

# ON THE MUSICAL PATTERNING OF SCULPTED WORDS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MELODY AND METRE IN A SOMALI POETIC FORM

by

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## Introduction

Somalia has often been called a “nation of bards”, and poetry is frequently considered to be the most important form of artistic expression and social commentary in Somali society, a point made clear by Andrzejewski and Lewis when they state that “the Somali poetic heritage is a living force intimately connected with the vicissitudes of everyday life” (1964:3). It is evident from existing literature that Somali poetry is a powerful force fulfilling a multiplicity of social roles; it is intrinsic to the fabric of social action itself, from the negotiation of inter-clan relationships to the accompaniment of camel watering, from commenting on issues of public policy to those of technological development. What is not so evident is that all Somali poems can also be carriers of melody.<sup>1</sup> These melodic qualities of Somali poetry are first noted fleetingly in the travel writings of Richard Burton:

It is strange that a dialect which has no written character should so abound in poetry and eloquence. There are thousands of songs, some local, others general, upon all conceivable subjects, such as camel loading, drawing water...assisted by a tolerably regular alliteration and cadence, it can never be mistaken for prose, even without the song which invariably accompanies it. (Burton 1966:92)

Ethnomusicology as a field has remained largely unaware of the fundamental importance of melodic constructs in Somali social and cultural life, and the musical aspects of Somali poetry have been rarely described in anything more than passing phrases like those of Burton's. To this day, ethnomusicological work on Somalia remains scarce and is largely limited to Johnson's description of the emergence of the sung *Heelo* genre (Johnson 1974) and Giannattasio's rudimentary taxonomy of styles, intended as a call for further musical investigation (Giannattasio 1988). These studies have seemingly not been furthered in subsequent academic literature, perhaps due to the difficulty of obtaining safe research access to an area typecast as being perennially consumed by civil strife. This situation is no doubt exacerbated by the lack of pre-existent literature and available recordings to ignite interest among students.

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<sup>1</sup> It must be made clear here that much of the literature dealt with in this paper stems from research undertaken among the Northern and Central pastoralists. We should evidently be wary of making any overwhelmingly general statements about Somali poetry as a whole. Clan groups such as the *Rahanweyn* have a highly distinct dialect and their poetry has been little studied. See Lewis and Mukhtar (1996).

The point at which to begin a foregrounding of Somali musical activity is with the melodic characteristics of these poems mentioned by Burton, the melodic element being known as the *luuq* (marked by the word “song” in Burton’s description). The *luuq* is a melody that is used to frame the contours of language during recitation and accentuate the metrical qualities of the poems themselves. It is not essential for the presentation of a poem, and a poem presented without it is not considered to be qualitatively different or lacking a crucial element. It has elsewhere been suggested that melody is one of the key characteristics by which Somali poetic genres are distinguished from each other (Johnson 1996) and it may be the case that the perception of the *luuq* allows an audience to quickly identify the genre to which a poem belongs. It thus cannot be said that the *luuq* is arbitrary or that it is merely a lifting of the voice into greater volume, a so called “heightened speech”.

Here I will attempt to demonstrate the possible roles that the *luuq* plays in the structuring of a given poem. This will be achieved through an analysis of melody in a *gabay*<sup>2</sup> poem by Cumar Xuseen “Ostareeliya”. It is hoped that this analysis will help to highlight the musical characteristics of Somali poetic forms, show how musical characteristics have implications for enhancing our current understanding of Somali metrical patterns, and attempt to elucidate the nature of the relationship between melody and metre in Somali poetry. It is also hoped that this discussion will further our understanding of the role of the *luuq* in genre taxonomy.

I will contextualize this analysis within a discussion of existing literature on the nature of metrical patterning in Somali poetry, current taxonomies of genres, and previous considerations of the role of melody in poetic recitation. In the process I hope to provide information that helps to form a dynamic understanding of the mutually constructive relationships that can exist between language and music.

### On Music as Language

Let us first contemplate pre-existing ideas and works about the relationship between music and language in academic literature. Feld and Fox have produced an exhaustive catalogue of this field, classifying a broad spectrum of articles according to particular concerns and paradigmatic shifts (Feld and Fox 1994). Despite surveying a vast field of cross-disciplinary literature they reach the conclusion that: “Taken as a whole the literature has tended toward programmatic speculation and suggestive analogies directed from linguistic structures to musical ones” (Feld and Fox 1994:26). That is to say that the space between the two fields is largely occupied by a process of metaphor and analogy, whether structural, qualitative or contextual. This metaphoric link has been classically expressed by Levi Strauss when he states that music: “is the only language with the contradictory attributes of being at once intelligible and untranslatable”(Levi-Strauss 1979: 18).

<sup>2</sup> Due to the flexible nature of Somali orthography, some Somali words will be spelled differently in quotes, an irregularity that should not be confused with typographic error.

