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The Life, Music and Literary Compositions of Abdillahi Qarshi (1924-1997)

Homage to the founding father of modern Somali music

Introduction

October 28, 1997 will forever be remembered as a tragic day, a burden heavy to bear for all the Somali people wherever they may be. The ultra modern communication system that facilitates human contact and makes the world like a village transmitted the sad news to everyone. The Internet played a prominent role in carrying the news of the death of Abdillahi Qarshi in London. Faxes were dispatched, radio programs relayed it in many languages, and eventually the message was carried by mouth from house to house.

Though death is inevitable, and everyone has to come to terms with that, yet the death that occurred on that day could be described as the most tragic one: the light of art - of literary songs and music - was extinguished. Musical pacesetter, composer, the most remarkable musician of the Somali people, Abdillahi Mohamed Mohamoud Hersi, widely known as Abdillahi Qarshi, passed away. May Allah rest his soul in peace. Abdillahi Qarshi died in London where he had been residing for the last number of years.

Condolence messages expressing bereavement rolled like stones driven by running water. Songs expressing the sorrow of his death were composed and disseminated through radio and newspapers. These songs of tribute were not only composed in Somali but in Arabic as well. Not only the Somali radio stations but also the Somali Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which enjoys a good reputation among its Somali audience, started series of programs involving interviews and the narration of the historical profile of Abdillahi Qarshi and his talent as a composer.

After the announcement of Abdillahi's death, preparations for his burial in Hargeysa got underway, with the government appointing a special ministerial committee, which decided that a national level burial with all the appropriate protocol would be accorded him.

Likewise, the establishment of a national hero cemetery was decreed, where Abdillahi Qarshi would become the first hero to be buried. It is worthy of note that the site selected for this purpose had first been used for target practice during the colonial days and then, during Siad Barre's regime, become known as *Badhka*, 'the Target' in sad memory of the many innocent individuals killed there by firing squads. In establishing here the National Hero Cemetery, all those innocent victims were recognized as martyrs.

When all these preparations for the burial of Abdillahi Qarshi were completed, his body was brought from London. On November 3, 1997, at around 1.30 pm, the plane carrying his coffin landed at Hargeysa International Airport, where thousands of people had gathered. The coffin was brought down from the plane, the flag of the Republic of Somaliland was draped over it, and it was transferred to an ambulance vehicle. The procession then moved toward the grave site where His Excellency Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, President of Somaliland, and the members of the national houses of Guurti and Parliament, the cabinet of ministers, artists troupes, the police force music band, units of the national army as well as a lot of the common folk had been waiting. In a respectful, decent and honorable manner, Abdillahi Qarshi was finally laid to rest. The band played the national anthem and the national army unit made a

tribute salute while the artistic group sang songs in his honor. The remarkable burial was concluded with a high profile speech by President Egal, relating the achievements, the struggle and the national contribution to Somali music and songs by Qarshi.

Abdillahi Qarshi: his life

Abdillahi was born to Mohamed and Dahabo Xirsi in 1924 in Moshi, Tanzania (Tanganyika) according to the late Abdillahi Qarshi's own records, as he told me in 1976 in Mogadishu where I met him while researching for and writing down the poems and biographical data of the nationalist poet Abdillahi Sultan 'Timacadde'. The name Qarshi was in fact his father's

Abdillahi was born lame. His flaccid left leg was the reason for the crutches that balanced his healthy right one. During his last years, a walking stick in his right hand doubly supported his movements.

Abdillahi was one of five children: he had two sisters and two brothers. The family moved to Aden, Yemen, while Abdillahi was still a child. Yasin, one of the brothers, was a merchant of substance there. In Aden, Abdillahi went to school in 1931. According to Omer Bulhan Mohamoud - a close associate of the composer-singer-musician, both in the world of music and outside it, with whom I fell into conversation at the Hargeysa airport while waiting for the great man's coffin - Abdillahi was enrolled at the MBS mission school of Tawahi, Aden.

