

## COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ON THE SONGS OF THE CITY

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**ABSTRACT** Harari songs, called *gey fāqār*, “the songs of the city,” are among the significant expressions of local intangible cultural heritage. Traditional *gey fāqār* (usually employing a voice-percussion configuration) are presently mostly performed at weddings: women sing in choir, led by an expert singer/poet (*wāli*); they may also play solo (*salley*) or in duo (*ḡāliyei*, *kōtankōi*). Harari sung verses, fixed or improvised, are quite stratified semantically; themes include religion, patriotism, friendship, love and marriage. Performance of *gey fāqār* combines the expression of a shared literary and musical patrimony with the ability of poetical creation and melodic variation; texts and melodies of *gey fāqār*, considered as a whole, are strictly interconnected with the social and ritual events they accompany. Documentation and analysis of the songs of the city thus implies an interdisciplinary approach –including linguistic, philological, literary, anthropological and musicological study– and cannot be removed from a positive relationship with the community and cooperative interactions with local and international researchers and intellectuals. While women sing symbolically for “the city,” thus expressing an important facet of Harari living culture, synergy between local community, scholars and cultural institutions may contribute to develop projects, reflections and activities towards preservation and valorisation of intangible cultural heritage.

Key Words: Ethiopia; Harar; Song; Poetry; Music.

### GEY FĀQĀR, SONGS OF THE CITY

“*Fāqār zezele elwā*

*Fāqār zezelelā asāsīn elā*”

Every society has traditional songs

Those who have no songs, have no foundation

—Kabīr Abdulmuheimen Abdalnassir, *Harari Gey Fāqār* (1995)

In the city-state of Harar, eastern Ethiopia, traditional sung poetry indeed represents one of the most significant expressions of knowledge and intangible cultural heritage. Traditional Harari songs, called in the local language *gey fāqār*, literally “the songs of the city” (Harar being *gey*, “the city”<sup>(1)</sup>), enclose in their melodies and texts, an extensive portrait of the multifaceted character of Harari culture. The most outstanding aspects of Harari culture are strongly connected with Harar’s history as a worldwide commercial crossroad and an Islamic holy city, and may be identified as urbanity, Muslim devoutness and a long-standing praxis of acquisition and reinterpretation of external cultural elements.<sup>(2)</sup> These

features of Harari culture are clearly perceivable in several expressions of local tangible and intangible heritage, such as architecture, costumes, gastronomy, craft-work and, indeed, music and literature.

The songs of the city reflect the uniqueness of Harari musical and literary culture, contextually revealing its enriching interactions with the outer world as well as the centrality of Islam in every aspect and moment of life. Accordingly, *gey fāqār*, which regularly open and close with the name of Allah and his Prophet, do combine sung verses in different languages (Harari, Oromo, Arabic, Amharic, and Somali) and entail rearranged melodies and echoes from India, Sudan, Egypt or Italy.

Although generally pervaded with religious elements, the verses of Harari *gey fāqār* mainly focus on secular themes; the designation *gey fāqār* in fact indicates an ample repertoire of traditional sung poetry deriving, for the most part, from an ancient and deeply rooted literary tradition that has been witnessed and transmitted for centuries through both oral and written processes<sup>(3)</sup> and sources (the most relevant historical texts on this topic being *Masnoy* and *Kitab al-Fāqār*).<sup>(4)</sup> *Gey fāqār* verses, fixed or improvised, are rich in metaphors and usually present a significant semantic stratification; themes may include religion, patriotism and friendship, although present-day songs principally focus on love and marriage.<sup>(5)</sup> Texts and melodies of *gey fāqār* are not considered as separate entities but rather as a whole: as a matter of fact, oral sources as well as Leslau's *Etymological dictionary of Harari* translate the polysemic term *fāqār* both as "song" and "poetry"; verbal forms *metfāqār* and *(tä)fēqāra*, translated as "play" (Leslau, 1963: 63), may be used for singing and poetry as well as for conversation, dance, sports, games and entertainment in general, including practice of modern musical instruments.

