

**Toward an Understanding of Justice, Belief, and Women's Rights:  
Ateetee, an Arsi Oromo Women's Sung Dispute Resolution Process in  
Ethiopia**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Ethnomusicology**

Memorial University of Newfoundland

**June, 2016**

St. John's, Newfoundland

## Abstract

This dissertation examines *ateetee*, a sung Arsi Oromo women's indigenous dispute resolution in Ethiopia, to demonstrate how music, as an expressive form, enables women to protect, promote and claim their rights, and to resolve disputes peacefully in a rapidly changing social environment. Though Arsi society is socio-politically male dominated, women have their own power through the *ateetee* ritual, their women's institution and the vernacular belief system. *Ateetee* is a highly political and power laden process, in which women travel to the offender's house singing insults, then sing in front of the offender's house until a reconciliation ceremony is held. At the ceremony they receive a cow as compensation, then the women finish by blessing the offender. I have demonstrated how this ritual process is a judicial process, through which women actively resolve disputes and uphold rights and respect they hold in Oromo society and under Oromo law. By examining this process from a local perspective, through the perspectives of the different participants, I have been analyzing the factors and circumstances that allow these musical rituals to remain relevant and effective means of dispute resolution, and to draw wider conclusions concerning how to foster restorative justice through the expressive arts. I have also explored some of the dramatic social changes that are affecting this ritual, including mainstream religions, government/political interferences, and urbanization/modernization. I spent cumulatively over two years in the field, with different communities in highland and lowland areas, and in the dissertation I have supplemented thick ethnographic descriptions and the voices of community members

with video and audio recordings of interviews and rituals. Theoretically my research engages three main areas: vernacular feminism, indigenous spirituality, and legal pluralism.

## **Acknowledgements**

I will try to be brief but there are many, many people and institutions to acknowledge and thank. I have been very fortunate to receive funding and support from a number of institutions and organizations. First I would like to express my gratitude to Memorial University for all the educational, logistical, and financial support over the years. I would also like to thank the French Centre for Ethiopian Studies and the Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing MRI team for the generous research grants (2010-2011). Finally, I cannot give enough thanks to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation for their incredible intellectual, emotional, and financial support for this project. Thank you for believing in me and in this research. I would particularly like to thank Josée St. Martin and Jennifer Petrela, for their continued support and friendship.

I have been very fortunate to have received guidance and advice from a number of established scholars for this research. Some are mentioned in more detail in the dissertation. I have had conversations with Dorothy Hodgson with regards to this dissertation research. In addition to sharing some of her personal insight from experience of working with women in a similar area, with a feminist, anthropological approach, she has directed me towards some of the similarities with her work. Kay Shelemay has provided immense support and encouragement over the years for which I am very grateful. Many thanks to Ellen Waterman for her help as a dean, a scholar and a friend.

The world of Oromo studies is quite small. I have had the great fortune of receiving information and guidance for this work from a number of scholars. Gemetchu Megerssa and Aneesa Kassam, both Oromo specialists and anthropologists, have been



wonderful friends and mentors. I am very thankful for the many conversations we shared. Several other Oromo scholars have also contributed to my understanding of Arsi culture and this topic in particular. I had the fortune of meeting and becoming friends with Gemechu Geda, who wrote a dissertation on Arsi belief systems, and while we both conducted some field research together, he offered his knowledge and insight on Arsi culture and belief systems. Mamo Hebo, an anthropologist, met with me, discussed the topic and guided me toward the Kokossa district, his native area. Hussein Endeesa, who I have known since 2002 through the cultural offices, has offered support and research suggestions over the years. Several conversations with Marit Østebø, an anthropologist and development scholar, have given us a chance to discuss our research projects related to Arsi Oromo women. She first showed me ways in which Arsi women traditionally have more respect and rights than they may first appear to have. Thanks to Eloi Fiquet, and FX Fauvelle-Aymar of the CFEE.

In Ethiopia I would like to thank the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage and the Oromia government Culture and Tourism offices in Addis Ababa, Adama, Kokossa, and Worqaa for their support over the years. Thank you also to the employees who helped me with all the administration. There are many individuals to thank and without whom I would never have been able to complete this research. Diribia Begna in Worqa went above and beyond his duties as the head of the Culture and Tourism office to assist me during fieldwork. I am very fortunate to have had his family's support and friendship. Gameda Galchu in Kokossa, Kababush in Adama and Simeneh Betreyohannes in Addis Ababa were also very helpful. Thank you to all the public schools, the churches, the mosques, and the government offices and their workers and

leaders for their time and logistical contributions. Special thanks to Woube Kassaye and his family for their warm welcome and support.

Diriba Eticha, Buzu Tsegaye and Jeilan Mohammed and W. G. provided invaluable help with the transcription, translation and interpretation of my field recordings.

I would like to thank all of my friends and interlocutors in Nansabo, Kokossa and Dhakka (Langano) districts. Special thanks to Tayere Godana, Hussein Ambo, Safaye Galchu, and Shuru Keroo. I mention many people who helped me, and with whom I spent time and developed friendships. But I will never be able to offer enough thanks for everyone who has helped me, shared their homes and meals with me, and guided me to understanding Arsi culture over the years. Thank you to all the ateetee women and other members of the Arsi communities who contributed to this research.

Without my dissertation committee and co-supervisors this work would never have been completed. Thank you to Robin Whitaker for all our conversations and email exchanges. I am extremely grateful for all her illuminating feedback on such a tight timeline. I will reap the benefits from her advice for years to come. I do not have enough words to express my gratitude to Kati Szego and Bev Diamond, my co-supervisors. Thank you for generosity, your dedication, your time, and all your intellectual contributions to my development. I can only hope that I will one day be able to reciprocate in some way for everything you have done for me.

Without Rebecca Draisey-Collishaw's amazing feedback, editorial suggestions, and friendship, this dissertation would not have been finished. And thank you to Marion MacLeod for your continual friendship and support. To my family in Ethiopia: Alima,

Amina, Llamó, Ijaroo, Aliyee, Gobane, and Geda, thank you for inviting me to live with you back in 2002 and for continuing to show such support and friendship over the years. And thank you to my family here: Marian, Julie, Nadine, and Susie, Stan and Kami for all your love and support over the years. Thank you also to Marie-Laure and Emmanuel for your continued support. And to Mathilde and Marin for making us live and laugh. Finally, as always, my biggest thanks is for Luc for all your support and love. Without you I couldn't have finished.

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### **Note on Oromo Transcriptions and Spellings in this Dissertation**

The Oromo all speak the same language, Afan Oromo (Oromo language), of the east Cushitic language family, which is in turn under the Afro-Asiatic language group (Griegenow-Mewis 2001, Janko 2012). There is currently no standard form of Oromo, though attempts have been made in this direction. There is even an Afan Oromo Standardizing Committee. Some linguists might say that the language is in a slow process of standardization. The Oromo Liberation Front established qubee Oromo, the Oromo alphabet, which is based on the Roman alphabet, in 1974, but it was not until the early 1990s and the current government that it came into use throughout the country. What has been established in the newspapers, government and schools in Oromia is based on the Western, Macca and Tulama dialects of Oromo (Greifinow-Mewis, 2001). There are two other main dialectical groups, of which Arsi is one.

This dialectical difference, of course, causes difficulties in writing Oromo: “There was at first no consensus on the representation of certain phonemes, and even today there can still be hesitations in marking vowel length” (Appleyard 2006). The hesitation referenced here is that the vowel length can change the word. For example, aada (uproar) with a longer final vowel becomes aadaa (culture). There are also differences in tone in Oromo. These tonal differences can cause lexical and grammatical confusion in homonyms (Raga and Adola 2012, 39). For example, dhúgáa with a high tone at the beginning indicates ‘drunkard’ whereas dhùgáa with a low tone at the beginning indicates ‘truth’ (ibid.). Tone difference can also cause confusion between focus and negation: hín dhufani (they are coming) with the high tone on hín differs with hin dhúfani, with the accent on the first vowel in dhúfani (ibid.).

Though I have tried to be consistent with qubee in the way I spell words in Oromo, in the Oromo writing I may have some irregularities in aspects such as vowel length. Though all the people who did transcriptions for me were Oromo, some of them were from different areas of Arsi and of varying educational backgrounds, so differences in their writing may also reflect this. Some opted to transcribe exactly as it was spoken, with the dialect reflected in the vowel and consonant length, whereas others relied on the language they had learned in the classroom, which is based on those Western Oromo dialects. Furthermore, scholarly representations of Oromo vary in ways of spelling words. Scholars who published before qubee existed, used phonetics or their own personalized systems. Today, some researchers spell words as they would be spelled in English, some use qubee, and some spell in relation to the Oromo dialect that they work with. This is why the Oromo words in quotations from scholarly documents are written in many different ways.

## Glossary of Oromo Terms

These are terms that appear frequently in the dissertation. Though the equivalent word(s) in English give an idea of what each word means, they are all culture and context specific.

Aadaa: culture, custom

Abarsaa: curse

Afolee: song leader

Akkoo: grandmother

Anaan: milk

Araraa: reconciliation

Ateetee: Arsi women's dispute resolution process; women's political and religious organization; female deity

Ateetee Falaa: ateetee prayers (usually for rain)

Ateetee gooraa/arabsa/deemsisa: ateetee for dispute resolution (gooraa - avenge, arabsa - to insult/dispute, deemsisa - to go)

Ayyaana: spirit, spiritual essence

Ayyoo: mother

Bonkoo: cowhide cape worn for rituals, often decorated with cowry shells

Booratti: wooden headrest for sleeping, which a mother gives her daughter on her wedding day

Callee: beads and necklaces worn for ceremonies and prayers

Dhugaa: truth, justice; absolute base form of knowledge

Faaruu: (praise) song

Gadaa: Oromo indigenous generation-based socio-political organization

Haadha: mother; leader (e.g. Haadha Saddeetta)

Hanfala: a leather belt women wear upon marriage and during pregnancy; it is used in prayer rituals.

Hayyuu: an expert of customary laws

Jarsaa: elder men; elder men who assist and judge in dispute resolution processes

Kabajaa: respect

Killa: ritual roasted coffee beans in melted butter in a cultural container

Meetixaa: strips of hide of animals slaughtered in an ateetee ceremony; they are placed on the siinqee

Mukaa laaftuu: soft wood; women

Qallu: to slay/slaughter

Qanafaa: beaded leather ornament tied around a woman's forehead and worn five-six months after childbirth

Qarruu: mud

Rabbi: local term for God (Waaqa)

Saddeetta: council of eight

Saffuu: Arsi moral and ethical codes not to be broken

Sardoo: blessed grass used in ateetee ceremonies

Seera: law  
Seera aadaa: cultural law; customary law  
Seera amba: customary law  
Shifaa: blessed grass. Some ateetee practitioners use this term instead of sardoo. This is the term used for Sheikh Hussein practitioners.  
Siinqee: women's spiritual stick given to a woman on her wedding day; a women's spiritual and political institution (siinqee institution)  
Sirba: music; dance  
Tapha: play  
Ulee: walking stick  
Ulfina: honour  
Uumaa: creator, creation  
Waaddeessa: stick given to a man on his wedding day  
Waaqa: God, higher being  
Waaqeffannaa: Oromo vernacular religion; worshipers of Waaqa  
Waaqeffataa: adherents of Waaqeffannaa  
Wayyuu: sacred respect, someone/something blessed; an expert of the spiritual domain



## Chapter 1

### Setting the Scene: Introduction and Background on *Ateetee*



Arsi Oromo women gathered in a circle, singing *ateetee* at a ceremony in Gutuu, near Kokossa, Ethiopia. April, 2011.

