The Traditional Secular Music of the *Harari*: Its State in History and Present Day

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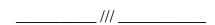
Marianne Bröcker (ed.), Bamberg 2002: 137 – 154

Abstract

This article chiefly discusses the traditional secular music of the *Harari* community residing in the *Harari People's National Regional State*, one of the nine Ethiopian administrative regions (*Kələloč*). In doing so musical styles such as *Saley*, *Ğaliyei* and *Dersi* and their distinct features (melody, rhythm, and lyric) will be taken into closer consideration. *Harari* songs that may be performed as solo, duo or group songs are accordingly classified to these basic musical styles accordingly. It is among other things worth to note that songs sung in duo or group mainly reveal peculiar characteristics that are totally unknown in the music cultures of other Ethiopian communities. This phenomenon shows the close historical link of the *Harari* with neighbouring Arabian countries since early periods.

Harari songs may be performed with or without instrumental accompaniment. For historical reasons music instruments played are not only very limited but they are completely non-melodic instruments. This refers to double and single-headed and variously sized drums, *Käräbu*, wooden clappers called *Käbäl* and frame drums, *Däf*.

This article also explores the present state of the *Harari* secular music in which primarily women play a significant role in maintaining it than their male counterparts. It is obvious that music is inseparably connected with the everyday life of a community. Non-musical factors such as social, cultural, historical and religious circumstances are always the reason for musical change, because music is a reflection of these phenomena. What is the cause for this perceivable musical transition in the today's *Harari* society?



My fieldwork in the south-east Ethiopian region *Harar* took place in November 2000. The aim was based on gathering audiovisual data (through recording) and on examining the traditional music of the *Harari*¹ community. Thanks to the kind co-operation of a number of people², I had the opportunity to make audiovisual recordings and thorough investigations within a short period of time.

Historical Background: *Harar* is the regional capital of the *Harari* People's National Regional State that belongs to one of the nine ethnic geographic divisions of Ethiopia known as *Kələloč*. *Harar* is located about more than 500 km to the East of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa with an altitude of more than 1800 meters.

Harar belongs to one of the oldest Ethiopian cities. There are different interpretations in terms of the history of Harar, due to lack of written sources. One of the versions believed by scholars is that Harar was founded by Semitic-speaking people approximately between the 6th and 9th centuries. From this time onwards Harar gained increasing attention as a metropolitan city. Until about 1887 it was successively ruled by more than 70 Sultanates who possessed their own territories, state machinery, political and social systems besides well functioning financial and economic systems. They also used their own currency. Among others Ahmed Gragn (ca. 1525-1544), also called "Ahmed the left-handed", Muhammad Jasa (1577-1585), Sa'ad al-Din II (1585-1613) and Abu Bakr II (1834-1852) were some of the rulers of Harar to mention just a few. The 16th century is considered as the "golden age" the successive emirates of Harar.

Harar is inhabited by *Semitic* and *Cushitic* speaking people whose languages belong to the Afro-Asiatic language family. Historical accounts portray that Semitic speaking peoples might have migrated in ancient times from Southern Arabia and settled in *Abyssinia*, present day Ethiopia, around 1,000 B. C. Further migrations were carried out in the periods following (Abdu-Nassir 2000). From linguistic point of view the *Təgre*, *Təgrāy*, *Amārā* ³ and

¹ Variation: *Harrar*, *Hārer*, *Harer*, *Adere*, *Adari*. Abdu-Nassir (2000) explains that the *Harari* were used to be called *Adere*, a term deriving from the *Gə'əž* verb "adere" meaning "he made a stop; he got settled instead of moving from place to place". This term has been misinterpreted – most probably as a result of inter-ethnic conflicts - so that its usage has gradually diminished. Today the population is legitimately called *Harari*

