



Aweys Geedow Nuur Diinle's 'Ciyow Biyaha Keen': A Case Study of Dooroo Duureed Aa in Banaadiri Metre

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the dooroo duureed aa, a form of poetry that is part of the wider Banaadiri fishing song genre and is yet to be explored in scholarly literature. This paper examines the metre of this form using Aweys Geedow Nuur Diinle's (1925-1970) 1968 song "Ciyow Biyaha Keen" as a popular example. The poetry of the Banaadiri people, a mainly coastal community located on the southern coast of Somalia and its surroundings, has long been overlooked in the field of Somali studies, and this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of its place in the landscape of wider Somali poetry.

In addition to the analysis of the dooroo duureed aa, this paper explores the life and work of Diinle, highlighting his role in preserving, modernising, and extending traditional Banaadiri forms through his use of work and dance song forms in his modern compositions. Furthermore, this paper discusses the political nature of his work, including his anti-colonial poetry and subsequent critiques of the post-independence Somali government.

Overall, this paper aims to both catalogue a yet to be explored metre and contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Banaadiri literature and its significance in the wider context of Somali poetry and culture.

Keywords

Banaadir, Somali Poetry, Metre, work songs

1 Introduction

Somali poetry has a rich history as a means of expression within an oral society. It encompasses various forms and styles, such as lullabies, work songs, dance songs, religious verse, and more. However, the prevailing trend in the collection, composition, and study of Somali poetry has been the focus on poetry from communities from nomadic pastoralist backgrounds. This can be attributed to several factors.

Ahad M Ali's "Somali Oral-Poetry and The Failed She Camel State" offers a compelling analysis of how poetry from nomadic pastoralist communities informed early Somali studies scholars' understanding of Somali society. This literature, which was unique to a particular segment of Somali society, was improperly applied to the whole, leading to an incomplete understanding of Somali society. Ali notes, "ever since the earlier publications by non-Somali scholars, a generalisation concerning the life and culture of the whole of Somalia became the holding pattern for Somali studies." (Mumin Ahad 22)

Somali political leaders have reinforced this narrow view of a homogenous society focused solely on nomadic pastoralism. With the political elite originating from nomadic pastoralist backgrounds, this view has been perpetuated through government institutions such as the Academy of Arts and Sciences, (Ahmed 16) which was tasked with collecting and disseminating Somali history and culture. Their total output included a negligible amount of southern literature and the literature textbooks studied in school (also published by the academy) also had very little from farming, fishing, and agro-pastoralist communities in the south. This has led to Southern Somali literature being continuously dismissed as unrefined or even nonexistent. This point is illustrated by Ali Jimale's story, "I remember literary discussions I had with some members of the Somali Academy of Arts and Sciences in the early eighties; some of these "intellectuals" were of the opinion that certain parts of the country did not have literature." (Ahmed 15)

The categorization of poetry and its function also plays a role in the dismissal of Southern poetry. The maanso genres of poetry (gabay, geeraar, masafu) are often seen as the preeminent form of poetry in nomadic pastoralist poetic culture, and until fairly recently, were considered one of the few acceptable forms for articulating socio-political issues as opposed to the hees which were light poetry forms that accompanied work as work songs and dances as dance songs. However, southern poetry often differs markedly in terms of genre and form from nomadic pastoralist poetry (Salaad 23). The differences in categorization, function, and what forms constitute "serious" poetry exemplify a tendency to exclude voices that do not conform to the conventions of nomadic pastoralist poetry

This article is part of a wider project that aims to achieve several objectives. Firstly, it seeks to explore southern poetry that goes beyond the nomadic pastoralist origins that dominate existing collections. Secondly, it aims to explore different forms of southern poetry, exploring their contexts and metres. Finally, the project aims to explore the development of Southern literature and how these communities have reacted to social and political changes. By achieving these objectives, this project seeks to both provide a more comprehensive understanding of Somali poetry and map southern metres that have yet to be explored.

