

Banī Halba Classification of Poetic Genres

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I. *Introduction*¹

The Banī Halba are an Arabic-speaking ethnic group who live in the Southern part of the Darfur Region in the Sudan. They are one of the *Baggāra* (cattle-rearing) ethnic groups who inhabit a curve-like belt in the Southern Darfur and Kordofan Regions. According to the 1955-56 population census, the last reliable census, their population was about 50,000. The Banī Halba inhabit an area which lies to the southwest of Nyala, approximately between latitudes 11^o and 12^o N., and longitudes 23½^o and 25^o E. They have a subsistence economy, the resources of which are animals (mainly cattle with a few goats), land, and *hashāb* trees, the producers of gum Arabic. The animals are privately owned by individual households, but land is communally owned and everybody has equal access to it.

The ethnic group has two sectors—a nomadic sector and a sedentary one. The sedentary sector lives on farming and the nomads migrate southwestwards in the harvesting season in search of water and grass for their cattle. They spend winter and summer there and then migrate back to the homeland at the onset of the rainy season. The two main sections of the ethnic group are Awlād Jābir and Awlād Jubāra, each having six main subsections. This structure is hereditary and each individual is a member of a household. A group of households forms both a social and an administrative unit headed by a *sheikh* (pl. *mashāyikh*). A number of sheikhs forms a larger unit headed by a *ʿumda*. All the *ʿumad* (pl. of *ʿumda*) used to owe allegiance to a paramount head, the *Nāẓir*. The administration of the ethnic group is thus organically linked to its social

¹ This paper originated in research completed in the Sudan in April, 1977. The tapes referred to here were recorded during the fieldwork I conducted in May-June, 1974 and March-April, 1975. These tapes are deposited in the Folklore Archives of the Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, Sudan.

I am using a phonetic system of transliteration for the names of the poetic genres to represent their actual pronunciation, and a phonemic one for proper nouns; hence *at-tiḍikkir* rather than *al-tiḍikkir*; and al-Raḍī rather than ar-Raḍī. All translations of Arabic poetic texts are mine.

structure. In 1971, however, the government cancelled the paramount headship and maintained the *mashāyikh* and *ʿumad*.

The Banī Halba are Muslims. The different facets of their life and culture are those of a nomadic Muslim Arab community. Kinship is an important social institution in their community and their group consciousness and sense of solidarity are very strong. Moral values such as courage, hospitality, respect for neighbors, and the like are highly regarded. The different aspects of their life and culture are interdependent, and there is a continuous interplay between them.

II. *Conception of Poetry*

The Banī Halba identify poetry with singing. To them, poetry is song irrespective of whether it is actually sung or merely chanted. It is art, and the difference between art and ordinary speech is the *naẓim* or *ghine* (singing) (ʿAlī 1975: Tape no. 1815). The poet is a singer, and all genres of poetry are called *ghine* (singing). Each genre is given a name of its own, distinct from other genres. The Banī Halba believe that in order to compose with a high degree of dexterity in any poetic genre, a bard² should be talented and inspired (Aḥmad 1974: Tape no. 1809). Poets themselves believe that composition is inspired by a supernatural being such as a jinnee or a demon. Each poet has a particular jinnee as the source of poetic inspiration. Inspiration is thus an important element in the Banī Halba conception of poetry. Intelligence is also a prerequisite for being a good poet (*ibid.*). An original and skillful praise poet should not repeat the same words, images, metaphors, and so on, which he has used previously (Muḥammad 1974b: Tape no. 1803). One should be creative and should always invent new stylistic devices and new ways of using the available linguistic repertoire of the dialect.

Other criteria by which the audience critiques the bards include richness and broadness of repertoire, thematic poise, and subtlety in both performance style and linguistic style.³ Plagiarism (borrowing from the compositions of other bards) is regarded as an indication of artistic incompetence.

² The words “poet” and “bard” are used interchangeably in this paper and invariably mean both male and female poet or bard, unless otherwise stated.