² Thanks to *Anisa Ali*, for accompanying and assisting me during my stay in *Harar*. She provided me with information by contacting local musicians whom I interviewed about the traditional music of this community in addition to the audiovisual recordings I made. During the interviews, *Anisa* among others served as a translator from *Harariña* into *Amariña* and vice versa so that language barriers and misunderstandings could be avoided right from the start. My special thanks also goes to Dr. *Hayat Ali* and Dr. *Salahadin* for providing my stay in the city of *Dire Dawa*, for their hospitality and kind support in supplying me with information about the history of *Harar*. I would also like to thank *Abdumuhemin Abdu-Nassir*, an expert of *Harari* history and *Abdullahi Ali Sherif*, owner of a private Museum with ethnographic objects of all ethnic communities residing in *Harar*. Last but not least my thank goes to the traditional singers *Nuria Ahmed* (a.k.a.: *Shamitu*) and *Amina Adem Abdi* (a.k.a.: *Gini*) for their kind co-operation.

³ The *Amārā* migrated to the highland regions of *Harar* about 100 years ago especially during the reign of Emperor *Menelik* II from 1889 up to his death in 1913. Abate (1969: 28) states that compared to the remaining population of *Harar*, the *Amārā* – though a minority group - possessed for a quite a long time the political power and privilege, for example as land owners, civil servants, army members, police officers as well as members of the church.

 $Gaf\bar{a}t$ belong to the northern Semites, whereas the $Arggob\bar{a}^4$, $Gur\bar{a}g\bar{e}$ and the Harari and/or Adere communities are known as the southern Semites whose ancestors used to speak the old $Ga'a\check{z}$ language. These are principally the $Am\bar{a}r\bar{a}$, $Tagr\bar{a}y$, Harari, $Arggob\bar{a}$ and the $Gur\bar{a}g\bar{e}$ people. On the other hand the $Oromo^5$, $Sum\bar{a}le^6$ and $Af\bar{a}r^7$ belong to the Cushitic people's group.

The *Harari*: In former times the *Harari* used to call their city *Gey* "city; place; settlement" and referred to themselves as *Gey Ussu'i* "the people of the city". However, according to Abdu Nassir (2000) this term had often been misinterpreted by foreign scholars⁸ so that it is today legitimately changed into *Harari* or *Adere* (see also Sartori 2007: 2). The *Harari* are Muslim people. Islam was introduced in the 12th century. With its numerous mosques and shrines including its ancient history the city of *Harar* is today considered as one of the holy cities of the world besides Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. The *Harari* predominantly inhabit the walled city called *Jegol*⁹ located within the city of *Harar* (figures 1-4) and surrounded by its five traditional and historical gates. In the local language these gates are called *Berri*, *Berr* or *Barri* "door, entrance, gate" and they represent the five pillars of Islam. The gates have ever since played a number of significant roles in terms of the economic growth of city of *Harar* and the preservation of a close socio-cultural and economic link with adjacent ethnic communities as well as neighbouring countries.

4 The *Arggobā* are known as the descendants of the so-called *Jabarti* colony (Moslem *Amārā*) who migrated from the former Moslem *Ifāt* Dynasty to the Emirates of *Harar*. During the Italian invasion the 8 major *Arggobā* towns located about 30 km South of *Harar* consisted of ca. 1000 people. Their original Semitic language has unfortunately diminished today (Abate 1969: 30).

⁵ The *Oromo*, Ethiopia's largest ethnic community migrated to Ethiopia from about 1570 onwards. Due to the rapid population increase of the *Oromo*, Semitic people were gradually assimilated. Today the *Oromo* inhabit the large part of Ethiopia including in the *Hararghe* plateau (Abate 1969: 28).

⁶ The *Somali* are nomadic and pastoral people whose culture is predominantly centered on camels with a few cattle and goats. They inhabit the area in southern *Harar* administrative region (southeast Ethiopia). Their nomadic life is not only meant to guarantee the economic base, but also to serve as a status symbol. They practice the Islam since the 14th century.

⁷ The *Afār* are nomads primarily inhabiting the Danakil Desert in north central Ethiopia, the today's Administrative Region *Afār* as well as in Eritrea and Djibouti. A small group resides in the Administrative Region *Harar*. The contact with merchants from the Arabian Peninsula brought about to the Islamisation of the *Afār* starting in the 10th century. Today the *Afār* confess to Islam.

