18
COLLANA STUDI SOMALI

RUIXUAN LI

SOMALI WOMEN'S POETRY

LULLABIES, MEN AND POLITICS

Roma TrE-Press
2025

Università degli Studi Roma Tre
Centro Studi Somali

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI ROMA TRE

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Note of the Editorial Director

This volume of the Studi Somali Series – No. 18 – appears after a considerable interval from the publication of the previous one, No. 17. There are reasons for this delay, but they would take too long to recount here. However, if you look back at the history of this series, you'll see that it was established to disseminate the results of the Studi Somali Project's research, which began in the 1980s.

The timing of publication has never followed a fixed schedule. Instead, each volume has been released when we had material that we believed was valuable enough to be shared.

Over the years, though with varying frequency, we have continued to publish volumes related to the Somali language and culture. These have included not only works from members of the original project team but also contributions by external researchers.

This volume, like the two preceding it (Nos. 16 and 17), is published by Roma Tre Press and is freely available for download. I would also like to take this opportunity to inform you that all volumes of the Studi Somali Series can be accessed in the Archivio Somalia – The Somali Archive – Kaydka Soomaaliyeed at the following address: <https://arcadia.sba.uniroma3.it/handle/2307/723>.

The Somali Archive is a multimedia repository of materials related to Somalia, produced and collected over the years, and made available for free online consultation and download. It is one of the resources of the Library System of Roma Tre University.

Prof. Annarita Puglielli
Università Roma Tre

Foreword

This book is the product of the author's engagement with Somali language, poetry and poets since 2016, when she arrived in London to study for an MA in African Studies at SOAS University of London. Having learned Somali for a year as part of her MA, she continued to study the language and quickly developed an interest in the poetry, particularly that of women. This became the focus of her PhD project which she successfully completed and which is the basis of this book with some edits and revisions.

There are not many books on Somali poetry and very few which provide analysis in such depth as the author goes into here. This is all introduced, however, by a chapter which addresses issues it is important to understand and bear in mind when discussing Somali poetry, especially for readers not already familiar with the tradition. This also introduces the relevant literature and the wider topics and perspectives which inform the author's approach taken in the main chapters. These draw on ideas relating to lyric poetry and the use of language. As the author points out in the section on research questions, she looks at both what women express in their poetry and how they express that.

The first of the three main chapters looks at lullabies, a very interesting topic, as there is much more to these poems/songs than simply lulling a baby to sleep, though that is also an important characteristic of them. Drawing on various sources, the discussion of Somali lullabies is set against a wider sense of what lullabies are as a human cultural phenomenon. The author also considers the genre itself and how it is perceived by Somalis within the categorisation of their poetry, a discussion that introduces wider themes picked up later at some other points in the book.

The next chapter considers poems by Caasha Luul Maxmuud Yuusuf and Xaawa Jibriil relating to gender dynamics and relationships and does so in quite some depth. The texts, like all the ones in the book are taken

from published sources. The two poems by Caasha Luul are 'Dookh' and 'Calaf' and the analysis allows for an appreciation of the poet's art and her careful crafting of how the messages she conveys in the poems are expressed. These two are well chosen given the complementary ways they address the poet's thoughts on relationships between men and women. The poems by Xaawa Jibriil are quite different in tone and style but are also well chosen, and the detailed analysis of these allows for an appreciation not only of the messages but of the skills of the poet and the ways she addresses male relatives and other men. All of these poems provide valuable insight into women's poetry and deepen our understanding not only of the work of these poets specifically but of how Somali poetry, in particular that of women, works more widely.

The final major chapter considers poetry by women on politics and social issues. The poems are taken from various sources and include a detailed analysis of two *buraambur*s, one by Halimo Shiil, previously published in an article by Zainab Mohamed Jama, and one by Xaawa Jibriil. These demonstrate women's involvment in the poetic discourse leading up to independence, as well as their political engagement. Of post-colonial political poets, two short examples are analysed, another by Xaawa Jibriil and one by Halimo Ali Kurtin. These are followed by the in-depth analysis of an interesting and powerful poem on war by Saado Cabdi Amarre and an important poem on irregular migration by Caasha Luul Maxmuud Yuusuf.

There are not many books on Somali poetry and very few which analyse poems in the depth that this one does. It is an important contribution, therefore, to Somali poetry studies which is very welcome. The analysis and discussion allows the poems to speak to a wider readership, and many readers from the wider poetry and lyric studies field will find the poems and their analysis fascinating from a comparative perspective. As displaying examples of characteristics of lyric poetry, the book contributes also to a nascent interest in the deeper aspects of form, voice, tone and structure of poetry in Somali, the wider poetics and literary history of which can only benefit greatly from this contribution. It is fortunate that it is published in the well-known series Studi Somali since this makes it an open access publication which will be available as easily in the Horn of Africa as it is elsewhere. It is hoped that it will find a wide readership who will engage with the ideas and, furthermore, that the author is able to continue to study Somali poetry and contribute in similar ways in the future.

Prof. Martin Orwin
Università di Napoli L'Orientale

Preface

This book is a revised and expanded version of my PhD thesis, which I completed at SOAS, University of London. My doctoral research was driven not only by a deep fascination with Somali poetry but also by profound respect for Somali women – their brilliance, resilience, and the remarkable bravery expressed in their verse. Yet, despite their significant contributions, women's voices in Somali poetry have often been overlooked, and I felt compelled to explore and illuminate their role more fully.

In this book, I examine how Somali women poets engage with themes of love, gender, power and social change, navigating the constraints of a patriarchal society while carving out space within national and cultural discourse. Through various poetic forms, I explore how early women's poetry often reinforced social norms while simultaneously offering subtle critiques, and how later poets, particularly in the postcolonial and contemporary periods, have increasingly challenged these limitations, using poetry as a means of asserting agency and resistance. By tracing this evolution, I aim to highlight the sophistication, depth, and transformative power of Somali women's poetry.

Throughout this study, I have engaged with the texts through close reading and literal translation. This process has led me to explore literary theory more deeply, particularly lyric studies. While some works discuss Somali women's poetry, few closely examine the poetic texts themselves. This book aims to bridge that gap by analysing how Somali women poets craft their verse – employing metre, alliteration, repetition, lyric structure, and rhetorical strategies to express their experiences. By shedding light on both the thematic concerns and the poetic techniques of these women, I hope to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of Somali poetry and its broader literary significance.

To the reader, I hope this book provides not only insight into Somali women's poetry but also a deeper appreciation of the brilliance, creativity, and power of these poets. Somali women poets have always been

active participants in shaping their cultural and political landscapes and their poetry deserves a more prominent place in literary and cultural discourse. May their voices continue to inspire and challenge the way we think about poetry, gender, and cultural expression.

Acknowledgements

I offer my profound gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr. Martin Orwin, for his unwavering support, guidance and understanding throughout the years since I first began learning Somali and Somali literature with him in 2016. His mentorship has been invaluable, and I can truly say that I would not have come this far without him. I am deeply grateful for his belief in my work and for the opportunities he has provided me to develop my research.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Somali poets Caasha Luul Maxamuud Yuusuf and Saado Cabdi Amarre, and author Maryan Anshur, for generously supporting my analysis of their works and sharing their personal experiences with me. I am equally indebted to the enriching discussions with the local Somali women who participated in my interviews and poetry reading events in Hargeysa.

I take special pleasure in thanking my Somali sisters, especially Aisha Afrah, Asli Jama, and Nasra Daahir. They have celebrated even my smallest achievements and never hesitated to offer their support. Words cannot fully express my gratitude to their encouragement and friendship. I would also like to thank Nasra's mother, Mako Mohamoud, for her kindness and hospitality during my fieldwork.

For the revision of my work, I am deeply grateful to Prof. Giorgio Banti and Dr. Ida Hadjivayanis, whose thoughtful feedback as examiners during my viva was invaluable. I also appreciate their encouragement in transforming my dissertation into this book.

Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my family for their constant belief in me and unconditional support. Thank you, mama and baba, for always standing by me.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. *A Point of Departure*

Oral poetry has been the core form of cultural expression in Somali society for as long as we know. It is considered a vital part of communication, affecting not only lineage and political affairs but also local matters and the everyday lives of the Somali people. As John Johnson observes, Somali poetry is 'employed as a running commentary on the latest news, a lobbying pressure device for social and political debates, a record of historical events, a revered form of aesthetic enjoyment, and an expression of deep feelings about love' (Johnson 1974: 1). Following these roles that Somali poetry has played, Johnson introduces the status of a Somali poet and writes: 'the poet is a prominent public figure who commands a following, and his prestige corresponds to his poetic ability' (*Ibid*). We see here that Johnson uses the masculine possessive pronoun 'his', implying that the poet who has such a high status, must be a man.

Indeed, Somali poetry was considered mainly a man's domain. In the patriarchal Somali society, while men were granted the privilege to comment on political and other serious matters, travel freely, and carry a piece of poetry over vast distances to transmit it to a larger audience, women were not allowed such opportunities. Somali women were placed in an inferior social position by social norms. Gender inequality sets the basis for a series of sexist moral standards imposed on women, and these standards were reflected and recorded in oral literature.

For example, Somali scholar Axmed Cali Abokor, quotes the saying in his *Somali Pastoral Work Songs: The Poetic Voice of the Politically Powerless* (1993: 21): 'Bravery, generosity and eloquence are laudable in men but shameful in women.' These moral standards were further combined with the suppression of women's speech, which was also reflected in poetry. Axmed argues that women's genres were largely played down by the male-dominated society and regarded as 'unsophis-

ticated and less serious and important' than adult men's genres only because the composers were women (*Ibid*). Since memorising and reciting poetry is a male occupation and these men feel that it is 'unmanly or demeaning' for them to recite poems by women, a woman's poem would only be performed, most of the time, within a limited circle of female relatives and friends. This eventually led to not only a form of silencing women's voices in the male-dominated world, but also the exclusion of women's poetry from the Somali literary canon.

The official Somali orthography was introduced in 1972. Prior to that, poetry was mostly composed, retained, and transmitted in oral form. Before the introduction of an official script, collectors of oral literature had written down oral texts in several different scripts, including an Arabic-based system known as Wadaad's writing, a Latin-based alphabet, and the Borama (or Gadabuursi), Osmanya and Kaddare alphabets[1]. These scripts were developed in different parts of the Somali territory in the early 1900s. After 1972, more orally composed poems were transcribed. Some of the first major publications following the introduction of the official writing system were collections of oral poetry such as Sh. Jaamac Cumar Ciise (1974) and Axmed F. Cali 'Idaajaa[2]' (1974). Andrzejewski (2011b) referred to these scholars as 'the preservers', and he regarded these collections as part of the history of written literature in Somali.

At this time, more poets, including the renowned Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame 'Hadraawi', began using the aid of writing when making poems. They would read from the written texts when performing their poems. This is also the case with Caasha Luul Maxamuud Yusuf, one of the contemporary women poets whose poems I shall be looking at in this book. Although with the use of writing, the poets would not need to memorise their poems, it is important to note that Somali poems are still primarily *heard*. They are listened to, not read, by the Somali people. There are still many poets who do not use writing in their composition process at all.

As mentioned above, writing made it possible for Somalis to preserve their oral art, but it also enabled academic researchers from other cultures to collect and translate Somali poems into other languages. The vast majority of the poems that have been documented from oral sources, whether by Somalis or people from outside the culture, are men's work. This is largely because most of the scholars who collected

[1] For a more detailed account on this, see Qubti (1961).

[2] Apart from being the editor of the work of several poets, Axmed F. Cali 'Idaajaa' is a poet himself.

the poems are male. In the introduction of *An Anthology of Somali Poetry* by B.W. Andrzejewski, the anthologist wrote: 'I myself regret that there is no women's poetry here; I found it difficult, as a man, to collect any myself, and there is as yet little documentation on it, but there are hopeful signs that women researchers are taking on the task' (Andrzejewski with Andrzejewski 1993: 1).

The Somalis classify their poetry into different genres based mostly on the rigid criteria of the quantitative metrical patterns. Each genre has a specific name. All these genres of poems can be broadly divided into two types: *maanso* and *hees*[3]. *Maanso* poems are considered as 'classical' poems that are noble enough to discuss serious social and political matters. Four of the major genres within *maanso* are the *gabay*, the *jiifto*, the *geeraar*, and the *buraambur*. A more comprehensive account of the genres and categorisation of Somali poetry will be given in the next section. While the first three genres were traditionally considered to be performed by and for men only[4], with the *gabay* being the most prestigious, the *buraambur* is considered as the genre particularly by and for women. Women used *buraambur* to give voice to their feelings and concerns and to comment on the world around them, despite the limited circulation of their words. Some *buraambur* poems by women discuss matters as serious as those discussed in *gabay* poems by men. For example, a *buraambur* poem called 'Gaajo See ku Hari?' (How can hunger be defeated?) made by Xaawa Jibriil in 1971 addresses the food crisis, one of the most severe issues that puts the lives of millions of Somalis in danger (Faduma 2008: 160-161).

Female Somali researcher Zainab Mohamed Jama notes that 'over the centuries and generations there have been women who composed poetry on political and other serious matters', and it was men's refusal to recite women's poems that limited the circulation and preservation of women's serious poetry (Zainab 1991: 44). Zainab uses 'fighting to be heard' as the title of her paper on poetry by a group of Somali women who were active in the independence movement during the 1940s and 1950s. During times of great political change, these women used the occasions of public gatherings and rallies made possible by the independence movement to recite their patriotic poetry to a mixed or a male audience.

[3] Note that the term *hees* used here is as the broad poetic type with a large number of constituent genres, which has been referred to as 'traditional *hees*' by some scholars, to distinguish it from 'modern *hees*' (*hees casri*), a new form of poetry developed roughly in the 1940s.

[4] This is the case in earlier times as far as we are aware.

Some of these women composed poetry in the male genres, including the most prestigious *gabay* form. These women sacrificed a lot in their personal lives because their public performance of poetry broke cultural taboos. Despite their devotion to the liberation movement, as women, they were punished for not adhering to the gender norms constructed by society. They were severely criticised not only by the general public but also family and friends for their 'misconduct'. Some of them never got married because of such reputations. Even so, their poems were mostly neglected, with only a few exceptions preserved and documented in published work. Analytical writing on these poems are even scarcer.

In addition to the *maanso* type, women's voices were also heard through *hees* poems, the less serious poems associated with work and dances performed by women and younger men. The dance songs are called *hees cayaareed*. Within this genre, there are different types of dance songs with similar metrical pattern. The work songs are called *hees hawleed* and have constituent genres based on the specific pastoral labour assigned to women and young men, respectively.

According to Kapteijns (1999: 51), Somali women's work fell into three categories. As a good wife, a woman was expected to serve her husband, relatives and guests. As a good mother, she took care of the children. As a 'competent married woman', she 'did most of the work related to the processing, preparation, and distribution of the food of the household, manufactured, maintained, and repaired the collapsible house and woven household utensils, and took care of livestock other than camels' (*Ibid*). When doing each type of work, Somali women sing a specific type of work song, sometimes alone, sometimes in a group of women working together. For example, weaving the *kebed* mat for the portable house is usually communal, with about half a dozen women working together. These women will sing the mat-weaving song called *heesta kebedda* together.

The gendered labour division is very specific. While household tasks are almost all under women's responsibility, animal work is undertaken by both genders, depending on the animal and the specific working situation. Camels, as the most cherished stock and symbol of wealth and prestige in Somali culture, are herded only by men because this type of work is considered to require strength, and the distance from grazing areas to watering points can be very far. However, loading and unloading camels is mostly a woman's task when the portable house is being moved to a new site. Therefore, it would be men singing the camel work songs while taking the camels to water points or grazing areas, and women singing the camel loading songs while loading house-

hold utensils (Axmed 1993: 43). Camels are also milked only by men, but milking is a situation where singing is not accompanied, hence no genre is assigned, as all disturbances that may irritate the animals are avoided in this process (*Ibid*: 29). The husbandry of sheep and goats is generally women's responsibility, but it is men who water them since watering is considered heavy work that demands more muscular activity (*Ibid*: 50). Again, those who do the work are the ones that sing the specific work songs.

In a society where rules and institutions favour men, one of the main ways women conveyed their attitudes and emotions was through oral poetry. In his introduction on household work songs, Axmed writes that the pastoral women 'employ the singing situations as forums to which social conflicts are brought, discussed and solved without undermining existing social relationships' (1993: 57). This accords with the idea that Somali pastoral poetry is often a verbal act that serves a social purpose. The author also points out that the verbal elements of the pastoral work songs convey important messages which cannot be regarded as 'meaningless', as described by some scholars in African oral literatures who state that the significance of African work songs lies in the rhythmic movement rather than the verbal element (*Ibid*: 26). Through the rhythmical lines, Somali women speak of things that they are not permitted to discuss openly or in ordinary language. According to Axmed, the fact that the household is the woman's domain has enabled women to have more freedom of expression than they are allowed in other places (*Ibid*: 57). The tradition of poetry has hence become a coping mechanism through which women make their voices heard and introduce change in the existing order, even if minimal.

Gender and identity representation is often explicit in Somali women's poems. Somali women speak of the values of women's lives, their roles as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters in the poems. Oral poetry not only gives Somali women a space to express their ideas, values and beliefs – providing a sense of control in their struggle as the politically powerless – but also gives them an audience with whom they can share their feelings and opinions, assuring them that they are not alone in confronting their struggles. Sometimes their voices may serve to reinforce the existing gender inequalities; sometimes they are artistic negotiations or acts of resistance aimed at agency and even activism. In reflecting both accordance and contestation, mediation and subversion, orature made by women is evidence of the reality of the hardship of women in a patriarchal society, and how women engage in a continuous debate about relations between men and women (Kapteijns 1999: 76-77).

Somali poetry also constitutes a distinctive corpus of commentary that reflects changes in Somali history and in historical consciousness. From the pastoralist world to contemporary urban life, along with the social changes, new themes and features emerged in Somali poems are also found in those made by women. Poetry has been the medium for them to explore their complex personal, familial, political and international identities. The political upheavals since 1991 have led to the displacement of a great number of Somali people throughout the world. Women poets in both the Horn of Africa and the diaspora choose to engage in the discussion about the ongoing civil war and the displacement. These powerful woman poets have not only used the women's genre, *buraambur*, but also the men's genres, such as *gabay* and *guurow*, to compose long political poems.

There are also a number of younger poets who have grown up in the diaspora adopting new forms and new languages in their poems. The intertwined identities of being Somali, an immigrant, a woman, and a Muslim are expressed differently in these poems compared with those made in the Horn of Africa. Despite the different contexts, there are values and beliefs shared by Somali women poets from different backgrounds, only expressed in different ways. However, these poems in Somali by contemporary Somali women poets have not gained enough attention in academia either as a corpus of literature or as traces of their social commentary.

My intention in this book is to take some of the poems by Somali women, in different genres and from different periods of time, on various topics, as examples to explore the messages conveyed in these poems and how these messages are expressed, hinted at, emphasised and communicated through the poetic language that not only represents the collective wisdom of Somali culture, but also embodies the poets' thoughts, emotions and creativity. I intend to look at the way language is used and tease out the expressive strategies in Somali women's poetry through close textual analysis. I will look closely at the words, sounds, and structures displayed in the Somali poems and explore how they serve as devices that deliver the poets' feelings to the audience's heart.

Among the existing works on Somali poetry and Somali women's poetry, there has been very little analysis with a view to describing and accounting for the use of certain aspects of language and style in Somali poems, in detail, except for some pioneering close textual analysis by Ahmed Adan Ahmed (Ahmed 1984) and Martin Orwin (Orwin 2000, 2006, 2020). Their analyses were all on men's poems; no such studies have been undertaken for poetry by women. It is with this in mind that I hope this book is a contribution. It is the first study that analyses

specifically the poetry of Somali women. Following Orwin's approach, I intend to engage with the poems by Somali women closely to investigate the relationship between the language use and the messages in the poems and to discover how the women poets make their voices persuasive and rhetorical. I will demonstrate how and why Somali women's poetry is by no means unsophisticated or less important than poetry by men, which I hope will provoke further discussion about rethinking genres, status and impact of Somali women's poetry in the gendered world. By referring to ideas from lyric theory in this corpus of poem in a non-European culture, I also hope to instantiate some of the possibilities that may stimulate further discussion not only in the field of Somali Studies but also in Lyric Studies.

1.2. *Theoretical and Methodological Framework*

How to read a Somali poem? Somalis do not *read* a poem in the way one might expect. As I mentioned at the beginning of this book, Somali oral poetry is primarily experienced through the ears rather than the eyes. A Somali listener can discern the metrical pattern and the textual logic, decode the messages embedded in the alliterating words, and judge if a poem is good or bad. Although this process is completely done through listening, for most, it also involves a form of reading.

To read is to comprehend, to generate meaning from signs. This doesn't necessarily require a written text. For example, we can read a picture or a facial expression. In the case of Somali poetry, we can *read* an oral poem. When we engage with poems that have been transcribed for analyse, we are, in effect, reading written versions of oral poetry.

In using the term 'text' though, I need to be a little more precise. What do we mean by the word 'text', and how am I applying it when discussing and analysing Somali poetry? Primarily, I refer to Barber (2007) in this discussion, along with references from literature on Somali text specifically. According to Barber (2007: 2), a text 'in the sense in which I am using it in this book, is utterance (oral or written) that is woven together in order to attract attention and to outlast the moment.' This definition encompasses a lot of possibilities, and she explores this concept further in a section titled 'What is a "text"?'.

The first point to note is that Barber does not exclusively link the concept of a text to writing; an oral text can be considered just as much a 'text' as a written text. The key element that defines a text is 'the idea of weaving or fabricating – connectedness, the quality of having been put together, of having been made by human ingenuity – that I want to

capture, rather than the idea of writtenness' (*Ibid*: 21). She expands on this by introducing the concept of a text being 'detachable' (*Ibid*: 22) through the process of 'entextualisation'. This is something that has been written about in the context of Somali poetry, where there is a clear sense that a text is something detachable and replicable, even if it is not written down. In this book, I will further explore the idea of poetic text in Somali.

Through which tools and methods should we engage with indigenous poetics so that a reader who is not familiar with the language or the culture can appreciate the aesthetics of Somali oral poems? While the literary theories in general circulation have been developed with European literary histories in mind, how can we navigate the complex dialectic of understanding what is intrinsic to Somali poetry while making the most of tools available to academic scholars writing in English? Failing to engage with this dialectic risks entrenching us in Eurocentrism. However, if we refuse to engage with the discourse in its widest currency within our immediate academic spheres, the results we obtain will communicate nothing to the broader world.

John Miles Foley tells us that oral poetry is 'not a "thing" but a process, not a set of discrete items but an interactive way of speaking' (Foley 2002: 127). It is a form of communication through a special language, and it is a special language. To decode this language, we need tools. Since I am writing this book in English to interpret Somali poems, English becomes one of these tools. As I pick up elements from the Somali text and use English to explain their meaning and rhetorical effect, I draw on tools from systematic poetics, as conceptualised by Western theorists through their study of poetry in European languages. These may include terms like 'line', 'half-line', 'metre', 'alliteration', 'voice', 'address', 'repetition', and 'metaphor', among others.

Some of these terms have been conceptualised and used by Somali scholars when discussing structure and content of Somali poetry, which I will explore below. Other terms are concepts that are not yet articulated by Somali scholars, but which are nevertheless inherently reflected in the language of the poems. In reading written texts of Somali oral poetry, I find the theory of the lyric particularly useful.

Lyric poetry has a long history in the West. In the introduction of *Theory of the Lyric*, Jonathan Culler quotes the great comparatist Earl Miner, who asserts that 'lyric is the foundation genre for the poetics or systematic literary assumptions of cultures throughout the world.' Mutlu Konuk Blasing, though only in a footnote, also claims that 'the lyric is a universal genre and it is the foundational genre in diverse languages' (Blasing 2007: 28). Culler identifies several key aspects of the ritualistic

dimension of lyric poetry – such as metre, rhythm, repetition, lyric structure and lyric address – to develop a general model of lyric.

This model explores the possibilities inherent in the tradition and offers these resources for future comparison and discussion of some salient features shown in different poems. As Culler himself acknowledges, 'there are, of course, very rich lyric traditions in other cultures, which I am not competent to address' (Culler 2015: 355). A theory of the lyric is thus not presented by Culler and Blasing as being limited to the European languages and cultures which have been written about the most in this field of study. Culler invites us, as readers of poetry in languages beyond European cultures, to use the theory of the lyric for a more fruitful and pleasurable engagement with poetry.

A broad conception of lyric is helpful for thinking about Somali poems for several reasons. First, all of the poems I am looking at are short and non-narrative, therefore, present the potential of speaking about them as lyric. There are no epic poems in Somali culture, although epic poetry exists elsewhere in Africa, particularly in West and Central Africa, but not in the Horn of Africa. To my knowledge, no epic traditions exist in other languages of the Horn either. Second, the theory of the lyric that Culler proposes 'makes salient the discursive strategies and possibilities in a range of periods and languages' (Culler 2015: 90), offering the possibility for poems made by Somali women poets in different times and in different languages to be discussed together.

Following Culler (2015), I will take an inductive approach with the corpus of poems by Somali women and tease out the possibilities inherent in the Somali poems that may align with the concepts that Culler develops through close reading. I will look for the major devices that are evident in the poems and consider how the language reflects concepts such as voice and address, which, I will argue, are crucial elements that can be picked up from the Somali poems. By using these terms in English, I will also evaluate to what extent these ideas allow us to view Somali poems as lyric poems in the sense given by Culler.

Admittedly, there is no direct equivalent in Somali for the concept of 'lyric'. In the tradition of Somali poetry, genres are distinguished by metrical pattern, with various names assigned to subgroups based on different themes. While the terms for genres such as *gabay*, *geeraar*, *jiifto* and *buraambur* are unique to Somali and cannot be translated into other languages, some genre names that describe the specific themes – such as *hobeeyo* (lullaby) and *hoyal* (mat-weaving work song) can be translated.

There are also terms that reflect the specific intent of a poem – such as *baroordiiq* for lament poems, and *jacayl* for love poems. This sug-

gests that when content, rather than metre, is highlighted for discussion, Somali terms can find analogues in other cultures. In this research, I aim to take the Somali terminology in the Somali poetry tradition and present how the Somalis conceptualise their poetry in a manner that can be compared with how Western theorists conceptualise poetry in European languages.

As mentioned earlier, the terms *maanso* and *hees* refer to two broad categories of Somali poetry. The distinction has been explored by Orwin (2003), Banti (2007), Maxamed (2013) and more recently by Orwin (2021). The main differences between the two lie in the textual nature of the poem and its performance. This brings us back to the idea of 'text' discussed earlier, now reconsidered in the context of Somali poetic terminology.

Maanso is poetry with a known composer, crafted before performance and meant to be delivered verbatim. That means that anyone who memorises and recites the poem must do so without altering a single word. In more recent times, this includes writing the poem down. No one is permitted to modify the text except the original poet. While I have not specifically examined the possibility of a poet altering their own work, the key point is that no one else can make changes to it. Furthermore, the reciter is always required to name and acknowledge the poet. This aspect relates not only to the text itself but also to the way it was composed and the person who composed it, implying that the text is intrinsically linked to its creator, who, in a sense, 'owns' the poem.

These characteristics of Somali poetry have led to what has been called an 'unwritten copyright law' by Andrzejewski (2011). Orwin (2003) has used the term 'definitive text' for the text of *maanso* poems with these attributes. The term is significant as it incorporates the word 'text', especially when discussing a poetry tradition that has been predominantly oral and remains deeply rooted in oral practices. I will explore this further below.

The other type of poetry, known as *hees*, is typically associated with work or dance, and its composer is usually unknown. There is no expectation of verbatim performance and it is more 'folkloric' in nature. While someone must have originally composed a *hees* poem, that individual is not identified. The way we approach these poems is therefore different. We may consider them to be part of the collective heritage of society, and the text is open to alteration by anyone. These changes are intentional sometimes, as in the case of a work song *hees*, where the singer might embed a hidden message for someone else.

In addition to these differences, there are more detailed aspects in the structure and content of the two genres that are worth exploring and

comparing. Orwin (2003) discusses these but I will not mention them in this section specifically. With regard to structure, it is important to remember that all poetry in Somali, whether it is *hees* or *maanso* poetry, must adhere to the rules of alliteration and metre. These stylistic characteristics are systematic in Somali poetry, with only a few exceptions in terms of alliteration. However, there are no exceptions to the metrical nature of Somali poetry – every poem follows one of a large number of metrical patterns. I will discuss some of the basic features of the metre below.

Alliteration is deeply ingrained in Somali culture. It is not only found in poetry, but also in other areas. Orwin (2011) notes that alliteration appears even in practices like naming children within families, as well as in poetry. In poetry, alliteration means that in every line of a poem there must be a word which alliterates with the same consonant. In poems with long lines, such as *gabay* or *buraambur*, there is an alliterating sound in each half-line. Consonants alliterate with identical consonants while all vowels alliterate with each other.

I will now discuss *maanso* poetry in more detail with the aim of introducing some terms which are specific to Somali. I do this with reference to Ahmed (1984) which is a very interesting and insightful paper on Somali poetry. It was the first publication of any kind to discuss the structure and content of an individual poem, in this case, one by Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan called 'Dardaaran' which was one of the last poems by the Sayyid. In addition to the analysis, the article introduces several terms in Somali which are used to describe and talk about poetry. As a Somali scholar, Ahmed provides us with a uniquely Somali perspective on how to think about Somali poetry. I draw on his work in my own analysis and so will present his ideas here.

When discussing the structure and content of *maanso* poetry, Ahmed (1984: 338) gives a list of key Somali terms that are used when Somali people discuss poetry. He also includes their English equivalents, organised into three groups: 'sound', 'meaning' and 'structure'.

Under the 'sound' group, there are five terms:
qaafiyad (alliteration)[5],
qaafiyad jaban (defective alliteration),
luuq (melodic chant),
jiib (vocal style), and
adkeyn (emphasis).

[5] Note that the word *qaafiyad* is rarely used now. The word for 'alliteration' that is used nowadays is *xarafraac*.

Under the 'meaning' group, we find:
humaag (imagery),
deelqaaf (incoherent imagery or language),
shareere (metaphor),
eekeeye (simile),
qofeeyn (personification),
adkeyn (emphasis), and
legaado (irony).

Lastly, under the 'structure' group, there are six terms:
hal-beeg[6] (balance),
luuq (melodic chant),
meeris (poem),
tix (verse),
hojis (first hemistich, supporting part), and
hooris (second hemistich, principal part).

We can observe some interesting correlations. The terms in 'sound' and 'structure' reflect the formal features shown in a poem and the performance of a poem. Interestingly, the word *luuq* (melodic chant) can be found in both groups. According to Ahmed (1984: 341), the *luuq* functions as a structural framework for composition and a parameter for the measurement of the *hal-beeg* (balance), which can be understood as 'a feeling of rhythm'. A poet chants the *luuq gabay* over and over in the process of composing a *gabay*, and reciters use the *luuq* as a mnemonic device. Even when a poem is recited without the *luuq*, it still resonates in the subconscious of the audience. With the *luuq* serving as the foundation, other sound features like *qaafiyad* (alliteration) and *adkeyn* (emphasis) can then stand out.

Another term shared between the 'sound' and 'meaning' groups is *adkeyn* (emphasis). The term derives from the verb *adkee* which means 'to strengthen, to make something strong'. In the case of poetry, both the sound in a performance and the meaning of a word can be emphasised. Often, a poet or reciter puts sound *adkeyn* on certain words that also carry meaning *adkeyn* during the reading or recitation a poem.

The connection between sound and meaning in Somali poetry extends beyond *adkeyn* (emphasis); *qaafiyad* (alliteration) also works closely with the figures of speech listed in the 'meaning' group. The alliterating word in each line or half-line is often an image, metaphor or

[6] Ahmed writes this word with a *q* at the end in the text but with a *g* at the end in a footnote. The correct spelling is with a *g*.

part of a figurative expression that conveys the poem's central message. A poet carefully selects alliterating words rich in connotation and arranges them within the metrical pattern to craft a strong poem. A Somali audience can quickly detect *qaafiyad jaban* (defective alliteration) or *deelqaaf* (incoherent imagery or language) in poorly constructed poetry[7].

When a Somali poet presents this carefully crafted language to an audience, the poem's sound, structure, and consistent imagery lend it authority as a verbal artefact. These material aspects of language are also discussed by scholars analysing Western lyric poetry. In this book, I will explore the materiality of Somali poetry, particularly in the *gabay* and *buraambur* genres, and examine how these linguistic characteristics allow us to consider Somali poems as lyric poetry.

How do we read Somali poetry by women? Jonathan Culler (2015: 9) argues that 'lyric can be a form of social action, which contributes to the construction of a world and works to resist other forms of world-making carried out by instrumental rationality and reified common sense'. Following this, I intend to look for elements in the language of the poems I analyse that explicitly or implicitly point at the relation between women and their sociopolitical world. By focusing on the features that reflect the poems as lyric poems, I will explore how these elements express this relationship in various contexts and in different ways.

Gender identity is a salient aspect in Somali women's poetry. When a woman composes a poem, she does so as a woman in a context where her voice may be less prominent than a man's. In this book, I ask the questions: 'Who are the women speaking to?', and 'Who are the women speaking as?' The poet and the person or people talked to in the poem are the voice and the addressee, both of which are important things to think about in the discussion of any poetry. In lyric poetry, these are particularly important and I shall look at the details of these in the poems that I discuss. I will think about these issues in particular in regard to how they reflect the poetry as the poetry of women. I will explore whether the voice and addressee in different types of poetry reveal features that represent women's identities and agency within the male-dominated world.

[7] The word *deelqaaf* is derived from the two words *deel* and *qaaf* which mean the letter or sound *d* and letter or sound *q* in the Arabic alphabet. Having these two sounds together is done to represent alliteration that is not correct and so also has the more specific meaning of bad alliteration.

1.3. *Metre in Somali Poetry*

In this section, I will outline the major features of metre in Somali poetry. Understanding this aspect is crucial, though it is a vast and technically complex topic. I will present the basic principles of how the metre works and provide the metrical patterns of the poetic genres discussed in this book, giving readers a foundational understanding of the metre underlying the poems. Even if readers are not fully familiar with all the technical details, it is important to keep in mind that these elements are always present.

The first work on metre in Somali was published by Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' in 1976, followed by several other works throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, particularly by John Johnson and Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed. Antinucci and Idaajaa (1986) is an anthology of Somali poetry with the original texts alongside Italian translations. It features an introduction to Somali poetry in general and offers some discussion on metre. Two articles published in 1996 explore how musical performance interacts with the metre of different genres; these were Johnson (1996) and Banti and Giannattasio (1996). Other important, more recent works include Orwin (2001) and Orwin and Mohamed (2010), which examine the role of consonants in metre from a more technical perspective.

Somali metre is a quantitative metrical system in which syllables are distinguished into two types: short and long. Short syllables contain a short vowel, while long syllables contain a long vowel. This system differs from how many other quantitative metres function. For instance, in Arabic, a syllable with a short vowel that ends in a consonant is considered long, whereas this is not the case in Somali. Diphthongs count as long vowels when followed by a consonant at the end of the syllable but not when they appear in open syllables. That means if there is no consonant at the end of the syllable, then they may be considered either long or short. In a private communication with Martin Orwin, he has mentioned that some are always short and some are always long and the research is still ongoing to find out more about the details of that. In this book I shall consider diphthongs as being either short or long, which will be sufficient for my analysis.

I shall present the metre for the *gabay* form here as an example. My information on metre in Somali poetry is based on the references mentioned earlier, and particularly Orwin (2000, 2001) on the *gabay* form, as well as insightful conversations with Martin Orwin about his ongoing research on this subject.

We can represent short vowels with a breve symbol ˘, and long

vowels with a macron symbol –. In the *gabay* metre as well as some other metrical forms, there are positions within the line which can accommodate either one long syllable or two short syllables. These positions are denoted by the symbol ≍. The full template for the *gabay* metre is as given below, along with additional requirements, which are explained in the following two paragraphs.

(⏑) ≍ (⏑) ≍ ⏑ ≍ ≍ ⏑ ≍ | ≍ ⏑ ≍ ≍ ⏑

The two short syllable positions in brackets indicate where an optional short syllable may appear at the beginning of a line. Only one of these is permitted per line, although the poem 'Dookh' which I shall look at in Chapter 3, may be an exception. In some of its lines, it appears to have two. The *gabay* metre is formed of two half-lines and the vertical line shows the break, the caesura, between them. Note that I have used the vertical line to indicate the caesura in the template above. In the published transcription of the texts, there is the possibility that the caesura is indicated by a comma and there are also cases when the caesura in a line is not expressed by any punctuation marks at all. It is important to note that the comma may not always indicate the correct position of the caesura. In the *gabay*, the caesura lies always between two words[8].

After the caesura, there must always be six syllables, two of which must contain long vowels. They can be in any position but the line is not metrical without them. All the rest are syllables with short vowels. In addition to the positions where the short and long vowels can occur, there are positions which are restricted with regard to consonants. In the *gabay* line when we have two short syllables in a position which is marked by the symbol ≍ then there cannot be a consonant at the end of the first syllable except for the first position in the line marked ≍. In this position there cannot be a geminate consonant or a virtual geminate consonant either. I shall not discuss these here but further details can be found in Orwin and Mohamed (2010).

Some example lines of the *gabay* are taken from 'Calaf' by Caasha Luul Maxmuud Yuusuf which is discussed in another section below. I give the text of the line followed by the scansion.

[8] In the *buraambur*, however, the caesura can lie between syllables within one word.

Cilmi gabayba waayadan ma furin, cutubyadiisiiye[9]
⏑⏑ ⏑ – ⏑⏑ ⏑ ⏑⏑ | ⏑⏑ ⏑ – – ⏑
(Lately I haven't opened the units of the knowledge of *gabay* poetry)

In this line we see the word *cilmi* in the first position in the line. The first syllable ends in a consonant which is allowed here but not in other first syllables of positions marked ⏑⃡.

Caynaddii murtida waanigaan, dhigin culuumyeede
– ⏑ – ⏑ ⏑⏑ – ⏑ – | ⏑⏑ ⏑ – – ⏑
(I did not set out the types and subjects of wisdom [of poetry] and advice)

In this line there is an extra short syllable at the beginning of the line. That is the middle *a* vowel in the word *caynaddii*. The *-ii* could also be scanned as a short vowel. This is a regular feature of the metre so instead of scanning as – ⏑ – the beginning of the line could scan as – ⏑⏑.

Caarad-dhuubtii maansada beryahan, kuma cillaalayne
– ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑⏑ ⏑ ⏑⏑ | ⏑⏑ ⏑ – – ⏑
(Recently I did not pay attention to the 'pointed tip' of poetry)

This line also has an optional short vowel at the beginning of the line and there is an instance of *-tii* where the vowel scans as short. It has to be like that here because it must fit the first proper short position in the line.

Aan caddeeyo caawoo kalaan, caadka rogayaaye.
– ⏑ – ⏑ – – ⏑ – | – ⏑ ⏑⏑ – ⏑
(Let me make it clear. On a night like tonight, I clear away the cloud.)

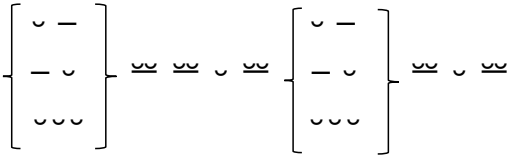
The line here also includes an optional short vowel although in Banti and Giannattasio (1996) they say that the *aan* pronoun can scan as short which means that the line at the beginning might also scan like this: ⏑⏑ – ⏑ instead of like this – ⏑ – ⏑.

[9] Martin Orwin in a personal communication has pointed out to me that in this *gabay hooris*, second half-line, there is a virtual geminate in the word *cutubyadiisiiye*. This is apparently quite rare in this position and is an interesting feature of the metre of the line.

In this short section I have set out the basics of the metre in Somali. It is important for us to remember that this is always there. However, it is also important to remember that for Somalis, they don't analyse the metre in the way I have done here and they simply know if the metre has been followed or if it is broken. There are very few people who can analyse the metre of a line. Good poets do not make poems with lines that don't follow the metre, they would, of course, feel that a line is broken and would not make it part of a poem.

The other major form of poetry which I will look at is the *buraambur*, the form which is made particularly by women. I have taken what Banti and Giannattasio (1996) have written on this form as the basis of what I write here though I do not write about the musical performance which they do in their article.

The template which they give for the *buraambur* is reproduced below (Banti and Giannattasio 1996: 106).



A *buraambur* line is also divided into two half-lines. The half-lines work differently to how they work in the *gabay* because there does not have to be a word break between them. This leads to a difference in the alliteration too in which the second alliterating word can begin in the first half-line. The rules about consonants at the end of syllables are not mentioned in Banti and Giannattasio (1996) and they have not been researched anywhere else, so cannot be given here. Some example lines from a poem I look at later are given below.

Dariiqa Hobyood warkay, nooga soo direen
˘ – ˘˘ – ˘ – | – ˘ – ˘ –
(They sent us news from the road of Hobyo)

Sidaan u danqaday calooshaydii[10], weli ma demin
˘ – ˘˘ ˘˘ ˘ – | – ˘ ˘˘ ˘ ˘˘
([It is like] the way that I was hurting [an already wounded spot]

[10] Note here the caesura lies between *caloo* and *shaydii*, the punctuation mark is not in keeping with the caesura here in the original text because *calooshaydii* is one word together. I have kept the text as it is presented in Faduma (2008).

my stomach still has not extinguished)

Raggii na daafici lahaa, bay[11] haddeer dileen
⏑ ⏑ ⏑ – ⏓ ⏑ – | – ⏑ – ⏑ –
(They have killed now the men who would have defended us)

In this last line we see an example again of the *-ii* definite article suffix scanning as short and not as long.

In this section, I have outlined the basic structures and rules of Somali poetic metre, focusing on the *gabay* and *buraambur* forms. While the scansion system presented here allows for a technical understanding of these metres, it is important to remember that such formal analysis is not typically part of the compositional process for Somali poets themselves. The sense of rhythm, appropriateness, and metrical precision is deeply internalised and intuitive, reflecting the oral and performative nature of Somali poetic tradition. These metrical patterns provide an underlying structure that shapes the aesthetic and rhetorical force of the poetry, yet they are often perceived more through aural recognition than conscious calculation. This foundational understanding of metre is essential as we move into the literature review, where I examine how scholars have approached Somali poetry and its interplay of form, content, and social meaning.

1.4. *Literature Review*

In this section, I shall briefly review the existing important publications in English which are central to this book. Most of the literature relates to Somali poetry which, when I compare it with other languages, has not had a lot of work written on it. I begin the review with works on Somali poetry more widely. I then review the literature on Somali women's poetry specifically. Finally I mention the works on lyric theory which I have used to present the discussion of Somali poetry as lyric poetry. My main aim in this book is to concentrate on Somali texts and to analyse how women have expressed themselves in their poems. I refer to lyric theory, in particular the theory of Culler in doing this but my aim is less to contribute to discussions within lyric theory that are related more to how it is applied to European languages. I am aware that there is a large literature on lyric theory and in recent years there has been a big discussion regarding the issue of what lyric really refers

[11] Here, I have changed the position of the comma to keep with the caesura.

to. I mention this below briefly but do not review the literature on this.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, a fair amount of research has been written on what has been termed classical Somali poetry. These works provide a foundation of my knowledge of Somali poetics. In *Somali Poetry, An Introduction*, Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964) provide readers of English with insights into the richness of Somali poetry. An overview of the social role of Somali poetry, the feature of alliteration, the oral transmission and the classification of poems is given. The authors find that the classification of Somali poems is mainly based on prosodic factors, and they consider the *gabay*, the *jiifto*, and the *geeraar* as the three types of 'most noble' Somali poems (*Ibid*: 47). In addition to detailed accounts of the three types of classical poetry, other genres such as the *buraambur*, the *heello*, the modern *hees* as well as dance and work songs are also briefly discussed.

When they published their work, the prosodic aspects of Somali poetry were not yet understood, apart from general descriptions of the number of syllables in metre. Additionally, their work did not include any literary analysis of the poems. Nevertheless, it was a pioneering effort that remains significant today. Another work that is important to this book is Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970). In Chapter 9, titled *Lyric*, Somali poetry is briefly discussed within the context of lyric poetry, including its occasions, subject matter, form, and composition. This provides valuable insight into understanding Somali poetry as lyric poetry while also encouraging a broader examination of its genres and features. It considers Somali poetry not only within its own categorisation but also from a wider perspective, an approach that this book seeks to adopt.

In a later work, Andrzejewski introduces the concepts of a time-bound stream of Somali oral and written literature and a time-free one (Andrzejewski *et al.*, 1985: 337-407). In the time-bound stream, Somali oral literature is divided into four periods: The Golden Era (the pre-colonial period), The Era of Fire and Embers (1899-1944), The Era of the Lute (1944-1969), and The New Era (from 1969) (*Ibid*: 339). Poems within the time-bound stream that deal with serious themes are expected to be memorised verbatim. Before each recital, the name of the original poet must be acknowledged. In contrast, the oral poetry of the time-free stream primarily consists of the texts of dance songs and work songs, whose composers are unknown, as well as fragments of longer poems that have been lost and, therefore, cannot be placed on the time scale (*Ibid*: 369). These significant insights presented by Andrzejewski highlight the distinction between *maanso* and *hees* poetry, a topic that was further explored by others later (see the discussion below on this distinction).

The four eras that Andrzejewski identifies in the time-bound stream have been widely acknowledged by scholars. However, an inevitable issue – particularly with the category of The New Era, is that it does not extend to the post-1991 period. The most recent contemporary poems show a lot of striking features that differ from those of the 1970s. The nearly sixty-year span from 1969 to the present has witnessed substantial social changes and significant development in Somali literature, highlighting the outdatedness of The New Era category and the possibility, or even necessity, of its revision.

The late 1980s were a time of great upheaval in Somalia, with civil war affecting several regions, particularly in the north. The conflict escalated, culminating in the overthrow of the regime of Maxamed Siyaad Barre in January 1991. This was followed by a prolonged period of further conflicts across different regions. Many people lost their lives, while others fled Somalia or became internally displaced. It is fair to say that this period of violent upheaval marked the beginning of another era in Somali poetry. Some of the poems discussed in this book are from this time.

The Somalis classify their poetry into various distinct types, each of which has its own specific name. Each individual type of poem in Somali may be said to belong either to the category of *maanso* or that of *hees*. In his 'On the Concept of "Definitive Text" in Somali Poetry', Martin Orwin presents the distinction between the two broad types of poetry (Orwin 2003). He describes *maanso* as 'poetry whose composer is known, which is composed prior to performance and which must be presented verbatim' (*Ibid*: 336), coinciding with the expectation of Andrzejewski's time-bound stream of literature, while *hees* is generally performed in association with work or dance whose composers are generally not known and there is not the expectation of verbatim performance, which is also recognised in Andrzejewski's time-free stream (*Ibid*: 336). He further shows the presence in Somali knowledge of *maanso* poetry of the concept of definitive text and brings in ideas related to intra-textual characteristics that support the concept of definitive text. The primary sources of my research consist of both *maanso* and *hees*. In Chapter 2, I focus on Somali lullabies, which belong to the *hees* type in Somali poetry. In Chapter 3 and 4, my focus is on *maanso* poems.

In the study of Somali poetry, there are works that focus on specific periods or themes. Andrzejewski and Galaal (1963a, b, c) look at a poetic combat between three of the greatest Somali poets after the end of the Dervish war: Cali Dhuux, Qamaan Bulxan and Salaan Carrabey. These early articles, which focus on individual poems, centre on their translations into English. The authors begin by providing a background

on the Somali language and briefly commenting on earlier works that mention Somali poetry. While artistic aspects are noted in these references, they are not explored in detail. At this time there were no literary analyses of Somali poems. However, the three articles offer some analysis of the language and cultural references, which were both pioneering and valuable. That said, they do not delve deeply into the artistic and poetic styles of the poems.

Said S. Samatar (1982) examines Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan's use of oral poetry to achieve political ends during the period of Dervish fighting for independence. This is an important work and is the first book published in English to focus on the poetry of a single Somali poet. The first chapters provide an extensive and detailed introduction to Somali poetry as it was created and understood during the Sayyid's time. In later chapters, Said offers an in-depth analysis of the Sayyid's poetry, focusing on numerous extracts. However, these extracts are presented only in translation, with no inclusion of the original Somali texts.

Said's analysis primarily explores the imagery and tone and how these elements reflects the themes of the poems. The work's main aim is to situate the Sayyid's poetry within its historical and social contexts. Said's depth of knowledge and the detail in his analysis make this book a cornerstone of studies on early Somali poetry. His insights into the relationship between politics and poetry remain relevant today. Another important work on the poetry of Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan and early poetry in Somali is Yaasiin (1984). However, as this work is written in Italian, I am unfortunately unable to comment on it.

Rashiid Sheekh Cabdillaahi (Rashiid *et al.* 2009) is a bilingual book which focuses on the theme of war and peace in the past and looks at the role of Somali poetry and stories in peace-making. This is the most recent book to explore poetry from early times in detail, particularly from the Era of Fire and Embers. Some of the poems are so important and famous that they are translated again in this book (the poems in Andrzejewski and Galaal (1963a, b) for example, are presented and translated). However, this book does not provide any analysis of the artistic or poetic aspects of the poems. Its primary aim is to present the poems within the context of how conflict and peace were traditionally managed in Somali society.

Axmed Cali Abokor examines the significance and persuasive power of Somali northern pastoral work songs (Axmed 1993). Unlike the works mentioned above, his book concentrates on *hees*. At the beginning of the book, he provides an extensive introduction to the people and the way of life, offering valuable context in which the songs are

performed. He also has a quite extensive look at the categorisation of poems into *hees* and *maanso*, as well as their social significance. His discussion includes an intriguing section on gender differences and their connection to poetry. He highlights how women use *hees* to express their thoughts, an aspect I discuss further below:

> Both men and women are fully aware of the existence of this social inequality, and their distinct roles are recognised, if grudgingly, by both sides. Since open arguments and confrontations between the sexes are socially avoided, women usually employ singing in working situations as appropriate forums to express their feelings, transmitting messages through their songs (Axmed 1993: 21).

Axmed categorises the songs into different sections based on their connection to specific types of work, and I refer to some of the texts he gives in my discussions below.

John Johnson's interesting chapter in Furniss and Gunner (1995) provides a unique, but often overlooked case study of the performance of Somali oral poetry in non-formal situations. He describes four vivid and true scenarios in which he illustrates how poetry is employed as an act of communication and even defiance between individuals and groups which are marginal in the power structure in Somali society. Two of the scenarios in his description show how a *buraambur* and a goat herding song are used by women to convey messages to their husbands, addressing sensitive issues within a household and a society that does not allow women to directly challenge their husbands' authority. By representing the voice of those marginalised in the Somali power structure, Johnson argues that their poetry is 'nonetheless valid, and perhaps even more influential in the long run, within the daily flow of Somali social relations' (Johnson 1995: 121).

John Johnson in Johnson (1974) examines the development of the *heello* genre in modern Somali poetry, which originated in the mid-1950s. He focuses on the historical origins of *heello* from the *belwo* genre which appeared between 1943 and 1945. He finds that the change from *belwo* into the longer *heello*, and the changes in the *heello* itself, developed as Somali poets and their audiences responded to political and social changes in the world. The influence of modern communications, and more particularly the radio, which encouraged some changes by paying for poems by their length as well as disseminating the appeal of their increasing musical settings is also highlighted. Moreover, Johnson notes that the *belwo* represents the 'beginning of new relationship between men and women', as it was recited by both sexes (*Ibid*: 70).

Women in the early period of modern poetry, such as Khadiija Ciya Dharaar 'Belwo', who composed *belwo* herself, and Khadiija Cabdullaahi Dalays, who 'weathered the widespread criticism of women in modern poetry' and 'established the right of women to recite the modern poem' are mentioned (*Ibid*: 71).

This was an important development which continued into the 1960s and 1970s, when women singers became increasingly popular and well known. They were seen as artists and important figures in cultural life, with many being as celebrated for the singers who performed them as for the poets who made the words. Although Khadiija 'Belwo' did make *belwo* poems herself, not many women went on to compose poems to sing. The development of love songs out of the *belwo* and the *heello* continued to be dominated by men. This is even to the extent that men composed the words to love songs which were voicing the thoughts of a female voice. In other words, love songs which were sung by women with a female lyric voice were composed by men. This continues today and there is discussion of this issue in Kapteijns (1999) and more recently in Woolner (2018 and 2022) and in Orwin (2021). I will not discuss this issue in my book. I have a section below in which I will discuss some poems by women which are about men.

Ali Mumin Ahad (2015) examines the *Deelley* 'polytext' through a critical discourse analysis, and looks at the language use and cultural concepts, in relation to the issues of national identity, the clan system, power and state together. He points out that understanding the 'polytext' in Somali entails a cultural competence to nuance the discursive meaning and the socio-political context during the poetry debate from 1979 to 1980. Ali gives a detailed discourse analysis of three *Deelley* poems and discusses how they relate to each other with respect to their presentation of the major theme. He provides detailed exposition of language use and the ways in which these reflect the attitudes of the poets and how subsequent poets respond to them. He also gives an elaborate interpretation of the metaphor of the *damal*-tree, the burden camel, and the smouldering dung, from which I have gained many useful insights for my textual analysis of Caasha Luul's poem, 'Tahriib' (The Sea-Migrations), in which she mentions it as following on from the *Deelley*. Ali also acknowledges that roles of youth and women in the *Deelley* poetry debate were left out in the discussions of the chain, even when some of the poets were youths and one of the poets was female.

Martin Orwin (2000) presents a literary stylistic analysis of a poem called 'Macaan iyo Qadhaadh' (Bitter and Sweet) composed in the mid-1960s by Axmed Ismaciil Diiriye 'Qaasim'. Through a close reading of the language structures and stylistic devices used in the poem, he

interprets how the language has been crafted to contribute to the power and meaning of the poem as a whole (Orwin 2000). He takes a detailed look at the language of the poem not only for linguistic interest, but also in terms of how it contributes to the meaning and artistic and aesthetic qualities of the poem. This is one of the articles which I use as a model for looking at the poems I consider in my work in this book. Although Orwin does not mention lyric theory in this article, there are features which are related to that and he does mention this in later articles I shall refer to below.

In a later work, Orwin (2006) discusses the worldly and unworldly representations of love in 'Jacayl Dhiig Ma Lagu Qoray' (Has Love Been Blood-written) by Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame 'Hadraawi', through examining the use of time references and references to people and imagery. He includes a comparison to another of Hadraawi's love poems, 'Beledweyne'. It should be noted that references to time, place and people could be a device used by a poet in any language. This article, hence can be considered as a precedent in which a close reading of a Somali poem is made with a focus upon aspects that are not solely rooted in the poetic traditions of Somali. In other words, the approach Orwin takes in this article is one which can be brought to a poem in any other language. These devices he discusses are ones which are related to the idea of lyric also.

In Orwin (2020 and 2021) he addresses the lyric theory directly in relation to Somali poetry. Orwin (2020) is an analysis of two modern poems, both by men, namely Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye' and Xasan Daahir Ismaaciil 'Weedhsame'. He concentrates on specific features of lyric theory in the analysis. He analyses structure, lyric time and apostrophe in Gaarriye's poem and the structure and sound-patterning in Weedhsame's poem. The analyses are very detailed and the poems are not compared but are presented individually.

In his doctoral dissertation, Jamal Abdi Gabobe probes into poems by Cilmi Boodheri and examines how notions of and techniques of self and subject were manifested in poetry composed by Cilmi Boodheri and others after him within a colonial and Sufi context (Jamal 2014). The contextual analysis of the Somali poems from a certain perspective in these works provides examples that I could draw on for my methodology. The context in the case of Cilmi Boodheri was the aftermath of the campaigns of Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan and the colonial city of Berbera. Life in the city was very different from life in the countryside where Cilmi Boodheri grew up. The intellectual influences present in the city also differed. In my work, the contexts in which the various women poets made their poems determined how they composed their

works, as I will discuss. Cilmi Boodheri was a very influential poet and is regarded by the author as being 'instrumental for the rise of the modern Somali subject' (Jamal 2014, abstract). As a man Cilmi Boodheri was part of the men's poetry tradition and all the poems he composed are in the *gabay* form.

Regardless of the time of composition, the overwhelming majority of the poems preserved and presented in the existing works are, as I have mentioned earlier, made by men. Although the special female *buraambur* genre is discussed, very briefly, in some of the works mentioned above, the significance of women's poems has been neglected. It was female scholars who took the first step and filled in this gap by looking specifically at Somali women poets. Amina Adan points out that the qualities of courage, generosity and eloquence in Somali culture are 'considered virtues for men are considered vice for women', hence women are excluded from this type of expression (Amina 1981: 116). What Somali women can compose are 'shorter and lighter' poems such as *buraambur* (the female style of poetry), *hobeeyo* (the lullaby sung to children) and certain work songs that are closely related to their daily housework. Amina claims that even though poetry is considered a man's domain, the formidable voice of the pastoral nomadic woman could be heard.

Zainab Mohamed Jama further discussed the role of Somali women's poetry in the independence struggle in Somalia during the 1940s and 1950s (Zainab 1991: 43). She finds that poetry composed by women concerning matters of political interest such as clan politics, the nationalist struggle, modern government politics and civil war is not in wide circulation. However, a group of Somali women who were members of the Somali Youth League made use of public gatherings and rallies made possible by the independence movements. This allowed them to recite their poetry to a male or a mixed audience during the colonial time.

In her other article, Zainab studies some specific poetry by Mariam Haji Hassan and other women in the Allah-Amin ('those who trusted Allah') group whose work had been promulgated through direct performance as well as radio and cassette transmissions (Zainab 1994). The role of written Somali script in helping record and preserve Somali oral literature is also emphasised. Some of the transcriptions and translations of these poems as well as their background introduction provided by Zainab form the main source of my writings in Chapter 4 where I give a textual analysis of the poems.