Unique and diverse at once, the songs of the city represent Harari cultural identity, concurrently disclosing the main aspects of local musical, poetical and performative knowledge as well as its adjustments through history and socio-political circumstances. If observed diachronically, social distribution and practice of Harari *gey fāqār* reveal quite a complex outline. Until Derg cultural repression (1974–1991) Harari songs were played, in a variety of poetic and musical styles, by most social strata: for more than one century the writings and recordings of Western scholars such as Bricchetti-Robecchi (1896), Cohen (1931), Leslau (1947, 1965), and Jenkins (1974) described men and women of different generations performing solo, duets and group songs; starting from the 1950s, a wide collection of recordings testified the fertility of *mugād* youth associations in composing and performing both local traditional sung poetry and modern musical forms, particularly inspired by international repertoires<sup>(6)</sup>; in recent times, collective memory, digitised cassettes, press articles, and evocative Millennium<sup>(7)</sup> video clips keep reminding the audience how the charming voice and poignant verses of the late Shamitu, a famous and treasured woman singer (also nicknamed "the Homer of Harar" because of her blindness and poetical ability), symbolized Harari culture for decades, inside the city walls as well as in the diasporic communities widespread all through the continents.<sup>(8)</sup>

In the course of time, the musical reality of Harar kept transforming, mostly in relation with the political, historical and social changes of the country, which



Fig. 1. Harari women perform *gey fāqār* in a drawing by Kabir Abdulmuheimen.

became particularly intense during the last century. Presently, Harari men have abandoned secular songs, eventually opting for religious chanting (*zikri*), while a young generation of pop singers (*fennan*) started performing on stage newly arranged Harari repertoires; in these circumstances, traditional forms of *gey fāqār* keep being performed, within the city walls, mainly by mature women, whose custodianship turned into the key of preservation, transmission and development of musical and poetical performance.<sup>(9)</sup>

Women's songs, generally implying a voice-percussion configuration, are mainly played during traditional wedding ceremonies (*gey bālāču*). In this context, a choir of *āyāč* (mothers or elderly relatives of the bride) and *afōča* (members of neighbourhood associations) is led by an expert or professional singer/poet (*wāli*); most songs present a responsorial structure and a rhythmical accompaniment provided by membranophone and idiophone instruments (*kārābu* drum, *dāf* tambourine and *kābāl* wooden blocks).<sup>(10)</sup> Modalities of execution may however significantly vary: vocal procedures may be monodic, heterophonic or polyphonic, and different sung styles may express a variety of timbers, techniques, and vocal-instrumental arrangements. For instance, group songs may be homophonic or take diverse responsorial and antiphonal forms; besides group songs, women may also play solo or in duo: two-part polyphonies known as *ǧaliyei* and *kōtankōt* represent a unique and particularly charming expression of Harari sung tradition.

Performance of today's traditional *gey fāqār* combines the expression of a shared literary and musical patrimony and the ability of poetical creation and

melodic variation, which acquire a particular significance within the framework of a specific ritual contextualization.<sup>(11)</sup> In this sense, texts, melodies and performance modalities of traditional Harari sung verses are strictly interconnected with the social and ritual events they accompany; because of texts' importance, musical focus usually lies on the vocal parts, presently identifiable with the voices of Harari women.

### STUDYING *GEY FĀQĀR*: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH AND COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

In spite of the apparent limitations of a monographic study on the secular sung traditions of a micro-society such as the Harari group, documentation and analysis of the songs of the city is an extremely complex task, which certainly implies an interdisciplinary approach—including linguistic, philological, literary, historical, anthropological and musicological study—and cannot be removed from a positive relationship with the community and a cooperative interaction with local and international researchers and intellectuals. Along with international scholars, many Harari individuals and groups proudly and passionately carry on studies on different aspects of their culture, increasingly promoting Harari identity revival. Because of the city's historical role as a centre of learning, Harar's population, more than any other in the region, is highly educated and counts an extremely remarkable number of literates and scholars.