³ Cf. the critical criteria for evaluating *ijālā* artists in Babaḷolá 1966:47-50.

III. Classification of Poetic Genres

The Banī Halba classify their poetry into various genres. Their criterion of classification is based on the tune to which the poetry is chanted or sung and the poetry's musical accompaniment, which is either hand clapping or drumming, for they use no other (°Alī 1975: Tape no. 1815; Muḥammad 1974b: Tape no. 1803). Even if two genres have the same musical accompaniment, they can be distinguished by their difference in tempo.⁴

There are sung genres and chanted genres. Both types are composed and performed by both men and women. However, some genres are exclusively sung or chanted by men, others exclusively sung or chanted by women; that is, gender is an important factor in the classification of poetic genres among Banī Halba. There are three major genres in Banī Halba folk poetry: *al-kātim*, *sanjak*, and *jardāg* or *bōshān*. The first is sung by women, the second is sung by both men and women, and the third is chanted by men.⁵

Poetic genres are classified according to gender.⁶ Two genres, however, are sung by both men and women. Men's genres are: *sanjak*; *jardāg* or *bōshān*; *zanig* (tea-praise); *ḵōrḡmagla*, *am-digēne*; and *dag-al-°ēsh* (grain-threshing) songs. All are chanted except *sanjak* and *dag-al-°ēsh*

⁴ Cf. the genres of medieval Arabic folk poetry in al-Marzūqī 1967:75-81.

⁵ There are other poetic genres not mentioned here which are obsolete: *at-tōr ḥaran*, *°irēj*, and *kifēt*. The first and second were for adults and were sung by women while men participated with women in the dance. The third was for the young and was sung by girls while boys participated with them in the dance.

There is a legend that explains why *kifēt* was abandoned. It says that there was once a big circumcision ceremony where a large number of people gathered. They ate and drank in abundance and sang and danced excessively. This hilarious festivity continued day and night for more than a week. One day while the boys and girls were performing *kifēt*, the earth suddenly swallowed them. Since then, the performance of *kifēt* was abandoned forever.

The reason why the performers of *kifēt* in particular perished may have something to do with its style of performance. The boys beat the ground rhythmically with their feet while the girls shook their heads, shoulders, and breasts rhythmically with the singing and the clapping. The element of protest on the part of the earth, which suffered beating for many days successively, may be the reason why *kifēt* has been chosen to be the subject of the legend rather than *at-tōr ḥaran*.

The moral of this legend is that what happened to the performers of *kifēt* was God's punishment for them, as representatives of the other dancers, for over-indulgent celebration. This punishment was meant to be a reminder to their contemporaries and to posterity. The legend is, moreover, a plea for mediation and an attack on extremity in life. Misery and joy are complementary to one another and are a part of human life; any excess in handling either of them may lead to catastrophes.

⁶ Cf. the criterion of classification of Somali poetry, which is similar to that of Banī Halba (see Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:46).

remains constant.⁸

In the performance of Banī Halba song, the call and response form depends basically on two devices—repetition and *marāra* (rhythmic humming of sounds)—and makes use of them to the maximum, which renders them essential characteristics of the performance of the poetry. These two devices intertwine and intermingle in the actual performance to the extent that they become one and the same thing.

The structure of *sanjak* exhibits the following elements: the *garjūm* (refrain), the *shēl* (song proper), the *muftāh* (a refrain which does not entail a closing song, lit. “key”), and the *kasre* or *dingēse* (closing song). The singing of the *garjūm* and *shēl* is compulsory and basic to the performance, but the singing of the *muftāh* is optional. The deft manipulation of these elements determines the bard’s degree of mastery of his art.