1.1 The Banaadiri People

The Banaadiri people, also known as the Benadiri, are a coastal community located on the southern coast of Somalia. The name "Benadir" is derived from the Persian word "Bendar," which means "ports," reflecting the coastal areas' significance in the exchange of goods. Persian and Arab geographers applied the term Banaadir to the East African coast of southern Somalia, much like they applied Sawahil to the East African coast further south. (Adams 9)

The Banaadir coast, stretching from Warsheikh to Kismayu, is home to a mix of ports and once-thriving city-states as well as small and remote fishing villages. The largest port settlements on the Banaadir coast include Mogadishu, Marka, and Brava, while smaller villages such as Jesira, Danaane, Gandershe, Jilib-Marka, Munghiye, and Torre dot the coastline. (Adams 9)

The Banaadiri identity, however, is not confined to the port states, as trade along the caravan routes to the interior continued as it had for centuries from the coast to the markets along the lower Shabelle. Local abbaana, who acted as commercial brokers or agents, facilitated the exchange of goods, resulting in the establishment of longer-term alliances and shared traditions through intermarriage (Adams 87). Luling's intriguing study of the Geledi (Afgooye) city-state in the nineteenth century attests to the social organisation in the hinterland city-states that resemble those of the coastal towns. (Luling)

Moreover, there were migrations of coastal Banaadiris into farming villages in Shabeellaha Hoose, which led to the identification of some clans in those villages as Banaadiri people, such as the Geledi and Begedi, among others.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that these settled urbanites are not disconnected from the overall Somali population but constitute a segment of it. Banaadiris are an integral part of Somali society, just like pastoral and agro-pastoral units, and share overlapping traditions and common historical experiences. (Adams 16)

Despite their rich cultural heritage and unique history, the Banaadiri people have been marginalised in scholarly works on Somali culture and society, which often concentrate on the pastoralist tradition dominant in the northern and central regions of the country. Nevertheless, their pivotal role in trade and their contributions to the cultural and historical landscape of the region cannot be underestimated. (Adams 16)

1.2 Short overview of literature on Banaadiri poetry

Compared to poetry composed in Northern Somali, Banaadiri poetry and song has received comparatively little attention. The existing scholarly literature on Banaadiri poetry primarily focuses on compositions in Chimwiini, a Swahili language spoken in Baraawe, and Arabic, with limited attention given to poetry composed in the Banaadiri dialect.

Ayan Abdi Salaad's 2020 thesis, "A Comparative Study of Expressive Cultures in the Indian Ocean: Belonging, Kinship, and Cultural Heritage in Banaadiri Poetry and Indian Ocean Texts," offers the most detailed exploration of Banaadiri literature composed in Somali. However, it does not specifically look at Banaadiri metre.

1.3 Aweys Geedow Nuur Diinle (1925-1970)¹

Aweys Geedow Diinle was a renowned Banaadiri poet and playwright who is widely considered the father of Banaadiri theatre.

Diinle was born in 1925 into a family of weavers in Mogadishu. Whilst young, as is common, he was enrolled into a local dugsi, or madrassah, where he began his quranic studies. At the same time he began studying Alindi weaving under his father. He would later travel to Jilib Marka, a village in the Lower Shabelle region of Somalia. Jilib Marka was known for its Alindi weaving industry, and Diinle saw an opportunity to enhance his skills by apprenticing there.

Diinle's political journey began in 1943 when he joined the Hamar Youth Club (HYC) in Mogadishu. It was during this year that he began composing poetry and his affiliation with HYC provided him with a platform to express his political views through his poetry. HYC was a political party that was primarily composed of Banadir people, particularly those from Hamarweyne, which shared goals and political interests with the Somali Youth League (SYL) (Urbano 62). Through his poetry and songs, Diinle played a crucial role in galvanising the independence movement. However, by the 1950s, Diinle became disillusioned with political parties' lack of concrete plans for implementing the people's goals and their single-minded focus on winning elections. Consequently, he left HYC and joined Hisbiga Digil iyo Mirifle (HDSM) where he continued to use his music and poetry to raise awareness of social and political issues in his community. Diinle composed numerous political plays and poetry for HDSM, which helped to highlight the struggles and aspirations of the Somali people.

Diinle was deeply inspired by the traditional Banaadiri culture and art. His compositions are a testament to his commitment to preserving and promoting this rich cultural heritage. To achieve this, Diinle incorporated various forms of traditional work and folk songs into his compositions. His efforts were aimed at ensuring that these forms of art did not disappear as a result of urbanisation and modernisation.