Another approach, taken by Lidwien Kapteijns, involves studying the context of poems through dialogues with female artists. Kapteijns

examines women and gender expectations in northern Somali orature of the period 1899 to 1980, foregrounding the oral texts that are in the voices of women (Kapteijns 1999). In some cases, the authorship of these oral texts is explicitly female, while in others, women sing pieces composed by men. Kapteijns explores representations of girls, married women's obedience and sexual fidelity as well as married women's work and competence through examination of the 'non-prestigious' oral genres associated with women and young men.

Additionally, she investigates the emergence of popular love songs between 1944 and 1980 and highlights women's roles in the development of this new genre. Themes such as being in love and suffering its symptoms, expression of sexual desire, debates over proper modes of courtship, ideal marriage and evolving gender expectations are explored through her analysis of the texts. In this book, I intend to engage with contemporary love poems by Somali women alongside the earlier modern poems presented by Kapteijns, exploring the development of gender ideologies and their representations. I will refer further to the works of Zainab Mohamed Jama, Amina Adan, and Lidwien Kapteijns in subsequent chapters.

Mohamed Haji Ingiriis (2015) examines the role of Somali women in the decolonisation and postcolonial movements through interdisciplinary approaches. He traces the development of women's social movements and their historical status within society during these periods. I have drawn upon this work to provide an overview of women's movements and voices in the 1940s-1950s, as well as during the Siyaad Barre regime, in my chapter on women's poetry addressing politics and social issues. Ingiriis also presents a few *buraambur* poems in which women articulate their political rights. While some studies on gender roles and Somali women's agency suggest that the military regime was a golden era of women in Somalia, Ingiriis challenges this view. He argues that women were ultimately unable to benefit fully from their feminist agenda, as the regime's governance shifted from democratisation to a dictatorial military rule.

In addition to works on Somali poetry, literature on the Somali diaspora provides crucial context for exploring the experience of young diasporic poets and the notion of identity expressed in their poems. Abdullahi Haji-Abdi examines the Somali diaspora community in the UK (Haji-Abdi 2014). He looks at the Somali diaspora from three perspectives: diaspora as a social form, diaspora as a type of consciousness, and diaspora as mode of cultural production. With inter-clan conflicts forming the basis of the ongoing civil war, the Somali case challenges the expectation that diaspora communities maintain a collective identity

(*Ibid*: 46). Additionally, the consciousness of diaspora heightens self-awareness among diasporic Somalis. This identification may extend to social, political and religious affinities, with cyber networks serving as powerful tools for mobilisation.

In his analysis of diaspora as a mode of cultural production, Abdullahi Haji-Abdi notes that cultural production pulls together 'the residual cultures of the diaspora community and the impact of globalisation' (*Ibid*: 48). While the civil war has diminished the degree of cultural production and reproduction within the Somali diaspora community, younger generations are observed to be involved in the revival of Somali culture by reproducing Somali music and songs with contemporary tunes (*Ibid*). Although the Somali young poets are not particularly mentioned here, the author states that the interpretation of Somali culture by the young people 'is sustained under the realm of their capability of understanding it and tweaking it by applying contemporary tunes, styles and productions', which accords with the young poets' case.

On the one hand, young British-Somalis adopt the English language and free-verse style to articulate their feelings. On the other, Somali words and proverbs frequently appear in these English works, reinforcing the *Soomaalinnimo* – the sense of Somali identity – within their poems. The concept of *Soomaalinnimo* can be interpreted as 'Somaliness' or 'being a Somali'. It is one of the complex identities that are expressed by contemporary Somali women poets. For example, Caasha Luul asks: *Yaa ka qaba su'aal tolow! Soomaalinnimadii* (Who has a question about it? O people! The Somaliness.) in her poem 'Surmi' (Thirst). A number of scholars from different fields have probed this concept. For example, in her study of diasporic Somalis in Cairo, Mulki Al-Sharmani observes that *Soomaalinnimo* is imagined as a positive identity rooted in the moral values associated with being diasporic Somalis. This contrasts with the culture of violence and anarchy in Somalia and the misbehaviours such as dishonesty and lack of commitment within the diasporic community (Al-Sharmani 2007).

By examining how Somalis in the diaspora construct and express *Soomaalinnimo*, Al-Sharmani emphasises the fluidity and complexity of identity claims, which can serve as sources of either cohesion or division. She also underscores the role of diasporic Somali communities in reconstructing a sense of nationhood, one grounded in moral values rather than territorial boundaries. The idea of *Soomaalinnimo*, particularly as expressed by women poets, will form a significant part of the discussion in this book.

The main focus of this book is the study of poetry by Somali women, with my discussion centred on a detailed discussion of selected

poems. However, I recognise that this study is set in the wider context of the study of poetry as a whole. Some of the key works that inform my exploration of poetic forms and the techniques employed in the creation of these poems are referenced here.

When studying poetry, the tradition of poetics provides a range of theoretical perspectives. Fabb's *What Is Poetry* (2015) explores how language is shaped to fit human memory by surveying the functions performed by metre, rhyme, alliteration and parallelism in poetic forms across the globe and throughout history. Drawing on examples from over 130 world literatures, Fabb argues that each line of a poem functions as a whole unit that fits within the limited capacity of human working memory. His central argument is that lineation, based on this cognitive capacity, fundamentally defines what is labelled 'poetry' in English.

Fabb discusses the various ways poems are structured, including systems of metre, alliteration, rhyme, and other organisational methods. One of his significant contributions is his definition of poetry:

> A poem is a text made of language, divided into sections that are not determined by syntactic or prosodic structure. The sections are lines, couplets, stanzas and so on. The definition does not distinguish between poems that are written, spoken or sung, or in sign language (Fabb 2015: 9).

Although Fabb does not provide a definition of a 'text', I refer to Barber's definition, which complements Fabb's and together, these definitions clearly encompass Somali poetry, where the sections that form a poem are determined by metre.

When examining poetry, the linguistic structure is crucial, as it connects to other elements that define a work as a poem and determine its specific type. Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* (2015) investigates the limitations of the two dominant conceptions of the lyric: the older Romantic model, which views the lyric as an intense expression of subjective experience, and the New Criticism model, which interprets the lyric as a representation of the actions of a fictional speaker. He explores the possibility of a more accurate and comprehensive account of the lyric. Culler argues that both models 'falsify the long tradition of lyric and neglect some of the central features of lyric poetry' (Culler 2015: 3).

Drawing on a selection of renowned poems from various periods and languages in Europe, Culler highlights the continuities of the lyric tradition and its most salient features despite centuries of change. These include its rhythmical resources, its unusual modes of address, its use of the present tense, and the compelling tension between what he iden-

tifies as its ritualistic and fictional elements. He suggests that the ancient Greek model of lyric is a form of epideictic discourse, in which the speaker is not a character in a novel, but a performer presenting their skills to an audience, who are expected to observe. He also considers lyric as 'thought-writing': a medium through which thoughts are crafted for readers to articulate. This perspective emphasises the poetic acts, memorable language, hyperbole, and apostrophe that define the genre. The rhythmically shaped and phonologically patterned verses, according to Culler, thus become elements that resonate in the reader's mind.

Furthermore, Culler calls for a shift away from focusing solely on the historical manifestations of lyric, and encourages critics to consider lyric as a viable critical category which has its own distinctive language (Culler 2014). According to Culler, lyric poems strive to be a public act of 'triangulated address', wherein a poet offers language to listeners, and indirectly addresses readers through the act of address to an imagined addressee (*Ibid*: 164). In addition to rhetorical figures that are not commonly found in non-poetic speech acts, Culler finds the distinctive lyric use of pronouns and the temporal-specification-free simple present tense in English worth exploring. It is these peculiar features that establish lyric as a special language, creating a linguistic event in which the reader or the listener assumes the position of enunciation – something that does not occur in the same way with narrative fiction.

Although lyric theorists have primarily conceptualised poetry in European languages, their aim to identify central features that could underpin a more expansive theoretical framework encourages us to look beyond the historical manifestations of lyric in European traditions. This opens possibilities for examining relationships between English terminologies and poetry in other cultures. With this in mind, I will approach Somali poetry and consider how women's poetry in both Somali and in English aligns with the ideas of lyric and the models of understanding lyric. This builds on Orwin's work, mentioned earlier, which examines Somali poems through the lens of lyric theory.

1.5. *Research Questions*

The main research questions central to my study are: *what* do Somali women poets express in their poems, and *how* do they express it? The first question points to the themes and contents of the poems. As Lee Cassanelli (2009: 12) observes, Somali poetry serves to be a major stream of intellectual discourse at the community level to record the historical and social events in the form of poetry. In times of unrest or

dramatic societal change, poetic production proved to have risen greatly when people had much to debate. While the majority of preserved Somali poetry is the voices of male poets, I ask: What do Somali women convey in their poetry? In what ways do the themes and aspects of women's poetry overlap with those found in men's poetry? Furthermore, what unique perspectives emerge that clearly reflect a distinctly female viewpoint? In particular, I will explore how women's poetry is expressed. What are the specific ways in which women articulate their feelings and thoughts through poetry? Can these methods of expression be seen as unique to women poets?

In Somali nomadic society, women make themselves heard through reciting or singing about aspects of their lives. In her various roles, a married Somali woman may sing as a competent wife, a good mother or a subordinated woman in the male-dominated society. For at least the last two hundred years, nomadic women have learnt these verses during childhood by listening to their mothers or other older women (Amina 1981: 117). What collective wisdom has been passed down from generation to generation? How do women express themselves in the various forms of poetry that they inherit and adapt?

I will explore these questions in relation to different poetic forms: the *hobeeyo*, the *buraambur* and the *gabay* in the poetry of women from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, I will consider the different contexts in which women find themselves. For example, I will examine the poetry of Xaawa Jibriil, who actively composed poems to mobilise the public during and after the independence struggle; Caasha Luul, who lives in the diaspora; and Saado Cabdi, who has spent her life in the Horn of Africa. The ways in which women discuss some of the topics may relate closely to their lived circumstances and I shall discuss these connections. In the poems of the diasporic women poets, for example, themes of migration, trauma, the ongoing civil war, and the notion of home are prominently featured. These same topics are also addressed by women who have remained in the Horn of Africa, offering points of comparison and contrast.

The next question concerns the ways in which women poets choose to convey their thoughts. In what forms do they craft their poems? How are their identities expressed in their works? Furthermore, how can we analyse their poetry for its aesthetic qualities, using the tools of literary criticism and performance studies? In my close reading of the Somali poems, deixis emerges as a key element that leads me to ponder: Who is the voice in the poem? To whom is the poem addressed? For the interpretation and appreciation of Somali poetry, can the terms and frameworks developed by Western lyric theorists be applied to identify and

discuss poetic devices within Somali poems?

In this book, I aim to address these research questions through case studies of poetry by Somali women, exploring works created in different genres and across various historical contexts.

1.6. *Poems in This Book*

Bearing these questions in mind, I will analyse three groups of poems by women: lullabies, poems about relations between men and women, and poems addressing politics and social issues. I chose these particular themes because they allow me to explore the different identities of women as represented in various poetic forms created across different periods. These three categories provide a well-rounded framework for hearing women's voices as nomadic mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, activists, and exiles.

Most of the poems I look at in this book are from published sources. They are *Somali Lullabies: Hobeeyaa Hobeeheey!* by Maryan Anshur published in 2015 and *Hobeheey, Hobeheey: Somali Lullabies* by Jawaahir Cabdalle Faarax published in 2016; Faduma (2008) *Saa Waxay Tiri: Maansadii Iyo Waayihii Xaawa Jibriil. And Then She Said: The Poetry and Times of Hawa Jibril* and Asha Lul Mohamud Yusuf (2017) *The Sea-Migrations*. I will also include a few poems made by women poets who were active members of the SYL, collected in Zainab Mohamed Jama's 'Fighting to be heard: Somali Women's Poetry' (Zainab 1991). I also draw on research I did during fieldwork in London and Hargeysa in the summer of 2019. I interviewed Caasha Luul and Maryan Anshur who are based in England and I collected lullabies and poems in other genres and interviewed some of the women and women poets who are based in Hargeysa. My research does not involve gathering personal information or confidential information. It is not sensitive politically or in any other way.

A big part of my research for this book involved translating the poems I analyse into English. For conducting close readings, literal translations are particularly essential. Only by looking at the literal meaning of the words in the original Somali poem, and by teasing out their further connotation, can we uncover the nuanced and often hidden tools that give the text its stylistic coherence and rhetorical effect.

While most of the poems had already been translated, I found the existing translations unsuitable for my analyses. Furthermore, to provide thorough interpretations, it was crucial for me to fully understand the language of the poems. Somali poetry is not easy to fully under-

stand. The language, as I shall show in this book, is often figurative and rich in metaphors and extended meanings of words. This is especially the case with the alliterating words which can stretch their meaning more than other words in a poem. This relates to the idea of 'semantic stretch' which is mentioned in the section on alliteration. The literal translations in this book were done with reference to the original translation of each poem as presented in the primary or secondary sources and with the help of my supervisor, Dr Martin Orwin, particularly for some lines. For the titles of the poems, I have retained the original translation as presented in the published works to facilitate ease of access for readers who are not familiar with Somali, allowing them to locate the poems by their titles in English.

1.7. *A Note on the References*

In the field of Somali studies, there is a convention that Somali references are made using the first name of the author. This is because Somali names work differently to names in European languages. Somalis have their own given name and the rest of the name is the name of their father and then grandfather and so on. Typically, only the father's and grandfather's names are used in daily contexts and this is the case also for the names of authors.

For example, Axmed Cali Abokor's book *Somali Pastoral Work Songs: The Poetic Voice of the Politically Powerless* which was published in 1993 is referred to as 'Axmed (1993)' and not 'Abokor (1993)' because the name of the author is Axmed and Abokor is the name of his grandfather and is not a surname. People in the Somali diaspora may use a grandfather's name or a father's name as a surname, but the convention of using the author's own given name has become well established in Somali studies and I follow that practice here as well.

This convention is particularly the case with women's names. Zainab Mohamed Jama, for example, is Zainab (her given name). Mohamed is the name of her father and Jama is the name of her grandfather. It is better to use her given name for referencing her work than either that of her father or grandfather. Thus, her article 'Fighting to be heard: Somali women's poetry' is referenced as 'Zainab (1991)' rather than 'Jama (1991)'. Andrzejewski (1982) addresses this naming practice in relation to library catalogues, highlighting the importance of recognising and respecting these cultural distinctions when referencing Somali authors.

Chapter 2

SOMALI LULLABIES

2.1. *Introduction*

The lullaby is a unique form of musical and verbal act that is found across the world. Much of what we know about lullabies comes from anthropological studies, which show that in cultures as diverse as Vietnamese, Hazara (from central Afghanistan), Columbian, and Native American communities, cradle songs are created to send infants to sleep (Trehub *et al.* 1993a; cited in Trainor 1984: 84).

In Chinese, the term 摇篮曲 (*yáo lán qǔ*), which translates to 'cradle song', is defined as 'a short song that lulls babies to sleep; vocal music or instrumental music that is simple in form and evolves from a lulling song; typically with a soft and slow melody' (Modern Chinese Dictionary 1983). Among the Igbo people, the popular terms for the lullaby are *egwu okuku nnwa* (song for baby-sitting) or *egwu igugu nnwa* (song for pacifying a crying baby), both of which can be understood as 'cradle song' (Ebeogu 1991: 99). Similarly, the English word 'lullaby' is defined as 'a soothing refrain used to please or pacify infants' (Oxford English Dictionary 1989) and 'a type of song by mothers and nurses the world over to coax babies to sleep; a cradle song' (Brakeley 1950: 653).

These terms across different cultures and the conceptual possibilities they evoke highlight the primary function of lullabies: to soothe and lull babies to sleep. Dogan (2004) offers a more detailed account of the form and performer of lullabies: 'they are rhymed, harmonious words in the form of either poetry or prose composed in a certain melody generally sung by mothers or some relative like grandmother, aunt, elder sister etc. to make the children sleep or soothe the crying baby' (Pathak and Mishra 2017: 677). Trehub and Trainor (1998; cited in Doja 2014: 126), suggest that 'lullabies account for a form that comprises performance features which, by their constant practice in a given group, fulfil the function of lulling children to sleep, even if it is not always clear

whether the defining features of lullabies are in the text, melody, movement, performance style, or all of these'.

While the function of lullabies is achieved through the harmony between melody and poetic texts, it is interesting to note that the lyrics and their intended function can sometimes seem at odds. A lullaby may contain words like 'hush, hush, go to sleep', yet often, the lyrics don't mention sleep at all. Instead, the subjects can be remarkably diverse, touching on themes such as wishes, desires, and love; family dynamics involving the husband, co-wives, or the mother-in-law; and moral or religious values, myths, or divine beings (Pathak and Mishra 2017; Trehub and Trainor 1993; Güneş and Güneş 2012). Themes and lyrics that appear to be inappropriate for children, such as natural disasters, wars, violence and even death may occur as well (Achté *et al.* 1990). A mother shares her joys and sorrows with her baby, even though the young listener cannot understand the meaning of the words. As Baruch notes (1988: 2): 'Were he able to comprehend the words of the lullaby, he would not fall asleep at all'. Yet, despite the seemingly mismatched content, mothers continue to sing such songs, and infants continue to drift off to sleep.

The observations above suggest that the poetic text of a lullaby is not its most dominant feature. Instead, lullabies are likely more function-oriented, focusing on how they are performed rather than solely on their meaning. The words sung to soothe a baby to sleep do not achieve this effect through their content alone but also through the rhythmic and melodic qualities of the performance (Doja 2014: 129). Across cultures, lullabies are characterised by performance techniques such as rhythmic repetition, elongation of certain syllables, and emphasis on specific words and their meanings.

The combination of melody, slow tempo, and rhythmic devices plays a crucial role in creating a sense of calm and inducing sleep. However, as Doja (2014: 130) argues: 'the interactive relations between the poetic and melodic texts are not merely superficial manifestations of the underlying pressure exercised by the function. The interaction is also capable of acting indirectly, through the melodic text's influence on the poetic text and conversely'. He finds that poetic texts are much enriched by vocal traits that prioritise sentimental expression as well as the melody's soothing and sleep-inducing allure (Doja 2014: 130).

Although the poetic component of a lullaby might seem to play a secondary and even unnecessary role in fulfilling its function, the lullaby's significance extends beyond its practical use. It is, after all, a form of oral literature, crafted and performed within a cultural context, which highlights the value of its semantic content. As a genre, the

lullaby can also be classified as folk literature, which, according to Bascom (1954), allows individuals to express emotions and escape societal repressions.

In this light, lullabies are often sung during challenging times, giving voice to a mother's struggles and hopes (Baruch 1988: 1). One possible reason why a mother might include elements of distress in a song for a baby too young to understand her words is that lullabies may serve to comfort the mother as well (Baruch 1988: 2). Hawes (1974: 147) observes that: 'there are, after all, two people present and in the "audience" when a lullaby is sung within context: the infant and the mother ... the lullabying mother may in fact be singing as much to herself as to her baby.'

In this sense, while the 'baby-talk' terms, rhythmic repetitions, rhymes, and assonances are intended to soothe the child, the verbalisation of issues the child cannot comprehend can be seen as 'autonomous units' directed at the mother herself (Doja 2014: 127; Baruch 1988: 2). This dual purpose underscores the lullaby's complexity as both a practical tool and a deeply personal form of expression.

In this chapter, I intend to bring the Somali lullabies into the discussion. The Somali lullabies share some similar features that are found universally in the genre while also reflecting elements unique to Somali culture. Through a close reading of the poetic texts in Somali lullabies through the lens of lyric theories, I will explore how the rhetorical and semantic resources achieve harmonisation. My objective is to consider lullabies as a form of poetry, drawing on ideas and lyric features referenced elsewhere in this book. Using Culler's lyric theory and other relevant frameworks, I will analyse how these lullabies demonstrate key lyric characteristics. Particular emphasis will be placed on the concept of address and how it functions within the genre.

2.2. *The Somali* Hobeeyo

Among the oral literature that is made and transmitted by Somali women, cradle songs have not given rise to as much scholarly attention as other poetic genres. In the pastoral communities, raising children is a key part of the gendered division of labour in which Somali women actively participate (Kapteijns 1999: 55). Mothers of young children are often assisted by other female members in the house. As Axmed Cali Abokor (1993: 71) observes, Somali women typically sing to their children while engaged in other important tasks, such as mat weaving, or when they wish to lull their children to sleep. During my fieldwork

in July 2019 in Hargeysa, some mothers shared that Somali lullabies are sung to babies until around the age of two, when the children begin to speak. However, Axmed Cartan Xaange (2014: 20) notes that these songs may continue until the child's dependence on the mother diminishes, often around the age of five. Using lullabies in child-rearing reflects established socio-cultural values and the pastoral communities' code of conduct. Nomadic Somali women typically learn these songs during childhood by listening to their mothers or other elder women and often compose new ones to complement traditional ones (Amina 1981: 117).

The Somalis employ their oral verse to convey messages, even through lullabies intended for listeners too young to comprehend their content. Through these songs, mothers express their emotions and perspectives. Many of the lullaby verses show a mother's care and love for her child, her desire to offer compliments, and her hopes and best wishes for the child's future. At times, Somali mothers also use lullabies to voice their concerns for their children, as well as their own fears and anxieties, conveying profound messages and articulating thoughts that might otherwise remain unspoken. Additionally, lullabies can serve as a mechanism for expressing sentiments about social issues, particularly those that impact women's traditional roles within pastoral communities (Axmed 1993: 71). These aspects will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

The preservation of Somali lullabies has largely been the responsibility of women, as singing for babies is an exclusively female practice, and men tend to avoid reciting verses made and performed by women. One of the earliest published works that incorporate and investigate Somali lullabies is Amina H. Adan's article 'Women and words' (Amina 1981) in which the author collected songs in 1978, six years after the introduction of the official Somali orthography. Another early study of women's voices is Kapteijns (1991), which incorporates a few lullaby verses collected by the author and examines gender representation within the texts.

Male researchers have also contributed to documenting women's poetry, particularly the traditional *hees* type. In Axmed Cali Abokor's *Somali Pastoral Work Songs* (1993), he examines the poetic voice of the 'politically powerless' and includes lullabies in the chapter on household work songs, alongside mat-weaving, milk-churning, and mortar-pounding songs made by women. According to Axmed, the lullabies in his book were collected by himself from two women from Buuhoodle named Ardo and Faadumo. Another male author who has dedicated himself to collecting Somali folktales and folk songs is

Axmed Cartan Xaange. He included and translated 191 songs, categorised into five main genres, one of which is nursery songs. Although completed in 1991, the book was published in 2014. More recently, two booklets featuring collections of Somali lullabies have been published: Jawaahir Cabdalle Faarax (2016) and Maryan Anshur *et al.* (2015). Both works are accompanied by CDs featuring Somali lullabies sung in their original language.

The examples of lullabies cited in this book are drawn partly from the existing works mentioned earlier and partly from my own collection during fieldwork in Hargeysa in July 2019. During my time there, I worked closely with Nasra Daahir Maxamed and visited several families. I recorded lullabies and collaborated with Nasra on analysing the texts while in Hargeysa. Upon returning to London, I continued to work on these recordings and remained in contact with Nasra, whose insights were invaluable in deepening my understanding of the lullabies and the cultural context surrounding them.

2.3. Hobeeyo *and the Variation in Spelling*

Rocking a baby in her arms, a pastoral Somali mother sings to her child with a soothing, repetitive melody. In 'Women and words', Amina (1981: 116) writes: '*hoobeyo* is the lullaby sung to children', and she classifies this type of song as 'another form of *buraanbur*'[12]. Later in the paper, she introduces *hobeeyo*, using a different spelling, as 'the chorus of the children's lullaby which Somali women have been repeating meticulously for at least the last two hundred years' (Amina 1981: 117).

The discrepancy in spelling may stem from the fact that the official Somali orthography had been introduced only nine years before the publication of the article, and even today, spelling has not become strictly standardised. Somali is essentially written as it is pronounced. Each of the vowels in Somali can be pronounced long and short and in spelling, the long vowels are written with two letters and are pronounced about

[12] There are several variations in the spelling of *buraambur* in existing academic works. In Zainab Mohamed Jama (1991), it is written as *buranbur*. The same spelling is also used in Safia Aidid (2010). In Amina (1981) and Dahabo, Amina and Amina (1995), it is written as *buraanbur*. In Zorc and Madina (1993), the entry is also spelt as *buraanbur*. In Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964), the spelling is *buraambur* and the same spelling is also used by other scholars in the field of Somali literature and linguistics including John William Johnson, Giorgio Banti, Francesco Giannattasio and Martin Orwin. I shall use *buraambur* in this book.

twice as long, in terms of time, as a single vowel. However, it is still common for Somalis to spell long vowels or geminate consonants simply with single letters in everyday practice, as mutual understanding is generally unaffected[13].

The variation in the spelling of *hobeeyo* appears again in a later work, in which Dahabo, Amina and Amina (1995: 174) first write: 'the *buraanbur* is the highest of women's literary genres. Other female minor literary forms are the *hobeeyo* (lullaby) and the *hoyal* or work songs.' Yet, in the next paragraph, the term is spelt as *hoobeeyo* with two long vowels, and the authors classify it as one of the main sub-categories of the *buraanbur* alongside the *hoyal* (work songs[14]) and the *sittaat* (religious song). Gardner and El Bushra (2004: xiv) support this classification, referring to the indigenous term as *hobeeyo* and translating it as 'lullaby'.

Despite these mentions, several Somali dictionaries and Somali-English dictionaries published between the 1980s and 1990s do not include *hobeeyo*, *hoobeyo*, or any similar term that might equate to 'lullaby' or 'cradle song' (see, for example, Zorc and Madina 1991). While major, prestigious poetic genres such as *gabay*, *geeraar*, and *jiifto* are consistently listed, terms associated with less prominent genres, including *hoyal* and *sittaat*, are notably absent.

Furthermore, many of the mothers interviewed during my fieldwork in Hargeysa were unfamiliar with the words *hobeeyo* or *hoobeyo*, which Somali scholars propose as terms for lullabies in their publications. However, these participants were well aware of the terms for recognised genres such as *gabay* and *buraambur*. It seems that *hobeeyo* is a technical term within the field of Somali literature that is less widely known and thus less commonly used by the general population.

Instead, the term more commonly employed by the participants to describe the songs they sing to babies is *hees carruureed*, which literally translates to 'children's song'. Other variations include *heesaha carruurta* (the children's songs) and *heeso carruureed* (children's songs). The participants explained to me that, unlike in other cultures where chil-

[13] Sometimes missing a letter doesn't indicate a difference in meaning, but there are times when the variation in spelling can indicate different meanings. For example, *u* is a preverbal preposition particle which we might translate as 'to' or 'for', whereas the long vowel *uu* is a third masculine singular person subject verbal pronoun. The word *warran* with double *r* means 'give news' whereas *waran* means 'spear'. Although the meaning of a misspelt word can be essentially different, people can make sense of it from the context.

[14] *Hoyal* is translated as 'work song' here, in Amina (1981) she explains the word as 'sung while weaving mats'.

dren's songs are often performed by children, in the Somali context, these terms refer specifically to the lullabies sung by mothers. Somali scholar Axmed Cali Abokor (1993: 71) also uses the term *heesaha carruurta*, translated as 'lullabies', as a section title in his discussion of household work songs by pastoral Somali women.

There are also works where the genre is mentioned only using the English terminology. For example, Kapteijns (1991) includes two lullaby texts in her paper on women and the Somali pastoral tradition. While most indigenous terms unique to Somali culture are provided in brackets, such as 'family law (*xeerka dheerta*)' and 'watering songs (*shubaal*)', the Somali terminology for lullabies is notably absent. In a more recent work, Safia (2010: 110) writes: 'work songs, lullabies, and other forms of *buranbur* poetry provided a platform for women's grievances and self-expression, allowing them to articulate their concerns through this socially acceptable medium'. She identifies *buraambur* as the overarching genre of women's poetry, and describes the lullaby as 'a traditional *buranbur* lullaby' (Safia 2010: 110).

The above discussion reveals the variations in the indigenous terminology for the genre and also raises the question about classification. Although the term *hobeeyo* mentioned by the Somali researchers is not widely known as the name of the genre, it is possible to trace the origin of the word. In his study of folk songs from central and north-eastern Somalia, Axmed Cartan Xaange (2014: 20) notes that the Somali nursery songs are called *hobeeya hobeeya*. He explains that the words have no specific meaning in themselves but serve as syllables which are often sung at the beginning of a song. Axmed also suggests that these sounds can be interpreted as 'Hey! Hey!' or 'Shssh!' to capture a baby's attention, especially when they are crying (Axmed 2014: 20). In his English translations of the Somali texts, he renders the line as 'hey hey baby'.

In the southern dialects, Axmed observes that the syllables become *huwaaya huuwaya*. This variation is reflected in the Advanced English-Somali Dictionary by Ahmed Hussein Mire (2009: 609), where the entry for 'lullaby' is given as: *huuwaayeelo; hees debacsan oo carruur lagu seexiyo*. While the latter phrase translates as 'a gentle, relaxed song with which one puts children to sleep', the first term, *huuwaayeelo* may derive from the *huwaaya huuwaya* vocables mentioned by Axmed Cartan Xaange, combined with the verb *yeelo* (to hold).

In Maryan Anshur's (2015) collection of Somali lullabies from 'different clans and regions in Somalia and Ogaden', the vocables in the opening line of each song are transcribed in the booklet and sung by Maryan on the accompanying CD as *hobeeyaa hobeeheey hobeeheyaa*. Interestingly, the editors present the title *Hobeeyaa Hobeeheey!* – no-

tably including an exclamation mark – on the cover page below its English title, *Somali Lullabies*. In her English translations, Maryan Anshur retains the original *hobeeyaa hobeeheey hobeeheyaa* as the first line of each song. However, the introduction to the booklet does not specify an indigenous term equivalent to 'lullaby'.

In Jawaahir Cabdalle Faarax's (2016) collection, the strings of vocables vary more widely, ranging from *hobeeheey hobeheey hobeeheeyaa* to *hobeeya hobeey hobeeya*, and sometimes include duplicated vowel letters and hyphens, as in *hobeey hobeey hobeeya-aa* and *hobeheey hobe-heee-yaaaa*. One possible reason for such variation in transcription lies in the different tunes used when chanting the lullabies. According to Axmed Cali Abokor (1993: 72), there are two musical patterns for Somali lullabies: the *galbeedi* (western), characterised by a slow and sonorous melody used by the western pastoralists, and the *reer bari* (people of the east), which is shorter in length and livelier, applied by the eastern pastoralists. The duplication of vowel letters in transcription likely serves to reflect the extended melodic lines of the *galbeedi* style, although strictly speaking, long vowels in Somali orthography are normally indicated by the doubling of only two vowel letters.

Somali mothers are aware of the two music patterns and their difference in tempo, even though the terms *galbeedi* and *reer bari* might not be widely recognised. On the accompanying CD to Maryan Anshur's collection, she performs all the lullabies using the slower and more sonorous *galbeedi* pattern. Maryan explained that she had learned both the rapid and slow melodies from her mother, as both patterns are sung in her region. However, she chose to record all the lullabies in the slower *galbeedi* style for the CD.

During my fieldwork in Hargeysa, most mothers I observed performing sang lullabies in a rapid melody. My transcription of the opening vocables in these songs is *hobeeya hobeey hobeeya*, which exactly follows the genre's metrical pattern that I shall discuss in the next section. If we compare *hobeeya hobeey hobeeya* to the longer *hobeeyaa hobeeheey hobeeheyaa*, we notice that the *hobee* part remains the same in both versions. Additionally, in both cases, the first and last words end with an *a* vowel following the *ey*, while the middle word does not. The *a* syllables in the same positions are written with double letters in Maryan Anshur's transcription, reflecting the elongation in the *galbeedi* melody. Similarly, Jawaahir's use of hyphens in *hobeeya-aa* underscores this prolongation, while hinting that the position is originally filled by a short-vowel syllable rather than a long one.

Another notable difference is the inclusion of an extra *hee* or *he* syllable after *bee* in the long version. These syllables, with an additional

voiceless *h*, are also added in accordance with the prolongation in the performance. The addition is not unique to the opening line but also appears elsewhere in lullabies transcribed by Maryan Anshur. For instance, in the line *Marnaba Tolyare ha guuhuursan* (Do not marry a small clan), an extra *huu* is added within the verb *guursan* (to marry). In Maryan Anshur's singing, these elongated syllables often feature a noticeable pitch bend, marked by the extra *h* consonant.

According to Banti and Giannattasio (1996: 87), 'Somali verse is mainly sung syllabically, i.e. 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'. The additional *h* and vowel syllable in lullaby performances exemplify such cases.

If we have a look around lullabies from other cultures, we notice that the use of vocables is rather common. In her book on lullabies, Leslie Daiken notes, 'of all our lulling songs, then, perhaps the oldest and most element is this croon without words' (Daiken 1959: 36). Similarly, in Christina Chamber's study of vocables in Scottish music, she finds that 'the semantic content or type of song can often determine the type of vocable or selection of vocables to be used' (Chambers 1980: 201). Chambers provides the example of Gaelic lullabies, which are often characterised by the vocable *ba*, usually repeated twice in succession as *ba ba*.

In Spanish, the word for 'lullaby' is *nana*, and in a Grenadian lullaby, the verse starts with *a la nana, nana, nana* (Cummins 1977: 173), in which the repetition of *nana* also serves as vocables designed to capture a baby's attention. This feature closely parallels the use of vocables in Somali lullabies.

Notably, one lullaby song which I collected during fieldwork[15] explicitly mentions the word *hobeey*, which may offer insight into the terminology of the genre and its cultural resonance.

Hobeeya hobeey hobeeya	Hobeeya hobeey hobeeya
Hobeeyadu hadalba maaha	The *hobeey* words are not meaningful words
Dhalaankaa lagu sabaayoo	One tricked in order to calm down the children
Hobeey lagu seexiyaaye	[By singing] *hobeey* one put them to bed
Hobeeyadu hadalba maaha	The *hobeey* words are not meaningful words

[15] The song was collected during my fieldwork in Hargeysa in July 2019. A young mother named Bahja sang it to me. The transcription is by Nasra Daahir. The translation is by myself in collaboration with Nasra Daahir.

The lyrics of this song reinforce the idea that *hobeeya hobeey hobeeya* are nonsensical vocables. The words *hobeey* and *hobeeyadu* (the plural form *hobeeyo* with the definite article suffix in the subject case) within the lines represent these strings of syllables. Although *hobeey* itself has no semantic meaning, mothers sing these vocable strings to put their babies to sleep. It is likely that the terminology of the genre comes from these vocables, despite the spelling variations found in the transcriptions mentioned earlier. Given that the initial syllables *hobee* remain consistent across the versions mentioned, and align with the metrical pattern of the genre (which I will examine in the next section), I have chosen to adopt the spelling *hobeeyo* as the spelling of the indigenous term for the Somali lullaby genre in this book.

The example above is particularly interesting from a lyric perspective, because it is an example of self-reference. This has been discussed by Orwin (2020: 131) in the context of *maanso* poem. Orwin notes that self-referencing within a poem is common in Somali poetry and can be achieved in various ways, including referencing the poem's alliterative sound. In his discussion, Orwin notes that in *maanso* poetry, the self-reference is often towards the poet or the individual poem itself (this is discussed in the next chapter on the *arar* in Caasha Luul's poetry). The *hobeeyo* here though is an example of a *hees*-type poem. Unlike *maanso*, where the poet's identity is often central, the creator of the *hobeeyo* is unknown, yet the poem still engages in self-referential practice. Here, the reference is to the poem itself but not only that, it is self-reference to the type of poem, to the *hobeeyo* as a genre. The voice in the poem is more generic, speaking broadly about what the *hobeeyo* does.

This is particularly evident in the line *Hobeeyadu hadalba maaha* (The *hobeey*s are not meaningful words). This statement underscores the idea of the *hobeeyo* as a verbal act, which ties in with the idea of lyric being more related to 'ritualistic' use of language rather than narrative. This general idea of the *hobeeyo* being a poetic act, a feature of lyric poetry, is one which is made clear in my analysis of the poems below and comes out also in the discussion below on address.

2.4. *The Formal Characteristics and Classification of the* Hobeeyo

As a distinct poetic form, the *hobeeyo*, is characterised by its unique prosodic features. The metre of Somali poetry was outlined in Chapter 1, but this section will focus specifically on the metrical pattern of the *hobeeyo*, which has not been addressed in previous studies on Somali metre.

All *hobeeyo* songs, like all Somali poetry, are metrical. The basic *hobeeyo* metrical pattern[5] can be represented using the following symbols:

˘ indicates a position that must be filled by a short vowel syllable;
˘˘ indicates a position that must be filled by either a long vowel or two short vowel syllables.

The *hobeeyo* metrical pattern can thus be illustrated as follows:
˘ ˘˘ ˘˘ ˘˘ ˘ ˘˘ ˘

Below, I analyse a *hobeeyo* which is presented in Axmed (2014: 29). The lines of the poem are provided below, accompanied by the metrical symbols to illustrate how they align with the *hobeeyo*'s characteristic pattern.

Maxaa Fiidoy ku keenay
˘ – – – ˘ – ˘
Fariid baa dhalan lahaaye
˘ – – ˘˘ ˘ – ˘
Raggaa faalali lahaaye
˘ – – ˘˘ ˘ – ˘
Wan baa foorari lahaaye
˘ – – ˘˘ ˘ – ˘

These lines show us that the patterns are remarkably similar. The first three syllables and the last three syllables remain identical across all lines, creating a regular rhythm. This regularity likely contributes to their rhythmic nature when sung, which is crucial to their function as lullabies intended to soothe infants. The word *foorari* is given as *fooraari* in Axmed (2014). I believe this to be a typographical error. The verb *fooraar* does not appear in Somali dictionaries, so I infer it to be *foorar*, meaning 'to bend over', which aligns with the context. Axmed Cartan Xaange translates this as 'feasted on', referring to the act of bending over the meat, as Somalis in rural areas traditionally eat while seated on the ground. The way in which the word *fooraari* does not conform to the metre, while *foorari* does, highlights how metrical

[5] The metrical pattern has been analysed with the help of my supervisor, Martin Orwin, who has done a lot of research on metre in Somali poetry. The analysis is based in particular on examples in Maryan Anshur's collection of *Somali Lullabies* (2015). All the lullabies in this book follow this metrical pattern except in the *ardooya ardooy ardooya* one, there are lines in which the metre seems to be broken or to have a variation.

analysis can assist in interpreting Somali poetic texts.

We can see that, metrically, the patterning of *hobeeyo* requires each line to end with a short vowel syllable. However, during performance, it is common for the final syllable of a line to be prolonged. In Maryan Anshur's transcription, this prolongation is represented with double letters. For example, in the line *cambaro kaahooy korkaagaa* (O Pearl, with your creamy smooth skin), the ending word is actually *korkaaga* (your skin), which ends with a short vowel. The word *korkaagaa* with the long ending vowel *aa* could, in some contexts, be the two words *korkaaga* and the focus marker *baa* together in one word. However, this is not the case here, as the line is neither a main clause nor connected to the subsequent line, *korkaaga cadee wanaagsan* (your beautiful shiny skin), to form a clause where a focus marker *baa* is needed. Instead, it is the word *korkaaga* with a short vowel ending that fits both the metre and the syntax of this line.

The long vowel *aa* ending reflects a performance feature rather than grammatical necessity. Sometimes an extra vowel sound such as *aa*, *ee* or *oo* is added to the end of semantically complete lines to align with the metrical and melodic pattern. For example, in the line *Ducada loo raatibyeeyaa* (One made the supplication for), the final *aa* following *raatibyey* is an added sound in the performance and not grammatically part of the verb.

In Somali, the third-person masculine general past tense is marked by the *-ey* (or *-ay*) ending attached to the verb stem (*raatibay*), while the present progressive tense uses *ayaa* (or occasionally *eyaa*). Although a present progressive tense might be possible in this context, I propose that the verb is intended to be in the past tense. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the *aa* in the present progressive form is strictly a long vowel syllable, which does not fit the metrical pattern here.

There are also cases when a line ends with a conjunction *oo* or a diphthong in an open syllable, such as *-ay* and *-ow* which are anceps and can be considered either short or long in open syllables (though diphthongs are always long in closed syllables). For example, in the line *Sidii Bilanow bil dhalatay* (Or the shining one, like the new moon), the final *-ay* syllable counts as a short vowel syllable to fit the metrical pattern. In contrast, in the line *Ducada loo raatibyeeyaa* (One made the supplication for), the *-yeeyaa* is a long vowel syllable with an added vowel that reflects the prolongation in performance. The expected verb form in this context, as previously mentioned, is *raatibay*, which ends with a short vowel and aligns with the metrical requirements. However, Maryan Anshur transcribes it as *raatibyeeyaa* to capture the way it is sung during performance.

While most lines in *hobeeyo* performances end with a prolonged syllable, even when the syllable is linguistically short, there are occasions when the final syllable of a line is sung with a very brief beat. This typically occurs at the end of a song or when a group of lines forming a complex sentence within the song reaches completion.

In Maryan Anshur's transcription, an apostrophe is added after an open syllable to represent this brevity. In Somali, the apostrophe functions as a consonant, marking a glottal stop. Additionally, these lines are followed by a full stop punctuation mark, indicating the conclusion of a coherent segment. Sometimes, a blank row separates these groups of lines from the subsequent ones. In contrast, other lines with a prolonged final syllable are followed by a comma. These features of oral poetry performances are thus reflected in the printed transcription, capturing both the rhythm and structural cues of the original performance.

The *hobeeyo* songs are typically short in length. In performance, different short pieces of *hees* songs with different alliterative sounds are often concatenated to form sequences, which can sometimes extend to considerable lengths. This results in a single performance that transitions from one *hees* to another, with each piece maintaining its own alliterative sound. Consequently, the performance gives the impression of shifting alliteration.

This variation in alliteration is a feature also found in the *buraambur* genre, whereas all of the other *maanso* genres require a consistent alliterating sound throughout the entire poem (Ahmed 1984: 339). However, not all *buraambur* poems exhibit this characteristic. In performing the *hobeeyo*, both verbatim memorisation and personal composition play important roles (Axmed 1993: 71). Some lines of a song are constantly repeated due to their significance, while others are expanded and ornamented to suit new contexts or needs. Furthermore, popular verses often appear in multiple performances across different regions, sometimes with minor variations (Maryan 2015: 5).

For example, the lines below are found in two different songs within Maryan Anshur's collection (2015: 13, 29).

Haddaad gaadhoo gabowhoodoo	If you grow up and reach an old age
Haddii Guulle Alle yeeheeloo	If Allah, the Victorious makes it happen
Haddii guur kuu malooboo	If marriage comes into your mind[6]

Having observed these characteristics of the *hobeeyo*, we can now reflect on its classification. Somali poetry is categorised into various

[6] Translation by Ruixuan Li.

distinct types, each with its own specific name. Each type of Somali poem can generally be classified as belonging either to the category of *maanso* or *hees*. In the existing works on Somali women's poetry, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the *hobeeyo* is often considered a subcategory of the *buraambur* genre, alongside work songs and women's religious songs. This classification implies that the *buraambur* serves as a broad category encompassing all poetry composed and performed by women. However, this approach overlooks the important distinctions between *maanso* and *hees* and how different female poetic genres align with these two overarching categories.

The place of the *buraambur*, according to Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964: 49), is 'somewhere between' the *gabay*, the *jiifto*, the *geeraar* and the lighter and less elaborate poems. The traditional evaluation of Somali poetry is based on a judgement of social status determined for the whole population by adult men, and the specific occasions and social situations that a poem is associated with. Poetry that is performed at dance and work occasions – where rhythmic and musical patterns seem to take precedence over the verbal message – is often dismissed as 'trivial' (Axmed 1993: 22-23).

As Orwin (2003: 340) suggests, the performance of *maanso* traditionally involves nothing but the reciter and the audience, with the focus placed squarely on the words themselves. The indeterminacy status of the *buraambur* genre likely stems from its dual nature. On the one hand, *buraambur* is often tied to music and dance in festive settings, such as weddings, leading to its classification as entertainment. On the other hand, it has been employed by women to convey serious and political messages, playing a significant role in Somali political and socio-economic development.

For instance, In the 1940s, a group of Somali women who were members of the Somali Youth League employed the *buraambur* genre to deliver patriotic messages, urging women to join the independence movement or appealing for peace between warring factions. Examples of these *buraambur* poems by women poets such as Halimo Godane, Halimo Shiil, Barni Warsame and Timiro Ukash, are documented by Zainab Mohamed Jama (1991). I shall look at some of these poems in Chapter 4.

The poetry of women has long been excluded from serious consideration until the mid-20th century. As Axmed (1993: 23-24) notes, it was only then that many contemporary Somali urban dwellers, particularly among the educated class, began to challenge the traditional biases in the evaluation of Somali poetry. These critics argued that the poetry of women and young men had been undervalued, asserting that evaluations

should focus on the merits of the poem itself rather than the social status of the poet or group. Such progressive ideas played a pivotal role in the recognition of *buraambur* as a serious poetic form (Johnson 1974: 13).

In his extensive discussion of *maanso* and *hees*, Ahmed Adan Ahmed (1984) also classifies *buraambur* under the *maanso* category. Similarly, in Kapteijns' introduction to Somali women's poetic genres, she suggests that the women's 'serious' genre, the *buraambur*, was 'similar to the *gabay* in some aspects, but differed from it in terms of quantitative scansion, accompaniment (often drumming and dancing), subject matters, and, of course, the sex of author and audience' (Kapteijns 1999: 21). Regarding lullabies, she writes: 'women also sang work songs (including songs for small babies) and had their own genre of religious song (called *sittaat*)' (*Ibid*). Her parenthetical reference to 'songs for small babies' suggests that lullabies have not commonly been treated as a distinct sub-category of work songs in the existing literature on Somali poetry.

Kapteijns (1999: 51) categorises Somali women's work into three key domains. First, as a good wife, a woman maintained personal cleanliness, upheld her appearance, and served her husband, relatives, and guests. Second, as a good mother, she took care of her children, attending to their nourishment, clothing, health, and moral upbringing. Third, as a competent married woman, she undertook most of the tasks related to the processing, preparation, and distribution of household food, managed the construction, maintenance, and repair of the collapsible house and woven household utensils, and tended livestock other than camels.

In Somali society, work is often carried out to the rhythm of poetry. Work songs, referred to as *hees hawleed* in Somali, form a major part of the *hees* category. However, the responsibility of caring for children and the songs performed in this context have often been overlooked by scholars. For example, Sheekh Jaamac, in defining *hees hawleed* within an introductory discussion on Somali poetry, associates these work songs exclusively with activities like livestock management and handicrafts (Sheekh Jaamac 1974: iv, cited and translated in Orwin 2003: 338). By contrast, other works, such as Axmed (1993), which focus on pastoral work songs, and studies on Somali women's orature, do include lullabies as part of their scope.

In Axmed (1993), the terms for each specific type of song are provided in both Somali and English. All the indigenous terms begin with *heesaha*, the plural form of *hees* with a definite article. In the subsection on *heesaha carruurta* (lullabies), Axmed further categorises these into *heesaha wiilasha* (lullabies for sons) and *heesaha gabdhaha* (lullabies for daughters). Some other types of *hees* songs use dif-

ferent terminology. For example, *hoyal* is used for mat-weaving songs (Amina 1981: 117), which in Axmed (1993) appear as *heesaha kebedda iyo aloolka* and *heesaha harrarka*[7]. Similarly, *salsal* is used for camel loading songs (Amina 1981: 117) which Axmed (1993) refers to as *heesaha raridda awrta*. In contrast, each type of *maanso* poetry has a single, distinct name that never includes the word *hees*.

This is the case with *buraambur*, it is the name of the type of poem and the dance and performance that is sometimes associated with it. While dance is performed at weddings, the form of the poem is not always tied to the dance. Based on this dual nature of the name and the other observations made above, I shall take *buraambur* as a subcategory of serious *maanso* poetry. Its subject matter is not associated with a type of work, and its authorship is typically known even though the poem might not go past a close circle of families and friends. I consider the *hobeeyo* or *hees carruureed* genre that is sung by Somali mothers to their young children, as a sub-category of the *hees* poetry in which characteristics including unknown authorship, openness to variation, brevity, potential antiquity, and the joining together of individual verses during in a performance are found[8].

2.5. *The Poetic Contents and Lyric Address in the* Hobeeyo *Poems*

In the previous sections, I have looked at some of the major extratextual characteristics shown in *hobeeyo* poems. In this section, I will turn to the poetic texts themselves. As we will see from the examples I analyse, the language of *hobeeyo* poems is simple and lacks the rich imagery characteristic of *maanso* poems. A mother draws inspiration from elements of pastoral life and her daily experiences to entertain or soothe her baby, but these are presented in a simple way. This simplicity, I suggest, reflects the context of the poems: the child, as the primary addressee, cannot comprehend complex metaphors. Consequently, the 'poet' or 'performer' does not aim to impress the child with intricate language.

It is reasonable to assume that this was also true when the lullabies were originally composed. The women who first created these texts would have crafted them for their children, prioritising functionality

[7] *Kebed*, *alool* and *harrar* are different types of mats used to cover the top and sides of the portable house. See Kapteijns (1999: 62) and Axmed (1993: 57-60).

[8] More accounts on the features of *hees* and *maanso*, see Orwin (2001: 339), Orwin (2021), Mohamed (2013) and Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964: 51).

over linguistic complexity. However, while the child is the primary addressee, the lullabies also reveal other perspectives on the lyric voice, which I explore further below. The use of the vocative plays a crucial role in this regard, and it is to this that I now turn.

Each line of a *hobeeyo* verse typically consists of three to four words and is constructed in a straightforward way. One distinct feature of these verses is the frequent use of vocatives. In a lullaby that is sung to her child, a mother repeatedly addresses her baby in various affectionate ways. Through these direct addresses, Somali women not only convey their care and love for their children but also reflect on and critique the prevailing gender norms within their pastoral community. By closely analysing selected *hobeeyo* texts, I aim to demonstrate that these lullabies, while seemingly simple, are crafted with artistic intent and carry profound social significance.

Among the Somalis, the vocative suffix attached to a person's name is frequently used in their daily conversations. The vocative form in Somali is created by adding *-ay* or the long form *-yahay* to female names and nouns, and *-ow* or *-yohow* to male names and nouns. If the word ends in a vowel, the vowel is dropped before appending the shorter vocative suffix directly to the final consonant. While the address in ordinary speech serves an apparent communicative purpose, the address in poetics can be a distinctive form of language which may or may not function to engage directly with the addressee.

The idea of address in these lullabies is particularly intriguing, especially when considered in relation to the idea of address in *hees hawleed* as discussed in Orwin (2021). In that work, Orwin makes the point that the address in some of the work songs for livestock is toward the animals themselves. At times, the animals are addressed directly, as demonstrated in the examples below.

Adhigow yaryare	O small sheep and goats
Waxaa kaa yaryari	What is smaller than you
Ma yamaarug baa	Is it *yamaaug* plant?
Ma yabaal baxaa	Is it shoots that sprout?
Taagane wanow	O standing ram
Tuurta u baxoo	Go up the hill
Tuugga iska eeg	Look out for the thief[9]

[9] Orwin (2021: 66).

The masculine vocative suffix is used in this work song, directly addressing the animals with words such as *adhigow* (O sheep and goats) and *wanow* (O ram). In some cases, however, there is no explicit direct address, and it is the context of the performance that makes it clear the song is meant for the animals. For example, when a *hees* for watering camels is performed, it is only done within the specific context of camel-watering. Even if the camels are not directly addressed, their inclusion is understood implicitly through the situational context.

Orwin points out that this is also the case with the 'lyric voice' in the poem. Since *hees* poems typically lack a known composer, the person performing the poem is not its creator and performs it not for a unique time and place, but for the general situation the *hees* was composed for. For instance, a camel-watering song can be performed in any camel-watering scenario, and the performer adopts the generalised perspective of a camel herder rather than expressing a personal viewpoint. This contrasts sharply with *maanso* poems, where the composer is known, and the poem is often crafted for a specific situation in time and place. In *maanso* poetry, the lyric voice is distinctly personal, representing the unique perspective and intentions of the individual poet.

In the case of lullabies, the context is also very clear. As I have noted, the *hobeeyo* falls under the category of *hees*, meaning that the identity of the original composer of the poem is unknown, as is the identity of the child to whom the lullaby was first sung. A mother sings a *hobeeyo* song in the specific context of soothing her child or helping her child fall asleep. The same *hobeeyo* can be sung to different children within the same family, and in other situations, it can be sung to the child of a relative or friend. The text of the *hobeeyo* is not a personal message from the singer but rather a collective one that Somali mothers have passed down through generations to sing to their babies.

In the following sections, I will explore the themes of the *hobeeyo* songs, focusing particularly on how socially constructed gender norms are embedded within them. I will also consider how this seemingly 'insignificant' form of women's poetry can carry significant cultural and social influence.

2.6. *Gender Preference in the* Hobeeyo *Poems*

Axmed (2014: 29) divides the lullaby songs he collected into two categories: songs for baby-boys and songs for baby-girls. During his research, he observes that songs for boys are more numerous than those for girls, attributing this to the preference for sons prevalent among Somali

parents. Axmed (1993: 74) also notes that lullabies composed for boys tend to be more elaborate than those for girls, reflecting gender biases in Somali society, where women are often placed in subordinate roles.

The following is a *hobeeyo* verse in which the preference for sons is straightforwardly expressed. The mother sings to her baby daughter, Fiido, expressing a wish that the child had been a boy named Fariid instead (Axmed 2014: 29):

Maxaa Fiidoy ku keenay	O Fiido, what brought you?
Fariid baa dhalan lahaaye	Fariid is who should have been born
Raggaa faalali lahaaye	The men should have celebrated
Wan baa foorari lahaaye[10]	A ram should have been feasted on

This short piece of lullaby alliterates in the *f* sound. In the first lines, the alliterating word is the daughter's name, Fiido, with the vocative suffix *-oy*. The mother addresses her daughter and asks her, 'O Fiido, what brought you?' Singing this line to the baby, the mother is not expecting an answer from her. Instead, the questioning is an illocutionary act that expresses the mother's emotions towards her new-born being a daughter rather than a son.

In the next line, with a male name Fariid being the alliterating word, the mother bluntly sings, *Fariid baa dhalan lahaaye* (Fariid is who should have been born). She is saying it is Fariid, a boy, rather than you, baby girl Fiido, who should have been born to me. Following the conditional structure, the next two lines give a listener a stronger impression of the preference for boys in the society: *Raggaa faalali lahaaye*[161] (the men should have celebrated), and *wan baa foorari lahaaye* (a ram should have been feasted on).

In the pastoral society, although the birth of a baby is a delight in itself, a new-born boy is regarded as more valuable than a girl. A son's birth was the occasion for the slaughtering of a ram and feasting, but a daughter was not celebrated in the same way (Kapteijns 1999: 58). The lullaby echoes this aspect. The alliterating verbs *faalali* (celebrate) and *foorari* (lean over), in combination with the conditional mood auxiliary verb *lahaa* (with *-ye* added for the metre), present a counterfactual joyful image of the festivities brought by the birth of a son. The happy image in the conditional tense implies that in reality, men didn't celebrate, nor were rams feasted on because Fariid, a boy, wasn't born. In-

[10] As mentioned above, the word *fooraari* in the original text is misspelled. It has been edited to *foorari* here.

[11] *Raggaa* is made up of *ragga* (the men) and the focus marker *baa*.

stead, Fiido, a girl, was born.

The parallelism achieved by the three lines in the conditional and the repetition of the final word *lahaaye* (should have) underscores the gender preference entrenched as a social norm, which is also imposed upon the mother. The parallelism highlights male entities in each of the last three lines: *Fariid*, the male name; *ragga* (the men); and *wan* (a ram). The emphasis on maleness in these syntactically parallel lines reinforces the societal preference for boys.

According to Kapteijns (1991: 7), a Somali mother was expected to invest as much as possible in her sons, as only they could be relied upon to provide economic and emotional support in the future, whether within or outside the framework of her marriage. Consequently, the birth of a boy brought a mother immense joy and a sense of security, whereas the birth of a girl did not offer the same assurance. In singing this *hobeeyo* to her daughter, the mother is, in fact, engaging with and reflecting the societal preference for sons.

Marriage is also a prominent theme in *hobeeyo* songs, as seen in two examples from Maryan Anshur's collection: 'Tolyare' (Small Clan) and 'Goonbaar' (Nasty Woman)[12]. These songs provide marital advice to baby girls and boys, respectively.

In 'Tolyare', a mother advises her daughter to marry a man from a large and powerful clan, reflecting the importance of clan status in Somali society.

Haddaad gaadhoo gabowhoodoo	If you grow up and reach an old age
Haddii Guulle Alle yeeheeloo	If Allah makes it happen
Haddii guur kuu malooboo	If marriage comes into your mind
Marnaba Tolyare ha guuhuursan	Never marry a small clan

In contrast, the following *hobeeyo*, 'Goonbaar', offers guidance to a son. Here, the son is warned against marrying a 'nasty woman' (*goonbaar*), with the emphasis placed on her character rather than her clan.

[12] This translation is by Maryan Anshur as shown in the English version of the lullaby in the booklet. *Goonbaar* in the Somali context is a bad housekeeper who fails to accomplish the labours and obligations allocated to women, and fails to meet the traditional gender norms and expectations. The words 'slovenly woman' and 'slut' are also suggested as its English translations in Zorc and Madina's dictionary (1993: 165).

Haddaad gaadhoo gabowhoodoo	If you grow up and reach an old age
Haddii Guulle Alle yeeheeloo	If Allah makes it happen
Haddii guur kuu malooboo	If marriage comes into your mind
Haddaba goonbaar ha guuhuursan[13]	And yet don't marry a nasty woman

These two *hobeeyo* songs clearly illustrate the societal gender norms embedded in their messages. For girls, the emphasis is on the social and clan status of their future husband, while for boys, the focus shifts to the individual traits of their future wife, highlighting a difference in how societal expectations for marriage are framed based on gender.