The *jardāg* or *bōshān* is chanted. Thematically, it is heroic and consists of praise poetry of men and horses; it eulogizes men of valor and horses of noble breed (Muḥammad 1974b: Tape no. 1803). In it the heroic and the eulogistic contents intermingle and it is difficult to draw a line between them. Love as a theme may also intertwine with the heroic content.⁹ The function of the *jardāg* as praise poetry is the validation of the social and political status of the panegyricized person—whether political leader or socially or economically renowned person—by glorifying him. In addition, it serves as an incentive for conformity to accepted social norms.¹⁰ The *jardāg* was also used in the past in its heroic capacity as war poetry chanted before going to battle to boost the morale of the warriors.¹¹ It is also chanted during the *nuggāra* (drum) dance as heroic poetry.

The performance style of *jardāg* is declamatory with a rapid tempo and a very high tone. Its manner of recitation is aloof and majestic to suit

⁸ Cf. the singing of the Somali *Heello*, in which we find such an aspect of performance (see Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:50).

⁹ ʿIzz-al-Dīn Ismāʿīl (1968:269), confuses *sanjak* with the *bōshān* or *jardāg*, the genre we are dealing with here, and considers them one genre. He writes: “And it is obvious that there is no difference between the *sanjak* and the *bōshān* except in their names. It seems that the name of *sanjak*—as usually happens—is originally the name of the dance accompanying the singing. It is known that the *sanjak* dance among Banī Halba is especially for men” (trans. mine). As I stated above, the *sanjak* and the *bōshān* or *jardāg*, our present genre, are two different genres, but they may have the theme of love in common. Moreover, the name of *sanjak* is given to both the singing and the dancing, and not to the dancing only as the writer claims. Both men and women participate in the *sanjak* performance, and it is the women who actually dance, not the men.

¹⁰ For other functions of folklore in general, see Bascom 1965.

¹¹ This function of the *jardāg* is similar to that of the Somali *geerar*; see Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:49.

the heroic content. Its artistic conventions of recitation demand a dextrous and dramatic manipulation of voice volume, pause, rhythm, tempo, and tone. There is a final cadence at the end of each verse and a pause. The voice then rises at the beginning of the following verse. Like the Somali *gabay*, the *jardāg* “has a simple melody with great variations in the length of notes” (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:47). The bard can make as many variations as he likes within the limits of these characteristics. His skill resides in the way he makes use of these conventions provided by tradition.

Non-verbal repetition is used as a keynote to the *jardāg* at the beginning of the performance in the form of repeated rhythmic humming of sounds:

W ō hō wō wōhō wō wō wōwōy
Awiya wō wō wōy ya wōy hō bōhōy wō hō wōy
A wiya wō wō ya wōy hō bōhōy wō hōy wōy
Hey bē biya hō wō hoy wōy hō wōy
 Our brothers, Banī Halba, do not accept the traitor
 Our brothers, Banī Halba, do not accept the traitor
 We, Banī Halba, are the panthers that spread after the rain stops
 Our horses attack other ethnic groups
 Banī Halba are panthers; our horses attack other ethnic groups.

(Bashar 1974: Tape no. 1820)

The diction of the *jardāg*, like that of the Somali *gabay*, “is characterized by a philosophical mood, with general observations about life interspersed throughout the poem” (Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:48). The style is reflective and the words are carefully selected:

He who tries to escape it [death] will find it chasing him.
 Fighting is a black cooking-pot which besmears whoever touches it.
 Discord is like food offered as charity; whoever is present gets his share.

(Abbakar 1974: Tape no. 1808).

The *zanig* is tea-praise. It is one of the two genres composed and chanted by both men and women, and is associated with one of the most popular practices in the Banī Halba community: drinking tea. Offering one’s guest a cup of tea is a measure of hospitality (Aḥmad 1974: Tape no. 1809). This genre is linked with the *barāmka*, which is a gallantry association of youth concerned with the norms of politeness, good manners, handsome attire, courteous behavior towards women, and-most important of all-the rules of drinking tea, either in an ordinary social setting or during the formal tea-drinking sessions of the association.¹²

In the *zanig*, sugar and tea are described from their arrival in Port

¹² Cf. the *barāmka* association among the Humur, another Sudanese *Baggāra* (cattlerearing) ethnic group in the Southern part of Kordofan region (in Cunnison 1966:122-28).