Diinle's work reflects his concern about the impact of Indian cinema and music on Somali culture. He believed that the growing popularity of Indian songs and cinema could

¹ This section primarily draws on The History of Banadir and Banadiris by Mr. Mohamed Ali Sheikhey and interviews conducted with Caasha Karaama and the Banaadiri poets Abdulqaadir Noorani and Sharif Jek. You can find a biography of Caasha Karaama in Ayan Abdi Salaad's "A Comparative Study of Expressive Cultures in the Indian Ocean: Belonging, Kinship, and Cultural Heritage in Banaadiri Poetry and Indian Ocean Texts"

potentially overshadow and displace traditional Somali art forms, including Banaadiri poetry. This led him to incorporate traditional work song forms into his compositions and to create plays that aimed to preserve Somali culture and tradition. By doing so, Diinle sought to promote a greater appreciation of Somali art and to ensure the continuity of the country's cultural heritage.

In 1960, Somalia gained independence, and Diinle's reputation soared. He was subsequently employed by the government as a Radio Mogadishu employee, but his tenure was cut short due to the political nature of his plays and songs. Diinle often criticised government corruption, leading to his dismissal and receipt of a *Busta Rossa*. The "*Busta Rossa*" were red envelopes that contained termination letters and were perceived by some as a means "to intimidate, punish, and remove defiant intellectuals from the civil service" (Ahmed, 2008:7). Despite this, Diinle continued to create and produce critical works, including plays and songs that tackled government corruption.

Diinle's most famous works include "Daadooy iyo Dalnuurshe," "Sharaf Ma Leh Sheeko Naagood," "Talo Xume Tol Ma Badiyo," and "Dhagarow Lagu Arag." These works were characterised by their strong socio-political themes. His poetry and plays were not only a reflection of the political and social issues of the time, but also served as a means of preserving and promoting Somali culture and tradition.

Diinle passed away in 1970, leaving behind a lasting legacy as the father of Banaadiri theatre and a prominent figure in Somali poetry and theatre.

2. The Songs

2.1 Dooro Duureed Aa

The first example of this form is a couplet that is traditionally sung by fishermen while they fish. This is the *dooro duureed aa* in its traditional setting and this couplet is from where the form takes its name. When recited in its traditional setting, the *hooris* (first hemistich) and *hoojis* (second hemistich) are sung differently. The *hoojis* are sung by a lead singer while the *hooris* are sung in unison by the rest of the fishermen. This type of singing is common in traditional Banaadiri fishing songs.

The *dooro duureed aa* couplet is a verse that encapsulates the feelings of the Banaadiri people towards two major events in Mogadishu's history: the arrival of the Italian colonists (literally referred to in the song as infidels) and the influx of Somali people of pastoral backgrounds. The "fowls of the wild" in the verse refers to the people of the pastoral communities, and the "stink of the colonisers (lit. infidel) perfume" is a poetic symbolisation of colonialist encroachment.

Dooro Duureed Aa

Uunsi gaaleed aa soo urowhaaya
Dooro duureed aa soo dagowhaysa

The stink of the colonisers perfume wafts
And the fowls of the wilds are moving in

2.2 Ciyow Biyaha Keen

"Ciyow Biyaha Keen" is a famous song from the play "Talo Xumo Tol Ma Badiyo". This play was the first Banaadiri production to be performed at the newly-built National Theatre and only the second play to be showcased there, the first being Shabeelnaagood. The play was a collaboration between Sheekh Mayow Halaag and Aweys Geedow Nuur Diinle with Diinle composed all the songs and geeraaro².

The theme of the play addressed casteism, an issue prevalent throughout Somali territories. It follows the story of a man from a fisherman background, an occupation traditionally looked down upon, who falls in love with a lady from a higher caste. However, their union is rejected, and they are not allowed to marry.

The song "Ciyow Biyaha Keen" is widely recognized as a powerful political critique veiled behind an apparent story of love. The song condemns government officials who prioritise their personal interests over the welfare of the general public. The lyrics vividly illustrate the struggles of a thirsty populace, desperate for sustenance, while the individual entrusted with providing life-sustaining water is occupied with trivial and meaningless activities, indulging in their own desires at the expense of the people.

Despite the abundance of natural resources such as clean, full wells, lush grazing lands, and ample livestock, the government officials responsible for protecting, distributing, and managing these resources have failed to do so. The second verse alludes to this fact and coupled with the refrain highlights that the issue at hand is not a lack of resources, but rather the negligence and corruption rampant within the government.