These metaphoric tendencies must not be immediately discredited, despite their universalistic undertones; they are after all based on the shared nature of language and music as communicative forms characterized by sonic patterning. Such metaphoric musings draw us back to the realisation that music and language can contain homologous process and functions. The following quote from Adorno is a lucid analogy of this type:

Music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal sequence of articulated sounds, which are more than just sounds...The succession of sounds is like logic: it can be right or wrong...The resemblance to language extends from the whole work, the organized linking of significant sounds, right down to the single sound, the note as the threshold of merest presence, the pure vehicle of expression. (Adorno 1992:1)

We can see that these types of analogy rest on the maintenance of the music/language dichotomy. It is acknowledged that they are very similar processes, yet they are opposed to each other in order to highlight their structural similarities. Such a dichotomy will not hold in the discussion of Somali poetry, where *luuq* is very much an emergent property of the patterns of metre itself. Its patterns follow the patterns of linguistic play and so it cannot be considered a mirror of, or metaphor for language, but is rather a property of a single process of voiced articulation.

### Poem or Song? On the Characteristics of a Dichotomy

Before beginning to address relationships between melody and metre, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the words “poem” and “song” in English language studies of Somali culture. It is important to note, that in the study of Somali oral culture, the words poem and song have been and continue to be interchangeable – as the type of Somali sonic organization usually labelled as poetry in academic literature often sits somewhere in between these two signifiers. The Somali “poem” is a composition recited from memory, often with a melody specific to the genre of the poem. Before the introduction of official orthography for transcribing the Somali language in the 1970s, Somali poetry was the product of an entirely oral culture (Johnson 1979:117). This is largely continued in contemporary poetic practice, and poetry is usually appreciated through live recitation or via cassette tape, and not through a written medium. A distinction between oral and written composition is also present in the language itself: “Somalis speak of a man of words ‘nin hadal’ as opposed to one of ‘letters’ thereby emphasising the oral character of their verse” (Samatar 1979:157).

A certain ambiguity lies in the fact that the word “song” often implies melodic prioritization over linguistic characteristics, while the term “poem” does not convey sufficient connotations of melodic contour. This causes significant interpretive problems for musicologists and linguists alike when dealing with Somali oral culture. An un-contextualized reader of Somali poetic texts, without access to audio recordings or live recitations of poetry, may be easily misled into thinking that Somali poetry is no different in its sonic qualities to written or recited English verse. The signifier of poetry thus

implies an emphasis on textual qualities over the immediate qualities of sound itself. In turn, a musicological analysis may easily neglect the importance of the word in creating meaning in forms of oral expression.<sup>3</sup> We shall see that melodic contour is often bound so tightly to the patterns of language that embedded assumptions about the expressive characteristics of melody may also have to be suspended.

It is with this dichotomy in mind that we can start to explore extant literature on the subject. The ambiguity is first reflected in the fact that to learn anything detailed about the characteristics of Somali song/poetry one must approach the writings of linguists, as musical analysis is so sparse. Even within this field there are no hard and fast terminological rules and different approaches exist within contiguous historical frameworks. In Kirk's 1905 work on Somali grammar he perceives the language/melody dichotomy from the musical side and declares that, "In the songs a distinctly poetical style is noticeable" (Kirk 1905:170). In this sentence, the words that signify musical and poetic qualities could be switched without significantly changing the meaning of the statement. Kirk then refers to "*Gerar, Gabei* and *Hes*" as songs, a nomenclature that reflects their inherently musical characteristics, yet an approach that is not replicated in later linguistic studies. The use of the poetic signifier begins with the work of Andrzejewski and Lewis and their publication of *An Introduction to Somali Poetry*. In this book a distinction is introduced in the organization of the material between "Classical Poetry" and "Traditional and Modern Songs" (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1994). The former is used to refer to serious genres such as *gabay*, *geerar* and *jiifto*, while the latter label is used to categorize modern poems with instrumental accompaniment, work songs, and dance songs. The main distinction between these two groupings is that the former are unaccompanied by any musical device external to the poem itself, while the latter are accompanied by instruments, a sung chorus, hand clapping, or dancing. It must be noted that all of these styles exhibit similar features of metrical patterning, despite some patterns being less complex than that of the *gabay*, and so it cannot be said that poems belonging to the latter category are any less "poetic" than the former. We can say that there are varying degrees of freedom in musical play that are present in the latter genres that are not in the former, yet we should not allow ourselves to be misled into thinking that these are entirely unrelated fields of sonic organization. This division has been replicated to the present day, and in most literature the *gabay*, *geeraar*, etc. have been referred to as "poems", a development that highlights both the fluid, interchangeable nature of this terminology and the fact that the musical characteristics of "Classical Poetry" have been largely overlooked.

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<sup>3</sup> In his work on spectral analysis Cogan notes that the characteristics of words can have a large influence on the basic sound conveyed in musical expression: "Many people...think that when music is added to words, it is the music that gives shape and expression to the words. Here we see that this is only a half-truth...the words, especially their vowels, orchestrate the music, giving each melodic note a specific array of resonating spectral elements" (Cogan 1984:27).