Omer Bulhan told me further that Abdulahi assisted Sheekh Saciid Meydh in the afternoons, attending to customers at his shop. The first notes of Abdillahi's prodigious musical talent were heard there, in the form of twangs emitted by an improvised contraption he made out of wood and nylon fishing line.

Abdillahi did not pursue his education to a higher level. He moved to Berbera in what was then British Somaliland, and soon after that to Hargeysa, where he settled in 1945. He found work at the District Commissioner's office; later he was placed at the administration office of the Group Hospital. His fluency in English and aptitude for secretarial responsibilities stood him in good stead where such was in great demand.

Still later, according to Osman Awad, whom I also met on November 3, 1998, at the Hargeysa airport, Abdillahi was placed at the command office of the Armed Police, which took over the duties of the Camel Corps who had mutinied in Burco and been dismissed.

Abdillahi, all the while, was clandestinely working with a fledgling underground anti-colonial movement where his outstanding multi-faceted talent earned him an enviable, top-notch position. It cost him his job in 1949, although, according to reliable sources, this mishap did neither faze him nor dampen his pioneering roles in the political and musical areas in which he figured prominently. He was also briefly detained in jail in Mandheera.

He married Rosy Abdillahi Abby in 1952 in Mandheera. The marriage didn't last long but it gave the artist a son - Cartan - who was to follow in his father's footsteps in music. Of Abdillahi's romantic songs from Mandheera, one could mention one of his most sweet songs:

Aqalkay ku jirtiyo intaa u dhow

Mandheera oo dhami waa udgoon dhaha

Abdillahi was a doting, indefatigable father and mentor to his only son, who soon became an accomplished, adept musical prodigy with the National Artist Band of Waberi, in Mogadishu. The teenage Cartan was the unchallenged trumpet player of the Band. No one before Cartan played it as expertly or as sweetly in the history of Somali music.

Cartan's life, however, come to an end in 1977, while he was participating in the All-Black Festival, FESTAC -77, held in Nigeria. He was killed in a road accident with a couple of his colleagues and they were buried in Jos, the capital of the Plateau State, Nigeria. The young musician's death shattered not only his father's heart but also his growing number of fans in

Somalia, and those who recognized his talent at the Festival could not be consoled for a long time afterwards.

Abdillahi Qarshi spent many years in Hargeysa, but later, he settled in Mogadishu. He was working as always as a musician, since the early 1950s, now recognized as the revered father of contemporary Somali music. He married Hibo Cali Suldaan in Mogadishu in 1984. Of this marriage, he was soon blessed with Cawo and Cawil, his twin daughter and son, soon followed by Wacays, another son.

After he and the family fled Mogadishu during the ferocious fighting in 1991, they ended up in Hargeysa. After a brief stay there, he then shifted base to neighboring Djibouti. Later, in 1994, he left for the UK, where he lived until his last days.

Abdillahi Qarshi was universally respected, revered and loved by all Somalis, a fact which always found him innumerable fans everywhere he went. It was also this unsurpassable reputation which paved his way all the way to England with heads of roses. The family he left behind now lives in on Hargeysa, the place where Abdillahi Qarshi first came to bloom.

The music and literary compositions of Abdillahi Qarshi

The artistic life, activities and compositions of Abdillahi Qarshi began only after he settled in Hargeysa, after a short stay in the coastal town of Berbera. At that time, the new style of Balwo songs was becoming fashionable, with influences coming from Borama in the west.

As we have mentioned earlier, Abdillahi arrived with a relatively good education, and with an ambition for literary promotion. In addition to that, he arrived with a valuable treasure of experience accumulated in the course of his life abroad. He had acquired a rich experience having lived in different environments of human settlements and with people of different socio-cultural background and levels of development. Abdillahi had lived in Tanzania (then Tanganyika) and in Aden, both serving as melting pots where African, Indian and Arabian cultures fully intermingled and fairly coexisted.

These experiences were coupled with the enormous advantages he had gathered from the artistic literatures and music of these societies. Abdillahi had gained an additional advantage: the different languages of these societies. All this interacted and gave him tremendous opportunities to add to his own artistic and musical knowledge and capacity. It provided him with the technical skills that gave the impetus to combine the talent, composition and play of both literature and music at the same time.