Occasionally, Somali women express their disagreement with the prevalent gender values. In the verse below, a mother shows an attitude contrary to that of the previous piece.

0 Hobeeya hobeey hobeeya[14]	0 Hobeeya hobeey hobeeya
1 Waxaa wiilloowda la hayo	1 [No matter] how one wants boys
2 Waxaa loo waalanaayo	2 [No matter] how one is enthusiastic of them
3 (Hooyo) aduun baa igala[15] wanaagsan	3 (Baby), it is only you that is better with me[16]

I shall now take a closer look at the lines. Lines 1-2, starting with *waxaa*, can be interpreted as two adverbial clauses of concession, describing how one (*la*) is crazy (*waalanaayo*) about having a son (*wiilloowda*). However, the main idea lies in the last line, where the mother herself holds an opposing view. Addressing the child[17], the mother

[13] The original texts of the last line given in Maryan (2015: 29), *Haddabaa goonbaar ka guurhuursan* seem to have two spelling mistakes. I have presented the version edited by myself.

[14] I use numbers to mark lines in order to discuss specific lines. I mark this line as 0 because this line is a string of vocables which is sung in the performance of the poetry but does not have a meaning, as I explained previously. For the rest of the poems that start with a line like this, I will also mark the first lines as 0.

[15] The *hoyoo* is an extra-metrical word added as an extra part of the performance which is outside of the metrical line. In the original source, *aduunbaa* appears as one word; a space has been added here for grammatical correctness. In this line, the *igala* doesn't strictly follow the metre as presented above. The metre here seems broken. This may be due to it being misrepresented in the text.

[16] Jawaahir (2016: 22). Translation by Ruixuan Li.

[17] In Somali culture, the word for 'mother', *hooyo*, is used by both a mother and her children to address each other. That is to say, Somali children call their mother *hooyo*, and the mother would call her children *hooyo* too. The same goes for the father (*aabbe* or *aabbo*) and other

sings: it is only (*uun*) you (*adi* in *aduun*) that is better with me (*i* and *la* in *igala*). The subject pronoun 'you', and the object pronoun 'me' highlight the intimate and strong connection between the daughter and the mother. The closeness between the 'I' and 'you' is also reinforced by the distance between the 'I' and the third person 'one' (*la*) achieved by the concession. With *aduun* (only you) being focused by the focus marker *baa*, the mother tells her baby girl that she chooses only the daughter over any other boys who might be wanted by others.

As Kapteijns (1991: 58) observes, women from a pastoral background today often state that they prefer daughters, who will help them with their work. The performance of the *hobeeyo* is most likely to occur inside a house, with the baby in the mother's arms or on her back. There may or may not be another person witnessing this event, unlike a *gabay* performance in public. However, there is still the voice of the Somali women, disagreeing, even when no one else is listening, except the baby who can't understand her words.

2.7. *Admiration and Blessings in the* Hobeeyo *Poems*

Topics of *hobeeyo* poems revolve around the lives of children and the exclusive, unbreakable bond between a mother and her children. Somali women draw the most cherished images of pastoralist life to convey their admirations and blessings for their children. In the following verse, sung to a son, the mother expresses what his birth means to her.

0 Hobeeyaa hobeeheey hobeeheyaa	0 Hobeeyaa hobeeheey hobeeheyaa
1 Markaad dhalatee dhawaaqday	1 When you were born and made a noise
2 Dhedow dhaxan bayga duushay	2 O dew, cold has flown away from me
3 Dhulkaa ii wada iftiimay	3 The whole world has come to light for me[18]

This *hobeeyo*, characterised by alliteration in the *dh* sound, conveys the profound significance of the baby boy's first cry to the mother. In line 1, two alliterative verbs *dhalatee* (*dhalatay ee*: were born and) and *dhawaaqday* (made a noise) are placed consecutively. Similarly, two alliterating words appear together in the next line. Here, the mother ad-

close relatives. In the performance of a lullaby, the word *hooyo* is occasionally added at the beginning of a line. In such lines, the word *hooyo* is not considered part of the metrical pattern of the line.

[18] Maryan Anshur et al. (2015: 9). Translation by Ruixuan Li.

dresses the boy with a symbolic object, *dhedo* (dew, with the vocative suffix *-ow*), and tells him that coldness has flown away from *i* (me) when *aad* (you) were born[19]. She further sings that the entire world has come to light *ii* (for me) when *aad* (you) first cried.

The imagery of coldness dissipating and the world coming to light, enhanced through hyperbole, symbolises the warmth, comfort and hope that the birth of the son brings to the mother. The use of pronouns and prepositions such as *iga* (from me) and *ii* (for me) underscores the intimate bond between the mother and the son. Additionally, the mother asserts her unique emotional connection to the child, claiming that no one else could experience these feelings in the same way.

The following is another example in which a mother expresses her desire to compliment the son. The lines brim with metaphors, with the use of vocatives adding a distinctive and evocative touch.

1 Dhammow dhuux iyo lafoowaa	1 O perfect child, O marrow and bones
2 Dhammow dhuubane dhalyow waa	2 O perfect child, O offspring of a slim man
3 Dhammow dhogor xaajiyow waa	3 O perfect child, O skin of a pilgrim
4 Dhammow kaan ku dhaartayow waa	4 O perfect child, O the one I swore an oath on
5 Dhammow dheegga Hartiyowa'[20]	5 O perfect child, O the high place of the Harti[21] clans

The vocative *Dhammow* derives from the word *dhan*, meaning 'whole' or 'complete', and can be interpreted as 'to make something perfect'. In this short lullaby, each line comprises two words that begin with the *dh* sound: one is the vocative *Dhammow*, and the other is either a noun, as in the first three and last lines, or a verb, as in the fourth line. In this *hobeeyo,* the vocative suffix *-ow* appear twice in each line: first attached to the word *dhamme* and then again at the end, followed by a *waa* sound. This *waa* here is not the mood classifier in Somali grammar, but an additional sound made during the performance, as noted earlier

[19] The *i* (me) is in the cluster *bayga* which is made up of the focus marker *baa*, the pronoun *i* (me), and the preposition *ga* (from). The *aad* is in the *markaad* which is the contraction of *markii aad* (when you) in the first line.

[20] Maryan *et al*. (2015: 9), Translation by Ruixuan Li. As mentioned earlier, the apostrophe in the end is added by the editor to mark a glottal stop in performance, and is not part of the spelling of the word.

[21] Harti: May refer to the Harti Daarood clan consisting of three sub-clans, the Warsangeli, the Marjeertaan, and the Dhulbahante.

in this chapter, with the final letter of the preceding syllable being reduplicated.

The second occurrence of the *-ow* suffix in each line is attached to a phrase or clause that conveys the mother's praise and blessings. In the first line, this is the *dhuux-iyo-lafo* (marrow and bones), which metaphorically addresses the son. In the second, third and fifth lines, the fine images are *dhuubane dhali* (offspring of a slim man), *dhogor xaaji* (skin of a pilgrim), and *dheegga Harti* (the high place of the Harti clan). These references highlight elements of immense value in Somali pastoral society, such as lineage, clan, and religious piety.

In the fourth line, the *-ow s*uffix is used to address a relative clause made up of *ka* (the one), *aan* (I), and *ku dhaartay* (swore an oath on). It is also in this line that the subject pronoun *-aan* (I) appears and creates a strong sense of connection between the voice and the addressee, declaring her unique position as the mother.

The concentration of the alliterating sound in this *hobeeyo* is particularly striking. The use of such sound parallelism is a feature that is recognised in lyric poetry and which helps to make such a poem one which can be very much considered to have lyric qualities. The density of the sound lends it an acoustic quality that highlights its being something that is made not to narrate something, but to be a lyric act, a poetic act. We can say that this highlights its lyric ritualistic quality of being a piece of language that is an event rather than recounting something.

In the following *hobeeyo,* a mother sings to her daughter using a structure similar to the 'Dhammow' lullaby mentioned earlier:

0 Ardooya ardooy ardooya
1 Ardooy indhahaygiyaya
2 Ardooy adhaxdaydiyaya
3 Ardooy[22] ardaa caano leh degtoya
4 Aroos khayr lehna geshoya
5 Ardooy inanteydiyeya
6 Ardooy ubad ababiyeya
7 Ugaasyo xambaaratoya
8 Ifkana lagaa naadiyeya[23]
9 Albaabka Jannada geshooya'

[22] This is extra to the metre as I mentioned before.

[23] The *lagaa* strictly speaking, should be *laga* so that it fits in the metre. However, the meaning is correct in this line. There seems to be a variation in the metre.

0 Ardooya ardooy Ardooya
1 O Ardo, O my eyes
2 O Ardo, O my spine
3 O Ardo, O the one who settles where there is milk
4 O the one who enters a good wedding
5 O Ardo, O my daughter
6 O Ardo, the one who will teach children
7 O the one who will carry clan leaders on the back
8 O the one about whom one announces in the world
9 O the one who enters the gates of Paradise

Addressing her baby girl, Ardo, the mother envisions her daughter's entire life, from her wedding and children, to her afterlife. In the opening line, *Ardooya ardooy ardooya*, the vocative of the name Ardo is repeated in a pattern similar to the *hobeeya hobeey hobeeya* vocables[24]. The long and short vowels appear in the same positions as those in *hobeeya hobeey hobeeya*. While the *hobeeya* vocables serve to call the baby's attention and do not have a lexical meaning, in singing *Ardooya ardooy ardooya*, the mother directly calls her daughter's name. The final *a* syllable in the word *ardooya* should be viewed as an extra sound added to fit the metrical and musical patterns, without affecting the meaning of the word. Other names which consist of two short vowel syllables are also found in strings of vocatives. For example, *Duco* in *ducaayo ducaay ducaaya* is a girl's name derived from the Arabic word *duʿāʾ*, meaning 'supplication to God'. *Same* in *samoowa samoow samoowa* comes from the Somali word *san* meaning 'goodness', and the name can be understood as 'the one who does good'.

In lines 1-2, the mother uses parts of the body to convey her love: *Ardooy indhahaygiyaya* (O Ardo, O my eyes), and *Ardooy adhaxdaydiyaya* (O Ardo, O my spine). The possessive pronouns *-aygii* and *-aydii*, embedded within the noun phrases being addressed, enhance the intimacy between the mother and her daughter. Another line constructed in the same way is line 5, *Ardooy inanteydiyeya* (O Ardo, O my daughter). These three noun phrases – *indhahaygi* (my eye), *adhaxdaydi* (my spine) and *inanteydi* (my daughter) – are metrically and semantically parallel.

Rather than placing them in complete declarative sentences (e.g. 'O Ardo, you are my eyes'), the mother addresses the noun phrases. There is no need to explicitly tell the baby 'you are my eyes' or 'you are my spine', as the vocative construction itself declares and intensifies the

[24] For this reason, I also marked this opening line as line 0.

closeness between the mother and her daughter.

The rest of the lines are constructed in a slightly different way. In lines 4-10 (excluding line 5, analysed above), the final vocative suffix is appended to a clause that includes an object and a verb. For example, in *Ardooy ubad ababiyey*, the clause to which the vocative suffix is added is *ubad ababi*, which can be translated as 'who teaches children'. Similarly, in *Ugaasyo xambaaratoya*, the clause consists of the object *Ugaasyo* meaning clan leaders, and the verb *xambaaro*, meaning to carry on one's back or shoulder. The tense in these lines appears ambiguous because the vocative suffix deletes the clause's ending. However, it seems that tense is not particularly significant here; what matters is the address and the ideas expressed for the child's future.

A shared characteristic of these vocative clauses is their focus on the daughter's aspirations and blessings: entering a good wedding, bearing sons who become clan leaders, and entering the gates of Paradise, among others. This special use of the vocative in the *hobeeyo* reflects a poetic language distinct from ordinary speech. Instead of full declarative sentences, such as 'you are the offspring of a slim man' or 'you will enter a good wedding,' the succession of addresses conveys the mother's heartfelt wishes for her daughter. These lines in the vocative case can also be rendered in English using a 'May you …' expression to capture their spirit: O Ardo, may you settle in a courtyard with milk; O Ardo, may you enter the gates of Paradise.

In light of the analysis of these *hobeeyo* poems, I now return to the idea of address which I discussed earlier. In his study of lyric poetry in western European languages, Culler argues that address to someone gives a poem a character of being an event; thus, a poetic discourse is an attempt to be an event (Culler 2014: 164; Culler 2015: 188). He emphasises the indirection in the 'triangulated address', wherein an audience is addressed through the act of address to an imagined addressee, a *you* which is indeterminate (Culler 2014: 164).

The *maanso* type of poetry, by and large, reflects such characteristics. However, the *hobeeyo*, as a speech act tied to a specific occasion, is inherently an event in itself, with the addressee being a particular and real audience – the child. The parallelism achieved through the replication of the vocatives enhances the ritualistic element of the *hobeeyo*. Although the actual addressee, the baby, may not comprehend the words, the mother emphasises the bond between the lyric *you* and *I* through her address to the child.

I propose that the *hobeeyo* serves as a medium of expression and meaning-making for the mother herself. In other words, the *hobeeyo* is not solely for the baby but also for the mother. In the following section,

I will explore *hobeeyo* songs that convey more serious messages, reflecting the life and struggles of Somali mothers.

2.8. *Womanhood in the* Hobeeyo *for Daughters*

A Somali lullaby can convey more than blessings and wishes. At times, the message in a *hobeeyo* takes on a more serious tone, particularly when it is sung to a girl. The following *hobeeyo*, addressed to a girl named Gudo, serves as a discussion on gender roles and expectations[25]:

Gudooy weynoo gefeene	O Gudo, they have done wrong to us
Ardaa aan gabadhi joogin	A dwelling where a girl is not there
Gudooy geel laguma maalo	O Gudo, one doesn't milk camels in it
Gammaan faras laguma raaco	One doesn't ride horses in it

To her infant audience, the mother sings: *Gudooy weynoo gefeene* (O Gudo, they have done wrong to us). The address here, again, is not guided by a communicative purpose in the conventional sense. By voicing an adult problem to her young daughter, the mother is not seeking a conversation but rather projecting into the future, seeing the child as a fellow woman who will one day share the same experiences. The use of 'us' here is layered – it may refer solely to the mother and daughter, or it may encompass women more broadly. With the word *gabadhi* (girl) standing out as the alliterating word in the next line, the gendered focus of this *hobeeyo* becomes even more pronounced.

In Somali families, women shoulder a significant portion of the work. This *hobeeyo* reflects an acute awareness of the essential role women play. Without nomadic women dismantling and rebuilding dwellings, crafting household utensils, and caring for children, the foundation of Somali pastoral life would falter. Men would be unable to milk camels or ride horses. Camels hold immense value in Somali society, and milking them is traditionally a male responsibility. Therefore, the impersonal pronoun *la* in the penultimate line, can be interpreted, particularly, as referring to a male 'one' – a man, a husband. In a household without women, men would be unable even to fulfil their own critical tasks, such as milking camels. It is also notable that horses are mentioned here, which may suggest that the song is quite old, given that horses have not been an important means of transport for some time. However, the horse may also carry symbolic meaning in this poem.

[25] Amina (1981: 116). Translation by Ruixuan Li.

Yet the messages in this song extend beyond this. What is the 'wrong' that the mother sings in the first line? In her paper, Amina Adan (1981: 117) suggests it may refer to the subordinate position of women in Somali society. Despite their labour and contribution to the family, women remain under male authority and are not fully integrated into their husband's kin group. At the same time, they are not seen as contributors to their birth family's wealth, even though the bride-price, often in the form of horses and camels, constitutes a tangible addition to their family's property. In a later work, Dahabo, Amina and Amina (1995: 177) argue that the mother's song is not only addressed to her child but also to fellow women who endure the same systemic inequality.

People turn to poetry when faced with difficulties. While the baby being addressed cannot alleviate the mother's difficulties, she serves as an emotional anchor. In singing to Gudo, the mother may also be singing to herself. At one level, the mother uses the lullaby to introduce her daughter to the importance of women's work and the realities of gender inequality. At another, *Gudo* may serve as a symbolic or indeterminate addressee, a figure to whom the mother can express both her pride as a woman and her grievances about the entrenched inequalities of her society. In this sense, the 'fellow women' she addresses could include herself, blurring the boundaries between the speaker, the child, and a broader audience.

The following *hobeeyo* also addresses the problems the daughter will inevitably face as she grows older.

1 Dhibaay gabadh dhalatayee
2 Dhibaad soo doonisteeda
3 Ninkii baa i dhibayadeeda
4 Dhibaato u joogisteeda
5 Anaan dhalin baa iigu roone

1 O trouble, a girl who has been born
2 Her wanting the *dhibaad* payments for her
3 Her [repeating] 'the man has caused me troubles'
4 Her being for a problem
5 It is better for me that it is not me who gave birth to her[26]

This *hobeeyo* begins with an alliterating word *dhibaay*, which combines the noun *dhib* (trouble, hardship) with the vocative suffix *-ay*. Here, the calls her daughter 'trouble', lamenting the difficulties the

[26] Amina (1981: 118). Translation by Ruixuan Li.

daughter might bring in the future. These include requests for the *dhibaad* gift[27] from her maiden family and potential conflicts with her husband. Notably, the mother uses third-person pronouns instead of directly addressing the daughter.

In line 3, 'the man has caused me troubles', the word *dhib* reappears as the denominal verb in the sentence *ninkii baa i dhibay* (the man has caused me troubles). The sentence, which sounds very much like quoted speech, is nominalised into a noun phrase. It is possible that this is in the plural form achieved through the suffix *-o* (which has changed into *-a*) before the possessive suffix *-teeda*[28]. This adds an impression of generality or recurrence. The nominalisation in this line creates a vivid image of a married woman voicing her complaints about her husband to her mother.

We don't know what troubles they exactly are. Some Somali women I interviewed interpret them as minor domestic disputes, while others view them as indicative of more serious issues like domestic violence. Amina H. Adan's (1981) translation of this poem supports this interpretation, rendering the quoted speech as 'the-husband-has-beaten-me complaints'. She further suggests that it is the mother who finds these complaints particularly loathsome because she endured similar hardships herself just a generation earlier (Amina 1981: 118).

In line 4, the alliterating noun *dhibaato* (a problem) once again emphasises the key word *dhib* in this lullaby. The word *joogis* (presence) derives from the verb *joog* (be present) and is followed by the possessive suffix *-teeda*. The voice laments that the very presence of a girl is tied to problems.

When compared to the preceding lines, a notable progression emerges. The repetition of *dhib* in the alliterating words and the recurring possessive suffix *-teeda* at the end of each line create a sense of parallelism. However, the lines develop in complexity and emotional weight. *Dhibaad soo doonisteeda* explicitly references the burden of the *dhibaad* payments for a family – a specific material concern. The voice here is not only that of a mother worrying about future *dhibaad* payments for

[27] Amina (1981: 118) suggests that the noun *dhibaad* originally comes from the noun *dhib* (trouble). According to a Somali mother named Mako Mohamoud, who I spoke with, the *dhibaad* is normally a traditional Somali dish consisting of preserved meat called *muqmad* and other gifts to the husband of a married woman. For a less wealthy family or a family with more than one daughter, such *dhibaad* gifts can be burdensome.

[28] One sound change particular to nouns in Somali is if the noun ends in *-o* and the possessive suffix is added, not only does the *t* change to *d* but the *o* also changes to *a*. See Martin Orwin, *Colloquial Somali* (1995) p. 44, 134.

her daughter but also that of a woman reflecting on the troubles she herself brought to her maiden family upon marriage.

Yet, material burdens pale in comparison to the emotional toll expressed in the following line. The mother dreads the potential complaints of her daughter – *ninkii baa i dhibay* (the man has caused me troubles) – which, as noted earlier, might point to domestic discord or even violence. This line transcends economic concerns, speaking to the profound heartbreak a mother experiences when her daughter faces such struggles. Cradling her baby, the mother ends the lullaby with a heartbreaking sentiment: she wishes she had never given birth to her daughter. This final line starkly conveys the emotional weight carried by the mother, reflecting not only her personal anguish but also the cyclical hardships faced by women across generations.

Cross-culturally, cradle songs often convey serious, even sombre, messages. During my interviews in Hargeysa, I repeatedly asked Somali women why a mother might sing to her infant about a co-wife, the injustices inflicted by men, or a husband striking his wife – topics far beyond the comprehension of a baby. Their responses were telling: 'The lyrics are not so important to calm the baby,' and, 'They are not about the child; they are about the mother.'

Themes and lyrics that appear to be inappropriate for children, such as wars, violence and death, are found in cradle songs across the world. Mothers share their joys and sorrows with their babies, even though the young listeners cannot understand the words, and yet, the infants fall asleep. While the tension between the content of the lyrics and the functional purpose of the lullaby has intrigued folklorists and anthropologists, the disconnection between the meaning of the poem and the power of its sounds can also be appreciated from a poetic perspective, particularly as lyric poetry.

In lyric poetry, the sound patterns and aesthetic forms often transcend specific semantic content. As Culler (2015: 136) notes:

> the sense of rhythm in the broad sense as something independent of writer or reader may be very strong in lyric … that sense of independence is especially marked in stanzas with short rhyming lines or in minor forms of lyric – jingles, limericks, nursery rhymes, … where sound and rhythm rather than meaning are the source of attraction.

This observation aligns with the essence of lullabies, where rhythm, melody, and the poetic structure often outweigh the literal meaning of the words, creating a soothing effect irrespective of the content.

Mutlu Blasing observes that a lyric is a text where sound and sense, form and meaning, operate as two systems, each with its own 'distinct

operation' (cited in Culler 2015: 168). In the case of the *hobeeyo*, the form and sound patterning function independently, playing a crucial role in soothing and inducing sleep. The articulation of issues beyond a child's comprehension can be seen as 'autonomous units' which is meant for the mother herself. There are, after all, two people present and in the 'audience' when a lullaby is sung: the infant and the mother. The mother may in fact be singing as much for herself as for her child.

To a baby boy, a mother might sing of her aspirations: that he will grow strong, honour his kin, prosper in camels, marry a beautiful wife, and care for his mother in her old age. To a baby girl, the messages differ – sometimes expressing societal preferences for boys, such as, 'I'd rather have a boy', but also celebrating the daughter's bond with her mother: 'no matter how they love boys, it is only you that is better with me'. Even as infants carried on their mothers' backs, girls are introduced to themes of marriage, womanhood, and societal injustices tied to their gender.

According to Bascom (1954), a lullaby allows an individual to escape from repressions imposed by the society. Similarly, Baruch notes that lullabies are often chanted during times of hardship, providing an outlet for mothers to express their troubles and hopes. The inclusion of distressing elements in lullabies sung to babies may serve a dual purpose: calming the infant through rhythm and melody while also providing emotional relief to the mother (Bascom 1954: 2).

2.9. *The* Hobeeyo *and the Modern Somali Mothers*

During my fieldwork in Hargeysa in 2019, I met a number of young women and young mothers, gaining insight into how they interact with babies and young children. These women were predominantly in their 20s or early 30s. Some had children of their own, while others had experience caring for the children of relatives or friends. While many of their families came from pastoral backgrounds, these young women had largely embraced an urban lifestyle.

The importance of pastoral poetry has to a large extent diminished in an urban social setting, as the specific contexts and social functions tied to its performance no longer align with the lives of urban Somali youth. Instead of herding livestock or crafting woven household utensils, these women attend university or work outside the home. Nevertheless, housework, food preparation, and child-rearing remain predominantly women's responsibilities. In many cases, young mothers share these duties with other female family members living in the

household, providing mutual support for managing these tasks.

Nowadays, in rural areas, older and middle-aged women, as well as younger women, may still preserve the use of *hobeeyo* songs passed down from previous generations. However, in urban settings, younger women have generally lost touch with these traditional songs. While they might recognise the melodies and rhythms or recall a few lines, the function of the *hobeeyo* has largely been replaced by modern popular music. They may select a song for a reason, such as resonating with the baby's name, or simply sing any tune that comes to mind to soothe or entertain their infants.

Some young women I interviewed expressed an interest in learning and preserving the *hobeeyo* songs, but voiced concerns about the gendered values conveyed in the lines. They told me that they would learn 'only the good ones' to sing to their children, referring to songs that express wishes and compliments. Songs that emphasise gender preference for boys or reinforce gender inequality were described as 'bad songs' that these young Somali women wished to avoid.

Young Somali women are keenly aware that marriage is a dominant theme in the *hobeeyo* songs, often reflecting traditional gender norms. Some acknowledged the importance of marriage, describing it as central to Somali women's lives, with sentiments like, 'life is to marry or to die' and 'university is something new to us'. In Hargeysa, it is not uncommon for female university students to leave their studies to get married. However, there are also women who challenge this perspective. While they recognise the significance of marriage, they argue, 'we can be more than a wife'. When considering their children's futures, these women envision a balance, valuing both education and marriage.

The media also plays an important role in preserving the *hobeeyo* genre. Some young mothers now use YouTube videos featuring Somali lullabies to play for their children. One such channel, 'Somali Kids', features *hobeeyo* songs recorded with modern musical melodies. Instead of the traditional *luuq*, Ukrainian musician Nick Usaty has composed new music, accompanied by animated videos that depict a Somali mother lulling her baby, with images like camels that resonate with the lyrics. These videos are appreciated by young Somali mothers. The 'Somali Kids' channel also includes the full lyrics of the *hobeeyo* in captions, making it easier for viewers to follow along.

There's also a Somali version of the popular English lullaby 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' on the channel with the original English lyrics translated and sung in Somali. These adaptations are interesting as they show how traditions are constantly evolving and how modern tools are used to both preserve and reimagine old verbal art. That being said, the

choice still rests with the young mothers: whether to play an innovative video of a Somali lullaby or opt for the global sensation, *Baby Shark*.

There are other *hees hawleed* (work songs) sung by women while performing tasks traditionally done by women. These include the *kebed*-mat weaving songs (*heesaha kebedda*), songs which are sung when women are preparing food, the milk churning songs (*heesaha lulidda*) and mortar pounding songs (*heesaha mooyaha*), and sheep and goat herding songs (*heesaha adhiga*). As women's work songs, these poems are also considered 'trivial' or 'insignificant', using Axmed's (1993) terms. However, Somali women make their voices heard by singing these work songs while doing their task at hand. On the one hand, they are sung for entertainment; on the other, the cultural practice of singing work songs serves as a platform of voicing and protesting for the female population that is accepted by the male-dominated society.

Somali women express their opinions on a variety of issues related to their social roles, in particular to marriage and womanhood. When a woman sings about her complaints regarding her husband, a family member, or male privileges, her message is communicated to the listener. Amina (1981: 117) offers an example of a wife singing a complaint about polygamy while loading camels with her husband. She sings: *Nabad gale nin laba dumar le/Nabad uma soo gelin* (For the polygamous my lovely camel/Worry and nagging are his companion)[29]. While she addresses the camel, the underlying message is intended for her husband. The beauty of this tradition is that her song, a part of an established cultural practice, cannot be silenced by him. It is simply a traditional work song that has been passed down through generations, allowing her to express herself within the confines of societal norms (*Ibid*).

Another true scenario highlighted by John Johnson (1995: 115) involves a husband choosing a young man for the youngest daughter in the family, but the wife disapproves. Without the right to voice her opinion directly, the wife sings a herding song to the sheep and goats, telling the story of a ram choosing the wrong mate for its youngest daughter. She ensures that her husband hears the song, and, as Amina notes, there is no way for him to stop her from singing a traditional work song. Through this, we see women's agency being expressed in the *hees* poems, despite the limited space they occupy in both the literary canon and the male-dominated social world. In the next chapter, I will explore how Somali women transcend these limitations and make their voices heard through the *maanso* poetry, particularly in the *gabay* genre.

[29] This translation is not a literal one, but Amina has translated the interpretation of those words.

Chapter 3

POETRY EXPLORING GENDER DYNAMICS AND RELATIONSHIPS

3.1. *Reclaiming the Silenced Voice*

In this chapter, I shift my focus from *hees* to *maanso* and look at those made by women on the theme of relations between men and women. This theme, prevalent in various literary traditions worldwide, takes on a distinct character within Somali oral literature. As Mohamed Farah Abdillahi and B.W. Andrzejewski observe in their article on the life of Cilmi Boodhari (1967: 191), Somali oral poetry has traditionally centred on topics such as wars, peace-making, alliances, politics, commentary on public affairs, religion, the prestige of one's clan or allies, attacks on enemies, or public justification of actions.

In contrast, love – especially as a primary subject – was historically relegated to lighter genres, such as simple ditties or the dance songs of young camel herders or girls, and rarely featured in serious poetry unless it intersected with topics of public significance (*Ibid*). This was before the emergence of Cilmi Boodhari, the poet renowned for his love poems and said to have died of love, according to the authors.

The name Cilmi Boodhari and his tragic love story are widely known among Somalis. In the 1930s, Cilmi Boodhari worked at a bakery in Berbera, where he reportedly fell in love at first sight with a young woman named Hodan who entered the shop. Though he never saw Hodan again, he became deeply lovesick and began composing poems to express his sorrow. Cilmi's desire to marry Hodan was thwarted when his clan refused to provide the requisite bride wealth. Eventually, Hodan married another man, and it is said that Cilmi Boodhari died of heartbreak.

Mohamed and Andrzejewski note that Cilmi's fame is due not only to the quality of his poems but also to his role as 'the spokesman of social reform', by defying the established, traditional view of love and marriage in the poetic form (*Ibid*: 205). However, there is one crucial question that remains overlooked: What did Hodan say about all of this?

In Hadraawi's famous romantic poem 'Beledweyn', the girl that Hadraawi meets at least responds, telling him, 'be here tomorrow' before they part ways, though they never saw each other again[17]. In Cilmi Boodhari's case, none of the sources compiled by Mohamed and Andrzejewski suggest that Hodan expressed any interest in Cilmi. Nevertheless, the two male authors speculate that she might have had some affection for him and that 'she could not bring herself to oppose her family when they rejected 'Ilmi'[18].

Back in the 1930s, when Cilmi Boodhari made those love poems, the cultural taboo surrounding expressions of love was significant, even for men. Somali poet Axmed Aw Geedi (cited in Thompkins 2009) remarked that a man openly expressing affection for a woman would have been considered unmanly and shameful. For women, this taboo was even more rigid. Axmed (1993: 14) notes that Somali women were not socially permitted to discuss matters of love or relations between men and women. Mohamed and Andrzejewski similarly highlight that Hodan remained silent about Cilmi's love for her because societal norms did not allow her to speak.

Hodan, undoubtedly, had her own perspective, but it was suppressed, rendered invisible by the cultural and literary conventions of the time. Her voice is conspicuously absent, lost to a tradition that privileged male expressions of love while silencing women's responses. However, Hodan had a voice. Somali women had a voice, and they did address the matter of love and their relationships with men. As explored in the previous chapter, Somali women used work songs as a vehicle to convey messages about their relationships with their husbands or broader issues of gender relations. These forms of verbal expression were culturally accepted and embedded in everyday life.

Beyond work songs, Somali women also made themselves heard in the more serious poetic genres, despite the social suppression and discrimination they faced. In this chapter, I will examine the *maanso* type of poetry, focusing particularly on the prestigious *gabay* genre. While the *gabay* has traditionally been dominated by men, this chapter will highlight its use by Somali women as a medium to articulate their experiences, challenge norms, and assert their agency.

In this chapter, I will examine the works of two women poets, Caasha Luul Maxamuud Yuusuf and Xaawa Jibriil. I chose these two

[17] This is in the line *[sow] berri joog imay odhan* ('Be here tomorrow!', didn't she say to me?) in 'Beledweyn' in Andrzejewski with Andrzejewski (1993).

[18] This article was written before the introduction of the official writing system of the Somali language. The name Cilmi Boodhari was written as 'Ilmi Bowndheri'.

women poets because they are both powerful women poets who have made poetry in the 'male' genres, especially the *gabay*, and whose poems have been widely recognised within Somali society. Despite their shared stature, these poets come from vastly different backgrounds, and their styles and themes reflect their unique life experiences.

Xaawa Jibriil was born in 1920 and actively participated in the Somali independence struggle, using poetry as a powerful tool to mobilise the public during the 1940s and 1950s. Her patriotic poems are held in high regard by many Somalis, both men and women (Faduma 2008: 91). Xaawa began expressing herself through poetry at a very young age and continued throughout her life. Many of her poems that are remembered by Somalis were made during and after the independence movements, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4. In this chapter, however, I will explore poems she composed at different stages of her life, revealing her personal growth and her evolving perspectives as a woman.

Caasha Luul Maxamuud Yuusuf is a contemporary Somali poet who has lived in Britain since 1990, having fled the civil war in Somalia. Born and raised in the northern parts of the Somali territories, she grew up immersed in the rich oral traditions of Somali culture and also began composing poems during her youth. Over the years, she has honed her craft, combining traditional poetic forms with incisive commentary on contemporary issues. Her work started appearing on Somali websites in 2008 and has since gained widespread recognition within the diaspora community. She is particularly admired for her ability to preserve the classical *gabay* structure while addressing modern themes such as gender equality, love, displacement, and the challenges faced by diaspora communities. Her poetry resonates deeply with her audience due to its masterful balance of form and content – rich imagery, nuanced arguments, and a flawless adherence to Somali poetic metre. In this chapter, I will analyse two of her poems that explore the themes of gender relations and love, while her work addressing war and displacement will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.2. *'Dookh' (Taste) and 'Calaf' (My Fortune) by Caasha Luul*

I will take 'Dookh' (Taste) and 'Calaf' (My Fortune) by Caasha Luul as examples to present close readings of Somali poems and how I engage lyric ideas with Somali poems. 'Dookh' and 'Calaf' are both *gabay* poems. 'Dookh' was written in London in 2011 and 'Calaf' was written in 2016. They are included in her dual-language Somali-English col-

lection entitled *Tahriib* (The Sea-Migrations) published in Asha (2017), with English translations provided by the English poet Clare Pollard, in collaboration with Said Jama Hussein and Maxamed Xasan 'Alto'. Both poems are about men, but from different perspectives. 'Dookh' presents a woman's perspective when she doesn't have feelings for a man, even though he may show many excellent characteristics. 'Calaf', on the other hand, recounts mostly negative characteristics that men might have, which the voice in the poem does not want as her 'due'.

In order to better understand the structure and poetic form of these works, it is important to explore how a *gabay* poem is traditionally organised. The *arar* is the introductory section of a poem in Somali. It is a section in which the poem introduces itself, but in many poems, especially ones which are more 'traditional' or are made to resemble poems from earlier times, the *arar* can refer to the poet and the making of the poem in question. Sometimes there is a reference to the poet's skills in the *arar*, and we see an example of this below.

Following the *arar*, the main part of the poem is called the *dhexdhexaad* (middle section). This is the main part of the poem in which the poet sets out what they wish to say in the poem. It is the longest part of the poem and is often divided into different sections. The examples below by Caasha Luul demonstrate this clearly.

The final section is called the *gebaggebo* (concluding section). This section is mostly short and may sum up the message of the poem in a concise way. This structure for poetry seems to be most clear in *gabay* poems although it is also found in other genres of poetry. It also seems to be prominent in more serious poems. In the *gabay* poems of Caasha Luul that I will discuss in this section, the structure is very clear, and I will analyse the poems following each part. I will start with the *arar* of the poem 'Dookh' (Taste).

3.3. *On the* Arar *of 'Dookh' (Taste)*

The first six lines of 'Dookh' by Caasha Luul are provided below. These lines form the *arar* of the poem and serve as a particularly fine example of an *arar* that both refers to the poem itself and to the poet.

1 Haddaanad gabayga deelqaafka iyo, dari ka saaraynnin
2 Dalabtiyo haddaan laga midh tirin, diniqa aan muuqan
3 Meeshii dahsoonayd haddaan, lagu daqiiqeeynnin
4 Doogtiyo haddaan lagu lafgurin, dakharradii raagay

5 Darar lagama maaloo tixuhu, dufan ma yeeshaane[19]
6 Aan dareersho caawoo kalaan, daribta saafaaye.

1 If you did not remove the incoherency and defect from the *gabay*
2 If one did not get rid of the disharmony and invisible wound from it
3 If one did not shed light on the obscure place
4 If one did not have an operation on the wound and the head wounds that lasted
5 One doesn't draw milk[20] from [it]. The lines don't make grease
6 Let me spill it out. On a night like tonight, I slice thinly the fat.

I have mentioned the Somali terms *hojis* and *hooris,* as introduced by Ahmed Adan Ahmed (1984) in Chapter 1. In Somali, the first hemistich of a *gabay* line is called *hojis,* and the second is called *hooris*. I will use these terms in my analysis of Somali poems. In a *gabay*, the *hojis* of each line is longer, while the *hooris* is shorter. According to Ahmed (*Ibid*: 344), the *hojis* can be considered the supporting part, while the *hooris* is the principal part. For every *gabay*, he notes – and as we saw in the section on metre – the *hooris* will always have six syllables, two of which are always long vowels. The number and syllabic positioning of long vowels in the *hojis* are more flexible. One way Ahmed analyses lines is in terms of the proportion of long vowels and syllables, following the work on metre by Cabdullaahi Diiriye Guuleed. The structure of the *gabay,* as given in the section on metre, also supports these proportions.

Taking the *arar* in 'Dookh' as an example and applying Ahmed's (1984) analysis, we can see that in the first line, there is a total of eleven syllables in the *hojis*, of which three are long vowels. This gives a 11/3 ratio. In the second *hojis*, there are again eleven syllables, but only one long vowel, resulting in a 11/1 ratio. In the third *hojis*, the total number of syllables decreases to seven, with five long vowels, resulting in a 7/5 ratio.

Let's then examine the *hooris* in these lines. It's not difficult to observe that the total number of syllables and the number of long vowels follow a fixed 6/2 ratio. That is to say, when one listens to a *gabay tix* (the whole line of a *gabay*), the *hal-beeg* (balance) in the first long part

[19] In Asha (2017) the word *tixuhu* is spelt *tixuu*. I have edited this to *tixuhu* which is the correct spelling. The noun is the subject of the verb *yeeshaan* which is in the plural and so shows us clearly that the subject is plural. The pronunciation of *tixuhu* might be heard as *tixuu* sometimes, but it does not reflect the grammar.

[20] The word *darar* in this line means renewed milk production after drought.

of a line always varies, but after the caesura, the listener can always expect two long vowels in six syllables. As the 6/2 ratio repeats again and again, it imposes upon a Somali audience a sound *adkeeyn* (emphasis). The effect of a sound *adkeeyn* then drives the poet to place a meaning *adkeeyn* in the position of the sound *adkeeyn.*

At the same time, such words are often stressed in the performance. In Caasha Luul's performance of 'Dookh', for example, when she performs the first two lines in the *arar*, she reads the lines at a relatively fast speed, except that at the words *saaraynnin* and *aan* in the *hooris,* she slows down her reading and gives extra force to the *aa* syllables. To what extent does this aspect of performance align with the emphasis in the semantic content? How much of a strong statement can we find in the *hojis* that might not be stressed in the performance? Being the 'supporting part', is the statement in the *hojis* less important than that in the *hooris*? With these questions in mind, I will now provide a close analysis of the semantic and structural features in each *hooris* and *hojis* in the *arar* of 'Dookh' (Taste).

This *arar* consists of six lines: the first four are protasis clauses in a conditional, to which the apodosis is given in line 5. In these lines, the poet expresses the importance of crafting a *gabay* well. I will now look at the *arar* line by line.

In the first line, the *hojis* consists of *haddaanad* (if you not), two nouns, *gabay* and the alliterating word *deelqaafka* (incoherent imagery or language), and the conjunction *iyo* (and), while the *hooris* is made up of another alliterating word *dari* (defect), and the verb of the negative conditional clause *saaraynnin* (not removed) with the preposition *ka* (from). The first word, *haddaanad* is composed of three parts: *haddii* (if), *aan* (not), and *aad* (you), with the second-person pronoun making it clear that the voice of the poem is addressing a 'you'. The subject pronoun *aad* is shortened to *ad*, which is a grammatical change that occurs regularly when these parts are combined into a single word. Then, the second word *gabayga*, reveals that the voice is making a point about the *gabay* poetry to the 'you'.

The word *deelqaafka* (incoherent imagery or language), as mentioned earlier in Ahmed's terminology chart, is the antonym of *humaag* (imagery). Explaining the terminologies, Ahmed (1984: 340) suggests that 'the use of *humaag* (imagery) in *maanso* is of paramount importance to a Somali audience's appreciation for and understanding of a *meeris* (poem)'. And a poet is 'expected to be highly creative and coherent in carrying out image relationships' (*Ibid*). He also provides examples to illustrate the consistency expected in the imagery and language used in a poem. He notes that if a poet chooses to use archaic

language, then slang shouldn't appear in the same *meeris*. Similarly, if a poet employs pastoral imagery, then 'his *meeris* is judged by the Somali audience according to the frequency of, and interconnecting relationships he is able to invoke through, his use of pastoral imagery'.

With this concept in mind, let us examine the imagery Caasha Luul employs in this *arar*. The alliterating word *dari* in the following *hooris* is an image that figuratively echoes the alliterating word *deelqaafka* in the *hojis*. *Dari* literally means a defect in a spine; here it metaphorically implies flaws in a poem. The last two words, *ka saaraynnin*, form the negative of the verb phrase 'to remove from' in subordinate clauses. Thus, in the first line of this poem, the voice says: 'if you did not remove the bad alliteration and defects from the *gabay*', then something would happen. The sound *adkeeyn* (emphasis), using Ahmed's (1984) term, as mentioned earlier, is placed on the verb *saaraynnin* (not removed).

The second line expresses a similar idea with slightly different word order. Instead of the second-person pronoun, the impersonal pronoun *la* (equivalent to 'one' in English) is used, and the verb phrase in negative form *midh tirin* (not get rid of), together with the preposition *ka* (from) in the cluster *laga*, is placed in the *hojis*. We find the word *haddaan* (if not) again, following the alliterating word *dalabtiyo*, which combines a noun *dalabta* (disharmony) and a conjunction *iyo*, joining the alliterating word *diniqa* (wound) in the *hooris*.

In Somali, *dalabta* originally refers to a medical term that describes the condition of knock-knee, the inward curvature of legs. Interestingly, the alliterating noun in the *hooris* is *diniqa* (wound), followed by a relative clause *aan muuqan* (that is not visible). If we compare *dalabta* (disharmony), *diniqa aan muuqan* (invisible wound) and *dari* (defect) from the first line together, we can see what the poet is trying to say.

A knock-knee might not be as severe or as apparent as a fracture or visible cut, but it is still a defect in the legs that needs correction. Similarly, an invisible wound might exist anywhere in the body, causing pain without a clearly identifiable source – much like a defect in the spine. These metaphors illustrate the discomfort caused by *deelqaafka* (incoherent imagery or language) if it is not eliminated. Listening to a verse with inconsistent language or imagery causes an audience the kind of pain associated with a defect in a spine, a knock-knee, or an invisible wound. The pain is tangible, yet its precise source is elusive.

The next metaphor used in line 3 is *meeshii dahsoonayd*, where *meeshii* is the noun meaning 'place', and the alliterating word *dahsoonayd* is an adjective meaning 'hidden' or 'obscure'. Again, the image echoes the sense of something invisible described in the first two lines. However, the structure of this line differs. The position of the word *had-*

daan is shifted to the middle of the line, just before the caesura, and the subject *la* (one) is placed in the *hooris* rather than the *hojis*. In the two previous lines, we find one verb corresponding to two object nouns. However, this line features the verb *daqiiqeeynnin* (not shed light on) in the *hooris*, which is paired with only one object: *meeshii dahsoon-ayd* (the hidden place) in the *hojis*. In Caasha Luul's performance, there is a noticeable sound *adkeeyn* (emphasis) on the *ii* vowel in the final word *daqiiqeeynnin*.

The structure of line 4 changes back to that of line 2, with the verb phrase *ku lafgurin* (not operate on) in the *hojis* collocating with two alliterating nouns: *doogtii* (pain from an old wound) in the *hojis*, and *dakharradii* (the wounds) in the *hooris*. Both nouns again symbolise flaws in a poem. The images of *doogtii* (pain from an old wound) and *dakharradii raagay* (wound that delayed) emphasise the 'old' and 'delayed' nature of a wound, adding to the severity of the pain.

If we compare line 2 and line 4, we can sense a progression toward a climax – from a mild knock-knee to a visible, lasting wound that urgently needs intervention. Through four conditional clauses, the poet guides her audience to imagine various kinds of pain: the discomfort caused by a defect in a spine, the persistent ache of an invisible wound, or the agony of a long-lasting wound. These vivid metaphors provide a powerful depiction of the frustrations an imperfect poem can evoke.

Then in the penultimate line, the poet employs two metaphors deeply rooted in nomadic Somali culture and declares: *Darar lagama maaloo tixuhu, dufan ma yeeshaane* (One doesn't draw milk from [it]. The lines don't make grease.) *Darar* refers to the renewed milk production after a drought and is associated with the verb *maal* (to milk). The alliterating word in the *hooris*, *dufan*, is a positive image that could signify both the nutrition derived from fat in the diet and its application as a salve for dry skin. The noun pairs with the verb *yeeshaan* (make). The meaning might thus be interpreted as: 'One does not draw milk from full udders when there is plenty of grazing, and the verse does not produce precious grease.'

This line represents the consequence of the four 'if-nots' expressed in the previous lines' negative conditional clauses. In this *apodosis* line, there are two complete negative sentences, each marked by the negative particle *ma* and joined by the conjunction *oo* (and). The subject of the first sentence is the impersonal pronoun *la* (one), while the subject of the second sentence is the plural word *tixuhu* (the verses, the lines) in the *hojis*.

One interesting feature of this line is that the two metaphorical expressions 'one doesn't draw milk from [it]' and 'the lines don't make

grease' convey connotations that are more or less the same. In Somali, there is no third-person object pronoun, however, from the context, we understand that the thing 'one doesn't draw milk from' is the poem, or *tixuhu* (the verse, the lines), as indicated by the subject in the *hojis* that connects to the sentence in the *hooris*. This sentence could also be translated as 'milk is not drawn from the lines' or 'the lines don't make milk'.

Then we see that this sentence is semantically parallel to the next sentence, 'the lines don't make grease'. Both metaphors refer to milk production and serve to emphasise the importance of well-crafted poetic texts. They are expressed in two similar constructions, a stylistic feature often found in other *gabay* poems or genres with relatively long lines. Thus, I propose that the two parts should not be interpreted independently but rather read as a unified statement: 'the lines don't make milk or grease'.

By this point, the poet has concluded her conditional clauses about the crafting of a *gabay* and proceeds to line 6. In the final line of the *arar*, the poet changes the sentence form. Line 6 consists of two complete sentences: *aan dareersho* and *caawoo kalaan daribta saafaaye*. After reflecting on poetry in general through the conditional clauses in the preceding lines, she declares *aan dareersho* (let me spill it out). As the audience may wonder what the spilling out figuratively entails, she continues, *caawoo kale baan daribta saafaaye* (on a night like tonight, I slice thinly the fat).

The alliterating verb in the *hojis*, *dareersho* (spill out), signifies an action that is both quick and smooth, which can be linked to the careful and deliberate act of slicing camel fat described in the *hooris*. Only a skilful cook can thinly slice the fat, an image that underscores precision and artistry. Here, the poet likens her craft of poetry to the fine slicing of camel fat, announcing her intention to present a piece of poetry as refined and excellent as the delicately prepared fat.

Having closely read each line of this *arar*, we can now examine how it is aesthetically and skilfully crafted by the poet. The *arar* stands out in many ways, but I would first like to discuss the use of pronouns and the notion of address in this section. When we consider the pronouns in the *arar*, we see three different ones are used: *aad* (you) in the first line, *la* (one) in the middle lines, and *aan* (I), expressed with the optative verb 'let me' in the final line. The order of their use, the lines in which they appear, and how they contribute to the notion of address are particularly intriguing.

Somali poetry, especially the *maanso* type, exists to be presented to a real audience and aims to resonate with them. The *arar,* as a piece of

poetic speech, refers to itself through reflecting on poetry in general. The poet creates a discourse in which a created lyric voice gives her opinion on *gabayga* (the *gabay* poetry), *deelqaafka* (the) and *tixuhu* (the verses). By using *aad* (you) in the first line**,** the voice of the poem is addressing a second person. This can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, as an imagined or impersonal addressee; and secondly, as addressing the audience – the listener of the poem.

In Culler's study of lyric theory, he highlights the structure of indirection resulting from what he terms 'triangulated address', where a poet addresses an audience 'through the act of address (implicit or explicit) to an imagined addressee' (2014: 164). He suggests that 'there is always an indirect 'you' in the lyric, as lyrics strive to be an event in the special temporality of the lyric present'. In this poem, the 'you' – the addressee – is not personal in the sense of referring to a specific individual but is expressed directly nonetheless.

In the following lines, the subjects of the clauses shifts from the second person *aad* (you) to the impersonal *la* (one). In other words, the use of *la* blurs the boundaries of the earlier *aad*, implying that the 'you' addressed in the first line also functions as an undefined 'one[21]'. In these lines, the deixis gestures towards the real listeners without specifying a particular person or group. The voice here is addressing an imagined someone, a pure placeholder, with the pronouns *aad* and *la*, in order to convey a message to the actual audience.

The voice, therefore, speaks indirectly to the audience about poetry. While the second person singular pronoun *aad* creates a sense of direct address – encouraging the listener to perceive the message as personal – it simultaneously implies the first person of the lyric voice: the 'I' addressing the listener. Given that *aad* appears in the opening word of the poem, the address may feel especially direct. However, as the poem unfolds, there is also an indication that the address may be directed at the poet's voice herself.

What is clear is that the second-person voice is initially concerned with *gabay*, saying 'if you didn't remove the defects and inconsistent images from a *gabay*'. This marks the first of the protasis clauses in the subsequent lines. Yet, after this, the pronoun shifts from 'you' to the impersonal *la* (one). In the continued conditionals, the poem reflects on creating flawed poetry, as in: 'if one didn't get rid of the wounds'. This idea is further developed through various metaphors in the following lines.

From the perspective of address, what stands out here is that the pronoun changes from *aad* (you), as in the first line, to the impersonal

[21] Culler talks of 'blurred' *you* in his *Theory of the Lyric* (2015: 194).

la (one). The shift from a personal pronoun to an impersonal one is intriguing. This change reflects a shift in focus from a direct individual to a more universal, imagined subject, reinforcing the broader message about poetry while maintaining an indirect connection with the real audience. Instead of emphasising the person responsible for creating a flawed poem, the impersonal pronoun highlights the act of making the poem itself, regardless of who is involved. This subtle change places greater emphasis on the general idea of poor poetic craftsmanship rather than on the individual poet.

This shift aligns with the indeterminate potential of the lyric *you* that Culler conceptualises. In this discourse, with the shift from the second person pronoun to the impersonal pronoun allows a lyric voice to address a blurred, indeterminate addressee. The poet then offers this discourse to the real audience and performers who read or recite this poem. The performers, including the poet herself, will take the position of the voice and speak to the *aad* and *la* in the 'special temporality of the lyric present' – a space that comes alive whenever and wherever the poetry is read. Listeners, in turn, are free to engage with the poem in different ways: they may feel personally addressed, aligning themselves with the blurred *aad* and *la*, or they may remain as detached observers, absorbing the discourse without being directly implicated or preached to.

In addition, the emphasis on making defective poems in this *arar* is conveyed entirely through consistent and carefully chosen imagery. In the first line, it is the metaphor of *dari* (defect in a spine) alongside the poetic terminology *deelqaafka* (inconsistent imagery or language), establishing a thematic connection. In the second line, more body-related imagery is introduced, with *dalabta* (knock-knee) – a subtle defect that might not be immediately noticeable – echoing *diniqa aan muuqan* (wound that is not visible) in the *hooris*.

The third line shifts slightly with the image of *meeshii dahsoon-ayd* (the obscure place), which, though not literally linked to the human body, maintains the idea of something hidden or difficult to detect, building on the imagery of line 2. In line 4, the wound imagery re-emerges with *doogta* (pain from an old wound) and *dakharradii raagay* (wounds that lasted), marking an intensification from the earlier *diniqa aan muuqan* (wound that is not visible) to *dakharradii raagay* (wounds that delayed), highlighting the growing severity.

We also notice that in all of these nouns and noun phrases, there's the alliterating *d* sound. While the poem critiques *deelqaaf* (inconsistent imagery or language) in the crafting of *gabay*, the poet herself demonstrates a mastery of consistent imagery. This imagery, combined with the repeated *d* sounds, creates a cohesive line group where parallelism

and semantic unity are evident[22].

I have mentioned the importance that Somalis attach to the use of consistent imagery in poetry. In the apodosis line, imagery shifts away from the human body to the theme of nourishment, referencing milk and fat. Then in the last line, the poet uses the pastoral imagery again in *daribta saafaaye* (slice thinly the fat). This change in imagery aligns with the shift in sentence structure and meaning. When portraying the pain caused by a poorly crafted poem, the poet chooses words that are related to the human body. By stating 'if these wounds and pains weren't removed, one doesn't draw milk and the verse doesn't make fat', the negative structure of both the protasis and apodosis clause serves to affirm the opposite idea: 'only if the wounds and pains were removed, can one draw milk and can the verse make fat.'

Fat and milk production hold immense value in Somali pastoral society. The satisfaction derived from 'making milk production' in real life is likened to the importance of creating a well-crafted poem. In the final line, the optative sentence, *aan dareersho* (let me spill it out), signals the poet's intention to express her skill. She compares her poetry-making to the delicate art of slicing fat, an act requiring precision and expertise. The milk imagery in line 5 also relates to the act of spilling, with the fresh milk, *darar*, serving as a metaphor for her poem. This positive image underscores the nourishing quality of her work.

This imagery is extended in the line, *Caawoo kalaan daribta saafaaye* (on an evening like this I slice the camel fat finely), which directly references the poet's act of making the poem. By framing the poem's creation in terms of *dufan* (fat), the poet links the earlier imagery to her own work, highlighting the poem's finely crafted nature. The audience would immediately grasp her intent: to present a poem as meticulously fashioned as finely sliced fat, exemplifying her skill and artistry.

As the audience listens to the voice presenting her arguments about poetry, the sound, language and consistent imagery of this *arar* work together to captivate their attention. They will observe that this *gabayga* is free from *deelqaafka* (inconsistent imagery or language) or *dari* (defect in a spine), and that *tixuhu* (the lines) can 'make milk and grease' through the poet's use of abundant, consistent imagery and other compositional techniques. Thus, while reflecting on poetry in general, the poet subtly uses her own skills to demonstrate the excellence of this particular poem.

This self-referential quality is a common feature of the *arar* in *gabay* poetry. The *arar* of *gabay* poetry exemplifies how the language

[22] As mentioned earlier, line 2 and line 4 are parallel.

of a poem can reflect upon itself. This reflexivity makes the *arar* a speech act through which the poet delivers a message to her audience.

One of the most striking features of this *arar* is that, if we hear it on its own, it provides no direct indication of what the poem is about. I will discuss the rest of the poem below, but to highlight this characteristic, I will first examine the *arar* of 'Calaf', another poem by Caasha Luul. When we read or hear the *arar* of 'Calaf', we are similarly left without a clear sense of the poem's subject matter. The audience might only gain an understanding of the poem's theme if they have previously heard it, heard about it, or if the poet or reciter introduces its topic beforehand. I will explore this aspect further following my analysis of the *arar* of 'Calaf'.

3.4. *On the* Arar *of 'Calaf*'

The word *calaf* in Somali has a range of meanings. At its core, as I understand it, *calaf* refers to sustenance – what an individual has in their life to sustain their existence. This includes basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing, as well as the emotional and social support of family and others. However, as mentioned earlier, the *arar* of the poem does not convey any clear sense of this concept.

1 Cilmi gabayba waayadan ma furin, cutubyadiisiiye
2 Caynaddii murtida waanigaan, dhigin culuumteede
3 Caarad-dhuubtii maansada beryahan, kuma cillaalayne
4 Aan caddeeyo caawoo kalaan, caadka rogayaaye.

1 Lately I haven't opened the units of the knowledge of *gabay*
2 I did not set out the type of wisdom [of poetry] nor its fields of knowledge
3 Recently I did not pay attention to the 'pointed tip' of poetry
4 Let me make it clear. On a night like tonight, I clear away the cloud.

The *arar* of 'Caraf' is shorter than that of 'Dookh'. In this *arar*, we also find words that refer to poetry such as *gabay* in the first line and *maanso* in the third line. In a similar vein, the poet expresses her thoughts on making poetry before getting to the theme.

The first word in the opening line is an alliterating word, *cilmi*, meaning 'science' or 'knowledge', and is followed by an attributive *gabay* (poetry). *Waayadan* is a noun and a demonstrative suffix (literally meaning 'these times'), used here as an adverb of time which we may

translate as 'lately'. Following the adverb, the verb of the sentence appears at the end of the *hojis*. The poet employs the negative past tense *ma furin* (didn't open). The object affected by the verb is separated due to the metrical constraints. The *cutubyadiisiiye* (its units) in the *hooris* is the other part of the object, with the masculine possessive suffix, *-diisii* (its, his) referring back to the *gabay* in the *hojis*. In prose, sentences follow rules and constraints imposed by grammar. However, in poetry, language must also adhere to additional structural constraints, enriching the composition of speech.

In ordinary discourses, Somali sentences typically follow a basic word order of subject-object-verb (SOV). In prose language, expressions such as *cilmi gabayba* and *cutubyadiisii* would often be placed before the verb *ma furin*. However, within this *gabay* structure, the poet separates the object into two parts, each containing an alliterating word to fit the metrical pattern.

The two alliterating words modified by *gabay* are both abstract nouns. But the verb in this line is a practical one, 'to open'. 'Open' is a verb that can be interpreted both literally and figuratively. Literally, 'to open the knowledge of *gabay* and its units', might refer to opening a physical collection of published poems. Figuratively, it could signify actions such as reciting, listening to, studying, or any other engagement with poetic knowledge.