*A full morning walking in the sun through the green and hilly southern Ethiopian countryside brought my colleague and me to Shuru's house. We had sent a message ahead through neighbours so she would know we were on our way. When we arrived at Shuru's home, she was still away at a market buying butter, which she would then resell at other markets in the days to come. When she arrived home, she invited us inside. In the bamboo and wood-thatched home, we sat around the fire pit and watched as she*

*prepared worqii (a powdery porridge made from ensete<sup>1</sup> and butter) and coffee for us. I had been friends with Shuru for a couple of years: I traveled with her, spent time with her in Kokossa town, and stayed at her house when she hosted a group discussion for me. She is a strong and confident woman, a businesswoman, a leader of women in her community, and a tradition bearer for her children and other women. I wanted to stay with her to see her involvement in the community, to discuss ateetee, and, if possible, to attend a ceremony. An ateetee process or ceremony is an Arsi sung indigenous justice process that is organized when a woman has been abused in any way. She gathers with all available women at the offender's home, sings prayers, and demands and negotiates compensation in the form of a cow.*

*In Shuru's home, we exchanged greetings, information about our families, and then discussed what was happening in the community. An elder in the neighbouring community had told us about several different ateetee ceremonies being organized for dispute resolutions. One was about to happen over the next few days for a man who had insulted many women by using strong language in a public fight with another man. Many had been offended, so the ceremony was expected to gather together large groups of women from the surrounding areas. Over the next few days, I spent time with Shuru, travelling around with her, taking the usual long treks to markets, visiting neighbours, and eventually attending the ateetee ceremony for the male offender. During the time I stayed at her house, she was visited by a remorseful-looking man pleading with her not to be the object of an ateetee ritual. He had had too much to drink at a wedding ceremony*

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<sup>1</sup> *Ensete ventricosum* is known as the false banana plant. It is a species of the banana family Musaceae. It is a staple food in the Arsi-Bale highlands.

*and insulted a large group of women of Shuru's clan, calling them "sarree" (lit. dogs). The offense, however, was so great and so direct that there was no way that he could escape the ceremony. He was, though, given time to assemble people and prepare materials for the ceremony, which involved choosing a cow from his herd or buying one to give to the women. Shuru talked to him about what he needed to gather and how they would organize the process. Until this time with her, I had been under the impression that ateetee ceremonies were more or less immediate and spontaneous because that is how participants described them in their narratives: women stormed from their homes leaving all their household duties, they travelled to the offender's home, and there they sang the offender's wrongdoing and prayers for reconciliation. Ateetee rituals can be spontaneous, but may also be arranged so that the offender is ready to receive the women. My initial assumptions and this revelation showed me that though some ateetee participants may describe one fixed way of conducting the ceremony, ateetee is an active and fluid process. While respecting basic elements of the traditional process and meanings, contemporary ateetee ceremonies, like their practitioners, are dynamic and adaptable.*

Over the years Shuru and other Arsi women have spent time with me, telling me their *ateetee* stories, singing songs, and teaching me about their culture so I could share it with others. This is in part why I initially wanted to study ateetee. I also found the ritual exceptional: by singing through a restorative justice process, ateetee allows women to achieve results and effect change directly, rather than only demonstrate resistance. Many Arsi women and girls have asked me to convey their stories in order to educate other

community members as well as national and international audiences, helping them to sustain their expressive practices in the face of opposition from mainstream religions in Ethiopia. What follows in this dissertation has grown out of diverse conversations with Arsi Oromo women and men, and observing and participating in *ateetee* rituals<sup>2</sup> in the lowlands and highlands of southern Ethiopia during over fifteen months in the field (multiple trips between 2009 – 2014, including one continuous year in 2010-11).

In this dissertation I explore *ateetee*, an indigenous Arsi Oromo<sup>3</sup> women's sung dispute resolution process, to demonstrate how music, together with other expressive forms, enables women not only to settle disputes and resist oppression and abuse, but also to assert, protect, promote, and claim their rights in a changing social environment. For the Arsi, *mirga* (lit. right) is the indigenous term for rights, which refers to the honour and respect an individual holds.<sup>4</sup> Arsi women hold a particular spiritual status in society. They are spiritually sacred, blessed, and highly respected (*wayyuu*), and they define their rights in terms of honour and respect: if someone disrespects a woman with insults or abuse, it is a moral and legal violation of women's honour/respect so women can call for an *ateetee* ceremony to restore this honour/respect. In the *ateetee* process, women sing insults to and about the offender on the way to and in front of his/her home. Once they arrive, they sing prayers, they negotiate with elders representing the offender, and once the offender offers a cow to sacrifice, the women bless the offender. An indigenized

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<sup>2</sup> I use ritual, ceremony and process interchangeably in the dissertation. I acknowledge the difference between them, but I would argue that *ateetee* encompasses aspects of all three.

<sup>3</sup> The Arsi are a subgroup of the Oromo ethnic group. The Oromo constitute a political minority, but a demographic majority in Ethiopia. They make up one of the largest ethnic groups in the horn of Africa.

<sup>4</sup> *Ulfina* (lit. weight/burden) and *kabajaa* (lit. have/hold (*qaba*)) can be used to mean rights and also refer to respect and honour.

language of rights exists in terms of honour/respect, but Arsi women have also vernacularized the international concept of women's rights (*mirga dubartoota*). They use *mirga dubartoota* locally when talking about ateetee, and they also use it to make demands for other rights that ateetee does not cover, such as divorce and land and property ownership.

In addition to local notions of women's rights, ateetee is interconnected with customary law (*seera ambaa/aadaa*), the *gadaa* system, and vernacular belief (*Waaqeffannaa*). *Gadaa* is the Oromo male-centred and generational socio-political organization that has existed to varying degrees for hundreds of years (see chapter 2).<sup>5</sup> Customary law is also very relevant throughout Arsi, and ateetee is practiced as a judicial process within that context. In Oromo society there is not a distinct separation between secular life and religion. There are many different types of belief among the Oromo and many different ways in which people practice their spirituality, so the contemporary connections between ateetee and the Oromo vernacular belief system are very fluid. In the dissertation I will explore how, through ateetee, men and women are reminded of specific cultural values: respect (*kabajaa/ulfina*) of women and their truth (*dhugaa*); women's *waayyuu* (sacred, blessed) status; power (*humna/arnya*) of women, and opposition to violence towards women.

Though it is constantly changing, scholars and activists have often characterized Arsi Oromo society as patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal (Baxter 1996, Gemeda 2000, Hussein 2004). Society is patrilineal and patrilocal, and lineage and clan are at the core of

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<sup>5</sup> The way the *gadaa* system is remembered and practiced varies from region to region and community to community. This system is still used by some Oromo in the south and is being revived among Oromo in other areas.

society, but gender roles are slowly changing. Today the patriarchal social structure is still reflected in some of the gendered expressions and narratives of the language, in the unequal access to education and land, and in the way Arsi women's lives can be managed by the men in their lives. These gendered divisions remain most present in the countryside, but are generally less prominent in urban areas. In spite of these gendered roles, women in traditional Oromo society are not powerless, silent observers. "Things are and are not what they seem" (Abu-Lughod 1993, 19). Arsi women's inferior and dominated status in some domains and in relation to men remains both true and an oversimplification. Imposed, non-indigenous terms and concepts such as patriarchy and even gender violence can create a fixed view of society in which individual positioning is misunderstood or ignored (Abu-Lughod 1993, Arnfred 2005, Butler 1990, Hodgson 2000). Every community and every individual is different and changing, and they need to be evaluated in relation to contemporary and historical contextualization.

Abuse towards Arsi women exists, and often it involves domestic or other types of gender-based violence. I have heard and documented many personal accounts of different types of violence against women, while at the same time reading studies, hearing stories, and seeing displays of strong, powerful women. For example, in the countryside, it was not uncommon for female community members of different ages, educational backgrounds, and various positions of power to tell me personal abuse stories and sometimes how they joined together with other women and used *ateetee* to fight back. Arsi women engage *ateetee* as justice to hold individuals in their society and states accountable. In effect, *ateetee* is a highly political and power laden process, in which women travel to the offender's house singing insults, then sing in front of the offender's

house until a reconciliation ceremony is held. In Arsi Oromo society, *ateetee* is the only dispute resolution ritual organized and conducted by women and it is the only one that is sung. James C. Scott has argued that traditional expressive forms can serve as powerful “weapons of the weak” (1985), creating openings for subaltern resistances to oppression and abuse where other forms of political contestation do not exist.<sup>6</sup> In this dissertation I argue that *ateetee* is more than resistance: it is a powerful dispute resolution process that is effective because the sung ritual constitutes justice. The victim’s truth is highly valued and she also receives support from an entire community. Furthermore, as stories from this research (supported by other scholarly examples) will demonstrate, for parties who are willing to participate, indigenous or restorative dispute resolution procedures often yield successful results because they are relational; many members of the community, including the victim and offender, are involved in the resolution process (Cayley 1998, Dembour and Kelly 2007, Lillies 2002, Downie and Llewellyn 2008, Napoleon 2010). Furthermore, they have an overall focus on peacemaking and reconciliation rather than punishment or retribution, as is more common in Western contexts. In an era when North

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<sup>6</sup> In Scott’s analysis, the public transcript is “the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate” (1990, 2). The hidden transcript is “discourse that takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by the powerholder” (1990, 4). Hidden transcripts include singing protest songs in a private setting away from the ears of the power holders. Although Scott has been critiqued by the anthropologist Sherry Ortner (among others) for talking about resistance in terms of binaries (1995), he does acknowledge that the line is not so clear between resistance and subordination. In his words, “it is clear that the frontier between the public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and subordinate – not a solid wall. The capacity of dominant groups to prevail—though never totally—in defining and constituting what counts as the public transcript and what as offstage is, as we shall see, no small measure of their power” (Scott 1990, 14). When discussing acts of resistance, it is essential to consider existing networks of interactions and tensions within and between the dominated/oppressed groups. Resistance and public and hidden transcripts are each complex areas. Although Scott has described “hidden” transcripts as those that remain hidden until a point when they may become public, hidden transcripts can also be public. For example, there are many cases where protests are displayed publically through music and the arts, but the author(s) remain hidden. This was the case in Myanmar, for example, where many artists had to mask their identities in videos or avoid critical lyrics in order to pass the censorship bureau (Douglas 2011, 2015).

American governments seem to be looking for harsher punitive laws with end results of longer sentences, overcrowded prisons and repeat offenders, restorative justice or vernacular dispute resolution processes are quite pertinent. In the dissertation, I look at ateetee as an alternative/restorative justice mechanism, using field data and some of these aforementioned studies to demonstrate how ateetee is a means of working with the offender as a community and restoring respect to women in Arsi society.

My main area of inquiry is how, faced with dramatic historic and social changes, women use the ateetee process to produce results rather than just using it as a means of resistance to the violations of their honour and respect. What makes ateetee effective (or not)? How do Arsi women use ateetee in relation to their honour, respect and rights in their communities? What distinguishes ateetee from and makes it more powerful than protest/resistance? I demonstrate how and why music or sung prayers play a key role in this process. In what ways are women using ateetee to take action against social, economic and religious problems they are facing? I am interested in the “doing,” the “knowing” and the “being” of the music and ritual process. I explore this through different examples of ateetee, from the perspectives of the different actors. I also demonstrate how ateetee is a dynamic and continually changing process that is flexible and fluid for the individuals and groups involved. Indigenous spirituality is another major part of this dissertation; it has historically been and continues to be a major part of the ateetee process. I wonder whether the volatile tensions between ateetee practitioners and members of Protestant or Salafi Islam faiths will lead to larger problems of intolerance, discrimination, and persecution. How have radical social changes (such as incursion or growth of mainstream religions) affected the ateetee process? Finally, I am looking at the



sustainability of ateetee and relevance of this ritual process for other peoples, places and contexts. What is the sustainability of a ritual that is rooted in vernacular religion, or for which there is not a clear distinction between the sacred and secular? This ambiguity could be considered a weakness by proponents of other religions who may not recognize the legitimacy of ateetee as a mechanism for securing justice. To what extent could this ritual process be transposable to other cultural contexts?