The dynamic relationship that exists between terminology and form in this oral culture is highlighted by Johnson when he speaks of how various categories of poetic activity can be distinguished from each other in multiple ways:

three of these categories are most prominent and scholars have labelled them from two points of view: students of literature call them ‘classical poetry’, ‘work poetry’ and ‘recreational poetry’. Students of music refer to them as ‘poetry’, ‘songs’ and ‘dances’. Somalis themselves call them *gabay*, *hees*, and *cayaar*. These terms are easy to translate linguistically (‘poetry’, ‘song’, ‘play’) but foreigners have difficulty understanding how Somalis view the concepts they convey. To Somalis, each class is both poetic and musical. (Johnson 1996:75)

These words cannot be considered anything more than a conceptual shorthand, as referents to real actions that cannot be fully reduced to description. It would be useful to recall at this point the adage of Gregory Bateson that helps lead us away from the entanglement of words: “The map is not the territory. The name is not the thing named”(Bateson and Bateson 2005:21). We are observing a complex human process that cannot be relegated to monolithic signifiers. We are dealing with statements of pure intent: political intent, intent of love, of contemplation, of territoriality, of reconciliation. The reasons that sounds are expressed by people are as myriad as the processes of life itself, and the subtleties of these forms are distinct and irreducible to our text. These sonic statements can only ever be maps of themselves. All we can aim to do through their analysis is evaluate our preconceptions and provide ourselves and others with the tools to experience the terrain. We are merely annotating fragments of the territory.

### On *Maanso* and *Hees*

The Somali taxonomy of poetic styles rests on the distinction between *maanso* and *hees*, one that we have seen has been mirrored in translation as being identical to that between poetry and song. A summary glance at the qualities of these two categories will reveal that there are deep complications in translating the distinction in this way. The following table reproduced from Orwin (2003:339) highlights the main distinguishing characteristics between them.

<i>Hees</i>	<i>Maanso</i>
Poetry of women and younger men	Poetry of older men
Lesser status	Higher status
Associated with work and dances	Associated with serious commentary
Unknown composer generally	Known composer always
Open to change reasonably freely	Memorised and recited verbatim
Regarded more as entertainment	Regarded as more socially important
Generally short poems	Generally longer poems than <i>heeso</i>
Individual <i>heeso</i> may be joined together	One poem recited on its own at a time
A large number of constituent genres	Fewer constituent genres

It must first be noted that both categories are essentially poetic, that is they conform to ideas of metrical form found in most Somali poetry. Both categories also contain many genres that can be considered musical, with melody playing an important structural role. The melodies found in both categories are also both based on the same anhemitonic pentatonic cycle of scales.

The opinion of Aboker is that this distinction is based largely on widespread cultural values rather than characteristics implicit in the genres themselves: “The local classification is based on gender and age prejudice that plays an important role in Somali cultural life” (Abokor 1993:1).

Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi in his recent work, *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, forwards the view that the main distinguishing characteristic between *hees* and other poetry is that *hees* is set to music (Abdullahi 2008:76). He also uses the word *maanso* to refer to poetry in general and makes an alternative distinction: “the ordinary people usually divide all verse into *gabay* (serious poetry) and *hees* (song)...The bards of old preferred the *gabay* as a genre, which is why sometimes the *gabay* is called today classical poetry; but many contemporary poets have a preference for the lighter meters in their compositions” (Abdullahi 2008:77). This distinction made by Abdullahi serves to illustrate that the word *gabay* is often interchangeable with the word *maanso* when speaking of poetry in general terms, yet it always retains its meaning as a signifier for a specific metrical pattern. The play between these words, and the flexibility between the categories of *maanso* and *hees*, demonstrates how particular concepts may be given undue fixity during the process of translation or scholarly mapping. As noted by Abokor, the terminology employed to distinguish between genres is highly flexible and is often illustrative of ideas of aesthetic worth and social value, a perspective made clear in poetic tirades against the emergence of the new *belwo* metres in the 1940s that were often associated with the loosening of traditional pastoralist values in the urban environment: “The evil *belwo* songs came, bringing corruption and spreading sin, and God was displeased with those who wrought such wrongfulness. They wasted their substance in frivolity and dissipation” (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:152).

These terminological distinctions can also be destabilised with reference to the verbal content of the poems themselves. Examples exist of the word *hees* being used reflexively within the context of a *gabay* recitation to describe the melodic qualities of the poem, as in the following refrain of a *gabay* by Salaan “Arrabey” translated by Andrzejewski and Galaal:<sup>4</sup>

Have I not made my point with vigour? (Others) let (their) poems stray.  
Have I not laid the keel for it and provided it with a melody?

<sup>4</sup> According to Orwin, the use of *hees* in this context is due to a broadening of meaning in poetic language. It is necessary to use the word to alliterate in H, yet it is evident that it does not refer to the melody of work song. The point remains that meaning is flexible in the relevant Somali nomenclature (personal correspondence 2009).