Sudan, through their transportation by train across the country up to Nyala, the provincial capital, then by truck to the Banī Halba homeland. The individuals who are associated with this process—the railway stationmaster, the train driver, the local government officer and the retailer—are mentioned in the poetry. In the *zanig*, the *barāmka* extol their patterns of behavior and condemn those who do not conform to these patterns. They call these people *kamākle* (sing. *kamkalī*).

Men's *zanig* is chanted in a very swift style of recitation and a deep voice. It has a lucid, straightforward linguistic style which rarely uses figurative language. Another feature of the *zanig* style is its frequent use of dialogue, which adds a dramatic flavor and vividness to the performance:

He said, "I was asleep at midnight
and the telephone brought me some news."
I said, "What is the news?"
He then said to me,
"Oh, head of the *barāmka*,
haven't you heard the news?"
I said, "No, I haven't heard anything."
He said, "Italy has attacked Suākin,
Port Sudan,¹³ and al-Gadārif with
tanks, aircraft, and artillery.
It bombed the telephone wires and
the railway, and that is why sugar
has not arrived."

(Aḥmad 1974: Tape no. 1809)

Ḳōrmaḡla was originally war poetry.¹⁴ It is a heroic recitation which was performed by men upon arriving home victorious from battle. Nowadays it is performed when men return from a *faza*^c (a help campaign in pursuit of a thief or assisting someone in trouble), or on ordinary happy occasions such as weddings or circumcision ceremonies. When men recite *Ḳōrmaḡla* the women receive them with exultant joy while ululating and singing merrily (Muḥammad 1974a: Tape no. 1802). *Am-digēne* is then performed at home. This is a jubilant victory dance to the non-verbal singing of a rhythmic utterance of sounds accompanied by clapping (*ibid.*; ^cU. Ibrāhīm 1975: Tape no. 1822):

S. *Wahaywō*
Ch. *Ohuwo*

¹³ Suākin and Port Sudan are the Sudanese ports on the Red Sea in eastern Sudan. These are the towns through which imports, including tea and sugar, enter the country; hence their significance to the bard.

¹⁴ Cf. the Somali *geerar* in Andrzejewski and Lewis 1964:49.

S. *Wahaywō*
Ch. *Ohuwo*

S. *Ihowo*
Ch. *Ihowo*

S. *Wahaywō*
Ch. *Ihowo*

S. *Tirīrīrī*
Ch. *Howo.*

(°U. Ibrāhīm 1975: Tape no. 1822)

Ḳōṛmagla and *am-digēne* are twin genres which are complementary; neither can be performed without the other. *Ḳōṛmagla* is recited in a declamatory style with a slow tempo and a deep voice. The manner of recitation is aloof and majestic to suit the heroic content. It has short staccato verses, and its diction is denotative rather than connotative. The sound effect of the poetry is emphasized for the creation of maximum emotional excitement:

S. *Wāy jāritna*
Le-'m-gurūn zōlina
Kin mutna ḥagga-'ṭ-ṭer yiwāritna

(Dahab 1975: Tape no. 1818)

S. Oh our neighbor
[I am addressing] our friend with the long braids
If we died let the vultures feed on us.

Dag-al-ēsh songs among Banī Halba fall within the larger cross-cultural generic category of work songs. These grain-threshing songs are sung during the harvesting season while men cooperatively thresh the millet harvest on a *madag* (threshing-floor). As is the case with other work songs, the words of these songs are simple and direct. The rhythm and the melody are of primary importance to the meaning of the words:

S. *Anīna gibēl shin gulnā?*
Ch. *Gulna-' ṭ-ṭer biyākulnā.*

(Faḍl-al-Karīm 1975: Tape no. 1823)

S. What did we say earlier?
Ch. We said the vultures will feed on us.

This stress on the rhythm allows for the use of nonsensical words to fill out the rhythm and complete the melody, e.g., the word “*kijaynā*” repeated by the chorus in the following stanza:

- S. *°Ammit̄ Maryam*
 Ch. *Kijaynā*
 S. *Maryam am-dalazāt*
 Ch. *Kijaynā.*

(Faḍl-al-Karīm 1975: Tape no. 1823)

- S. Aunt Maryam
 Ch. *Kijaynā*
 S. Maryam, the one with the fat behind
 Ch. *Kijaynā*

Moreover, the performers themselves are the audience of the grain-threshing songs. In Finnegan's words, "the work . . . provides the occasion rather than the subject-matter, and the song depends on the rhythm of the work rather than an audience for its point of departure" (1970:231).