Among them, Kabīr Abdulmuheimen Abdalnassir, renowned and versatile Harari thinker (historian, poet, painter, singer, mystic, researcher, and owner of a noteworthy private library), mirrors, with his multifaceted, revolutionary and generous personality, the charming complexity of Harari culture, as well as the necessity of approaching it in an all-compassing manner. Furthermore, Kabīr Abdulmuheimen represents the most reliable source on Harari *gey fāqār*, having tirelessly recorded and documented its oral and written verses for over three decades, elaborating through his insightful and poetic approach any element contributing to the knowledge of Harari songs and poetry. His interests span from history of *mugād* to dance choreography, from *‘ajami* manuscripts philology to pronunciation's evolution in ancient and modern language, from the legends related to a single song to the different states of consciousness associated with musical rituals. Furthermore, he studied the relationship between Islam and musical performance, the connections linking Harari songs with other local and international intangible cultures, the social role of singers in Harari society, up to the most undisclosed meanings hidden in each single Harari verse, analyzed layer after layer, word after word, sound after sound.

Last, but not least, Kabīr Abdulmuheimen is the author of the first published text on *gey fāqār*, which includes both a classification and an anthology of the most recurrent and relevant Harari sung verses. His booklet, compiled in Harari language, is officially titled *Harari Gey Fāqār* (1995) and unofficially labelled by the author as *Masnoy higan*, “the consequent of *Masnoy*,” in order to underline the continuity of Harari sung verses through history (*Masnoy* being the title of

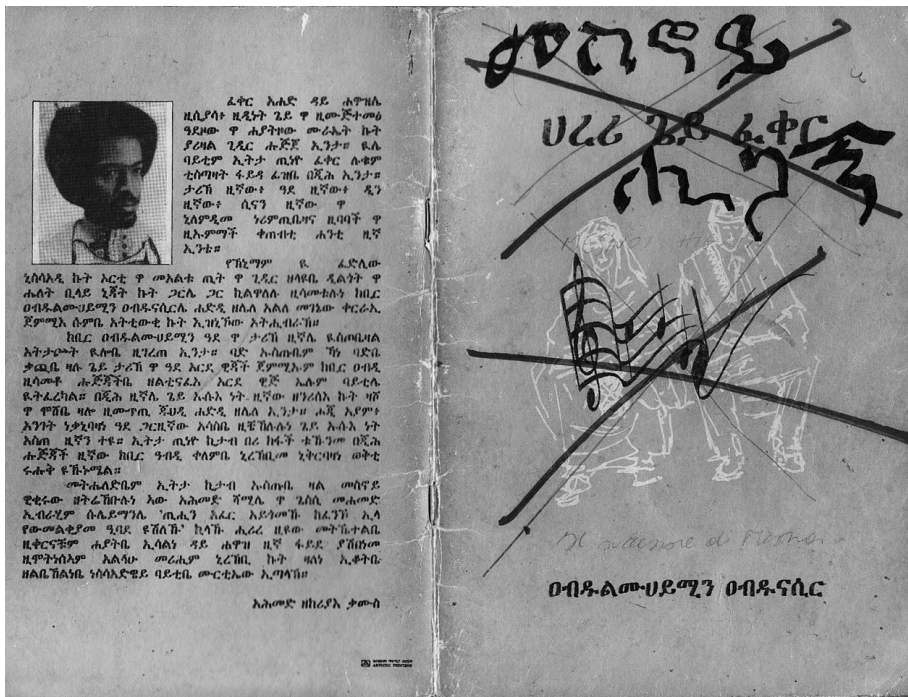


Fig. 2. Cover of the booklet *Harari Gey Fäqär*:

an ancient Harari poem which used to be sung by elder men during wedding ceremonies<sup>(12)</sup>).

In spite of his essentially non-academic attitude, the prominent role of Kabir Abdulmuheimen in the study of *gey fäqär* and of Harari culture in general, together with his innate capacity of positively interacting with local and international scholars, is witnessed in a great number of academic writings, including all the previous publications by the writer of this article. Through the years, Kabir Abdulmuheimen generously shared with me his vast knowledge of Harari poetry, music and ritual practices, encouraging me to regularly record, note and report his spontaneous speeches as well as the interviews and dialogues on the subjects I proposed. Our intellectual cooperation has been extremely precious and fruitful through the years, taking several interpersonal and professional forms and originating a number of academic products.

