

Da'uud and Bedri: The "Enough" of a Father's Love

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Few bonds are as strong and devoted as those parents feel towards their children, though sometimes this fidelity may be harder to discern, or easier to misinterpret, in the relationships of fathers and sons, because of the oppressive nature of gender and cultural expectations. The novel *Love Enough*, by Dionne Brand, vivifies the complexity of immigrant family life in the conflicted relationship of Da'uud and his son Bedri. Da'uud wants his son to live respectfully and freely and to embrace the opportunities Canada has to offer, but Bedri pushes away his father's wisdom and hopes for him. Some critics of the book may conclude that Da'uud fails in his parenting because his methods are harsh and strict and thus serve to suffocate Bedri and spur Bedri's rebelliousness. However, there is evidence that Da'uud is as good a father as he can be with what he has been through, what he has given up for Bedri, and what his teachings have impressed on his son.

Da'uud's upbringing within a different and tumultuous world is laced intricately in the way he acts towards his son Bedri and the expectations he puts on him. Da'uud grows up in the Republic of Somaliland where many assume women "should be in the house or in a grave" (43), and thus has different customs and a different definition of masculinity than the Toronto that molds Bedri. Da'uud's perspective begins to be shaped when his country erupts into tension, then into violence, and finally as he watches as everything he knows is reduced to being "no longer important" (79). Watching his "whole country [fall] apart under the men who [know] everything" becomes the new basis of Da'uud's worldview: it is only the "hard men" who come out on top (72). Da'uud is compelled to leave his work as an economist and flee the deadly environment of his native land. He arrives in places with a less imposing political agenda. However, before long, he learns violence "[is] there too" (80). "[This] violence assail[s] him" as

pictographic "ferocity and punishment" as he tours churches in Rome, is discriminated against and interrogated in Sweden, and can't find "work and a place to live" for months in Norway (80). He sees Canada, the country where he eventually settles and raises his children, as not immune to violence either, when he becomes concerned for one of his female passengers who meets with an abusive man, a man Da'uud knows "can kill someone," as Da'uud "has seen the faces of people who can kill people" (74). This adversity and the ubiquitous presence of violence animates his relationships with those around him, and his harshness serves as a means to warn and protect his children, and to try to instill his hard-earned expectations in them.

Da'uud is also as good a father as he can be because he pulls back on his own ambitions for the sake of his children even though his accumulated sacrifices detrimentally affect him. Initially, upon coming to Canada with "five languages" (72) and an education from Switzerland, he feels "blissful [and] free" (83), and expects to "melt into a new life" (84). However, he is "trapped" (72) into working as a taxi driver to support his family. His existence turns repetitive and wearisome as he works all evening and into the night, and then too as he sits in a café until three in the morning with other "insomniac" coworkers, "sleep drugged" as "the smoke of cigarettes crumpl[es] every man's chest," with their "brown smiles" reminiscing about the old days (44). Though Da'uud, due to his schedule and his coping strategy, is not often present to raise his children, Da'uud shows his love for his family—for Bedri—every night by living in "past tense" (44) and by falling asleep soon after work, "dropping his dead body on the couch" (43). Though Da'uud "would rather be in an office with numbers and papers," he chooses to miss out on his own life's potential in order for his kids to have a better life, and he believes "[it's] over for him but not for Bedri" (82). Da'uud chooses to see his endurance as something he must do to keep his family away from "poverty" (82), even though his "heart is sore" (73). The strain

between him and his son arises because Da'uud "*take[s] shit . . . and lose[s] everything*" in his work (15) and puts his son Bedri first, yet Bedri's response to his father's sacrifice and suffering is to only live thanklessly and recklessly. Though Da'uud comes off as abrasive in his relationship with Bedri due to feeling as if his life has become a "waste" (71), he ultimately gives all of himself in order for Bedri to live the life he himself cannot.

Though he may not feel like a good father, Da'uud's guidance and presence does have a lasting, positive impact on Bedri, despite Bedri's lack of present lawfulness. More than Da'uud may ever know, Da'uud's wise words and sentiments influence Bedri silently but noticeably. Like his father, Bedri believes that a "bigger man overshadow[s] a smaller man" because that's "the way it [is]" (16), and he naturally incorporates his father's spoken "wisdom" in regular conversation (153). Also, Bedri emulates the same behaviour towards his sister that was once displayed by his father for Bedri's sake. For example, Bedri shows concern for his sister's wellbeing by telling her the possible negative consequences if she "[isn't] careful" and wishing he can be someone for her to "count on" (120)—strongly enough that he feels "dejected" when he is ruthlessly dismissed by her (120).

After Bedri comes close to committing homicide, he is guilt-ridden and reflects on his father, which contrasts with his accomplice's seemingly guiltless attitude. Bedri "[thinks] of his father" (15) as he flees the crime scene, feels the depth of his father's disappointment when he thinks his father will "kill him" (17), and ruminates over how he "[will] explain [his broken hand] to his father" (43). Also, when Bedri comes to be isolated in the middle of the night after leaving his accomplice, feeling bereft and left by all, his father's words come to him as Bedri "whisper[s] [a] fragmented prayer" (45) to handle his tough situation.

In the end, Bedri's choices seem to be only temporarily egregious and not consistent with his genuine nature, the part of his nature his father tries regularly to resuscitate in him. Bedri has been seduced by a different kind of masculinity than the one his father has grown up with, and in contrast to his father's conservative values, Bedri in his young age idealizes being "muscle . . . [with] girls on [his] shoulders" (166). However, like his father, Bedri changes his views as he comes to "know the value of" pain (166) and comes to understand his father's lessons.

The difference between the cultures and expectations Da'uud and Bedri embrace fuels the discord within their relationship. However, as the history and strife encompassed in Da'uud's life clash with the alluring lifestyle Bedri fantasizes about, there are few other outcomes possible. Though Da'uud's fatherly conduct seems rigid and unforgiving, his rough demeanor is caused by the turmoil which he escapes from, the various hardships he faces, and the seemingly unacknowledged sacrifices he makes for his family. These struggles, however, also contribute to the way he loves: he protects his children from the corruption humans may succumb to, by trying to raise them as strong, wise individuals, and he does so while living as a ghost of his former life in essence, giving up his aspirations so that his family's freedoms and opportunities may surpass his.

Overall, Da'uud's fatherly being, in its imperfect form, influences his son and discernibly cultivates in Bedri a sense of sincerity, moral agency, and responsibility as he matures. The relationship between Da'uud and Bedri shows that love within families may present itself as partial, disfigured, or incomplete, if not analyzed in depth. It also indicates there may be room for flaws if the defects are made up for with enough love elsewhere.

Work Cited

Brand, Dionne. *Love Enough*. Vintage Canada, 2014.