

Lyric Voice in *Hees* and *Maanso* Poetry: Some initial thoughts concentrating on *hees-hawleed*

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In this article I shall consider, albeit briefly, the idea of *lyric voice*, in *hees-hawleed* and *maanso* poetry and shall, also briefly, mention how it may relate to modern *hees*. I use the term *lyric voice* to refer to the voice of the poem; another term is the *lyric "I."* This is the voice that Blasing speaks of when she writes "Implicitly or explicitly, the speaker in a lyric poem is an 'I.' This figure is a generic 'I,' not to be confused with an extralinguistic entity;" (Blasing 2006: 36). I shall consider here how the lyric "I" relates to the poet who made the poem, to the voice reciting or singing it and to the *hees* / *maanso* distinction in Somali poetry.

The distinction between *hees* and *maanso* has been discussed in Orwin (2005) and in Maxamed (2013), who use the terms *hees-hiddeed* for "traditional *hees*" and *hees-casri* for "modern *hees*" (Maxamed 2013: 69), terms I also use here. Within the category of *hees-hiddeed* there is a further distinction between *hees-hawleed* "work-song" and *hees-ciyaareed* "dance song," though I shall concentrate on *hees-hawleed* here.

Two features of the distinction between *hees* and *maanso* relate more specifically to voice: definitive text and known poet. The notion of definitive text refers to the fact that the words of a *maanso* cannot be changed by anyone, whereas those of a *hees-hiddeed* can. The known poet is related to this; the poet who originally composed

a *maanso* is known and must be acknowledged, whilst the poet of a *hees-hiddeed* is generally not known.

The idea of “voice” is important when considering poetry in any language; in Somali poetry, however, we must also bear in mind that we are using the term in the context of poetry which is made to be heard rather than read. I suggest those speaking and/or performing must therefore be considered for a full understanding of voice in the Somali context. In the literature on Somali poetry, Woolner (2018) makes prominent reference to voice from an anthropological perspective with respect to love songs. For her, and in anthropology generally, the use of the term tends to range over a wider set of issues than when discussing poetry more specifically, as here. The term voice has also been used in the literature on Somali poetry by Jamal (2014: 15) who writes about Cilmi Boodheri’s innovative poetry as follows:

The old sensibility was under assault. All of this became concentrated in Bodari’s poetry. It is in his poetry that the crisis reaches its highest intensity until it was no longer tolerable and the old order broke up. Bodari’s voice came through this. The old way of expressing love in poetry was abandoned. Bodari brought into being a new type of love poetry.

My aim in this article is to begin to consider how the lyric voice in a poem relates to the original poet, to the performing voice and the *hees / maanso* distinction. Given its length, the article is very limited in scope but it is hoped the ideas presented will stimulate further work and discussion on this topic more widely.

Voice in hees-hawleed poems.

I discuss in this section some examples of *hees-hawleeddo* beginning with *maqalaay warlaay*, a genre performed by children and young women when they are herding sheep and goats (in particular young ones, *maqal*). The examples below are transcriptions of recordings made by the present author at the offices of Radiodiffusion Télévision de Djibouti on 24 June 1995 from the poet Xasan Cilmi. Vocables are not included in the texts.

(1)

Adhigow yaryare O small sheep and goats

Waxaa kaa yaryari What is smaller than you

Ma yamaarug baa Is it *yamaa*ug plant?

Ma yabaal baxaa Is it shoots that sprout?

(2)

Taagane wanow O standing ram

Tuurta u baxoo Go up the hill

Tuugga iska eeg Look out for the thief

When considering these texts as poems, the first thing to bear in mind is that the words are organised in a very particular manner. Somali poetry of all categories is metrical and alliterative, and each line in these short poems follows the same metrical pattern (often called *maqalaay warlaay* after this specific type of *hees-hawleed*). Each line also has an alliterating word which begins with the same sound (“y” in (1) and “t” in (2)). These characteristics set poems apart formally from other speech and play a significant role in defining the utterances as being of a particular type. In addition to the systematic aspects of style, there are non-systematic stylistic features which contribute to the aesthetic characteristics of the pieces. In the two short examples above, for example, we see syntactic parallelism playing a role in the last two lines of each poem (a question of the type *ma ... baa* in (1) and an imperative verb in the final two lines of (2)).