The negative particle *ma* in this line is without a subject verbal pronoun, which means that grammatically the subject is not explicitly stated. This omission is common in spoken Somali, where subject pronouns are often dropped with the negative particle *ma*. Nevertheless, we observe the clear use of the subject pronoun *aan* in line 4, which is necessary for the optative construction. The notion of expectation created by the poetic voice throughout the poem suggests that the line is in the first person.

By stating '[I] did not open the knowledge and the small units of *gabay* poetry', the voice is implying that the speaker has not engaged with any verses for a while. This acknowledging in the *arar* that the poet has been distanced from making poems is something we find in other poems, both contemporary ones and ones from the past.

The second line mirrors the structure of line 1. The noun phrase *caynaddii murtida*, which consists of *caynaddii* (the type) and *murtida* (the essence or wisdom of literature), begins with the alliterating sound *c* and is semantically parallel to *cilmi gabayga* (knowledge of *gabay*) in the first line.

Furthermore, the phrase *aan dhigin*[23] (not set out, put, teach) in the middle of the line aligns with the negative and figurative *ma furin* (not open) from the previous line. The object of *aan dhigin* consists of four words: the alliterating noun *caynaddii* (the type), *murtida* (the essence or wisdom of literature), *waano* (advice), and the alliterating word in the *hooris*, *culuumteede* (its subjects, its topics, its fields of knowledge)[24], which parallels the word *cutubyadiisii* (its units) from line 1, as both feature a possessive suffix following a noun.

These abstract nouns, placed alongside the verb *dhig* (put, set out), underscore the contemplative nature of *gabay* poetry. This reflects a layered meaning of the word 'teach' within the poetic context. A poet is expected to impart *murti* (wisdom, essence) and *culuumta* (subjects, sciences, knowledge) in a *gabay* poem. While in line 1 the lyric voice says that she has not engaged with poetry in a broad sense, line 2 reveals a more specific absence – she has not been actively composing poems.

The idea introduced in line 1 and 2 continues seamlessly into line 3. However, line 3 adopts a slightly different structure. It comprises a single noun phrase object, *caarad-dhuubtii maansada* (the sharp point of the poem), and an adverbial of time, *beryahan* (recently), in the *hojis*, along with the negative verb phrase *kuma cillaalayne* (didn't pay attention to) in the *hooris*, which refers to the act of crafting poetry.

The alliterating word *caarad-dhuubtii* originally means an object with a long, pointed tip. When modified by the attribute *maansada* (poetry), it figuratively represents the sharp focus of poetry. This imagery resonates with the abstract nouns *cilmi gabayba* (the knowledge of gabay), *cutubyadi* (the units), *caynaddii murtida* (the types of wisdom), and *culuumtii* (the sciences) from the preceding lines. These abstract terms emphasise the intellectual and artistic depth of poetry. Through the use of these metaphors, the poet conveys in three successive negative statements that she has not recently been engaged in any of these profound aspects of poetry.

An interesting comparison emerges when we juxtapose this with the 'Dookh' *arar*. In both *arar* sections, the lines and imagery revolve around poetry and the act of making poetry, and in both, the consistency in language use is remarkable. However, a key distinction lies in the use of metaphor. In 'Dookh', many nouns originally associated with physical defects or injuries to the human body are employed to express

[23] The word *waanigaan* in this line is made up of a noun *waano* (advice) and a negative focus marker *aan*.

[24] This is not the literal meaning of *culuumteeda* which actually means 'its sciences, its subjects'. The word comes from Arabic and means the areas of knowledge and of learning.

the frustration caused by poorly crafted poetry. In contrast, 'Calaf' leans heavily on abstract nouns like *cilmi* (science, knowledge, learning) and *murti* (the wisdom or essential point of literary knowledge), which connote depth in content, themes, and the educational value of poetry. It is only in line 3 of 'Calaf' that we encounter a metaphorical noun: *caarad-dhuubtii* (sharp pointed tip). Here, the metaphrand of the metaphor represents the abstract concept of poetry's essence and subtleties. Compared with 'Dookh', 'Calaf' appears less focused on the craft and technicalities of poetry and more centred on the ideas and intellectual depth conveyed within it.

Another interesting aspect is that both *arar* sections are composed of a series of negative sentences. However, in 'Dookh', the poet uses five conditional clauses to construct a single complete sentence, whereas in 'Calaf', each line functions as an independent main clause.

The use of negation is particularly interesting because, in both *arar* sections, the central message is not about negating something. Instead, the negation serves as a rhetorical method to express and emphasise affirmative ideas. In 'Calaf', the lyric 'I' says that she hasn't engaged with poetry for a while. Yet, as the poet composing this verse or as the voice performing it, she is actively engaging with poetry in the lyric present. In this way, the statement about 'not doing lately' is meant to highlight the contrast with the 'I am doing now,' which is further reinforced by the optative line, 'Let me spill it out.' In 'Dookh'.

Similarly, in 'Dookh', while the lyric 'I' speaks about the pain caused by poorly crafted, inconsistent poetry in the negative protasis clauses, the poet simultaneously demonstrates the opposite by creating a highly consistent and well-crafted poem. The voice in the discourse offers coherent and vivid language to the addressee. Thus, the point of discussing *deelqaaf* (flaws in poetic structure) is not to dwell on the flaws themselves but to use negation as a technique that highlights the affirmative opposite of its negative meanings. In both cases, the negative constructions enhance the emphasis on positive action and excellence in poetry.

In both *arar* sections, the lines reflect on the process of making poetry, albeit with different emphases. The *arar* of 'Dookh' highlights the importance of consistency in language, whereas the *arar* of 'Calaf' underscores the wisdom and knowledge embedded in the verbal art. Both elements are fundamental to appreciating Somali poetic culture.

It is through the language in these lines that the audience perceives the ideas that 'a poem must be consistent' and 'I am engaging with the wisdom of poetry now.' Moreover, it is the language in these lines that captures and sustains the audience's attention, drawing them into the

depth and intricacy of the poetic discourse.

In line 4, the final line of the *arar* of 'Calaf', we see a line which is syntactically parallel to line 6 in 'Dookh' (*Aan dareersho caawoo kalaan, daribta saafaaye*), and which serves a similar purpose. The poet uses the optative again and says *aan caddeeyo* (let me make it clear). *Caawoo kalaan* (on a night like tonight), *caadka rogayaaye* (I clear away the cloud).

In this line, the poet also uses pastoral imagery to convey the idea of 'let me present you my poem'. By employing the optative in the first person with the subject pronoun *aan* in these final lines of the *arar*s across different poems, the voice's act of willing herself becomes an illocutionary act. While addressing and willing herself in the optative 'to spill it out' or 'to make it clear', the lyric voice is simultaneously performing the actions of spilling it out and making it clear – both of which signify presenting the poem to the audience.

The optative also functions to affect the listener. Following a series of negative sentences, the abrupt change in sentence structure signals to the audience that the *arar* part has concluded. Before the optative line, the poet discusses *gabay* poetry in general, without mentioning the topic *calaf*. However, through the optative line, the voice invites her listeners to prepare for what comes next in the poem. In the video recordings of Caasha Luul reading these two poems, after finishing the last line of the *arar*, she pauses, and the audience responds with applause.

In this section, I have examined the *arar* sections of the two poems by Caasha Luul that I am analysing. Both are very well-crafted examples of *arar* and demonstrate some of the key features that Ahmed (1984) identifies as being highly appreciated in Somali poetry. Each *arar* exhibits consistency in its imagery, with that imagery carefully shaped to effectively convey its message. Similarly, there is a consistency in the use of grammar, which helps to structure and give form to each *arar*. Because both are so finely composed, the poet reflects her own skill, not only in the choice of words but also in the way those words are arranged.

Having looked at the *arar* of the two poems. I will now move on to the main body, i.e. the *dhexdhexaad* part of the verses. I will first conduct a close reading of each poem individually and then proceed to compare them.

3.5. *On the* Dhexdhexaad *and* Gebaggebo *of 'Dookh'*

Following the *arar*, the poet transitions into the theme of *dookh* (taste). The *dhexdhexaad* (middle section) consists of six line groups, with the number of lines varying across them: line groups 2, 4, and 7 each contain six lines; the shorter line group 3 has five lines; and the longer line groups 5 and 6 consist of seven and ten lines, respectively. A distinctive feature marking the segmentation of these line groups is the repetition of the same closing line: *Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane* ([If he] is not to your taste, it is a blocked path). This line contains the title word *dookh* (taste) with the second-person possessive suffix -*kaaga* (your). When the poet reads this poem in an event, she pauses for a few seconds at the end of each line group, allowing the audience to respond with applause and cheers[25]. We will return to the significance of this repeated line in a later section.

Another feature that delineates the line groups is the poet's use of the words *inkasta-* (though) or *hadda-* (if) in each line group of the *dhexdhexaad*. Additionally, the conjunction *hadda-* (if) appears within the middle of each line group. These conjunctions not only connect the clauses in the respective lines where they occur but also serve to join all the lines in the line group leading up to the final line.

In the concessive or conditional clauses, a third-person pronoun *uu* (he) appears while the lyric voice addresses a lyric *ku* (you) who is an imagined female listener. The lines describe how *uu* (he) tries to impress *ku* (you), moving through depictions of material wealth, virtues, educational background, religiosity, and specific actions intended to please 'you'. These lines brim with vivid and appealing images, portraying qualities that a woman might be expected to find desirable.

However, just as the listener begins to form a favourable impression of this 'he', the repeated line *Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane* (If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path) interrupts the narrative. This recurring line disrupts the seemingly positive depiction, highlighting the idea that, despite all these admirable qualities and actions, *dookh* (taste) is something different. We shall now proceed to a close reading of each line group to explore how the poet develops her ideas on *dookh* (taste).

[25] A video recording of Caasha Luul reading 'Dookh' at London Somali Week Festival 2015 is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twczcfNP25k&t=25s> accessed May 2025. In the video, we can clearly see how the audience responds to the poem throughout the performance.

Line Group 2
7 Inkastuu darmaan quruxsan iyo, daaddax ugu yeedho
8 Ama uu ammaan deexdo oo, 'dawlo!' ku yidhaahdo
9 Hadal dhegaha deeqaaya oo, dabacsan oo fiican
10 Dun xariir ah iyo shaal hadduu, dahab ku saarsaaro
11 Daraandaryo araggaaga hooy, damacu waa yaabe,
12 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.

7 Though he calls out 'a beautiful mare' and 'cutie'
8 Or he gives a lot of praise and calls you: '*dawlo*!'
9 [If he] gives generously soft and nice speech to the ears
10 If he puts silk thread and a shawl and gold on top of you
11 Wonderful, beautiful things; the sight of you! Desire is a surprise.
12 If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

Line 7 starts with the conjunction word with the third-person suffix *inkastuu* (though he), indicating a concessive clause. The two alliterating nouns in the *hojis* and *hooris* are *darmaan* and *daaddax*. The word *darmaan* (mare) is modified by the following adjective *quruxsan* (beautiful), forming the noun phrase 'beautiful mare', a term used metaphorically to compliment a woman's appearance. The other alliterating word *daaddax*, is a noun equivalent to English adjectives such as 'cute', 'nice' or 'clean'[26]. These two nouns, joined by *iyo* (and), together constitute the object of the verb *ugu yeedho* (calls) in the *hooris*.

This line depicts a man using flattering and ingratiating language to address a woman. While the indirect object of the verb is not explicitly stated in this line, it is clarified in the next line, where the pronoun *ku* (you) appears as the indirect object, continuing the theme of addressing the woman directly.

Line 8 begins with the conjunction *ama* (or) and the subject pronoun *uu* (he). The line contains two verbs: *deexdo* (talks a lot) and *yidhaahdo* (says), with their respective direct objects being *ammaan* (praise) and '*dawlo!*'. The word *dawlo* is derived from *dawlad*, which usually means 'government' or 'state' when people talk about politics. *Dawlad* originates from Arabic and carries the implication of something that is established. The *-o* ending here turns the noun into a woman's name, thus metaphorically elevating the woman by comparing her to a well-established state.

There is a clear consistency in language between these two lines. The three verbs – *yeedho* (calls), *deexdo* (talks a lot) and *yidhaahdo*

[26] Personal communication with Nasra Daahir, 1 July, 2019.

(says) – all related to the act of speaking. And the objects of these verbs – *darmaan quruxsan*, *daaddax*, *ammaan* and *dawlo* – all serve to compliment the woman. As given in line 8, the woman being praised is the *ku* (you).

This theme of verbal praise continues in line 9. In this line, the verb is the alliterating word *deeqaaya* (to give generously), with *dhegaha* (the ears) being its indirect object. The direct object of this clause consists of the noun *hadal* (speech, words) modified by two adjectives, *dabacsan* (soft) and *fiican* (nice), connected by *oo*. The subject of this clause, while not explicitly stated in this line, remains the *uu* (he) referenced earlier in *inkastuu* (though he) and *hadduu* (if he). Up to this point, the poet has devoted three lines to illustrating how 'he' flatters 'you' with sweet and pleasing words.

In the next two lines, the poet shifts focus from hearing to seeing. *Dun xariir ah* (silk thread) and *shaal* (shawl) in the *hojis* and *dahab* (gold) in the *hooris* constitute the objects that *uu* (he) *ku saarsaaro* (puts on you). These luxurious items highlight the material gifts offered by the man. The reaction of 'you' to these offerings is revealed in line 11. The word *daraandaryo* means very beautiful, exceptional and unbelievable things. The lyric voice then directly addresses the 'you' with *hooy* (hey you), and remarks *damacu waa yaabe* (the desire is a surprise), emphasising the unexpected and alluring nature of such desires.

Line Group 3
13 Hadduu daaro waaweyn dhisoo, dabaqyo kuu jeexo
14 Dal dhan oo muraayad ah dhammaan, adiga kuu deyro
15 Sancadaw dambeeysiyo hadduu, dalabka kuu keeno
16 Naftu waxay yara doonayso uu, deregga soo saaro,
17 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.

13 If he builds big houses and divides floors for you
14 A whole land which is entirely glass, [he] fences for you
15 If he brings you the latest fashion and the request
16 Whatever little things the soul wants, he places at the threshold
17 If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

In this line group, the 'he' continues to impress 'you' with material possessions. Lines 13, 14 and 15, use vivid imagery to depict the wealthy and extravagant 'he'. In line 13, the poet highlights *daaro waaweyn* (big houses) divided into *dabaqyo* (multiple floors). Both alliterating words are in the plural form, a stylistic choice that suggests exaggeration.

In line 14, the exaggeration becomes even more evident with the use of the adjective *dhan* (whole) and the related noun *dhammaan* (entirety). Interestingly, the two words alliterate in the *dh* sound. This is an instance of secondary alliteration which is commonly found in Somali poetry. Together, these words convey the idea of completeness: *dal dhan* (a whole land), which 'he' builds into *muraayad ah dhammaan* (an entire glass [building]) for 'you'. The *hojis* emphasises the luxury of the property through the repeated *dh* sound and the theme of 'entirety'. Meanwhile, in the *hooris*, the poet employs both the independent pronoun *adiga* (you) and the object pronoun *ku* (you). That is to say, the word 'you' is said twice in this line for emphasis, which mirrors the emphatic use of *dhan* and *dhammaan* in the *hojis*.

The careful construction of this line exemplifies the poet's craftsmanship, presenting the audience with a beautifully crafted piece of language. Such intricate structures are hallmarks of high-quality *gabay* poetry. The *gabay* genre allows poets to exploit the extended line format, showcasing their linguistic artistry and delivering a rich lyrical artefact that fully utilises the medium's potential.

The images of multi-storeyed big houses and a whole land of glass buildings symbolise the wealth of the lyric 'he' and his desire to please the lyric 'you' with material possessions. Interestingly, in traditional Somali pastoral society, nomadic houses are meticulously designed for portability, allowing families to dismantle the structure, load it onto camels, and rebuild it when migrating. In such communities, it is the nomadic women who construct the family's dwelling. By contrast, in urban settings, house builders are predominantly male.

Amina (1981: 122) says of the women in the rural areas 'the sole architect of the family's dwelling'. However, she also observes: 'the nomadic women, who played such an important role in rural life found themselves in towns cut off from the animals, excluded from building houses because in town, builders are mainly male…' (*Ibid*: 130). This shift in gender roles highlights a significant cultural transformation. The portrayal of a man building large, permanent houses to impress the addressee reflects not only a departure from traditional Somali practices but also the modernity embedded within the poem. This contrast between the traditional and the modern underscores the poet's engagement with contemporary ideas while remaining rooted in the cultural heritage.

The image in line 15, *sancadaw dambeeys-* (latest fashion), resonates with the earlier imagery of silk, shawl and gold in the previous line group. This 'he' is eager to bring 'you' the latest trendy clothes upon your 'request' (*dalabka*). The definite article suffix *-ka* here is another example of a relational possession being implied without the ex-

plicit use of a possessive form. Following the three lines depicting tangible items that 'he' offers 'you', line 16 summarises the idea in a more general way: 'Whatever little things the soul wants, he places at the threshold'.

When looking at the *hooris* from line 13 to line 16 together, we find a striking use of consecutive parallelism. Each *hooris* comprises three words, following an identical metrical pattern: three short vowel syllables, one long vowel syllable, and a final sequence of a long vowel and a short vowel. Beyond this metrical alignment, the meanings are closely related. The cluster *kuu*, composed of the pronoun *ku* (you) and the preverbal preposition *u* (to/for), appears consistently in lines 13-15, followed by the verbs *jeexo* (divide), *deyro* (fence), and *keeno* (bring). The lyric 'he', divides the floors in line 13, fences the land in line 14 and brings the latest fashions in line 15. These actions all reflect the efforts 'he' makes 'for you'.

Notably, the sound *adkeyn* in performance aligns with the placement of 'for you' (*kuu*). In the video recording of Caasha Luul reading this poem, we can hear a clear rising intonation on the long vowel in *kuu* in line 13-15, as well as on *soo* in line 16. This emphasis on *kuu* through intonation enhances the meaning of 'for you.' Thus, in these four parallel *hooris* hemistiches, the poet skilfully achieves a convergence of sound *adkeyn* and meaning *adkeyn*.

After illustrating a wealthy man's attempts to win a woman's affection by offering 'whatever the soul wants', the poet once again repeats the refrain: 'if he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.'

Line Group 4
18 Inkastoo adduun door ah iyo, duunyo lagu sheego
19 Inkastuu dulqaad badan yahoo, deeqsi lagu sheego
20 Duub iyo malaaq uu yahoo, dooje lagu sheego
21 Digriigiyo mastariga[27] iyo, derejo weyn haysto
22 Digrigiyo[28] Quraankiyo hadduu, diinta yahay xaafid,
23 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.

[27] This word is spelt *maastariga* in Asha (2017) but that then breaks the metre. It is an obvious loan word from English 'master', referring to a master's degree.

[28] The original text in the published book writes *digriigyo*, however according to the *gabay* metre and the poet's reading in the video recording, this is a typographical error. In this book, I use *digriga iyo* in its correct contracted form *digrigiyo*. The reference is to the performance of poems by the Sufis. It comes from the Arabic word *dhikr* which means 'remembrance [of God]' and refers to the performance of poems in praise of God, the Prophet Mohamed and, for the Sufis, also saints.

18 Although one says [that he has] worldly wealth and livestock
19 Though one says that he is very patient and generous
20 One says that he is a leader, a chief, someone who brings good to the community
21 Having a degree, a Master's, and a high level [in education]
22 If he is religious and memorises the Qur'an and *dhikr*
23 If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

Compared to line groups 2 and 3, line group 4 introduces a man who is more than just a honeyed mouth and his material wealth. In addition to being rich in material possessions, particularly *duunyo* (livestock) as described in line 18, the lyric 'he' is portrayed to be a decent man in many other aspects. From line 19 to 22, the poet talks about his character, title, educational background and religiosity. Lines 18, 19 and 20 also exhibit parallelism in the *hooris* and a repetition of the phrase *lagu sheego* (one says).

The repetition here differs from the repetition of *kuu* in the previous line group. In line group 3, *kuu* (for you) is repeated while followed by different verbs, emphasising the indirect object of these different actions. However, here in line group 4, the lexical verb *sheego* (says) is also repeated. This repetition is noteworthy, as in *gabay*, Somali poets typically aim to showcase their extensive vocabulary and avoid reusing the same words unless repetition serves a deliberate purpose. Additionally, in the *hojis* of lines 19 and 20, we find the repetition of the pronoun *uu* (he) and verb *yahoo* (*yahay* – 'is' with the conjunction *oo*).

If we look at the two instances of repetition together, the recurring idea is 'one says that he is'. Interestingly, the object pronoun *ku* (you) that frequently appears in other line groups, is absent in line group 4. Instead, there is the impersonal subject *la* (one). In this line group, the woman doesn't interact directly with the man. Instead, she learns about him – his wealth, his character, titles, degrees and knowledge of Qur'an – all through *lagu sheego* (one says).

My understanding of this is that the poet is emphasising the idea of externality. All information about this man is conveyed by others. The impersonal *la* (one) might suggest general hearsay, portraying the man as well-known, or it might refer to specific individuals such as a friend, family member, or matchmaker introducing him to her. Importantly, the woman does not come to know the man through her own experiences but instead relies on the accounts of others. These appealing qualities of the man, though seemingly impressive, may be understood as external and superficial. The poet suggests that external features alone are insufficient to win a woman's affections.

The imagery used in this line group blends pastoral and contemporary elements. While words such as *duunyo* (livestock) and *duub* (turban, figuratively used to indicate a crown, leader or particularly religious individual) evoke the 'classic' aspect of the *gabay* poem, terms like *digriiga* (degree) and *mastariga* (master's), borrowed from English, highlight the poem's modernity. This fusion of traditional and contemporary is also evident in line group 6, where pastoral images – such as animals, camel milk, and landscapes – coexist with the notion of air travel and global exploration.

The nouns in a *gabay* line, or sometimes, in several successive lines, often correlate to each other, collectively emphasising a specific point the poet wishes to make. For example, in line 19, the two alliterating nouns *dulqaad* (patience) and *deeqsi* (generosity), describe the man's admirable character. In line 20, three nouns are used to portray his reputation: *duub* (turban, figuratively meaning crown) and *malaaq* (chief) joined by *iyo* (and) in the *hojis*, and *dooje* (someone who brings good to the community) in the *hooris*. In line 21, there is *digriiga* (degree), and *mastariga* (Master's degree) in the *hojis*, and *derejo weyn* (high rank) in the *hooris*, joined by two instances of *iyo* (and) in the *hojis* and followed by the verb *haysto* (has). When translated literally into English, the line reads: 'one says that he has the degree and the Master's degree and a high degree'. While this repetition may appear redundant or clumsy to an English ear, it serves a significant poetic function in Somali.

Similarly, in line 22, referring to 'his' religiosity, the poet uses *digrigiyo Quraankiyo* ([chanting] of the Qur'an and *dhikr*) in the *hojis* and *diinta* (religion) and *xaafid* (someone who memorises the Qur'an) in the *hooris*. These nouns, joined by the *iyo*, exemplify a central stylistic element in Somali poetry. Far from being clumsy, this creative repetition of ideas and concepts is a hallmark of the poet's skill. It is through this technique that Somali poets demonstrate their competence and earn appreciation from their audience.

In Somali poetry, repetition is employed artistically to make the poem rhetorically powerful and convincing, while still adhering to the constraints of metre. In 'Dookh', Caasha Luul demonstrates her mastery by skilfully weaving together nouns joined by *iyo* (and), effectively delivering her message in a manner that resonates with the Somali audience.

Line Group 5
24 Inkastuu dillaacshoo qalbiga, daabac ku xardhaayo
25 Xididdada dil-dilayee wadnuhu, dirayo dhiiggooda

26 Dahriga iyo laabtaba ku dhigo, Deeqa magacaaga
27 Diiwaankii Cilmoo kale galoo, deli ka laallaado
28 Suugaanta duugga ah murtida, damashi kuu qaado
29 Daaweeynta heesaha intaa, daram garaacaayo[29],
30 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.

24 Though he pulls out the heart and decorates embroidery on it
25 And the blood vessels beat, through which the heart sends the blood
26 [Though] he puts your name, Deeqa on his body and torso
27 And goes into all the poems by Cilmi and others, dangling from a cliff edge
28 Sings for you old poetry rich in wisdom
29 The healing of songs which the drums beat
30 If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

Line group 5 can be divided into two parts. From lines 24 to 26, the poet employs images of the human body to figuratively depict 'his' love for the 'you'. Then, from lines 27 to 29, the imagery changes to literature and songs. In both parts, the poet dedicates three lines to exploring one essential theme, using similar or repeated images to build her ideas. When compared with the imagery in line groups 2 to 4, we observe a progression from what could be considered the external aspects of this 'he' – such as the soothing words he speaks, the material gifts he offers, and the good character traits and background he is said to possess – to what could be viewed as more internal and intrinsic elements.

In the first part of this line group, the poet uses a series of bodily imagery, including *qalbiga* (the heart), *xididdada* (the blood vessels), *wadnuhu* (the heart), *dhiiggooda* (their blood, with 'their' referring to the blood vessels), and *dahriga iyo laabtaba* (body and torso) with the definite article suffix, grounding them in specificity and referring directly to the body parts of the 'he'. Previously, in the *arar*, the poet has used images related to physical defects or injuries to convey the frustration caused by poorly made poetry. Images such as *dari* (defect in a spine) and *diniqa* (wound) evoke physical pain, drawing a comparison to the discomfort people feel when faced with poetic disharmony.

In this line group, the poet uses images of 'his' body to express 'his' intense feelings for 'you'. In line 24, the *qalbiga* (heart) is pulled out and decorated with embroidery. Line 25 depicts the beating vessels and

[29] The spelling here has been edited from *garaacayo* to *garaacaayo* as it should be a long vowel according to the metre.

running blood. In line 26, *Deeqa magacaaga* (your name 'Deeqa') is placed on 'his' chest. These images are clearly imaginative, exaggerated, and hyperbolic. It is, of course, impossible to embroider one's heart in reality. Through this figurative language, the poet creates a striking impression of a pursuer who loves so genuinely and wholeheartedly that 'he' would metaphorically pull out 'his' heart to prove his devotion.

At this point, the audience's perception of the 'he' evolves from that of a superficial man who attempts to win a woman's affections with soothing words and material wealth to a passionate and romantic figure. The transformation deepens further as the poet introduces poetry in the following lines. 'He' 'sings for you' (*kuu qaado*) Cilmi Boodhari's poems, along with old poetry filled with wisdom, and healing songs accompanied by the beat of drums. The imagery of poetry and the imagery of body parts in this line group shape the 'he' into a more compelling man compared to earlier verses. In line group 2, 'he' calls 'you' fair names, yet 'he' is not to 'your' taste. In line group 3, 'he' places 'you' in a skyscraper, yet 'he' remains unsatisfactory. In line group 4, despite being renowned for his good character and holding a Master's degree, 'he' still fails to meet 'your' expectations.

By line group 5, 'he' bares his heart and veins and writes love poems reminiscent of Cilmi Boodhari's devotion, pouring his soul out from the edge of unrequited love. And yet, the refrain reappears: *oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane* (if he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path). This is the fourth time the audience hears the refrain. By now, they not only anticipate its return but also expect a more forceful or determined 'he' to emerge in the next line group.

The progressive development of the 'he' illustrates how the content of each line group is masterfully sequenced, building anticipation and emotional intensity. If line group 5 were placed at the beginning of the *dhexdhexaad*, followed by descriptions of wealth, the carefully crafted climax would be disrupted. Instead, following the imagery of body parts and poetry in line group 5, we are presented with the longest line group in the *dhexdhexaad* section of *'*Dookh', rich with abundant pastoral images.

Line Group 6
31 Haddii uu dalxiis kuugu diro, dunida guudkeeda
32 Diyaarado hawada sarena aad, kula damaanshaaddo
33 Durdur iyo hadduu kugu dul furo, ilo dareeraaya
34 Deeradiyo cawshiyo ugaadh, quruxda daa'uuska
35 Doog iyo cagaar soo ifbaxay, darinta kuu daadsho

36 Ama Daallo oo roobku heley, Dalawa kuu maalo
37 Oo doobi kuu buuxiyoo, kuna daryeelaayo
38 Dayrtiyo Gugaba kuu da'oo, adiga kuu deexdo
39 Daruur hoortay uu kuu noqdiyo, malabka Doocaanka,
40 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.

31 If he sends you over the whole world as a tourist
32 And celebrates with you on the plane in the upper air
33 If he makes streams and springs flow for you
34 The gazelle, the antelope, the prey, the beauty of the peacock
35 Spreading out for you the mat of green and grass which spring up
36 Or the *Daallo* mountain which the rain found, [where he] milks *Dalawa* the camel for you
37 And fills the milk vessel for you, and cares for you
38 Through the *Dayr* and *Gu'* season, [he] falls as rain for you, and talks a lot to you
39 He becomes a cloud which poured [rain] down and is the *Doocaan* honey for you
40 If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

We have seen line group 5 where there were two parts focusing on different subjects, line group 6 presents a unified portrayal of 'he' and 'you' engaging with the pastoral landscape. In this nine-line sequence, the poet evokes numerous elements highly valued in pastoral society. For example, in line 33, *durdur iyo hadduu kugu dul furo, ilo dareeraaya* (he opens on you a stream and flowing springs), the imagery of water symbolises life and abundance. This is followed in line 34 by descriptions of beautiful animals, including the gazelle, antelope, prey animals, and peacock. Then, in line 35, 'he' spreads out a verdant scene for 'you'. In line 36, the poet skilfully weaves two names into the alliteration: *Daallo,* the mountain, and *Dalawa,* the camel, which embody both natural beauty and societal value. There's another name in line 39, *Doocaan,* the honey, which also alliterates in the *d* sound. These names consistently highlight things considered precious in Somali society and demonstrate the poet's technical virtuosity.

In line group 6, the poet draws deeply from Somali poetic tradition, offering stunning imagery such as *ilo dareeraaya* (flowing springs), *Daallo oo roobku heley* (the Daallo mountain just after rain), *daruur hoortay* (a cloud which poured [rain] down). What's more, the precious images are interwoven with frequent mention of *kuu* (for you). In *Dalawa kuu maalo*, the *Dalawa* camel is milked for 'you'. In *doobi kuu buuxiyoo*, the milk vessel is filled for 'you'. 'He' even becomes *daruur*

hoortay (a cloud that poured [rain] down) for 'you'. And yet, despite all this, the refrain returns once more: *oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane* (if he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path).

Line Group 7
41 Inkastuu Darwiish adag yahiyo, geesi diriraayo
42 Dirica iyo wiil hoog yahoo, degello naafeeyo
43 Dumukha iyo qorigaba ridoo, diiradda u saaro
44 Halka lagu dagaalamo hadduu, doorar ka ciyaaro
45 Ama uu daqiiqaayo oo, duubiyada gooyo[30]
46 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.

41 Though he is a hard Dervish and a hero who fights
42 And is a determined person, a fearless young man who destroys communities [of enemies]
43 Firing the gun and rifles, hitting the targets
44 If he plays roles in the places where one fights in war
45 Or he crushes and cuts off the bodies [of enemies]
46 Yet if he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

In the final line group of the *dhexdhexaad* section, the poet primarily portrays a heroic fighter. Using five lines with consistent imagery, she vividly describes 'his' actions in war. Interestingly, this line group does not involve the pronoun *ku* (you). The ordering of the line groups suggests that a courageous fighter is held in higher regard than the qualities explored in the earlier line groups. The absence of 'you' here is notable; war and conflict are traditionally considered the domain of men, and women are not typically seen as active participants in such events. The 'he' depicted in this line group does not appear to be defending the 'you' specifically, as if Caasha Luul deliberately distances the woman from the concept of war and conflict.

Throughout the *dhexdhexaad* section, the voice of the poem, the lyric 'I' narrates a series of scenes in which a man courts a woman. This is done with the use of the third-person subject pronoun *uu* (he) and the second-person object pronoun *ku* (you). There is an interesting distinction between *aad* (you), the addressee in the *arar,* and *ku* (you), the addressee in the *dhexdhexhaad*. In the *arar*, the imagined addressee is the subject of the conditional sentence: 'if you didn't remove the defects

[30] The original text shown in Asha (2017), *Ama u daqiiqaaya oo uu, duubiyada gooyo*, has a few typos in the first half-line. I have edited it from *u daqiiqaaya oo uu* to *uu daqiiqaayo oo*.

from the *gabay*'. Here, the 'you' is a gender-neutral person who makes poetry. The *ku* (you) in the *dhexdhexaad*, however, is the indirect object in the lines where *uu* (he) is the subject. Based on the relationship between *uu* (he) and *ku* (you) implied in the lines, the 'you' in the *dhexdhexaad* can be interpreted as an imagined female person engaged in a dialogue with the lyric voice about the 'he'.

However, while this poem revolves around 'he' and 'you', I suggest that neither this imagined man nor the imagined woman is truly central to this poem. The vivid descriptions of the man's qualities may lead the audience to anticipate a romantic resolution between the man and the woman. In a conventional narrative, where the man demonstrates such admirable traits, one might expect the woman to express interest in him and embark on a romantic journey. Yet, the refrain at the end of each line group disrupts this anticipation, anchoring the audience back to the present discourse.

At a poetry reading event I attended, the audience naturally joined in reciting this refrain with Caasha Luul, *Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane* (yet if he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path). Their reaction is expected by the poet as she looks up and waits for their reaction. Their participation seemed anticipated by the poet, who looked up and paused, waiting for their reaction. This interactive moment underscores the refrain's centrality, highlighting its role as a grounding element that repeatedly draws the audience back from the narrative's imagined events to its overarching message.

In this poem, the voice can, but does not necessarily have to, represent the poet herself. Whoever reads the lines can take the position of the lyric 'I'. Furthermore, the 'he' in each line is less an individual person than a representation of certain aspects of men. Rather than an actual individual or a fictional persona, the 'he' functions as a poetic device designed to address a 'you'. As Johnson (1983: 4) suggests, this 'you' can be viewed as a 'metaphor' for the audience, a 'symbolic mediator', and a 'conductor' between the poet and each reader and listener.

When listening to the performance of a voice addressing a lyric 'you', the audience is given significant latitude in interpreting the discourse. They can choose to regard it as the poet's personal thoughts or as generalised wisdom open to their own observations. Similarly, they can decide whether to feel personally addressed by positioning themselves as the 'you' in the poem or to remain an observer of the performance. For a woman who may have encountered such a 'he' before, she might identify closely with the poet, feeling like a confidante and resonating with her insights. For a young girl who has not yet experienced the complexities of love, the poem may come across as advice

from an anonymous, experienced woman, cautioning her: one cannot traverse a blocked path.

Following the six line groups of the *dhexdhexaad*, the poet sums up her *gabay* in a *gebaggebo*.

Line Group 8, *Gebaggebo* (concluding line group)
47 Xeedhyo duuban oo duqus leh oo, geedo lagu daadshay
48 Hilbo duban kuwii diirranaa, qaar dux lagu shiilay
49 Daboolkiyo lingaxa lagu xidhood, uumi lagu daaro
50 Ubbadii dahaadhnayd haddii, diiqo lagu siiyo
51 Haddaan milix yar lagu daadinayn, kaama daadego'e
52 Dookhana sidaasoo kalaan, loo dirqiyahayne
53 Damiirkaagu meeshaanu rabin, dooni kari maysid.

47 [If] one spilled spices in a big bowl of spiced food
48 Cooked meats, those warm ones, and some which one fried with fat
49 One tightly covered with a lid and fastened with strings to keep them in perfect steam
50 If one gives it as a gift in a ghee pot in its traditional decorated case
51 If one didn't spill a little bit of salt in it, it doesn't appeal to you
52 And the taste is not forced in a similar way to that
53 The place which your feelings don't want, you can't want it

This line group can be divided into two parts. From line 47 to line 51, the poet uses five lines to describe an image of a bowl of cooked food. With evocative images such as 'spiced food', 'cooked meat', 'meat fried with fat', 'a dish in perfect steam' and 'a gift in a decorated ghee pot', the lines call to mind the appealing qualities of the 'he' depicted in the *dhexdhexaad*. These enticing food images metaphorically represent the desirable aspects of the imagined man described earlier in the poem.

Notably, the image of fat, used here, also appeared in the *arar*, the opening section of the poem, where it figuratively referred to the poet's skill in composition: *aan dareersho caawoo kalaan, daribta saafaaye* (let me spill it out and slice thinly the fat). This repetition creates an echo between the *arar* and the *gebaggebo* (the closing section). In the *arar*, fat symbolises the poet's creative prowess, while in the *gebaggebo*, fat in the dish signifies the man's wealth, admirable qualities, and passion for 'you' – all impressive traits, but ultimately 'not to your taste'.

Throughout the *gabay*, the voice repeatedly emphasises the 'he' and his qualities that are 'not to your taste' but refrains from specifying what

is 'to your taste'. It is only in line 51 that the poet offers a metaphorical answer through the image of salt: *Haddaan milix yar lagu daadinayn* (if one didn't spill a little bit of salt in it). Without this essential ingredient, the grilled meat, despite being cooked with fat, spices, and herbs, would remain unpalatable for 'you'.

In the final two lines, the poet abandons metaphorical language to articulate her message directly, summarising the essence of the *gabay*: *Dookhana sidaasoo kalaan, loo dirqiyahayne* (and taste is not forced in a similar way), *Damiirkaagu meeshaanu rabin, dooni kari maysid* (The place which your feelings don't want, you can't want it). The poet concludes that in matters of love and relationships, one cannot go against one's heart. While Caasha Luul does not explicitly reveal what qualities in a man are 'to her taste' in 'Dookh', hints of her preferences can be discerned in her other poem 'Calaf', which we shall discuss in the next section.

3.6. On the *Dhexdhexaad* and *Gebaggebo* of 'Calaf'

'Dookh' and 'Calaf' are *gabay* poems composed in a similar style. As discussed earlier, the poet employs the traditional structure of starting a *gabay* poem with an *arar*, where she uses the first-person pronoun 'I' and reflects on the act of making poetry before delving into the theme. In line 6 in the *arar* of 'Dookh', the poet writes: *Aan dareersho caawoo kalaan, daribta saafaaye* (Let me spill it out. On a night like tonight, I slice the fat thinly.) Similarly, in line 4 in the *arar* of the arar in 'Calaf', we find: *Aan caddeeyo caawoo kalaan, caadka rogayaaye* (Let me make it clear. On a night like tonight, I clear away the cloud.)

As noted above, both lines begin with the first-person optative construction ('let me'), and are structured in a parallel way. The phrase *caawoo kalaan* (a night like tonight) appears in the *hojis* of both lines, while the *hooris* features a distinct metaphor – 'slicing the fat thinly' in 'Dookh' and 'clearing away the cloud' in 'Calaf'. However, 'Calaf' departs from 'Dookh' in one notable way: it includes two additional lines after line 4 in the *arar*. These lines serve as a transitional bridge between the *arar* proper and the *dhexdhexaad* of the poem. While still adopting the voice of the poet and referencing the alliteration, these lines also hint at the poem's theme and foreshadow what will follow in the next section. The two transitional lines are:

5 Cadad toban ah tiradaan cabbiraye, Caynka ka higgaadshay
6 Sagaal baan ka caagee Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin

5 I argued ten points alliterating in ‘ayn
6 I stay away from nine, O Lord! Don’t give me such due

In line 5, the poet not only identifies the alliterating sound of the poem – a convention commonly followed by Somali poets – but also reveals her intention to argue ten points in this composition. This explicit structuring of the poem provides a sense of order and anticipation for the audience. In the next line, she elaborates on the *cadad toban ah* (ten points) and intriguingly states, *sagaal baan ka caagee* (I stay away from nine). At this point, the audience is left wondering about the nature of the nine points, as their meaning remains ambiguous. The poet, however, concludes the line with her first supplication: *Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin* (O God, don’t give me such due).

As previously discussed in the section on *arar*, the term *calaf* carries a rich and complex meaning, often referring to one’s predestined due in life as determined by Allah. Here, I translate *calaf* as ‘due’ to capture its religious undertone. This connotation is further underscored by the poet’s direct invocation of God with the word *Rabbi*, followed by the vocative suffix *-ow*. In this heartfelt supplication, the poet asks Allah to spare her from receiving ‘the nine out of ten’ as her due in life. The poetic weight of this line lies in its mystery: the audience must listen further to understand what the ‘nine’ represents and why the poet so fervently wishes to avoid them.

In ‘Calaf’, the poet uses the technique of repetition in a way that is similar to, but slightly different from its use in ‘Dookh’. In ‘Dookh’, the line ‘*oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane*’ (if he’s not to your taste, it is a blocked path) functions as a refrain, repeated at the end of each line group. This refrain is a full line that remains identical in wording throughout the poem, reinforcing its thematic emphasis. In contrast, ‘Calaf’ features a repeated pattern that serves to structure the line groups, but with notable differences. The repetition here takes the form of a supplication embedded within the *hojis*, as seen in the transition line: *sagaal baan ka caagee Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin* (I stay away from nine. O God, don’t give me such due.)

Unlike the refrain in ‘Dookh’, which repeats as a complete line with fixed wording, the refrain in ‘Calaf’ is limited to the *hojis*, *calafba hay siinnin* (don’t give me such due). This nuanced use of repetition highlights the poet’s skill in combining structural and thematic elements. While the refrain in ‘Dookh’ is more rigid and declarative, the supplicatory refrain in ‘Calaf’ is fluid and layered with religious sentiment, inviting the audience to reflect on its spiritual and personal dimensions.

In alignment with the general outline presented in the transition

lines, the *dhexdhexaad* section of 'Calaf' can be divided into two parts. The first part consists of nine line groups, where the voice addresses the 'nine out of ten points' and describes the type of man she doesn't want. At the conclusion of each of these nine line groups in the first part, she repeats the supplication *calafba hay siinnin* (don't give me such due), underscoring her rejection of these nine types of men. The second part comprises five line groups, where she focuses on the tenth point and portrays the man she desires. In the final lines of these five line groups, she repeats *calaf wadaagnaa dheh* (say to him that we share a due), marking a shift in tone as she identifies the qualities she seeks in a partner.

In a manner similar to 'Dookh', each line group of *dhexdhexaad* in 'Calaf' also tells the audience about a type of man. The lines within these groups are linked by the word '*mid*' (one), which is the head-noun of the relative clauses and can be translated as 'one that' or 'he who'. In the published version of 'Calaf' in the collection Asha (2017), the editors added Roman numerals I to X[31] to the *dhexdhexaad* section to indicate the 'nine points' and the 'tenth point' referenced by the poet earlier in the poem. I will use these Roman numerals when referring to the line groups in my writing.

From line group I to line group IX, the poet portrays a selfish, irresponsible and unwise man and asks Allah not to give her this man as her *calaf* (due). In line group I, 'he' is a man incapable of wisdom and unable to end conflict. In line group II, 'he' is described as a 'moron who moans' but never takes action and 'whose morality declines'. In line group III, 'he' is a man who disobeys and disengages from Allah. In line group IV, 'he' is portrayed as a womaniser. In line group V, 'he' is jealous and demeaning, a man who insults his wife. In line group VI, 'he' is a stingy man who doesn't trust his wife with money and counts each mouthful. In line group VII, 'he' is a shameless man who pursues modest, single girls as well as married women. In line group VIII, 'he' is a man with a perverse mind, unwilling to lend a helping hand. In line group IX, 'he' is depicted as a pathetic, lonely patriarch, twisted by negativity and deluded into thinking he is still young.

Before transitioning to her tenth line group, the poet uses an additional line group to signal her shift towards listing the virtues of the man she desires, marking another transition in the *dhexdhexaad*. In this transitional line, the supplication changes from *calafba hay siinnin* (don't give me such due) to *calaf wadaagnaa dheh* (say to him that we share a due).

[31] As told to me by Caasha Luul in an interview on 5 May 2019.

Part X consists of four line groups, each presenting various positive qualities of an ideal man and the dynamic between 'him' and the voice. Unlike 'Dookh', which doesn't directly describe the kind of man who isn't 'a blocked path', 'Calaf' gives us a clue. 'He' is someone with whom 'I' play the *caddallool* stick game in the evening. 'He' upholds justice and avoids invoking maledictions. 'He' is devoted to his faith, attending the mosque to pray and teaching 'me' lessons from the Qur'an. Above all, 'he' desires no woman other than Caasha Luul.

We can see from the poet's use of her own name in this poem that, while 'Dookh' serves as advice to her fellow women – where a voice speaks to 'you' about a 'he' – 'Calaf' is much more personal. This poem functions as a note to the poet herself, reflecting on the type of man she seeks as her due in life from God. It is personal, but not private. By composing it as a *gabay*, the poet ensures that her words and supplications are heard. She invites both male and female listeners to feel the *calaf* she prays not to receive and the *calaf* she longs to share.

The use of her name in the poem is striking. While the names of other individuals are common in *gabay* poetry, the use of the poet's personal name is unusual. The fact that Caasha is a woman poet making such a personal declaration is also significant. She asserts her skill as a poet in the *arar* and firmly anchors the poem in her own experience. The supplicatory tone of the poem enhances its personal nature.

Before delving into the *dhexdhexaad* of 'Calaf' in detail, it is worth addressing the use of pronouns and the lyric voice in 'Calaf' compared to 'Dookh'. Both poems talk about relationships and men, presenting a series of images of men in their *dhexdhexaad* section. However, there is a clear difference in the use of pronouns. In 'Dookh', the first-person singular pronoun 'I' appears only once in the *arar,* where the voice is the poet. In the rest of the poem, the pronouns *uu* (he) and *ku* (you) dominate, with the voice addressing an imagined 'you' about a 'he', but never involving the lyric 'I'.

However, 'Calaf' incorporates first-person pronouns throughout, from the opening line in the *arar* to the final line of the *gebaggebo*. In the *arar*, the lyric 'I' speaks about herself as a poet, crafting poetry. In the transition between the *arar* and the *dhexdhexaad*, she mentions the alliterating sound, addresses the theme of *calaf*, and reflects on the poem's structure – all while maintaining the voice of the poet who makes the poem and its supplication. We will now examine each line group in detail.

I
7 Gar cargaagtay taladoo cakiran, cudud la baanaayo
8 Colkoo weerar laba-qaadayoo, curado loo ooyay
9 Caaqil kaan noqonaynnin ee, damin colaad baasta
10 Cadkiyo jiidhka kala saafin een, ciriqa saaraynnin
11 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calafba hay siinnin.

7 Having an animated discussion of a case that ended up in a stalemate and praising physical force
8 Fighting that is waged by two warring factions, one cried for the [loss of their] first-born children
9 The one who can't become a wise person and end the cursed war
10 And who can't strip lean meat from bones and take out worthless meat
11 O Almighty, O Allah! That one, don't give me such due.

This is the first line group of the *dhexdhexaad*. The poet begins her 'nine out of ten points' with a critique of men who lack the ability to negotiate and instead resort to violence. The *gar* (case) referenced in line 7 extends beyond a simple domestic dispute, encompassing broader conflicts. In lines 8 and 9, the poet alludes to the matter of war, embedding political undertones reflective of the social and historical context of the Horn of Africa. In line 10, she employs metaphors of 'lean meat' and 'worthless meat' to symbolise right and wrong within her value system, which includes waging war and the ability to end it. She concludes this line group with a supplication: 'O God, don't give me such due.'

It is crucial to note that the ability to mediate conflicts is highly esteemed within Somali society, with *gabay* poetry serving as a vital medium for addressing such themes. Traditionally, *maanso* poems have been concerned with war, peace-making, politics, and public affairs. Male Somali poets, as noted by Mohamed and Andrzejewski (1967: 191), often touched upon themes of love and romantic relationships only incidentally, when these bore relevance to matters of public interest.

Here, however, we witness a woman poet subverting this convention. Caasha Luul purposefully intertwines themes of war and peacemaking with her commentary on love and romantic relationships in a *gabay* poem. By beginning her 'nine points', with a reference to war and mediation, she not only aligns her work with Somali poetic tradition but also challenges it. Through this fusion, she presents a fresh perspective, asserting that the dynamics of relationships between men and women deserve recognition as matters of public interest in their own right. Far from being apologetic, she boldly integrates these themes into

the prestigious *gabay* form, showcasing her skill and demonstrating that love and relationships are as significant and worthy of poetic discourse as politics and war.

II
12 Codka mid aan ahayn oo intaa, calallaqlaynaaya
13 Caarriyo midkii fulay ahee, caalle lagu sheego
14 Caanyay aan ka diirayn dhibkii, uu ka cabanaayay
15 Caaryaystay doqonniimo oo, ciiro qarinayso
16 Candaddawl caqligu naaqus yahay, calafba hay siinnin

12 One who's not an orator but talks a lot of nonsense
13 One who is a coward and who is said to be a fool
14 A dolt who doesn't act in response to the trouble he complained about
15 One whose foolishness decayed and perplexity hides
16 One who's blockheaded and is short of intelligence. Don't give me such due.

In line group II, the poet portrays a type of man whose words and actions are characterised, through alliterating terms, as negative and foolish. She describes him with phrases such as *calallaqlaynaaya* (talking nonsense) in line 12, *caar* (coward, deserter) and *caalle* (fool) in line 13, *caanyay* (dolt) in line 14, *caaryaystay doqonniimo* (foolishness decayed) and *ciiro qariinayso* (mist hides) in line 15, and *candaddawl* (block-headed) alongside *caqligu naaqus yahay* (in short of intelligence) in line 16.

Examining closely these alliterating words, we find that each *hojis* begins with the *c* consonant, and four out of five *hooris* also start with the *c* sound. Additionally, nine out of eleven vowels following the *c* are *a* or *aa*. This careful alignment of sound and meaning creates a striking consistency, one that is not strictly required by the formal rules of the *gabay* genre but demonstrates the poet's mastery of sound patterning.

The placement of these alliterating words adds to the impact. At the beginning of each line, the poet delivers sharp critiques, striking the listener's ear with words that initially rhyme in *ca-* (except for line 12, where it is *co-*), from line 12's *codka* (orator) *mid aan ahayn* (one who's not), line 13's *caarriyo midkii fulay ahee* (a deserter who is a coward), to line 14's *caanyay* (a dolt), line 15's *caaryaystay* (decayed) *doqonniimo* (foolishness) and particularly line 16's *canadaddawl* (a block-headed) *caqligu* (intelligence) *naaqus yahay* (is in shortage) where the use of two alliterating words heightens the tone of ridicule and scorn.

The negativity and aggression embedded in these terms, combined with their consistent placement and alliteration, work together to achieve *adkeyn* (emphasis). This emphasis reinforces the poet's critique and creates a rhythm that holds the audience's attention. This technique is evident throughout the poem. Unlike 'Dookh', where the alliterating words can appear in any position within a hemistich, in 'Calaf', the poet places them predominantly at the start of each line. This deliberate positioning underscores the poet's skill and enhances the overall force of her message.

III
17 Caasiga Illahay ka go'ay, aan cidnaba xeerin
18 Cirfiid iyo iblays ay wataan, cubullo Shayddaan ah
19 Caaddilkay wixii u xarrimay, cabaya ee daaqa
20 Caqiibaba mid aan lagu ogayn, oo cahdiga gooya
21 Caynka iyo bayddaba jaroo, cidhibta ruugaaya
22 Cuqla waalid kii qaba Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin

17 One who is a rebel and is cut off from Allah, and forgives no one
18 Who drives along with a group of people who are demon and Satan
19 Who is drinking and eating what my God has made forbidden
20 One who one isn't aware of a good future and breaks God's solemn promise
21 Cutting the cord and robes [with God], chewing the destiny
22 One who has the karma from disobeying the parents. O God! Don't give me such due.

This is the third line group of the *dhexdhexaad*. Here, the poet critiques a type of man's disconnection with God. Interestingly, in 'Dookh', it is also in the third line group of the *dhexdhexaad* that she addresses the matter of religiosity. This coincidence highlights the significance of religion when a Somali woman considers a relationship. Faith appears to take precedence over other aspects, which is likely why it is referred to in an earlier line group.

From the structure of these lines, we observe that the poet consistently places the alliterating words at the beginning of each line. Even in the *hooris* lines, the alliterating words are typically at the start of the hemistich, except in line 17 and line 20, they are slightly delayed, appearing after the negative particle *aan* (not) and the conjunction *oo*. This consistency in alliteration and its deliberate positioning reflect the poet's technical skill, as well as her ability to intertwine sound and meaning.

IV
23 Godadlaha cartamayiyo midkii, meherka caadaystay
24 Casho noolba tii uu calmado, 'Cayni' ugu yeedha
25 Cuddoontuu qabiyo kii dayacay, ubad carruurtiisa
26 Caarcaariyoo aan haween, garan culayskooda
27 Caruus been ah kii raba Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin.

23 One who is the womaniser and got used to quick marriage contracts
24 Crying out 'Oh, my eyes!' to women he likes all day
25 One who neglects his upright wife and his children
26 One that never settled down and doesn't understand the importance of women
27 He who wants a sham marriage, O God! Don't give me such a due.

Line group IV presents the audience with the image of a superficial man who flirts excessively with women, including married ones, and is irresponsible towards his family. This man fails to grasp the value of marriage, women, and family. The poet further portrays him as a suspicious and stingy husband whose actions contradict his words, revealing his lack of responsibility.

In these line groups, the 'he' represents a type of man, not a singular individual embodying every fault mentioned in the lines, but rather a collective depiction of various undesirable traits. Notably, the poet avoids using the pronoun 'I' when describing the negative traits of this man. For example, in line 25, it is *caruurtiisa* (his children) who are abandoned, and in line 26, it is *culayskooda* (their heaviness, their importance) that 'he' fails to understand. The poet chooses not to use words like 'our children' or 'my importance', keeping her narrative at a distance. As she says at the beginning of the poem: she stays away from the negative images she portrays.

In contrast, as we will see in later line groups where the poet supplicates for the type of man she desires, she employs numerous first-person deictic words such as *aan* (I), *i* (me), and *ay* (my). The word *wada* (together) also appears frequently. This distinction in pronoun use underscores the shift in tone and focus between the negative critique of the man she rejects and the hopeful, personal supplication for the man she seeks.

V
28 Canwaj ooriduu qabay intaa, cay la daba jooga
29 Caado iyo dhaqan beeley oo, cunaha buuraaya
30 Cabbudhsane hinaasuhu intaa, cunaya dhiiggiisa

31 Caydhkiyo dabaylaha[32] ka dida, oo cidlada maaga
32 Cawdiyo salliga 'yaa fadhiyey?', Canab ku hiifaaya
33 Jin intuu cumaamado u xidhay, caydhsan waxan joogin
34 Caroog baas mid loo tumay Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin

28 One who is an aggressive man, the wife he married is followed with insult
29 Who has lost custom and tradition, enlarging the gullet[33]
30 The stuffy one that jealousy is sucking his blood
31 The one who is scared by heavy rains with gusty winds, and pro vokes where there is no one
32 Saying 'Who sat on it?' by the prayer mat made of palm leaves, accusing Canab
33 He who jinn has wrapped him with a turban, and who runs after things that don't exist
34 One for whom an ominous conch shell horn is played for, O God! don't give me such due.

Line group V shows us some vivid images of a terrible husband who is aggressive, jealous and suspicious. In line 29, the poet says he has 'lost custom and tradition'. In the *hooris*, she uses the phrase *cunaha buuraaya*. *Cunaha* refers to the gullet, the passage that connects the mouth and the stomach, and *buuraaya* is the present progressive of the verb *buur*, which means 'to enlarge'. Together, the phrase literally translates to 'enlarging the gullet', and it is a slang that is use to describe someone is always uptight and irritable, even for no particular reason. The poet may be critiquing a man whose abandonment of cultural values has led to excessive indulgence, greed, or selfishness. The gullet could symbolise his insatiable desires, whether material or emotional, which grow unchecked due to his lack of grounding in tradition. For further clarity, it may be helpful to examine the subsequent lines in this group, as they could provide additional insight into the connotation of the gullet metaphor and its connection to the poet's broader critique of this type of man.

In line 30, the poet introduces another body-related noun, *dhiiggiisa* (his blood). The verb *cunaya* (eating), which precedes it, shares the same stem *cun* (to eat) with *cunaha* (gullet) in line 29, and is also in the present progressive tense. In this line, it is *hinaasuhu* (the jealousy) that

[32] Originally written as *dabayllaha* in Asha (2017); I have amended the spelling for accuracy.

[33] See discussion below.

is eating *dhiiggiisa* (his blood). In line 31, the poet first paints an image of his cowardice: *Caydhkiyo dabaylaha ka dida* (scared by heavy rains with gusty winds), followed by, *oo cidlada maaga* (and provokes where there is no one). Ironically, what he is scared by is harmless – rain and wind – yet he boldly 'provokes' where there is no real threat, an empty area.

Line 32 further deepens the critique, portraying him as suspicious and irrational, accusing Canab (a generic name for a woman) of sitting on the prayer mat. The juxtaposition here is striking: the sacredness of the prayer mat, a symbol of faith and peace, becomes the setting for his baseless accusations. In line 33, the poet uses the character of a jinn and says, 'jinn has wrapped him with a turban' and caused him to be 'running after things that don't exist'. The imagery of possession here underscores the irrationality and instability of this man. He is not in control of his actions, his behaviour dictated by delusion.

If we put these images all together, a fuller picture emerges. We see a man who is physically and emotionally bloated – his *gullet* enlarges due to his baseless fears, jealousy, suspicions, and provocations. His gullet becomes even bigger, when he goes to the prayer mat and asks: *Yaa fadhiyey?* (Who sat on it?), and then accuses Canab. His behaviour deviates from the norms of custom and tradition, which the poet explicitly states he has lost. This loss becomes the root cause of his grotesque transformation – his metaphorical gullet grows as he acts against the values that should ground him.

The poet's skilful use of metaphor and imagery creates a vivid critique of this type of man. By linking his behaviours – jealousy, suspicion, cowardice, and irrationality – to the loss of cultural and moral grounding, she crafts a powerful commentary on how deviating from tradition leads to self-destruction.