⁸ The term bears a negative content when the pronounced; i.e. *Gey* = homo sexual, gay.

⁹ After long lasting successive holy wars led by *Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi, Harar* was exposed to continuous attacks from different angles. *Gragñ* was defeated around 1543 by King *Gelawdewos* who had the support of Portuguese military forces. Consequently his nephew *Nur Ibn al-WazirMujahid* came to power and married the widow of *Gragñ, Bati Del Wambara*. It is believed that it was this man who was responsible for the construction of the remarkable defensive wall today known as *Jegol*. This walled city comprises a surface of ca. 48 hectares with 362 relatively narrow lanes, whereas its circumference is about 3,348 meters with five traditional gates demarcating both the administrative and socio-economic zones of the city. Therefore, this wall symbolizes the important cultural affiliations, because without it the indigenous people would feel as if their cultural and social contact wouldn't exist any longer.



Figures 1-2: Mosques in *Jegol*





Figure 3: Rimbaud House

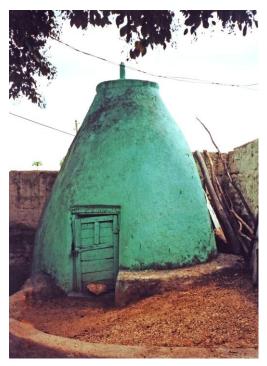


Figure 4: Shrine¹⁰

The gate to the north called *Berberē Berr* or *Assum Barri* was for instance used as the centre for merchants who imported pepper, salt, spices and other items from the Gulf of Aden. The *Argob Barri* gate located to the east was used by businessmen handling similar profitable trades from *Arggobā* to *Harar* and vice versa. All the gates were strictly guarded and thus closed at around 6:00 p.m. so that from this time onwards it was forbidden to enter or leave *Jegol*. The five historical gates are listed below:

¹⁰ Photos: T. Teffera November 2000, *Jegol, Harar*.



Figure 5: The gate Argob Barri

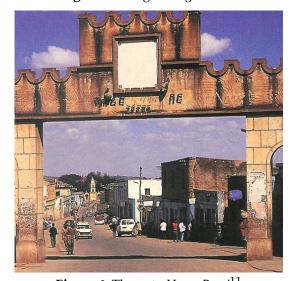


Figure 6: The gate *Harar Barri*¹¹

- Bedro Barri or Kerre Buddawa (to the south)
- Asmadin Barri or Hamaressa (to the west)
- Argob Barri (to the east; figure 5)
- Bebere or Asum Barri (to the north) and
- Sugud At (to the south east) and
- Buda Barri

The gates of *Jegol* are named differently by adjacent ethnic communities, e.g. *Sumāle* and *Arggobā*. In general we may assume that the *Harari* always gave value to unity and respect between their neighbours which is also observed today. Thus, *Harar* is ever since considered as a metropolitan city with a multinominal community reflecting colourful and mixed cultures along with a multifaceted regional development that is among others observed in its trade boom since early periods creating one of the ancient and largest market centres of Ethiopia¹².

Today the number of the gates, that are still being intensively used by farmers, merchants and caravans coming from various directions, has increased to seven including the *Shewa Barri* represented in figure 6. A large part of the *Harari* today still inhabits *Jegol*.

In respect to the origin of the *Harari* there are different hypotheses. Abate (1969: 29) for instance argues that they belong to the oldest *Cushitic* people's group of the *Sidamā* who had already been assimilated by Semitic Arabia prior to 1000 A. D. In the centuries following they were dominated by a small group of *Abyssinians* who possessed a military colony in the city of *Harar*. Just about the beginning of the 16th century the population shaped by *Abyssinians* and Arabs was pushed back to the city because of the *Oromo* migration.

The *Harari* are a mixed community as a result of inter-marriage at first with Egyptians¹³ who resided here from the 16th century onwards for quite a long period of time. Since recent

¹¹ Photos: T. Teffera, 14.11.2000 Harar.