Turning specifically to voice, since these are *hees-hawleeddo*, we do not know who it was who composed the lines, despite the fact that there must have been such a person. The lyric voice—the lyric “I”—cannot therefore be associated with the original poet as is the case with a *maan*so poem. When a *maqalaay warlaay* poem is performed by

a young person herding sheep and goats, the lyric voice is expressed through that individual's physical voice. When uttered, the words of the poems become meaningful to the performer in that context as an expression of their own self as they herd the sheep and goats. We might say that the words, in not being attributable to a known poet, allow the goatherd to express something that is personally meaningful to them in the specific context, despite them not having composed the words personally. The voice performing the poem and the lyric voice may be considered as becoming virtually one and the same in performance.

The fact that there is no named poet for these poems allows the words to be taken by the herder and performed in the first person in a manner which reflects their own subjectivity in a context for which the poem was originally made; the lyric "I" becomes an expression of the subjectivity of the performer in the context. We might also say that this context and experience of performance itself has led to the lack of a known author in poems of this type. The fact that the lyric voice of these poems can be performed as personal expression might therefore be considered to be part of determining the categorisation as *hees-hid-deed* rather than *maanso*. Both features are, of course, intertwined, but I am suggesting that how the voice is experienced in such poetry may be a facet of the categorisation of such poetry as much as the lack of a known poet and the lack of a definitive text.

It is clear from these poems that the sheep and goats are being addressed and that what is said to them reflects the context of herding in the countryside. The content of the poems is related to the activity, something which is the case with many *hees-hawleeddo*. We don't find, for example, political topics generally being presented in such poems.

The next examples are also from the recording of Xasan Cilmi and are performed when camels are being given a second drink after resting for a while after a first drink when they are very thirsty. These poems are in the same metrical pattern as the *maqalaay warlaay* and, of course, display alliteration. The mode of performance is, however, different with two distinct melodic patterns: one is used for the first line in each individual short poem and the other for the remaining lines (though they vary a little when there is more than one). Vocables are not included in the texts below.

(3)

<i>Si waliba jirtaa</i>	Whatever might be
<i>Sabada ha ku dhalin</i>	Do not give birth by the well

(4)

<i>Geel nimaan lahayn</i>	A man who has no camels
<i>Geeridii war ma leh</i>	His death makes no news

(5)

<i>Meel ay martida</i>	In a place where the guest
<i>Meel dheer ka timid</i>	Has come from a far place
<i>Meer la ma yidhaa</i>	One doesn't say pass by

In (3), a camel is addressed directly since having a calf by the well, where there are many other camels and the ground is wet and muddy, is not good for the new-born calf. In (4), the wealth camels bring makes a man well known, hence his death would make news, whereas the death of a man with no camels would not make news. In (5), the wealth of camels allows a family to provide hospitality to a guest who is not told to pass by. As with *maqalaay warlaay*, the lyric voice is not that of a specific named person but of a generic camel herder, and we don't know who first composed the words. However, when the words are performed, as with *maqalaay warlaay*, it is as if the lyric voice is that of the individual who is performing the words in the context of the associated task, and the words may be considered as becoming personal to that person in that context.

We may also say something similar regarding the addressee in (3). The camel or camels are addressed, as are the sheep and goats in the *maqalaay warlaay* examples. In the same way that the lyric voice can be understood as the voice of a generic goatherd or camel herder and can thus be taken on by those performing in the work contexts, the sheep and goats, camel or camels being addressed in the poems can be regarded as generic which allows for the address to be made to the actual animals in the context of performance.

One example of the camel watering *hees-hawleed* which displays these aspects of the lyric voice and the addressee in a particularly interesting way is (6), also from the recordings of Xasan Cilmi.

(6)

<i>Anigu adigaan</i>	I you
<i>Ku adeecayoo</i>	Obey and
<i>Ku ag-joogayaa</i>	By you I stay

This poem is simple but nevertheless profound in its own way. Its simplicity not only clearly expresses the intent of the words but, along with the use of syntax and sound makes it stand out as a jewel-like example of a *hees-hawleed* and indeed of Somali poetry more widely. The first thing to bear in mind is that it contains no references to camels, to wells, or to anything relating to the situation in which it would be performed. The whole consists simply of pronouns, a focus marker, a conjunction, and two verbs (neither of which refers to anything to do specifically with camels). Below in (7) is a gloss of poem.