VI
35 Mid cuntada ilaashoo ka naxa, ceesh la karinaayo
36 Cashiiradiyo ehelkaba jaroo, aan casaba dhawrin
37 Caanaha midkii aan gadayn, cunnugga loo siiyo
38 Caantaynka aan quudhinoo, caanad kala jeex ah
39 Cajiinkiyo daqiiqdii madhuun, ku citikaafaaya
40 Cantafuude 'reerka ha cawarin!', carrabka loo saaray
41 Qorqodaha cantuugada tirshana, calafba hay siinnin.

35 He who guards the food and panics when food is prepared
36 He who abandons his relatives and kinfolks and doesn't look after his family

37 He who doesn't buy milk to give for the children
38 He who isn't generous to give ten or twenty cents
39 He who feels blameless when the dough and flour is empty
40 He who keeps saying 'don't hurt the family' but hoards and hides his things
41 The suspicious husband who counts the mouthfuls, don't give me such due.

In line group VI, the poet continues to use the negative form to portray an irresponsible and undesirable man. Line 36 shows how 'he' doesn't take care of his relatives. In line 37, 'he' doesn't buy milk for the children. In line 38, 'he' doesn't show generosity. In these lines, the negative marker *aan* (not) is repeatedly employed. Even when the man is quoted as saying *reerka ha cawarin*! (Don't hurt the family!), the poet ironically uses a negative imperative, further highlighting the dissonance between his words and actions. This accumulation of negative statements vividly characterises the man and manifests the poet's strong disapproval of this type of *calaf*.

Interestingly, during one of my interviews with Somali women in Hargeysa about this poem, one participant expressed that this depiction of food-guarding behaviour is the aspect she 'hates the most' among all the traits mentioned in the poem[34]. This insight may be connected to the gendered division of labour in Somali society. Food preparation has traditionally been regarded as a woman's responsibility, even today, when many women in urban areas like Hargeysa hold jobs outside the home.

On the one hand, this division of labour reflects systemic gender inequality and the harm it perpetuates. On the other hand, within the patriarchal framework that imposes rigid gender expectations on women, the kitchen is to some extent viewed as a woman's domain. This space, though unequally small and limited, grants women a certain autonomy and underscores their unique contribution to the household. However, in line 35, this already marginal autonomy is further encroached upon by the stingy and suspicious man described in the poem. His intrusion into the woman's domain, where she traditionally holds sway, diminishes her sense of identity and agency even within the confines of the patriarchal structure.

The poet's sharp critique of such behaviour resonates strongly with Somali women, who immediately relate to the frustration expressed in these verses. The act of food-guarding is not merely seen as a man's stinginess but also as an attack on the limited space of autonomy women

[34] Interview with Somali women in Hargeisa, July 2019.

have been afforded. This dynamic of intrusion and disempowerment becomes a significant focal point for the poet, making her disapproval all the more impactful.

VII
42 Cocobbada midkaa taagan een, ceeb ka korahaynnin
43 Ceelkuu istaagaba midkii, gabadh cayaarsiiya
44 Caloolyowna kugu beera iyo, ciillo kugu raagta
45 Cadraddii xishootiyo marwaba, daba carraabaaya
46 Casarka iyo duhurkii intaa, cago budhlaynaaya
47 Kii dumarka ciil bada Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin.

42 The one who stands shamefaced in secluded areas and never behaves in a more mature way
43 The one who causes girls to play at the well where he stands
44 Planting anxiety in you and resentments that linger in you
45 Chasing after modest unmarried girls and even honourable married women
46 Mid-day to late afternoon, the feet running after women, so fast that clouds of dust comes visibly after his feet
47 The one who made women deserve grief, O God! Don't give me such due.

In line group VII, the poet continues to depict a type of man who is flirty, shameless and a source of trouble for women. In line 42, she uses the word *cocobbada* (the secluded areas) as the alliterating word. Combined with the verb in the *hojis,* 'standing at secluded areas' is portrayed negatively, reinforced by the alliterating word *ceeb* (shame) in the *hooris*. In line 43, the alliterating word *ceel* (well) is also place-related. Though words like 'secluded places' and 'well' do not inherently carry negative connotations, the poet's context imbues them with negativity, focusing instead on the man's actions in these places. In line 43, he 'causes girls to play', suggesting flirtatious and inappropriate behaviour. By line 45, his behaviour escalates as he 'chases after' not only a 'modest unmarried girl' but also a 'married woman'. This lack of boundaries and propriety creates discord. As the poet vividly describes in line 44, these actions 'plant anxiety in you' and 'make resentments linger in you', as line 44 reads.

Through this portrayal, the poet condemns a man whose shameless and reckless behaviour disrupts women's lives, presenting him as the epitome of what she wishes to avoid in a partner. Her supplication to God to be spared such *calaf* reflects not only her personal rejection of

such a man but also her critique of societal norms that tolerate or enable such behaviour.

VIII
48 Mid caqligu naxaasoobayoo, cudur ka guuxaayo
49 Cuyub iyo magaal liito oon, xoogga kugu caawin
50 Canaadnimo mid ah haysoo, laabtay cududdiisa
51 Ciirsili'i mid ay dhaanto meel, ciyow ka yeedhaayo
52 Cumuq-cumuq midkii lagu salliday, cayn la garan waayo
53 'Cakudaa!' intaa kugu hayoo, cunaya jiidhkaaga
54 Cuqdad kii la yuurura Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin.

48 One whose intelligence is corroded, groaning from disease
49 The one who is cynical and a weak town person, and doesn't offer help to you with strength
50 The one that stubbornness has gotten hold of, who folded his upper arms
51 The one where helplessness grows, the bustards calling out warnings
52 The one who is compelled in an abyss that nobody can understand
53 The one who says 'Ugh!' to you and yet eats your flesh
54 The one who crouches with psychological problems, O God! Don't give me such due.

In this line group, the audience hears a succession of alliterating words that describe the negative qualities of a man. In line 48, the *hojis* describes him as *caqligu naxaasoobayoo* (the intelligence corroded), followed by *cudur* (disease) in the *hooris* which he 'groans about'. In line 49, he is *cuyub* (cynical) and who never lends a helping hand. The word *magaal* (town) here also carries a negative connotation in the Somali context. In Somali society, the notion of a townsman is often contrasted with the nomadic pastoralist. The townspeople's commercial, capitalist way of life is frequently criticised by the nomads, and this tension between perceived materialism and traditional pastoral values is often expressed in Somali proverbs and poetry[35].

In the next two lines, the poet uses *canaadnimo* (stubbornness) and *ciirsili'i* (helpless) to deepen her critique. Then in line 52, she repeats the word *cumuq* (an abyss) to emphasise the negative feeling evoked by this man. In line 53, the metaphor of meat resurfaces, echoing its earlier appearance in the beginning of the *dhexdhexaad*. In line group I, the poet uses *cadkiyo jiidhka kala saafin een, ciriqa saaraynnin* (One

[35] For further accounts on this, see Kapteijns and Spaulding (1989: 19, 38).

who can't strip lean meat from bones and take out worthless meat) to describe a man incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong. *Jiidhka* (the lean meat) symbolised important matters and moral clarity, contrasting with *ciriqa* (*worthless meat*), which represented trivialities. Here, *jiidh* (lean meat) is used again, with the possessive suffix *-kaaga* (your). The man is described as 'eating your meat' while expressing his disgust with an 'Ugh!' This *jiidh* serves again as a figurative expression, symbolising how the man's words and actions cause harm and emotional pain to 'you'. This imagery effectively conveys the profound damage caused by his toxic behaviours and unkindness.

IX
55 Cooflaa risiqii soo madhsaday, caalamka u yaallay
56 Canka dhigey shinkiisii haddana, calowsi doonaaya
57 Carjajoof gaboobiyo camoodh, soo ciddiyo goostay
58 Duq cardaaduqooboo intaa, keli is coofadhshay
59 Cajuus guriga ii yuururiyo, coomir igu yuusa
60 Cimri kuma canbaareeynayoo, waa cawo Ilaahe
61 Mid cibaaraduu beri yiqiin, wali la ciiraaya
62 Oo cawaaqib-xumo hayso oo, cunug is-moodaaya
63 Cirro baaqday kii lagu yidhaa, calafba hay siinnin.

55 That old man who squandered the wealth that was there for him in the world
56 He who has had stuff to eat all the time, and now wanting soft food for babies
57 He who is an old man ageing, who separated himself from family
58 An old man who failed and acted like a monkey patriarch on his own
59 An old man who crouches at home and nags to me
60 Age is good fortune from Allah, don't let him get blamed
61 One who is still staggering with the novelty he knew in the past
62 And who has bad behaviours, thinking himself as still a child
63 The one who is said to be 'an old man who has been left behind', don't give me such due.

Line group IX portrays an old man whom the poet despises – not for his age, but for his mindset and behaviours. Throughout this section, the alliterating words consistently reinforce the notion of 'oldness'. In line 55, the term *cooflaa* is made up of the word *cooflaha*, which literally means 'the shaggy coat' and the focus marker *baa*. The image of a 'shaggy coat' here metaphorically refers to an old man, evoking a sense of weariness and decline.

In line 57, the *hojis* presents a compact repetition of words associated with age: *carjajoof* meaning an old man, *gaboob* meaning getting old, and *camoodh* meaning an elderly man with numerous wrinkles. This dense repetition intensifies the depiction of old age, while the *hooris soo ciddiyo goostay* (separating himself from the family) reinforces the image of a lonely and estranged old man.

A similar portrayal continues in line 58. In the *hojis*, *Duq cardaaduqooboo intaa*, *duq* means an old man and *cardaaduqooboo* has the literal meaning of 'who became destroyed'. This phrase presents the image of a pitiful old man whose life has been a failure. However, in the *hooris*, the poet adds *keli is coofaadhshay* (he makes only himself that head monkey). Despite his failure, he still holds a self-important attitude, highlighting his delusions of grandeur.

Line 59 stands out with the poet's skilful use of double alliteration. In *cajuus guriga ii yuururiyo, coomir igu yuusa*, not only is the *c* sound alliterating, there is also the alliteration of *y* sound which is particularly challenging to use in alliteration in Somali poetry due to the limited vocabulary available. Beyond the sound patterning, the line also achieves a striking semantic balance. The terms *cajuus* and *coomir* both have the connotations of an old man, while the verbs *yuururiyo* (crouches at home) and *yuusa* (raises his voice and nags) paint a vivid picture of his actions. The juxtaposition of physical passivity and vocal dominance portrays a man who is both idle and overbearing.

In line 60, the poet addresses the matter of age explicitly and says *cimri kuma canbaareeynayoo, waa cawo Ilaahe* (Age is good fortune from Allah, don't let him get blamed). Here, the words *cimri* (age), *canbaareeynayoo* (may he[36] not be blamed), and *cawo* (good fortune) are not only phonetically alliterating, but also carry a meaningful connection, reinforcing the poet's belief that age itself is not to be condemned, as it is a blessing from Allah.

64 Cayn-cayn raggaa wada ahee, dunida ceegaaga
65 Caleemaha midkaan saarayee, cugatay laabtaydu
66 Calaamadaha aan soo wadana, caan ku noqon doona
67 Caaddilow aduun baa hayoon, kaa codsanayaaye
68 Carrabbaabay oo waad ogtahay, caynka uu yahaye
69 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.

64 There are many types of men that the world is filled up with
65 The one that I crown with leaves and which my chest has chosen

[36] Note that the pronoun 'he' here refers to *Ilaahe* (Allah).

66 Who will become famous through the following signs that I go with
67 O God, only you have him, I am requesting him from you
68 I've mentioned it and you know the type he is.
69 O Almighty, O Allah! Tell him that we share a due.

Following the nine supplications in which the poet asks God *calafba hay siinin* (don't give me such due), the poet uses another transitional line group to prepare the audience for the contrast type of man she wishes to have as her *calaf*. From this point onwards, first-person deictic expressions referring to the poet herself become prominent, signalling a shift in tone and perspective.

In line 65, the poet declares, *caleemaha midkaan saarayee, cugatay laabtaydu* (The one that I crown with leaves and whom my body has chosen). Here, the use of *aan* (I) in *midkaan* (the one that I), and the possessive suffix -*aydu* (my) in *laabtaydu* (literally 'my chest, my body'; figuratively 'my inner thought'), underscores the poet's personal agency and deep emotional investment. In line 66, *aan* (I) appears again in the *hojis*, *calaamadaha aan soo wadana* (the signs that I go with).

From line 67 to line 69, the poet directly addresses God in a heartfelt plea, using the vocatives, *Caaddilow* (O God) in line 67 and *Casiisoow Allahayoow* (O Almighty, O Allah) in line 69. Following the direct address, she says, *aduun baa hayoon* (only you have him), *kaa codsanayaaye* (I'm requesting him from you), and *carrabbaabay oo waad ogtahay* (I've mentioned it and you know it). The interplay between first- and second-person pronouns in these lines creates an intimate exchange, while highlighting the poet's reliance on God's will. As listeners, we are overhearing what feels like a deeply personal conversation between the poet and the divine. Finally, in the concluding line, the poet uses the imperative *calaf wadaagnaa dheh* (tell him we share a due), expressing her hopeful plea for the right partner and her firm belief in God's power to make that happen.

X
70 Cirka oo da'aayoo dhulkoo, dooggu carafaystay
71 Naqa oo cagaar wada noqdoo, curubta saydhaaya
72 Cuudka iyo maalkoo dhaloo, ciirtu qubanayso
73 Carradoo barwaaqo ah arladoo, nabaddu caan gaadhay
74 Caddalloolka fiidkii mid aan, wada caweeynaynno
75 Cawo iyo wanaag ii horkaca, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.

70 The sky which pours with rain and the ground [on] which the green grass are fragrant

71 The fresh growth which becomes all green and which splashes out fresh saplings
72 The domestic animals which have given birth, the butter milk which is spilling
73 The territory and settlements are in prosperity, and peace has become widely known
74 The one with whom we play the *caddallool* game and spend the evening together
75 Good fortune and good outcomes which rise up for me, tell him that we share a due.

Under Roman numeral X, the poet composes four line groups, each concluding with the supplication *calaf wadaagnaa dheh* (tell him we share a due). She begins her first line group with a series of images depicting a countryside scene. From the raining sky, the land and the green grass in line 70, to fresh growth after rain in line 71, the poet paints a vibrant picture of rain, fertile land, and lush greenery – elements deeply valued in pastoral society, where drought poses a severe threat to survival.

The image of rain is widely used in Somali poetry as a symbol of preciousness and joy. Following the depictions of land and greenery, which evoke notions of growth and renewal, the poet shifts her focus to domestic animals' production and the prosperity of the people in lines 72 and 73. These coherent images present the listeners with a beautiful vision, imbued with a sense of cheerfulness and abundance.

In line 74, the poet introduces the first image of the man she desires: *Caddalloolka fiidkii mid aan, wada caweeynaynno* (The one with whom we play the *caddallool* game and spend the evening together). The *caddallool* game is a traditional stick-throwing game played by Somali countryside children in the evenings. Interestingly, rather than describing any kind of personality or characteristics, she chooses to highlight a shared moment of leisure and companionship. This image, following those of the sky, rain, grass, and flowing milk, evokes a sense of romance and intimacy. She then turns to God with her supplication, saying, *calaf wadaagnaa dheh* (tell him we share a due).

76 Mid cirshiga Ilaah laga raboo, Caaddil garanaaya
77 Caddaaladda midkii falaya een, cuqubo doonaynnin
78 Oo cammira masaajiidda oo, caalin iyo shiikh ah
79 Casharkiyo Quraanka i bariyo, camalka kii suubban
80 Midkii diinta caawinaya ee, cadow u diidaaya
81 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.
76 One that is wanted at the throne of God and understands God

77 The one who acts justly and seeks no malediction
78 And who regularly attends the mosques, who is a scholar and a sheikh
79 Who teaches me the lessons of the Qur'an and the good manners
80 The one who is helping the religion and defending it from the enemy
81 O Almighty, O Allah! Tell him that we share a due.

In this line group, the poet devotes an entire section to the theme of piety, which serves as a direct contrast to Line Group III, where she depicts a man disengaged from Allah. The ideal 'he' is not only someone who *Caaddil garanaaya* (understands God), but also one *casharkiyo Quraanka i bariyo* (teaches me the lessons of the Qur'an). Once again, the poet's use of the first-person pronoun reinforces the sense of intimacy and personal connection between herself and this partner. 'He' is not only a pious Muslim, but also a companion and guide in her spiritual journey. Following the shared moments of leisure described in the previous line group, the emphasis on religiosity highlights that the ideal 'he' must also fulfil her expectations in matters of faith – an aspect that is both serious and profoundly important to her.

82 Cid kaleba mid aan eegin oo, calanka lay saaray
83 Oo aan Caasha-Luul mooyiye, dumar canaynaynnin
84 Cirdiga iyo sharaftayda kaan, ceel ku ridi doonnin
85 Farxad aan ku wada ciidaynnoo, cagaha ii maydha
86 Cayn ay u tahay kii adduun, igu casuumaaya
87 Curdin baxay sidiisii mid aan, ugu carfoonaado
88 Gob caqiibo dheer lagu ogyahay, ciriq wanaaggiisa
89 Ciddayda iyo ciddiisaba midkii, wada cisaynaaya,
90 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.

82 He who doesn't look at another woman but raised the flag [of love] over me
83 And desired no other woman except Caasha Luul
84 He who doesn't dishonour my prestige, doesn't drop it in a well
85 He whom we celebrate the holy day together in joy, and washes my feet
86 He who invites me to whatever wealth he deservedly gains
87 One for whom I become perfumed like a young sapling that has sprouted
88 He who is known for high moral principles and his good nerves
89 He who respects both my family and his family
90 O Almighty, O God, say to him that we share a due.

In this line group, the poet shifts her focus to moral qualities such as loyalty, generosity and respect, which stand in stark contrast to the negative images in line groups I-IX. She also highlights his deep affection for her. Notably, almost every line contains a first-person pronoun, further emphasising the poet's longing to establish a deep connection with a devoted partner.

In line 82, 'he' raised (*saaray*) the flag (*calanka*) for 'me' (*i* in *lay*, a cluster of *la* and *i*). In line 83, the poet directly uses her own name, Caasha Luul, as the alliterating word, further reinforcing the personal nature of this section. These two lines sharply contrast with the negative portrayal of the womaniser in line group IV, who not only pursues young women but also married ones. In line 84, 'he' does not drop 'my prestige' (*sharaftayda*) in a well, symbolising his commitment to safeguarding her honour. Earlier, the poet avoided direct interaction with this 'he' she wishes not to be fated to. While she previously refrained from explicitly stating that a man of declining morality brings shame to his family, including his wife, here she addresses the matter directly, underscoring the importance of honour and reputation in a relationship.

In line 85, the poet deepens the sense of intimacy by depicting *cagaha ii maydha* (he washes the feet for me). Feet-washing is an act that is considered intimate and loving in many cultures, not just Somali culture. Interestingly, the alliterating word *cago* (feet, in *cagaha*, the feet) has appeared earlier. In line group VII, when the undesirable 'he' chases women from midday to late afternoon, *cago budhlaynaaya* – his feet kick up vast clouds of dust as he runs. The contrast between the negative image of dirty feet from improper behaviour and the positive, tender act of washing 'my' feet is a brilliant design, highlighting the profound difference between the two portrayals.

The contrast continues in the following lines. In line 86, the poet presents a man who generously shares his wealth 'with me', standing in opposition to the stingy, suspicious man who doesn't trust his wife with household money and even intrudes into the kitchen in line group VI. In line 87, the poet uses the pleasant scent of a young tree to symbolise 'his' affection for 'me', providing a stark contrast to the disdainful husband in line 53 who exclaims 'Cakudaa!' (Ugh!) to his wife. Similarly, in line 89, 'he' is portrayed as someone who respects (*cisaynaaya*) both 'my family' (*ciddayda*) and 'his family' (*ciddiisa*), offering a clear distinction from the neglectful man in line group VI who fails to care for his family. In a society where the wife's kinship is often neglected, this respect for the woman's lineage emphasises his admirable qualities.

The warm and heartfelt portrayal continues in the next section,

which forms the final line group of the *dhexdhexaad*.

91 Mid caqligu illayn waa hibee, Caaddil ugu deeqay
92 Calaacalaana igu qaadda oon, ciidda igu tuurin
93 Calcalyada xareeddiyo biyaa, wada cabboonaynno
94 Cishqi iyo wanaag aan dhammaan, Caaddil nagu beero
95 Aniguna cindiga iyo wadnaha, caashaq ugu beero
96 Oo cunaha ii dhaafo oon, dhigo calooshayda
97 Mid qalbiga intoo aan u culo, cuudka ugu daaro
98 Canbar iyo mid aan udug u ahay, cadar sidiisiiya
99 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.

91 He whose intelligence is a gift that God gave generously
92 He who doesn't throw me in the mud but takes me in his hands
93 He who we drink fresh rainwater together
94 He whom with him God bestows everlasting love and goodness on us
95 And for whom I plant love in the mind and the heart
96 And let love pass down the throat and I put it in my stomach
97 One for whom I purify the heart and light an incense [to purify and fragrance] for
98 He for whom I would be like amber perfumes
99 O Almighty, O God, say to him that we share a due.

This line groups contains a line that I personally love dearly. That is line 93: *Calcalyada xareeddiyo biyaa, wada cabboonaynno* (He who we drink fresh rainwater together). Despite rainwater not being scientifically clean to drink, the image of sharing it with a beloved one evokes a deep sense of closeness and bond. This line reminds me of a classic Chinese poem called 'Bu Suan Zi' by Li Zhiyi from the Song Dynasty, also known as the 'Longing for You' poem. The first part of the poem translates as:

> I live at the head of the Yangtze River
> You live at the tail of the Yangtze River
> Every day I think of you, but cannot see you
> We drink from the same Yangtze water[37]

The Chinese poet of the 11th century uses the image of 'drinking from the same water' in a similar vein to Caasha Luul, though the main

[37] Originally in Chinese: '我住长江头，君住长江尾。日日思君不见君，共饮长江水。' Translation by myself.

focus differs. The Chinese poet expresses deep longing in the context of separation and uses the imagery of the long Yangtze River, flowing continuously to reflect the enduring and unyielding nature of his love. The imagery of 'Yangtze water' also serves as a symbolic connection between the poet and his loved one, transcending the physical gap.

I have mentioned the significance of rain in Somali culture. In addition to symbolising renewal, fresh rain water, also evokes a sense of purity. And this might also be what she longs for in her relationship. The Somali poet, like her Chinese counterpart, expresses a profound sense of connection with a loved one through nature. The imagery of 'drinking from the same water' holds great significance, conveying the idea of shared experiences, unity, and intimacy. Just as the poet finds immense joy in the simple act of playing a children's game in line 74, she finds equal delight in the thought of sharing something as pure as rainwater with the right 'he'.

In addition to describing the ideal man, the poet also expresses what 'I' would do for 'him' in return. In lines 95-97, body-related words such as *wadnaha* (the heart), *cunaha* (the throat), *calool* (stomach), and *qalbiga* (the heart) are intertwined with expressions like *caashaq ugu beero* (I plant love for) and *cuudka ugu daaro* (I light an incense [to purify and fragrance] for). These again, evoke a profound sense of intimacy. Having depicted all his desirable qualities, the poet now reveals the depth of her feelings and intentions. She not only appreciates the qualities of the ideal man but also expresses a deep commitment to him. These lines suggest an intimate, nurturing love that she cherishes and sustains. It is through these gestures, both symbolic and tender, that the poet affirms her devotion and the profound connection she hopes to build with the man she desires. And once again, she concludes the *dhexdhexaad* with the supplication: *Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh* (O Almighty, O God, say to him that we share a due.)

Gebaggebo (Concluding line group)
100 Waxba yaanan Caynkiyo murtida, soo celcelin uune
101 Cirka tiirka aan lagu arkayn, ciidda gogoshaas ah
102 Cadceeddiyo dayaxa aan midina, midna cidhiidhaynnin
103 Caska waaga cawlaanka fiid, caddiyo nuurkeeda
104 Gudcurkoo cawaag soo rogtoo, culay madowgaas ah
105 Buurahaa cuslaadiyo baddaa, cidhifka soo jooga
106 Allihii cibrada nooga dhigey, dunidan ceegaagta
107 Cabdi iyo addoon baan u ahay, Caaddilka Ilaahe
108 Cawaaloow Alloow ii ajiib, ducadan aan cuurtay.

100 Let me not repeat the wisdom behind the *c* alliteration only for the sake of repeating
101 One doesn't see any pillar for the sky and the earth is like a spread-out mat
102 Neither does the sun nor the moon squeeze the other into a restricted space
103 The red dawn and tan evening, the clarity and its light
104 The darkness and dark nights making a distinctive mark, like black, burnt wood
105 The heavy mountains and the seas standing on the edges
106 The Allah that made it novel and made this world full for us
107 I am a worshipper and a servant of Allah, the Just One
108 O Allah, O God, accept for me this prayer that I took attention over.

In the *gebaggebo*, we can see that the poet is addressing the alliteration again by mentioning *Cayn* (*C* letter) in line 100, which echoes her earlier self-reference in the beginning of this poem, in line 5: *Caynka ka higgaadshay* (I argued ten points and alliterated with the *C*). This repetition not only reinforces the thematic and stylistic continuity but also signals to the listeners that the poem is reaching its conclusion. Moreover, the word *murtida* (the wisdom, the essential point) in this line further links to the *arar* section, where she earlier mentioned in line 2: *Caynaddi murtida waanigaan, dhigin culuumteede* (I did not set out the types and subjects of wisdom [of poetry] and advice). By connecting these references, the poet provides a sense of closure while reinforcing the ideas of wisdom and poetic craft, creating a circular structure that ties back to the beginning of the poem.

In line 100, we encounter the word *cayn* once again; however, here it carries the meaning of 'type' rather than the *C* letter, as it does in line 5, and it appears in the plural form. The recurrence of the word *cayn* throughout the poem is particularly striking, as Somali poets typically avoid repeating the same word to showcase their extensive vocabulary, unless repetition serves a deliberate purpose. In this poem, the poet employs *cayn* intentionally in various contexts, demonstrating its multiple meanings. At the beginning and end of the poem, when the poet refers to making poetry and the alliteration, as mentioned above, it denotes the *C* letter. In line 21 *Caynka iyo bayddaba jaroo, cidhibta ruugaaya* (Cutting the cord and robes [with God], chewing the destiny), *cayn* takes on the meaning of 'cord'.

Additionally, in line 2, as previously noted, and lines 64 and 68 – *Cayn-cayn raggaa wada ahee, dunida ceegaaga* (There are many types of men that the world is filled up with), and *Carrabbaabay oo waad*

ogtahay, caynka uu yahaye (I've mentioned it and you know the type he is) – the word *cayn* conveys the sense of 'type'. The reduplicated form *cayn-cayn* in line 64 is particularly noteworthy, as the repetition of the sound effectively emphasises the variety of men, a common linguistic feature in Somali to express multiplicity or intensity. Through the strategic repetition of *cayn* in its various meanings, the poet not only enriches the poem's linguistic texture but also reinforces its central themes of types of men and her supplication of *calaf*.

In lines 101-105, the poet once again fills her verse with natural elements, guiding the listeners towards line 106, where she acknowledges that it is Allah who created this world and its beautiful natural scenery and objects. As the poem reaches its conclusion, the poet underscores the religious aspect of her composition. She affirms that the poem is created because *Cabdi iyo addoon baan u ahay* (I am a worshipper and a servant of Allah) and because she has a supplication to make. In Islamic tradition, it is customary for individuals to ask Allah to grant them something or to protect them from harm, and in this poem, Caasha Luul follows this practice, expressing her heartfelt prayer for love and an ideal partner.

3.7. *Comparing 'Dookh' and 'Calaf'*

Both 'Dookh' and 'Calaf' are poems in which the female poet resists the prohibitions that prevent Somali women from making *gabay* poems and speaking about gender dynamics and their relationships with men. 'Calaf' is even more radical compared to 'Dookh' as the poet explicitly criticises nine types of men in her 'Don't give me such due' line groups. This poem thus demonstrates a sense of in-betweenness. On the one hand, the poet addresses subjects deemed unsuitable for women in the patriarchal society. She also employs strong language in certain lines when targeting specific types of men. These elements highlight the rebellious aspects of the poem. On the other hand, she embeds these messages within a supplication to God, adhering to the traditional *gabay* form, which is well-established and cherished in Somali culture. Therefore, no one can stop her from making this poem and arguing her points.

Both 'Calaf' and 'Dookh' talk about men with the pronoun 'he' being repeatedly used throughout. The audience may be dazzled by the idealised man in 'Dookh' or look down upon the flawed man in 'Calaf', but they are also aware that these representations are not based on real individuals. In an interview with the poet Caasha Luul, she confirmed that no specific man inspired these poems. Interestingly, women who

listened to 'Calaf' were deeply moved and approached her, saying: 'You were talking about us. How did you know?' Despite having never met these women or knowing their personal stories, the poem resonated with them on a profound level. How is this achieved?

In 'Dookh', an imagined addressee, *ku* (you), appears to be a fellow woman to whom the lyric voice offers advice or relates experiences. By addressing this imagined individual, the poet indirectly reaches her real audience, regardless of their gender. When uttering the lines themselves, the audience respond to the expressed sentiments in the lines and at the same time, share these emotions by taking the position of the voice. Conversely, in 'Calaf', there isn't a blurred lyric 'you'. Instead, the addressee is a very specific one, God. As mentioned earlier, the supplication in a poem is distinct from daily prayers. The voice is not speaking to God privately, but rather expects an audience.

By calling upon God, the voice establishes its identity as a poetic voice. As Culler (2015: 216) suggests, 'voice calls in order to be calling, and seeks to manifest its calling.' The supplication in 'Calaf' thus serves as an indirect address to the audience. The poet invites the audience to witness her personal supplication, enabling them to listen, relate, and assume the position of the poet's voice. As a lyric event, the women who engage with the poem experience a deep emotional connection, as evidenced by the reactions shared by Caasha Luul in the interview.

W.R. Johnson observes that 'the most usual mode in Greek lyric (probably) and in Latin lyric (certainly) was to address the poem (in Greek, the song) to another person or to other persons. What this typical lyric form points to is the conditions and the purposes of song: the presence of the singer before his audience; his re-creation of universal emotions in a specific context, a compressed, stylized story…; and, finally, the sharing, the interchange of these emotions by singer and audience' (Johnson 1983: 4; quoted in Waters 2003: 18) In the case of Somali poetry, especially the *maanso* type, the verses are made to be heard by others. The poet Caasha Luul herself says[38]: 'My poems are for other people. Even when my name "Caasha Luul" is there in those lines, other people can use it and let it be her.'

Frye takes up Mill's definition of lyric as an utterance that is 'overheard', and defines it by its 'radical of presentation', where the poet 'turns his back on his listeners, though he may speak for them, and though they may repeat some of his words after him' (Frye 1957: 250). Culler notes that 'triangulated address' – address to the reader by means of address to something or someone else – is the root form of presenta-

[38] In an interview on 5 May 2019.

tion for lyric. However, instead of the figure of the audience 'overhearing' a poem addressed to another, Culler inclines towards that of the voice 'winking' at the audience (2015: 206). 'This is a phenomenon with which we are all familiar', he writes, 'when we speak ostensibly to one person but with an eye to how our discourse will be received by others who will hear it and so insert some elements specifically chosen for them' (*Ibid*).

As Caasha Luul says, her poems are for other people. The supplications she makes in 'Calaf' are as much for her audience as they are for her. So are her techniques, such as the metre and rhythm, the alliterating words and pronouns, the way she structures a poem, and very importantly, the address to God.

In the several instances of *Rabboow* and *Casiisoow Allahayoow*, the poet invokes God in a literary way, not only for herself but also for her audience. What does addressing God accomplish? First, it gives us a ritualistic event in the lyric present. The vocatives *Rabboow, Casiisoow, Allahayoow* and the following imperative sentences *calafba hay siinnin* (don't give me such due) and *calaf wadaagnaa dheh* (say to him that we share a due), give the poem a ritualistic air, after having portrayed a fictional 'he' in the previous lines. The fictional representation of the 'he' serves to bring out the final supplication.

By describing the due she wants and doesn't want in the supplication, the poet incorporates fictional elements into the ritualistic event. Addressing God permits a stronger and more vivid expression of feeling, highlighting the criticism or enhancing the desire. Apostrophe is not mundane communication. It makes its point by troping 'not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit of communication itself, foregrounding the fact that this is utterance of a special kind' (Culler 2015: 213). In the moment of articulation, the vocative posits a relationship between the voice and God. Just as Martin Heidegger says: 'Calling brings closer what it calls'. To the poet, God is a responsive force to which she has a relationship. In the last line of 'Calaf', she says: *Cawaaloow Alloow ii ajiib, ducadan aan cuurtay* (O God, O Allah, accept for me, the prayer I took attention over).

Caasha Luul made 'Dookh' and 'Calaf' in the 2010s in London. Her poems show a degree of modernity as well as her background of living in exile in the West. In the next section, I shall turn my focus to poems that were made in the Horn of Africa several decades before Caasha Luul's poems. We will see how women poets at that time address relations between men and women in ways different from Caasha's. They may be shorter in length, but by no means quieter or less radical.

3.8. *Poems by Xaawa Jibriil*

In this section, I will look at poems made by Xaawa Jibriil. Xaawa's poems were collected and translated into English by her daughter Faduma in Faduma (2008), with an elaborate introduction about Xaawa's life presented in both Somali and English.

Born in 1920, Xaawa Jibriil has used poetry to comment on the world around her since the age of twelve. She made poetry in not only the *buraambur* genre but also the male-dominated *gabay* and *geeraar,* using them to persuade others of her points of view. Some of her poems are personal. For example, her first poem was a short *gabay* in which she complained about her younger brother begrudging her share of food. She also used *gabay* to justify herself after a rebuke by her father for neglecting the camels for which she was responsible at the age of thirteen. Ten years later, suffering from an unhappy marriage, she asserted that she was not a 'bridled camel' and told her husband to either 'take my life and pay the price' or 'set me free' in two *gabay* poems.

In many of her poems, she commented on men or directly addressed them. These men can be specific individuals, such as her brother, her father, her husband (when she made poetry about her personal life), or the military dictator, Siyaad Barre, and the delegates of the Djibouti peace meeting (when she commented on politics). The men she talked about could also be a collective group, such as those who incited clan wars or the pro-Italian men whom she called *odeyaasha ina aakhiray*[39] (the old men who hold us back).

We also see, in different periods of her life, that the poet spoke out about various issues at that time, which she found so important that they needed to be addressed through the means of poetry. It is also interesting to note that the poet chose the *buraambur* genre which is exclusive to women, and, as such, regarded as the lowest amongst all major genres of Somali poetry according to Sh. Jaamac Cumar Ciise, the author of Jaamac (1974), to express her political opinions, despite her competence in composing poems in the more prominent *gabay* genre.

In this chapter, I shall examine what Xaawa addressed in her poems made in different periods of her life and compare how she spoke out about them. My focus will be on the poems in which she addressed or spoke about men. In these poems, her identity as a Somali woman is foregrounded. In her early poems, she spoke out as a female family member, such as a sister, a daughter, or a wife. The sister-brother relationship, fa-

[39] In the book this last word is written as *akhiray* which is a misspelling. I have corrected the spelling here.

ther-daughter relationship, as well as the intimate relationship that a Somali woman may experience in her life, are epitomised in the poems. In her later years during the independence movements, she also took on the men who criticised women's participation in nationalist activities and made a rather feminist poem, which I will also examine in this book. Since the independence struggle, Xaawa's poems were primarily political, as she continuously used poetry as a weapon to fight for not only the rights of Somali people but also Somali women's rights in particular. We will explore her political poems in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.9. *'Waa ii Gunuunucahayaa?' (Why Is He Grouchy?)*

I shall start with Xaawa's first poem 'Waa ii Gunuunucahayaa?' (Why Is He Grouchy?). It is a short *gabay* poem in which the poet, at the age of 12, complains about her little brother. The text is taken from Faduma (2008: 124) with my own translation.

1 Waa guridambayskii waxaas, ii gabyahayaaye
2 Waa ii gunuunucahayaa, godobna ii qaadye
3 Sidii niman ganbiya yuu cawada, guure ii yahaye
4 Oo waa i gawrici lahaa, taydi baan geline
5 Geestiisa weel uu ku jirey, oo ganfaha haysto
6 Muxuu iigu goodinahayaa, gurey docdiisiiye?

1 He is the youngest of the house, that thing who is making *gabay* poems to me
2 He is grumbling at me and brought a grudge against me
3 Like men who are fighting in the night, he is one who comes upon me
4 And he would have slaughtered me, [but] my [time] did not enter
5 At his side a vessel he was in and of which he holds the edge of the mouth
6 Why is he threatening me? He has collected his share.

This is a very short piece of *gabay* which doesn't quite meet the general expectation of long verse paragraphs typically consisting of between 30 and 150 lines, as observed by Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964: 47). In fact, all the *gabay* poems Xaawa made throughout her life are rather short, ranging from about 6 to 20 lines, while, interestingly, her *buraambur* poems can be longer. While the ability to sustain longer poems is highly admired by Somalis, and the most widely known *gabay* poems tend to be long, we must not forget that short *gabay* poems are

also valid and an integral part of oral poetry.

Xaawa's daughter provides us some background to this poem in the introduction. She mentions that 'on occasions when the family slaughtered an animal for food, the tradition was that the boys got the ribs, the thighs, and the shoulders, which were considered the noble parts, while the girls were given the remaining, and less noble, cuts of meat' (Faduma 2008: 73). However, Xaawa's father loved her dearly and made sure she ate with her brothers, sharing a large common wooden bowl. 'Waa ii Gunuunucahayaa' was made in response to the squabbles over a piece of meat between her and her youngest brother Xasan.

Gabay was a form which, at that time, was frequently used for serious matters in the context of kin groups, particularly in conflict resolution between lineages. Here, we see that the young poet has chosen to use this form rather than others, such as the *buraambuur* or work songs. Indeed, in this poem, there is a dispute. Yet the dispute is confined to the family, not between clans. Why did she choose the *gabay* form rather than the *buraambur* or another form? Clues can be found in the text itself. In this next section, I shall explore the language of the poem and attempt to answer this question.

In the first line, she says: *Waa guridambayskii waxaas, ii gabyahayaaye* (He is the youngest of the house, that thing who is making *gabay* to me). It is a straightforward opening line that tells us the poem is about her youngest brother. If we examine the language carefully, we find that the subject of this line is *waxaas* (that thing), which is quite striking as it is a dismissive term. By using such a term at the beginning of the poem, she is setting a certain tone. She does not use her brother's name, nor does she refer to him as 'brother'. Instead, she calls him 'that thing', followed by another description, *guridambayskii* (youngest of the house). This word further shapes the tone by emphasising her brother's young age. We might interpret this as a way of highlighting the male sense of entitlement towards the girls in the family. Then in the *hooris*, we find the indirect object pronoun *i* (me) within the *ii* (to me) cluster, which reinforces her personal perspective in the poem.

The poet continues her *gabay* with three more lines describing her youngest brother's actions. In each of these lines, we find at least one first-person object pronoun, *i* (me). The verb *gabyahayaaye* (making *gabay*), used here as an alliterating word, could refer to her brother actually making a real *gabay,* or may serve as a metaphorical description of his speech rather than its literal meaning. Through this metaphor, we might say that she frames their interaction as an exchange of *gabay* poems, much like those used in conflict resolution between clans at the time. Her response, delivered in the form of a *gabay* poem, thus speaks

for itself as a fitting reply in such a situation.

In the second line, she says: *waa ii gunuunucahayaa, godobna ii qaadye* (He is grumbling at me and brought a grudge against me). The verb in the *hojis, gunuunucahayaa* (grumbling), once again in the present progressive tense, clarifies what she meant by *gabayahayaaye* (making *gabay*) in the previous line. In these two half-lines, she uses dynamic verbs in the present progressive tense to describe what she actually saw and heard during her quarrel with her brother.

Then in the *hooris,* the tense shifts. The verb *qaadye* (took, brought) is in the past tense, indicating a completed action. Here, she frames those actions of her brother as *godobna* (a grudge) that he *qaadye* (took, brought) against her. Rather than focusing on a specific physical action, this *hooris* reveals how the poet interprets her brother's state of mind, thus bringing the tension between them to the forefront. The term *godob* is commonly used in the context of conflict resolution in Somali society (see Rashiid 2009 for discussion of this concept and a collection of poems on conflict and peace in Somali society). By using this term, the poet further reinforces the theme of conflict that was established in the opening lines of the poem.

After recounting what actually happened, the poet presents an imagined image of her brother in the next two lines: *Sidii niman ganbiya yuu cawada, guure ii yahaye* (Like men who are fighting in the night, he is one who comes upon me). She compares her brother to fighters, and the enemy 'he' (*uu* with a focus marker[40]) fights against is 'me' (*i*). This image continues the use of terms associated with conflict in a broader context. The reference to men is also quite direct, as she explicitly uses the word *niman* (men), foreshadowing the attitudes and comments she would express in her later poems as an adult.

Then in the fourth line, she says: *Oo waa i gawrici lahaa, taydi baan geline* (And he would have slaughtered me, but my [time] did not enter). The modal verb *lahaa* (would have), combined with *gawrici* (to slaughter), intensifies the depiction of the tension between the 'he' and 'me', pushing it to a climax. The use of the term *gawrici* (the infinitive form of *gawrac*) is particularly striking, as it refers to the slaughtering of animals for food. Here, it is employed metaphorically to signify killing, which is especially powerful given the context of a sibling quarrel.

From 'making *gabay* to me', to 'brought a grudge against me', to 'a night-time traveller who comes upon me', and finally to 'he would have slaughtered me', the poet progressively intensifies the portrayal

[40] The focus marker here is a shortened version of *ayaa* with the subject verbal pronoun -*uu*: *yuu* instead of *ayuu* which would break the metrical pattern if it was used.

of her brother's actions. Line by line, the growing sense of threat he poses to her becomes increasingly vivid and pronounced.

The next line shifts from the use of imagery to language that directly reflects reality. The poet clearly describes the situation that led to the poem – this is the first time the reader hears explicitly about the circumstances that prompted her to compose it. *Geestiisa weel uu ku jirey, oo ganfaha haysto* (At his side, a vessel he was in, and of which he holds the edge of the mouth). This echoes Faduma's introduction, where she explains that the poem was inspired by a quarrel over food. Interestingly, this line is not a complete sentence but rather a relative clause, creating an enjambment that draws the listener's attention to the following and final line of this short *gabay* poem.

Having imagined the harm her brother might do to her, the young poet finally asks: *Muxuu iigu goodinahayaa, gurey docdiisiiye*? (Why is he threatening me? He has collected his share). In this final line, there is a third person subject pronoun *uu* (he) in the word *muxuu* (why), the first person object pronoun *i* (me) within the cluster *iigu*, and a third person possessive pronoun suffix *iis* (his) in *docdiisiiye* (his side, his share). We see that the final two lines form a single complete sentence, whereas the first four lines are all independent main clauses. Notably, in each sentence, the poet includes the first-person object pronoun *i*, often combined with the preposition *u* in the *ii* cluster, which in English translation can take various forms such as 'to me', 'against me', 'at me', or 'upon me'.

Having analysed the poem, I shall now discuss specifically the use of pronouns. Throughout the poem, the verbal subject pronoun *uu* is consistently used to refer to her brother, while all first-person references to the poet herself appear as the object pronoun *i* (me). The poet describes what she sees, hears, and feels that her brother does – or would do – to her. By positioning her brother as the grammatical subject, the poet, despite recounting her own experience, appears only in the object position.

For instance, she states that her brother *godobna ii qaadye* (brought a grudge against me), yet she does not explicitly convey how this makes her feel. Similarly, she declares *waa i gawrici lahaa* (he would have slaughtered me), yet her response – *taydi baan geline* (my time for death didn't enter) – offers little resistance to such a powerful verb as 'slaughter'. Even if this response were considered equally strong, the phrase *taydi* (my time) suggests that her fate is determined not by herself, but by God. In other words, her agency remains absent.

The agents in these sentences are external: her brother and God. Notably, there is not a single sentence in which the poet herself takes the

subject position to directly express her feelings. Instead, she continually describes what 'he' does to 'me', without revealing how she feels, what actions she takes, or what she desires to do in response. While it is undeniably her voice that narrates the poem, it does not assert itself as an active subject. Rather, her voice remains passive, not in a grammatical sense, but in terms of the poem's lyric voice. She is portrayed as the recipient of her brother's actions, reinforcing her role as the object within the poem's narrative.

We must remember that this poem was originally composed as an oral piece and was not written down at the time. Everyone who first heard it would have experienced it directly from the poet herself. How many others may have recited it afterwards remains unknown. Unlike some of the well-known poems by men of the past – often recited repeatedly by others – it is unlikely that a poem like this would have been widely shared. It is almost certain that it would not have been recited by men, for reasons discussed elsewhere in this book.

Moreover, this is a deeply personal poem by a young woman. While it is possible that it was recited by other young women within Xaawa's circle of family and acquaintances, it still stands out as a more intimate piece, lacking the 'transcendental' quality that Said Samatar (1982: 58) attributes to *maanso* poetry – the ability to be performed in various contexts while retaining its resonance. In this sense, it is Xaawa's own voice that was heard most directly when she first recited the poem, rather than an abstract lyric voice. She is the agent of the poem, both as its composer and initial performer. However, within the narrative itself, she is not the active agent of the actions described; instead, it is her brother who occupies the active subject position. Thus, while Xaawa is the creator of the poem, she portrays herself as passive within it.

The poem was made after a squabble with her brother. Yet it is neither a counterattack nor even a strong complaint; rather, it takes the form of a question – *Muxuu iigu goodinahayaa*? (Why is he threatening me?). This rhetorical choice further reflects her passivity. Her emotions – whether fear, anger, or grievance – are conveyed indirectly through the descriptions of what 'he' does to 'me', rather than being explicitly stated. It could be argued that the passivity of the poetic voice mirrors the passivity of the poet herself within her family. As Faduma notes in the introduction, in patriarchal Somali society, gender inequality is deeply entrenched; male family members are given the best cuts of meat, while female members receive the leftovers. Even though Xaawa was allowed to eat with her brothers, this decision was made by her father, underscoring her lack of agency. The young poet thus grew up in a passive position within both her family and a society where male priv-

ilege is firmly established.

This broader context helps to explain why she chose the *gabay* form rather than *buraambur* or another poetic genre. For the young girl, the argument with her brother held the same significance as a conflict between clans. Although the immediate scene described in the poem is limited in scope, when considered against the wider societal backdrop, it reveals a deeper struggle – a conflict between a female family member and a privileged youngest son. Through this altercation and the way she articulates it, we gain insight not only into her personal experience but also into the broader condition of women and girls in relation to men and boys within Somali society.

3.10. *'Awr Qabbiran Maahi' (I Am Not a Bridled Camel)*

In 1943, at the age of 23, Xaawa made this poem, 'Awr Qabbiran Maahi' (I Am Not a Bridled Camel). By that time, she had already experienced much in her life. This poem was her response to her second husband, who subjected her to severe abuse and sought to obstruct her efforts to obtain a divorce. He attempted to intimidate her by threatening to take another wife, thereby labelling her a *naakiro* – a Somali term describing a woman who rejects her husband sexually but remains neither divorced nor free to remarry (see Kapteijns 1999: 42). Humiliated by her husband's actions and resolute in her desire to leave him, Xaawa composed the following *gabay* (Faduma 2008: 130).

1 Inkastoo albaabbada qafilan, laygu soo qariyo
2 Oo qolalka gaalshire wax badan, gaalo igu quuddo
3 Naag kale haddaad qaadatoo, qaalliga aad geyso
4 I qabi maysid oo maanta waa, kaa quluub go'ay e[41]
5 Adigaa isqaafinahayee, waa ku qaadacay e
6 Awr kuu qabbiran maahiyoo, reeryo qaayibay e
7 Qushigayga weeyoo wallaan, qabanayaa meele
8 Abadkayba uma qaawanaan, maro aan qaataaye
9 Qalabkaan sameeyaa ka badan, qadiyo dheeraad e
10 Qalbi gaabanaayey muxuu, aniga ii quuray[42]

[41] The original punctuation mark in this line in Faduma (2008) was between *maanta* and *waa*, however, it is not where the caesura lies. I have changed it to keep with the actual caesura according to the metrical pattern.

[42] I have moved the punctuation mark from before *muxuu* to after it to keep with the actual caesura in this line.

1 Even though I am hidden by the locked doors
2 And infidels feed me in the rooms of a colonial jail for a long time
3 But if you take another woman and take her to the *qadi*[43]
4 You will not have me [as your wife] and today there is a broken heart
5 It is you who has put on airs, I have cut you off
6 I am not a burden camel tethered for you and which families have taken for granted
7 It is my resentment and I will go wherever I please
8 Never have I been naked and needed to be clothed by others
9 The utensils I make are more than my daily meal
10 O the heartless man! Why did he disrespect me?

Men's authority over women, and women's obedience and forbearance, are commonly portrayed, and reinforced in Somali oral literature, which is predominantly composed by men (see Kapteijns 1999). Verbal and physical abuse are also widely practised by men to assert their power and ensure their wives' compliance. Women's responses to these experiences are documented in the oral traditions they themselves compose. In her study of Somali women's work songs, Lidwien Kapteijns observes that in the female genre *buraambur*, as well as in many categories of women's work songs, Somali women often explicitly challenge male authority and reject the expectation of obedience. In this poem, we see Xaawa Jibriil resisting through the form of *gabay*.

A key difference between this *gabay* poem and the earlier piece lies in the time in which they were composed. This poem was made in 1943, a period when Somalis were under colonial rule and actively engaged in nationalist movements to fight for independence. Xaawa draws on the imagery of colonialism to reflect her oppression at the hands of the men she addresses. Another notable contrast is in how she expresses her thoughts and feelings. In this poem, the poet uses direct address to convey a message to her husband. While in the first poem her voice was presented as the passive object, here the lyric voice – closely aligned with the poet's own – asserts itself as the subject.

This shift is most salient in lines 5-7. Line 5 begins with the independent pronoun *adiga* (you), which emphasises the subject, followed by the statement *baa isqaafinahayee*[44], meaning 'acted importantly' or 'put on airs'. As a consequence, the poet declares, *waa ku qaadacaye* (I am cutting you off). Grammatically, the poet does not use a first-per-

[43] The term *qadi* refers to an Islamic legal expert who will transact the marriage.

[44] The focus marker *baa* is contracted and becomes part of the word it is focusing. The word *adigaa* in this line is actually made up of the pronoun *adiga* and the focus marker *baa*.

son verbal subject pronoun in combination with the mood classifier *waa*, yet from the context, it is clear that the subject is the voice of the poet herself. The object, however, is explicitly expressed through the pronoun *ku*, the second-person object pronoun, which here refers to the husband. By stating this, the poet makes it clear that she has decided to cut her husband off, and she conveys this message through the form of *gabay*. She then asserts the line which is used as the title of the poem: 'I am not a bridled camel'.

The Somalis attach great importance to camels, and burden camels are especially valued when they display patience and dutifully serve the household in a calm and composed manner. Thus, the image Xaawa has chosen is highly significant. The alliterating word in this half-line is the adjective *qabbiran*, meaning 'tied up (of a camel)', which, combined with *awr* (burden camel) and *kuu* (for you), conveys the message: 'I am not a burden camel tethered for you'.

Often tied up and laden with heavy household equipment, the burden camel here symbolises the obedience, endurance and hard work expected of a married woman. What exacerbates the poet's burden is her husband's humiliation and abuse. By asserting, 'I am not a burden camel', she is rejecting these expectations. In line 7, she further asserts her autonomy and determination to leave, demonstrating that she is no longer passive. She is resolute in making her own decisions.

While Somali oral literature has traditionally encouraged men to ensure women remain without independent wealth as a means of control (Kapteijns 1999: 40), Xaawa challenges this notion by asserting her ability to produce. She highlights her competence in crafting household utensils, implying not only her ability to sustain herself through her skills but also her potential to sell these items and achieve financial independence. This notion of self-sufficiency stands in contrast to the values of the male-dominated society in which she lives.

Kapteijns (1999: 75) finds 'speech drawing on the power of women's overwhelming private passion and pain' to be a potent form of women's literary self-expression. In a world where their thoughts and speech are often trivialised, Somali women have consistently composed poetry reflecting their experiences of love, jealousy, anger, and sorrow in their relationships with men. Axmed (1993: 2) suggests that *buraambur* poems addressing the dynamics between men and women were 'conventionally considered personal secrets that cannot be exposed to a third party,' and thus were not recorded for his publications on Somali poetry. Consequently, when a woman articulates her intimate gender experiences and emotions in a *buraambur* poem, it remains confined to the private sphere of husband and wife or close fe-

male confidantes (Kapteijns 1999: 75).

Yet here, we have a valuable testimony of a *gabay* poem in which a woman bravely and resolutely confronts her husband, challenging the ways in which oral texts have traditionally stereotyped the female gender. As mentioned earlier, the *gabay* genre addresses serious matters and has historically been the preferred form for conflict resolution. By choosing this genre, Xaawa has wielded the most powerful verbal weapon at her disposal to speak out and deliver a firm message to her husband: 'I am leaving you because I am an independent woman, not a burden camel.'

Unlike what Axmed and Kapteijns have observed, as noted above, Xaawa's poem is not confined to the private sphere. Instead, she makes a bold public statement in the most prominent and prestigious poetic form available – *gabay*. In this poem, we also hear a much stronger and more confident voice compared to the earlier poem composed in response to her brother. The use of pronouns highlights this transformation directly. Her agency is prominently expressed in the second poem, which stands in stark contrast to the passivity evident in the first.

3.11. *'Waa noo Xarrago' (For the Sake of Elegance)*

The next poem I shall look at in this chapter is one that Xaawa made in 1952, at the age of 32. By this time, she had dedicated herself to the political struggle for national independence, led by the Somali Youth League (SYL). During this period, she composed several poems promoting nationalism and urging clans to cease their infighting. I will look at more of these works in detail in the next chapter.

While many Somali women in the urban capital were enthusiastically joining the nationalist movements led by the SYL, their growing confidence and active presence at meetings were met with disapproval from many male members of the organisation. These men were particularly troubled by the women's increasing self-assurance, their omnipresence at political gatherings, and, most notably, their adoption of modern fashionable attire – especially the visible presence of bras beneath their clothing (Faduma 2008: 90). The *gabay* by Xaawa that follows is a direct response to an anonymous male critic who had composed a *gabay* mocking the activist women for wearing bras to support what he disparagingly referred to as 'sagging breasts' (*Ibid*).

1 Waa noo xarrago naasahaan, kor u xiraynaaye
2 Xornimada hablihii haystay baa, xeerkan soo rogay e

3 Markuu xabadka joogiyo hadduu, nabasta xaabaayo
4 Xubbi ninkii yaqaan naaska waa, lagu xanteeyaaye
5 Oday xiisoloowaa[45] arkee, lama xusuusteene
6 Xifaalada aad sheegteen afkaan, kala xishoonnaaye
7 Idinba xubinta waad leedihiin, xagal ka daacaaye
8 Xaq miyaad ku hadasheen ragyohow, waad na xamateene.

1 For the sake of elegance, we lift up our breasts
2 Young women who have freedom took on this way [of dressing].
3 Whether they are up on the chest or sweeping lower down
4 For a man who knows about love, one touches him through the breast
5 If an old man didn't show his interest [in a poem], no one
[of us wearing the bras] would have been remarked upon
6 We as women are embarrassed to reply from the mouths
7 But you also have an organ that loses its vigour
8 O you men, did you speak truthfully? No, you slandered us[46].

Traditionally, in Somali poetic combat, a poet would use the same alliteration employed by their opponent to counterattack. Xaawa follows this rule in her poem. A distinct feature of this piece is that she does not speak solely for herself but for all the women who were offended. This collective representation is evident in her use of the first-person plural pronoun.

The word *noo* in the first line is a cluster composed of the exclusive *na* (us), emphasising female identity and excluding men, and the preposition *u* (for). Xaawa further clarifies in line 6, stating, *Xifaalada aad sheegteen afkaan, kala xishoonnaaye* (We as women are embarrassed to reply from the mouth). She asserts that many women were offended by the comments, but chose not to respond only because they feel embarrassed to address such an issue directly. However, Xaawa is acting like the spokesperson here, much like the male poets making *gabay* poems to declare war on behalf of their clans. She delivers a powerful counterattack, addressing not just one man but men in general, as indicated by the vocative *ragyohow* (O, you men) in the final line.

However, we might consider both poets as representatives of their respective gender communities, engaged in a debate over the political matter of women wearing bras. Body shaming, especially the shaming of breasts, is a challenge that women in patriarchal societies frequently

[45] The word *xiisoloowaa* is written *xiisolowaa* in the original. I have changed it here as it should be a long vowel according to the metre.

[46] Faduma (2008: 137). Translation by Ruixuan Li.

confront. Breasts symbolise femininity, power, and sexuality – concepts that can be perceived as both threatening and grotesque in patriarchal frameworks. Women have often been burdened with societal norms that compel them to repress their femininity in order to conform. In this context of systemic oppression, Xaawa courageously stood up for her fellow women, many of whom felt too shy to respond directly. She not only openly defended their right to wear bras by framing it as a matter of 'freedom', but she also boldly retaliated with humour and satire. In line 7, she targets men's genitalia – an audacious move within a genre traditionally dominated by men, the *gabay*.

This poem is deeply empowering, as the poet is asserting that wearing or not wearing a bra is a woman's personal choice, not a social expectation imposed by men. This is an assertion of bodily autonomy that challenges entrenched gender norms. These verses embody Somali women's interpretation of their own identity and sexuality, which naturally contests the expectations normalised by men. The poem is particularly striking in its directness, openly addressing body parts that are typically not discussed between men and women. However, Xaawa also acknowledges that not all men share the same patriarchal mindset as the critic she addresses. This recognition appears in line 4, where she references a man who 'knows about love'. Notably, the agent of expressing love in this line is conveyed through the impersonal subject pronoun *la*, referring to women collectively.