Like other work songs, grain-threshing songs have a psychological function in lessening the fatigue of the workers and enabling them to endure the monotony of the work, a psychological effect created by the harmony resulting from the synchronization between the song and the rhythmic movement of the work. Finnegan's description is, again, appropriate: "the work becomes attractive and artistic rather than merely laborious, and the song a background to a kind of dance as well as to labour" (238).

The Banī Halba also have *niḥās* (royal copper-drum) poetry in the sense that the beats of the drum performed in a particular rhythmic manner express linguistic meaning. This takes place, as Finnegan puts it, "through direct representation of the spoken language itself, simulating the tone and rhythm of actual speech. The instruments themselves are regarded as speaking and their messages consist of words" (481). This poetry is peculiar to the traditional *niḥās* only. Ordinary drums are used as accompaniments to sung poetry as in the *kadal* or the drum dance as mentioned above.

This copper-drum is kept by the paramount head and handed down from generation to generation of rulers. It is the emblem of ethnic pride and solidarity, since the Banī Halba believe that it has been brought from Arabia by their ancestor Jam°ān al-°Aṣī. This *niḥās* poetry is political poetry which is normally beaten on political and social occasions such as gatherings, battles, installations of new paramount heads, *faza°* (help campaign), *naḥīr* (voluntary customary co-operative work) in the paramount head's farm, funerals of the royal family, and so forth. Each beat has a particular linguistic meaning known to the members of the ethnic group and thus is easily communicable to them.

Copper-drum poetry uses non-verbal communication through the almost indefinite repetition of the beats with varying tempos. There are three kinds of beat sequences, which differ in tempo depending upon the

situation in which they are employed. The first one, a call for the men to gather, is composed of one beat repeated several times in very slow tempo; there is a pause after each beat. It goes:

Till
Till
Till
Till
Till

(Maghayyan 1975: Tape no. 1824)

The second kind of beat sequence is sounded when the paramount head is getting ready to lead the procession after the gathering of his men on horseback. This beat sequence simulates the phrase *Sulṭān gum* (“stand up, Sultan”).¹⁵ The repeated unit of this kind consists of three beats sounded continuously without pause and with a swifter tempo than that of the first sequence:

Til dil dil
Til dil dil

(Maghayyan 1975: Tape no. 1824)

The third kind of beat sequence is sounded when the horses start their procession with the paramount head in front and with the copper-drum on camel-back succeeding him, followed by his men on horseback. This beat simulates the phrase *biktul biḡgul* (“he [the paramount head] kills and throws away”). The repeated unit consists of four beats sounded continuously without pause. This sequence’s tempo is faster than that of the first beat and slower than that of the second:

Dil til dil til
Dil til dil til

(Maghayyan 1975: Tape no. 1824)

¹⁵ The use of the word *Sulṭān* here instead of its local equivalent *nāzīr* is an index to the cultural dissemination that took place as a result of the close—and yet hostile—contact between Banī Halba and the Fur Sultanates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Al-kātim is the major women's genre. It is sung and is thematically love and heroic poetry (al-Rihēd and al-Raḍī 1975: Tape no. 1821).¹⁶ The heroic content intermingles with the panegyric content, which is either communal or personal. The communal panegyric is for either the whole ethnic group, a section of it, or a clan; the personal panegyric is for either kinsmen or renowned men.