Though Arsi Oromo communities may be socio-politically male-dominated in terms of division of work, education and local politics, in order to represent the situation accurately in the chapters that follow, I analyze ateetee in relation to historic and contemporary contexts (Hodgson 2005). I also think it is essential to problematize feminist/Western discourses on indigenous women. While Oromo women may at times be vulnerable, they should not be considered passive victims, but agents in the improvement of their condition. In the dissertation I aim to present the research as much as possible in the vernacular, with explanations of Arsi Oromo terms, how they are expressed and what they mean. Many terms that are used in academic and international contexts, such as patriarchy, women's rights, gender violence and more, need to be used with caution since they have often been imposed from the outside or come to mean something else when adopted to local vernaculars (e.g. Hale 1999).

In addition to music/performance analysis, in order to understand how ateetee works, I have three main overlapping axes of analysis: (1) I analyze the ritual in relation to indigenous belief/religion, women's rights, and legal pluralism. (2) I apply indigenous legal theories, ethnomusicological theories and relational theories (Borrows 2010a, Llewellyn 2012, Napoleon 2013, Robinson forthcoming) to my research to explore how

this ritual process is a judicial process through which women actively resolve disputes and uphold their rights under Oromo law. By examining this process from a local perspective, I uncover the factors and circumstances that allow these musical rituals to remain relevant and effective means of dispute resolution, and draw wider conclusions concerning how to foster restorative justice through the expressive arts. (3) I also explore some of the dramatic social changes that are affecting this ritual, including mainstream religions, government/political interferences, and urbanization/modernization.

### **Development of this Project on Ateetee**

In order to situate this research, it is important to go back to my first connections with the Arsi Oromo: everything has grown from these first encounters. I will introduce the Arsi Oromo through this narrative, but for more geographic and historical information and a literature review on the Oromo, see Annex A. In 2002, I travelled to Ethiopia for the first time to conduct research for my master's degree (maîtrise). I was invited to join a research project led by Dr. Olivier Tourny, a researcher at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). The ambitious project involved documenting, recording and archiving music from as many of the more than eighty Ethiopian ethnocultural groups as possible. This project was logistically supported by the CNRS and financially backed by the French Embassy in Ethiopia. Later it became a UNESCO project, to which I also contributed. In 2002, Olivier connected me with Aliyee, an Oromo man with whom he had made a personal connection during his previous travels in Ethiopia. I set off to Ethiopia in pursuit of Aliyee Ogeto's family, who lived in the Rift Valley, near kilometer 194 on the highway heading south out of Addis Ababa.



I spent three months living with Aliyee's family, a relationship that began in 2002 but will last a lifetime. I was touched by the way the entire family accepted me with open arms. Aliyee has two wives and I stayed with his first wife, Llamo, and her family, helping them in any way I could. But my contribution was minimal in comparison with the immeasurable amounts of help and teaching they gave me. I can still remember those first few months in much detail. Everyone helped me learn the Oromo language. I remember one afternoon when Gobane, the elderly aunt, spent hours counting corn seeds with me so I learned all the numbers. I worked with Ijaroo, their oldest son, who spoke some English, on interviews, transcriptions and translations. Every week I walked to the town to help Llamo obtain her tuberculosis medicine from the health clinic. Then I would head to another town with a larger market, where I could buy fruit and vegetables and make a weekly phone call back home. I shared stories and practiced language with the two oldest daughters, Alima and Amina. Their family was not the only one to welcome me with such kindness. The neighbours also invited me in, gave me *silga* (fresh cow's milk), *torosho* (corn cakes) and *marqaa* (porridge made with corn, wheat or barley and butter) when butter was available. Everyone's kindness and hospitality seemed remarkable to me, given that everyone was affected by the lack of rain and previous year's poor crop production. I was to learn that hospitality towards guests (*keessuumaa*) is one aspect of their culture that the Oromo value the most. The culture of "the guest" even extends to adoption of outsiders within the clan. Historically, the Oromo have had the means to legally accept and make non-clan members a part of their clans. When I reflect back upon this first experience, especially given the hardships the family experienced that

year, everyone was exceptionally hospitable, taking me in with open arms and urging me to have fresh cow's milk and any food they made.

Through the family, neighbours, and clan members, I learned about Arsi Oromo society, which is founded on a patrilineal, clan-based system. Kinship can be grouped in the following ascending order: family/extended family (*mana* or *warra*), sub-lineage (*ardaa*), lineage (*balbala*), and clan (*gosa*) (Hebo and Shigeta 2014). As I experienced for this first and subsequent stays, family and clan still remain the most important institutions for the Arsi. Family makes decisions and holds land, property and other resources. Gosa (clan) is the most extensive level; gosa usually dominate and control specific territories. There are two branches of lineages (*balballa*) from which all the Oromo can claim common descent: Borana and Barrentu (Megerssa 1994, Gemedo 2000, Hassen 1990). The Arsi Oromo descend from the Barrentu. Then each of these Oromo subgroups, such as the Arsi, divide into clans (*gosa*). “The heart of every clan is compounded of a cluster of lineages tracing their descent to the ancestor who gave his name to the clan” (Bartels 1983, 205). The Arsi alone have over 250 different gosa (Endessa 2011, 2). Knowing one's lineage is very important. From an early age, boys and girls learn how to recite the names of their father's fathers seven generations back, their clan, and the lineage from which they descended. Knowing these ancestors creates alliances: it allows for individuals to identify with family and clansmen from the past and for distant family and clansmen to recognize each other. It is also a way of checking whether two people can marry. In Oromo society it is not possible to marry someone who is from the same clan and/or who descends from one of the maternal or paternal ancestors going back seven generations. I was often asked what my *gosa* (clan), *balballa* (lineage) and father (*aabaa*)

were, to which I learned to respond with the connection to my Arsi family in Langano: *gosa* Gambo, *balballa* Hidito, *aabaa* Araro. By living and working in the community and attending many weddings, I also came to know and recognize many other people from the *gosa* Gambo.

The clan and lineage system is patrilocal: upon marriage, women move to live with their husband's clan, and their children belong to the father's clan. Marriage is very consequential for Arsi women and men, in terms of social relations, but also in relation to politics, property/land ownership, and rights. Because it is a foundation for many other descriptions and discussions in this dissertation, I will offer a brief synopsis of weddings here based on my former research work on marriages and my years of living and working with Arsi and attending weddings (see Baxter 1996 and Qashu 2009 for more information on Arsi weddings). Even while conducting my dissertation research, I attended five complete wedding ceremonies in different geographic areas. Though it wasn't the focus of my research, weddings are so significant for in Arsi society that I had to attend because of the family and clan alliances I had made. Today, though some youth are continuing their studies or choosing their spouses, in rural areas marriages are still generally decided and contracted by fathers, men searching for second wives, and elders. Because marriages are exogamous, they are seen as a means of strengthening alliances between different families and clans, and land and property holdings. Historically young women did not have a say in the matter, but today it is possible to find youth who want to continue studying or do not agree with a proposed marriage. However, wedding contracts and ceremonies still tend to be asymmetrical, with men deciding and managing the social and economic terms of agreement, and women preparing the logistical arrangements and

emotional support at home. Because of this asymmetry and men, women and youths' involvement in weddings, the marriage process is a fascinating space to examine and question the different ways genders are conceived, negotiated, and manipulated in Arsi society.

While seeking a marriage agreement, a man may have a specific clan or family with which he would like to strengthen relations, so he will contact that family directly, or he may discuss and learn about union possibilities in social settings, such as a wedding, a bar, or at the market. He may also see a young woman outside by the river, tending to the cattle, or singing with youth at a wedding, and inquire about her. There are several different types of marriages, but the two most common are *gabbara/halanga* (lit. bridewealth/whip) and *wolgara* (lit. exchange of two wombs; exchange of daughters). In a *gabbara* wedding, a daughter from one family and clan is given (*gurgurra* – lit. to sell) to another family/clan. The groom, his father, friends, and male members of the groom's clan (called the *hamoomota*) travel to “take” (*fuudha*) the bride. At the bride's home, there are a series of rituals punctuated by songs. The bride's family gives a dowry (*geegayo*) to the groom, but much of this is cattle for the bride to have in her new life. In exchange, the groom also gives cattle, money and goods in various amounts as the bridewealth (*gabbara*) to the bride's family. After sealing the wedding agreement at the bride's home in a formal oral agreement in the presence of mainly male members of the two clans, the groom and his party return home with the bride. What finalizes the wedding ceremony in many areas of Arsi is a ceremony called *rakoo qaluu* (slaughter of *rakoo*, the sacrificed animal), which happens when the bride and groom arrive at the groom's home. The animal is killed, then the groom places blood on the bride's forehead

with his *waddeesa* (ceremonial stick) as means of legalizing the woman as his wife and an official member of his clan. Her children will also be members of the husband's clan. Weddings are an extremely important point of reference in Arsi society in order to understand the way gender is constructed and enacted. Technically Arsi women cannot participate in *ateetee* until they are married. Though they face inequalities and problematic differences in the socio-political power they have compared to men in Arsi society, women have *ateetee* to be able to protect and promote their respect honour and rights. As I will continue to ask throughout the dissertation, is *ateetee* something women can use to better their situation or is it merely a way to compensate for inequalities and reinforce the asymmetrical gender divisions?

For the Arsi Oromo polygamy is quite common, a practice that was used traditionally to increase intra-clan ties, to increase the number of offspring, and to extend a man's territory and cattle land by placing wives in different land locations. Today, as I experienced in home-stay situations, there are still many families constituted of multiple wives. Due to economic hardships, having several wives in order to broaden land claims is more common in the highlands where people have more crops and cattle, and are wealthier. It is also common for a businessman who lives in a town to marry a second wife and place her in another town where he owns a shop, justifying the need for the second wife in terms of business expansion. These marriages can also be politically or economically advantageous.

In rural areas where I lived in both lowlands and highlands, much historic social organization is still relevant today. Within this clan-based society, men traditionally took care of cattle, defended their clan/families by going to war, and passed on their values and



music to their sons. Women tended to work in and around the home, milking cows, and selling and buying goods at the market. Together men and women accomplished collective farming work. Today, though there thankfully is not as much war, raising cattle and farming are still very much a part of Arsi society, and much of it is done collectively. The oldest son inherits his father's land, so these traditional livelihoods do continue. In the Langan area, though many people now work in hotels in the vicinity, there are still many people living off the land. Life is generally sedentary in both the highlands and lowlands. It was always more sedentary in the highlands because there is grass and water year round. In the Langan area, during the winter dry season, male cattle raisers in the lowlands tend to head to the highlands to the east for the better grasses. During the summer rainy season, some families in the highlands travel down to the lowlands to escape the daily heavy rains and mosquitos. By the end of my first three-month stay in the Langan area, I had made strong connections with the family in the valley and their relatives in the highlands. I spent time in both of these areas, hiking for an entire day to get to the secluded highland areas that were not accessible by road at the time.

Although there are towns all over Oromia, in rural areas, such as the Langan countryside, most Oromo do not live in villages. One family lives on its homestead, surrounded by its fields. 200 metres away there may be another homestead. In the highlands, the distances are much greater between homes. And I have also found some more isolated areas where there are small family "villages" in which all the brothers of a family live in a large area surrounded by a fence and further surrounded by their fields. Houses are generally round, made of wood and mud, with a thatch-covered roof. Further south, where bamboo is easily accessible, some people make large woven bamboo homes.

More contemporary building structures are present in the countryside in the form of rectangular homes with walls made of wood and mud or cement and with high roofs of corrugated metal. When I returned to Langano in 2014, Llamo had just built one of these new rectangular homes.