*Hig ma siiyay? Hawraarta way, kala halleeyaan e*  
*Heeraabta maw dhigay intaan, hees na dabo joojay?*  
 (Andrzejewski and Galaal 1963:191-195)

As acknowledged by Orwin, these tabulated distinctions are in no way definitive or all-encompassing and many genres offer exceptions to the above stated rules. The early modern *heeso* (pl.) associated with the independence movement were certainly perceived as serious social commentary, many of these songs being composed by individuals whose names are widely associated with their work (Johnson 1996). Despite these exceptions, the distinctions made in the above table do hold in many circumstances and are useful tools to orientate the reader among the social lives of specific genres.

It is thus clear that many factors come to bear on the shaping of indigenous nomenclature, making the terms *maanso* and *hees* a shifting network of interpretations and values. The lines drawn between blocks of styles are flexible in the context that they stem from, and thus must not be interpreted as the monolithic categories of “poetry” contrasted with “song”.

### Sound of Language/Sound of Music: Highlighting Sonic Characteristics

A fundamental characteristic of many Somali poetic forms is that they can carry melody, as noted by Samatar:

All pastoral verse is intoned: this means that every Somali poem has a melody or tune to which it is chanted. The musicality of pastoral verse is obvious enough and derives from its continuous feature of regularity, the poetic rhythm. (Samatar 1982:62)

We have noted that the melody used in *maanso* genres such as the *gabay* is often known as the *luuq*. It is clear that the *luuq* is intrinsically linked to concepts of orality and every translation links it implicitly to the voice. The *luuq* is defined in Zorc’s Somali-English dictionary as “voice, tone, intonation” and *luuqee* as “chant, intone a poem” (Zorc 1991:312). This close link with oral expression is characteristic of most recorded Somali musics, and it can be noted that melody does not seem to occur as anything other than an accompaniment to words.<sup>5</sup>

It has been noted that the *luuq* is applied to the poem by the reciter, that is to say that a given poem is not associated with a fixed melody. It is also generally the case that the *luuq* is rendered in a similar way for a particular genre by the same reciter. This has led authors such as Johnson to speculate that melodies are genre specific: “a small number of melodies belong to each genre, and a musician can utilise any one of them to sing any poem in the genre; but each of these melodies is subservient to the prosody of the genre. Hearing a Somali whistling, one might guess the genre, but not the poem” (Johnson 1997:614). This fixity of the relationship between genre and *luuq*

<sup>5</sup> This is also evident in modern *Hees*. Even the repertoire that surrounds the *kaban* lute seems to be devoid of solo performance styles. It seems that when the instrument is played by itself it is merely to illustrate the melody of a song or to lift the words of a poem into melody during the compositional process.

has been contested by Giannattasio and Banti, who state that: “although a certain genre may have its prototypical *luuqs*, these vary according to the individual performer, and from the primary performance to its subsequent interpretations” (Giannattasio and Banti 1996:88). Whether or not the *luuq* is actually indicative of poetic genre is still unclear. However, it has been firmly established that the amount of melodic variation within the *luuq* of a particular genre is slight compared to the amount of poems that exist in that genre; a firm proof that words are more important than melody.

It has been argued that the *luuq* is not regarded as emotionally expressive:

The performance of *maanso* is not something to which the reciter brings an affective contribution. rather the recital is such that the words are allowed to speak for themselves. This is not to say that a good clear voice or a reciter who is particularly adept at the traditional chant known as *luuq*. is not prized. But I would say that a good reciter adds nothing more than a good frame adds to a painting. (Orwin 2003:340)

Thus the essential quality that the *luuq* adds to the sonic construct is clarity, both of meaning and form. Its function is to frame the verse, but this act of framing also adds to the qualities of the verse itself. It is a raw enunciative function that passes messages independently of linguistic meaning, its contours enhancing our perception of metrical rhythms. This melodic lineation of metrical structure is so evident that it allows listeners unfamiliar with the Somali language to perceive the syllabic content of each line in the *gabay* and to hear patterns of consonant alliteration. It can thus be said that, by framing the poem, the *luuq* also enhances the conveyance of its structural qualities. We will also see in the subsequent analysis that the *luuq* introduces a parallel pattern of cadential pauses that have not yet been integrated into the current metrical models formulated by linguists.

It may also be the case that the *luuq* acts as a mnemonic aid, helping the reciter to quickly absorb the poem’s qualities during the process of learning and facilitating the swift retrieval of a poem of a given genre from memory during performance.<sup>6</sup> If the *luuq* does actually act as a trigger for speedy metrical recognition on the part of the listener, we can say that it does have an inherent performative function, even if it is not one that adds emotional content or meaning to the rendition of a poem.

### Metrical Characteristics

Prominent in the phonology of Somali poetry are patterns of consonant alliteration<sup>7</sup> and of the distribution of single and double vowel sounds (morae), together creating a

<sup>6</sup> As outlined by David Hughes, language is used as a mnemonic aid for musical instruction and memorisation (Hughes 2000). It is feasible that melodies have a similar function in assisting the recollection of large linguistic structures.