After seven years of frequentation, I finally had the fortunate opportunity to sit beside Kabir Abdulmuheimen on the conference chair at the international workshop *Preserving Local Knowledge in the Horn of Africa*. Subsequently, when we learned that the proceedings of the workshop would be published, I discussed with him about the shape our article should take; “I am the thinker and you will be my doer” he told me, and after repeating for my recorded archive the main points of his research, he gave me complete freedom to convey any portion of his thought on Harari literary and poetical tradition.

I am therefore honored and glad to report in this article a small selection of

Abdumuheimen's most outstanding elaborations on Harari *gey fāqār*, recounted through his written or spoken words that I have witnessed, recorded, selected, translated and re-elaborated under his supervision.<sup>(13)</sup> In the following pages, his direct contributions and quotations will appear in quotation marks, organised, on his demand, "the way people with formal education put it." Moreover, the inputs he gave me through the years pervade every page and every word of any of my works on Harari *gey fāqār*.

#### ABDULMUHEIMEN ABDULNASSIR'S CLASSIFICATION OF *GEY FĀQĀR*

Indeed, the most precious contribution Kabīr Abdumuheimen Abdunnassir gave to the study of *gey fāqār* is his written classification of musical forms and themes of Harari sung verses; it will therefore be convenient to briefly examine it in English translation. Before proceeding, however, a more detailed distinction of men's and women's sung practices will be opportune, since such separation, although essentially operative in a synchronic perspective, is not completely unambiguous.

As previously stated, Harari traditional songs are presently mainly performed by women; however, men certainly played an essential role in the history of *gey fāqār*: *mugād* associations held for decennia the role of "factories for song manufacturing," being a regular context of traditional musical/poetical composition, performance and dance, both on the male and female sides; in the 1960s and 1970s, while girls kept performing *gey fāqār* in the traditional voice-percussion configuration (which is still in function among elder women), young men started experimenting with new musical instruments and forms, anticipating the new wave of Harari pop; *mugād* eventually disappeared under the cultural repression of Derg, but the memory of their repertoires survived and flourished in collective memory, in transcribed texts as well as in female sung practices. Today, although most male singers have abandoned music, some of them keep writing verses, sharing reminiscences and collecting documents from their musical past; even though most Harari do believe that abandoning music is quite a beneficial step on the path of righteous Islam, a well-known local saying replies: *wāli zalkhāna wāli yekhunumel*, "the one who was not a singer will not become a saint."<sup>(14)</sup>

In a broader view, today's Harari women's musical practices shall be considered as not exclusively bound to the female part of society, since they explicitly bear the legacy of a musical past where the social distribution of repertoires was not impermeable between sexes. In this sense, Kabīr Abdumuheimen once told me: "You have to stop your advocacy for women," and, underlining the mutual cooperation between sexes in Harari society, he added: "Men are like a river that flows, women are like a pool that gathers and beautifies the waters of the flowing river; if Harari mothers could not sing according to our fathers' tradition, Harari people would have disappeared centuries ago." Hence, to be completely accurate, it is necessary to state that Harari songs can virtually be composed and performed by both men and women, although, at present, male sung practices of traditional secular songs have become extremely rare.

Under such specification it is thus possible to properly take into account the data Kabīr Abdulmuheimen collected for decades, including during the time when *gey fāqār* was not only in the domain of women. Of course, the relative importance attributed to historical time and current holders of a certain tradition is quite frequent in the Harari mindset and can be easily perceived through the pages of Kabīr Abdulmuheimen's *Harari Gey Fāqār*; notably in the way themes and forms of Harari songs are arranged.

In his anthology, Kabīr Abdulmuheimen reports 361 poetic nucleuses, divided into 12 thematic groups, respectively 1) Allah; 2) the Prophet; 3) *Fāqār* (song/poetry); 4) country; 5) love; 6) death; 7) wedding; 8) situation/surroundings; 9) praising; 10) joke/provocation; 11) war/hero songs; 12) history song (see Table 1).