3.12. *'Jawaab Talo Guur' (A Marriage Proposal)*

The final poem by Xaawa Jibriil that I will look at is 'Jawaab Talo Guur', composed in 1970 in response to a marriage proposal when she was around 50 years old. In this poem, she again conveys a personal message, but the tone is markedly different from the previous ones discussed above.

1 Dhafoorrada cirraa iiga taal, oo dheehme timihiiye[47]
2 Dhaqan hadday addunyadu lahayd, cunay dhankaygiiye
3 Dhaqmaaddii haweenkiyo ma helo, dhiigga caadada e
4 Waxaan dheelliyaa waa kuwaan, dhalay dhashoodiiye[48]

[47] In Faduma (2008), an *oo* appears after the comma, which disrupts the metre. As I have not found a recorded version to confirm the intended line, I have omitted the word to maintain metrical consistency. Its removal does not alter the meaning of the line.

[48] In the original text this line ends in *-ee* but that is not correct and not metrical, so I have

5 Dhaqdhaqaaqa ii haray ma rabo, dhib iyo jiidjiide
6 Dhawaaqaaga iga daa talaan, dhoobtay waa hore e.

1 Grey hair is at the temples for me and the hair is thinning
2 If the world had a culture, I have eaten my share
3 I don't find the age of child-bearing and the regular blood[49]
4 The ones I play with are those I gave birth to, their offspring
5 [In] the movement that is left to me, I don't want difficulty and pulling
6 Leave your asking away from me, the responses I piled up are the same as before

In this poem, she refuses the offer of marriage but does so in a way that does not criticise the man. In other poems she has directly criticised men (or her young brother), but in this poem, there is no direct criticism. In lines 1-4, she describes herself and her situation, focusing on the qualities and characteristics of a woman who is older and concentrating on the physical aspects of ageing. The last two lines of the poem are the only ones where we hear how she feels about the man. In line 5, she states that she does not want 'difficulty and pulling', which implies that marriage to this man would bring such challenges. Having already experienced difficulties in previous marriages, she does not wish to endure them again. This line does not mention or address the man directly; she continues speaking about her own feelings in the first person, serving as a bridge between the earlier lines and the final line.

The last line of the poem begins with an imperative clause: *Dhawaaqaaga iga daa* (Leave your announcement/asking away from me). The verb *daa* (leave something alone), used with *ka* is typically employed when someone wants another to stop doing something, conveying an irritated tone. In the remainder of the last line, she says *talaan dhoobtay waa hore e*. The verb *dhoobo* meaning 'to pile up, to make many', suggests that she has already answered the man numerous times and is now frustrated by his persistent asking. The imperative *ka daa* (leave it alone) reinforces this irritation.

Looking back at Xaawa's poems in this chapter, we see an evolution – from a complaint about her brother, to a serious message to her husband, to a counterattack against a male poet's assault on women's bod-

edited it. The final *-e* which is at the end of many lines of *gabay* poems is a short syllable which has no meaning but is needed to make the line metrical. I have also changed the position of the comma from between *waa* and *kuwaan* to after *kuwaan* so that it is in keeping with the caesura.

[49] This refers to menstruation.

ies, and finally, to this poem, where she acknowledges her growth in both age and wisdom. Here, Xaawa reflects on her identity as an older woman. Kapteijns (1999: 69) notes that 'Old women (*habro*) do not figure prominently in the oral literature surveyed here. When they are portrayed, it is not in a positive light.' Old women are often depicted as sick, useless or unable to take on responsibilities, and are stigmatised as angry, bitter, and envious in male literature. For example, in a camel watering song mentioned by Kapteijns (*Ibid*), the herder sings that an old woman who belittles the work of camel husbandry has no right to speak, as she has never been involved in milking or watering them. This portrayal contrasts sharply with women's own literature. In the poems presented in this chapter, there are no negative stereotypes about ageing or targeting older men for their age. In Caasha Luul's 'Calaf', which we examined earlier, while criticising a certain type of man, the poet also says: *Cimri kuma canbaareeynayoo, waa cawo Ilaahe* (Age is God-given and I don't want to censure him for it).

In this chapter, we have examined several moments in Xaawa's life through the lens of her poetry. As a female poet, Xaawa has used the traditionally male genre to express her private experiences and emotions in relationships with men, while also asserting women's collective perspectives and values against the patriarchal world. Although the gender-based realities of Somali women's lives have been, and remain, harsh, one lesson we can learn from Xaawa's experience and poetry is that, no matter how the male-dominated world tries to silence them, women will not stop fighting. In the next chapter, I will examine some poems by Xaawa, as well as other women poets, on the theme of politics. We will see the female genre, the *buraambur*, being used in poems that address serious political issues.

Chapter 4

POETRY BY SOMALI WOMEN ABOUT POLITICS AND SOCIAL ISSUES

4.1. *From Private Voices to Public Advocacy*

In the previous chapter, we looked at women's poems about their relationships with men. Most of these poems were made on an individual level, serving as public expressions of the poet's personal experiences and private thoughts. Some were crafted with precision to address specific occasions, sometimes a conflict within a household, in which the poet directly or indirectly spoke to or about a man or men collectively. Others communicated particular aspects of their personal philosophies regarding love and romantic relationships, creating relevance for the audience and resonating with them.

In this chapter, I will explore poems that address political and social issues. These poems possess a distinct feature that sets them apart from those discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike the personal reflections seen earlier, political poems are composed with the aim of persuading large masses of people. Their messages are not solely rooted in the poet's personal experiences and values but are instead aligned with the collective beliefs and aspirations of a group, striving to achieve a common political goal.

Somali poetry has long been more than a cherished form of artistic expression and popular entertainment. The renowned Somali scholar Said S. Samatar (1982) asserts that Somali poetry is both the language and the vehicle of politics, serving as an important source of Somali history, 'just as the printed and televised word performs a similar function in the West'. According to historian Lee Cassanelli (2009: 10), while colonial and foreign scholars, as well as Western-educated Somalis, have written about Somali society in various European languages and western academic traditions, Somali poetry also serves to be a major stream of intellectual discourse through which Somalis record and reflect on their history and society.

In Cassanelli's words, 'poetry was a discourse that took place

among Somalis, and as such, it gives us unique access to popular opinions about small and great events that mattered at the community level' (*Ibid*: 12). Historians have observed that in times of unrest or dramatic societal change, poetic production has increased significantly as people sought to debate pressing issues. For example, during the Dervish wars and their aftermath (1900-1930), as Sayyid Maxamad Cabdille Xasan used poetry as a weapon to rally Somalis against colonial invasion, there was an 'explosion in poetic production' (*Ibid*: 10).

For as long as Somali poetry has existed, women have composed poems addressing social and political matters. Beyond using this cherished traditional art form to bring entertainment to their daily lives and to voice the unspoken within male-dominated households, Somali women have also documented historical events during times of significant societal change from their own perspectives. Ingiriis (2015: 376) notes that Somali women 'had absorbed local politics earlier than many of their peers around the globe'. In tracing their role in the decolonisation and post-colonial movements of modern Somalia, he found that, since the 1940s, Somali women had been actively involved in numerous grassroots associations and social movements, including gender-related initiatives (*Ibid*).

While women joined political movements with the same enthusiasm as their male counterparts, poetry played a significant part in their activism. Somali women activists expressed their political beliefs not only within their small circles of female family members and friends but also to male and mixed audiences at public gatherings and rallies during the political struggle. They did so using the *buraambur* genre in which they were most proficient, as well as genres such as *gabay* or *geeraar,* alongside new poetic forms that emerged with societal changes. Their poems provide unique accounts of conflicts and transformations in Somali history, offering insights into women's historical consciousness and responses to these events. Although their voices have largely been excluded from official narratives of state and nation-building, their contributions demonstrate that Somali women's poetry was far from 'trivial' or 'less important', as perceived by many conservative, patriarchal men.

In this chapter, I will examine a selection of poems made at different times, following a chronological order – beginning with those from the independence movement (1940-1960), continuing with those produced in the post-independence period up to the end of Siyaad Barre's regime (1960-1991), and concluding with poetry from the post-1991 era, following the collapse of the state and the subsequent Somali diaspora.

The political upheavals of the mid-20th century brought about social transformations that laid the foundation for the contestation of gender

norms and increased women's participation in the political arena. In the 1940s and 1950s, Somali women activists used poetry to recount their experiences in the fight against colonialism, presenting themselves as patriotic Somalis rather than merely nomadic wives. Their voices were not confined to mobilising the masses to join the nationalist campaign; they also actively advocated for peace in response to clan divisions during the independence struggle.

Despite their active involvement, Somali women did not receive the recognition they deserved for their contributions to the nationalist struggles following independence. The Siyaad Barre regime, which came to power promising equal opportunities for women, ultimately failed to deliver on its commitments. Many women poets courageously criticised men's political greed and lack of accountability, even addressing the military dictator directly, and called on women to persist in their struggle for equal political participation and women's rights.

In 1991, the outbreak of the Somali Civil War divided the country. As they witnessed the collapse of the state and the displacement of the people, women poets not only continued to lament and criticise the violence while calling for peace, but also addressed the failure of Somali society and the challenges faced by the Somali diaspora. Both poets within Somali territories and those in displaced communities expressed their deep concerns and anxieties through poetry. A growing number of young women poets, raised in Western countries, have also engaged with these themes, often composing their poems in other languages.

Somali women's poetry on political and social issues demonstrates that their identity was not confined to marriage, motherhood, and the home. They refused to conform to stereotypes based on their gender, instead speaking up as active members of the nation – individuals who cared about their country and its people, who fought against colonialism alongside men, and who voiced concerns on behalf of both men and women. The concept of *Soomaalinnimo* (Somaliness), the shared sense of Somali identity, is as evident and powerful in women's poetry as it is in men's. However, what distinguishes Somali women's political poetry from that of men is its strong emphasis on female solidarity. This sense of female bonding, seen in work songs discussed in previous chapters – whether women weaving a *kebed* mat together or a mother singing her worries to her daughter – is equally present in their political poetry.

In the political arena, the Somali Women's Association, a women's section within the SYL, was established in 1951. It provided a dedicated space for women activists to belong, collaborate, and mediate gatherings exclusively for themselves. Both the association and its female

members were referred to as 'Sisters', emphasising their collective identity as women. Some of these Sisters used poetry to make their voices heard in the nationalist movements. Through their poems, women poets offered a distinct perspective on conflicts and struggles – one rooted in their experiences as women – and this sense of female solidarity is evident in their lines.

They spoke about how political upheavals affected women specifically. During the colonial period, Somali women poets called on their fellow women to actively participate in the independence movements. Zainab (1991) and Ingiriis (2015: 379) note that these female activists used poetry as a unifying tool to bring together women from both urban and rural areas. After independence, poetry continued to serve as a means of advocating for women's rights within the government apparatus. For example, in 'Gabdhihii Isku Duubnaa' (Sisters), the poet addresses *gabdhahay* (my girls), highlighting how women contributed to the fight for independence but were ultimately 'forgotten' after its achievement (Faduma 2008: 154).

This emphasis on collective female identity sets women's poetry apart from that of men. While male poets occasionally refer to men collectively, they do not identify themselves as a politically active collective group based solely on their sex or gender, as women poets do. This female solidarity fosters collaboration and shared purpose among women. Furthermore, in these poems, women are not portrayed solely through their familial roles – such as wife, daughter, or mother – but are instead positioned within a broader female collective, foregrounding their shared political goals and rights. This stands in contrast to the poems examined in previous chapters.

During periods of dramatic societal change, when gendered divisions of labour and social norms were challenged by urgent political and social crises, a collective consciousness of female empowerment emerged as a unifying force in women's poetry. Alongside expressions of solidarity, many poems also critique men's actions, reflecting a degree of feminist consciousness in opposition to patriarchy. Male faults – such as waging clan wars, obstructing nationalist agendas, and chewing *qaad* – are frequently highlighted.

Gender is explicitly represented in these poems. For example, in 'Xaawaleeyeey' (O Daughters of Eve), the poet appeals to women, referring to them as 'daughters of Eve', urging them to 'end this conflict they [men] have raised' (Faduma 2008: 188). In keeping with the combative tradition of Somali poetry, male poets responded with their own compositions, rejecting women's activism and criticising the so-called modernisation process. Ingiriis (2015: 382) observes that male poets

expressed concern over women's attempts to 'act like men' and saw their activism as a threat to social stability. In response, women poets countered these narratives, using their poetry to defend their cause and assert their right to political participation.

However, it is important to acknowledge that these pioneering women activists, whose voices were amplified through poetry, represented only a small number of progressives in urban centres. Their experiences did not necessarily reflect the realities of women in rural areas, who remained largely focused on survival in harsh environments. For many rural women, daily life revolved around childcare, household responsibilities, and tending to livestock, leaving little opportunity for political activism.

In examining the progressive poetry of these women, my intention is not to romanticise their social status. As Ingiriis (2015: 390) points out, although women played a crucial role during the nationalist political struggles and the early years of post-colonial Somalia, 'they lost whatever gains they had achieved in those days'. Nevertheless, the poems demonstrate that Somali women continued to express themselves in various ways and voices. While their poetry did not fundamentally overturn the patriarchal structures of Somali society, it provided a platform for negotiating, contesting, and resisting gender norms as women engaged with political discourse and shaped their social environments.

The poems examined in this chapter consist of *buraambur* and *gabay* poems. According to Zainab (1994: 200), *buraambur* 'played a crucial, if not fundamental, role in shaping Somali society, educating the public, conveying messages on political and social affairs, and raising awareness'. During the women's struggle for Somali independence and in the post-independence period, it was 'generally used to exhort the public to take up or abandon important causes, to foster a common consciousness – whether for the national project or for clan solidarity, depending on the context – to extol one's clan lineage during wedding ceremonies, and to eulogise respected individuals upon their passing', as noted by Ingiriis (2015: 379). Zainab (1991: 50) also notes that while members of the Somali Youth League (SYL) were imprisoned, men composed *buraambur* and memorised women's *buraambur* poems. However, they would only recite them in the absence of other men, highlighting the gendered perceptions associated with the genre.

In this chapter, I will look at poems made by Somali women in both genres. The manner in which these poems were created and performed varies greatly. Some were composed as immediate responses to a friend's concerns, while others became popular chants during street demonstrations, committed to memory by many. Some are shorter in

length, while others are more elaborate compositions, possibly crafted with the aid of writing. Regardless of their form, both genres served as powerful tools for persuasion, appeal, inspiration, and social change. I will explore what the poets convey in their poems and the poetic techniques they employ to enhance their rhetorical impact.

4.2. *Poems in the Struggle for Independence*

In the 1940s and 1950s, Somalis actively fought against colonial domination. The first modern political party in Somali history, the Somali Youth League (SYL), initially known as the Somali Youth Club, was founded in Mogadishu in 1943 and played a crucial role in the nation's path to independence. Although comprehensive documented histories of Somali women are lacking, it is well established that women played a pivotal role in the nationalist movement from the outset.

They not only joined the party in large numbers and held office but also recruited new members, sacrificed their scant personal financial resources – such as jewellery – organised fundraising activities, and crafted sweaters, traditional Somali hats for men, and utensils for the campaign. Additionally, they provided food and shelter to young nationalists, reflecting their traditional roles in the countryside. These young men were often denied jobs due to their political affiliations. Women also played a key role in organising and securing resources for major congresses and demonstrations. Moreover, women composed poetry to raise awareness and boost morale at rallies and demonstrations. They translated the lofty ideals of party programmes into tangible action. Their unwavering dedication even led some to pay the ultimate price for their convictions, facing imprisonment or even death (Kapteijns 2009, Zainab 1991).

In 1952, two female members of the SYL, Raha Ayaanle Guled and Halima Godane, formed the first women's organisation, the Somali Women's Association (SWA). This organisation, also referred to as 'Sisters', was established to create a space of belonging and to facilitate gatherings exclusively for women activists (Ingiriis 2015: 381). A few years later, in 1959, Raha Ayaanle Guled became the first female member to be accepted into the SYL central committee (*Ibid*). Ingiriis notes that Somali women's movements during this period 'were the drivers of once overlooked social transformation that almost revolutionised society to develop common national feeling and unity' (*Ibid*: 378).

Traditionally, women only performed poetry at weddings, where both men and women participated. However, these pioneering women

activists defied social norms by taking part in political events, using poetry as a powerful tool of expression. According to Faduma (2008: 88), these women 'formed the backbone of the League'. Yet, their public performances of poetry were met with severe criticism from family, friends, and the wider public (Zainab 1991: 52). In a male-dominated society, their political engagement transgressed the culturally prescribed boundaries of 'good conduct' expected of women. Breaking this cultural taboo came at a significant personal cost. Some married women involved in the movement faced divorce, while unmarried women were stigmatised as 'loose women', disowned by their families, and, in some cases, never married (*Ibid*).

One of the most symbolic and heroic figures in the Somali struggle for independence was a woman called Xaawo Cusmaan Taako. As a member of the Somali Youth League (SYL), she was one of many women who participated alongside men in a rally in Mogadishu in January 1948. The rally opposed the return of Italian rule after the Second World War, coinciding with the visit of a United Nations fact-finding mission sent to help determine the future governance of the territory. According to Ingiriis (2015: 380), 'women composed the vast majority of people who came out in support of the SYL's message of self-determination'. Xaawo Taako was among these women.

The rally turned violent, with clashes erupting between protesters and the authorities, who had the support of some Somali collaborators. During the fighting, Xaawo was killed. While casualties occurred on both sides, her death quickly elevated her to a symbolic figure in the struggle for Somali independence. As Ingiriis (2015: 381) notes, 'action-driven incidents like that of Taako changed local perceptions of women as a weak force, but did not build up chances to gain access to decision-making spheres'.

In 1972, twenty-four years after her death, the Supreme Revolutionary Council of General Maxamed Siyaad Barre passed a resolution to build several monuments throughout Mogadishu to honour symbolic nationalist figures and events in Somali history (Ali 1997: 4). Among these was a statue of Xaawo Osman Taako, depicted with a sword and stone in hand, permanently inscribed in the collective historical consciousness of the Somali people at a key intersection in the heart of the capital city.

In a patriarchal society where social, political, and religious authority was traditionally exercised by adult men, women were largely confined to their roles as nomadic or urban housewives and excluded from leadership positions. However, women's active participation in the nationalist movements challenged this stereotype, proving that their con-

tributions extended beyond household duties. They not only wanted to take part in political activities but also found ways to do so, with poetry serving as a powerful medium through which they could address political issues and make their voices heard on a broader scale.

The accelerated social changes in the Horn of Africa during this time also led to the emergence of new literary genres. The growing middle class, representing a new, modern way of life associated with the colonial economy, developed a new genre called *belwo,* which originated within urban communities. It derived from traditional poetry but was characterised by shorter lines, melody and the accompaniment of musical instruments (Zainab 1991: 45).

The genre was pioneered by a young man called Cabdi Deeqsi, known by his nickname 'Sinimo' – a name he earned due to his storytelling skills, which were so engaging that people likened him to a cinema. Cabdi Deeqsi worked as a lorry driver, a modern occupation at the time. According to oral tradition, *belwo* was born when his lorry broke down one day, and in his frustration, he recited the words: *Belwoy, belwooy hooy belwooy maxaa i beleeyay mooyaane* (O calamity, hey O calamity, what has caused me this calamity? I don't know). Stranded somewhere between Boorame and Djibouti in the northwest region of the Somali territories – then British Somaliland – he faced the difficulty of no established roads, a problem that persists today with the lack of tarmacked routes. Eventually rescued, Cabdi Deeqsi returned to the town of Boorame and shared his verse, which resonated with the townspeople. He and others went on to compose similar short poems and performed them collectively, leading to the creation of the *belwo* genre.

Around the same time, instrumental music was introduced to this region, with Cabdullaahi Qarshe widely credited as the first Somali to play the oud – a Middle Eastern lute. He developed a distinctive Somali playing style, and soon, *belwo* poetry was sung to musical accompaniment. This innovation was primarily an urban phenomenon and contributed to the dynamic cultural developments taking place during this period.

The *belwo* genre soon gained popularity across the northwestern regions of the Somali territories, a rise that was facilitated by the simultaneous emergence of radio broadcasting. Radio in this part of the Somali territories was established by the British in 1943, making it contemporary with the development of *belwo*. In a country where a formal writing system had yet to be introduced, radio broadcasting became a strategic tool for disseminating ideas. This period saw a convergence of various developments: the creation of a new poetic form that rapidly gained popularity, the incorporation of music, the influence of urban

settings where poetry and music thrived, and the rise of political awareness and sentiment. Parallel developments in Mogadishu and other regions further accelerated the spread of these ideas and artistic expressions.

In the early 1950s, Radio Muqdisho and Radio Hargeysa broadcast Somali women's voices for the first time (Johnson 1974: 71). A pioneering figure in this era was Khadiija Cabdullaahi Dalays, who courageously faced widespread criticism of women engaging in modern poetry. She first performed at political rallies in 1951 and later joined Radio Muqdisho in 1952. The advent of radio provided women with the opportunity to participate not only in the performance but also, at times, in the composition of *belwo* (Kapteijns 1999: 104). Initially, *belwo* was primarily composed to express themes of love and was recited by both men and women. John Johnson notes that *belwo* 'represented the beginning of a new relationship between men and women' and marked 'a move toward social equality'. This new form of poetic expression challenged traditional gender norms and provided a platform for women's voices to be heard more widely, thereby fostering a shift in social dynamics.

An important collection of poems by Somali women who played an important part in the independence struggle was compiled by Zainab Mohamed Jama. She collected, translated and analysed poetry by a group of female activists from the Somali Youth League (SYL) during the 1940s and 1950s (Zainab 1991: 43). Among the SYL women poets included in this collection are Halimo Godane, Halimo Shiil, Barni Warsame, and Timiro Ukash. Additionally, the collection examines the work of Fadumo Hersi Abbane, who, although not an SYL member in Mogadishu, was involved in the independence struggle in the northern regions. Another key figure is Xaawa Jibriil, whose poems are featured in Faduma (2008) and some of which were examined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will explore selected poems from these women and analyse how they convey their messages.

4.3. *Untitled* Buraambur *by Halimo Shiil*

I begin by examining a short *buraambur* poem composed by Halimo Shiil, presented in Zainab (1991: 46). The translation provided is my own based on my own reading of the original poem and the translation in Zainab (1991). I am also grateful to Martin Orwin for comments on the translation. It is not intended as a literary translation; rather, it seeks to offer a clearer representation of the Somali original for analytical

purposes. While my translation is based on Zainab's version and shares some similarities, I have adhered more closely to the literal meaning of the Somali text to facilitate a more precise analysis. I will not present Zainab's translations here or highlight any differences between the two versions.

In her article, Zainab does not provide the kind of analysis that I have undertaken here with the poem. She presents the poems within their historical context, allowing them to speak for themselves without offering commentary on their artistic and lyrical qualities. For instance, after presenting the poem below, Zainab simply remarks: 'In this short poem, as the occasion demanded a prompt answer, Halimo wanted to say quickly in verse to her friend what her feelings were about the struggle, and how important it was to her, so much so that she did not care if she died for the cause' (*Ibid*: 46).

In contrast, my approach – consistent with the analyses in previous chapters – examines the language in greater detail. I consider the poems not only as historical artefacts but also as literary works that exhibit lyric qualities. This perspective allows for a deeper appreciation of the poetic techniques employed by the authors and how they contribute to the overall impact of the poems.

Halimo Shiil's *buraambur* is as follows:

1 Aniga geeri iyo nololi way ii gudboonyihiin
2 Go'aan baan gaadhnay isticmaarka inaan gubnaa
3 Sharduu naga guuro gaashaanka waa la hayn
4 Guhaad iyo ciil nin qaba yaa wax gaysan jiray
5 Sharduu naga guuro gaashaanka waa la hayn

1 For me death and life are equal
2 We reached a decision that we burn the colonialism
3 On condition that it [colonialism] leaves us, one has the shield
4 A man who holds anger and resentment used to bring something about [for himself]
5 On condition that it [colonialism] leaves us, one has the shield

The first line begins with the independent first-person pronoun, *aniga* (I). In Somali, the independent pronoun is not commonly used in a sentence, and when it is, it adds emphasis to the statement or is used for focusing a pronoun. Placing it at the beginning of the line gives it even greater emphasis. Following the independent pronoun, the statement reads: *geeri iyo nololi* (death and life) *way ii gudboonyihiin* (are equal for me). From the background provided by Zainab (1991: 46), we

learn that this poem was composed as an immediate response to a friend who expressed concern about the dangers of her involvement in the independence struggle, cautioning her: 'Be careful; if you were to die now, remember you wouldn't leave any children behind'. This remark reflects gender norms in the patriarchal society, where motherhood and bearing children are seen as fulfilling a woman's purpose in life, and the absence of offspring is regarded as a misfortune.

However, Halimo's response defies this expectation. Her poem demonstrates that her friend's words did not make her waver. Instead of being discouraged by the thought of not leaving children behind, she reaffirms her commitment to the struggle. The political goal of overthrowing colonialism and achieving independence is, to her, more significant than her own life. The poem serves a clear purpose – to assert her position and justify it, with the hope of persuading and raising the consciousness of her friend. The first line provides a direct response to her friend's warning, indicating that she is fully aware of the danger but remains undeterred. Even the risk of losing her life will not stop her, as life and death hold the same value to her.

Halimo does not offer an explanation for this statement. It may be influenced by an Islamic perspective, where death is seen not as the end of life but as a transition to another form of existence. Alternatively, considering the context of the poem and the mention of *isticmaarka* (colonialism) in the next line, we might interpret it as: 'I would rather die fighting against colonialism than live under it.'

Zainab mentions that the poem was composed in response to a friend, as noted earlier. However, there is no explicit reference to the friend within the poem itself, nor is the address directed specifically at her. In other poems examined in this book, we often find a direct addressee – this could be a specific individual, an unknown person, or a more general audience. The absence of such an addressee in this poem could be attributed to two possible reasons.

Firstly, when the poem was recited to the friend, she would have already been aware that it was a response to her remarks, making it unnecessary to mention her explicitly. Secondly, this omission allows the poem to take on a more general quality in terms of its audience. Without a direct addressee, the poem can be perceived as addressing people more broadly, rather than a single individual. In this way, the message extends beyond a personal exchange and resonates with a wider audience, including men.

The second line, *Go'aan baan gaadhnay isticmaarka inaan gubnaa*, is a complex sentence. *Go'aan baan gaadhnay* is the main clause that means 'we reached a decision', while the remainder of the line forms

the subordinate clause, 'that we burn colonialism'. The verb endings *-nay* in *gaadhnay* (reached) and *-naa* in *gubnaa* (burn) indicate that the subject in both clauses is the first-person plural, 'we'. This marks a shift from the singular 'I' in the previous line to a collective 'we'.

There is also an interesting grammatical feature here. The verb ending of *gubnaa* would typically be *gubno* but it needs to be a long vowel here because of the metre, and so it takes the long vowel *-aa* instead. This alteration is characteristic of Somali clauses expressing necessity or obligation (for example, *Waa inaan tago* meaning 'I have to go', which can also appear as *Waa inaan tagaa* with *-aa* replacing *-o*). This suggests that an implicit sense of obligation or duty may be embedded in this line of the poem.

At this point, the poet expands her perspective beyond her personal beliefs to reflect a collective stance. As a member of the League, she embraces its values and goals, particularly the commitment 'to burn colonialism'. The shift from 'I' to 'we' highlights the poet's identification with the nationalist movement and reinforces the idea that the poem is addressing a broader audience rather than merely responding to her friend.

Additionally, a notable lyrical feature in this line is the use of double alliteration. The first word, *go'aan*, and the third word, *gaadhnay*, share the same initial sound. Although only one instance of alliteration is necessary, the repetition intensifies the line's emphasis and enhances its lyrical quality.

Alongside the shift in voice, there is also a distinct sound pattern in this line. The first line contains multiple short *i* and long *ii* sounds, while the other vowels are, for the most part, neither *a* nor *aa*. In contrast, the second line features a notable frequency of *aa* and *a*. This creates an acoustic contrast between the two lines, which, while not directly stated in the language, reinforces the thematic contrast: 'It is equal to me whether I live or die *but* we made a decision to burn colonialism'. This technique can be described as contrastive assonance. Assonance typically refers to the repetition of similar vowel sounds; however, in this instance, the deliberate variation in vowel sounds enhances the contrast between the lines.

I have previously discussed Mutlu Blasing's concept of the separation of sound and sense in lyric poetry in Chapter 2. The sound patterning observed in these two lines serves as another example of how sound independently echoes and reinforces meaning. While phonic patterning functions as a linguistic code with collective and social dimensions, I suggest that the intentional contrast created by the poet adds a layer of individuality to this socially constructed sound system. In doing so, it

allows the poet to express personal emotions that are intricately intertwined with the meanings conveyed by the lines.

To express her determination, the poet uses a conditional sentence in line 3, stating: *Sharduu naga guuro* (On condition that it [colonialism] leaves us), *gaashaanka waa la hayn* (one has the shield). The word *sharduu* is rarely used as a conditional term. *Shardi* is a loan word from Arabic and means 'condition, stipulation, agreement'. In this context, it appears to function similarly to *haddii,* which we have seen in previously discussed poems and is commonly used to introduce conditional statements. Here, the phrase suggests something akin to 'the stipulation that colonialism leaves us' or 'the condition for colonialism to leave us' is that we hold the shield. In other words, it is only through 'our' own efforts that colonialism will end.

Line 3 serves as a conclusion to the first two lines. Notably, it is repeated in the fifth line, concluding the whole poem. At this point, I wish to introduce a new concept – the topic line of a poem. I use the term 'topic line' to describe a line that encapsulates the poet's core idea or central theme within the poem. In this case, as in other poems examined, the repetition of the line underscores its significance and the poet's desire to emphasise its message. This concept is inspired by the term term 'topic sentence' used in prose writing to identify the main idea of a paragraph. There are several reasons to consider this line as the poem's topic.

The first reason for considering this line as the poem's topic line is semantic. In this line, the poet explicitly states both the goal and the action: to fight for independence 'until colonialism leaves'. This directly relates to the poem's context – her response to her friend's warning. The line functions almost like a slogan, succinctly expressing the poet's stance. Despite its directness, the line incorporates a metaphor – the shield (*gaashaanka*), which is the only metaphorical image in the entire poem. The shield symbolises the act of defending the nation against colonialism. Although metaphorical, it remains easily comprehensible. This feature makes this line accessible and memorable, enabling it to resonate with a broad audience.

Another reason for considering this line as the topic line is the poet's deliberate use of sound techniques to enhance emphasis. While the alliterative sound *g* is expected in each half-line, the poet intensifies its presence by repeating it in quick succession – *naga guuro gaashaanka*. Additionally, the placement of the *sh* sound both before and after the dense cluster of *g* sounds forms an A-B-B-A structure, or chiastic pattern, which adds a striking rhythmic quality to the line. These clever sound techniques further support the idea of this being the topic line.

I shall now turn to line 4, which I discuss in particular because it appears almost proverbial. Kapchits (2005: 83-85) highlights how proverbs often exhibit both alliteration and a certain metre, making them resemble lines of poetry. In fact, it is not uncommon for a proverb to originate from an aphoristic line within a poem. The seemingly proverbial nature of this line enhances its memorability. It also makes a cultural reference to an aspect of Somali pastoral society, as many proverbs do – in this case, addressing the idea that, in times of conflict, the aggrieved party will seek revenge. Such themes are frequently represented in Somali oral literature. As Rashiid (2009: 111) notes, the most common causes of conflict among Somali nomadic clans – often reflected in poetry – include disputes over blood (involving injury or death), camel raiding, pasture and wells, and women.

In the past, Somali poets could use verses to incite conflict between clans due to avenging a wrong, thereby reinforcing ongoing tensions. This tradition is also evident in the poetry of the anti-colonial period. For instance, Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan, the leader of the Dervish movement and a renowned poet, composed a *gabay* poem titled 'Cabdullaahi Waxa Loo Qudh-Jaray' (Why Cabdullaahi Has Been Killed) when he was at war with the British (Rashiid 2009: 139-140). In the poem, he laments the killing of a man named Cabdullaahi by someone from a different lineage. The Sayyid asserts in one line that Cabdullaahi was killed because he 'lacked a clan', expressed as: *Cabdullaahi waxa loo qudh jaray waa qabiil li'iye* (Cabdullaahi was killed because he lacked a clan). Another line states: 'A coward would turn away; and that man's lack of a clan', rendered in Somali as: *Fulay baa qamaadee ninkii qolo la'aantiisa.*

I suggest that these lines are intended to reprove and condemn Cabdullaahi's clan for failing to take revenge. In his translation, Martin Orwin includes a note in brackets: 'i.e. his clan was of low standing' (Rashiid 2009: 139). Beyond this, I propose that the reference to the 'lack of a clan' serves not only to denigrate and insult Cabdullaahi's clan but also acts almost as a curse upon them. By employing the term *fuley* (coward), the Sayyid expresses his anger, resentment, and disappointment towards Cabdullaahi's clan, using the emotional weight of the line to provoke them into taking revenge.

Halimo Shiil's line is in a similar vein to this. By stating 'a man who holds anger and resentment used to bring something about', she disagrees with the act of having resentment without taking action. There is a Somali word, *nabsi,* which refers to negative repercussions that arise from one's immoral actions. This is an old concept akin to the concept of *karma* in Hinduism, except that while karma can be either good

or bad, *nabsi* is always bad[50]. When a person is wronged, they are culturally permitted to invoke *nabsi*. By drawing on a cultural reference to address her friend, Halimo highlights the necessity of taking actions to resist injustice.

Comparing Sayyid Maxamed Cabdille Xasan's poem with Halimo's verse reveals how she employs earlier poetic traditions within the context of conflict. While Caasha Luul's *gabay* embodies traditional qualities in form, Halimo Shiil's *buraambur* demonstrates a connection to tradition in a different way. In this particular line, she advocates for the legitimacy of fighting and taking revenge, echoing the assertive tone and persuasive rhetoric found in poetry such as that of the Sayyid.

This short poem was made on an occasion that required an immediate response. The language reflects the poem's improvisational nature, setting it apart from the texts examined in Chapter 3, such as 'Dookh' and 'Calaf', which Caasha Luul composed in this century with the aid of writing. In contrast, this poem contains no elaborate figures of speech, relying instead on the repetition of a single line for emphasis. The language is plain and straightforward, with *gaashaanka* (the shield) in the repeated line standing as the sole metaphor, symbolising the defence of the nation against colonialism. However, the improvisational style and simplicity of language do not diminish the poem's strength or artistic value. These features do not render it inferior to other poems. Rather, the direct and plain language serves a specific purpose, ensuring the message is immediate and accessible, which is precisely what the occasion demanded.

Although this is a short poem, it nevertheless shows a clear structure, with the repeated line dividing the five-line verse into two parts. The first part comprises the initial three lines, while the second part consists of the final two lines. In the first part, the poet clearly states her position that she is unafraid of death as an individual in the first line, and in the second, she affirms her dedication to the collective struggle for independence as a member of the League. The repeated line that follows serves as a conclusion, articulating both a definitive goal and an action. The action, 'one has the shield', conveys an easily understood connotation of defending the nation and resisting colonialism, while the goal is the departure of colonialism. In the second part, the poet uses a cultural reference through a proverb-like line to support her and the League's commitment to the fight for independence. The poem concludes with a repetition of the topic line, once again asserting the goal and action. In essence, we can say that the poem is fundamentally about action.

[50] In a private conversation with Nasra Daahir in 2025.

Examining the use of deixis in each line reveals how the person deixis shifts throughout the poem. As discussed earlier, the voice transitions from the singular first-person 'I' in the first line to the plural 'we' in the second, with an accompanying acoustic contrast that underscores this shift. In the third and fourth lines, the deixis changes once more – the poet employs the masculine third-person pronoun *uu* (it) to refer to colonialism, establishing an oppositional relationship with the inclusive first-person object pronoun *na* (us).

In the second half of the repeated line, the poet utilises the impersonal pronoun *la* (one) in the phrase *waa la hayn.* In Somali, the impersonal pronoun is often used in place of the first-person pronoun to express personal experience. For instance, the phrase 'I am fine' can be expressed as *waan fiicanahay* or, alternatively, using the impersonal form *waa la fiicanyahay*. Thus, the use of *la* (one) in this context can be interpreted as an alternative way of expressing 'I'. The contrast between colonialism and the poet's voice is therefore created through these shifts in deixis and further intensified by the poem's sound patterns.

In the fourth line, the subject shifts once again. The poet uses another third-person deixis, *nin* (a man) to introduce the cultural reference discussed earlier. This indefinite *nin* is also mentioned by the lyric voice to present an opposing position. By stating, 'a man who has anger and resentment [but who does not take revenge] used to bring something [about for himself]', the poet suggests that she will not repeat this man's mistake. She implies that action, rather than merely harbouring anger and resentment, is necessary. The action is reiterated in the repeated line. By introducing third-person references, the contrast highlights the first-person perspective. Through the voice of the first person, the poet's stance against colonialism and her determination to fight it are emphasised.

4.4. *'Soomaaliyeey Is Daa!' (O Somalis, Stop!)*

The second poem I will examine is 'Soomaaliyeey Is Daa!' (O Somalis, Stop!) by Xaawa Jibriil. In Chapter 3, we explored some of her poems that addressed personal matters in relation to men. Now, we will turn to her political works. Xaawa moved to Mogadishu in 1945 and was soon swept up in the activities of the nationalist movement and the SYL. From that point on, her poetry took on a political tone. According to Faduma, 'Soomaaliyeey Is Daa!' was composed in 1953, a time when the Somali people were deeply apprehensive about the Italian administration's intention to petition the UN for an extension of colonial rule

beyond the stipulated ten-year period. The Italians justified their request by claiming that Somalis were not yet ready for self-governance (Faduma 2008: 91). This fear was further heightened by the persecution of SYL supporters following the Italian administration's resumption of control.

While the Italian administration sought to legitimise its continued colonial domination, Xaawa, like many other nationalists, was particularly concerned with the ongoing clan conflicts, which risked reinforcing the narratives used by colonial authorities to undermine nationalist aspirations. She composed this poem as a rhetorical response to the news that ninety men had been killed in a clan conflict in Hobyo.

The text of the poem can be found in Faduma (2008: 138-139). As with the poems published in Zainab (1991), I have provided my own translations. Dr Martin Orwin assisted me in understanding a few particularly challenging or obscure passages. My approach to translation here remains consistent with my previous work, aiming to present an English rendition that closely follows the Somali original. My goal is to enable readers to engage with the arguments conveyed through the Somali language as it is used in the poems. The translations I have produced for Xaawa Jibriil's poems occasionally differ more significantly from those by Faduma Ahmed Alim in her book (Faduma 2008). This is because Faduma's translations tend to be freer, adopting a more literary style, whereas my translations prioritise a closer adherence to the original text.

The poem consists of twenty lines, with a repeated line dividing it into groups of five. In Faduma (2008: 138-139), the text is similarly formatted, with blank lines marking each five-line section. I will present and discuss the entire poem according to these line groups.

1 Dariiqa Hobyood warkay, nooga soo direen
2 Sidaan u danqaday calooshaydii[51], weli ma demin
3 Raggii na daafici lahaa, bay haddeer dileen[52]
4 Dambi la'aan bay ku laayeen[53], sagaashan diric

[51] The commas as presented in Faduma (2008) do not coincide with the actual caesura in many lines in this poem. In line 2, the caesura lies between *caloo* and *shaydii*. The comma follows the original written text so that the word is not split in two. I use the template in Banti and Giannattasio (1996) for the *buraambur* metre template as presented in Chapter 1.

[52] In line 3, I have changed the position of the comma to indicate the correct position of the caesura.

[53] In line 4, the caesura lies between *laa* and *yeen.* I keep the punctuation as in the original so that the word is not split in two.

5 Yaan naloo darine Soomaaliyeey[54] is daa!

1 They sent us news from the road of Hobyo
2 [It is like] the way that I was hurting [an already wounded spot] my stomach still has not extinguished.
3 They have killed now the men who would have defended us
4 Without [them having committed] a crime they killed them, ninety noble, determined men
5 Let one not make it worse for us. O Somalis, stop!

The opening line of this poem has a narrative quality. Xaawa Jibriil begins by directly addressing the incident that inspired the poem, recounting the events as they happened. Compared to other poetic openings, this approach is strikingly direct, especially when contrasted with the first lines of *gabay* poems by Caasha Luul, who employs the traditional *arar* technique.

From the second line, it becomes evident that the poetic voice is the poet herself. She reflects on her emotions upon hearing the tragic news, metaphorically describing the pain in her body caused by the fighting. Although she was not physically injured, the ongoing conflict among Somalis continues to cause her pain.

Notably, the first two lines of this poem use different grammatical persons, a pattern also observed in the poem by Halimo Shiil, discussed earlier. In Halimo's poem, the first line adopts a personal tone in the first-person singular, while the second line shifts to the first-person plural, broadening the scope to include women and society as a whole. In contrast, Xaawa Jibriil's poem takes the opposite approach. The first line presents a general perspective by narrating the news, while the second line offers her personal response, expressed in the first-person singular. This progression from a broader, impersonal perspective to a more intimate, personal one adds depth to the emotional impact of the poem.

In line 3, a clear distinction emerges between 'they' and 'us', creating an oppositional relationship similar to that seen in the previous poem. Here, 'they' refers to the warring clans, while 'us' represents all Somali people under colonial rule, without differentiation between clans. While colonialism and the Somali people ('us') already form an

[54] In line 5, the caesura lies between *Soo* and *maaliyeey*. I keep the punctuation as in the original for the same reason mentioned above. In the rest of this poem, *Soomaaliyeey is daa* is repeated, and the correct caesura will always be between *Soo* and *maaliyeey*. I will not mark these individually.

opposition – where Somalis resist and fight against colonial rule – this poem introduces a new opposition: that between clan conflicts and the Somali people as a unified whole.

This opposition is particularly interesting because the poet does not focus on the conflict between the warring clans themselves, but rather on the broader struggle between clan warfare and the collective aspirations of the Somali people. By implication, the ongoing clan conflicts undermine their hopes and struggle against colonialism.

Line 4 is another line which presents the tragic events that prompted Xaawa to compose her poem. It serves as part of the narrative, emphasising that innocent lives were lost and should not have been taken. Turning to line 5, I return to the concept of the topic line, which I discussed earlier. I propose that this line serves as the poem's central theme, as it is repeated at the end of each section: *Yaan naloo darine Soomaaliyeey is daa!* (Let one not make it worse for us. O Somalis, stop!).

Addressing the Somalis with a vocative, the poet makes a heartfelt appeal. As in Halimo Shiil's poem, we can see there is an acoustic link between this line and the previous one. The alliteration is in *d* but when we look at lines 4 and 5 together, a secondary alliteration can be found between the word *sagaashan* in line 4 and *Soomaaliyeey* in line 5. Having the inclusive 'us' and 'O Somalis' in this line gives this poem a strong sense of solidarity. Furthermore, the poet offers wise counsel, emphasising that ending the clan wars is in the best interest of all Somalis.

6 Dooxada iyo hawdka iyo, meesha daranta badan
7 Daaqi kari waayey, geelii[55] dareeri jiray
8 Nabaddu waa doore, Soomaaliyeey is daa!

6 The dry river beds, the *hawd* grazing area and the place with lots of *daran* plants [salty plant that the camels like to eat]
7 They could not graze, the camels that used to spread about there
8 Peace is preferable, O Somalis, stop!

In line 6, the poet uses a series of pastoral images – such as dry river beds, the *hawd* grazing area, and the *daran* plants favoured by camels – to illustrate the detrimental consequences that await her country if its people do not cease their internal conflicts. These elements are powerful and recurring motifs in Somali poetry, traditionally evoking positive as-

[55] The caesura lies between *gee* and *lii*.

sociations. The river beds, the *hawd* and the *daran* plant all contribute to an initially uplifting image. However, their significance shifts when we reach the next line, where the poet introduces a contrasting perspective. The juxtaposition between the positive pastoral imagery in line 6 and the negative consequences revealed in line 7 highlights the destructive impact of ongoing conflicts and wars.

In line 7, the poet introduces the image of camels, noting that they once spread freely across the grazing areas described earlier but can no longer do so. In Somali political poetry, the milk camel frequently symbolises the Somali nation. As Ali Mumin Ahad observes: 'the oral poetry of the pastoral nomad represents the idea of nation through the cultural signifiers of pastoralists: that is, the representation of the nation-state coincides with the emblems of pastoralist property, the camel in particular.' (Ali 2015: 24) In this poem, Xaawa refers to camels in a general sense, leaving room for both literal and metaphorical interpretations. She may be speaking of actual camels, or she may be employing them as a symbol for the Somali nation – or perhaps both.

The idea of camels no longer grazing may have both literal and figurative meanings. Literally, it suggests that the adult men, who were responsible for taking the camels to graze, could no longer care for them due to the war. Figuratively, it implies the breakdown of society and the failure of the nation-state in the face of ongoing conflict. This theme is echoed by other poets whose works will be discussed in the next section. In either interpretation, the image of the camel serves to emphasise the poet's emotions. The deep attachment to camels, ingrained in every Somali nomad, is embedded within this imagery. It fosters a personal connection – first between the poet and the text, then between the listener and the text, and ultimately, between the listener and the poet. This connection creates an emotional bond, transforming the poem into an emotional bridge.

We have previously seen in Xaawa's 'Awr Qabbiran Maahi' (I Am Not a Bridled Camel) how *awr* (burden camel) is employed metaphorically to express the poet's feelings of oppression and her determination to break free. In political poetry, the image of the camel can carry both positive and negative connotations, depending on the context and the emotions the poet seeks to convey.

The negativity conveyed in lines 6 and 7 serves to highlight the concluding line of this line group: *Nabaddu waa doore, Soomaaliyeey is daa!* (Peace is preferable, O Somalis, stop!). This line stands out for its directness, contrasting with the preceding lines. It consists of a main clause, *nabaddu waa doore* (peace is preferable), followed by an imperative clause that is repeated for emphasis.

Up to this point in the poem, there is no clear representation of the female gender. When the poet states, 'they sent us news from the road of Hobyo', the inclusive 'us' encompasses both women and men. Similarly, in the appeal 'O Somalis, stop', there are no specific linguistic markers indicating that the poem was composed by a woman.

However, the next two lines are slightly different.

9 Asay bay dumarku[56] qaadaan[57], diraac walbaba
10 Doorarkii qabayna[58] haad, baa[59] daleel ku cunay
11 Yaan naloo darine, Soomaaliyeey is daa!

9 The women wear mourning dress each *diraac*[60] season
10 And the excellent ones who married [them], vultures ate them in a barren land
11 So that it is not worse for us, O Somalis, stop!

In line 9, women are explicitly mentioned in a *buraambur* poem made by a woman. The reference to mourning clothes implies the death of men as a consequence of war, even though the conflict itself is not as explicitly stated as in other poems. The death implies the presence of the conflict between men through portrayal of women in mourning, grieving for their lost husbands.

The female perspective introduced in this line is further developed in the following line, where the poet refers to their husbands as the 'excellent ones' (literally the 'choice ones'). The word 'husband' is not given in this line directly, instead, they are described as 'the choice ones [who] married [them]'. Here, 'them' refers to the women mentioned in the previous line. Note that in Somali, there is no word for 'them'. Third-person object pronouns are implied through transitive verbs, as seen here. We know that the subject of the verb *qabay* is *doorarkii* because it is in the reduced paradigm form, with no subject pronoun in the relative clause.

This line is linked to the previous line through the conjunction *-na*. The imagery of vultures consuming the dead 'in a barren land' is particularly striking and reinforces the rural setting. In this way, soldiers

[56] The original text *dumaarku* has a spelling mistake. I changed it to *dumarku*.

[57] The caesura lies between *qaa* and *daan*.

[58] The original text *qabyna* has a spelling mistake. I changed it to *qabayna*.

[59] I moved the comma to the actual caesura in this line.

[60] This is the harsh dry Somali season from December to mid-March, also known as *jiilaal*.

are not portrayed merely as combatants; they are also husbands, which personalises their deaths. By framing the fallen men in terms of their relationships, the poet brings the tragedy closer to the women's personal experiences. Whether or not a woman's own husband has been killed, these powerful lines evoke a profound sense of loss and emotional connection.

The repetition of line 11, following the powerful references to the killing of people in the preceding lines, serves to reinforce their impact. As mentioned earlier, the idea of a line functioning as a slogan is evident here. In this poem, the repeated line takes on a slogan-like quality, further emphasised by the repetition of the final three words from line 8. Repetition is a common feature in poetry and has been widely discussed in lyric theory. In this instance, the repeated imperative carries a powerful rhetorical force. Moreover, repetition enhances the memorability of the poem, making it easier for listeners to internalise and recite it themselves, thereby strengthening its emotional and persuasive effect.

12 Dawladaha UNO ka yimid, wayna dayahayaan
13 Waxay damcahayaan xornimadeenna[61], inayn durin
14 Sagaashanka dawladood, xaalkuu[62] kula dacwiyay
15 Xaqii Cabdullaahi noo doonay[63], waa diyaar
16 Yaan naloo darine, Soomaaliyeey is daa!

12 The governments which came from the United Nations Organisation are looking at us
13 They intend that our freedom not be jeopardised
14 He argued [in a legal sense] with the ninety governments about the situation
15 The truth which Cabdullaahi sought for us is ready
16 So that it is not worse for us, O Somalis, stop!

This line group marks the beginning of another section of the poem, once again addressing the reality of the situation and highlighting the scrutiny of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) towards the Somali people. The underlying implication is that Somalia's governance was in the hands of the UNO. If the UNO observed ongoing internal conflict among Somalis, they might hesitate to transfer power to them as planned. Faduma's (2008: 139) translation of lines 12-13 reads: 'Now

[61] The caesura lies between *xornima* and *deenna*.

[62] I moved the comma to reflect the correct caesura position as mentioned earlier.

[63] The caesura is between *doo* and *nay*.

that the UN mission is here with us/Let them not find fault and impede our freedom'. In these lines, Xaawa urges the listeners to recognise that both the UNO and the Italian authorities, who were administering Somalia on behalf of the UNO, were closely monitoring the situation and did not want the prospect of freedom to be jeopardised. The internal conflicts among Somalis posed a serious threat to this goal.

Lines 14 and 15 are closely connected, referring to the discussions between the United Nations Organisation and the Somali Youth League (SYL). The mention of Cabdullaahi in the poem refers to Cabdullaahi Ciise, who represented the SYL at the United Nations Trusteeship Council. Xaawa expresses, in a simple yet powerful way, that everything is now prepared for independence following these discussions. In line 15, the word *xaq*, an Arabic word, extends beyond the meaning of 'truth' in a literal sense. It also conveys the broader ideas of justice, fairness, and propriety. In other words, what Cabdullaahi sought for the Somali people was not only truthful but also just and rightful. This more straightforward assertion is then followed by the repeated line in line 16, which concludes this section of the poem.

17 Duumo iyo cudurba awal, baan[64] la daadsanayn
18 Gaalku waa ina dulleeyaa[65], dan nooma galo
19 Lagama daaweeyo ruuxeennii[66], dakhar ku dhaco
20 Yaan naloo darine, Soomaaliyeey is daa!

17 We were already scattered with malaria and every disease
18 The infidel oppresses us, does not enter for our interest
19 Our people in whom a wound happens are not treated for it
20 So that it is not worse for us, O Somalis, stop!

The next section of the poem opens with a line that reflects on the past, where the poet metaphorically describes the state of the Somali people as being 'scattered with disease'. Here, the 'disease' serves as a metaphor for the hardships they endured under colonial rule. While disease has historically been present in the Somali Horn of Africa, as it has been elsewhere in the world, I interpret this reference metaphorically rather than literally. The notion of being 'scattered' could also allude to the division of the Somali people among colonial powers – Britain, Italy, France, and Ethiopia – who each governed different parts

[64] Comma moved to reflect correct caesura position.

[65] Caesura lies between *dulleey* and *yaa*.

[66] Caesura lies between *ruu* and *xeennii*.

of Somali territories.

In line 18, Xaawa explicitly mentions the *gaal*. The term refers to non-Muslims and, in this context, serves as a reference to the colonial rulers and other non-Somali figures who held power over various Somali regions. Unlike the preceding metaphorical references, this line is a direct statement of the poet's perspective – she asserts that the *gaal* do not have the best interests of the Somali people at heart. Within the same line, the poet uses the inclusive pronoun *ina* (us), which suggests a sense of unity and collective identity. This inclusivity makes it clear that the poet aligns herself with the audience she is addressing, her fellow Somalis, as explicitly indicated by the recurring vocative phrase 'O Somalis'.

The use of the word *gaal* alongside the inclusive pronoun *ina* (us) also establishes a clear opposition between the non-Muslim colonialists and the Somali people, reinforcing the sense of solidarity that the poet is invoking. This opposition highlights the collective identity the poet seeks to strengthen. In line 19, the poet further emphasises this solidarity by employing the inclusive possessive suffix *-een* (our) in the noun *ruuxeennii*, which literally translates to 'our person'. The word used is a singular noun *ruux* (person) but refers to the Somali people as a whole. This line, which directly refers to the people, serves as the final statement before the repeated refrain. By stating that 'our people who were wounded are not treated', the poet continues the opposition introduced in the previous line. The suffering of the Somali people is presented as an unresolved issue, contrasting against the colonialists who, as implied, neglected their well-being.

On the one hand, the poet's statement that 'our people are wounded' resonates with the earlier mention of the ninety dead men and the broader negative impacts of war on both the land and its people throughout the poem. On the other hand, she emphasises that the 'infidels' will not provide a cure for 'our' problem. The responsibility lies with 'us' – only through unity can 'we' save 'our people'.

Looking back at the poem, we see that *Soomaali,* as referenced in the title and the repeated line, symbolises the people, whom the poet continually calls upon. The poem's focus on 'people' is evident throughout: in the first section, the ninety men killed are people; in the third section, the grieving women and their husbands are people; in the fourth section, Cabdullaahi Ciise stands as an individual representing the collective people. Ultimately, the poem revolves around the concept of 'people' and their fate, serving a singular purpose – to evoke sympathy for 'our people', for 'us', from the audience.

The language in this poem is simple. It is less opaque and more

public, aligning to some extent with the language of mass communication. As mentioned earlier, the way the poet begins the poem resembles a narrative, making it sound somewhat like a news report that might have been heard on the radio. The first line, in particular, reads almost like the opening of a news story about the fighting that took place.

In crafting poems intended for a wide audience and delivering direct political statements in contexts like this, it is crucial to use familiar, accessible language that can be easily understood, repeated, and passed on. This accessibility marks a shift from earlier political poetry – particularly before the Second World War – when clan-related issues were more central, whereas in this new political context, discourse operates on a more national level.

The repetition of memorable words and phrases is also vital in this political landscape. As seen in the poems discussed so far, repetition plays a significant role, not only in performance but also in personal engagement with the poem. In the poem 'Dookh' by Caasha Luul, discussed in Chapter 3, a repeated line often encouraged audience participation – after hearing it a few times, audience members would join in reciting it with the poet. Although I do not have a recording of a performance of the current poem under discussion, it is possible that a similar dynamic occurred during its recitation.

As demonstrated by the two poems above, the 1940s and 1950s marked a critical period when gender expectations established in pre-colonial times were increasingly contested. Women were not traditionally expected to participate in the political arena, nor were their poems anticipated to address serious political matters. However, the pressing need for a nation-state and the rise of nationalism created a social reality in which women could assume the same roles as men, as activists and patriots, despite facing harsh criticism for their involvement in nationalist activities.

In these *buraambur* poems, their identity as Somalis, rather than specifically as women, was emphasised. In the next section, we will explore how Somali women's poetry in post-colonial movements not only highlights their national identity but also places greater emphasis on their identity as women.

4.5. *Poems on Women's Rights in the Post-colonial Movements*

In this section, I shall examine poems from the 1960s to 1970s in which women poets explicitly voiced their demands for women's rights, particularly their right to participate in government. Despite their sig-

nificant contributions to grassroots associations and social movements, Somali women were largely excluded from political power and leadership. Ingiriis (2015: 379) notes that the leaders of the Somali Youth League (SYL) regarded women as mere 'supporters' rather than equal partners. As Somali women became increasingly involved in the independence movement, they grew more aware of their subordinate position in society and began to demand greater political representation.

According to Faduma (2008: 91), the SYL leaders were reluctant to include women in the decision-making process and initially excluded them from the SYL Congress held in 1958. It was only after a group of determined women presented their grievances to the Congress that two female delegates, Ardo Dirir and Xaawa Jibriil, were permitted to attend. Xaawa Jibriil further challenged the Central Committee's decision to exclude women candidates, responding to a leading male member's assertion that 'women were not yet prepared for such an important and difficult task.' As a result of her efforts, the Congress ultimately agreed to elect women to all party committees. In 1959, Raha Ayaanle Guled made history by becoming the first female member of the Central Committee of the SYL, securing official access to decision-making circles that had previously been dominated by men (Ingiriis 2015: 381).

Somalia gained independence in July 1960, with the former Italian Somaliland in the south and the former British Somaliland in the north merging to form the Somali Republic. The post-colonial government, albeit somewhat reluctantly, granted women the freedom to express themselves, pursue artistic careers, and perform in theatres. While the authorities recognised the people's right to mobilise through movements, associations, organisations, petitions, and political parties, they also faced opposition from conservative critics who sought to uphold social patriarchy. These critics composed poetry denouncing the so-called 'modernisation process' (*Ibid*: 382).

Despite the reluctance to positively transform women's status in society, the period saw the emergence of some of the most popular female singers, including Asha Abdow Suleyman 'Malaika', Faduma Abdullahi Kaahin 'Maandeeq', Faduma Abdullahi Ali 'Dalays', Faduma Qassim Hilowle, Habbon Abdullahi, Maryan Mursal Iise Bootaan, Sahra Ahmed Jama, Seynab Ige Mohamed, Halima Khalif Omar 'Magool', and Seynab Haji Ali Siigaale 'Bahsan' (*Ibid*: 383). Maandeeq, for instance, performed a song demanding equity and justice for women upon the formation of the Somali Republic.