<sup>7</sup> I suggest that the alliterative sound is analogous to that of “attack” in instrumental performance. It is the sound at the start of a tone that often has the largest impact on our perception of the sound characteristic. Patterns of attack are used effectively in many musics to create sensations of form and phrasing within performance. They help to orientate the listener within a rhythmic grouping.



system of quantitative scansion. The morae give the temporal quality of duration, and thus when patterned form metrical cycles, complemented by the rhythmic punctuation of the alliteration. Syllabic groupings also shape the rhythm, although these do not contribute to metrical scansion. These qualities of most Somali poetry are summarised in an appendix to Andrzejewski's *Anthology of Somali Poetry* (Andrzejewski and Andrzejewski 1993:103).

Alliterative consonants occupy regular positions throughout a poem, which must be alliterated in a single specified consonant, making the composition of a long work an act of incredible linguistic innovation. This rule has given rise to a highly specialised poetic language, rich enough to provide the words necessary for patterning, yet often sharply removed from the vocabulary of everyday spoken Somali: "The poet, to supplement his store of words, has to resurrect archaic words, enliven obsolescent ones, and even create new ones, and many arguments arise among Somali audiences as to the precise meanings of such archaicisms as are used in poetry" (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:43).

This process often leads the poet on sophisticated alliterative tangents and makes the appreciation of poetry a refined skill, a "fascinating intellectual exercise of decoding the veiled speech of the poet's message" (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:44). Sustained and innovative consonant alliteration is a sure sign of poetic mastery and is frequently the subject of a refrain during recitation, as in the following examples:

Have I not put these four points one after the other, like the marked sticks in the Deleb game?

Have I not set them out clearly? Errors and prevarication spoil a poem!

Have I lost the alliteration in the letter D with which I began?

(Andrzejewski and Galaal 1963:23)

And in the words of Cabdulqaadir Xaaji Cali Axmed:

I pass you this message alliterating in "d"

to ring to pour forth harmony forging the path

(Orwin 2001a:18)

References to vowel scansion are not as apparent in the literature and it seems that these patterns are largely understood through being inherent in the sound pattern. They are not learnt as formulas to be applied to language, but are inherited orally as sonic forms: "The rules of each of the metres are intuitively applied by the poets, who have no explicit knowledge of them but immediately recognise any departures from correctness. No one knows how the system developed but it is certain that it was developed without any recourse to writing" (Andrzejewski and Andrzejewski 1993:104).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The phrase "no explicit knowledge" seems to stand out as a stark value judgement weighted against the validity of oral knowledge. We should interpret this phrase as meaning "no explicit literary knowledge", with literary implying an interpretative paradigm based on textual analysis.

### Transcription of *Gabay*

The following *gabay*<sup>9</sup> is by Cumar Xuseen “Ostareeliya” who became a seaman after his early pastoralist years before returning to Somalia and his former way of life. His nickname grew from his stories of travelling to Australia (Andrzejewski and Andrzejewski 1993:72). The poem is written as a praise to the camel and has been translated by Andrzejewski as “Where True Profit Lies” (Andrzejewski and Andrzejewski 1993:72). I have transcribed a section of the piece in both staff and graphic notation. Both forms have their strengths and it is hoped that the graphical notation will help to show patterns of phrasing and form, while staff notation allows the presentation of more melodic detail. The recording from which the transcriptions have been made can be heard on the accompanying CD.

It must be noted that the notated pitches are not exact, and the notation must be considered together with the recorded material. Some of the pitches are quite variable and can deviate by as much as a quarter tone upon some repetitions, an observation also made by John William Johnson; “Somali music...uses a pentatonic scale, the tones of which are not standardized by pitch. There is a window of frequencies in which notes are acceptably ‘on pitch’. The resulting intervals are also unstandardised; but relative to the pitches on either side of them, they are more predictable” (Johnson 1997:613).

I have chosen to focus on a *gabay* because much work has already been done on the form by linguists and its metrical properties are well understood. It is also considered by many Somali poets to be the pinnacle of poetic composition, being the most metrically sophisticated and socially prestigious. It is the *gabay* that best epitomises the *maanso* category and is considered the most “poetic” form of oral culture. It may seem inappropriate to apply melodic analysis to this seemingly least musical of styles, yet I feel that it is here, furthest from ideas of unbounded musicality, that an observation of the role of melody will be most rewarding.

Andrzejewski and Lewis describe the *gabay*'s sound as follows:

The chant of the *gabay* usually has a simple melody with great variations in the length of notes. Some are held for a considerable time, and this applies particularly to those which correspond to the end of a line in the poem: in this position they fade gradually into silence. The tempo of the chant is slow and majestic, seldom changing throughout the poem. All emotional appeal depends on the expressive power of the words, and the reciter does not especially modulate his voice or accentuate any words or lines, thus giving an impression of superb restraint and stylization. (1964:47–48)

In order to examine the relationship between the metrical rules of the *gabay* in relation to the melody of the *huuq*, we must look at the rules behind the metrical pattern.

<sup>9</sup> The Somali words and recorded recitation were provided by Martin Orwin, whose assistance and patience have been essential in surmounting the difficulties of this project.