Abdillahi Qarshi, since his childhood in Aden, had shown an immense interest in the art of playing music, songs, composition and in singing, which he and many of his contemporaries greatly believed in.

Speaking about these issues, Abdillahi said, in an interview for the Djibouti Radio and Television (RTD):

'The motivating force which drove me to join the lot of art and music was that in 1941, the Aden Protectorate had one small radio station. Its range of reception was confined within the bounds of the city of Aden, and it broadcast programs in Arabic, Somali and Hindi, every day for an equal amount of time, one hour for each language. Both the Arabic and the Hindi programs included songs with music after their respective news broadcasts, while the Somali news broadcast was followed by Somali poems only, devoid of music and with no song entertainment.

As a result of that, our Arab and Hindu schoolmates laughed at us and pitied us on our cultural deficiencies. They usually asked, what is wrong? Doesn't your literature have any music? We responded with humiliated answers stating false reasons, saying that we do have music, but it is back there in our home country. The ambition to realize the promotion of Somali music inspired the decision and

compelled me onto the path that led me to become an artist, a musician and a pioneer.'

With that ambition already established, and packed with the relevant experience, Abdillahi came to Hargeysa. Speaking about this, he said in the same interview for the RTD:

'... Soon, on my arrival at Hargeysa, I found the Somali Balwo songs already in progress and widespread among the youth. The first night I observed in Hargeysa a Balwo on stage, with music originating from Boorame. The honor of this goes to Cabdi Sinimoo. I was delighted, overwhelmed and filled with joy by what I saw. These great works of art gave me confidence. Those composers had relieved me of many pressures by composing major works of art, otherwise it would have been my moral obligation and duty to do so. Now I could relieve myself of some of the responsibility and change the plans of what I had initially intended to do here. I simply joined the lot of artists, as one member of them, a *Daf* music role player with relevant songs in the plays.'

As he stated, Abdillahi Qarshi arrived in Hargeysa at a time when the Balwo movement was in full swing, led by Cabdi Sinimoo in the initial stages. Later, Qadiija Ciye Dharaar, known as Qadiija Balwo, joined. From there on, Abdillahi Qarshi started his artist's life as a musician and a literary composer. These activities, started in 1945, he kept up until his death in 1997, thus fully earning the title 'the Father of modern Somali music'.

As he said in the RTD interview, the first song he sang with a musical tune, with words by Suudi Xaaji Aaden and music by himself, included the following verses (Johnson 1996):

<i>Hadhuub nin sitoo hashiisa irmaan</i>	I am a man who carries a milk vessel
<i>Ha maalin la leeyahaan ahay</i>	Who is forbidden to milk his own she-camel

<i>Dagaal nimuu haysto meel halisoo</i>	I am a man who is in battle in a dangerous place
<i>Hubkiisu hangool yahaan ahay</i>	And whose (only) weapon is a <i>hangool</i>

At the time of Abdillahi Qarshi's arrival in Hargeysa, musical instruments were hardly known and rarely available. Nor were there many who knew how to play them, since until then, Somali culture didn't include the development of musical instruments other than drums, used to accompany Somali folklore dances. The new musical style called *Daf* was adopted from the Arabian culture, which has provided many contributions to Somali culture, melting into a fine mix in the course of continuous social interaction.

Later, the instrument called *uud*, also widely known as *kaman*, the violin and the flute were introduced. These instruments were played by people of Arabian and Indian birth, whose descendants up to this day live in Hargeysa as ordinary citizens of the country. These include Mohamed Said, known as *Gu'-roon-jire*, Ismail Nahari, Raw, and many others. They all had a positive influence on Somali art, in particular on the development of musical composition.

The theme central to the *Balwo* songs used to be love, but as we have seen above, already from the first song Abdillahi Qarshi performed, an element of politics was present under the influence of Somali folk literature. This art form had undergone many and rapid changes, motivated by the swift changes of the people's awareness, as the wind of the independence movement swept through the country from the middle of the 1940s on.