Pastoral lifestyles still apply in many areas, but men's and women's roles are also changing. Many men and women now hold part-time government or private positions in addition to farming. In rural areas, there are some limited work opportunities in tourism and with NGOs. Many other Arsi have abandoned rural areas and farming for town or city life. Some Arsi had already owned a business or had been living in towns prior to this recent rural exodus. Further changes that have contributed to rural exodus include: fathers who are living longer; large numbers of children putting severe stress on limited land resources; and consumer culture and inflation leading to an increasing number of people dissatisfied or unable to meet their basic needs with subsistence living alone. These changes have led to people moving to urban centres, youth unemployment and persistent poverty. Though the Ethiopian economy has improved over the past decade, unemployment remains widespread, particularly in urban centres, and for youth and women (Broussar and Tekleselassie 2012, Guarcello and Rosati 2007).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For many youths who have grown up in the countryside, education can be a major challenge. Many children in the countryside attend school late or their education is interrupted because they need to help on the farm, care for their siblings, herd the cattle, or their parents do not have the money for the school supplies. There are schools, but there are not enough for the number of students. When students from the countryside reach the level of high school, many must rent rooms in the town in order to attend classes and pay for the uniforms and books. If their family does not have the money for this, they simply cannot attend school. If they can attend high school, there are further challenges for those from rural areas who only know Oromo (or the language of their specific ethnic group). Since Ethiopia's national government is organized as ethnic federalism, each ethnic region can teach in their own language; in Oromia students learn in Oromo until they reach high school. They only have Amharic and English (ESL) as subjects taught twice a week until grade 9, when all of their subjects and national exams are conducted in

As for religion, today there are many different belief systems practised in Oromia, including Oromo vernacular religion, Christianity, Islam, variants of all of these and other folk religions. During the time of the Ethiopian emperors at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity and Islam were the only recognized religions. Many of the Oromo who continue to practice their vernacular beliefs are also self-declared members of one of the “official” religions, practicing the latter to varying degrees. Among the Arsi Oromo, Islam is the most prevalent mainstream religion. Among the other vernacular religions, there are many followers of Sheikh Hussein, a Muslim belief system that has existed in the Bale region of Oromia for hundreds of years, with many followers from other regions and areas. Every year there is a pilgrimage to the site of Sheikh Hussein in the Bale zone and smaller pilgrimages to sites such as Sof Umaar Gutoo in the Nansabo district. Contemporary and traditional perceptions and enactments of belief will be explored in detail throughout the dissertation.

My two master’s research projects grew out of that first stay with my Arsi Oromo family. During that first research trip I studied wedding rituals, attending and participating in six ceremonies. My first master’s thesis examines how, in Arsi Oromo

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English. This leaves students from rural areas at an extreme disadvantage for succeeding in school and job searches after, because they do not have the necessary English and Amharic skills. The common teacher to student ratio in a high school classroom is 1 to 90 or more. This is the same for laboratories, where students cannot physically practice experiments. Learning is by memorization, and content is often delivered by teachers who do not teach with clear accents and grammatically correct English. In grade 10, students must take national exams that are entirely in English. If they do not pass, their high school career is over: they do not have a chance at continuing to grade 12. Testing for universities or for government trade schools is available only for those who score high enough after grade 10, and the only options for continuing education are expensive private colleges. For youth who have only known their ethnic language and have not had much exposure to English, having only two years to achieve this level of English and of comprehension is very difficult. Furthermore, if they did not have much contact with other ethnic groups, they will not know much Amharic either, and this is the national language. This puts many youth at an extreme disadvantage for succeeding in school and for the job market, which often requires education and at least a working knowledge of the national language.

society, men, women and youths have distinct social responsibilities and musical repertoires. Wedding rituals reflect this gender/age social structure and are a means by which these groups construct their identities and values. My second master's research project grew out of the first. For that study, I returned two times during 2005 and 2006 for a cumulative six months. Among men at weddings and in society, I had come to know warriors (*qondala*) who could sing praise songs (*geerarsa*) because they have a particular status, having killed a wild animal or another person. Although the "warriors" have this very particular status, these individuals are also active members of society, as farmers, cattle raisers, merchants, teachers, workers, etc. These individuals stood out from the group and the group ethic that was so prevalent in Arsi society, in both their leadership in singing and in life. I also observed concord and conflict between groups and individuals in other types of music and in society, so I began to question the roles and actions of individuals and groups. The group is such an important structure in Oromo society, in terms of the kinship system, clan organization, the socio-political system, every day work and gatherings, and music making. That said, group structure and action is never static: there are always inherent tensions within the group and between individual leaders. My research on men's song performances in individual and group contexts showed how expressive behaviour could mean the difference between achieving concord and succumbing to physical conflict.

For the second master's, I conducted research in the lowlands around Langano Lake and in two separate highland areas east of the lake, one in a region called Luugaa (in the countryside around the town called Kancharee) and the other in the countryside around Qarsaa. I stayed with the same family in the Rift Valley, their relatives in the

highlands around Luugaa, and the relatives of one of the cultural officers in the Qarsaa countryside. I strengthened and deepened some of the former family and friend connections and built new ones. Though all of my interlocutors were Arsi Oromo and they all spoke the same language and shared the same general traditions, I found dramatic cultural differences between the highlands and the lowlands. In the highlands, many Arsi practiced rituals regularly that were either no longer practiced in the lowlands or had never been practiced in the same manner. I became interested in these variations, the dynamics of change and the many factors that led to these differences.

My doctoral research has built on and grown from this pre-doctoral work. This research emerged out of years of living in and working with different Arsi Oromo communities and out of spending time with women. I often heard women talk about their daily lives and the challenges and struggles they faced, yet observed how they managed to continue their lives with optimism, strength, and strong spirit. With the exception of the women I lived with on a daily basis, I initially found women more challenging to work with than men. This is because many face emotional and economic hardships, are afraid or not accustomed to talking to unfamiliar people, and simply cannot take the time away from their household, family and farm duties. With repeated lengthy stays, I gradually began to know many more women than those in my immediate family and I participated in many women's activities and events, resulting in a gain of trust among women in the communities. In conversations, women began asking me why I wasn't working on their music and culture. They told me stories about the ateetee ceremonies, sang the prayers and demonstrated the ritual. I was inspired by the many strong women with whom I had the privilege of spending time. These conversations and demonstrations

with and by women and our shared time together, led me to further question the position and voice of women in a male dominated society, where women are excluded from male spaces, activities and political decisions, yet have their own mechanisms and spaces.

### **Multiple coexisting gender relationships**

As I will continue to explore later in this chapter and in this dissertation, describing gender relations in Arsi society in binary terms does not convey their complexities. Instead, by analyzing the everyday, narratives, social situations, and specific events, it is possible to begin to perceive these multiple coexisting gender relationships. With the exception of women's councils, female council leaders and elder female leaders, women have traditionally been excluded from the political realm, tending to children's socialization, the domestic sphere, markets, and farm work (Gemedda 2000). Mamo Hebo, an Oromo scholar from the Kokossa district who has worked extensively on land tenure, dispute resolutions related to land, and women's access to land and property ownership in the Kokossa district of the Arsi highlands, describes a division of activities between women and men:

The division between the domestic and extra-domestic activities is almost clear-cut and well defended, particularly by women. Unlike what has been described for other sub-Saharan Africans, where women are said to be the backbone of agriculture and contribute most of the agricultural labour, Arsii Oromo women's responsibility predominantly, if not exclusively, is limited to the domestic sphere, that is, to change what men produce to consumable items. Thus man and land are tied together because he is the one who is expected to till that land, produce and feed his family. This closeness between men and land gives a superficial impression that men own land while women do not. (Hebo 2006, 90)

Though this division may be more flagrant in the Kokossa district, I have met many Arsi women who do farm work. In the Langano area in the Arsi lowlands, this is often the case. Though men and youth tend to plant the seeds, men and women work together

during the harvest. However, most Arsi women I know in both rural and urban settings would still defend the domestic realm as women's domain. In Arsi tradition and norms, it is considered morally wrong (*saffuu*) for men to do certain domestic chores (see chapter 3 for more on *saffuu*). As Hebo indicates at the end of this excerpt, women do own land. However, this land ownership is held in conjunction with their husbands and immediate family. Generally while the husband is alive, the land is maintained in his name. If he has multiple wives, he will have land holdings in the names of the different wives. Because divorce is relatively recent and rare, upon divorce a woman does not have rights to the land she shared with her family. Part of this is to keep the land stays within the husband's clan if the woman remarries (Hebo 2006, 87 -90).

Today, some women are going on to high school and higher education, working in government and private positions, and moving to more urban centres. However, women still face more challenges than their male counterparts in access to education, employment and other opportunities. Hebo and Shigeta describe the gender imbalance in relation to property and land rights in the Kokossa district:

Male children are generally preferred over female children. These practices discourage, if not explicitly forbid, a woman's inheritance of her parents' property. The dominance of men in economic, legal, and political spheres is obvious. Although one cannot make absolute generalizations about men's domination and women's subordination in all spheres of life, men make the major decisions regarding property (e.g., selling, gifting, and inheriting), and the culture generally places males at the top of the social hierarchy. Thus, the customs favor men over women and thereby perpetuate inequality. (Hebo and Shigeta 2014, 20-21)

It is certain that in a patrilineal society, access to property, land ownership and rights after divorce are areas that are still marked by inequalities today. In a contemporary and ever changing pluralistic legal setting, Arsi women have Ethiopian constitutional rights that grant them the same access to property, land and livelihoods as men. However in Arsi

society, there are norms, roles, and rights that are connected with the patrilineal society and do not provide the same provisions as the constitution. Many of these local land and property ownership issues are regulated by Arsi customary law. A woman who is married and stays married has access to land even after her husband's death. But a woman who never marries or who divorces and does not remarry is at the mercy of her birth family and clan. For women who do not conform to the norms of Arsi patrilineal society, traditionally they do not have the same rights to land as men do. Today they can apply to the government courts to enforce their constitutional rights. In the dissertation I will further discuss these divisions and the negotiations men and women are making between "traditional" norms, customary law and the Ethiopian constitution.

In other domains than property and land ownership, Marit Østebø, a scholar who has worked for years among the Arsi Oromo, has argued that Arsi Oromo women's roles are not the same as men's, but different and complementary (2009, 2015). In a recent publication, which is based on ethnographic work on gender equality in Ethiopia, she demonstrates how government and NGO gender "experts" see equality as "sameness" while local community members speak of "complementarity" and "conjugal dialogue" (Østebø 2015). As Østebø argues, "One should not assume that a radical change in the gendered division of labour is necessarily key to women's emancipation. Such changes could in fact be a threat to the power, respect and autonomy that women to some extent already have" (Østebø 2015, 460). Of course imposing notions of "gender equality" can be completely disrupting in relation to the position and rights women already hold in their society. At the same time, I think it is necessary to question the notion of complementarity. As feminist anthropological scholars have demonstrated (Moore 1988,



Ortner 1972, Rosaldo 1980) in the past complementarity has been a means to justify politics of discriminatory or unbalanced relationships between the sexes. In the case of the Arsi Oromo, is it possible to be separate or different, but equal? Or, as Hebo and Shigeta (2014) indicate, can complementarity be a means for some men to reinforce male domination in the patrilineal structure? As Østebø contends, complementarity can be meant to refer to women's agency and their lives as they are lived on their own terms. However, because of the inherently complex and negative connotations with the term, perhaps it is not the right one to use when discussing complex gender relations. These questions related to gender negotiations and conceptualizations bring me to a similar question in relation to *ateetee*. Can *ateetee*, which was historically created to uphold women's rights, also be a mechanism that keeps women in an expected position in society in relation to men? Or is *ateetee* a mechanism that allows women not only to defend their rights, but to change social norms and their position in society? In all cases, as I explore in this dissertation, it is important to consider the Arsi gender complexities in relation to *ateetee* through local perspectives, including individual narratives, community contextualization, and specific cases.

It is true that, as with land ownership, some cultural norms and traditions are not in the interest of some Arsi women, but in other cases, Arsi women have their own spaces, respect and power. This is the case with *ateetee* and women's *saddeetta* (women's councils, lit., group of eight). Women have always had local political roles in their communities through *saddeetta* councils, comprised of around eight elected members. These women decide whether or not to call for an *ateetee* ritual and they are involved in any issues concerning women, sometimes joining in discussions with the men's councils.

However, their gendered positions remain demarcated: although the *saddeettaa* leader can speak the group's concerns freely, when the women's council is gathered with the men's, the women sit behind or to the side of the men. Furthermore, the women's *saddeetta* does not take part in all ceremonies or legal cases (see Chapter 2).