Al-kātim exploits the soloist-chorus reciprocity in musical form by drawing it out almost indefinitely. Verbal repetition is used, and there is a repeated interchange between soloist and chorus. Two types of verbal repetition can be discerned. In the first type, both soloist and chorus repeat their parts of the stanza without variation:

S. They [Banī Halba] have unified their opinion
And they approach death if they sense it.

Ch. They have prepared their weapons
And they are getting trained.

* * * * *

S. They have unified their opinion
And they approach death if they sense it.

Ch. They have prepared their weapons
And they are getting trained.

* * * * *

S. They have unified their opinion
And they approach death if they sense it.

Ch. They have prepared their weapons
And they are getting trained.

(al-Rihed 1975: Tape no. 1821)

The second type of verbal repetition in *al-kātim* takes place when the cantor repeats the first verse of the stanza and improvises on it indefinitely while the chorus refrain remains constant. There is an unlimited possibility for improvisation on the cantor's part, which is done by substituting words and

¹⁶ Dr. ʿIzz-al-Dīn Ismāʿīl, again, confuses the *bōshān* and *al-kātim* just as he confused the *bōshān* and *sanjak*. He writes (1968:275): "The praise *bōshān* is called *al-kātim*." This is not correct because, as we have seen, the *bōshān* and *al-kātim* are two separate genres although they may have some themes in common; e.g., panegyric and love. This is a common feature of Banī Halba folk poetry. What brought confusion to Dr. Ismāʿīl might have been that he adopted a thematic typological criterion extrinsic to the poetry in question, while ignoring the local typological criterion adopted by the people themselves.

phrases in the formulas. The repeated refrain of the chorus acts as a closing cadence to the singing of each stanza:

- S. Halba's sons are few.
 Ch. There is no desertion in the face of death.
- S. The ethnic group is small.
 Ch. There is no desertion in the face of death.
- S. The rams of sacrifice are few.
 Ch. There is no desertion in the face of death.

(al-Rihēd 1975: Tape no. 1821)

Women's *sanjak* is thematically love poetry but sometimes merges into praise and heroic poetry. It shares with men's *sanjak* such generic features as the *shēl* (song proper) and the *kasre* (closing song), and such stylistic features as the call and response musical form, repetition, and *marāra* (rhythmic humming of sounds) with men's *sanjak*. The only difference is that the *garjūm* (refrain) and the *muftāḥ* (a refrain which does not entail a closing song) are restricted to men's *sanjak*; e.g.

- S. *Sanjak* demands discipline
 S + Ch. Perform it gently,
 My twin,¹⁷ the newly-grown seedling.¹⁸
- S. *Sanjak* demands discipline
 S. + Ch. Perform it gently,
 My twin, the newly-grown seedling.
- S. *Wōhō habābi hōy*
 S + Ch. *Hōhō wōho wōhōy*
Wōhō habābi hēy.

(A. al-Manzūl 1975: Tape no. 1825)

The following is an example of a *kasre* (closing song):

- S. Pure honey, if you are leaving
 Just say to me, "Let us go."
- Ch. Pure honey, if you are leaving
 Just say to me, "Let us go."
- S. Pure honey, if you are leaving
 Just say to me, "Let us go."

¹⁷ The lover is frequently referred to as a "twin."

¹⁸ "Newly-grown seedling" is a euphemism for physical tenderness.

- Ch. Pure honey, if you are leaving
Just say to me, "Let us go."

CA. al-Manzūl 1975: Tape no. 1825)

The *kadal* or *geduma* is sung exclusively by women to the accompaniment of the drum solely on the occasion of circumcision of boys, that is, of their initiation into manhood (M. Ibrāhīm 1974: Tape no. 1804). In the *kadal*, the rhythm of the drum beats is balanced with that of the words of the poetry. The bardess composes during performance and praises the circumcized boy and the male members of his family: his ancestors, his father, his uncles, and his brothers. In the content of the *kadal*, there is an interplay between the praise and the heroic, which are closely knitted together.

