy life and that you believe I have but that is not the case. In my own way, I have suffered and paid the price for you and Aabbo's divorce. The note ends there, just as the recriminations would have started. Filsan remembers tucking it away in the book to finish at a calmer time. She grabs a pencil from her drawer and rests the note on her textbook; she treats it like an exercise, listing the pertinent points first:
> • You married Aabbo out of your own volition.
> • You decided to leave him for another man.
> • You have done nothing with your life but live off one husband after another.
> • You should not be surprised that I take after my father when you are the one who left me to him
> • I am ready to forgive you.
> • I want a mother who I can sit with and talk to nicely.
> • I will help your children with their education.
> • When I am with you, I don't want to talk about Aabbo.
> • When I am with you, I don't want to talk about the past at all (180)

The content of the letter is a way she represses her pain and hatred toward her mother. Though Filsan imagines that her mother would not care about the contents of the letter, she writes to relieve herself of her pain. She confesses her healed wounds and her unwillingness to pick up her mother's past issues.

Staying Away from Her Father

Filsan distances herself from her father to repress her thoughts and feelings about him. She leaves Mogadishu for Hargeisa, where she feels exiled. She craves Mogadishu, but because she wants to escape her father, she stays. She stays to help herself forget the ordeals she endures with her father. Though lonely, she believes that a change of environment would help her repress her situation. Filsan refuses to pick up her father's calls for two weeks, but his voice continues to ring in her

mind. The narrator describes it as the "restrained but contemptuous tone" (234). The urge to forget her past with her father urges her on.

Displacement

Boeree (2006) defines displacement as "the redirection of an impulse onto a substitute target." The target can be a human being or an object that can be symbolically substituted. For example, someone infuriated by his or her boss goes home and redirects the anger onto a spouse or the children.

The verbal, as well as physical, abuse suffered by Filsan is a displacement of anger. Aabbo transfers his anger at his divorced wife to her daughter. This is why, as Aabbo beats Filsan for going out with her cousins, she continuously abuses her verbally. Aabbo barks:

> Is it time for you to follow in your mother's footsteps? I shouldn't have kept you! You scorpion, you whore, you don't deserve to carry my name or my father's. You were going to bring those boys, those dogs into my house? You thought while your uncle was here that you could do what you liked? Idiot! I should throw you out! Let you live in the gutter with your filthy mother. (168)

Aabbo's abuse of Filsan is the bottled-up anger he transfers onto her. In a way, this could relieve Aabbo of his anger toward Filsan's mother. Filsan hates seeing herself in the mirror because her face reflects her mother's. Because of her mother's negligence, Filsan transfers her anger at her father onto her mother. Filsan complains that if she had had a decent mother, she would not have ended up, at age 30, "unloved and unlovable" (160).

CONCLUSION

This paper examined single-parent and broken-family situations in Nadifa Mohamed's The Orchard of Lost Souls with a particular focus on Aabbo's rearing of his daughter, Filsan. Applying Lamb et al.'s model of paternal involvement (engagement, accessibility, and responsibility), it is argued that Aabbo is responsible and materially accessible but is emotionally distant and abusive. His authoritarian parenting is the cause of Filsan's loneliness, her social problems and her resentment, but it is also the reason for her discipline, her moral strength, her focus at school and her eventual success as a military officer.

The paper concludes that family breakdown is very damaging psychologically but that alternative carers (Intisaar in this case) and hard work and determination can go a long way to helping the child to manage and to succeed. Again, a father's involvement in his children's lives is a significant responsibility. If a father fulfills his role well, his children can have a brighter future. However, rigidity on the part of fathers can strain their relationships with their children. Aabbo is an authoritarian parent. He sets rules for his daughter and expects her to follow them without

discussion. This style, however, has both positive and negative effects on his daughter. Though their relationship is strained, Filsan grows up to achieve her goals and becomes a respected member of the army.

In sum, *The Orchard* of *Lost Souls* powerfully illustrates how single-parent and fractured family life can affect a child's emotional, social, and psychological development. In Aabbo's case, we see clearly that material provision and the mere presence of a parent are not, in themselves, sufficient to meet a child's emotional needs. Aabbo's authoritarian and abusive nature is a major contributor to Filsan's sense of isolation, alienation and social difficulty. Her relationship with Intisaar, along with her own determination and commitment to education, provides the support she needs. Filsan's eventual resilience and success show that a child can emerge from a very difficult family background and thrive if they can find other sources of care and develop the inner strength to do so. The book is ultimately a very strong argument for the need for parenting to go beyond provision and protection to include emotional availability, guidance and understanding.

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