I have distilled these rules from the following articles<sup>10</sup> (Guled 1979) (Orwin 2003) (Orwin and Riraash 1997) (Banti and Giannattasio 1996):

1. The basic element of Somali poetic metre is the relationship between the durational values of single and double vowel sounds. This metrical pattern is independent of syllabic units.
2. The distribution of these elements has distinct patterns for different poetic genres.
3. Each vowel sound (one mora), occupies a single short position (a double vowel sound is two morae and occupies a long position).
4. Two single vowel sounds can occupy the same space as a double vowel sound.
5. The *gabay* line is composed of 20 morae with an occasional optional anacrusis at the beginning of the line.
6. The line is divided into two half lines or hemistichs – the first half containing 12 morae and the second containing eight.
7. The entire poem must be alliterated in one specific consonant and this consonant must occur once in each half-line (the consonant in this case is d).
8. The letters y and w are semi-vowels, diphthongs which in a closed syllable always count as two morae, but in an open syllable may count as one or two.
9. The particle oo may count as long or short for metrical purposes.

The *gabay* metre is composed of the following pattern of vowel positions (long positions being occupied by a double vowel sound or two single, and short being a single vowel sound):

(Optional short) • long • long • short • long • long • short • long | long • short • long • long • short

We can map this pattern onto the first section of the *gabay* in accordance with the stated rules in the following way:

*Dh**iba**ativo adioo gaajo qaba | dhaxanta jiilaalka*

*Dhoor caano laga jooivavoo | vara dhanaanaadav*

*Nin dhadhamivev waa garanavaa | dhul av qaboojaane.*

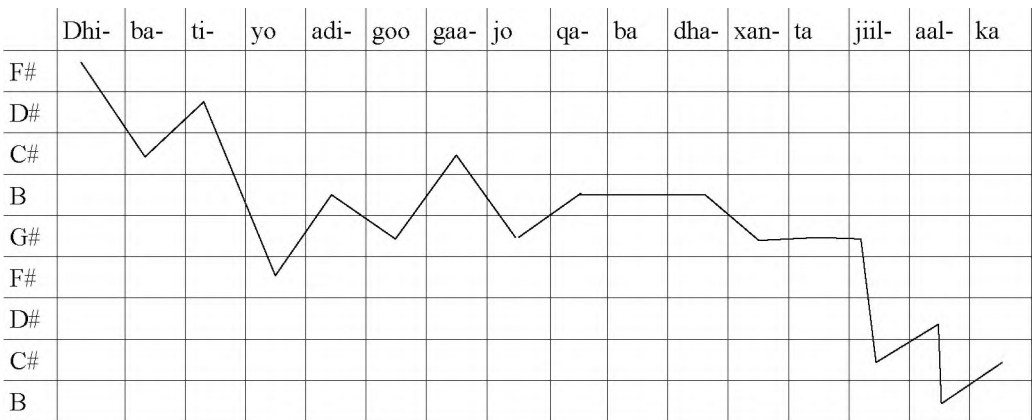
The underlines mark the morae used to scan the meter and the vertical line marks the hemistich. The optional anacrusis is marked by a bold underline, a single mora position by a regular underline and a double mora position by a double underline.

<sup>10</sup> Note that there are additional rules that govern the grouping of non-alliterative consonants but their characteristics lie outside the bounds of this article. For details see (Orwin 2001b). The foundation for most of these theories of Somali metrical pattern is the frequently overlooked work of Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac “Gaariye” (1976).

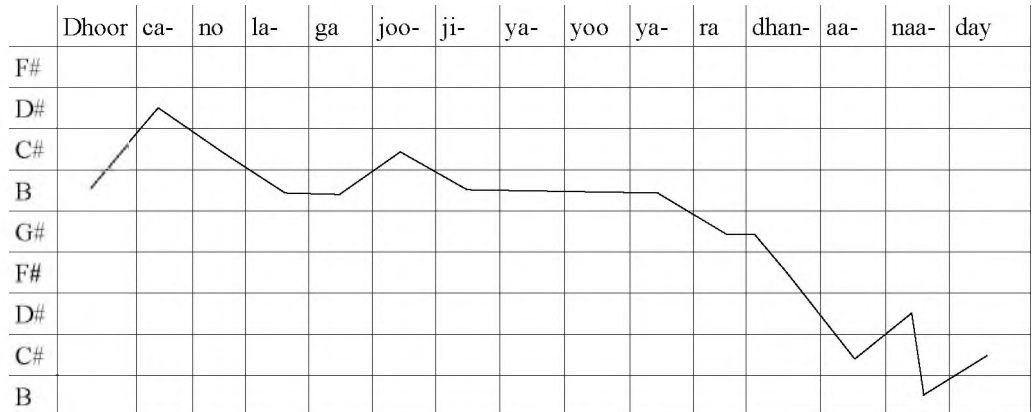
The melody of the *luuq* is divisible into two distinct sections; the second section is then divisible into two sections. I shall call these sections A, B and C. Sections B and C sound like a cohesive phrase and can be bracketed together. Each one of these sections occupies exactly one line of the *gabay* metre. The form of the *luuq* as a whole is A/B/C and this pattern is repeated throughout the *gabay* with only slight differences in ornamentation and inflection, giving a sense of verse structure and continual refrain. Towards the end the form changes to A/A/B/C, and then A/A/A/B/C in the last instance. This expansion of the form seems to have the effect of compounding the force of the recitation, as the listener is exposed to increasingly regular melodic reiteration. It should also be noted that the pause left between B and C decreases towards the end, a development that adds to the heightened sense of impact by contracting the density of the form. I have transcribed the first rendition of this theme and it can be heard that the sections A/B/C correspond to the above three lines exactly.