## Researching Ateetee

When I first embarked on this research, I knew ateetee was a sung process that women could use for different purposes, including but not limited to: childbirth, women who cannot conceive, sickness, scarcity of rain, war, disputes, and gender violence. I did not have many more details, except for stories from elders about how they used ateetee to pray for rain, or insult an offender and sing for reconciliation. Rather than begin with a specific definition, I decided to begin by asking women what ateetee meant to them.

These are some of the answers I received: Ateetee is...

“Nui, beeran”  
 “Waaqa kadhaachuu”  
 “Aadaa Oromootti”  
 “mirgaa dubartoota”  
 “seeraa aadaa keenyattitti dubarttiin”  
 “kabajaa duubarttitti”  
 “aadaa dubartoota”  
 “aadaa keenyaa”  
 “Waaqa waamachuuf”  
 “Illiilli jechoodha”  
 “faaruu”  
 “namaa”  
 “abbaa irraan itti dhufinee”  
 “araraa naa araramii”  
 “ateeteen arnyaa, arnyaa rabbi nuu gargaarii”  
 “guyyaa fuudhaa nuu keenyattii”

“Us, women”  
 “praying to *Waaqa* (God)”  
 “Oromo's culture”  
 “Women's rights”  
 “Our women's cultural law”  
 “respect given to women”  
 “women's culture”  
 “our culture”  
 “to call out/pray to God”  
 “it is ululating”  
 “songs”  
 “a person”  
 “it comes to us from our ancestors”  
 “reconciliation/dispute resolution”  
 “the power, the power of *rabbi* (God) to help us”  
 “given to us upon marriage”

“the rights given to us on our wedding day”  
“a culture that came to us from the past  
from our women’s agreement”

Ateetee is a word that has many meanings for different Oromo women. As seen above, this word can evoke a concept, a dispute resolution process, women’s rights, ancestors, singing, culture, a privilege associated with shift in status, and an actual person. For many, Ateetee is a female spirit who looks over them, and she is also sometimes referred to through other names such as: Mother (*Haadhhaa*), Grandmother (*Akko*, *Akkayyoo*), or Maryam. The latter has been interchangeably used by Christian Oromo in some areas with the Virgin Mary (Gemetchu Megerssa, Personal communication).

Many women also answered by giving descriptions of different types of ateetee ceremonies. Today there are basically two main categories of ateetee ceremonies that are commonly practiced: (1) Ateetee is a vernacular community dispute resolution mechanism that is used when a woman has been abused or insulted. It is organized and led by women. When a woman has been abused by another person in any way (verbally, physically or otherwise),<sup>8</sup> she takes her *siinqee* (spiritual stick)<sup>9</sup> and travels with other women to the offender’s house singing insults. In front of the offender’s house they continue to sing insults and prayers while the women’s *saddeetta* (council) members negotiate with the men’s *saddeetta*. At the end, the offender is expected to confess his/her guilt, ask for forgiveness and offer a gift, usually in the form of a cow for sacrifice. (2)

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<sup>8</sup> Although *ateetee* is used for all different types of disputes and many types of violence, it is not used for what are considered extremely serious or severe crimes, namely rape and murder.

<sup>9</sup> *Siinqee* (or *siinqee*) designates both: (1) a blessed stick from a specific tree given to a woman on her wedding day in a blessing ceremony, for her to keep as a sign of respect for her rights and spiritual power; and (2) an exclusively women’s spiritual and political institution that parallels that of the men.

Ateetee consists of prayers to ask for rain when the rainy season has not yet begun, and in cases of scarcity of rain or drought. Women go to the river with their *siinqee* (spiritual sticks), praying for the rains to come. Ateetee can also be used for several other problems, including but not limited to: infertility; difficulties with conception, pregnancy and childbirth; sickness; war; disputes; and gender violence (see appendix 2 for a chart of different types of ateetee ceremonies). In all these manifestations, it is important to remember that the way women evoke and practice ateetee varies depending on several factors, including the specific type of case, the individuals involved, the communities, and the geographic areas.

Sometimes scholars and interlocutors refer to what I call ateetee as *siinqee* or the *siinqee* institution. *Siinqee* is the name of the object, but it also designates a society belonging exclusively to women<sup>10</sup> who are or have been married. *Siinqee* society has cultural, spiritual and political functions. Often referred to as the *siinqee* institution (Kumsa 1997, Mamuye 2010), I would opt for a word such as society, organization or mobilization to describe this women's system within the Oromo socio-political system. Some Oromo scholars I have met have insisted that these gatherings of women are called *siinqee* or gatherings of the *siinqee* institution, while the songs are called *ateetee*. However, in the areas where I conducted research, women do not really use a term like

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<sup>10</sup> There is no provision for women who never marry. When I asked informants whether mature, unmarried women could participate in the *ateetee* ceremonies, other women told me they could. However, I never met an unmarried woman in any of the ceremonies. Unless a woman is physically or mentally impaired, she marries. Of course this is changing with education and geographical displacements (e.g., youth moving to larger metropolises for education or employment).

“institution” but instead call both the ceremonies and the sung repertoires *ateetee*.<sup>11</sup> Marit Østebø also confirms that these two terms “refer interchangeably to religious fertility ceremonies as well as to political mobilizations conducted when women’s rights, or perhaps more correct to say, women’s wayyuu has been violated” (Østebø 2007, 62).<sup>12</sup> This observation is seconded by Tolosa Mamuye (2010), an Oromo scholar who also conducted research in Kokossa (one of my field research sites). Although he refers to the “women-based institution” as *siinqee*, in a detailed analysis of the use of the two terms, he explains that *ateetee* and *siinqee* are used interchangeably. Throughout his thesis he alternates these two terms, referring to the women involved in the ceremonies as “*ateetee* women” (Tolosa Mamuye 2010, 44–45).<sup>13</sup>

Though I will describe other types of *ateetee* ceremonies, in this dissertation, I focus on the *ateetee* for dispute resolution/reconciliation. There are many parts of the *ateetee* process that allow women to express themselves, to complain about injustices and to achieve resolution. Some of the more obvious expressions are in the different steps of the ritual. The following is an abbreviated list. I will give a more detailed list in Chapter 6:

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<sup>11</sup> If they do refer to the women’s organizations, they often talk about *aadaa dubartoota* (women’s culture) or *welgayy’ee dubartoota* (women’s meetings).

<sup>12</sup> The concept “wayyuu” indicates roughly something that is blessed or spiritually significant. To harm something that is *wayyuu* upsets the order of respect and balance in the Oromo worldview. This concept will be explored further in chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> He also states that a ceremony cannot be called *ateetee* if the women do not have *siinqee* in their hands (Tolosa Mamuye, 2010, 44). I, however, disagree with this statement. Though there are always women who have *siinqee* at the *ateetee* ceremonies, there are, similarly, women who do not have *siinqee*. In the past, almost all the women may have come with their *siinqee*, but today, perhaps, it is only necessary that some women have *siinqee*. There is a degree of flexibility between what women say should happen at a ceremony and what takes place.

- (1) After an Arsi Oromo woman has been abused, she can voice her grievances to the women's council. Then, if they deem that the offense is a "wrong" (*yakka*) that has violated her rights, they begin the *ateetee* process.
- (2) While going to the offender's house with neighbouring women, she can sing insults about the offender. This exposes the violation to all who hear them.
- (3) Once at the offender's house, she and the other women sing about the offense and sing prayers for a resolution.
- (4) During this time groups of women, including the women's committee, are involved in negotiations with the male elders.
- (5) Once the negotiations are finished, the offender apologizes by slaughtering a cow. The male elders distribute the meat and hides, and they put blood on the women's foreheads as a blessing.
- (6) After this act of reparation the women bless him/her and the other male elders who facilitated.

I found that, in addition to music, the discourses, general research, and data on *ateetee* presented three key theoretical problems: legal pluralism, indigenous belief, and women's rights. These areas, which are the main theoretical foci in this research, overlap in my interlocutors' discourses and in this dissertation.

For this doctoral study, I spent more than fifteen months conducting research in Ethiopia, including an initial trip (2009), one continuous academic year (2010–2011) and follow-up trips (2012, 2014). In order to fully understand the dynamics of the *ateetee* ritual, I needed to work in highland areas where the ritual was still in practice and in

lowland areas and towns where women no longer practiced the ritual or where it was in decline. I decided to go to an area that was highly recommended for its current practice of *ateetee*: Kokossa, a highland town located over 250 km south of Addis Ababa, in the highlands of West Arsi Zone, east of the city Hawassa. I traveled to this town for the first time in 2009, conducting interviews and fieldwork in the town and the surrounding countryside. I found confirmation that the *ateetee* ritual was alive and well through conversations and interviews with community members, including elders and women who were actively involved in women's councils and *ateetee* rituals when they occurred.

In the fall of 2010, my spouse and I moved to Ethiopia for the year. We took up residence in Adama, the administrative capital of Oromo region, located 90 km southeast of Addis Ababa. Although there are many other ethnic groups present, the Oromo are the largest group in Adama and Oromo is widely spoken there. When I arrived, I contacted the Oromo Office of Culture and Tourism, whose employees are effectively government-paid folklorists, who have a duty to do research, document and organize activities (and sometimes festivals) related to local heritage and culture.<sup>14</sup> It turned out that one worker, Kabbabush, was documenting *ateetee* in the area, so we quickly formed a research collaboration and spent a month travelling around to different areas of the city, including some bordering very rural areas,<sup>15</sup> conducting interviews and attending ceremonies. The

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<sup>14</sup> These offices and the workers will be discussed in more detail in the dissertation (chapter 4). Since the department's mandates include culture and tourism, using the workers' research to create touristic or folkloristic versions of music and dances that can be promoted for tourism is part of the goal.

<sup>15</sup> All of the cities in Ethiopia are growing, but, when I was living in Adama, the countryside was always very close. We could go running from our home and quickly be in an area with fields and desert. The climate is very dry and windy, so there were often dust-filled winds blowing around. And hyenas were often seen on the outskirts of town and sometimes within the city. Any of the city limits are surrounded by very rural areas with farms and livestock. While doing this research in Adama, I was able to talk to several

majority of the Oromo around Adama are from the Shewa subgroup, so for me, it was fascinating to document how they practice *ateetee* in comparison with the way the Arsi Oromo conduct the ritual.<sup>16</sup> Since the Shewa Oromo can be found all over Oromia, I had many other opportunities to build on this research conducted in Adama.

Another pivotal connection in Adama was our friend, neighbour, and colleague, Dr. Gemetchu Megerssa and his spouse, Dr. Aneessa Kassam, both anthropologists and Oromo specialists. Aneessa conducted her initial work with the Gabra Oromo in northern Kenya and has since worked on many aspects of Oromo culture, developing and publishing research on the Oromo. During my time in Adama, I was fortunate to have some insightful discussions with her. As a young man, Gemetchu worked as an assistant for some of the most famous scholars of the Oromo, such as Lambert Bartels and P.T.W. Baxter, and among all the different Oromo subgroups. This included lengthy stays in some Oromo communities, including a number of years with the Borana Oromo in Southern Ethiopia. Gemetchu is Matcha Oromo, from the west of Ethiopia and is holder of the *bokkuu*, literally a symbolic staff but also politically one of the most respected and highest responsibilities in the *gadaa* system. I have known him since 2002, when I took my first trip to Ethiopia, and since then our friendship and intellectual discussions have thrived. During the time we lived as neighbours, we spent much time discussing and debating Oromo matters. These conversations provided me with extraordinary insight into

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individuals and groups of women who practiced *ateetee* in different ways and who lived in rural and urban locations.

<sup>16</sup> The Shewa Oromo conduct the *ateetee* ritual privately in their homes as prayers for different reasons, including for cases of dispute resolution. One Shewa Oromo scholar I met suggested that this more private, insular way of practicing *ateetee* might not be the way it was always practiced. When the Shewa Oromo were colonized by the Amhara ethnic group in the late nineteenth century, hiding some of their cultural practices may have been a means for survival and integration. Some of the more externally expressive practices may at this time have been forced indoors, into private spaces.



my work and helped me frame and understand many of my fieldwork questions, ideas and findings.