Overall, the song serves as a poignant reminder of the suffering that citizens endure as a result of the selfish actions of their leaders.

It is important to note that Banaadiri songs often incorporate a diverse array of poetic forms within a single composition. The chorus, bridges, and verses can all vary in form, yet they maintain a uniformity within themselves. For example, if the bridge is a shirib, all bridges within the song will be shirib. Similarly, if a verse is a dooro dureed aa, all verses will be dooro dureed aa

"Ciyow Biyaha Keen" adheres to this convention, alternating between verses and a refrain,

with the refrain being a distinct form from the dooro dureed aa verses.

This particular version of the song has been transcribed from a track that was sent to me from Radio Mogadishu, and it is the earliest version that I have been able to locate.

² Plural of geeraar, a form of somali poetry, it was often used as the medium of conversation in Banaadiri plays

There are other versions of the song that can be found online, with many renditions being sung by different singers and it is worth noting that in some of these other versions and renditions, the verses of the song are arranged in a different order.

Ciyow Biyaha Keen

Ceelka waa cayntaa ceeb ma keenaaye
Ceen kalaa taalee caajis ii haaye

Ciyow biyaha keen, cidada oomanee
Caweys ii ciyaar dhaafee, ceelka soo jiidee

Cuud caleentiisaa soo carfowhaysa
Cirka waa soo ciiramiyowhaaya

Ciyow biyaha keen, cidada oomanee
Caweys ii ciyaar dhaafee, ceelka soo jiidee

Meel cagaar buuxoo caws ka soo muuqdo
Caano waa yaalaan looma ciishoode

Ciyow biyaha keen, cidada oomanee
Caweys ii ciyaar dhaafee, ceelka soo jiidee

Ceelka jiidowgiis aan la caatoobe
Caawinaan waayee Caasho waa nooge

Pull Water from the well

The well is sufficient, it shall bring no shame
But there is another issue which troubles my mind

Bring the water quickly, the people are thirsty
Stop dancing and clubbing and draw water for us

A scent of aromatic leaves perfumes the air
As the sky clouds, heralding rain

Bring the water quickly, the people are thirsty
Stop dancing and clubbing and draw water for us

A place where greenery is plentiful, grass spread all around
There is sure to be an abundance of milk and no reason for concern

Bring the water quickly, the people are thirsty

Stop dancing and clubbing and draw water for us

I have become skinny due to pulling water from the well
I have no one to help me, O' Asha i am weary

2. 3 Metric Template

dooro dureed aa is a syllabo-quantitative form, defined as a sequence of a fixed number of syllables in a fixed order of succession (Deo 68). These sequences are often made up of syllables of varying weight that are dispersed aperiodically. Of the 24 different Banaadiri forms we have currently identified, 18 are syllabo-quantitative.

Syllabo-quantitative forms are found all across Somali speaking territories with the most famous example being the geeraar. These forms have been referred to by Djibouti scholars as "chain meters" (Orwin and Riiraash 95). Despite being found throughout Somalia, these forms are less frequent in nomadic poetic culture compared to the standard quantitative forms.

The matrix of the dooro dureed aa is as follows:

U U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U

Where U corresponds to a position which can be filled by a short vowel syllable and _ corresponds to a position which can be filled by a long vowel syllable. U is an anceps, corresponding to a position which can be filled by a long vowel syllable or a short vowel syllable and || being the caesura that separates the *hoojis* and the *hooris* or the first and second hemistic.

The first position is an anceps, followed by a short vowel syllable and three long vowel syllables. There is then a caesura which occurs, for the most part, at a word boundary. After the caesura we have a long vowel syllable followed by a short vowel syllable, followed by two long vowel syllables and ending with a short vowel syllable.

Consider the lines below:

1a.
_ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
Uunsi gaaleed aa, soo urowhaaya

b.
_ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
Dooro dureed aa, soo dagowhaysa

c.
_ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
Ceelka jiidowgiis aan la caatoobe

d.
_ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
Caawinaan waayee caasho waa nooge

- e.
 _ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
 Ceelka waa ceentaa ceeb ma keenaaye
- f.
 _ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
 Ceen kalaa taalee caajis ii haaye
- g.
 _ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
 Cuud caleentiisaa soo carfowhaysa
- h.
 U U _ _ _ U _ _ U
 Cirka waa soo ciiraamiyowhaaya
- i.
 _ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
 Meel cagaar buuxoo caws ka soo muuqdo
- j.
 _ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
 Caano waa yaalaan looma ciishoode

Of the examples presented, only one, line h, begins with a short syllable. Due to the limited number of examples of this form, it is challenging to determine if this belongs to the metre or is unmetrical. The answer may lie in how Faadumo Qaasin Hilowle sings it. In Somali poetry, to abide by metrical rules, a poet may lengthen a short syllable to a long one or shorten a long syllable to a short one. For example, in a Shallaad poem, the unknown poet turns Axmad UU to Axmaad U_ to fit the metre.