The melody can be represented in graphic notation as follows:

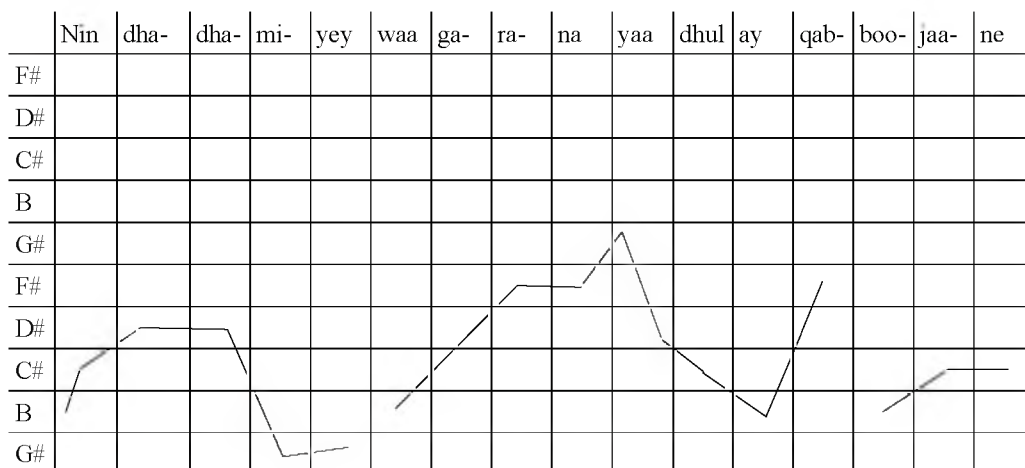
Section A



Section B



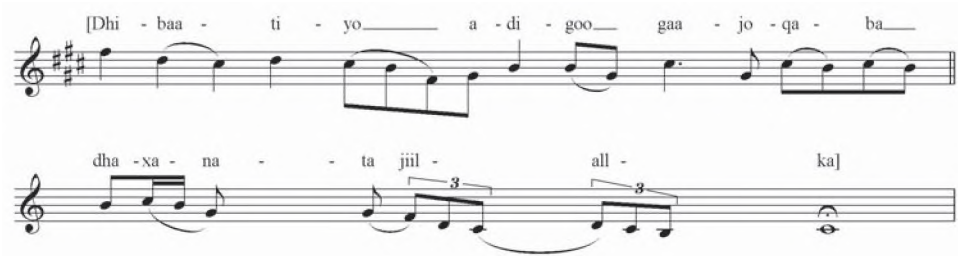
Section C



It should be noted that the graphic notation does not attempt to portray time values independently of the syllabic units, and that the time values in the staff notation are but an approximation. It is evident that the piece does not have musical metre, yet it does have a fairly regular pulse. This pulse seems to decrease in tempo in the second hemistich of each line, before returning to its original speed at the start of the next line. It is difficult to say whether this change in speed is a result of how the stresses of language are perceived, or if it is an independent musical process, yet it is evident that it creates rhythmic tension. Snyder’s description of tension in free rhythm can be usefully applied to our understanding of rhythmic emphasis in the *gabay*: “timing intervals, durations, and accents become functionally very important for defining tension. This is true rhythmic tension, rather than metrical tension...Denied metrical accents, free rhythm instead uses phenomenal and structural accents” (Snyder 2000:190).

A transcription on stave notation reads as follows. Note in the transcription below that patterns of accents/stresses are not depicted as they follow the syllabic divisions clearly.

Section A



## Section B

[Dhoor caa - no la - ga joo - ji - ya - yo -  
ya - ra dhan - aa - naa - day]

## Section C

[Nin dha - dha - mi - yey waa ga - ra - na - y - aa  
dhul ay qa - - - boo - - - jaa - - - ne]

It is immediately apparent that the main pitch movements and stresses lie on syllabic changes, a point already noted by Giannattasio and Banti: “regardless of the underlying metrical pattern, only one musical sound corresponds to each syllable with the exception of a handful of cases where a vowel is divided rhythmically” (1996:88). These movements provide the most immediately perceivable rhythm upon listening to the recording and it is upon the syllabic stresses that a clear pulse can be felt. It can also be seen that the metre does not exactly correspond to this pattern of most audible stresses and often crosses syllabic units. Traces of the metrical pattern can however be perceived in the stave notation, where the short clusters of ornamentation, often triplets, generally seem to occur within the confines of a double vowel sound. It seems to be the case that melodic ornamentation is used to place emphasis upon certain metrical features, and here comparative analysis of many recitations may yield patterns by which melodic performance emphasizes the listeners’ perception of metrical positions.