The antiphonal form is also an essential element in the performance of *kadal*. One type of verbal repetition is used in which the cantor recites the whole stanza, followed by the chorus repeatedly reciting the whole stanza:

- S. The lion of the night
And the tiger of the evening
I am calling him, al-Ḥurriyya's maternal uncle,
Who needs no support if it [the battle] started.

- Ch. The lion of the night
And the tiger of the evening
I am calling him, al-Ḥurriyya's maternal uncle,
Who needs no support if it [the battle] started.

- S. The lion of the night
And the tiger of the evening
I am calling him, al-Ḥurriyya's maternal uncle,
Who needs no support if it [the battle] started.

- Ch. The lion of the night
And the tiger of the evening
I am calling him, al-Ḥurriyya's maternal uncle,
Who needs no support if it [the battle] started.

(Ilyās 1974: Tape no. 1802:

Mushkār ar-rujāl wa-' l-khēl (lit. "praise of men and horses") is women's genre which is chanted. It is concerned with the eulogies of courageous and hospitable men and horses of noble breed (K. al-Manzūl 1975: Tape no. 1821). The *mushkār* is, hence, generically related to that men's *jardāg*. It is also thematically and stylistically akin to the men's *jardāg* in that they both have heroic and eulogistic content. Like the *jardāg* the manner of recitation of the *mushkār* is aloof and majestic to suit the heroic content. It is recited with a very high tone and a rapid tempo:

Banī Halba, my kinsmen, you are the humming bees that sting in the face.
 You are the bitterness of a split colocynth.
 You are the sharpness of a newly-sharpened razor.
 The ones who protect the women of the ethnic group, the ones who do not
 take indignity.
 The generous ones, the ones who are not dishonest.

(Ilyās 1974: Tape no. 1802)

The *mushkār* also encompasses the *mi'yār* (lampoons) of men who do not conform to accepted patterns of social behavior, especially the cowards and the mean (K. al-Manzūl 1975: Tape no. 1821). Such lampoons are used as incentives for conformity and instruments of social pressure:

Al-Bilēl, °Uthmān's son,
 I thought you were one who crushes men,
 But I found out that you are a fool and good-for-nothing
 When the horses galloped [to battle], the one who is as domestic as
 a pet.

(K. al-Manzūl 1975: Tape no. 1821)

Also:

°Aṣīr, al-Gōnī's son, and al-Faḍl are neighbors.
 If you ask °Aṣīr [to go to fight], he will say to you, "I am looking after my
 children."
 If you ask al-Faḍl, Dabbūg's son, he will say to you, "I am ill."

(K. al-Manzūl 1975: Tape no. 1821)

Women's *zanig* is chanted. It is thematically love poetry; it also uses antiphony:

S. Azum sea,¹⁹ I will swim nowhere except in your waters.
 Wait some days for me to rid me of my worries.

Ch. Azum sea, I will swim nowhere except in your waters.
 Wait some days for me to rid me of my worries.

(Sabīl 1975: Tape no. 1824)

Women's *zanig* is sometimes a straightforward non-narrative tea-praise unlike the narrative and dialogic men's *zanig*:

¹⁹ Azum Sea is actually not a sea, but is figuratively called so. It is a large seasonal water-course.

- S. Tea, the medicine of the sick, is being served.
- Ch. What we are doing is mere gallantry, for these are the affairs of the ḥurafa.²⁰

(Sabil, 1975: Tape no. 1824)

*At-Tiḍikkir*²¹ (lit., “remembering”) is a genre of work poetry collectively chanted by women while separating the husk of millet from the grains to prepare food during the *furāsh* (the first three days of formal mourning after a person’s death). It is a hymn-like invocation in which women ask God’s forgiveness for the dead person. Essentially, it expresses an acceptance of, and a resignation to, the bitter fact of death as dictated by the teachings of Islam:

We have been created from non-existence to end in non-existence.
Non-existence is unavoidable.
God the Beneficent creates and exterminates.