These verses were mainly collected and transcribed from sung practice and, differently combined, still appear in songs as well as in transcriptions and recordings. In fact, within the textual corpus of *gey fāqār*, several recurrent verses and semantic sequences, deeply rooted within local poetical and musical knowledge, may constitute “une unité du point de vue de sens et de point de vue musical” (Leslau, 1947: 132). The collection reported in *Harari Gey Fāqār* gives a wide documentation of these musical-poetical units, which may take, in some cases, a male or female connotation (see for instance Table 1, group no. 9).

The poetic nucleuses reported in Kabīr Abdulmuheimen's anthology are composed by a variable number of verses (2 to 7 verses per nucleus); the majority of them portray the most common metrical structures of Harari songs: 346 of 361 groups of verses are in fact organized in couplets and quatrains, or else in groups of three verses.

When it comes to sung performance, Harari recurrent verses may be combined

**Table 1.** Themes of *gey fāqār* according to Abdulmuheimen's classification

No.	Title	Transliteration	Translation	Units
1	አልላ	<i>Allāh</i>	God	41
2	ነብ	<i>nābi</i>	Prophet	25
3	ጃቀር	<i>fāqār</i>	Sung verses	22
4	ባድ	<i>bād</i>	Country	14
5	ደድ	<i>dād</i>	Love	22
6	ሙጎ	<i>mūt</i>	Death	12
7	ሙራዖ	<i>murād</i>	Marriage	7
8	ሽርቲ; ሓል	<i>širti hal</i>	Situation	56
			Praising:	
9	ሙፋሊስ	<i>māfulās</i>	a) ሓሊስ ሞረዖ <i>halās morād</i> Invitation for ♀ to sit b) ጌልዋ ሙረኝ <i>gēl-wa mārīñ</i> Friendship ♀♂ c) ሙረኝ <i>mārīñ</i> Friendship ♂ d) ዮንደው-ዮንደው <i>yondayoude</i> (?)	88
10	ሙስዳብ (ቆስ ፈቀር)	<i>māsḍab (qōsa fāqār)</i>	Joke, provocation	21
11	ሙለላይ ፈቀር	<i>mālāsay fāqār</i>	Epic/heroic song	24
12	ታሪቀ ኤድ ፈቀር	<i>tarīq fāqār</i>	History	29

and adapted to performative necessities through formulaic mechanisms. At times, their semantic value may prevail over musical form, determining significant metrical redistribution; conversely, their juxtaposition within regular metrical structures (such as the cyclic *kōtankōt* melodies) may originate wide-ranging combinations of themes.<sup>(15)</sup>

Also, in the Harari language, some oral linguistic units bear a particularly relevant emotional power and may be used by the singers to embellish a verse, to complete a melodic line, to underline a statement or to balance metrically insufficient textual improvisations. Among them, the particle *-wa* especially contributes to the beauty of a song: *gey fāqār-le wāreg-zo wawinta*, writes Kabīr Abdulmuheimen, meaning “the beauty of *gey fāqār* lies in *-wa*.”

While textual documentation and verbal compositional procedures and forms are dealt with particular accuracy in Kabīr Abdulmuheimen’s writings and speeches, description of musical aspects of *gey fāqār* might not be of immediate understanding for the average foreigner, since they reflect the local concept of *fāqār* as a unique entity including poetry and music, as well as the consequential absence of an explicit exclusively musical theory within Harari culture.

During several interviews about his book, Kabīr Abdulmuheimen declared to base his organization of Harari *gey fāqār* on “colour” or “spirit” of songs, which depend on the combination of “semantic meaning of verses, musical form and context of performance.” In fact, his discourses, frequently characterized by a stunning interchangeability of terms such as *form*, *quality* and *kind*, *type*, *style* and *category*, reflect an essential aspect of Harari mindset: in oral and written discursive praxis and elaboration, the occurrence of elements such as expressive intensity, lexical variety, stylistic richness and manifestation of religious feelings may substitute the operational value of systematic organization and unambiguous object definition, which thus acquire only a secondary importance. Under these considerations, the foreign researcher might believe that, if projected in an emic perspective, the extraction of merely musical significance from the local concept of *fāqār* would result as an artifice of relative necessity. Nevertheless, in one chapter of his *Harari Gey Fāqār*, whose title may be translated as “Forms and behaviours of Harari songs,” Kabīr Abdulmuheimen implicitly but precisely elects the musical form of Harari sung repertoires as the fundamental distinctive trait for their description. It will be therefore convenient to report the most relevant lines of this chapter, explicating what is implicit thus pertinent and significant for a taxonomy of Harari sung poetry.