My Oromo language skills have greatly improved over time, and I can now hold conversations with people, understand most things, read and write. But I was hoping to find a young woman who could be my assistant for my fieldwork throughout the year to help me with interviews, transcriptions, translations, and with whom I could collaborate. I did not find a local Arsi woman since there are many challenges on this front: not many Arsi women have the opportunity to achieve a high level of literacy, and often they have other responsibilities, such as family, school, and work. I did find a young Oromo woman who worked with me, travelled with me and helped me conduct interviews and transcribe for the year, but her command of English was not at a sufficient level for translation, so we worked in Oromo. Additionally, I received an incredible amount of assistance from some of the cultural officers and new friends I made while conducting fieldwork. Gemechu Geda, another Oromo scholar I met while conducting field work, and with whom I conducted some research in Bishaan Gurracha and the Nansabo district, was very helpful on the field and has continued to be a supportive advising scholar and friend since then. Gemechu completed his PhD on syncretism in Oromo indigenous belief systems (see chapter 3 for references to his work).

I spent my research time alternating between Adama and five other areas: in the Rift Valley near Langano Lake, around the town of Kokossa,<sup>17</sup> in the Kokossa district

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<sup>17</sup> The population of Kokkossa is 3,224 according to the 2007 Ethiopian Census and around 10,000 for the town and the immediate surrounding areas according to local authorities.

countryside in the highlands East of Hawassa, around a town called Worqaa<sup>18</sup> in a region southwest of the Bale Mountains called Nansabo, and in the extensive countryside of Nansabo. My primary focus was the Arsi Oromo, but I also had informal conversations, attended ceremonies and conducted research with Matcha, Guji, Karayu and Shewa Oromo, many of whom were living in predominantly Arsi areas.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes the rituals may not have the same name or may not be practiced in the same way, and there may be striking differences in the way traditions have been passed down, but often cosmology, belief and socio-political systems are very similar. I continued working near Langano in order to ask about the decline or demise of ateetee. In contrast, the two highland locations both Kokkossa and Nansabo districts, are areas with very active women's councils and frequent ateetee ceremonies. In this last location I was fortunate to have the help of Dirriba Begna, a dedicated and energetic cultural worker (and head of the cultural office at the time) who loves documenting and supporting local culture. Gemechu Geda and I met Dirriba at a cultural festival in November, and he enthusiastically told us that we needed to come to his region for research, beginning with a pilgrimage called Sof Umaar Guutuu that was happening in December. We both travelled there for the pilgrimage, which proved to be an extraordinary experience. I continued working with Dirriba, returning frequently to the region.

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<sup>18</sup> The population of Worqaa is 6,068 according to the 2007 Ethiopian Census 2007 and around 8,000 according to local authorities.

<sup>19</sup> The Shewa Oromo, who are predominantly Ethiopian Orthodox, live in many areas throughout Oromia. Historically, Shewa came from around Addis Ababa, but many either had to leave or were given land in rural areas of Ethiopia after the conquest at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to sending Amhara government representatives to these areas, this was also a means for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the ruling government to have representation throughout the country and, in this case, Arsi Oromia (Haustein and Østebø 2012, Østebø 2012).

In reading this dissertation, it is important to have a clear picture of the rural nature of these towns and the surrounding countryside. Simply getting to the town of Worqaa in Nansabo involved a long journey. After arriving at the junction town (and frequently later than planned if buses had broken down), the dirt road became rougher and more mountainous as it went on. Because there were few buses per day (and sometimes only one), by the time the bus arrived in Worqaa, it was packed, with multiple people in each seat for two and people standing up all along the aisle of the bus. There were inevitable traffic police stops, which would culminate with either a ticket for the bus driver or some form of bribe. One time when I was travelling to Worqaa, our bus stopped in Garanbambo (the town at the halfway mark) for a good part of the afternoon because the driver was involved in a lengthy dispute resolution ceremony that needed to be concluded before we could continue. No matter what delays occurred, when the bus finally arrived at the vista before the last perilous descent into Worqaa, it was breathtaking. You could look down and see Worqaa: a coffee-producing town with a river running through, nestled in a valley between lush, green mountains.

With Dirriba and others, we traveled hundreds of kilometers on foot, attending rituals, holding discussions and interviews with groups of women and other community members, and staying with people in the countryside where we traveled. This area will have undoubtedly changed by the time this writing is finished, but during the entire time of my fieldwork, it remained extremely rural and remote. In the town of Worqaa, there was no tap water, and electricity and cell phone reception was unreliable, limiting connection with the outside world to trucks and buses that came to town. The irony of the lack of infrastructure is that the region, with its prosperous coffee production, has a

number of wealthy merchants. Some of these merchants and former inhabitants are contributing to development projects in the region.<sup>20</sup> Personally, I was touched by the generosity of many people I met in the Nansabo area. Tayere Godana who is the Abbaa Gaada, a local leader in the *gaada* system, was extremely helpful and generous with his time and hospitality on a number of occasions. The culture of “the guest” (*keesumaa*) was prevalent wherever I went, so I was often invited into homes for meals and given places to stay.

Kokkossa was much more accessible by bus since the road was shorter, less mountainous, graded and was much more traveled. As in Worqaa, I stayed in town and went on day trips to the nearby countryside or on longer trips to further rural areas. At times these travels took me to the Sidama Zone, principally occupied by members of the Sidama ethnic group, neighbours and historic enemies of the Arsi Oromo. In the Kokkossa area, I also worked with Gemedi, one of the cultural office workers. We would travel on foot to surrounding areas, staying in his village or in the countryside at the house of Shuru, one of the women’s council leaders. I have spent hours and even days with people in their homes, returning multiple times to see friends, to talk to informants and to follow up on interviews.

The lowland locations I worked in were chosen based on personal relationships I had been developing for years. The comparison with the Shewa ethnic group also gave

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<sup>20</sup> Hussein Ambo, a man who is originally from the area, and his spouse Haleema Hussein, have made efforts to contribute to his hometown, the broader community and the region. They have started local NGOs (including a coffee co-op and a women’s entrepreneur organization started for widows and those without land) and have found funding for an impressive bridge and road construction project in a remote area that did not previously have a road. I have met both of them on several occasions, discussing ideas on ways I could help contribute or we could collaborate together on projects in the community.

added perspectives on ateetee, women's roles, and their methods for negotiating their spaces and rights in their communities. However, I chose to focus on the Arsi Oromo in this dissertation, so I have only cited the Shewa rituals in passing. I chose some of the highland field site locations, such as Kokossa and Worqaa, because of the frequency of the rituals there. However, a disadvantage of the highland locations is that their remoteness can make them and the context of the ritual very localized. Because I, quite literally, covered a lot of ground in the highlands, I hope that I am offering a representation of many voices in the regions. At the same time, I believe that an in-depth look at a particular individual and her stories through her voice, in a very localized context, can provide a deeper understanding of the ritual, the culture, and insight into particular worldviews. Though I did not focus on one person in this dissertation, I would be interested in doing this in the future. While not losing sight of the broader perspectives, understanding very local perspectives and situations is key to understanding views, perspectives and potential needs of individuals and community groups (Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993, Østebø, Marit 2009, Østebø, Terje 2012).

### **Methods in and out of the field**

I set off to conduct my fieldwork with an interlocutor- and community-focused ethnographic methodology in mind. From prior experience I had learned that if my interlocutors and my interactions and experiences with those community members were the main source of my methods and data, I always needed to be ready to change and adapt my ethnographic process. On a personal level, I found that my research went more smoothly if I stayed focused, trying to better understand my research questions, but at the

same time remained relaxed, adaptable and energetic. Maintaining this balance between focus and flexibility was a necessary combination for me not to face frustration. For example, many times I would set up interviews or discussions with people, only to arrive at a person's house to find that s/he went to the market (or hadn't returned), or left for another area for several months to herd the cattle, or went to visit a sick relative, etc. Life moves at a different pace for rural Arsi Oromo and even urban Arsi, and more broadly, in Ethiopia, than I grew up knowing. I did manage to spend much valuable time with many participants in different areas.<sup>21</sup> When I did sit down for interviews, although I had questions to guide them, I also let the participants expand on their answers and stories as much as they wanted. Often the interviews became more like discussions.

Because I wanted to remain close to the community, I chose to live with families in the countryside. In the rural towns, I would either stay with friends, rent a room or stay in what they call *mana sirree* (lit., house with beds, or a hotel).<sup>22</sup> The fieldwork was multi-sited, between the Arsi-Bale highlands and the lowlands around Langano Lake, with some additional work around and in the city of Adama. I conducted fieldwork in several ways, which included audio- and video-recordings of ateetee and other performances; formal and informal interviews, including feedback interviews of ritual events; casual discussions in homes or while traveling or participating in an event; and

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<sup>21</sup> The anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983) has discussed how it is these unplanned moments of ethnographic research, such as waiting for someone to arrive, miscommunications, and time shared chatting, that can give the most insight into a society. As I will discuss in the next section, the shared time can also contribute to meaningful ethnographic relationships.

<sup>22</sup> Some of the rural establishments I have stayed in are called hotels, but they are more like very rural lodging houses with no running water. There are usually restaurants and in the back or on the side there are a number of rooms, each with one bed, a small window and a metal door that you can lock with a small lock, either provided by the hotel or that you need to bring or purchase from a nearby shop. A shared outhouse is available for everyone to use. Usually there is no bathing space. I had to improvise a space or request a pitcher and a large basin in order to bathe.

group discussions with women in areas where the rituals are and are not practiced. I sometimes played recordings back for participants to see and hear. This stimulated conversations about the information or the repertoires and helped inform other community members about traditions and practices they had forgotten.

I found that although men would talk for several minutes when I asked one question or showed interest in a subject, women were often more apprehensive or hesitant to answer. It was usually easier to interview women whom I met through another friend or acquaintance. Living with a family and being in an area over time also created a space of trust and a natural origin for these conversations with women. I always made my presence and objectives known to everyone I met. Usually this happened by word of mouth and simply with my presence in an area. Because I was usually the only non-Ethiopian in the area, people inquired about my objectives and about me. In addition to these inquiries, I made it clear that any participants could limit their consent and offered the option of creating pseudonyms and eliminating any direct reference to specific locations or families.

As for the specifics of the interviews and conversations, I worked with women, men and youths in some of the following ways: specific question interviews and open-ended conversations with women in individual homes when the men were not home in order to have a more secluded conversation space; open-ended conversations in individual homes with women and men, together and separately, in order to have conversations about rituals and the ways men and women negotiate their positions in society; conversations with female youths to understand their perspectives on the ritual and the women's groups; organized meetings or gatherings of women so that I could

discuss and record with the group; interviews with women and men in town and its close proximity; and interviews with male and female leaders and elders in the Oromo community, local cultural office and government officials.

In some respects, the conversations with female youths proved to have the most surprising results because they were very candid with their answers, examples and stories. In some of the rural areas many unexpected stories emerged about abduction for forced marriage and sugar daddy/sugar baby relationships. Although the former is not legal, it still occurs in the countryside, particularly in the Nansabo highlands; and the latter, though frowned-upon by families and societies, has become quite a common means for young women to pay fees associated with attending school. My Ethiopian colleagues and I were surprised by the frequency of both of these practices and the young age of the persons involved. Though not directly related to ateetee, these conversations are leading me toward future research projects.