(cAbd-al-Ḥamīd 1975: Tape no. 1824)

At-Tiḍikkir, as its name designates, functions as a remembrance and a reminder to the living of the transience of life, of the inevitability of death, and of the eternal life that follows.

Ghine-’ l-murḥāka (grinding stone singing) is another genre of work poetry sung solo and without chorus by women when grinding millet indoors (cAbd-al-Raḥmān 1975: Tape no.1819). Finnegan’s description of solitary women’s work songs adequately applies to this genre: “This is a situation that gives scope to the expression of more personal feelings . . . than in the group songs” (1970: 237). Here is an example:

O, his mother who begot him,
Tell the highly selected *zaytūn*²² to take it easy.
Wealth is acquired and not hereditary.

(cAbd-al-Raḥmān 1975: Tape no. 1819)

This genre is now dying because of the increasing number of flour-mills built in the Banī Halba homeland.

Chaq poetry is sung during the lip-tattooing ceremony of a young

²⁰ *Ḥurafa* (sing., *ḥarīf*) is another name that the *barāmka*, the members of the tea drinking association, call themselves.

²¹ In Banī Halba dialect, and most other Sudanese Arabic dialects, the standard */dh/* is pronounced */d/*, as in *ḍanab* for *dhanab* (“tail”) and *ḍabaḥ* for *dhabaḥa* (“to slaughter”); hence the standard equivalent of *at-tiḍikkir* is *al-tadhakkur* (i.e., “remembering”).

²² The *zaytūn* (lit., “olives”) is the generic name given to a kind of rounded ornament made of ivory and used in necklaces. The shape of a single *zaytūnāye* is oval, similar to that of an olive.

girl, an initiation ceremony into womanhood and subsequently marriage. Its content is panegyric: it eulogizes the girl who is being lip-tattooed, and usually praises her beauty, virtuous behavior, and endurance:

The multi-colored heifer
Has an amulet hanging from her neck
The one with a luminous canine
What does the track of thorns do?²³

(Sabīl 1975: Tape no. 1824)

Mahōhāt al-atfāl (lullabies) are a genre sung by mothers while rocking their children to sleep or trying to stop them from crying. These songs use simple words which are chosen for their sound quality rather than their meaning:

<i>Ta'āl yā nōm</i>	<i>nōm al-^ciyāl</i>
<i>Kin jīt nahār</i>	<i>banṭik kisār</i>
<i>Kin jīt fi-'l-lēl</i>	<i>banṭik ijēl</i>
<i>Kin jīt 'ashiye</i>	<i>banṭik nasiye</i>

(Sabīl 1975: Tape no. 1824)

Come, sleep	come to my child
If you come by day	I'll give you bread
If you come at night	I'll give you a calf
If you come in the evening	I'll give you buttermilk

Al-Gidērī is a genre composed and sung by adolescent girls and performed in a dance in which both boys and girls participate. The theme of this genre is adolescent love.

Musa, the ounce of gold,
My life is a gift to you.

(Umar 1975: Tape no. 1821)

Also:

He is a summer rain
that quenches thirst.

(Umar 1975: Tape no. 1821)

IV. Conclusion

The Banī Halba identify poetry with singing. To them, poetry is song and a bard is a singer: that is why they consider non-verbal genres,

²³ Lip-tattooing is performed by using a bundle of thorns.

such as *am-digēne* and copper-drum beat, poetry. Inspiration and talent are regarded as the basic prerequisites for being a good poet. Bards themselves believe in inspiration by jinnees, each bard having a particular jinnee who is the source of poetic inspiration. Critical criteria for evaluating poetry include originality, richness and broadness of linguistic repertoire, thematic poise, and stylistic subtlety.

The Banī Halba classification of their poetic genres is based on the tune to which the poetry is chanted or sung, and on the musical accompaniment, which is either clapping or drumming. The dichotomy of poetic genres according to gender is a facsimile of the social dichotomy: there are men's genres on the one hand and women's genres on the other. The chanting and singing of poetry, however, is not divided according to gender, for both men and women chant and sing.

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