Gardner and El Bushra (2004: 176) outline a chronology of the pre-1991 women's movement in Somalia. Two key social organisations established before Siyaad Barre's rule – the Somali Women's Association

('Sisters') in 1959, and the Somali Women's Movement (SWM) in 1960 – were dismantled following his rise to power in 1969 when all political parties and social organisations were banned. According to Zainab (1994: 188), during the first eight years of the Siyaad Barre regime, 'women participated in government rallies, gave speeches at orientation centres, and composed poetry in support of the regime'.

Gardner and El Bushra (2004: 176) also highlight the establishment of the Women's Section under the Political Office in the Presidency of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) in 1970 and the government-founded Somali Women's Democratic Organisation (SWDO) in 1977. In terms of national legislation supporting women's rights, the 1975 Family Law amendments granted women and men equal rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance (though polygamy was not prohibited). The Labour Code of 1972 promoted workplace equality, Law No.173 of 1975 made all land state property, enabling women to obtain land leases or inherit leaseholds, and the 1978 Constitution enshrined equal rights and duties for both women and men (*Ibid*: 176-177).

Although Siyaad Barre once stated, *Haweenku waa garab, aan maangaabku garanahayn* (The women are a shoulder which the short-sighted cannot understand) in a speech, his promotion of gender equality and women's rights – central to his socialist vision for Somalia – has been argued by scholars to be a strategy for legitimising a regime that seized power through undemocratic means. Ingiriis (2015: 387) identifies three reasons for Siyaad Barre's instrumental use of women to consolidate his authority: first, he viewed women as a compelling means of enhancing his global reputation under the guise of gender equity; second, he sought to mobilise public support and secure long-term legitimacy for his regime; third, he aimed to 'accelerate the replacement of customary and religious laws with secular legal practices' (Bryden and Steiner 1998: 31, cited in Ingiriis 2015: 387).

Even though the mid-1970s to 1980s saw a sharp increase in the proportion of women in government posts – averaging an annual growth of 40.6 percent – the number of women in parliament throughout Siyaad Barre's rule never exceeded 10 percent of the 176-member total. Furthermore, only one woman held a position on the Central Committee, and just two out of 51 ministerial posts were occupied by women (Gardner and El Bushra 2004: 177). It is worth noting that while the Somali Women's Democratic Organisation (SWDO) played a role in raising the discourse on women's rights and facilitating policy changes – particularly on issues like public office participation and the campaign to abolish female genital mutilation (FGM) – it was fundamentally compromised by its integration into the authoritarian mechanisms of Siyaad

Barre's regime. Additionally, the primary beneficiaries of this gender equality agenda were urban-based middle-class women, while the situation for rural women remained largely unchanged (*Ibid*: 178).

Somalia's post-colonial government from 1960 to 1969 was often regarded as a progressive era marked by vibrant democracy, freedom of speech, and opportunities for citizens to voice concerns about government policies. However, this came to an end with Siyaad Barre's dictatorship, which imposed strict censorship, including on poetry composition and broadcasting. Under Barre's regime, poetry – traditionally a medium of critique and resistance – was restricted to promoting government rhetoric, focusing on gender equality, the benefits of socialism, and praise for Siyaad Barre himself. Criticism of the government or its policies was not only banned but criminalised, as Zainab (1994: 187) observes.

In 1978, when an unsuccessful coup posed a threat to the military regime, women, alongside the military police, played a significant role in defending Barre's government. They mobilised public support through Radio Mogadishu, using poetry as a powerful propaganda tool (Ingiriis 1995: 388). For example, Halimo Shiil (Zainab 1994: 189) composed a *buraambur* poem in the 1970s that celebrated Siyaad Barre:

> *Siyaad hoggaaminayoo ciidankeenna haybadda leh,*
> *Haweenku hanbalyiyo salaan hooyo nimay baxsheen*
> (Which Siyaad [Barre] led our prestigious forces,
> The women sent motherly congratulations and greetings.)

However, according to Ingiriis (2015: 389), some women's groups may have expressed their support for the regime out of fear. This fear stemmed from concerns that their male relatives could lose government positions or that they themselves could be labelled 'reactionaries' – a term that carried severe consequences under Barre's rule.

There are numerous poems by women that comment on matters of modern government politics and are worth discussing. In this book, I will focus on the theme of female representation in government as addressed in these poems. In the next section, I will closely examine two poems: a *gabay* poem titled 'Gabdhihii Isku Duubnaa' (Sisters) by Xaawa Jibriil, composed in 1966 before Siyaad Barre's rule, and an untitled *buraambur* poem made by Halimo Ali Kurtin in the 1970s.

4.6. *'Gabdhihii Isku Duubnaa' (Sisters)*

1 Calankaa dusheennaa markii, loo dagaallamayay
2 Labadooda daan iyo gabdhahay, dashay gacantoodu
3 Dirisyoonka Leegada gabdhihi, geeyey dahabkooda
4 Gabdhihii isku duubnaa raggaa, qaar la duufsadaye
5 Daruur midabkii leeyeey gabdhihii, Xaawa laga dooxay
6 Markii dawladnimadii la helay, dibedda loo tuurey[67]
7 Diretoore kay tahay xornimo, lama dacaamsiine
8 Digriigii ay qaadanahayeen-na, dacaska weeyaane

1 When that flag above us that one was fighting for
2 Their two cheeks and, O women!, their hands got sore
3 The women passed on their gold to the directorate of the League
4 The women who were bound together, the men – some of them were led astray
5 O ones who have the colour of the clouds, the women, Xaawa who was stabbed
6 When statehood was gained, [they] were thrown outside
7 [the woman who would be] director, was not made to eat [the fruits] of freedom
8 And the degree[s] they took are flip-flops

A striking feature immediately noticeable when hearing this poem is the repetition of the word *gabdhihii* (the girls, the women), which also creates a secondary alliteration with the *g* sound in some of the lines. I have mentioned that in Somali poetry, skilled poets often avoid repeating the same word to demonstrate their command of Somali vocabulary and their ability to find the most fitting words for a line while adhering to the metrical pattern. Therefore, when a word is repeated, it becomes a deliberate technical choice. Here, the female poet purposefully repeats *gabdhihii* to emphasise women's identity. Interestingly, despite highlighting women's identity through this repetition, as a female activist who participated in the struggles, the poet does not use the first person to express her concerns for women's rights.

Instead of using phrases like 'our cheeks', 'our hands' and 'our gold', the poet employs the third-person *gacantoodu* (their hands) and *dahabkooda* (their gold). This creates the impression that the voice is not speaking as a member of the League, but rather as an observer or

[67] The spelling here has been edited from *tuurye* to *tuurey* which, as the past tense form, makes better sense and also reflects other line endings in the poem.

someone outside the group who benefited from the contributions and sacrifices of its female members. However, in the first line of the cluster, the poet uses an inclusive 'us' with *dusheennaa* (which was above us), thereby including herself, along with her listeners – both male and female – in this collective 'us'. This 'us' symbolises all Somali people who were enjoying *calankaa* (that flag), representing the independence of the nation and the ideals *loo dagaallamayay* (one was fighting for).

The poet's use of the impersonal *la* in this context is particularly intriguing. I interpret it as encompassing all the brave nationalists who fought in the struggle, regardless of gender, though it could also refer specifically to the female activists. The poet does not explicitly emphasise gender in this half-line, but this omission does not alter the way we interpret the rest of the poem.

In contrast to the plain, slogan-like poems discussed in the previous section, this poem employs consecutive use of vivid imagery. Beginning with the image of the flag symbolising freedom and sovereignty in the first line, the poet transitions in the second line to *labadooda iyo gacantoodu* (their two cheeks and their hands) and *dan dashay* (scraped the flesh) to convey the jubilation of women when the independence struggle culminated in victory. This exaggerated expression uses the alliterative words *dan* and *dashay* to form the phrase 'scraped the flesh', not to suggest that their cheeks and hands were literally scraped from laughing, cheering, and clapping, but rather to hyperbolise their intense joy. This joyful imagery also serves as a prelude, foreshadowing the contrast the poet will present in the following lines.

Interestingly, the poet introduces the vocative *gabdhahay* (O women) in the middle of this line. However, it does not function as a straightforward address to women in the way vocatives typically do in other poems we have examined. Here, the poet continues to address the broader audience – the masses who benefitted from the women's devotion. The vocative instead serves as an expression of complex emotions: nostalgia, admiration, and pity, as the poet recalls the scene of women cheering for the new Republic, full of hope for a future where they, too, would reap the fruits of independence. This sentiment flows seamlessly into the next line, where the poet uses the image of *dahabkooda* (their gold) to signify women's approval of the League's directorate.

In the fourth line, the poet introduces a direct comparison between women and men during the struggle for independence: *Gabdhihii isku duubnaa raggaa, qaar la duufsadaye* (The women who were bound together, the men – some of them were led astray). Here, she highlights how women united to pursue a collective goal, while some men deviated from the path. This may allude to pro-Italian, clannish men, whom

she criticised in two of her earlier *buraambur* poems, 'Odeyaasha Ina Aakhiray' (The Old Men Who Hold Us Back) and 'Dulan Nin Wada' (The Wicked Men) in 1962. By contrasting the unity of women with the perceived failings of men – despite women holding a subordinate social status in reality – the poet conveys her stance without overtly criticising men. The poem subtly transitions from its initial relaxed and celebratory tone towards a more serious mood, setting the stage for a turning point in its emotional journey. This pivotal moment, I suggest, is introduced with the image of Xaawa Osman Taako in the fifth line.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Xaawa Osman Taako is celebrated as the first female freedom fighter in the modern history of Somali society (Ingiriis 2015: 380). In the *hojis* first half-line, the poet employs a metaphor, *daruur midabkii leeyeey* (ones who have the colour of the clouds), enhanced by the vocative suffix *-eey*. This comparison evokes the innocence and sublimity of Xaawa Taako as a nationalist symbol, likening her to the white colour of clouds – a recurring image symbolising purity, innocence, and goodness in Somali and other cultures.

In this line, the poet refrains from directly commenting on Xaawa Taako's death or the society in its aftermath. Instead, she simply mentions Xaawa's name, followed by the relative clause *laga dooxay* (who was stabbed). The simplicity of this line belies the depth of emotion it carries. The poet leaves ample space for listeners to interpret and reflect on the weight of Xaawa Taako's sacrifice. Rather than preaching to her audience, she crafts her words to evoke reflection, allowing the profound loss of Xaawa Taako to speak for itself.

In line 6, the poet echoes the first line but this time, completes the thought. In the first line, she says, *Calankaa dusheennaa markii, loo dagaallamayay* (when that flag above us was fought for), while in this line, she states, *Markii dawladnimadii la helay, dibedda loo tuurey* (when the statehood was gained, [they] were thrown outside). She constructs this *hooris* in a traditional manner, with the verb *tuur* (to throw) standing on its own, without a focus or person marker. However, from the context, it is clear that 'they' refers to the women – the very ones who fought for independence but were subsequently neglected and excluded from the government apparatus by the male authorities.

Following this line, line 7 further expands on the poet's critique. The alliterating word in the *hojis, diretoore* is derived from the Italian *direttore*, meaning 'director', a governmental position. After *diretoore*, the word *kay* is made up of *kii* (the one) and *-ay* which, combined with the next word *tahay*, forms 'she is'. Here, the poet implies that 'the one' who was qualified to be a director or 'the one' who would or should be a director – the woman who deserved the position – was never ap-

pointed. In the *hooris,* she uses *dacaamsii* derived from the Arabic word for 'food'. By adding the strong causative suffix *-sii*, the verb shifts in meaning to 'to make someone have food, feed', or figuratively, 'to benefit'. This reinforces the previous line's assertion: women did not reap the rewards of independence.

Finally in the last line, she uses another loan word: *digriigii* (degree). As a matter of fact, the poet's daughter, Faduma, was the first Somali woman to complete a university degree in Italy in 1962 (Ingiriis 2015: 384). According to Safia (2010: 117), many women who followed in her footsteps and obtained diplomas were still unable to enter the civil service, despite a policy guaranteeing 'grade A' government positions to diploma holders. This context is reflected in the poet's critique.

She employs a striking metaphor in the *hooris*, using *dacaska*, which Faduma translates as 'rubbish'. However, *dacaska* literally means 'flip-flops' – casual sandals widely worn across Somali and other cultures. The image of flip-flops conveys a sense of worthlessness, something easily discarded, much like the phrase in line six, *dibedda loo tuurey* ([they] were thrown outside).

If we compare the alliterating words in the last two lines, we find a deep contrast. *Diretoore* (director) and *digriigii* (degree) symbolise prestige – positions and achievements that should have secured women a rightful place in government. Yet, they are paired with *lama dacaamsiine* (not tasted) and *dacaska* (flip-flops), signifying denial, exclusion, and devaluation. The poet masterfully juxtaposes these terms to expose the disillusionment that followed women's struggle for independence.

According to Ingiriis (2015: 384), this poem 'appeared to have been heard in the inner circles', as Xaawa's daughter, Faduma was, promptly appointed Director of Women's Section at the Ministry of Education, in addition to becoming a School Inspector. After Siyaad Barre seized power, Xaawa returned to the theme of female representation in a 1972 poem, this time addressing the dictator directly. She opened with a quote from one of his speeches, in which he promised that women's rights would not be neglected by his government, and then challenged his commitment with sharp rhetorical questions:

Misana Goleheenna iyo, Gobolkeenna waxa ku jira
Laba gabdhood weeyee, gar Ilaah miyaa?
Ma hawshii bay gabeenoo, waxbayan garan?

And yet in our Committee and in our Region there are
Two women, is it a law of God?
Did they fall short in the effort? Did they understand nothing?

Her questions went unanswered until 1978, a critical moment for Siyaad Barre's military regime, which faced an attempted coup d'état. As mentioned earlier, women demonstrated strong support for the regime during this period. In response, Siyaad Barre promised to reward their loyalty, appointing Faduma as vice minister.

It is also worth noting that Faduma had ties to the military regime through marriage – her husband, Ahmed Mohamud Farrah, served as Vice President. Additionally, Xaawa Jibriil, the poet who addressed Siyaad Barre so boldly in her verse, was, according to Ingiriis (2015: 388), a distant cousin of the dictator himself.

4.7. *Untitled* Buraambur *by Halimo Ali Kurtin*

Another short excerpt I shall briefly look at is a *buraambur* verse made by Halimo Ali Kurtin during Siyaad Barre's rule. This poem was collected by Zainab Mohamed Jama and presented in Zainab (1994: 188). Through its lines, the poet directly addresses women's identity and experiences, both in the past and in the present.

1 Haddii haweenku nafsadoodii oo dhan aanay hurin
2 Hiil iyo hoo waxay lahaayeenba aanay hibayn
3 Hodanow calankeena waligeen ma aan heleen
4 Hashii markay noo dhashoo caano laga habcay
5 Haweenku se wali hamuuntoodii ay qabeen

1 If the women did not set alight all their lives
2 [If] they did not give support and offerings of what they had
3 O, rich person! We [incl.] would never have attained our [incl.] flag
4 When the she-camel gave birth and enough milk was taken from her to satisfy
5 The women, however, still had their hunger

The Somali word for 'women' used in this poem is *haween*. We see *haweenku*, with the subject definite article suffix *-ku* following the noun *haween,* repeated twice in this short verse – much like how Xaawa Jibriil reiterated *gabdhihii* (the girls, the women) in her poem. Given that the poem focuses on the subject of women, the poet deliberately alliterates with the *h* sound, reinforcing the presence of *haween* in the verse. There is also a distinct pattern in the alliterative scheme: each line begins with an *h* sound, and four out of five lines end with an alliterating word. These sound patterns serve as mnemonic devices, aiding in the

poem's oral transmission and memorisation.

The first two lines highlight women's sacrifices In Somalia's Independence movements. Notably, the poet, like Xaawa Jibriil, uses the third person to refer to these women. In the first line, she writes *naf-sadoodii* (their life) rather than 'our life', and in the second line, *waxay* (they) instead of 'we', even though both pronoun choices would have fitted within the poem's metrical constraints. Then, in the following line, she shifts to an inclusive 'we' and refers to 'our flag' while addressing *hodanow* (O, rich one). This pronoun shift underscores the exclusion of women, who are the 'they' in the first two lines, from the privileged group she later addresses. This exclusion is reinforced in the poem's final line, where she states that women remain trapped in 'their hunger'. The poet implies that those benefiting from the independence won through women's sacrifices are not suffering, while the very heroines of the struggle are left to starve – an injustice she calls attention to.

In this poem, the history and role of women in Somali society are invoked to highlight how they were ignored by the elected government that came to power after independence. The poet employs the image of a she-camel – *hal* in Somali. According to Ali (2015: 175), Somali poets have used the she-camel as a metaphor since the 1940s, often symbolising the nation, while the herder represents its people (*Ibid*). In the penultimate line, the she-camel giving birth and producing abundant milk symbolises independence and the subsequent development of the new nation.

However, the joyful image is immediately contrasted in the final line, which reveals that the interests of women,who sacrificed so much for the country, remain unprotected. The gender of the she-camel, particularly the associations of birth-giving and milk-producing, resonates with the gender of the women in the last two lines. While male poets have often used the she-camel as a symbol of national identity and *Soomaalinnimo*, it is women poets who have drawn a direct connection between the she-camel and the 'she-Somalis' who fought for the nation. The stark contrast between the she-camel producing milk in line four and women being left in hunger in the final line reinforces the poem's central message. This juxtaposition recalls the sacrifices and contributions of women, as referenced in the first three lines, and underscores the injustice of their exclusion.

The short *buraambur* is a highly coherent poem that conveys a powerful message through simple, accessible language. It was intended for oral circulation and was broadcast on Radio Mogadishu during the Siyaad Barre regime. In the same poem, the poet Halimo Ali Kurtin also addresses why women initially supported the regime, stating:

Siyaad hoggaaminayoo ciidankeenna haybadda leh/haweenku hanbalyiyo salaam hooyo nimay baxsheen (Which Siyaad led our prestigious forces/the women sent motherly congratulations and greetings). As mentioned earlier, Siyaad Barre's promotion of women's rights was primarily a political strategy to consolidate power. Zainab (1994: 189-190) notes that many women who had initially supported the regime later changed their stance after realising that the government's calls for equality amounted to mere 'lip service'.

Some scholars, such as Gardner and El Bushra (2004), view the period of Siyaad Barre's rule as a golden era for women in Somalia. However, as Ingiriis (2015: 377) argues, 'these narratives tend to overlook the condition of women in terms of freedom of speech and freedom to form independent associations, a right they enjoyed under the successive post-colonial government prior to the military rule'. In his conclusion, Ingiriis (*Ibid*: 290) writes that Somali women 'seem as though they became forward-thinking when compared with many other women in post-colonial settings. They nonetheless shared certain characteristics with others, such as the perpetuation of marginalisation in politics.' Despite their crucial role in the independence movements and the formation of the post-colonial Somali government, 'they lost whatever gains they had achieved in those days.' Even more tragically, their initial support for the Siyaad Barre regime ultimately 'made their status worsen instead of developing into that for which they had struggled' (*Ibid*).

The struggle for Somali women's rights and social status has been fraught with obstacles, and the ongoing civil war following the collapse of the Siyaad Barre regime has only exacerbated their plight. Zainab (1994: 199) notes that after the regime's fall and the subsequent declaration of the independent Republic of Somaliland, not a single woman was included in the new government. Moreover, Islamic fundamentalists who gained power during the years of civil war imposed even stricter limitations on women. Gardner and El Bushra (2004: 150) highlight that during the 1993 Boorame Grand Conference on National Reconciliation, hundreds of clan elders exercised their traditional voting rights to elect a president. Although ten representatives from two women's organisations were allowed to attend, they were only permitted to speak and lobby – they were denied the right to vote.

Despite these challenges, women poets have continued to make their voices heard. In the next section, we will examine how they have responded to the post-civil war era and the subsequent historical transformations through their poetry.

4.8. *Poems Made after 1991*

The political instability that intensified in the late 1980s – marked by increasing opposition to Siyaad Barre's regime, violent repression, and growing civil unrest – ultimately led to the collapse of the Somali central government in 1991 and the outbreak of a prolonged Civil War. This period of conflict triggered widespread displacement, forcing millions of Somalis to flee their homes and seek refuge both within the Horn of Africa and in the global diaspora. This period of upheaval has left deep and lasting scars on the nation, reshaping its social, political, and cultural landscapes.

Amid this turmoil, Somali poetry has continued to thrive as a vital form of expression through which individuals and communities articulate their experiences of loss, resilience, identity, and hope. Many remarkable poems – composed by both male and female poets – bear witness to the traumas of war, the challenges of exile, and the longing for peace and return. These works merit close analysis, not only for their literary and rhetorical qualities but also for the insights they offer into the lived experiences and evolving identities of Somali communities at home and abroad. After careful consideration, I have chosen to present two of my favourite poems in this book: 'Waad Garan Lahaydeene' (You Understand)[68] by Saado Cabdi Amarre, and 'Tahriib' (The Sea-Migrations) by Caasha Luul Maxmuud Yuusuf.

4.9. *'Waad Garan Lahaydeene' (You Understand) by Saado Cabdi Amarre*

Saado Cabdi Amarre is one of the many women who have actively mobilised for peace in the two decades following the Somali Civil War. Her deeply emotional poems lament the senselessness of the conflicts that have devastated the Somali people in its aftermath. 'Waad Garan Lahaydeene' (You Understand), composed in 2005, is featured on the Poetry Translation Centre website[69]. A note accompanying the text reads: *Mowduuca: Wayeellada hubka halista ah – fudud & culus – uu leeyahay*, which translates 'The topic: Possession of dangerous weapons

[68] For the title of this poem, I retain the original English translation by Maxamed Xasan 'Alto' in collaboration with Sarah Maguire, despite the fact that a more grammatically accurate rendering would be 'You Would Have Understood'. This choice is made for the sake of consistency with existing English-language sources that reference the poem under its established title.

[69] <https://www.poetrytranslation.org/poems/you-understand/original> accessed May, 2025.

– light & heavy –. This poem is also included in *So At One With You: An Anthology of Modern Poetry* in Somali (Herbert and Said 2018), and it is this version that I have used in this discussion.

The title immediately stands out because the poet is addressing a plural 'you'. The verb form *lahaydeene* conveys the English modal verbs 'would have' or 'should have' in second-person plural, following the verb stem *garan* (understand). Somali does not distinguish tense in this mood, but as in English, the construction suggests that something was possible in the past but did not happen. In this case, by saying 'you would have understood', the poet is implying that there are things that 'you' [pl.] didn't understand but should now recognise.

Within the poem, she elaborates on what 'you [pl.]' 'would have' or 'should have understood' are. While she says it to the plural 'you', she also positions herself as someone who already understands, urging them to gain this awareness through her words. This gives the poem a didactic quality, reinforced by the repeated refrain *aad garan lahaydeene* (you would have understood). The poet systematically lays out the dangers and destruction brought by war and weapons, contrasting them with the benefits of peace. Through her lines, she expresses an earnest hope that her audience will not only comprehend her message but, more importantly, take action to bring about change. We shall now examine the poem in detail. As with the other poems analysed in this book, the translation is my own.

0 Hooyaallayey hooyaallayey, hoyaallayey hooye[70]
1 Warshadaha madfaca gaw leh iyo, gumuca beeraaya
2 Hubkan dunida kala gooshayee, gees walba u raacay
3 Ee aan xuduud lagu gartiyo, gogol-dhig loo yeelin
4 Aakeyga kii geela jirey, saaran garabkiisa
5 Intuu halista gaadhsiiyay baad, garan lahaydeene.

0 Hooyaallayey hooyaallayey, hoyaallayey hooye
1 The factories which manufacture the artillery and the bullets
2 These weapons which cut the world apart and spread everywhere
3 And [to which] no borders are understood and no introduction agreed
4 The AK, that is on the shoulder of the one who was with the camels
5 You [pl.] would have understood the amount of danger which it has brought

[70] I marked the first line as line 0 for the reason that the line is a string of vocables that are traditionally used at the beginning of a *gabay* to attract the audience's attention and do not have any meaning.

This *gabay* does not begin with an *arar*; instead, the poet sings the traditional opening string of vocables and launches directly into her argument. She addresses the arms industry right away. In the first line, the head noun *warshadaha* (the factories) is followed by a relative clause, *madfaca gaw leh iyo, gumuca beeraaya*, where the verb *beeraaya* literally means 'to farm', and the objects are *madfaca gaw leh* (artillery that makes the *gaw* sound) and *gumuca* (the bullets). In the following line, she maintains the same structure, shifting the head noun to *hubkan* (these weapons). She then provides two relative clauses connected by the conjunction *ee*, describing the weapons as *dunida kala gooshay* (which cut the world apart), and *gees walba u raacay* (lit. which accompanied every side, i.e. which spread everywhere).

So far, the language remains relatively plain, and the message is direct. However, the sentence does not conclude here. The audience would immediately recognise an enjambment upon hearing *ee* (and [to which]) at the beginning of the next line, signalling another relative clause extending the previous thought. This is followed by *aan* (not), which goes with the negative verb *yeelin* (not agree with) at the end of the line.

In this line, we observe a shift from the previous plain language to a more abstract level. The nouns *xuduud* (border) and *gogol-dhig* (introduction) do not refer to material objects but rather to abstract concepts with nuanced connotations. Similarly, the verbs *garan* (to understand) and *u yeel* (to agree with, to consent to) relate to cognitive processes rather than physical actions. The meaning of this line is that the people did not agree to the 'borders' imposed for the weapons – meaning there is no restrictions – and they did not consent to the 'introduction', that is, to the justifications given for their use.

I interpret *xuduud* (border) in two ways. It could refer to the physical borders that weapons cross when they are fired or exported – either the countries to which weapons are sold or the target nations under attack. The poet suggests that no public consent was given regarding where these weapons would be sent or used. The exportation of arms occurs without consulting the taxpayers who fund government policies. Similarly, when war is waged, civilians on both sides are excluded from the decision-making process. While the poet does not explicitly describe the devastation caused by these weapons in this line, the assertion that 'there was no consent' prompts the audience to reflect on the consequences.

In line 4, following what she has said about the weapons and border, the poet presents us with a striking image. She references a specific Somali context, describing a young camel herder, once living a pastoral

life, now carrying a Russian-invented AK-47 rifle. This imagery underscores how commonplace gun ownership had become among young Somali men.

As an aside, I'd like to introduce an excerpt from 'Home', an English poem by the young Somali poet Warsan Shire[71], where a similar reference appears. The British-Somali poet writes in English:

'the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay'

Here, the poet creates a stark contrast by presenting a peaceful, romantic image of young love and kissing, only to follow it with the cruel reality of a ruthless weapon. As a young poet with a different upbringing, Warsan Shire blends *Soomaalinnimo* with elements of 'Westernness' in her poetry. The phrase 'kiss you dizzy' in the second line stands out as an intimate, romantic expression, reflecting qualities often found in English and other Western poetry. Yet, at its core, the poem is about *home*, as its title suggests.

Warsan also employs the second-person 'you', positioning the subject in an intermediate space that any Somali reader can step into. The phrase 'kissing behind the old tin factory' evokes an imagined scene of youthful innocence, but 'holding a big gun' abruptly grounds it in reality. This contrast, present in both poems, draws the listener's attention to the impact of these weapons. They were manufactured in factories and sold to armies, destinations unknown – but what is known is that they have ended up on the shoulder of a young man who should have been herding camels. Once again, the poet does not explicitly state words like 'harm', 'danger', or 'violence'. Instead, she carefully leads her listeners to consider the weight of the issue, inviting them to reflect as she unfolds her verses.

Returning to Saado Cabdi's poem, in line 5, she states: 'you would have understood the danger that the weapons and the military industry have brought', with the titular phrase *aad garan lahaydeene* (you would have understood). This line not only concludes and clarifies the images

[71] Warsan Shire is a Somali British poet born in Nairobi in 1988 and raised in London. She writes poetry in English and has received various awards for her poetry. Her words 'No one leaves home unless/ Home is the mouth of a shark' from the poem 'Home' is widely known in the diaspora Somali communities.

and phrases from the preceding lines but also serves as an introduction to the rest of the poem.

The use of the second-person plural pronoun throughout the poem makes it clear that the poet is addressing a collective audience. Unlike Caasha Luul, who begins her *gabay* with a traditional *arar*, Saado does not follow the same structure. However, these opening five lines function in a similar way, setting the stage and introducing the poem's central theme to the audience.

Following this opening, the poem adopts a clear structure, marked by the repetition of the following four lines, which can be considered a refrain:

6 Inta gibil madow, inta gibil cad, gaaliyo Islaamba
7 Rag adduunyada gubayoo wa[a] la garanayaaye[72]
8 Iyagaa gantaallada rakibay, mana gar-qaataane,
9 Waa kuwaa haweenkii guddiyay, geedkii nabadeede.

6 The ones with black skin, the ones with white skin, non-believers and Muslims
7 It is only men who have burned the world, it is known
8 It is they who assembled the missiles and who do not accept legal arguments
9 There they are, the women who met in council at the tree of peace

Line 6, as the first line in the refrain, is particularly interesting, especially when compared to the poems we have previously examined. In poems written during the colonial period, the word 'infidels' was used to refer to the colonisers. However, in this poem, a poet who has lived through colonisation calls on people from all around the world, regardless of race or religion, to unite and stand against these weapons.

In precolonial times, poetry was primarily a weapon wielded by a spokesperson of one clan to attack another. During the independence movements, poetry was used to mobilise the public to fight against colonialism, condemning the 'infidels'. Yet here, in a poem composed a decade after the Somali Civil War, the poet calls on 'black people, white people, non-believers and Muslims' to unite and recognise the problem of possessing dangerous weapons. The theme extends beyond the household and national borders, reaching the level of global governance – and it is articulated by a Somali woman. Although the backdrop is the

[72] The original text shown in Herbert and Said (2018) does not fit the metre for this line. In a recording available on SoundCloud Saado performs this line as written here.

Civil War and conflicts between Somali clans, this poem is not about any particular war in Somali territories but rather about war, weapons, and decision-making at a global level. This ties back to *gogol-dhig loo yeelin* (no introduction agreed) in the opening lines of the poem.

Moreover, the poet raises a highly explicit gender issue in these lines, a topic still widely debated today. While men, whether at the household level or within clans and governments, often use misogynistic rhetoric to argue that women are *too subjective* to make important decisions and thus justify their exclusion from politics and leadership roles, it is, in fact, men who make disastrous decisions. *Guddi* means 'council', and as a verb, it means 'to come together in a council'. This refers to the *tree of peace* where traditionally, adult men of families would gather to discuss important matters with the elders. However, the poet states that while men make decisions to wage wars, women are coming together under the trees, taking their positions. I interpret this as a symbolic image rather than a literal depiction of women participating in the traditional council, which is typically led by elder men. The poet expresses that while men wage wars, women pray for peace – an idea that resonates with the poet herself, a woman using poetry to call for peace in a genre traditionally dominated by men: the *gabay*.

Following the refrain above, the phrase *aad garan lahaydeene* (you would have understood) becomes increasingly repetitive, intensifying the poem's impact until its conclusion.

10 Geeliyo lo'dii buu jariyo, gaabanow adhiye
11 Geyi aan ugaadhiyo ku hadhin, diin gangaamaniye
12 Intuu gegida meyd jiifiyaad, garan lahaydeene,
13 Shimbirihii geyiga joogay ayaa, guuray oo qaxaye
14 In Hiroshiima gaadhsiisanyaad, garan lahaydeene,
15 Dhibtuu dunida gaadhsiiyay baad, garan lahaydeene.

10 He has cut down the camels and the cattle and the short sheep and goats
11 A land in which wild animals and shielded tortoise(s) do not remain
12 You would have understood how many he made to lay dead in the open space
13 The birds which were in the land have moved and fled
14 You would understand that it [would] reach Hiroshima
15 The difficulty which he brought to the world, you would have understood

In lines 10-13, Saado addresses the animals affected by the conflicts and wars, starting with the most precious *geel* (camels). A particularly interesting lyrical aspect is her use of the singular third-person pronoun *-uu* (he) in lines 10 and 12 when referring to men – a collective subject that she previously emphasised with the independent pronoun *iyaga* (they) in the refrain. Why does she change the pronoun from the plural to the singular?

For instance, in line 10, the cutting down of camels and other livestock is an action still attributed to men collectively rather than to a single individual. Likewise, in line 12, it seems unlikely that the poet is referring to a single man killing numerous animals in war; rather, the singular 'he' should be understood as representing men collectively. I propose that this use of 'he' can be interpreted through what Jonathan Culler describes as blurred in lyric poetry. We have previously observed the use of a blurred 'you' in poems discussed earlier in this book; here, we similarly observe a blurred 'he', merging the individual and the collective in a fluid, poetic manner.

If we look back at the refrain, and compare it with the following line group, we find a consistency in the use of deixis. It is almost only in the refrain that the poet does not repeat the phrase *aad garan lahaydeene* (you would have understood), instead using *waa la garanayaaye*, which translates as the passive 'it is known'. In the refrain, the person deixis include *gibil madow* (black skin), *gibil cad* (white skin), *gaaliyo Islaamba* (infidels and Muslims), *rag* (men) and *haween* (women), each an explicitly defined social group. The plural pronoun *iyaga* (they) refers to 'rag' (men), making it a clearly defined rather than a blurred position. We can say that, in this refrain, there is no need for an intermediate position to be taken.

By contrast, in the sections with *aad garan lahaydeene* (you would have understood), the poet employs a different system of address, using a blurred second-person addressee, 'you', and a blurred imagined subject 'he'. The shift from one deixis system to another – when the poet moves from an *aad garan lahaydeene* line group back to the refrain – acts as a structural marker, signalling a transition in the poem.

I have discussed the use of pastoral imagery in previous sections, so I will not elaborate on each of the images mentioned in this poem. However, I would like to highlight some aspects of these images that hold particular significance. For instance, in line 13, the poet introduces another animal reference: birds. Yet the verbs *guur* (to move, as in what the nomads do) and *qax* (to flee as a refugee) suggest that the birds serve as a metaphor, indicating that the poet is speaking just as much about human displacement. In line 14, she references Hiroshima, an extreme

example of the devastation that war brings. References to foreign events appear in other Somali poems as well. For example, in Caasha Luul's 'Tahriib' (The Sea-Migrations), she alludes to Palestine in one line that translates: 'In the book, what is written for us is the role of Palestine', when talking about the national traumas of the Somali people. I will explore this in more detail in the next section.

Following lines 10-15, the poet repeats the refrain. I will not include it here, as it remains the same as lines 6-9. She then begins a new section (lines 20-27), listing the harms caused by weapons and conflict, with each line ending in *aad garan lahaydeene* (you would have understood). As shown below, this section consists primarily of direct and realistic references, expressed in plain language. Structurally, each line follows a simple and consistent pattern: the *hojis* being an *in*-clause (which we may translate with 'that' in English), followed by *[b]aad* (you), which syntactically connects the *hooris*.

20 Colaad iyo waxay geysataad, garan lahaydeene
21 Inay gacalka naafeeysataad, garan lahaydeene
22 Gurbood inay agoomaysataad, garan lahaydeene
23 Odayada inay gawracdaad, garan lahaydeene
24 Inay dunida gaas-maas sudhaad, garan lahaydeene
25 Godob iyo wax baas inay tahaad, garan lahaydeene
26 Guryo negi inay ololisaad, garan lahaydeene
27 Intay halis gaadhsiisay baad, garan lahaydeene

20 Conflict and what it brings about, you would have understood
21 That it disables the dear ones you would have understood
22 That it orphans the children you would have understood
23 That it slaughters the elders you would have understood
24 That it hangs a gas-mask on the world you would have understood
25 That it is a resentment and a difficulty, you would have understood
26 That it sets alight permanent houses, you would have understood
27 The amount of danger which it has brought, you would have understood

In lines 21-23, the poet describes the human cost of war and conflict in plain language, using direct phrases such as 'it orphans the children' and 'it slaughters the elders'. Then, in lines 24-26, she shifts to metaphor, employing images such as *gaas-maas* (gas mask), *godob* (unresolved resentment, whether legally or through conflict), and *guryo negi* (permanent houses) being set alight, to figuratively describe the damage and danger. Line 27 then concludes this section with a straight-

forward statement: *Intay halis gaadhsiisay baad, garan lahaydeene* (The amount of danger which it has brought, you would have understood).

Saado Cabdi repeats the refrain again in lines 28-31. Following this, she turns to the theme of peace, dedicating 12 lines to its benefits.

32 Inay nabadi tahay geed hadhlaad, garan lahaydeene
33 Inay gacal xannaanaysataad, garan lahaydeene
34 Geel dhalay inay daaran tahaad, garan lahaydeene
35 Inay gaawe xoor badan tahaad, garan lahaydeene
36 Geyaan iyo jacayl inay tahaad, garan lahaydeene
37 Gelbis iyo aroos inay tahaad, garan lahaydeene
38 Inay goob farxadi taal tahaad, garan lahaydeene
39 Inay horumar gaadhsiisan tahaad, garan lahaydeene
40 Inay tahay guryo deyrka laad, garan lahaydeene
41 Inay tahay xariir lagu goglaad, garan lahaydeene
42 Gobaad inay ku iidaaman tahaad, garan lahaydeene
43 Inay tahay aqoon loo gudbaad, garan lahaydeene.

32 That peace is a tree with shade, you would have understood
33 That it cares for the dear ones, you would have understood
34 That it is about camels that have given birth to, you would have understood
35 That it is a [full] milk vessel with lots of froth, you would have understood
36 That it is a couple ready to marry and love, you would have understood
37 That it is escorting the bride and a wedding, you would have understood
38 That it is a place in which happiness is, you would have understood
39 That it brings development, you would have understood
40 That it is houses with the fenced yard, you would have understood
41 That it is silk which has been laid down throughout, you would have understood
42 That the she-camel [i.e. the nation] is seasoned by it, you would have understood
43 That it is knowledge which is passed on, you would have understood

In the first line of this line group, *Inay nabadi tahay geed hadhlaad, garan lahaydeene* (That peace is a tree with shade, you would have understood), the poet shifts the subject to *nabadi* (peace), with the *-i* suffix marking it as the subject, and it remains the subject in the following

lines. The image *geed hadhleh* (tree with shade) in this line resonates with *geedkii nabadeed* (the tree of peace), a phrase she repeats in the final line of the refrain.

Further parallels emerge in the subsequent lines, where images associated with peace mirror those used earlier to depict danger and harm. For instance, *gacal* (dear ones) in line 33, *Inay gacal xannaanaysataad, garan lahaydeene* (That it cares for the dear ones, you would have understood) echoes its use in line 21, *Inay gacalka naafeeysataad, garan lahaydeene* (That it disables the dear ones you would have understood), creating a striking contrast between destruction and care. Similarly, in lines 36-37, the imagery of 'couple', 'bride', and 'wedding' contrasts with the 'orphans' and 'elders' mentioned in lines 22-23.

Parallelism also appears in lines 34-35, where references to camels and milk production echo the earlier depictions of camels and other livestock in lines 10-13. In line 40, the image of houses with fenced yards directly contrasts with the image of houses set alight in line 26. Finally, in line 42, the poet reintroduces the image of the she-camel, which has appeared in previous poems. *Gobaad* is the name of a she-camel that produces milk and, in this context, symbolises the nation. The idea that the she-camel is 'seasoned' by peace suggests that peace nurtures and strengthens the nation, bringing prosperity and well-being.

In addition to the resonance with previously mentioned images, the poem also blends metaphorical imagery with plain language. While the poet fills her lines with vivid images – such as trees, camels, milk, fenced houses, and silk – representing different aspects of the benefits that peace brings, she also includes more straightforward statements in lines 38 and 39, directly stating that peace is 'a place where happiness is' and 'it brings development'. This balance between metaphor and direct expression is consistent with the style of language used in lines 20-27.

Following this section on peace, Saado repeats the refrain one final time to emphasise her message and bring the poem to a powerful conclusion.

'Waad Garan Lahaydeene' is a *gabay* with a language style markedly different from that of Caasha Luul's *gabay* poems. We have seen how Caasha Luul employs the technique of repeating a line or half-line and how she structures her poems. In contrast, Saado Cabdi uses repetition more intensely, incorporating both a four-line refrain and the same *hooris* repeated throughout, reinforcing her peace-making message as the lines echo in the audience's ears.

Gardner and El Bushra (2004: 140) note that women in Somali pastoral society have traditionally played an 'indirect but important part'

in conflict resolution. They have acted as peace envoys for their clans in the early stages of conflict, exerting influence in private over their husbands, sons, brothers, and uncles, and helping to seal peace agreements by being exchanged as brides to their clan's former enemy (*Ibid*: 147). This practice reflects the deep-rooted kinship system and patriarchal structures in which women were not formally autonomous but were objectified as belonging to a household or clan led by male members.

However, Somali women have demonstrated both the will and ability to exert collective, rather than personal, influence at the community and broader levels. Their contributions to ending violence and promoting peace have included formal presentations to warring parties, demonstrations, direct action, petitioning politicians and elders, and providing logistical and financial support to peace processes (*Ibid*: 140). As this chapter has shown, at many of the peace-making events, women have made themselves heard through the most important form of expression in the culture, poetry. While male leaders of warring parties may expect women to belong to a household or clan led by men and serve as a tool for sealing peace agreements through kinship bonds, women have asserted their autonomy in peace-making.

Moreover, in 'Waad Garan Lahaydeene', Saado Cabdi's appeal extends beyond Somali territories. She addresses 'the ones with black skin, the ones with white skin, non-believers and Muslims', and she notably highlights the identity of women and their influence in peace-making through her repeated lines. Although she does not explicitly challenge patriarchal traditions and gender expectations, we hear a strong and assertive voice – a woman poet who, far from being servile to male authority, speaks with clarity and conviction.

4.10. *'Tahriib' (The Sea-Migrations) by Caasha Luul Maxmuud Yuusuf*

Finally, I shall examine a powerful poem by Caasha Luul Maxamuud Yuusuf. We have already explored two of her poems on relations with men, observing her distinctive style, spirit, and skill in composing *gabay* poetry as a woman poet. Not only has she gained a reputation among the global Somali diaspora for her exceptional talent, but she is also recognised for engaging with the plight of her people through traditional poetic forms.

The poem I will now discuss is titled 'Tahriib' (The Sea-Migrations), which also serves as the title of her award-winning collection (Asha 2017). The word *tahriib* originates from the Arabic term for 'fleeing' and is defined as 'the mass migration of Somalis to North Africa with

the desperate hopes of crossing the Mediterranean and eventually reaching Europe' (Mehri 2018: 48). In this *gabay*, Caasha laments the countless Somali lives lost in *tahriib* and delivers a searing critique of Somali society's failures, which drive people to abandon their homeland.

What makes the poem particularly astonishing is that Caasha situates it within the *Deelley* poetic 'chain' that dates back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, during Maxamed Siyaad Barre's military regime. A poetry chain is called *silsilad* in Somali. It is a series of poems that respond to one another in succession. Ali Moussa Iye notes that 'in order to influence Somali socio-political debates, and to create a space for the free exchange of ideas and for the popular transmission of political thought, Somali poets inaugurated the use of poetic chains' (Iye 2007: 87, cited in Ali 2015: 63). These poetic chains thus form an essential part of Somalia's intellectual heritage, capturing historical events and collective consciousness, as Cassanelli (2009: 11) highlights.

The *Deelley* chain was initiated by two poets: Maxamed Xaashi Dhamac 'Gaarriye', a prominent poet and literary scholar who first articulated the metrical patterns of Somali poetry, and Maxamed Ibraahim Warsame 'Hadraawi', widely regarded as one of the greatest Somali poets of all time. Their poems set the foundation for the debate, which was later joined by more than fifty poets, all maintaining the same alliterating sound, *d*. Addressing the core issues of the Somali political crisis, particularly clannism, and criticising the regime through figurative language, these two poets sparked what became the most significant and controversial poetic debate in modern Somali history. Some participants contributed to support their arguments, while others used their poetic skill to launch counterattacks.

In Ali's discourse analysis of the *Deelley* chain, the author observes that the roles of both youth and women were largely overlooked, despite some of the poets themselves being young and one participant being female. The female poet in question, Saado Cali Warsame, contributed two poems to the chain, responding to accusations that someone else had written on her behalf with the defiant words: *Haddii aad rumaysnaysaan iyo haddii kaleba, warmihii ku soo dhacaysaa waxaa ganay gabar* (Whether you believe it or not, the spears that are hitting you have been thrown by a woman[73]). This attitude towards female poets appears to have shifted in the era of new media. As a female poet, Caasha Luul has gained widespread recognition and respect – something that women poets had long deserved. Not only are her works cir-

[73] Twitter thread by Ibrahim Hirsi, <https://twitter.com/TheNabaddoon/status/1277338770736627717> accessed on May 30, 2025.

culated via YouTube, WhatsApp chain messages, and satellite television, but she has also been invited to festivals and literary events in the Horn of Africa and several Western countries to perform her poetry. In 2021, she was selected as a member of the judging panel for the Somali Poetry Awards (*Tartanka Gabayada Soomaalida*), a major competition organised by the United Nations Development Programme.

One interesting feature of the *Deelley* chain is that all the poems made in the last century were in the short *jiifto* form, making them easy for listeners to understand and for poets to contribute to the chain. However, evoking the poetic debate of the past to reflect the experiences of Somalis today, Caasha opts for the *gabay* form. This choice may stem from the fact that, as she extends a chain that de facto ended in the early 1980s, she has greater freedom to choose between *jiifto* and other forms that best suit her messages. Additionally, while the poets of the late 1970s and early 1980s relied on oral transmission, Caasha benefits from both writing and the internet as platforms, providing a more conducive environment for composing and sharing lengthy *gabay* poems[74].

The poem 'Tahriib' (The Sea-Migrations) consists of nine line groups. Like her poems discussed in Chapter 3, it follows a traditional structure, beginning with an *arar* (opening line group) and concluding with a *gebaggebo* (closing line group). The poem's structure is evident not only in the thematic development of each line group but also in the use of language, particularly the shifting voice throughout. I will explore this aspect in detail in the following section. For now, I shall begin with the *arar*.

1 Da'da gabayga dabuubtiyo murtida, doodda hadalkayga;
2 Waxaan uga danleeyahay inaan, danaha sheegaaye
3 Dadweynow waxaan doonayaa, inan dadaalaaye
4 Dulmigaan dhacaayaan rabaa, inaan dillaacshaaye[75]
5 Tahriibtaa dadkeennii rogtaan, deyr ku xidhayaaye.

1 The *d* of the *gabay*, the argument and the wisdom, the discussion of my words
2 What I mean by that is that I tell [the things that are in the people's] interests
3 O population, I want to try hard

[74] The most important medium for poetry in the 1970s and 1980s was cassettes on which poems were recorded and then copied many times over.

[75] The word *dulmigaan* replaces *dulmigan* in the original text because of the metre. This makes no difference to the meaning or my discussion of the poem.

4 This injustice which has happened, I want to crack it apart
5 That *tahriib* which has turned our [incl.] people upside down, I am enclosing it with a fence

As we have seen in 'Dookh' and 'Calaf', in the first line, Caasha once again references the poem itself in the opening line, claiming both the *gabay* as a genre and *d* as the alliterating sound. She does this skilfully, packing seven *d* sounds into a single line composed entirely of noun phrases: *da'da gabayga* (the *d* [alliterating sound] of the *gabay*), *dabuubtiyo murtida* (the argument and the wisdom), and *doodda hadalkayga* (the discussion of my words).

The *Deelley* chain derives its name from the *d* alliterating sound, and it is these alliterating words that carry significant political meanings, such as *dawlad* (state, government), *dal* (country), *dad* (people), and brilliant metaphors such as the *daray*-tree and *damal*-tree representing tribalism and the power, offering shade only to itself and its 'underwood' (Ali 2015: 104).

In 'Tahriib', Caasha similarly keeps the alliterating words thematically interconnected. The phrase *da'da* (*d* sound), as the symbol of alliteration, embodies the key elements sought in alliterating words in Somali poetry. This resonates with both *dabuubtiyo murtida* (the argument and the wisdom) and *doodda hadalkayga* (the discussion of my words). Additionally, there is a secondary rhyme between *gabayga* (the *gabay*) in the *hojis* and *hadalkayga* (my speech), beyond the recurring alliterative *d* sounds. While *gabayga* (the *gabay*) ends in *ayga*, this is not the possessive suffix *-ayga* (my) as in *hadalkayga* (my speech). However, the two words still echo each other in meaning – suggesting that the *gabay* is her speech – further reinforcing the poet's mastery of sound techniques. By doing so, Caasha confidently demonstrates her poetic skill and commands the listeners' attention.

In the second line, Caasha immediately shifts from noun phrases to a complete sentence, which is almost prose-like. She begins with *waxaan*, stating *Waxaan uga danleeyahay inaan, danaha sheegaaye* (what I mean by [that] is I tell interests [of the people]), introducing a first-person pronoun as the lyric voice to address the first word in the next line, *dadweyn* (population). With the vocative suffix *-ow*, she is not addressing a 'blurred you', nor a specific person or group within the community, but rather the entire Somali public.

In my analysis of *arar* sections in 'Dookh' and 'Calaf', I noted that those openings do not explicitly introduce the poem's theme. For example, the *arar* in 'Calaf' begins with *Cilmi gabayba waayadan ma furin, cutubyadiisiiye* (Lately I haven't opened the units of the knowl-

edge of *gabay* poetry) and ends with *Aan caddeeyo caawoo kalaan, caadka rogayaaye* (Let me make it clear. On a night like tonight, I clear away the cloud[s]), without mentioning the poem's central theme.

However, in 'Tahriib', Caasha takes a different approach. Here, the *arar* not only references the poem itself but also introduces its theme directly in the final two lines: *Dulmigaan dhacaayaan rabaa, inaan dil-laacshaaye* (This injustice which has happened, I want to crack it apart); *Tahriibtaa dadkeennii rogtaan, deyr ku xidhayaaye* (That *tahriib* which has turned our people upside down, I am enclosing it with a fence). By metaphorically stating that she is 'enclosing the *tahriib* with a fence', she makes it clear that the purpose of this poem is to stop the *tahriib*.

Following the *arar*, there is a brief bridge-like line group, similar to the two lines that follow the *arar* in 'Calaf'.

6 U dulqaadan kari waayay oo, waan damqanayaaye
7 Jidhkaa iga dubaaxiya markaan, dib u jalleecaayo
8 Inta aan ilmada daadiyaan, dibinta ruugaaye.

6 I could not bear it and I am feeling the pain
7 The body twitches against me when I turn around to look
8 As I spill the tears I chew the lip

We see in the three lines, the subjectivity of the lyric voice is intensified as the lyric 'I' conveys personal emotions and deep pain. Through this voice, the poet expresses her anguish at witnessing the illness within society and reveals her motivation for composing this poem.

The word *dubaaxi*, used to describe the twitching of the body, typically refers to the convulsions of an animal after it has been slaughtered. Here, the poet employs a pastoral reference metaphorically to illustrate her own suffering. It is this unbearable pain that compels her to speak out against *tahriib*.

These three lines serve as a bridge between the *arar* and the *dhexdhexaad*, preparing the listeners for the arguments to follow. The lyric 'I' remains consistent with the *arar*, as the *-aan* (I) pronoun is repeated throughout these lines. However, as the *dhexdhexaad* begins, we will observe a distinct change. Now, we turn to line 9-17, the first line group of the *dhexdhexaad* section.

9 Afrikaa dhib deris looga dhigay, daayin abidkoode
10 Soomaaliduna ka daran oo way, ugu dambeeysaaye
11 Qalbigaa intuu daxal ka galay, daamur wada yeeshey
12 Dareenkii waddanigaa lumoo, waa dad baabba'aye

13 Damiirkii waxaa garanayaan, digigixoonayne
14 Dabin laysu dhigay weeye oo, duul kalaa xidhaye
15 Diiwaanka waxaa noogu qoran, doorkii Falastiine
16 Ma daneeye aan diirran baa, dooxay shacabkiiye
17 Dillaal iyo mallaal baa midiba, dacalka haystaaye.

9 Africa has made trouble a neighbour for their everlasting [time] that lasts
10 And the Somalis are worse and they come last
11 The heart, as rust entered it, it was all made into tarmac
12 The national feeling has got lost, they are a people which has become destroyed
13 The conscience of understanding the feelings of sorrow for their compatriot's misfortune is missing
14 It is a trap laid for each other and another group of people has set it
15 In the book, what is written for us is the role of Palestine
16 One who doesn't care who is not stirred has stabbed the people
17 A broker and a middleman each one holds the hem

In lines 9 and 10, the poet directly addresses the dilemmas of Africa and the plight of the Somali people. However, as an African and a Somali in exile herself, she does not use the first person. Instead, she employs the third-person plural in words such as *abidkoode* (their everlasting, i.e. forever) and *way ugu dambeeysaaye* (they are the last) to describe her motherland. This marks a shift from subjectivity to a more objective depiction of the reality that, in the poet's view, Somalis are facing.

Lines 11-13 function as a unit, with all three lines revolving around a single key message. The metaphor of a 'rusted heart' in line 11 resonates with the phrase 'national feeling has got lost' in line 12 and the absence of conscience and sympathy in line 13. 'Heart', 'national feeling' and 'conscience' all point to morality, evoking issues such as irresponsibility, malfeasance, hypocrisy, and corruption. This theme was also central to the *Deelley* poems. In addition to condemning how clannism was manipulated to uphold the regime, the *Deelley* poets spoke out against a range of moral failings. While *Deelley* exemplifies a search for a shared moral foundation to resist oppression, Caasha's 'Tahriib' reiterates its importance in rebuilding a fractured society.

Following the line group, the next three line groups – lines 18-23, 24-29, and 30-34 – form a new segment in which the poet describes the deep-rooted crises in Somali society. I shall examine these line groups together, highlighting notable aspects of language use.

18 Haddii laga dareeroo dalkii, doonni laga raacay
19 Deebaaq qadhaadh iyo hadduu, dacar inoo yeeshey
20 Dullin iyo abaar iyo hadduu, diirato horseedey[76]
21 Daad laga ordaayiyo hadduu, degel madow yeeshey
22 Duufaan kacaysiyo haddii, duumo laga qaaday
23 Duqaydiyo carruurtii hadday, dibed u soo yaacday.

24 Dalka yaa u hadhi tolow markaa, waa dareen yimiye?
25 Waa xaajo duudduuban iyo, sheeko duluc dheere
26 Da'yartaa dhammaatiyo waxa, dumar idlaanaaya
27 Diricyada tahriibaaya ee, dabargo'aa taagan
28 Diihaalka gaajada kuwaa, dibed wareegaaya
29 Badahay dul-heehaabayaan, damalladeenniiye.

30 Diibkiyo yaxaaskaa cunoo, daaqay lafahooda
31 Dugaaggiyo waraabaa daldala, darib sideediiye
32 Duleedkaa la soo wada wadhiyo, dacalka xeebaaye
33 Iyagoo dubkiyo diirku baxay, baa la daawadaye
34 Waa kuwaa darxumo leeday[77] een, duugan kari waynnay.

18 If one poured out of it and went away from the country in a boat
19 If it makes a bitter thing, bitterness and aloe for us
20 If he who lacks dignity and drought and *diirato* [one who peels, strips things away] has led
21 If he has made a flood from which one runs and a black long-term encampment
22 If [they] are taken from a typhoon which rose and from plague
23 If the old people and the children spread out abroad

24 Who will remain for the country, O people, then, it is a thought that has come
25 It is a question that is twisted in itself and a story
26 The young have perished and women are coming to an end
27 The noble people who are going on *tahriib* and facing destruction
28 The destitution of hunger those who wander around abroad
29 They float on top of the seas, our [incl.] *damal* trees
30 The sharks and crocodiles ate them and grazed on their bones

[76] There is a spelling mistake in *horseeddey* as shown in the original text. There should be only one *d*.

[77] Written as *le'day* in Asha (2017). I changed this to *leeday*, from *leedahay* because there needs to be a long vowel in the metre.

31 The wild animals and the hyenas eat them like camel fat
32 They were put out to dry at the back and at the side of the coast
33 While the skin and hide left them, one watched them
34 There are the ones which misery owns and which we could not bury

She begins this section in a style we have seen in 'Dookh', using consecutive lines joined by *haddii-* (if), which also creates a secondary alliteration in lines 18-23. Except for line 18, which begins with *haddii* (if) and places the alliterating word *dalkii* (the country) in the middle, all the other lines in this line group start with a *d-* word in both hemistiches. Additionally, *haddii* (if) appears in a cluster with *uu* (he) in lines 19-21, and *ay* (they) in line 23, positioned mid-line. The consistent placement of these elements makes this line group instantly engaging, creating a rhythmic pattern that leads listeners to anticipate the next line.

As the listeners follow along, they unconsciously take on the lyric voice's perspective, echoing these 'if' questions themselves. Through this sound technique, the poet invites listeners into the lyric event – not merely as passive observers of her emotions but as participants who may feel their own emotions stir as they step into her voice. This emotional intensity builds as the repeated sounds accumulate and new images unfold, culminating in the mention of *duqaydiyo carruurtii* (old people and the children), those physically least able to endure the hardships of *tahriib*.

In the next line group, following these conditional questions, she shifts to direct address. Beginning with *dadka* (people), she poses a rhetorical question using *yaa* (who), addressing the people in a vocative, *Dalka yaa u hadhi tolow* (Who will remain for the country, O people). In lines 26-27, following the mention of *duqaydiyo carruurtii* (old people and the children) in the previous line group, the poet introduces *da'yarta* (the young people), *dumar* (women) and *diricyada* (the noble people) – three alliterating words representing different groups in society, collectively signifying all those who embark on *tahriib* and tragically lose their lives. Although women and their fate in *tahriib* are specifically mentioned in this line, unlike in the other poems examined in this chapter, the poet does not emphasise women's identity in particular. Instead, she evokes a broader Somali identity and the collective suffering caused by forced displacement. The image of women, like that of young and noble people, symbolises this shared national grief. There is another image representing the young people in this line group: the *damal*-trees in line 29. The poet says, *Badahay dul-heehaabayaan, damalladeenniiye*, (They float on top of the seas, our [incl.] *damal* trees).