We can see that the patterns of syllables and of moraic scansion occupy two distinct layers of rhythm, both of which can be perceived by the acculturated listener. These layers of patterning are those emphasised in the linguistic analysis of metre.

A third layer is added by the durational values of the melody, as distinct from the accentuation of linguistic stresses; that is, these are the sustained pitches on the syllables that end each line, the pause after *yey* in the first hemistich of section B, and the syllable *ab* in the middle of the last hemistich of section C.

A fourth layer is evident in the spaces left between the melodic patterns A/B/C, and the spaces between the reiteration of this complete pattern. Thus a pattern of versification is enunciated, with three metrical lines packaged within each melodic reiteration.

The investigation of the interface between metre, recitation, and melody also bears on the wider study of recited poetry in the Horn of Africa. In an article on Afar poetry, Morin speaks of how this interface can be found across many Cushitic languages: "Since poetry is sung in these languages, as well as elsewhere in Cushitic, music should also be considered as another structural feature. If not sung, the reciter's scansion will retain the musical accentuation" (1996:269). Unfortunately Morin is unable to comment on the melodic aspects of the poem he translates in his article. Among the Beja peoples of southern Sudan, whose language belongs to the Cushitic group, Morin writes that it is also melody that gives shape to the verses and thus creates a meta-form independent of metrical structure: "Each phrase ends on a pause after a vocalic lengthening. If we decide to represent this graphically...it has to be stressed that none of the resulting four 'verses' is conceived on a metrical (rhymed) pattern but result instead from a musical pattern" (1997:20). Zaborski also speaks of the role of melody as a compliment to metrical structure in Afar poetry: "This bundle of metric features would, by itself, be sufficient to provide metrical structure, but it is reinforced by a correspondence between the verse and an intonational-musical pattern, i.e. the limits of the melody correspond to the limits of the verses, so that the musical metre is superimposed over the verse structure metre and dominates it, so that the metric structure is adjusted to the melody" (1996:267).

These points support my "fourth layer" in the above analysis. They illustrate melody as a process that has a modulating effect on metrical structure when actualized in performance, across a broad spectrum of distinct oral traditions in the Horn of Africa.

Thus the overall sonic construct contains a type of polyrhythmic play between the rhythmic features of the language and the additional durational values of the *huuq* itself. It is clear that the main organizational principle of the *gabay* are the words themselves, yet their idealised patterning is disrupted by the process of performance. It would seem, that to the Somali listener, the metre is not conceived as being qualitatively changed when it is modulated by melody: the metrical pattern is still carried intact by the *huuq*, and it can be certain that any metrical deviations would be quickly noticed by a discerning audience (Orwin 2009, personal correspondence). It would seem that the recognition of metrical characteristics alongside the appreciation of the performative effects of the *huuq* involves a deft process of bi-lateral cognition. I suggest that this tension between an abstract ideal type (metrical model) and an actualized performative function (*huuq*) contributes significantly to peoples appreciation of recitation and can in fact be a hallmark of virtousity and expressive skill. The clarity and applicability of this thesis cannot be confirmed at present without further analysis of recited poems with and without the *huuq*, alongside further research into what exactly is perceived as the dominant characteristics of a performance by an acculturated listener. Further information from Somali poets and listeners on the role and characteristics of the *huuq* will be necessary to clarify this point.

## Conclusions

It should be noted here that conclusive statements about the relationship between the melody and metre cannot yet be made and that the following points have not yet been fully understood:

1. How the modulating effect of the *huuq* on the perceivable characteristics of poetic meter are understood by the listener.
2. What role the *huuq* plays in the listener's recognition of specific poetic metres.
3. Whether the *huuq* is considered to have an extralinguistic performative function.
4. If the *huuq* is considered to be a mnemonic aid.

These are all domains of enquiry that lie beyond the knowledge-producing characteristics of formal analysis and structural mapping. Neither can extant literature clarify any of these points. Yet this survey of the *gabay* will hopefully serve to highlight the musical characteristics of this single poetic genre chosen from a broad spectrum of oral culture. Perhaps this will prompt the awareness that the multitude of poetic creations of an entire culture are also songs, and thus finally draw Somali poetry into the arena of rigorous musicological consideration. Likewise it is hoped that presenting these characteristics in relation to formalized metrical analysis will serve to draw linguistic discussions of Somali oral poetry into engaging with issues of performance and sound, cognition and memory. Such interdisciplinary research may offer insights into how a culture of linguistic play can give rise to and shape the characteristics of a form of musical expression.

It is only through ethnographic enquiry, through the documentation of oral knowledge situated in a direct experiential relationship with the *huuq* that the above listed points can be clarified. As Blacking notes: "Music is humanely organized sound, and its effectiveness, and value, as a means of expression rest ultimately on the kind and quality of human experiences involved in its creation and performance" (1995:53).

It is thus the case that a thorough ethnomusicological enquiry into the qualities of the *huuq*, of its form and meaning for those poets who utter it in social space, brimming with vibrant intent and purpose, remains to be articulated.

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