The powerful results of long-term ethnographic research and its qualitative methodologies should not be underestimated. Through her analyses over the years, Lila Abu-Lughod has demonstrated the power of the “ethnography of the particular” and of “writing against culture” (1993, 2000, 2013). In the same way, many other ethnographers have demonstrated the fruitfulness of this type of work. Nader’s account of her fieldwork sites in the Zapotec mountain villages is especially relevant to this study:

A number of empirical questions also guided my early work. What did people fight and argue about publicly? Who initiated disputes, and what was the outcome for the individual as well as for the society? Within what groups were disputes concentrated? How did disputes at one level of organization affect those at another? And what were the manifest and hidden jobs of the law, and how were they related to the social structure? I envisioned a qualitative and quantitative sampling of dispute cases. The law case was my focus because I knew that the case in some form (dramatic or mundane) is present in every society: there are always parties who articulate complaints against others (though whether I would discover any particular procedure such as adjudication was



uncertain). Furthermore, I thought that mapping the component parts of a case would produce results that could prove useful as a springboard for comparative work. This was the heyday of componential analysis, and I was attracted by the idea of transposing the linguistic notion of a scant number of units to the law case. Little did I realize that the passion of the litigants could not be converted into minimal units. (Nader 2000, 23)

Because of my experience doing ethnographic work with the Arsi, the qualitative nature of this project, and my strong convictions in the benefits of qualitative work, quantitative work was never a consideration for me. However, the dispute-related questions Nader outlines gave me some ideas on how to question the dispute resolution process. In that same book she also described how she went into the community with initial ideas on community disputes, but while researching she discovered many other political, socio-cultural and historic layers. The following are some examples of questions of my own that were inspired by her research on indigenous legal traditions. What were some of the disputes that would merit an *ateetee* process? What types of insults would result in *ateetee*? How was this determined and who decided whether the offender was guilty? How was the *ateetee* process initiated? Why? Where did the process take place? Who helped through the process? What were the potential positive and negative outcomes for individuals and community members? What were the different layers that were sometimes hidden under the public dispute processes?

The video work I conducted merits particular discussion because it is a major part of my methodology and a powerful and effective demonstration of the thesis. I videotaped all interviews, some discussions, most rituals, and even landscapes. I always had the video camera ready for use. In addition to using it for documentation, I used it afterwards to check facts and review what happened on particular occasions. As for the rituals and other events, the camera brings to life moments that are difficult to put on the page.

Unfortunately I do not have an entire ateetee ritual for dispute resolution documented on camera, as I was only able to record part of one and because an agreement at that ceremony wasn't reached by the time I had to leave: it was deferred to a later, undefined date when I could not attend.

Of all the methodologies and practices, the casual discussions and the shared experiences were the most useful, instructive and memorable. Furthermore, they were the most natural for community members and myself, initiating from our shared living and allowing all of us to make more sincere and deeper connections that I hope will last a lifetime. Some of the kitchen discussions alone with women ranged from accounts of ateetee participation to their own and more disturbing stories of female circumcision, abduction for marriage, and discontent with the relationship with their husbands or with the fact their husband had taken or was taking on another wife (or wives). All of these very intimate discussions not only intensified my understanding of women's lives, but also drew us together through the shared experiences. Having the time to hang out, whether intentional or not, often deepened relationships but also often led to new and unexpected connections and opportunities. I spent many hours socializing and waiting for people in small village cafes and bars, especially on market days. In this manner, I frequently met elders and knowledgeable community members. Sometimes we would have a lengthy conversation or interview on that very day; other times it would lead to an arranged meeting at a later date.

I always travelled in the countryside with others, with friends, cultural office workers and sometimes children of friends. Many times during the year, Buzu, my assistant was with us too. To do research among the Oromo, I always had to obtain

authorizations in Addis Ababa, the capital. I also always had permissions from the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) and from the Oromia Culture and Tourism division in Addis Ababa. I then took these authorizations to the local Culture and Tourism Office that I would be working with. Respecting that authorization hierarchy is important in Ethiopia, especially when researching in an area for the first time. In some areas the cultural offices are more involved in the community than others; involvement also depended on the head of the office and funding. Usually the office assigned a cultural officer to me in the field based on availability at the time, but there were two notable exceptions. In Kokossa, it has always been the same person—Gemedi Galchu—and in Nansabo I always worked with Dirriba Begna, the head of the office at the time. Both of them were very helpful and knowledgeable and facilitated connections with community members, but Dirriba really went beyond his office duties and provided exceptional assistance. In this regard, I did not really have a choice of people I would travel with, but I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Dirriba, and met many others along the way who were always eager to help. The advantage of working with the culture and tourism offices is that the workers were often from rural communities themselves, they were well connected and accepted by those communities, they did not mind travelling to and staying in rural locations, and they were honestly very interested in local cultural practices. The disadvantage of the tourism part of the title is that the culture and tourism office does have an underlying agenda of promoting culture for the purpose of tourism. Furthermore, they tend to promote a static definition of what Arsi culture is and how it should be performed. Their research and documentation has a goal of preservation and folklorisation of cultural practices for

festivals and tourism. This can lead to rehearsed, staged representations of traditional practices. However, in most of the rural areas and the small, isolated towns where I worked, the festivals (*ayyanna*, lit. holiday) were only attended by local people so the culture and tourism offices actually helped with the continuation of very localized practices and they helped create and reaffirm links between different community members.

Fieldwork in the rural areas was challenging physically and sometimes emotionally, due to geography, logistics and communication issues. I travelled on foot often over mountainous terrains for many kilometers, and, sometimes, entire days at a time, often without eating much except for the snacks I brought along. I only mention these challenges because that is what the Arsi Oromo live on a day-to-day basis. That is how the Arsi Oromo travel in areas without automotive transportation. They eat breakfast, and then walk as fast as they can, often through the heat of the day (usually around 20–30° C), until they arrive at the sleeping place or final destination. Particularly in the mountainous areas, people travel by horse if they have them or can borrow them from relatives. Several times we had arranged for horses or a donkey (for bags) that never arrived or that arrived a day late, thus leading to a late departure during the hottest point in the day. The benefits of these hiking trips covering a geographically vast amount of terrain on foot included meeting people in remote areas that I would have never met otherwise, experiencing rituals and gatherings, and really traveling like everyone else. As a result of all these travels on foot, I gained a reputation in the areas. When I first crossed paths with travelers on the road, we always had short exchanges and conversations in Oromo because they always asked me what I was doing, where I was going, why I was

going on foot and more. Although this could be exhausting at times, especially days when I crossed paths with many people all asking the same questions, I have grown to understand it as part of the shared curiosity toward each other's cultures. I had been accepted as a guest on their lands and until I had spent much time there and became acquainted with many more people, I was to receive the same questions. Over time, we came to recognize each other and I was more often able to greet people on the trails with a simple *nagaa* (hello, lit., peace) or a name exchange. In lowland areas, where cars are sometimes available, people were often incredulous that I travelled on foot since they had never seen a foreigner walk so many kilometers. To this incredulity I would usually respond that I don't have a car, but I have feet and can walk, so it is only natural that I use them. This would often elicit laughter and a friendly, more meaningful exchange.

Travelling on a lack of food can be challenging at times. But even more challenging are sickness and conditions that cause sickness. Staying in people's homes, we were all challenged by smoky air from cooking fires, sicknesses such as colds and coughs passed on from others, contaminated food, and insects (such as fleas and bedbugs). I protected myself as well as I could and was constantly aware of the privilege I have as a healthy person coming from a place where salubrious conditions are often taken for granted. Sharing meals and time with friends and new acquaintances meant that I would sometimes get sick, but so would everyone else. Health troubles are shared by the Arsi Oromo on a daily basis. I tried to help when I could in casual conversations about health by answering questions and informing friends about separating wood fires from the living space; keeping animals separate from sleeping areas; using a dug outdoor toilet; healthy eating (e.g., varying diet by trading some of the staple grain for other grains and

beans); and keeping living areas and grounds clean of debris. I only engaged in these conversations when friends asked me questions about these topics or when a problem presented itself, because although I felt I could advocate on some levels, it was not necessarily my place. One particular example is illustrative. While travelling back from a ritual with my spouse, friends and colleagues, we stopped in a small town to stay the night at a friend's house. When we went behind his house, down the hill to the stream to find some water to wash up, we found on the hill and close to the water's edge, many pieces of garbage littering the area, including used syringes, and other areas that had served as outdoor toilet spaces. I had a conversation with my friends (some of whom were government workers) and our host about this because it was problematic on a number of levels for him and others living in the village. He was unaware of some of the garbage because his home had been serving as a traveling health clinic at times while he was away. This led to a productive discussion about long-term disposal of garbage, particularly the syringes, and how to manage it. Some of these problems, such as the garbage issue, are relatively recent because in rural areas there was little or no non-organic waste up until the past ten years. Inhabitants could not afford or did not have access to such items. Even today, plastic bags are a commodity that are purchased and not freely distributed. It is true that these issues do not fall into the direct domain of my research, but are topics about which I felt some moral obligation to engage. They affect everyone's ability to live healthily, and to conduct and participate in the rituals and aspects of everyday life.

During and after spending time conducting fieldwork, I worked on notes, transcriptions and translations. I also consulted the video material and began writing up

descriptions on different topics and themes. While I am not a fluent Oromo speaker, I am competent and I understand, speak and write with some ease. I often work with local community members and friends on terms and parts of descriptions that I do not fully comprehend. I would have preferred to spend more time on transcriptions with people in the community while I was conducting field research, but many young people were in school and older community members were busy. Some of the cultural office workers were helpful, but they, too, were quite busy. Often working on even a page of song verses required hours of explanations and consultation with community members to understand the specific geographic, temporal, ancestral, and community-specific references. It was very difficult finding someone with both the English language expertise and cultural knowledge that were necessary to explain particularities of these terms in English with ease. As a result, I did some Oromo-Oromo work and some Oromo-English work, depending on who was available.

### **Research as a non-Oromo scholar and ethnographic reflexivity**

*Nuullee kaa sooqnuutu kana. Galatoma!  
Galatoma gaafa mara waliinu hujii waliin  
deemuu waan nuu goodhuu. Aadaa keenya  
akka kaa gane nuu toobadha laalaa ee.  
Uduu waan hin jenne ulfate qororo dirraa  
kaasii jira aadaa bareeduu oromoo tiyyaa.  
Ni bareeda.*

We want this. Thank you. Thank you for the questions. We need to work with you. We will not lose sight of our culture! Like a rope on the horn of a cow, let us keep hold of the beautiful Oromo culture! It is beautiful.

(Bujjaa and Rufoo, interview, April 2011)

As a non-Oromo scholar, I am conscious of my position as a guest learning about Oromo lifeways. I am honoured and feel privileged that I have been accepted as a guest in the culture and I hope to rise to the responsibility I have been granted (even urged) to

speaking and to inform others about aspects of Arsi Oromo practices. In the long term, I hope to be able to work with community members on sustainability projects that they wish to launch. In collaboration with community members, I try to represent their voices and their beliefs as they explain them.<sup>23</sup> As the Oromo, and especially Oromo women, have undergone much discrimination in the past, I am aware that it is important to work with Oromo people to help construct and represent their history and culture from their perspectives, but this will necessarily be shaped by my understanding and knowledge. Through interview and conversation excerpts, I have tried to give voice to participants and allowed space for them to share their stories and opinions. I believe this collaboration and my subsequent representation of their voices is my ethical responsibility towards the community members I have been working with.