The first parameter chosen for classification is thus the number of performers. Kabīr Abdulmuheimen acknowledges, “*Gey fāqār* may be organized into three categories: *salley*, *mirās fāqār* and *dārsi*.” In fact, *salley* songs are performed in solo, *mirās fāqār* include different kinds of duets, *dārsi* songs are always played by a group. Each typology is then divided in sub-categories based on formal, functional or contextual factors.

He also clarifies, “Whatever song a single person performs is called *salley*.” Solo songs are essentially classified according to function and circumstances of execution: they may be performed for entertainment or as an accompaniment



to specific activities or particular emotional conditions. He continues:

Solo songs may facilitate domestic and agricultural work; singing *salley* may help individuals overcome personal difficulties. The name *salley* was given so the performer doesn't feel the loneliness. Such types of songs are called by most *wāli mutti fāqār* (sadness/loneliness song), *yāda fāqār*, *sēna fāqār* (grievance song), *afdīga fāqār* (kitchen song) or else *mihra fāqār* (duty/occupation song). A type of song called *adiyay* (swing) is also categorized into *salley*.

The term *salley* may also ironically describe two-part singing in case the first and second voice (*māmsās* and *mālhād*) are not rhythmically coordinated and one overcomes the other: "When *māmsās* and *mālhād* cannot go rhythmically together, one of them, to satisfy her thirst of song, sings alone covering both sounds."

The author then continues with a description of duets, or *mirās fāqār*. *Mirās fāqār* means "inherited song"; Kabīr Abdulmuheimen also translates it as "shared songs," as a reference to the transmission of poetical and musical knowledge from generation to generation as well as to the broad social participation to traditional sung performances. The expression *mirās fāqār* generally describes polyphonic duets known as *ḡaliyei* and *kōtankōt* (or *leley*), which are "performed by two, *māmsās* and *mālhād*": the first voice "throws" the verse (*māmsās*, from *māsāsa*, to unsheathe and throw the melody) and the second voice "catches" it (*mālhād*, from *lāhada*, to catch). Their specific denominations correspond to a double distinction, formal and historical: while *ḡaliyei* songs, more ancient, are performed a cappella, the *kōtankōt* style, established within the frame of last century's *mugad*, is usually played with the rhythmical accompaniment of *dāf* tambourine.

Kabīr Abdulmuheimen emphasizes the continuity of these Harari two-part singing styles: "In old days, *mirās fāqār* were known as *ḡaliyei*; currently, they are called *kōtankōt* or *leley*. The way of playing, however, has not changed its nature: *kōtankōt* is an evolution of *ḡaliyei*." While describing the two Harari two-part styles, he does not draw attention to their formal differences, rather preferring to highlight their common nature: according to his opinion *kōtankōt* is in fact merely a stylistic development originated from *ḡaliyei* (and "if there is anybody who rejects this theory, he should bring some evidence"). Indeed, several elements seem to confirm his thesis (among them, a chronological correspondence between the introduction of tambourine in Harar and the birth of the new style<sup>(16)</sup>) therefore *mirās fāqār* can be coherently treated as a whole. Kabīr Abdulmuheimen reports, in the subsequent lines, eight "types" of *mirās fāqār* (*ḡaliyei*, *wireḡla*, *māwa ḡali ḡaliyei*, *neleši*, *ḡale ḡale*, *amīrel muāminīnow*, *iseyleley māddiwa*, *nābo hay nābo*), giving for some of them a small translation and description.<sup>(17)</sup> According to my observations, several "types" listed by Kabīr Abdulmuheimen are still in use: they may represent the textual and musical models, which define a style that includes songs with common formal characteristics (*ḡaliyei*), or they may be recorded

as single songs (*wīreġla/wīrayla*, *neleši*, *nābo hay nābo*).