¹² *Harar* has recently received international recognition for its historical backgrounds and its historical gates. For that matter, it has been considered in The UNESCO list as one of the world's cultural heritages.

¹³ Since its foundation *Harar* completely remained independent up to the Egyptian occupation in 1875 so that the situation of *Harar* changed accordingly. Besides regions like for instance *Berbera*, the Port of *Zeila* was also seized by the Egyptians. *Rauf Pasha*, who served as the Egyptian governor brought about a very rapid process of modernization in *Harar* especially focusing to monopolize commerce (e.g. coffee business) in the Egyptian-controlled territory for about a decade. Among other things he introduced the Egyptian piasters in order to replace the so far used currency in *Harar*, the so-called *Mehallaq*. Through the influence of British colonial rule however, he was forced to withdraw his troops from *Harar* on January 19th 1885 so that the power was transferred to *AmirAbdulahi Ibh Mohammed* who ruled *Harar* from 1885-1887 (Gebissa 2004: 47; Sartori 2007: 3).

periods they have also been mixed with neighbouring *Oromo* and *Somali* peoples through inter-marriage.

Harari **Music:** Little is known about the orally transmitted music tradition of the *Harari* which consists of different musical practices mirroring the socio-cultural aspect of the community. The music repertoire comprises wedding, working, entertainment, love; religious and ritual songs just to mention a few. In addition music events in which both male and females may take part¹⁴, there are also certain musical styles that are explicitly divided in distinct gender and age-groups.

During the long lasting emirate of *Harar*, the different rulers had accordingly different opinions to worldly music and accompanying instruments. The playing of instruments was for instance strictly forbidden during the reign of *Sultan Haboba Ibn Harar*¹⁵ (ca. 960-1000 A.D.). Other rulers allowed the playing of instruments while following sultanates again prohibited this. Taking this situation into account, we may assume that the persistently changing attitudes towards secular traditional music and instruments might presumably also have influenced the freedom of the musician in singing, dancing and instrument playing without restraint.

It may be the outcome of this "negative" historical process along with the influence of neighbouring Arabian countries that the *Harari* today only use just a few music instruments for song accompaniment. Above all melodic instruments have ever since been totally abandoned so that the use of music instruments has always been limited to idiophones and membranophones (Sartori 2007: 3). These include double-headed cylindrical or conical drums



Figure 7: Frame drum, Egypt¹⁶

as well as kettle drums mostly played in ensembles and/or sets. Drums - generally known as *Käräbu* - are among others played on religious and ritual ceremonies accordingly by men or by women. The *Käräbu* played in sets are distinguished by their different sizes and their musical functions in a given performance that depends on the occasion taking place. Another very common music instrument of the *Harari* is the single-headed frame drum *Däf* or *Daf* ¹⁷ (figure 7), an indirectly struck idiophone made of a round wooden ring. Usually pairs of thin metal jingles are fixed to produce

percussive sound when beating the membrane or shaking the drum as such. The round frame is covered only on one side with parchment or skin that is nailed around the frame.

¹⁴ For example, the *Shewalid* feast referring to an elaborated religious ceremony taking place after the end of the fasting month Ramadan. The festival usually lasts for six successive days on which quite a large number of people (men and women) take part.

¹⁵ *Amir Haboba* is though supposed to have been the first *Harari* ruler, nevertheless historians believe that there had been quite a large number of kings and queens prior to him. The problem lies in the luck of written documents so that the exact date of their rule is unknown.

¹⁶ Collection: Völkerkundemuseum of Viena, Africa collection; Photo: T. Teffera 2006, Vienna.

¹⁷ The *Däf* is also widely known in the Islamic-Arabic world as *Riqq* or *Buben*.