This period of transition was reflected in the culture. The traditional *dhaanto* folklore dance gave rise to the urban *balwo*, and from *balwo* the development went on to the more advanced *heello*, which continued to thrive and dominate the scene until 1962. It was then replaced by the yet more advanced *hees* which in turn included an unlimited number of forms

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and styles. Another singer-composer who must be noted in this context is Ahmed Mohamed Good 'Shinbir'. He was one of the pioneers of the transition from the *heello* to the modern *hees*. The *heello* songs, in a style new to the society, were composed in either of two ways:

1. The words of a *heello* song were composed entirely by one artist;
2. The song text would be the ultimate product of many contributors, who might either complete it quite easily and playfully in one gathering, or it would be garnered by bits and pieces over a period of space and time.

The *heello* would appear in either of two forms:

1. With one single alliterative sound throughout the length of the song, every stanza of the song featuring two words beginning with the given sound;
2. As a collection of stanzas, each one of which alliterated in a different sound.

The *heello* songs which were and still are among the most prominent ones were given the name *qaraami*, which means 'antique love songs'.

Abdillahi Qarshi's reputation as the most talented artist of his age and time is based on his accomplishments in all the fields: poetic and musical composition, lyrics, and singing. His lyrics seemed to be tugging at the nerve centers of the listener with its melodic harmonies. The stealthy interplay between the musical instrument and the sweet, emotional lyrics associated with the early Somali songs is indeed mostly attributed to the late artist. 'All but seven of the classical *qaraami* songs owe their composition, popularity and agelessness to Abdillahi Qarshi' said Mohamed Suleiman Tubea, himself one of the foremost Somali vocalists, in a BBC talk-show commemorating the artist's passing.

One ought to note, at this juncture, that any individual even remotely associated with the world of music used to be ostracized and put through a grueling and often cruel segregation, to coerce him/her to stop being a music lover - that individual's only crime. The going was rough indeed, and coming out of the woods, so to speak, to declare one's proclivity to and love for music called for great courage, stamina and willpower.

The whole atmosphere prevailing during the years of the emergence of Somali music was characterized by continuous, concerted and crippling pressure that tethered and muffled the musicians at every chance. Among the most persistent accusations directed against them were the following:

1. The artists, through the introduction of an occupation that appealed to many people, were inherent heretics who had little respect for the Islamic faith and its divine precepts. Men of religion and the fanatics they incensed against the artists mounted the greatest onslaughts.
2. Male artists themselves made the munching of *qaad* (*Catha edulis*, khat, a leafy shrub chewed for its mild narcotic content) a habit whenever they had work to do together. Female artists were gradually pulled into these sessions and female habitués of khat were considered on the same level as the lowliest women on the street.

But the valiant defiance against these oppressive tactics only gained momentum, the pioneers fostering an environment conducive to music and its noble possibilities. Abdillahi Qarshi reminisced at length on the hurdles that encountered them as artist in his introduction to John W. Johnson's *Heello. Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali*, stating that:

'The Somalis are by nature deeply religious, and the birth and acceptance of the modern *heello* had to overcome the antagonisms and resistance of tradition and of religious leaders. In its infancy the *heello* was considered to be something completely against Somali and Islamic culture. For those of us who were involved,

it was a creative and recreational pursuit. We would gather in a house in the evenings to compose and to play and to sing. But the music of the *heello*, the clapping and unconstrained enjoyment of it, and the ill-famed houses where women danced to it were not acceptable, the behaviour therein being considered far beyond the limits which were set for young people.'

Following the *balwo* and Qadiija Balwo era, which marked the first times when Somali songs were sung for their own sakes, came the second stage of the development, that of the *heello*, with the great vocalist Shamis Abokor, widely known as Guduudo Carwo. She, too, broke the taboo put on women artists by a disapproving public. When Shamis started taping her songs at Radio Somalia in Hargeysa, she was whisked in and out in different guises, for fear of public wrath. She did not even admit that she and the sweet powerful voice heard over the radio were one and the same.