(7)

- | | | |
|----|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. | <i>Anigu</i> | <i>adigaan</i> |
| | I-SBJ | you-FOCUS-I |
| 2. | <i>Ku</i> | <i>addeecayoo</i> |
| | you | am obeying-CONJ |
| 3. | <i>Ku</i> | <i>ag-joogayaa</i> |
| | you | side-am staying |

In line 1 there are three pronouns. The first is *anigu*, the subject form of the first-person singular independent pronoun. Its use here is quite emphatic since the independent pronouns are not normally used other than when focussing a pronoun or for emphasis. Immediately after this we hear the second-person singular independent pronoun in the non-subject form, *adiga*, which is coalesced with the focus marker *baa* and the third pronoun, the first-person subject verbal pronoun *aan*. Each part of this line expresses nothing more than the lyric voice and the addressee which is focussed. The following two lines are syntactically parallel, each beginning with the second person singular verbal object pronoun *ku* “you” which picks up *adiga* in the first line. After *ku* we then hear a verb in the first-person singular present progressive form: *addeecayaa* “am obeying” in line 2 followed by the conjunction *oo* which joins the next verb phrase centred on the verb *ag-joogayaa* “am staying by your side” in line 3.

Since there is nothing in the poem to suggest that it has to do with camels, it is only the context in which it would normally be performed that allows for this interpretation to be made. In being so performed, the interpretation of the lyric voice as the performing voice and the addressee as the camel become obvious. The lyric voice and the three-fold repetition of the second-person singular object pronoun makes the poem both personal sounding and yet, given the lack of reference to any individual people or animals, lacking in specificity. As mentioned above, the lyric voice is that of a generic camel herder and when the poem is sung, that lyric voice may be considered as becoming the per-

sonal voice of the camel herder who is singing it when watering his camels. Equally the “you” in the poem becomes whichever camel the herder is singing to. This seems to be highlighted in this example given the lack of any reference to camels or any verb which might specifically be associated with camels or the life of the camel herder and the nature of the task being undertaken when it is performed.

Aside from the syntactic structure and deixis, it is also interesting to note the use of sound in this poem which, I suggest, contributes to its aesthetic quality. It alliterates in the vowels, but all the alliterating words have the same vowel quality, namely “a,” thus the initial syllables of the alliterating words are assonant with each other. The concision with which the poem presents its message might be considered as highlighting these features.

Although *hees-hawleeddo* are short, less complex and less prestigious than *maansooyin*, they nevertheless display characteristics of “lyric” as presented in some of the wider literature on lyric poetry cross-linguistically for example Culler (2015) or Blasing (2006), see also Orwin (2020) for further discussion on this matter in relation to two modern *maanso* poems in Somali. One such characteristic relates to the “lyric present” on which Culler (2015: 226) writes: “The fundamental characteristic of lyric, I am arguing, is not the description and interpretation of a past event but the iterative and iterable performance of an event in the lyric present, in the special ‘now,’ of lyric articulation.” In light of this comment, the short poems presented here may themselves be considered to be such events. Each performance is an iterable event in which the “lyric present” along with the lyric “I” becomes one with the performer’s present and voice. The “now” of the poem is not a particular day or hour; the description is not specific to time in any of these short poems and in that sense, they are not bound by time, an observation which was also made by Andrzejewski (1985: 368-370) in relation to such poetry. The poems also display other characteristics of lyric poetry such as the sound parallelisms. When considered from this perspective, Somali knowledge and perception of the *hees / maanso* distinction has the potential to contribute to the wider comparative study of lyric poetry.

Having said what I have about *hees-hawleeddo*, it is important to acknowledge that they may, on occasion, be attributable to individu-

als, but in a very particular way as discussed in Johnson (1995). While individuals are performing *hees-hawleeddo* in a work context, they may, on occasion, insert words or a poem which they themselves have composed with a view for those words to be overheard by someone to whom they wish to convey a message, but to whom they cannot convey the message directly. One example Johnson gives is that of a stevedore who is leading a team working in the docks in Mogadishu. One member of the team is a relative of his who is not pulling his weight. As a relative, the leader cannot address him directly nor criticise him in front of the others for not working as he should. Given this situation, as they perform *hees-hawleeddo* during the work, the leader composes some new words which are embedded in “a veiled message to [the] lazy kinsman” (Johnson 1995: 114), which is overheard by him and the others working with him and understood by them. This is an example of a poem which can be said to have a named composer, but it is not made to be listened to specifically as a *maanso* is, rather it is meant to be overheard. It is, I suggest, the fact that such poetry generally lacks a known poet and has a generic lyric voice that allows for this sense of overhearing.