The *Däf* is of an average diameter of 25-35cm and a height of 5-8cm. Frame drums were introduced to *Harar* around the 1950s along with the accordion, harmonica and the guitar that are used in the popular music today particularly represented by young and modern *Harari* musicians (primarily males). In the process of time all these instruments, including the *Däf* have been integrated in the both traditional and modern music of the *Harari*. Another common music instrument is the *Käbäl* shown in figure 8. The *Käbäl* - a concussion idiophone

- is made of a pair of wooden blocks or clappers usually of the same size, i.e. ca. 15-17cm long, 7cm wide, and 3cm thick. Likewise the Däf, the Käbäl is mostly played by female musicians, again a common feature observed in many parts of the Islamic-Arabic world. Nevertheless, on special occasions such as the religious Mawlid ceremony - in which only men take part - the songs are accordingly accompanied by more than two male Käbäl and drum players. When playing, the clappers are taken in each hand and beaten against each other. The player usually moves her upper body forth and back according to the given rhythmic structure. Along with the Däf, at least two or more Käbäl accompany songs and dances. On wedding feasts for instance it is customary that four to five Käbäls and at least two Däfs are played in an ensemble.

In *Harar*, I had the opportunity to contact the two well-known female musicians, namely the blind singer *Shamitu* and her companion *Gini* who provided me with required information and performed music which I recorded. Some of the songs were accompanied by the *Däf*. The only instrument they used during my recording was the *Däf* played by *Gini* as shown in figures 9 and 10 a-b (music example 1). I was above all interested in and at the same time impressed by the variety of the melodic and rhythmic arrangements of the performed songs. Besides the solo songs that



Figure 8: a pair of wooden blocks, Käbäl¹⁸



Figure 9: *Gini* playing the *Däf*¹⁹

consist of relatively simply perceivable melodic phrases, the pair songs primarily dominated by parallel thirds and fourths are to be considered as the distinct feature of the *Harari* music. These polyphonic melodies are not just performed arbitrarily; instead they are on the contrary subordinated to predetermined musical rules.

¹⁸ These are similar wooden clappers of the *Bajuni* people of Somalia that are similarly played for song accompaniment (mostly female songs). Collection: Völkerkundemuseum of Viena, Africa collection; Photo: T. Teffera 2006, Vienna.

¹⁹ Photo: T. Teffera; 15.11.2000, Harar, southeast Ethiopia

One part of the *Harari* music repertoire includes songs that are performed in duo; i.e. two women or two men. Another part involves antiphonal songs that are accompanied by the frame drum *Däf*. The third category consists of songs performed in solo mostly without instrumental accompaniment.





Figures 10a-b: Traditional musicians Shamitu and Gini²⁰

Taking the entire *Harari* music repertoire into consideration, we may ascertain three basic song styles called a) *Saley*, b) *Jaliye* c) *Miras Fäqär* and d) *Dersi* (Abdu Nassir: 2000) discussed below:

Saley: can be performed both as solo and group song. An example for a solo song in *Saley* style is the song *Runey Runey* that was performed by *Shamitu* and shown in the score of figure 11 (music example 2).

Ğaliyei: A similar song belonging to *Saley* style and exclusively sung by women is the *Ğaliyei* performed either in duo (music example 3) or in solo usually without any instruments accompanying. The lyrics of *Ğaliyei* "The friend of my heart" may differ according to the given event. Among other things the Prophet Mohammed is praised on ritual and/or religious music ceremonies. On weddings feasts on the other hand *Ğaliyei* is performed as a closing or a farewell song for the bridal party. *Ğaliyei's* lyric may as well refer to entertainment, patriotism and religion. According to the two singers *Shamitu* and *Gini*, *Ğaliyei* can also be performed as a work song by women while cutting the well known *chat* plant (*chata edulis*)²¹ every morning.

Miras Fäqär: this song style comprises songs performed in duo (two female or two male) without instrumental accompaniment. As an example the song *Ğaliyei* may once again be mentioned. The melody of *Ğaliyei* may vary and therefore reveal differences between those who are performing it. Additionally it can be performed in different styles. Nevertheless, the basic melodic structure that identifies this song should be maintained by the singer/s.

When a song in *Miras Fäqär* style is performed, at the beginning one of the two singers starts singing a phrase or a stanza. At a certain point the second singer joins him/her and from this point onwards both sing up to the end of this phrase. The melody is at the beginning mainly arranged in parallel third and fourth. Prior to reaching the end of the phrase, the singers meet at a common pitch and from here they continue singing in unison up to the end.