Shamis became an indispensable gem among the artists, inspiring many poetic allusions to her which highlight the esteem and love she eventually enjoyed. One poet said of her:

Guduudo Carwoy gugii la rakaba
Allow yaa gashaanti kaa dhiga

O, Guduudo Carwo
At each spring that come to pass
May God remold you younger

The public gradually gravitated towards the *heello* and came to accept the genre. This change in attitude among both the artists and the public fostered the formation of independent groups, such as the Medical Group and the Signals, whose efforts and productions paved the way for Somali music to popularity and complete acceptance. Long-distance truck drivers also contributed to the composition and popularization of the *heello*. They were well placed for these functions since they always acted as active disseminators of what was new or of interest to all they met and who eagerly waited for them along their routes.

Husein Jama, better known as Haji Gujis, a playwright, composer and actor, speaking about Abdillahi Qarshi said:

'I first met Abdillahi Qarshi in 1956. Artists, then, used to meet in a two-story building at Lira Street (Seketu Lira) in Hargeysa. Upon reflection of those times, the great difference and dissimilarities between Abdillahi's lyrics and modern day ones always strike me. Abdillahi, one would think, never missed the most appropriate note in music for each word, believing in the relevance of each syllable for the whole. He never hurried through a song nor was he ever pressed to come up just with a lyric. Today one is witness to words composed last night being sung today, music and all.

Abdillahi's fame and respect came through this total devotion to music and the concentration he accorded to the words of a song long before he picked up the *uud* to test this or that note and their relative suitability to words he would hum to himself. Abdillahi only allowed versions of the music he adjusted to the words after three or four days.'

Haji Gujis added that the late artist's lyricism and mastery of words were quite unique and are difficult to surpass. Every note of music, one can see, is never in any place other than where it was intended, bringing out the depth and feeling of each letter and each word.

'For instance', Haji Gujis illustrated, 'for the most popular *'Isku shuban' heello*, it took him four days to set the music. He concentrated all his thoughts, energy and imagination into one particular section for twenty-four hours, until he merged musical note to poetical note and poetical note to musical note. Later on, the song caught on the public unaware, gripping them so possessively. It took us seven nights of spellbound attention to understand how he did it, note by note, which he so graciously took us through.'

I believe that the methods he exploited in composing song music have greater depth than meets the eye. I have registered about forty of the *qaraami heello*, and neither me nor the musically more adept can comprehend how he perfected them. The meter of all the *heello* songs are the same, based on the *dhaanto*, but the alliteration differs from one song to another. To each *heello*, Abdillahi composed the music, giving it a name suitable to the mood and the words of the song.

All the *heello* songs are interchangeable, in the sense that all of them could be played with the music of all the others. The secret of their individuality, which made him a composer way ahead of others, is yet to be discovered.

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Ahmed Ali Harun 'Dararamle', a vocalist-musician of renown, speaking of Abdillahi's innumerable merits, told me in Hargeysa in January 1998:

'Abdillahi was a phenomenon. He was the first to dare the public and stage a drama in front of a curious audience. His great personality, presence, ingenuity perhaps, in that first presentation was a most singular step that brought our rich literature to flourish on the stage. Until then, plays were enacted on makeshift school stages by pupils whose parts were spoken in both Arabic and English. Abdillahi, instead, spoke in the native tongue, underlining the Somali language's inexhaustible treasure in its variety and genres of poetic material, prose and terminology.'

It is impossible to discuss and analyze the theatre without taking into account the role of the composer and playwright Husein Aw Farah. Apart from his contribution to and role in the overall Somali artistic culture, he was the first to compose a dramatic play. The first two plays, both by him, were called *Cantar iyo Cabla* and *Isa-seeg*.