Following this rule, it is then very possible for Hilowle to sing Cirka UU as Ciirka _U to fit into the metrical pattern. However, the fact that she doesn't, instead singing it as Cirka, leads us to believe that the first position is an anceps. Line h is also of note because of the caesura. The words carry across the caesura. Just as in the question of the first position, the answer to this conundrum may be found in the way in which it is sung by Hilowle. As she sings it, Hilowle stretches the Cii in Ciiraamiyowhaaya, enunciating where the caesura would be, confirming that although in this line the word crosses across the two hemistichs, there is a caesura.

2.4 Other songs

Examples of dooro duureed aa's are scarce however another example of this metre is from Cali Cusmaan Daroog's "Meel Xareed Taalaa," which is featured in the play Xidigtii Is Xujeysay. This song was performed as a duet by Faadumo Qaasin Hilowle and Axmed Naaji Sacad.

Similar to "Ciyow Biyaha Keen," "Meel Xareed Taalaa" employs a unique interplay between the refrain and the verses, with the verses being a particular type of popular southern shirib and the chorus being dooro dureed aa.

For those interested in a more in-depth examination of the form of shirib, an upcoming paper by Hirsi will provide a comprehensive metrical analysis of the form.

Meel Xareed Taalaa Chorus

k.
 _ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
 Meel xareed taalaa, xiiso loo aada

l.
 _ U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U
 Xaajadii toostaa, loo xanjeertaaye

3 . In comparison to other metres

The dooro dureed aa has a remarkable similarity with the pastoral Kebed weaving song. Despite the dooro dureed aa being syllabo-quantitative and heesta kebedda being considerably longer and quantitative in nature, it is their shared metrical positions that pique my interest.

For illustration, the kebed metre as articulated by Idris M Cali is given as.

W V W W W, W V W W, V W W V W W W

Where W corresponds to a position which can be filled by a long syllable or two short syllables and V corresponds to a position which can be filled by a short syllable and the comma representing a caesura.

And the dooro dureed aa is

U U _ _ _ || _ U _ _ U

The first section of heesta kebedda maps perfectly onto the first section of the dooro dureed

In the second section of heesta kebedda, there is mostly a match with the dooro dureed aa, aa, including the position of the caesura. The second section of heesta kebedda mostly maps onto dooro dureed aa, except for the dooro dureed aa being a short vowel syllable longer. What is interesting here is, however, the third section of heesta kebedda begins with a short syllable. This means that the dooro dureed aa fits into heesta kebedda (albeit, stopping at the first vowel syllable of the final section). However due to the syllabo-quantitative nature of the dooro dureed aa, heesta kebedda does fit into the dooro dureed aa.

The common patterning of the placement of long and short vowel syllables in these two different metres may give us insight into the “grammar” of Somali metre, however this is a point for further research .

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper sheds light on the dooro dureed aa, a form of fishing work song poetry that has not been explored in scholarly literature before. By analysing the metre of this poetry using Aweys Geedow Diinle's famous song as an example, this paper not only articulates a previously unexplored Somali metre but also highlights the work of Aweys Geedow Diinle, his role in preserving and modernising traditional Banaadiri forms, and his political commentary on the post-independence Somali government.

One difficulty experienced in researching the dooro dureed aa, is the lack of examples of both modern and traditional songs that are composed in the form.

Furthermore, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of Somali poetry and culture, which has traditionally been dominated by poetry originating from nomadic pastoralist communities. The paper acknowledges the dismissal of southern Somali poetry and the need for a more comprehensive approach to the study and collection of Somali poetry that includes non-nomadic pastoralist communities and different forms of poetry. Overall, this paper highlights the need for further research and study in this area to fully appreciate the rich and varied history of Somali poetry.

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