²⁰ Photos: T. Teffera; 15.11.2000, Harar, southeast Ethiopia.

²¹ This song may be compared with the *Ingurguro* style of the *Amārā* of central Ethiopia.

After the end of the first phrase a short break occurs. Then, the first singer starts singing the following phrase or strophic part in the same was as described so far (figure 12; music example 3).

Another song classified to the *Miras Fäqär* style refers to canonical songs sung in duo. At the start the first vocalist sings a short phrase that is repeated by the second vocalist who may arrange his/her melodic and metro-rhythmic part individually. Both of them then meet at a certain point and continue singing either in unison or in parallel third and fourth. In music example 4 *Shamitu* und *Gini* perform such a song (see also figures 6a-b).

Figure 11: Solo song: "Runey Runey" performed by Nuria Ahmed (Shamitu)

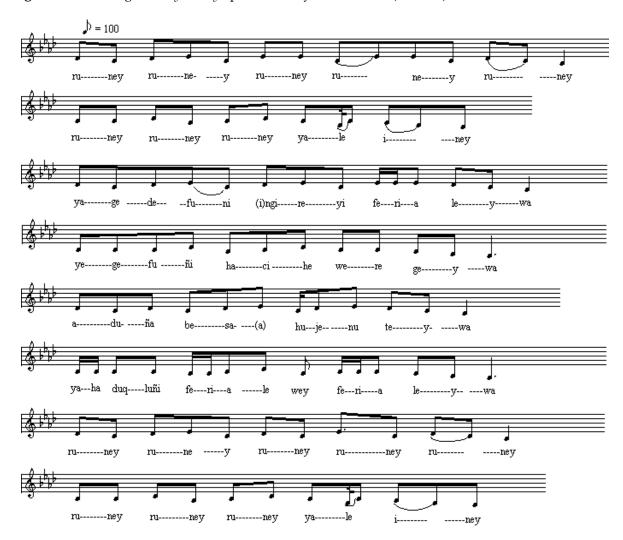
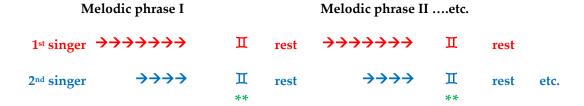


Figure 12: Melodic and rhythmic arrangement/structure of the *Miras-Fäqär* song style



^{** =} end of the given song line

As a result of the canonical style of singing, nearly no rests occur in the melodic course when listening to the song (figure 13).

Figure 13: version of the *Miras-Fäqär* song style

Dersi is a group song in which the song leader initially sings a phrase that will be accompanied by a chores group. In doing so, the choir may completes or repeat the started phrase. As to my *Shamitu* and *Gini*, this song style possesses distinct similarities with other alternate songs. *Dersi* songs are mostly accompanied by the *Käräbu*, *Däf* and *Käbäl* (Abdu Nassir: 2000).

Dersi songs are divided in different sex groups being performed either by men or women. They may also comprise both uniform and/or changing tempi depending on the various song parts. *Dersi* songs may be performed as entertainment, praise and religious songs on respective occasions.

Conclusion: Referring to the state of the *Harari* secular music we may observe that mainly women contribute a lot to maintain it rather than their male counterparts. *Harari* men are less involved and interested in worldly music. Particularly after their marriage they focus on spiritual life (Islam) hence, participating in religious music events only. They usually consider the partaking in secular music events, especially after their marriage, as "irreligious". This fact reveals that music making has merely become the task of female musicians who play a decisive role in keeping the musical culture alive. Sartori (2007:1) who undertook thorough investigations and field researches on the *Harari* music states the following related to shifting women's role in preserving this asset:

"Gay fäqär", literally "the songs of the city", is ... currently performed by Harari women according to different musical styles, most frequently in a voice-percussion configuration.