There is much more to be said about *hees-hawleed*. For example, the way some are performed to rhythmic work such as drawing water from a well. In *hees-hawleeddo* which are performed communally there may also be comment not just on the work and things associated with it, but on other people, though such examples in the literature are all quite generic, such as women commenting to their daughters on the characteristics of potential husbands in grain-pounding songs (see Axmed 2014: 31). These nevertheless still lack a known poet and a definitive text.

Having considered some examples, I suggest the lack of a known poet allows for the personal voice of the performer to be associated with the lyric voice in *hees-hawleeddo* in a way which cannot be done with *maansooyin* and that this may be as much a part of the categorisation of *hees* and *maanso* as the lack of a known author and the related issue of definitive text. The suggestion is, indeed, that these are two facets of the same idea.

Voice in maanso poems.

Turning very briefly to *maansooyin*, as mentioned above, these display characteristics which are quite distinct from *hees-hawleeddo*. We know who the original poet of any *maanso* poem is, and this person must be acknowledged. Very often, the circumstances in which the poem was originally made are also known. Given this, first person reference in such a poem, the lyric voice, will often be interpreted as being the voice of the poet. This is in contrast to the voice of the person performing a *hees-hawleed* as discussed above.

As an example of a *maanso* poem, let us consider “Ooggii horay nagu keceen” by Ismaaciil Mire (see Axmed 1974: 141-2). The poem recounts the poet’s experience of selling some sheep and goats in Burco and was composed, according to Axmed (1974: 141), when the women who had given him some animals to sell asked him what he had returned with in exchange, which was in fact very little. The poem expresses his frustration and is addressed to a woman, possibly his wife. The first people to hear the poem will have known the context (as we do today when reading it) and, when they heard the first two lines, will have been in no doubt that the lyric voice in the poem is an expression of the poet’s own voice as, again, we do today. Example (8) gives the first two lines of the poem. Line 1 includes the 1st person singular subject verbal pronoun *-aan* in *abkaan*, and line 2 includes the 1st person singular independent pronoun in the subject form: *anigu*, which allows us to consider the poem in comparison to the ones analysed above in this respect.

(8)

1. *Naagyahay awow iyo awow iyo abkaan sheegto*

O woman, the grandfathers and early male ancestors I descend from

2. *yo anigu abidkay ma arag iibsi lacageede*

And I have never seen trade with money

If we compare the use of the first person here with example (6) then, unlike that *hees-hawleed*, in this *maanso* poem, we associate the first-person reference to the poet, to Ismaaciil Mire himself. The lyric voice is the voice of the poet and, when the poem is recited, that lyric voice cannot be considered to be one with the personal voice of the performer. Comparing the way the lyric voice functions in examples (6) and (8) provides an example of how we may consider voice to be reflected in the *hees / maanso* distinction.

Another feature of *maanso* poetry in which the notion of the voice of the poet being expressed very clearly is in the way that poets may refer to the poem within the poem, though I shall not pursue that further here.

Voice in *hees-casri* poems.

I turn finally to some very brief thoughts on *hees-casri*. Orwin (2005: 291-2) presents *hees-casri* as being somewhat ambiguous in the *hees / maanso* distinction, and the way the lyric voice manifests in these poems seems to differ from what has been suggested here for both *maanso* and *hees-hawleed*. *Hees-casri* are *maanso*-like in that there is a definitive text and a named poet. However, the lyric voice and the voice of the poet are most often not the same. This is particularly noticeable in the case of love songs in which the lyric voice is that of a woman. The words of such songs are, for the most part, composed by men, though are performed by women. This leads to a complex interplay of voices, both abstract and physical in which characteristics of both *maanso* and *hees-hiddeed* poetry interact.

Woolner (2018) describes one such example in detail: “Qirasho,” a love song written by Xasan Daahir Ismaaciil, “Weedhsame,” sung by Ubax Daahir, “Ubax Fahmo” to music composed by Xuseen Aadan “Karoone” and played by Yuusuf Subxaanyo. The first three lines are given below in (9).

(9)

Qof baan ahay aawadaa I am a person who, because of you,

Qandhada caashaqa qabtoo Has caught the fever of love

Haddana waan kaa qarshaa And yet I conceal it from you

As in examples (6) and (8), we hear the lyric voice expressed in the first-person subject pronoun *-aan*. When this lyric “I” is expressed in performance, however, we hear it in a very specific way through Ubax Fahmo’s voice sung to music that has been crafted specifically for the words. As the singer, she is presenting a poem crafted by the named poet, Weedhsame, but in a woman’s voice that reflects the emotional state of the lyric “I,” an unknown woman speaking about love. So the words cannot be changed and we know the poet, but unlike *maanso* poetry generally, the lyric “I” does not echo the voice of the poet himself. Is it then more like a *hees-hiddeed* in some respects?