To conclude the paragraph on Harari two-part singing, Kabīr Abdulmuheimen takes into account formal difference between male and female sung practices, highlighting a routine which actually applies to most Harari sung repertoires as well as to spoken language: “when men sing, it is short; when women sing, it is long.” In other words, while Harari men enjoy fast vocalizations, women generally prefer slower metronomic tempo and protracted pronunciation, often lengthened in the final cadence; this use may be easily verified by any compared listening session.

Finally, the third category considered in the booklet is represented as songs performed by several singers. Harari group songs are defined *dārsi* (from Arabic *dars*, “lesson”) or *mugād fāqār* (literally “group song”). Kabīr Abdulmuheimen distinguishes the *dārsi* into responsorial songs (which he calls *dābāl fāqār*, *dābāl* being the corresponding dance type) vs. homophonic chants (or *nešida*, “hymns”): “In general, *dārsi* or *mugād fāqār* can be categorised into two: if one sings and the others follow as *māmsās* and *mālhād*, this is known as *dābāl fāqār*; the other is *nešida*, hymns.”

*Dārsi* songs are particularly vital in wedding context; “during wedding celebrations it is common to hear: ‘have the mothers stated the *dārsi*?’ or ‘are they in *dārsi*?’” It is quite interesting to notice that Kabīr Abdulmuheimen also includes *dārsi* songs, among them, the ritual chanting connected to nuptial ceremonies of henna (*henna māgād*) and hairdressing of the bride (*gufta māgād*): “The songs played during *henna māgād* and *gufta māgād* are also known as *dārsi*.” Actually, these are antiphonal chants performed by two small choirs and therefore factually determine a third formal sub-category.

According to my data, most Harari do not consider these chants as *fāqār*, rather assimilating them to other ritual expressions (such as prayers and *zikri*). However, this inclusion efficiently accomplishes the description of most formal categories of Harari sung practices, whose vast entity and complexity is clearly stated by Kabīr Abdulmuheimen as the conclusion of the chapter<sup>(18)</sup>: “Finally, *dārsi* doesn’t have categories: it is endless. God only knows, so I make my conclusion with this.”

Considering the relative importance attributed to music in Harari culture, Kabīr Abdulmuheimen’s contribution does play an essential role both locally and in transcultural perspective, notably towards the elaboration of taxonomy and musical analysis of Harari sung practices.

## EPILOGUE

*“Harar is a planet within the planet which has not yet been discovered; its history, landmarks, literature and spirituality are expressed through fāqār.”*

—Kabīr Abdulmuheimen Abdunassir

Whether observed under linguistic, philological, literary, historical, anthropological

or musicological points of view, Harari songs contribute to trace an extensive outline of this eastern Ethiopian culture and its local and global preservation strategies. While Harari women's voices sing for the city, accompany ritual practices and perpetrate literary knowledge, thus representing an important facet of Harari living culture, synergy between local community, international scholars and cultural institutions may contribute to cooperative knowledge, projects and works (recordings, translations, transcriptions, publications, workshops, capacity building actions). This collaboration may prove essential to develop further reflections and activities towards preservation and valorisation of local intangible cultural heritage.

“*Aw Abadir*<sup>(19)</sup> keeps the doors open for the foreigners who are interested in Harari culture, history and literature” once said Kabīr Abdulmuheimen, mirroring the essentially welcoming attitude of Harari people. He concluded that, “As long as outsiders come, Harari will be aware of themselves; activity will then take place spontaneously.”