The *damal* tree, first introduced into the *Deelley* by Hadraawi, has been used by many poets in their works (Ali 2015: 140-141). Although Hadraawi originally used the term to indicate a location where Somali men gather to discuss serious matters, rather than as a metaphor, it later took on new meanings. Idaajaa used it to refer to the tribal system, while Yuusuf Aadan Xuseen added the connotation of power. However, in 'Tahriib', Caasha does not use the image of *damal* to comment on clannism, but rather as a metaphor for young people, reinforced by the inclusive possessive suffix *eennii* (our). The phrase *damalladeennii* (our *damal*-trees) is particularly striking, as it marks a shift from the third-person perspective that the poet has maintained throughout the *dhexdhexaad* (main body) section to an inclusive first-person possessive: *our damal* trees, *our* young people.

A similar shift occurs with the use of *inoo* (for us) in line 19: *Deebaaq qadhaadh iyo hadduu, dacar inoo yeeshey* (If it makes a bitter thing, bitterness and aloe for us). While earlier in the *dhexdhexaad*, as in lines 10 and 12, the poet refers to Somalis as 'they', and in line 28, she describes them as *kuwaa* (those who), these first-person pronouns disrupt the established distance.

When depicting the horrors of the *tahriib* journey, the lyric voice uses a consistent third-person point of view which makes it a seemingly 'narrator'. This creates the impression that the voice is objectively recounting events rather than conveying personal emotions. However, this consistency is suddenly broken by the first-person pronouns in lines 19 and 29, as mentioned. This shift collapses the distance between the lyric voice, as a 'narrator', and the subjects of the poem – 'Somalis', the 'one who went away from the country in a boat', the 'young', the 'women', the 'noble people', who are, in reality, the listeners themselves and their people. When the lyric voice utters 'we' instead of 'they', Somali experiences are no longer externalised as *their* suffering but are instead internalised as *our* suffering. This contrast is made even more explicit within a single line, as seen in line 29: *Badahay dul-heehaabayaan, damalladeenniiye* (They float on top of the seas, our [incl.] *damal* trees).

This *gabay* is a poem about *tahriib* and, fundamentally, about the people who are forced to endure its suffering. As Caasha declares in the final line of the *arar*: *Tahriibtaa dadkeennii rogtaan, deyr ku xidhayaaye*, (That *tahriib* which has turned our people upside down, I am enclosing it with a fence). Thus, the poet is speaking to the people, addressing them, and speaking about them. Rather than repeatedly addressing the audience directly with a second-person *you*, or maintaining the first-person perspective she used in the *arar*, she predominantly em-

ploys the third person. However, I suggest that it is through the sudden shift from third person to first person that heightened emotion is conveyed, leaving a lasting impact on the listener.

Following this shift in pronoun, in lines 30-34, the voice returns to the third person as the poet continues to honour the lost lives. The pastoral imagery of *darib* (camel fat) in line 31 is particularly striking: *Dugaaggiyo waraabaa daldala, darib sideediiye* (The wild animals and the hyenas eat them like camel fat). A metaphor like camel is typically associated with positive connotations – seen, for instance, in the last line of the *arar* in 'Dookh', as discussed in Chapter 3. However, here, the poet subverts this conventional meaning. Instead of signifying value or nourishment, camel fat represents the tragic fate of those taken by *tahriib*, devoured by wild animals and hyenas. The images of *dugaag* (wild animals) and *waraabe* (hyena), alongside *diib* (shark) and *yaxaas* (crocodile) in line 30, serve as metaphors for the dangers of the *tahriib* journey. They also allude to the horrors of human trafficking and even possible enslavement in transit countries such as Libya, as noted by Momtaza Mehri (2018: 49).

In the next line group, the poet shifts back to the first-person pronoun, speaking about the problems she sees in Somali society – problems that have forced people to embark on *tahriib*.

35 Damac baa dadkaygii galoo, waa dawamayaane
36 Dayow waynnu wada noqonnayoo ways, dib maraynaaye
37 Dib-u-socod ayaan wada nihiyo, dawlad jaahil ahe
38 Dawarsiga ku naaxdaan nihiyo, doonis ruux kale
39 Diif aan dhammaanaynnin baa, loogu dawggalaye.

35 Greed has entered my people, they get-rich-or-die-trying[78]
36 We all became bewildered [people] and are back-biting each other
37 We are all backward moving and a polity which is ignorant
38 [Ones that] grow in begging we are and looking from other people
39 One has entered on the path of weakness which does not end

In each line of this line group, Caasha Luul directly or indirectly highlights an issue she sees in Somali society. In line 35, she addresses the desire for wealth and material possessions, implying a lack of ethics and morals among the people. In line 36, she critiques clannism, echoing the debates in the *Deelley* poems. In lines 37-39, she speaks about

[78] The word *dawamayaan* seems to be a word that is not included in the dictionaries. I used the translation by Clare Pollard in Asha (2017) for this hemistich.

the lack of quality education, dependence on international aid, and weak state capacity.

While listing these societal problems, the poet shifts to the first-person pronoun, creating a stark contrast with the third-person perspective used in the previous lines. It is as if the lyric voice is saying: 'The young, the women, the noble people – they – were cast aside, left to dry at the back and the edge of the coast because greed has entered my people; we have all become bewildered, and we are all moving backwards.' There is also an implicit message: 'They have suffered through *tahriib*, yet we remain stagnant, still looking to others for solutions.'

By invoking *Soomaalinnimo*, the poet moves from 'they' to 'we' – shifting from third person to first person – to appeal to responsibility, integrity, and collective sympathy, calling on the people to enact change. 'They' would not be forced into *tahriib*, if 'we' took action and did better. The use of the third-person plural pronoun (they) indicates a more 'narrative' mode, but by switching to 'we', the poem transitions into a more lyric mode, engaging the listeners in a direct and intimate way. Whereas 'they' and 'their' in earlier lines refer to the *blurred* lost ones, 'we' pulls the audience back from the imagined 'shores', to the lyric 'now' where the poet delivers her message. This shift transforms the audience's experience, making it more immediate and personal, a key feature of the lyric mode rather than a more distanced 'narrative' mode.

I shall now move to the next line group, which consists of lines 40-47, marks the final line group of the *dhexdhexaad* section.

40 Afartaa intaan dabar ka furay, diirad ma ku eegey
41 Darajada Ilaah baa baxshee, mawga furay daaha,
42 Doorkaa abwaannadu horey, uga daliilsheene
43 Deelleeyda maansada horey, uga daqiiqsheene,
44 Aniguna ka dabaggeeyey oo, waan ku darayaaye
45 Waanadu kuway deeqdo ee, raacda danahooda
46 Iyo kuwa dariiqii wacnaa, diinta ku ekaada,
47 Daayinow Ilaahow ka yeel, dabargo' weeyaane!

40 Those four as I have untied a hobble have I looked with a compass
41 God brings [a person] to the position and have I opened the curtain from it for him
42 That role the poets brought as proof before for it [i.e. the argument]
43 They ground it for that in the *Deelley*
44 And I have brought it [i.e. my poem] to it [i.e. the Deelley] and I am adding to it
45 The ones that advice is generous to and which serves in their interests

46 And the ones who are limited to the good path in the religion
47 O Everlasting One, O God, make them so; [otherwise] it is destruction.

When examining the *dhexdhexaad* as a whole, we can observe an internal structure of opening – main body – conclusion. within this section. I previously noted that lines 6-8, following the *arar*, serve as a bridge that transitions the listener from the *arar* to the beginning of the *dhexdhexaad*. Similarly, the line group 40-47, positioned near the end of the poem, functions as a concluding section within the *dhexdhexaad*. It bridges what has been said in this section to the poem's final conclusion in the *gebagebbo*.

Two distinct features set this line group apart from the previous lines in the *dhexdhexaad* and signal its concluding function. First, there is the explicit reference to the *Deelley*. The first word *Afartaa* in line 40, was used by Gaarriye, Hadraawi and others in the *Deelley* and elsewhere to refer back to earlier lines in a poem. While I have already noted that the alliterative metaphor of '*damal*-trees' was a subtle reference to the *Deelley*, its meaning in 'Tahriib' differs from how it was used in the *Deelley* poems of the 1970s-80s. However, in this instance, *afartaa* is employed in exactly the same way as in the *Deelley* tradition. Hints of the *Deelley* appear throughout the poem – from the emphasis on the *d* alliterating sound in the *arar* to the poet's critique of societal ills – but she does not make a direct reference to the *Deelley* until lines 42-44, where she explicitly states that she is contributing to the poetic chain.

The other feature that stands out is the inclusion of supplication. In 'Calaf', we saw how she addressed God, saying *Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa calafba hay siinnin* (O Almighty, O Allah, that one, don't give me such due) at the final line of a line group. In 'Tahriib', however, she refrains from mentioning God throughout the poem, maintaining a consistently secular tone, until this penultimate line group. As I previously discussed, supplication is, in essence, an indirect address to the audience. It introduces a ritualistic element to the poem, establishing a lyric event in which the poet invites her listeners to participate. As she makes the supplication, the audience listens, relates, and reflects – momentarily stepping into the poet's voice. In doing so, she prepares them for the poem's final concluding section: the *gebagebbo*.

48 Waxba gabaygu yuu ila durkine, waan dabrahayaaye;
49 Haddii dalagga aan beerannoo, doogga la abqaalo
50 Nimcadaa inoo dararaysan iyo, badaha duudduban

51 Buurahan Ilaah noo dejee, godol la soo daatay
52 Baadroolka diliq laynayee, dixaya hoostooda
53 Macdantaa dingiigtiyo haddaan, dahabka[79] soo saarno
54 Duunyada haddaan dhaqannoo, doobi laga buuxsho
55 Duruustiyo cilmiga lays baroo, diinta la adkeeyo
56 Dalku wayna wada deeqi laa, aynnu dib u joogno
57 Daaquudka[80] aan naarno iyo, ducufka shayddaanka
58 Khayraadku waa dihinyahee, aan dibnaha saarno.

48 Let the *gabay* not move along [too far] with me; I am hobbling it
49 If the crops which we cultivate and the pasture one replants
50 The natural abundant resources which have made a lot for us and the seas folded [in waves]
51 These mountains which God set down for us and which flowed with lots of milk ready to be milked
52 The petroleum which flows in channels and which flows beneath them
53 If we produce those minerals lying underneath and the gold
54 If we raise the livestock and fill the *doobi* milk vessel
55 [If] one teaches oneself the lessons and the knowledge and strengthens the religion
56 The country would have been generous to us all let us stay again
57 Let us send to Hell the evil-doer and the weak deeds of Satan
58 The good resources are untouched; let us put the lips on them

In the classic style that she has mastered, Caasha ends this *gabay* poem with a *gebaggebo* (concluding line group). We see that the first line in this *gebaggebo*, *Waxba gabaygu yuu ila durkine, waan dabrahayaaye* (Let the *gabay* not move along [too far] with me; I am hobbling it) echoes with her very first line in the *arar*, *Da'da gabayga dabuubtiyo murtida, doodda hadalkayga* (The *d* of the *gabay* the argument and the wisdom, the discussion of my words). By doing so, she reaffirms that she is composing a *gabay* – a genre traditionally associated with political and serious discourse. From a gender perspective, this also serves as a powerful assertion, as *gabay* poetry has historically been a predominantly male domain.

As a woman poet, she offers her advice on addressing the social cri-

[79] In Asha (2017: 22) the text is given as *dahab ka*. It should be written *dahabka*, and this is as it is pronounced in the recording.

[80] *Daaquud* is from a reference in the Qur'an (2:256) that means 'false gods, false objects of worship'.

sis of *tahriib* that she has highlighted in the preceding lines. In this final line group, pastoral references are not merely used as imagery and metaphor but are presented in a realistic sense – highlighting the resources available in the country and urging people to make proper use of them. Finally in the last line, she uses an *aan* (let us) optative sentence, and delivers her appeals once more to her listeners: *aan dibnaha saarno* (let's put the lips on them), in other words, let's act now.

This chapter has explored poetry by Somali women about politics and social issues, tracing a gradual shift from seeking inclusion in nationalist movements to asserting independent voices in political and social discourse. If we compare Caasha Luul's 'Tahriib' with poems composed between the 1940s and 1970s, we see a clear evolution in the empowerment expressed in women's poetry. In the 1940s, poets called on fellow women to join men in the struggle for independence. By the 1970s, with their political consciousness awakened, women poets began advocating for women's rights and their participation in government – something that still required recognition and approval from male authorities. Now, with Caasha Luul writing as a poet in exile, we see a significant shift. She is not seeking permission from any authority to engage in political discourse. Instead, she asserts her voice through *gabay*, a traditionally male-dominated genre, using poetry to critique societal failures and offer solutions.

Caasha Luul's contribution to the *Deelley* tradition exemplifies this transformation. Unlike earlier women poets who framed their demands within existing power structures, she claims her space in political discourse without seeking validation from male authorities. She challenges the sexist restrictions placed on women in a patriarchal society, making her voice heard on her own terms, and asserts that women have the autonomy to speak on political matters – not through institutional roles granted by men, but through the power of poetry itself. Her poetry is not a plea for recognition but an assertion of responsibility, reflecting the deeply rooted Somali belief that poets serve as spokespeople for the people. Her competence is evident not only in the message she conveys, but also in her mastery of form, language, and overall composition.

This chapter has demonstrated how Somali women's poetry has moved beyond the margins, increasingly engaging with political and cultural discourse. While historical barriers have often led to the neglect of women's voices in Somali literary traditions, female poets have continually challenged these limitations, proving that they have long been active participants in shaping national consciousness.

By reclaiming their space in poetry, Somali women poets across different periods have affirmed that their voices matter – not as an exten-

sion of male authority but as independent, critical perspectives on the realities of their society. Whether calling for national unity, demanding political representation, or addressing contemporary crises, they have used poetry as a means of resistance, expression, and advocacy. This development not only reshapes Somali poetic traditions but also contributes to broader discussions on gender, agency, and social transformation.

Conclusion

Dabaho *et al.* (1995) note on the marginalisation of women in Somali poetry: '... you will never hear of a great woman poet in Somali history, while there have been a great many celebrated male poets, whose poems have been documented and memorised by a large number of people.'

This, of course, does not mean there were no women poets; but the reality is that nobody, neither foreigners nor the Somalis themselves, bothered to view women's literature and the themes they talk about as important enough to be recorded. Even the women themselves did not see their importance because they had internalised the idea that their culture was of less significance than men's'.

That was written in 1995. Before then, as far as I am aware, only two female researchers – Amina (1981) and Zainab (1991, 1994) – had focused on Somali women's poetry, offering the earliest first-hand accounts of women's experiences in their own voices. Kapteijns (1991) was another early work exploring gender representation and women's voices in poetry. The poems collected, translated, and analysed by these pioneering female scholars form an essential part of the Somali Studies canon. In contrast, male scholars, such as B.W. Andrzejewski, found it difficult to access women's poetry and, as a result, did not incorporate any into his anthology of Somali poetry (Andrzejewski with Andrzejewski 1993: 1).

However, Somali women have been composing poetry for as long as men. Traditionally, their work circulated within female family networks and close social circles. Yet, this has changed significantly due to social transformations in the Horn of Africa and, more recently, the rise of modern media. The barriers that Dabaho *et al.* described have gradually shifted over the past two decades. Not only have collections of Somali women's poetry, such as Xaawa Jibriil's poems in Faduma (2008) and Caasha Luul's poems in Asha (2017), been published with

translations in English[81], but contemporary Somali women poets like Caasha Luul and Saado Cabdi have also gained recognition for their work. Their poetry now reaches not only Somali audiences but also attracts foreign researchers, including myself, to examine their contributions more closely.

Having studied Somali for only a year when I first began my research, I wondered how I could truly appreciate the beauty of Somali oral art without a native ear to 'take the pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetical expressions', as Sir Richard Burton remarked in *First Footsteps in East Africa* (Burton 1894). Naturally, my initial approach to the poems was through the available English translations in published works. However, I quickly began searching for repeated lines, structural patterns, and alliterative metaphors, asking myself what the poet was actually saying and why she expressed it in a particular way. My background in Chinese poetry – both as a learner and as a poet myself – guided this inquiry.

It was then that I realised I wanted to explore how the intricate use of language – pronouns, tenses, sound, figures of speech, imagery, hyperbole, and poetic structure – makes Somali poetry persuasive and rhetorical, as it is expected to be. Since my analysis is written in English, I have drawn on concepts from lyric theory, particularly those developed by Culler (2015) and other scholars, as analytical tools to examine linguistic devices inherent in Somali poetry.

A close reading of Somali women's poetry, with a focus on language and style through the lens of lyric theory, has not been undertaken by previous researchers. I argue that the materiality of language is crucial to understanding these poetic artefacts and that it is this very quality that allows us to discuss Somali poems as lyric poetry. I hope this book has demonstrated both the feasibility and the value of approaching Somali poetry in this way.

As I explore Somali women's poetry, I constantly engage with the gender perspectives embedded in their poems. This has pushed me to read more on gender studies and incorporate gender theories into my textual analysis. In a patriarchal society, Somali women face significant barriers, yet they assert their agency through poetry. Within the limited spaces available to them, they make themselves heard, pushing beyond the margins set by men. I then ask myself: What makes a good poem? What defines a good poem? And, just as importantly, who decides what constitutes one? In other words, who determines whether a poem

[81] There are, of course, more collections of Somali women's poems in Somali or with translation in other language that I did not include in this book.

is 'trivial' or 'unsophisticated', to use Axmed's (1993: 22) words.

Inspired by Kapteijn's (1999) examination of Somali women's voices from a gender perspective, I hope to have provided my own answers to these questions. Women's poems are by no means 'trivial' or 'unsophisticated' and should not be regarded as such. Their genres have historically been judged as inferior, not because of their poetic qualities, but because those who make and perform them have been viewed as having lower social status. This is not a fair assessment, as it is not even based on an analysis of the poetry itself. To address whether women's poems should be considered good, I have examined both what these poems express, and how the poets express them.

I began my investigation with *hobeeyo*, the Somali lullabies. In Chapter 2, we explored how a woman's life is encapsulated in a *hobeeyo*, from birth to marriage and even the afterlife, expressed in short lines to an audience that does not yet understand the words – her child. These songs can be seen as a mother's wishes or advice for her child, but they also reveal her concerns about her own life. Somali lullabies, therefore, carry profound messages deeply rooted in both pastoral traditions and a patriarchal society. This is evident in themes such as the preference for a baby boy or the hope that a daughter will marry into a powerful clan. At the same time, there are *hobeeyo* that challenge gender norms, such as when a mother sings that she prefers a baby girl. Though these messages may be in opposition, they both reflect the collective wisdom of women navigating a patriarchal system.

This collective wisdom is also reflected in the voice and address found in the poetic language. *Hobeeyo* and other *hees* are often learned from mothers and other women, meaning that their voice is not that of an individual performer but one that any woman can adopt. As a result, *hees* largely represents socially constructed expressions of Somali women's experiences rather than individualised perspectives. For example, when a mother sings to her infant daughter about how 'men have wronged us', her voice is not just her own – it is a collective lament on women's subordinated position in society. However, this lament remains within the private sphere, never seeking direct confrontation with the Somali power structure. It is, at most, a complaint, a recognition of injustice voiced behind closed doors, rather than an act of defiance.

Occasionally, however, *hees* offers space for individual expression, as seen in the scenario described by John Johnson, where a wife embeds a message to her husband within a work song, addressing the camel to avoid directly confronting his authority. While this illustrates that women do possess agency in such moments, it remains constrained. The *hees* serves as a culturally accepted means of negotiation, but they

rarely reach the level of outright resistance or challenge existing norms.

Maanso, however, opens up a greater space for language and, importantly, for individuality. In Chapters 3 and 4, I examined how women poets use *gabay* and *buraambur* to articulate their personal experiences and opinions. Both *buraambur* and *gabay* feature longer lines with two alliterating words per line, allowing for greater expressive range. We have seen how poets like Caasha Luul and Saado Cabdi skilfully structure their poems, 'play' with sound patterns, and use pastoral imagery and alliteration to emphasise their ideas and emotions. While *hees* offers little room for such poetic techniques, *maanso* provides women with a more expansive platform to craft persuasive arguments and engage a broader audience.

This individuality is also reflected in the diverse identities expressed in these poems. Whereas *hobeeyo* often reinforces conventional expectations of a woman's life, *maanso* allows for a more complex and autonomous self-representation. Xaawa Jibriil, for example, recorded her entire life story through her *maanso* poetry. She asserts her identity not only as a nomadic daughter, sister, or wife but also as a patriot, an activist, and a woman who challenges gender norms through poetry. The voice in her poems may represent her own perspective, or it may serve as a collective voice for a broader group. Through this voice, a woman poet can highlight concerns that extend beyond her personal experiences, addressing issues of significance to women as a group and contributing to the broader consciousness of the community.

Women poets also exercise autonomy in choosing the poetic form through which their messages are delivered. A *gabay* may be chosen for its traditional function in resolving conflicts, engaging in poetic debate, or asserting political arguments – domains from which women were historically excluded. The use of *buraambur* to convey political messages can similarly be seen as a form of contestation, challenging the notion that this female genre is limited to personal or domestic themes. Of course, there are many other genres that this book has not explored in depth, such as women's religious songs (*sitaad*) and various dance and work songs. Somali women's voices, wisdom, and power are embedded in these poetic forms, and I hope that future studies will examine them further.

Both *hees* and *maanso* serve as artistic expressions of Somali women's lives. In each genre, we find language that clearly articulates women's perspectives, emotions, and critiques of society. More importantly, in both, women express what they might otherwise be forbidden to say. As American poet Craig Morgan Teicher states, a poem is something that can't otherwise be said addressed to someone who can't oth-

erwise hear it. Far from being ‘trivial’ or ‘unsophisticated’, Somali women’s poetry forms a crucial part of Somali literature, presenting complex and nuanced discourses both by women and about women. As they navigate personal transformations and historical shifts within their communities, Somali women use poetry to express their thoughts and emotions, reinforce or challenge gender expectations, and shape their social environment through this cherished artistic tradition.

Appendix: Full Texts of Long Poems with Translations

I have broken down long poems into smaller groups of lines for analytical purposes in Chapters 3 and 4. Here, I present their full texts and translations so that readers can appreciate the poems in their entirety. I have made changes to the spelling of some words and the placement of some commas to reflect the correct word, metre and caesura. Only the corrected version is presented here.

Dookh (Taste) by Caasha Luul

1 Haddaanad gabayga deelqaafka iyo, dari ka saaraynnin
    If you did not remove the incoherency and defect from the *gabay*
2 Dalabtiyo haddaan laga midh tirin, diniqa aan muuqan
    If one did not get rid of the disharmony and invisible wound from it
3 Meeshii dahsoonayd haddaan, lagu daqiiqeeynnin
    If one did not shed light on the obscure place
4 Doogtiyo haddaan lagu lafgurin, dakharradii raagay
    If one did not have an operation on the wound and the head wounds that lasted
5 Darar lagama maaloo tixuhu, dufan ma yeeshaane
    One doesn't draw milk from [it]. The lines don't make grease
6 Aan dareersho caawoo kalaan, daribta saafaaye.
Let me spill it out. On a night like tonight, I slice thinly the fat.

7 Inkastuu darmaan quruxsan iyo, daaddax ugu yeedho
    Though he calls out 'a beautiful mare' and 'cutie'
8 Ama uu ammaan deexdo oo, 'dawlo!' ku yidhaahdo
    Or he gives a lot of praise and calls you: '*dawlo*!'
9 Hadal dhegaha deeqaaya oo, dabacsan oo fiican
    [If he] gives generously soft and nice speech to the ears
10 Dun xariir ah iyo shaal hadduu, dahab ku saarsaaro
    If he puts silk thread and shawl and gold on top of you
11 Daraandaryo araggaaga hooy, damacu waa yaabe
    Wonderful, beautiful things; the sight of you! Desire is a surprise.
12 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.
    If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

13 Hadduu daaro waaweyn dhisoo, dabaqyo kuu jeexo
If he builds big houses and divides floors for you
14 Dal dhan oo muraayad ah dhammaan, adiga kuu deyro
A whole land which is entirely glass, [he] fences for you
15 Sancadaw dambeeysiyo hadduu, dalabka kuu keeno
If he brings you the latest fashion and the request
16 Naftu waxay yara doonayso uu, deregga soo saaro
Whatever little things the soul wants, he places at the threshold
17 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.
If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

18 Inkastoo adduun door ah iyo, duunyo lagu sheego
Although one says [that he has] worldly wealth and livestock
19 Inkastuu dulqaad badan yahoo, deeqsi lagu sheego
Though one says that he is very patient and generous
20 Duub iyo malaaq uu yahoo, dooje lagu sheego
One says that he is a leader, a chief, someone who brings good to the community
21 Digriigiyo mastariga iyo, derejo weyn haysto
Having a degree, a Master's, and a high level [in education]
22 Digrigiyo Quraankiyo hadduu, diinta yahay xaafid
If he is religious and memorises the Qur'an
23 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.
If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

24 Inkastuu dillaacshoo qalbiga, daabac ku xardhaayo
Though he pulls out the heart and decorates embroidery on it
25 Xididdada dil-dilayee wadnuhu, dirayo dhiiggooda
And the blood vessels beat, through which the heart sends the blood
26 Dahriga iyo laabtaba ku dhigo, Deeqa magacaaga
[Though] he puts your name, Deeqa on his body and torso
27 Diiwaankii Cilmoo kale galoo, deli ka laallaado
And goes into all the poems by Cilmi and others, dangling from a cliff edge
28 Suugaanta duugga ah murtida, damashi kuu qaado
Sings for you old poetry rich in wisdom
29 Daaweeynta heesaha intaa, daram garaacaayo
The healing of songs which the drums beat
30 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.
If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

31 Haddii uu dalxiis kuugu diro, dunida guudkeeda
If he sends you over the whole world as a tourist
32 Diyaarado hawada sarena aad, kula damaanshaaddo
And celebrates with you on the plane in the upper air
33 Durdur iyo hadduu kugu dul furo, ilo dareeraaya
If he makes streams and springs flow for you
34 Deeradiyo cawshiyo ugaadh, quruxda daa'uuska
The gazelle, the antelope, the prey, the beauty of a peacock
35 Doog iyo cagaar soo ifbaxay, darinta kuu daadsho
Spreading out for you the mat of green and grass which spring up
36 Ama Daallo oo roobku heley, Dalawa kuu maalo
Or the *Daallo* mountain which the rain found, [where he] milks *Dalawa* the camel for you
37 Oo doobi kuu buuxiyoo, kuna daryeelaayo
And fills the milk vessel for you, and cares for you
38 Dayrtiyo Gugaba kuu da'oo, adiga kuu deexdo
Through the *Dayr* and *Gu'* season, [he] falls as rain for you, and talks a lot to you
39 Daruur hoortay uu kuu noqdiyo, malabka Doocaanka
He becomes a cloud which poured down and the *Doocaan* honey for you
40 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.
If he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

41 Inkastuu Darwiish adag yahiyo, geesi diriraayo
Though he is a hard Dervish and a hero who fights
42 Dirica iyo wiil hoog yahoo, degello naafeeyo
And is a determined person, a fearless young man who destroys communities [of enemies]
43 Dumukha iyo qorigaba ridoo, diiradda u saaro
Firing the gun and rifles, hitting the targets
44 Halka lagu dagaalamo hadduu, doorar ka ciyaaro
If he plays roles in the places where one fights in war
45 Ama uu daqiiqaayo oo, duubiyada gooyo
Or he crushes and cuts off the bodies [of enemies]
46 Oo aanu dookhaaga noqon, waa dariiq xidhane.
Yet if he's not to your taste, it is a blocked path.

47 Xeedhyo duuban oo duqus leh oo, geedo lagu daadshay
[If] one spilled spices in a big bowl of spiced food
48 Hilbo duban kuwii diirranaa, qaar dux lagu shiilay

Cooked meats, those warm ones, and some which one fried with fat

49 Daboolkiyo lingaxa lagu xidhood, uumi lagu daaro
One tightly covered with a lid and fastened with strings to keep them in perfect steam

50 Ubbadii dahaadhnayd haddii, diiqo lagu siiyo
If one gives it as a gift in a ghee pot in its traditional decorated case

51 Haddaan milix yar lagu daadinayn, kaama daadego'e,
If one didn't spill a little bit of salt in it, it doesn't appeal to you

52 Dookhana sidaasoo kalaan, loo dirqiyahayne
And the taste is not forced in a similar way to that

53 Damiirkaagu meeshaanu rabin, dooni kari maysid.
The place which your feelings don't want, you can't want it

Calaf (My Fortune) by Caasha Luul

1 Cilmi gabayba waayadan ma furin, cutubyadiisiiye
Lately I haven't opened the units of the knowledge of *gabay*
2 Caynaddii murtida waanigaan, dhigin culuumteede
I did not set out the type of wisdom [of poetry] nor its fields of knowledge
3 Caarad-dhuubtii maansada beryahan, kuma cillaalayne
Recently I did not pay attention to the 'pointed tip' of poetry
4 Aan caddeeyo caawoo kalaan, caadka rogayaaye.
Let me make it clear. On a night like tonight, I clear away the cloud.

5 Cadad toban ah tiradaan cabbiraye, Caynka ka higgaadshay
I argued ten points alliterating in 'ayn
6 Sagaal baan ka caagee Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin
I stay away from nine, O Lord, don't give me such due

I
7 Gar cargaagtay taladoo cakiran, cudud la baanaayo
Having an animated discussion of a case that ended up in a stalemate and praising physical force
8 Colkoo weerar laba-qaadayoo, curado loo ooyay
Fighting that is waged by two warring factions, one cried for the [loss of their] first-born children
9 Caaqil kaan noqonaynnin ee, damin colaad baasta
The one who can't become a wise person and end the cursed war
10 Cadkiyo jiidhka kala saafin een, ciriqa saaraynnin
And who can't strip lean meat from bones and take out worthless meat
11 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calafba hay siinnin.
O Almighty, O Allah! That one, don't give me such due.

II
12 Codka mid aan ahayn oo intaa, calallaqlaynaaya
One who's not an orator but talks a lot of nonsense
13 Caarriyo midkii fulay ahee, caalle lagu sheego
One who is a coward and who is said to be a fool
14 Caanyay aan ka diirayn dhibkii, uu ka cabanaayay
A dolt who doesn't act in response to the trouble he complained about
15 Caaryaystay doqonniimo oo, ciiro qarinayso
One whose foolishness decayed and perplexity hides

16 Candaddawl caqligu naaqus yahay, calafba hay siinnin
One who's blockheaded and is short of intelligence. Don't give me such due.

III

17 Caasiga Illahay ka go'ay, aan cidnaba xeerin
One who is a rebel and is cut off from Allah, and forgives no one
18 Cirfiid iyo iblays ay wataan, cubullo Shayddaan ah
Who drives along with a group of people who are demon and Satan
19 Caaddilkay wixii u xarrimay, cabaya ee daaqa
Who is drinking and eating what my God has made forbidden
20 Caqiibaba mid aan lagu ogayn, oo cahdiga gooya
One who one isn't aware of a good future and breaks God's solemn promise
21 Caynka iyo bayddaba jaroo, cidhibta ruugaaya
Cutting the cord and robes [with God], chewing the destiny
22 Cuqla waalid kii qaba Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin
One who has the karma from disobeying the parents. O God! Don't give me such due.

IV

23 Godadlaha cartamayiyo midkii, meherka caadaystay
One who is the womaniser and got used to quick marriage contracts
24 Casho noolba tii uu calmado, 'Cayni' ugu yeedha
Crying out 'oh, my eyes!' to women he likes all day
25 Cuddoontuu qabiyo kii dayacay, ubad carruurtiisa
One who neglects his upright wife and his children
26 Caarcaariyoo aan haween, garan culayskooda
One that never settled down and doesn't understand the importance of women
27 Caruus been ah kii raba Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin.
He who wants a sham marriage, O God! Don't give me such a due.

V

28 Canwaj ooriduu qabay intaa, cay la daba jooga
One who is an aggressive man, the wife he married is followed with insult
29 Caado iyo dhaqan beeley oo, cunaha buuraaya
Who has lost custom and tradition, enlarging the gullet

30 Cabbudhsane hinaasuhu intaa, cunaya dhiiggiisa
The stuffy one that jealousy is sucking his blood
31 Caydhkiyo dabaylaha ka dida, oo cidlada maaga
The one who is scared by heavy rains with gusty winds, and provokes where there's no one
32 Cawdiyo salliga 'yaa fadhiyey?', Canab ku hiifaaya
Saying 'who sat on it?' by the prayer mat made of palm leaves, accusing Canab
33 Jin intuu cumaamado u xidhay, caydhsan waxan joogin
He who jinn has wrapped him with a turban, and who runs after things that don't exist
34 Caroog baas mid loo tumay Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin
One for whom an evil conch shell horn is played for, O God! Don't give me such due.

VI
35 Mid cuntada ilaashoo ka naxa, ceesh la karinaayo
He who guards the food and panics when food is prepared
36 Cashiiradiyo ehelkaba jaroo, aan casaba dhawrin
He who abandons his relatives and kinfolks and doesn't look after his family
37 Caanaha midkii aan gadayn, cunnugga loo siiyo
He who doesn't buy milk to give for the children
38 Caantaynka aan quudhinoo, caanad kala jeex ah
He who isn't generous to give ten or twenty cents
39 Cajiinkiyo daqiiqdii madhuun, ku citikaafaaya
He who feels blameless when the dough and flour is empty
40 Cantafuude 'reerka ha cawarin!', carrabka loo saaray
He who keeps saying 'don't hurt the family' but hoards and hides his things
41 Qorqodaha cantuugada tirshana, calafba hay siinnin.
The suspicious husband who counts the mouthfuls, don't give me such due.

VII
42 Cocobbada midkaa taagan een, ceeb ka korahaynnin
The one who stands shamefaced in secluded areas and never behaves in a more mature way
43 Ceelkuu istaagaba midkii, gabadh cayaarsiiya
The one who causes girls to play at the well where he stands
44 Caloolyowna kugu beera iyo, ciillo kugu raagta
Planting anxiety in you and resentments that linger in you

45 Cadraddii xishootiyo marwaba, daba carraabaaya
Chasing after modest unmarried girls and even honourable married women
46 Casarka iyo duhurkii intaa, cago budhlaynaaya
Mid-day to late afternoon, the feet running after women, so fast that clouds of dust comes visibly after his feet
47 Kii dumarka ciil bada Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin.
The one who made women deserve grief, O God! Don't give me such due.

VIII
48 Mid caqligu naxaasoobayoo, cudur ka guuxaayo
One whose intelligence is corroded, groaning from disease
49 Cuyub iyo magaal liito oon, xoogga kugu caawin
The one who is cynical and a weak town person, and doesn't offer help to you with strength
50 Canaadnimo mid ah haysoo, laabtay cududdiisa
The one that stubbornness has gotten hold of, who folded his upper arms
51 Ciirsili'i mid ay dhaanto meel, ciyow ka yeedhaayo
The one where helplessness grows, the bustards calling out warnings
52 Cumuq-cumuq midkii lagu salliday, cayn la garan waayo
The one who is compelled in an abyss that nobody can understand
53 'Cakudaa!' intaa kugu hayoo, cunaya jiidhkaaga
The one who says 'ugh!' to you and yet eats your flesh
54 Cuqdad kii la yuurura Rabboow, calafba hay siinnin.
The one who crouches with psychological problems, O God! Don't give me such due.

IX
55 Cooflaa risiqii soo madhsaday, caalamka u yaallay
That old man who squandered the wealth that was there for him in the world
56 Canka dhigey shinkiisii haddana, calowsi doonaaya
He who has had stuff to eat all the time, and now wanting soft food for babies
57 Carjajoof gaboobiyo camoodh, soo ciddiyo goostay
He who is an old man ageing, who separated himself from family
58 Duq cardaaduqooboo intaa, keli is coofadhshay
An old man who failed and acted like a monkey patriarch on his own
59 Cajuus guriga ii yuururiyo, coomir igu yuusa

An old man who crouches at home and nags to me
60 Cimri kuma canbaareeynayoo, waa cawo Ilaahe
Age is good fortune from Allah, don't let him get blamed
61 Mid cibaaraduu beri yiqiin, wali la ciiraaya
One who is still staggering with the novelty he knew in the past
62 Oo cawaaqib-xumo hayso oo, cunug is-moodaaya
And who has bad behaviours, thinking himself as still a child
63 Cirro baaqday kii lagu yidhaa, calafba hay siinnin.
The one who is said to be 'an old man who has been left behind', don't give me such due.

64 Cayn-cayn raggaa wada ahee, dunida ceegaaga
There are many types of men that the world is filled up with
65 Caleemaha midkaan saarayee, cugatay laabtaydu
The one that I crown with leaves and which my chest has chosen
66 Calaamadaha aan soo wadana, caan ku noqon doona
Who will become famous through the following signs that I go with
67 Caaddilow aduun baa hayoon, kaa codsanayaaye
O God, only you have him, I am requesting him from you
68 Carrabbaabay oo waad ogtahay, caynka uu yahaye
I've mentioned it and you know the type he is
69 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.
O Almighty, O Allah! Tell him that we share a due.

X
70 Cirka oo da'aayoo dhulkoo, dooggu carafaystay
The sky which pours with rain and the ground [on] which the green grass are fragrant
71 Naqa oo cagaar wada noqdoo, curubta saydhaaya
The fresh growth which becomes all green and which splashes out fresh saplings
72 Cuudka iyo maalkoo dhaloo, ciirtu qubanayso
The domestic animals which have given birth, the butter milk which is spilling
73 Carradoo barwaaqo ah arladoo, nabaddu caan gaadhay
The territory and settlements are in prosperity, and peace has become widely known
74 Caddalloolka fiidkii mid aan, wada caweeynaynno
The one with whom we play the *caddallool* game and spend the evening together
75 Cawo iyo wanaag ii horkaca, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.

Good fortune and good outcomes which rise up for me, tell him that we share a due.

76 Mid cirshiga Ilaah laga raboo, Caaddil garanaaya
One that is wanted at the throne of God and understands God
77 Caddaaladda midkii falaya een, cuqubo doonaynnin
The one who acts justly and seeks no malediction
78 Oo cammira masaajiidda oo, caalin iyo shiikh ah
And who regularly attends the mosques, who is a scholar and a sheikh
79 Casharkiyo Quraanka i bariyo, camalka kii suubban
Who teaches me the lessons of the Qur'an and the good manners
80 Midkii diinta caawinaya ee, cadow u diidaaya
The one who is helping the religion and defending it from the enemy
81 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.
O Almighty, O Allah! Tell him that we share a due.

82 Cid kaleba mid aan eegin oo, calanka lay saaray
He who doesn't look at another woman but raised the flag [of love] over me
83 Oo aan Caasha-Luul mooyiye, dumar canaynaynnin
And desired no other woman except Caasha Luul
84 Cirdiga iyo sharaftayda kaan, ceel ku ridi doonnin
He who doesn't dishonour my prestige, doesn't drop it in a well
85 Farxad aan ku wada ciidaynnoo, cagaha ii maydha
He whom we celebrate the holy day together in joy, and washes my feet
86 Cayn ay u tahay kii adduun, igu casuumaaya
He who invites me to whatever wealth he deservedly gains
87 Curdin baxay sidiisii mid aan, ugu carfoonaado
One for whom I become perfumed like a young sapling that has sprouted
88 Gob caqiibo dheer lagu ogyahay, ciriq wanaaggiisa
He who is known for high moral principles and his good nerves
89 Ciddayda iyo ciddiisaba midkii, wada cisaynaaya
He who respects both my family and his family
90 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.
O Almighty, O God, say to him that we share a due.

91Mid caqligu illayn waa hibee, Caaddil ugu deeqay
He whose intelligence is a gift that God gave generously

92 Calaacalaana igu qaadda oon, ciidda igu tuurin
He who doesn't throw me in the mud but takes me in his hands
93 Calcalyada xareeddiyo biyaa, wada cabboonaynno
He who we drink fresh rainwater together
94 Cishqi iyo wanaag aan dhammaan, Caaddil nagu beero
He whom with him God bestows everlasting love and goodness on us
95 Aniguna cindiga iyo wadnaha, caashaq ugu beero
And for whom I plant love in the mind and the heart
96 Oo cunaha ii dhaafo oon, dhigo calooshayda
And let love pass down the throat and I put it in my stomach
97 Mid qalbiga intoo aan u culo, cuudka ugu daaro
One for whom I purify the heart and light an incense [to purify and fragrance] for
98 Canbar iyo mid aan udug u ahay, cadar sidiisiiya
He for whom I would be like amber perfumes
99 Casiisoow Allahayoow midkaa, calaf wadaagnaa dheh.
O Almighty, O God, say to him that we share a due.

100 Waxba yaanan Caynkiyo murtida, soo celcelin uune
Let me not repeat the wisdom behind the *c* alliteration only for the sake of repeating
101 Cirka tiirka aan lagu arkayn, ciidda gogoshaas ah
One doesn't see any pillar for the sky and the earth is like a spread-out mat
102 Cadceeddiyo dayaxa aan midina, midna cidhiidhaynnin
Neither does the sun nor the moon squeeze the other into a restricted space
103 Caska waaga cawlaanka fiid, caddiyo nuurkeeda
The red dawn and tan evening, the clarity and its light
104 Gudcurkoo cawaag soo rogtoo, culay madowgaas ah
The darkness and dark nights making a distinctive mark, like black, burnt wood
105 Buurahaa cuslaadiyo baddaa, cidhifka soo jooga
The heavy mountains and the seas standing on the edges
106 Allihii cibrada nooga dhigey, dunidan ceegaagta
The Allah that made it novel and made this world full for us
107 Cabdi iyo addoon baan u ahay, Caaddilka Ilaahe
I am a worshipper and a servant of Allah, the Just One
108 Cawaaloow Alloow ii ajiib, ducadan aan cuurtay.
O Allah, O God, accept for me this prayer that I took attention over.

Soomaaliyeey Is Daa! (O Somalis, Stop!) by Xaawa Jibriil

1 Dariiqa Hobyood warkay, nooga soo direen
They sent us news from the road of Hobyo
2 Sidaan u danqaday caloo|shaydii[82] weli ma demin
[It is like] the way that I was hurting [an already wounded spot] my stomach still has not extinguished
3 Raggii na daafici lahaa, bay haddeer dileen
They have killed now the men who would have defended us
4 Dambi la'aan bay ku laa|yeen sagaashan diric
Without [them having committed] a crime they killed them, ninety noble, determined men
5 Yaan naloo darine Soo|maaliyeey is daa!
Let one not make it worse for us. O Somalis, stop!

6 Dooxada iyo hawdka iyo, meesha daranta badan
The dry river beds, the *hawd* grazing area and the place with lots of *daran* plants
7 Daaqi kari waayey gee|lii dareeri jiray
They could not graze, the camels that used to spread about there
8 Nabaddu waa doore Soo|maaliyeey is daa!
Peace is preferable, O Somalis, stop!

9 Asay bay dumarku qaa|daan diraac walbaba
The women wear mourning dress each *diraac* season
10 Doorarkii qabayna haad, baa daleel ku cunay
And the excellent ones who married [them], vultures ate them in a barren land
11 Yaan naloo darine Soo|maaliyeey is daa!
So that it is not worse for us, O Somalis, stop!

12 Dawladaha UNO ka yimid, wayna dayahayaan
The governments which came from the United Nations Organisation are looking at us
13 Waxay damcahayaan xornima|deenna inayn durin
They intend that our freedom not be jeopardised
14 Sagaashanka dawladood, xaalkuu kula dacwiyay
He argued with [in a legal sense] the ninety governments about

[82] I use a vertical bar to indicate the correct position of the caesura when it falls within a word in this poem. Incorrect commas in the original written text have been removed from lines like this in this section.

the situation
15 Xaqii Cabdullaahi noo doo|nay waa diyaar
The truth which Cabdullaahi sought for us is ready
16 Yaan naloo darine Soo|maaliyeey is daa!
So that it is not worse for us, O Somalis, stop!

17 Duumo iyo cudurba awal, baan la daadsanayn
We were already scattered with malaria and every disease
18 Gaalku waa ina dullee|yaa dan nooma galo
The infidel oppresses us, does not enter for our interest
19 Lagama daaweeyo ruu|xeennii dakhar ku dhaco
Our people in whom a wound happens are not treated for it
20 Yaan naloo darine Soo|maaliyeey is daa!
So that it is not worse for us, O Somalis, stop!

Waad Garan Lahaydeene (You Understand) by Saado Cabdi Amarre

0 Hooyaallayey hooyaallayey, hoyaallayey hooey

1 Warshadaha madfaca gaw leh iyo, gumuca beeraaya
The factories which manufacture the artillery and the bullets
2 Hubkan dunida kala gooshayee, gees walba u raacay
These weapons which cut the world apart and spread everywhere
3 Ee aan xuduud lagu gartiyo, gogol-dhig loo yeelin
And to which no borders are understood and no introduction agreed
4 Aakeyga kii geela jirey, saaran garabkiisa
The AK, that is on the shoulder of the one who was with the camels
5 Intuu halista gaadhsiiyay baad, garan lahaydeene.
You [pl.] would have understood the amount of danger which it has brought

6 Inta gibil madow, inta gibil cad, gaaliyo Islaamba
The ones with black skin, the ones with white skin, non-believers and Muslims
7 Rag adduunyada gubayoo wa[a] la garanayaaye
It is only men who have burned the world, it is known
8 Iyagaa gantaallada rakibay, mana gar-qaataane
It is they who assembled the missiles and who do not accept legal arguments
9 Waa kuwaa haweenkii guddiyay, geedkii nabadeede
There they are, the women who met in council at the tree of peace

10 Geeliyo lo'dii buu jariyo, gaabanow adhiye
He has cut down the camels and the cattle and the short sheep and goats
11 Geyi aan ugaadhiyo ku hadhin, diin gangaamaniye
A land in which wild animals and shielded tortoise(s) do not remain
12 Intuu gegida meyd jiifiyaad, garan lahaydeene
You would have understood how many he made to lay dead in the open space
13 Shimbirihii geyiga joogay ayaa, guuray oo qaxaye
The birds which were in the land have moved and fled
14 In Hiroshiima gaadhsiisanyaad, garan lahaydeene
You would understand that it [would] reach Hiroshima
15 Dhibtuu dunida gaadhsiiyay baad, garan lahaydeene

The difficulty which he brought to the world, you would have understood

16 Inta gibil madow, inta gibil cad, gaaliyo Islaamba
The ones with black skin, the ones with white skin, non-believers and Muslims
17 Rag adduunyada gubayoo wa[a] la garanayaaye
It is only men who have burned the world, it is known
18 Iyagaa gantaallada rakibay, mana gar-qaataane
It is they who assembled the missiles and who do not accept legal arguments
19 Waa kuwaa haweenkii guddiyay, geedkii nabadeede
There they are, the women who met in council at the tree of peace

20 Colaad iyo waxay geysataad, garan lahaydeene
Conflict and what it brings about, you would have understood
21 Inay gacalka naafeeysataad, garan lahaydeene
That it disables the dear ones you would have understood
22 Gurbood inay agoomaysataad, garan lahaydeene
That it orphans the children you would have understood
23 Odayada inay gawracdaad, garan lahaydeene
That it slaughters the elders you would have understood
24 Inay dunida gaas-maas sudhaad, garan lahaydeene
That it hangs a gas-mask on the world you would have understood
25 Godob iyo wax baas inay tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is a resentment and a difficulty, you would have understood
26 Guryo negi inay ololisaad, garan lahaydeene
That it sets alight permanent houses, you would have understood
27 Intay halis gaadhsiisay baad, garan lahaydeene
The amount of danger which it has brought, you would have understood

28 Inta gibil madow, inta gibil cad, gaaliyo Islaamba
The ones with black skin, the ones with white skin, non-believers and Muslims
29 Rag adduunyada gubayoo wa[a] la garanayaaye
It is only men who have burned the world, it is known
30 Iyagaa gantaallada rakibay, mana gar-qaataane
It is they who assembled the missiles and who do not accept legal arguments

31 Waa kuwaa haweenkii guddiyay, geedkii nabadeede.
There they are, the women who met in council at the tree of peace

32 Inay nabadi tahay geed hadhlaad, garan lahaydeene
That peace is a tree with shade, you would have understood
33 Inay gacal xannaanaysataad, garan lahaydeene
That it cares for the dear ones, you would have understood
34 Geel dhalay inay daaran tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is about camels that have given birth to, you would have understood
35 Inay gaawe xoor badan tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is a [full] milk vessel with lots of froth, you would have understood
36 Geyaan iyo jacayl inay tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is a couple ready to marry and love, you would have understood
37 Gelbis iyo aroos inay tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is escorting the bride and a wedding, you would have understood
38 Inay goob farxadi taal tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is a place in which happiness is, you would have understood
39 Inay horumar gaadhsiisan tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That it brings development, you would have understood
40 Inay tahay guryo deyrka laad, garan lahaydeene
That it is houses with the fenced yard, you would have understood
41 Inay tahay xariir lagu goglaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is silk which has been laid down throughout, you would have understood
42 Gobaad inay ku iidaaman tahaad, garan lahaydeene
That the she-camel [i.e. the nation] is seasoned by it, you would have understood
43 Inay tahay aqoon loo gudbaad, garan lahaydeene
That it is knowledge which is passed on, you would have understood

44 Inta gibil madow, inta gibil cad, gaaliyo Islaamba
The ones with black skin, the ones with white skin, non-believers and Muslims
45 Rag adduunyada gubayoo wa[a] la garanayaaye
It is only men who have burned the world, it is known

46 Iyagaa gantaallada rakibay, mana gar-qaataane
It is they who assembled the missiles and do not accept legal arguments
47 Waa kuwaa haweenkii guddiyay, geedkii nabadeede.
There they are, the women who met in council at the tree of peace

Tahriib (The Sea-Migrations) by Caasha Luul

1 Da'da gabayga dabuubtiyo murtida, doodda hadalkayga
The *d* of the *gabay*, the argument and the wisdom, the discussion of my words
2 Waxaan uga danleeyahay inaan, danaha sheegaaye
What I mean by that is that I tell [the things that are in the people's] interests
3 Dadweynow waxaan doonayaa, inan dadaalaaye
O population, I want to try hard
4 Dulmigaan dhacaayaan rabaa, inaan dillaacshaaye
This injustice which has happened, I want to crack it apart
5 Tahriibtaa dadkeennii rogtaan, deyr ku xidhayaaye.
That *tahriib* which has turned our people upside down, I am enclosing it with a fence

6 U dulqaadan kari waayay oo, waan damqanayaaye
I could not bear it and I am feeling the pain
7 Jidhkaa iga dubaaxiya markaan, dib u jalleecaayo
The body twitches against me when I turn around to look
8 Inta aan ilmada daadiyaan, dibinta ruugaaye.
As I spill the tears I chew the lip

9 Afrikaa dhib deris looga dhigay, daayin abidkoode
Africa has made trouble a neighbour for their everlasting [time] that lasts
10 Soomaaliduna ka daran oo way, ugu dambeeysaaye
And the Somalis are worse and they come last
11 Qalbigaa intuu daxal ka galay, daamur wada yeeshey
The heart, as rust entered it, it was all made into tarmac
12 Dareenkii waddanigaa lumoo, waa dad baabba'aye
The national feeling has got lost, they are a people which has become destroyed
13 Damiirkii waxaa garanayaan, digigixoonayne
The conscience of understanding the feelings of sorrow for their compatriot's misfortune is missing
14 Dabin laysu dhigay weeye oo, duul kalaa xidhaye
It is a trap laid for each other and another group of people has set it
15 Diiwaanka waxaa noogu qoran, doorkii Falastiine
In the book, what is written for us is the role of Palestine
16 Ma daneeye aan diirran baa, dooxay shacabkiiye

One who doesn't care who is not stirred has stabbed the people
17 Dillaal iyo mallaal baa midiba, dacalka haystaaye.
A broker and a middleman each one holds the hem

18 Haddii laga dareeroo dalkii, doonni laga raacay
If one poured out of it and went away from the country in a boat
19 Deebaaq qadhaadh iyo hadduu, dacar inoo yeeshey
If it makes a bitter thing, bitterness and aloe for us
20 Dullin iyo abaar iyo hadduu, diirato horseedey
If he who lacks dignity and drought and *diirato* [one who peels, strips things away] has led
21 Daad laga ordaayiyo hadduu, degel madow yeeshey
If he has made a flood from which one runs and a black long-term encampment
22 Duufaan kacaysiyo haddii, duumo laga qaaday
If [they] are taken from a typhoon which rose and from plague
23 Duqaydiyo carruurtii hadday, dibed u soo yaacday.
If the old people and the children spread out abroad

24 Dalka yaa u hadhi tolow markaa, waa dareen yimiye?
Who will remain for the country, O people, then, it is a thought that has come
25 Waa xaajo duudduuban iyo, sheeko duluc dheere
It is a question that is twisted in itself and a story
26 Da'yartaa dhammaatiyo waxa, dumar idlaanaaya
The young have perished and women are coming to an end
27 Diricyada tahriibaaya ee, dabargo'aa taagan
The noble people who are going on *tahriib* and facing destruction
28 Diihaalka gaajada kuwaa, dibed wareegaaya
The destitution of hunger those who wander around abroad
29 Badahay dul-heehaabayaan, damalladeenniiye.
They float on top of the seas, our [incl.] *damal* trees

30 Diibkiyo yaxaaskaa cunoo, daaqay lafahooda
The sharks and crocodiles ate them and grazed on their bones
31 Dugaaggiyo waraabaa daldala, darib sideediiye
The wild animals and the hyenas eat them like camel fat
32 Duleedkaa la soo wada wadhiyo, dacalka xeebaaye
They were put out to dry at the back and at the side of the coast
33 Iyagoo dubkiyo diirku baxay, baa la daawadaye
While the skin and hide left them, one watched them

34 Waa kuwaa darxumo leeday een, duugan kari waynnay.
There are the ones which misery owns and which we could not bury

35 Damac baa dadkaygii galoo, waa dawamayaane
Greed has entered my people, they get-rich-or-die-trying
36 Dayow waynnu wada noqonnayoo ways, dib maraynaaye
We all became bewildered [people] and are back-biting each other
37 Dib-u-socod ayaan wada nihiyo, dawlad jaahil ahe
We are all backward moving and a polity which is ignorant
38 Dawarsiga ku naaxdaan nihiyo, doonis ruux kale
[Ones that] grow in begging we are and looking from other people
39 Diif aan dhammaanaynnin baa, loogu dawggalaye.
One has entered on the path of weakness which does not end

40 Afartaa intaan dabar ka furay, diirad ma ku eegey
Those four as I have untied a hobble have I looked with a compass
41 Darajada Ilaah baa baxshee, mawga furay daaha
God brings [a person] to the position and have I opened the curtain from it for him
42 Doorkaa abwaannadu horey, uga daliilsheene
That role the poets brought as proof before for it [i.e. the argument]
43 Deelleeyda maansada horey, uga daqiiqsheene
They ground it for that in the *Deelley*
44 Aniguna ka dabaggeeyey oo, waan ku darayaaye
And I have brought it [i.e. my poem] to it [i.e. the *Deelley*] and I am adding to it
45 Waanadu kuway deeqdo ee, raacda danahooda
The ones that advice is generous to and which serves in their interests
46 Iyo kuwa dariiqii wacnaa, diinta ku ekaada
And the ones who are limited to the good path in the religion
47 Daayinow Ilaahow ka yeel, dabargo' weeyaane!
O Everlasting One, O God, make them so; [otherwise] it is destruction.

48 Waxba gabaygu yuu ila durkine, waan dabrahayaaye
Let the *gabay* not move along [too far] with me; I am hobbling it
49 Haddii dalagga aan beerannoo, doogga la abqaalo

If the crops which we cultivate and the pasture one replants
50 Nimcadaa inoo dararaysan iyo, badaha duudduban
The natural abundant resources which have made a lot for us and the seas folded [in waves]
51 Buurahan Ilaah noo dejee, godol la soo daatay
These mountains which God set down for us and which flowed with lots of milk ready to be milked
52 Baadroolka diliq laynayee, dixaya hoostooda
The petroleum which flows in channels and which flows beneath them
53 Macdantaa dingiigtiyo haddaan, dahabka soo saarno
If we produce those minerals lying underneath and the gold
54 Duunyada haddaan dhaqannoo, doobi laga buuxsho
If we raise the livestock and fill the *doobi* milk vessel
55 Duruustiyo cilmiga lays baroo, diinta la adkeeyo
[If] one teaches oneself the lessons and the knowledge and strengthens the religion
56 Dalku wayna wada deeqi laa, aynnu dib u joogno
The country would have been generous to us all let us stay again
57 Daaquudka aan naarno iyo, ducufka shayddaanka
Let us send to Hell the evil-doer and the weak deeds of Satan
58 Khayraadku waa dihinyahee, aan dibnaha saarno.
The good resources are untouched; let us put the lips on them

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Somali women's poetry has long been marginalised in a society where men have traditionally dominated both the public and literary spaces. In this book, I offer a close reading of poems by Somali women, focusing on three main types: lullabies, poems that explore gender dynamics and relationships with men, and poems addressing political and social issues. I explore how these poets use language to express their thoughts and make their messages powerful and persuasive. I argue that Somali women's poetry is neither unsophisticated nor peripheral; rather, it is a rich and vital form of expression that challenges prevailing gendered hierarchies. By foregrounding its complexity and cultural significance, I hope to provoke further reflection on genre, status, and impact of Somali women's poetry in a gendered world.

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