In a sense we might consider it to be so in that the poem is made for a type of situation. As a modern love song, it is made to be performed in a particular manner and to be recorded and/or performed in certain situations. Also, those listening to it know what sort of poem it is and have certain expectations from a poem of this type performed in the way it is. We might consider it to be more *hees-hiddeed*-like in that it is made for a type of situation rather than in response to something very specific such as might prompt a *maanso* poem. Although what prompted the words was the experience of a young woman who confided in Weedhsame that she was in love for a long time with a young man but hid her feelings; the sentiments are made more general, more generic, as a love song and the lyric voice is not attributable to a named person. This is different in quality from the specific event that often prompts a *maanso* poem such as that by Ismaaciil Mire above and the comments on that specific event in the poem.

The camel herder performs the poem (6) when giving camels water and the lack of a known poet allows for his voice to be one with the lyric voice in that context. For the love poems such as “Qirasho,” there is a known poet and a definitive text, and in this sense they are *maanso*-like poems. However, they might also be considered *hees*-like in the sense that the lyric voice is most often not that of the poet and there is a specific type of context in which they are performed and experienced. As love songs, they are made and performed to coincide with the experiences of some of those listening to them. That is to say, the lyric voice, may be regarded, to some extent, in some cases, to become one with that of someone listening to the song and in some cases with the performer. It is this idea that forms a large part of Woolner’s discussion of these songs though from a more anthropological perspective. Here

I hope to have brought out some ideas of how they may relate to the idea of voice and the *hees / maanso* distinction.

In this short article I have presented some ideas relating to the concept of lyric voice in the context of the *hees / maanso* distinction. This by no means covers all aspects but I hope to have prompted some further thought on this matter.

Notes

1. The plural of *hees-hawleed* is *hees-hawleeddo* and the plural of *maanso* is *maansooyin*.
2. Ajala, 1983; Amadife and Warhola, 1993; Blanton et. al. 2001; Green, 2012
3. The term also features prominently in Kapteijns and Maryan (1999) which is entitled *Women's Voices in a Man's World* and in Axmed (1993) *Somali Pastoral Worksongs: The Poetic Voice of the Politically Powerless*.
4. For more detail on *hees-hawleed* see Axmed (2014) and Amina (2017) and references therein.
5. Although interesting, the fact that Xasan Cilmi was not reciting these poems in the context for which they were originally composed does not, I suggest, affect the arguments made. An excellent recording of some *maqalaay warlaay* poems which is publicly available is in the Archivio Somalia, Centro Studi Somali, Roma Tre University: <http://hdl.handle.net/2307/1815>. The melody used in those recordings differs from the mode of performance by Xasan Cilmi.
6. The translations in this article are all by the present author unless otherwise stated and are not made as literary translations but follow more closely the original language.
7. See Orwin (2019 355-6) for some details on the *maqalaay warlaay* metre.
8. The mode of recitation also determines how the utterance is perceived but will not be discussed here.
9. See below for some further comment on this issue.
10. There are some further examples of such poems in Axmed (2014: 52, song 44).
11. I take the final verb, *ag-joog*, to be a compound of the noun *ag* and the verb *joog*, rather than two separate words because the object pronoun is heard before it, something that can only occur before a verb.
12. The final vowel of the verb in line 2 is not heard since the conjunction *oo* coalesces with the final vowel. Present tense is, however, assumed on the basis of analogy with the final verb.
13. The idea of the lyric present is also one which relates to *maansooyin*, though I don't consider that further here. See Orwin (2020) for some more discussion on that.
14. Banti (2007: 610) gives specific occasion and purpose of composition as being one of two salient features of *maanso* poetry, the other being 'authoriality, i.e., that oral poems are attributed to individual poets'.

15. The translation is that provided in Woolner (2018: 49) with some additions by the present author. Woolner's translation reads: 'I am a person, who / Has caught the fever of love / And yet conceal it'. She acknowledges the help of Mohammed Ahmed and Kenedid Ali Hassan (Woolner 2018: 49). The song can be heard here (last accessed 9/7/2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCCOYxG85ds>.

16. Having said that, the experience of the woman who confided in Weedhsame when she hears the song will, of course, be quite different to the rest of us who listen to this particular hees-casri. As Woolner points out, he has never revealed her identity and would never do so.

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