If projected diachronically, however, social distribution and performance of Harari Gey Fäqär reveal a more complex outline, also involving a noteworthy production of earlier male singers. Although most Harari men do not play songs anymore, a vast assortment of recordings testifies in fact their past musical and poetical fertility. In the last decades most men have eventually chosen to abandon music, thus conveying almost entirely to women the custodianship of traditional secular songs."

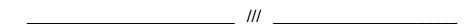
The once famous musician *Shamitu* who mastered the entire traditional *Harari* music repertoire since early childhood and whose songs I had recorded on the spot in 2000 passed away a short time after my visit. In one of our interviews *Shamitu* explained that she has unfortunately never been able to pass on her artistic skills and experience to young *Hararis*. The youth is not interested in practising the traditional music and there is a general negligence as to *Shamitu*. From time to time – especially in the past 3-4 decades – quite a large number of young *Harari* left their birth place towards the capital Addis Ababa or to

foreign countries (mainly Europe and USA) looking for a better life; e.g. further education, job opportunities and business.

Music, an unquestionably significant aspect of human culture, reveals the social structure of a community, patterns of diffusion and adaptation, changes along with new appearing and disappearing features, the reason and the effect of such changes for the society. In terms of changes that have taken place in the traditional secular music of the *Harari*, Sartori notes the situation in contemporary *Harar* as a result of her research as follows:

"Harari community embodies a peculiar example of social rearrangement of musical roles under the stress of historical transformations, suggesting a potential recipe to balance codified social values between conservation and innovation: when men chose to leave music, women's custodianship turned into the key of preservation, transmission and development of local traditional modalities of musical performance.

Contemporary Harari musical practices, between old and new cultural habits, represent an example of how a Muslim micro-society may face historical and political dialectics, cultural reconstruction, revival of Islamic belief and identity issues by finding peaceful solutions within its own resources, redistributing repertoires among sexes and age-groups and keeping sung traditions licit and lively"



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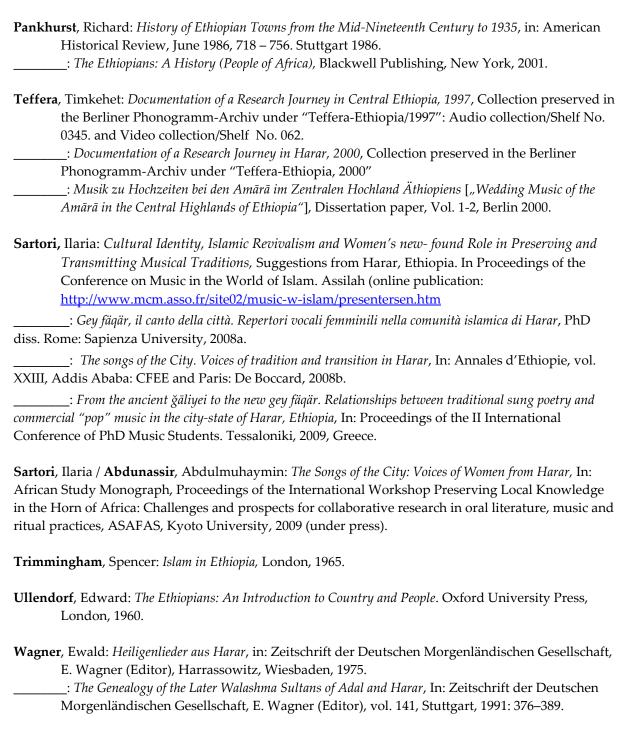
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Music Examples

All music recordings were made by Timkehet Teffera on 15th November 2000 in *Jegol, Harar*.

Music Example 1

song title: Ya Wadud

repertoire: Religious praise song

musician: Nuria Ahmed (Shamitu) and Amina Adem (Gini)

Music Example 2

song title: Runey Runey repertoire: Nostalgic song

musician: Nuria Ahmed (Shamitu) solo song

Music Example 3

song title: Jaliye

repertoire: Religious praise and entertainment song musician: Nuria Ahmed (Shamitu) and Amina Adem (Gini)

Music Example 4

song title: Le le

repertoire: Entertainment song

musician: Nuria Ahmed (Shamitu) and Amina Adem (Gini)