It must be noted here, that in the initial stages, all roles were played by men, also the roles of women characters; the whole affair was already a taboo for the community, but even more so women performing on the stage. The famous vocalist-composer-musicians Omer Dule Ali and Hasan Gidin played with artistry such difficult roles in disguise. From those days of the *heello* to this day, Omer Dule remains one of the best liked Somali singers and one of the foremost players of the *uud*.

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The national independence movement culminated on June 26, 1960, with the achievement of the sovereignty of the northern regions, merging in a now contested union with the south on July 1, 1960, forming the Somali Republic. This union was on a multilateral basis, rather than on a bilateral one, intended for the unification of the five Somali territories symbolized by the white five-pointed star of the Somali flag; a dream that was never realized. Abdillahi with other notable composers, poets and playwrights took a lion's share in the agitation of the people. Many of those songs, with either both words and music or music only by Abdillahi Qarshi, were taken up by many national artistic troupes and are still known today, defying the cycle of time and age. Among them, one could cite:

1. *Qolaba Calankeedu Waa Cayn*, words by Husein Aw Farah, with music by Abdillahi Qarshi,
2. *Dhallintii Waddankiyo*, words by Mohamed Ismail 'Barkhad-cas', with music by Abdillahi Qarshi;
3. *Waa Mahad Allee*, with both words and music by Abdillahi Qarshi.

The Somali national liberation movement was part and parcel of the global and regional liberation movements that were appearing in all corners of the world. This is witnessed by the correlations between Qarshi's artistic production and the worldly events, especially those in Africa. His deeply touching tribute song in honor of Patrice Lumumba at his sad and sudden death is a good example (words and music by Abdillahi Qarshi) (Johnson 1996):

*Lumumba ma noola, mana dhiman
Labada midna ha u maleynina
Muuqiisoo la waayo mooyaane
Imuu maqan yahay ha moodina*

Lumumba is neither living nor dead
Do not imagine that [he is in] either of the two [conditions]
Although people have failed to find his person
Do not imagine that he is absent

In his literary compositions, Abdillahi Qarshi was not confined to the national and regional cause, but on many occasions also tackled world issues. Aside from their involvement in Pan-Somalism and Pan-Africanism, many Somalis were looking abroad to other nations and continents, comparing other country's plights with those of Somalia and Africa. Here is another fine example by Abdillahi Qarshi (Johnson 1996):

<i>Dawladdii gumeysiga</i>	The colonial governments
<i>E dul ahaanba Afrika</i>	Of the whole of Africa
<i>Waagii ay damaaciyayeen</i>	When they coveted it
<i>Shirkii ay u dalbadeen</i>	The meeting arranged for this
<i>Magaaladay u soo dirteen</i>	They city where they sent [delegates]
<i>Kobtii ay ku doodayeen</i>	In the exact section [of town] where they debated
<i>Baarliin daya</i>	Look at Berlin
<i>Bal daya</i>	All of you look
<i>Derbaa dhex yaal</i>	A wall is splitting it
<i>Bal daawda!</i>	Look and be entertained!

Abdillahi Qarshi spent many years in his youth in Hargeysa, but later lived for a long time in Muqdisho, only leaving it for Djibouti and then London, for the last few years of his life. As the dictatorial regime of Siad Barre banned the freedom of expression and all works of art were put under the notorious Censorship Board, Abdillahi turned to composing songs pertaining to social issues. Among these we can cite:

1. *Ogaada Ogaada Dugsiyada Ogaada*, relating to education;
2. *Hooyadii Wanaagsani*, on motherhood and the role of mothers;
3. *Waa Duni Gabowdoo Illeyn Waa Dumaalee*, on the destiny of man;
4. *Beenlow Faalalow*, pertaining to bad news and rumor mongers bent on social destabilization.

In the twenty-one years of Siad Barre's repressive, tyrannical regime, art in Somalia suffered

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regression as did all other aspects of life. In those long, tedious years of Siad's despotic rule, free thinking and creativity in the fields of art, especially in poetry, songs and drama, became a crime to be harshly punished. Most of the best poets and playwrights languished in the main security prisons of the repressive regime. Just to cite a few examples: Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame 'Hadraawi', Abdi Adam Had 'Qays' and Ali Sugulle were among those who served years in detention. The rest of the composers either fled the country or were kept under strict surveillance by the oppressive institutions of the regime. Abdillahi Qarshi was among those who lived in solitude and kept almost silent except on certain sparse occasions.