## NOTES

- (1) Reflecting their fundamental urbanity, Harari call their town simply *gey*, “the city,” define themselves as *gey usu*’, “people of the city,” and describe the essential aspects of their culture as *gey*, “of the city.” Accordingly, Harari culture is defined *gey āda*, Harari language is *gey sinān* and Harari sung traditions are called *gey fāqār*.
- (2) Cultural exchanges pervaded and enriched Harar’s history since its foundation, attributed to *Aw Abadir*, a Muslim saint who united a number of rival tribes in peace. Exchanges continued through its expansion as the capital of the Muslim kingdom of Adal (16<sup>th</sup> century) until the city’s loss of political independence at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was occupied by Egyptians (1875–1885) and subsequently incorporated by Menelik into the Abyssinian Empire (1887). After the fall of Mengistu’s Derg regime (1974–1991), Harar eventually retrieved a relatively autonomous political status with the establishment, within the new Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, of the Harari National Regional State.
- (3) On transmission processes for Harari sung verses, see Sartori’s (2008) *Gey fāqār, il canto della città. Repertori vocali femminili nella comunità islamica di Harar*, pp. 108–116. See also, Sartori’s contribution for the Conference on Music of the World of Islam, *Cultural identity, Islamic revivalism and women’s new-found role in preserving and transmitting musical traditions. Suggestions from Harar, Ethiopia* (2007).
- (4) On Harari ancient manuscripts, see, for example, the article of Gori in this volume as well as Banti’s (2005a) *Remarks about the orthography of the earliest ajami texts in Harari*; Banti (2005b; 2007) “Harari Literature” and “Masnoy” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*; on written sources of *gey fāqār* (including *Masnoy*) see Sartori (2008: 116–129).
- (5) Leslau, in *Chansons Harari* (1947: 131) describes Harari songs’ themes as follows: “Le lecteur se rendra facilement compte de la diversité des thèmes traités dans ces chansons: amour, amitié, sentiments religieux, considérations sur la vie et ses vicissitudes.”
- (6) The collection gathered by (Abdallah) Sherif, presently at the Sherif Harar City Museum, is doubtlessly the most remarkable anthology of Harari historical recordings; nevertheless, some hundreds of digitalised *mugād* songs presently freely circulate through new media and formats (most frequently as internet downloads or copied MP3s on CD or flash card). On *mugād* see also Mohammed’s (1955) “The mugads of Harar,” and Sartori

- (2008: 46–53).
- (7) As the calendar in use is the Julian, Ethiopian and Harari new Millennium started in Gregorian 2007.
- (8) See, for instance, Kimberlin's (1997) *Four contemporary Ethiopian composers and their music: Asnakech Worku, Nuria Ahmed Shami Kalid A.K.A. Shamitu, Ezra Abate Iman, and Ashenafi Kebede*.
- (9) On relationship between historical and social changes and the performance of Harari songs, see, for example, Sartori's (2007).
- (10) On Harari musical instruments, see Tarsitani's (2007a; 2007b) "Käräbu" and "Käbäl" in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*; on Harari women's musical instruments, see Sartori (2008: 75–84); on Ethiopian musical instruments, see Damon et al., (2007), "Instruments, musical" in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*.
- (11) When Harari ritual songs are played out of context, the performers might be questioned ("Are you singing for jinns?"). On *gey fäqär*'s spontaneous occasions and contexts, see Sartori (2008: 133–170).
- (12) See above and note 4.
- (13) Part of the translations and elaborations has been carried out with the precious cooperation of Amir Redwan and Mohammed Jami Guleid (a.k.a. Daque).
- (14) The saying plays with different vocalic lengths: *wäli* means "singer, poet," while *wäli* literally means "friend (of Allah)."
- (15) See Leslau (1947: 131): "Ce qui caractérise ces poèmes c'est le mélange de plusieurs thèmes dans la même chanson. Ceci donne l'impression que la chanson harari n'a pas un texte fixé. Elle est plutôt une collection de couplets que le chanteur combine à son gré. Ce mélange s'exerce non seulement sur les thèmes chantés mais aussi sur la langue dans laquelle le chanteur exprime ses idées."
- (16) On *kōtankōt* as an evolution of *ǧaliyei* and on Harari duets in general, see Sartori (2008: 207–223).
- (17) For instance: "*ǧaliyei*" means "I love you" or "my kin, my dear, my good friend" but after the revolution in 1974 the word *ǧalle* took the meaning of "comrade." *Wireǧla* is now called *wireyla* and means "come down to the stage from the place where you're hiding."
- (18) Descriptive tables of each Harari sung repertoire in relation with specific parameters (such as presence of instruments or dance, form, meter, rhythm, vocal procedures, relationship between vocal parts and song structure) can be found in Sartori (2008: 178–184), followed by a complete documentation and musical analysis of Harari women's and children's sung practices (Sartori, 2008: 185–302).
- (19) The founding father of Harar, see note 2.

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