During this period, Abdillahi composed the words and music of one song which was sang by Mohamed Ahmed and Asha Abdo. The words were composed in Somali, Arabic, English, Swahili and Italian, to a light and jolly tune, and the song remains a favorite even so many years after its creation.

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In this way, Abdillahi spent almost fifty years of his life for the development and advancement of Somali music, songs and theatre, and he has left his imprint on the wide range of Somali art in all its diversity. Consequently, he will be remembered as the father and founder of modern Somali music and theatre, and his music and literary compositions will remain a precious treasure for the Somali people, wherever they are.

The art of title giving of the Somali *qaraami* songs – an exclusive school established by Abdillahi Qarshi

Abdillahi Qarshi's creative talents were extensive and varied. Whenever the researcher studying his works digs deeper into his artistic heritage, there suddenly comes to light a tantalizing new creative aspect and an unexpected facet previously overlooked or unnoticed. For instance, if we reexamine attentively the process of title-giving of the *qaraami* songs, we discover that their titles and the method of their naming are completely different from that of the modern songs, or *heeso*.

Shuffling through those legendary *qaraami* songs, it is evident that Abdillahi Qarshi is responsible for the music of the majority of them, but he was not alone. Associated with him and contributing to the music inventions, was Mohamed Said 'Gu'-roon-jire' - already mentioned - a prominent personality in this field and a pioneer in the art of playing the *uud*. Sweet tunes like *Xusuus*, *Xaafuun*, *Mudan* and others owe their musical form to Mohamed Said. Sahardid 'Jibiye' was another talented composer who among other things produced a number of popular dramas. He was also the composer of both words and music of the ageless *qaraami* songs entitled *Kaar* and *Murug*.

Once presented with the words, Abdillahi Qarshi did not embark upon the music quickly. Rather he devoted a lot of time studying them from many perspectives. What he wished to realize was that the words and the musical rhythm should match. Having reached that aim, he used to give that piece of music a name exactly matching it. This process could be called his special school of naming songs.

Let us take as example the song called *Laac*. In Somali the word *laac* means reaching up to grasp something which is placed above you. If you listen attentively to this song, especially as sung by Omer Dule, you would notice how the voice is raised from very low to a high pitch, representing the complete picture, the music and the name *Laac*.

In addition to this, the alliteration of the words and the choice of the sound 'L' have their own impact. Consider the following verse:

Waan litaa is-loodin kari maayee Ah, I am weak and can turn to no side
Liciifaye show laf baa i jaban I became tired and my leg is broken

These *qaraami* songs would really demand an in-depth study, here, let us just take one more example, the song *Caweys*, sung by both Abdillahi Qarshi and Ahmed Ali Harun 'Dararamle'. It is one of the oldest *qaraami* songs, with a love theme, one from the drama *Cantar iyo Cabla* by Husein Aw Farah. Abdillahi composed the music for it. By correlating the words, subject, feeling, musical tone and the name *Caweys*, meaning 'spending an evening together', and keeping in mind the alliteration in 'C', there is no doubt that, one could easily get the feeling of being together with a close one, at a beautiful scene, under the full moon. Here is a verse, just to give a taste of the song:

Sidii Cantar iyo Cablaynu nahee
Miyeynu kala caajisaynaa

Giving names to musical tones in this way was confined to the *qaraami* songs. These belong to the period from the *balwo* in 1943 up until 1962. Since then, the *heeso* have replaced them and still continue. The difference between the *heello* and the *heeso* lies in that the former originated from the *dhaanto*, while the *heeso* are composed from all Somali poetic genres. When the *hees* era dawned, songs were not commonly given a name the way the *heello* songs were.

Notes

¹ See also Abdilahi Qarshi: *The Birth of Somali Modern Music*, in this volume.

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