The terms “outsider/insider” or the idea of the “other” often end up creating binaries and are not representative of much more complicated realities. In effect, as the anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983) demonstrated, knowledge is intersubjective. Fabian critiques anthropological writing that places referents in a different time and place than the ethnographer: “fieldwork is a form of communicative interaction with an Other,

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<sup>23</sup> I am always learning about Oromo culture and beliefs through fieldwork or readings. When I was reading Lambert Bartels’s book, I came across a passage in which he referred to the fact that Oromo do not count the number of children they have. Each child is considered a blessing from *Waaq* (God): “As Asafa Disasa once told me, ‘If somebody asks me: ‘How many children do you have?’ I reply: ‘You want to know how many children I have? Waaq gave me three children.’ I would not say: ‘I *have* three children.’ Nor will I ever say so in regard to my cattle or even my chickens. We do not count whatever has life. People can ask us: ‘How much do you have,’ when dollars, chairs or containers are concerned, but not if the things concerned have life” (Bartels 1983, 96). Reading this passage made me reflect on mistakes I had made on the field in the past. It also made me aware of everything I still had to learn about the Arsi. I have asked about numbers in the past and had resistant or bewildered responses, undoubtedly because of this belief that Oromo do not count life. Over time, as I have learned more about the culture, my understanding has improved, my discussion questions have ameliorated, and as a result I can only hope that I am constantly improving in my representation of the Oromo views.



one that must be carried out coevally, on the basis of shared intersubjective Time” (148). As he emphasizes, knowledge is created by ethnographers and their referents over time and in shared spaces (see also White and Strohm 2014). However, my difference from my Oromo friends was apparent in many ways, the most immediately obvious being the colour of my skin. Difference was also reflected in my accent and language skills while speaking, in the way I dressed, and in my continual learning process in relation to the culture. In the remote Oromo areas, particularly in the highlands around the Bale Mountains, I often encountered entire villages of children who had never seen someone white (*nama adi* in Oromo), whom they called by the Amharic term, *farenji* (foreigner). In the Nansabo area, many of the villages hadn’t had visits by foreigners since the Italian occupation in the 1930s, which meant that many inhabitants, particularly children and youth and women who hadn’t travelled out of the rural areas, had never seen a foreigner. This often created an instant crowd of curious youth and women around me, following me, looking at me, observing what I was doing, and trying to touch me. In Arsi society, crowding around to see people, objects or displays is very normal, and especially common when something is new. In addition to the unwanted attention being embarrassing for me, frustrating to my friends and colleagues and complicated at times for my mobility, it made observing and participating in the everyday much more arduous and time consuming than I would have previously imagined. Staying with families in the countryside and coming back repeatedly to villages and areas were key to my becoming less of an attraction and more someone with whom to engage and share. Collaboration has always been my aim as much as possible, taking the time to be present, to hang out and to return is key to forging these relationships. And I think this exchange goes both

ways. It is only fair that I am the object of curiosity, when I have come from far away to work with people there.

One other notable feature of my difference should be mentioned as it provides cultural insight. I have always worn trousers when I do fieldwork because it is more comfortable, particularly for the long treks or horseback riding that I have undertaken. In traditional Oromo culture, trousers are only worn by men so women who wear trousers may be regarded culturally as men or categorized into a non-gendered status. This was helpful when I was working on men's repertoires because I was included in many activities and ceremonies as a non-gendered person. To this effect, I have been asked whether I am a man or a woman on multiple occasions. Women know that I am from somewhere else and have become accustomed to my clothing, but I do receive the occasional comment about my dress in relation to my gender. My assistant wore trousers too. She is from a more urban location where this is common. Many Oromo who live in very rural areas see these differences in dress when they travel to urban areas, encounter an occasional female government worker wearing trousers, or hear about it from others. At the same time, not dressing like the women has implications for how they perceive me. I wouldn't say these perceptions are negative or positive, but they definitely do emphasize my being from another place and culture.

Some of the exchanges and shared experiences I've had over the years have been very touching and personal. In addition to long-lasting friendships developed over time and through experiences, I have also had powerful first encounters and sympathetic moments with complete strangers. When I travelled to the Sof Umaar Guutuu ritual on foot in Nansabo, many young women began to give me beaded necklaces as a gesture of

friendship and support. It was touching and significant as both a mark of friendship and sometimes as a blessing, since some of the necklaces have spiritual significance.

As for the ethics related to sharing Oromo culture with others, most people were very excited to share their culture with me and wanted me to share it with others. I only protected the identity of offenders, so their names are not mentioned. In instances when participants did not want it, I did not use video. I did have some situations in new areas where my presence was questioned by participants, but once I explained the research in detail and how I was conducting it, and sometimes after being asked to participate and sing in the ceremony, they were content to be included as participants in the research process. More specific examples of these encounters will be described in the dissertation. Sultan, the chief of police in Kokkossa town offered a fairly common response to my ethics questions and questions about sharing and discussing Oromo culture with the non-Oromo people out of the community and further abroad:

Beekuu dhabuu hin danda'an aadaa saba kanaa meeyibii carraa kanatti fayyadamtee. Aasaa saba keennaa kana, aadaa gaarii kanaa, aadaa araaraa, aadaa dubbartiin ittiin nama waan guddaa araarsuu dandeettu kana. Ati ammo adunyaaf yoo dabarsite waan tokko dabarsite asii galtee nuuf waan guddaa dha. Aduunyaan akka aadaa kana beektu taasiisaa. Kuni waan guddaa. Atiis waan hubatte kanaa waan nurraa hubatte waan namoota baay'ee irraa hubatte kana qaamoonni biraa hiriyoonna keetiis haata'uu, waroota firoota sitti aanuus haata'uu, namoota wajjiin barattan adunyaan biraallee akka hulbattu akka nu taasiftu dhaamsa sitti dabarsa kana.

Perhaps you may take this great opportunity and introduce this culture of our nation, this beautiful culture, the culture of dispute resolution, and the culture where females and elders resolve disputes, to the world. If you are showing this to the whole world it is great. You are letting the world know this culture. You are expected to share this experience, the facts you have noticed yourself or with other people to your colleagues, to your close relatives, to your classmates, and you should make the other world know this culture. I want you to pass my thoughts on to you that you are supposed to tell the world about these facts. (Sultan, interview, April 2011)

Though not expressed in these terms, many community members who are represented in this research urged me to tell others about their culture and their practices. Outside recognition, knowledge and appreciation of Oromo culture is desired by many Oromo due to the past and ongoing political and social discrimination they have faced.

### **Scholarly and Theoretical Significance and Review**

As a complement to ethnographic data and the narratives of community members, and in order to better understand *ateetee* and its local and broader implications, I have integrated interdisciplinary theoretical and analytical sources in the dissertation. Namely, I engage: interdisciplinary feminist and gender studies, including ethnographic models for re-defining patriarchy, and engendering through music; philosophical and anthropological writings on narratives and sung poetry; legal and anthropological literature on women's and human rights and relational studies; literature on indigenous justice, customary law, and restorative justice; and research on spirituality and rights. As will become apparent through their introduction and in the dissertation, these different areas are interconnected and complementary. My three larger areas of focus are: women's rights, legal pluralism, and indigenous spirituality. I look at how expressive arts and ways of "doing" and "being" interact with these areas of focus. In order to keep the flow of this introductory narrative, I have chosen to continue the narration, blending together my literature review, theory, and ethnographic data. In the first section, which is by far the largest, I develop an argument for *Arsi* vernacular feminism that takes *ateetee* into account and provides a foundation for vernacular feminism in the dissertation. The other sections are shorter because they will be discussed further in chapters in the dissertation.

*Vernacular feminism: ateetee, women's rights, expressive arts, and stories from the field*

In addition to the ground-up, practice-based<sup>24</sup> and participatory research<sup>25</sup> approaches of this study, different theories on gender have been applied as part of the theoretical framework. Gender issues, in the overarching sense of the term, encompass debates the Arsi Oromo case raises in interdisciplinary feminism/feminist studies, African feminism, indigenous feminism, discussions on how to re-define patriarchy, and women's rights. All over the world, before and sometimes in combination with written theory, feminism's roots have been in individual and group practice-based efforts to express the needs, desires and everyday concerns of women, and to assert and claim what women are due. In vernacular expressive arts, it is important to emphasize the difference between feminism as practice and feminism as ideology. For example, in the eastern Busoga region of Uganda, women's groups have been educating others about AIDS and its prevention through songs and dance (Barz 2007, 2011). Although they would not necessarily define themselves as feminists, at least not in the ideological ways the term is often used in academic literature, the acts they commit are very much within definitions of feminism. To the same extent, many female Arsi Oromo ateetee participants and organizers are executing different actions, gestures, and songs that could be seen from the

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<sup>24</sup> Practice-based research (and related concepts of practice as research and practice-led research) often initiates in the practice and is based on the needs of the practitioners. It recognizes that scholars, as practitioners, inherently know through that process of doing, whatever the field might be. For more details and examples related to these definitions, see Candy 2006, Gray 1998 and Nelson 2009.

<sup>25</sup> There are many different examples and models for participant observation, participatory research, and participatory action research in the humanities and social sciences. I use "participatory" to refer to my full involvement with the communities and people with whom I worked, lived and experienced everyday life. The participatory research comes from some of the work with the women and their communities, letting them guide some of the conversations, interviews and group discussions and having them tell me what they would like to see develop from this research. We mutually assisted and trained each other in ethnographic and research methods. For models of different types of participatory and participatory action research, see, for example: Abu-Lughod 1986, 1991, Araújo 2006 and Bourgois 1985.

outside as “feminist.” They would not necessarily define themselves with these terms, but they do have their own vocabulary and actions to describe and assert women’s rights.

Asserting and claiming rights is not limited to the ritual process, but in Arsi society, these rights are framed and confirmed by *ateetee*. In many other everyday actions, Arsi women also voice their opinions, their grievances, their rights, their emotions and more. For example, this could be through individual utterances, such as singing lullabies or singing or telling their children stories, through conversations with women at the grain mill, through official gatherings of the women’s council, through their leadership roles in official ceremonies, or through protesting something a family member or other community member has done. The practice of the everyday in combination with the *ateetee* rituals provides insight into womanhood in Arsi society, its individual and group expressions, and manner in which women assert their powers. Though there are different spaces and expectations for Arsi men and women, women can express discontent and protest injustices through their voices and actions. While *ateetee* is the focus of this dissertation, it is important to understand that there are different modes of expression and protest in Arsi women’s lives. I will offer short descriptions of some of the other types of expression here to counter Western discussions, particularly in development and rights literature, of muted voices or the quiet, oppressed woman in male dominated societies (Arnfred 2005).

(1) Immediate verbal protest and confrontation to injustices, though not encouraged, are very common. Domestically, this can be seen in a fight between spouses during which the wife defends her position vocally, even loudly if she deems it necessary. I have seen many such cases in the countryside. Several times I have been staying with a

family in which a first wife was arguing with her husband about his spending on his second wife: the second wife received new clothing and house amenities while the first wife received nothing, not even needed items for the children. In cases of domestic abuse, some women use the *ateetee* process, but some also openly protest or retaliate against their husbands; I have talked to women who have confronted their husbands' physical and/or verbal abuse by arguing, threatening to leave, or warning that they will start an *ateetee* process.

(2) Running away or leaving home is always an option. If a woman is unhappy with her domestic situation and particularly if she is being abused by her husband, she may choose this option and either return to her family home or to another relative's house. In one of the Arsi families I was staying with, the husband and his wife got into a fight, he hit her and she ran away from home during the night. She was found, and when she came back, local elders facilitated a resolution process between the two. In other cases, I have seen and heard of neighbour women who have returned to their family homes permanently because their domestic situation was too abusive or they had irreconcilable differences with their husbands. This is the equivalent of divorce. Young women have also been known to leave home to avoid forced marriages. I know one young woman who secretly married her school friend so that she would not have to marry her recently deceased sister's husband.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Binbeeto* is the term for the tradition in which a younger sister must marry her deceased sister's husband if the sister dies before having any offspring. Historically, *binbeeto* was a way to compensate the husband of the other clan for the loss of his wife and a way to keep the two clans connected under the marriage agreement. Now it is deemed an unnecessary or "harmful" cultural practice by many Arsi, but it still exists.

(3) Stories, narratives and sung poetry are also powerful forms of expression for Arsi women. In effect, power can be seized and used through different forms of discursive expression (Foucault 1980). Similar to the narratives and poetry described by Abu-Lughod in *Writing Women's Worlds* (1986), Arsi women also express happiness and displeasure through storytelling and can sometimes find solutions to problems through these means. A woman may go over to another woman's house specifically to complain about a fight or an abuse that happened to her in a public space or at home. Or during times when women get together privately, such as during food preparations for a wedding or birth gift, before or after a women's council meeting, or at the grain mill, women may tell stories about their personal problems and disputes, or they may recount friends' and neighbours' problematic experiences. They may also get together to play (*tabbachuu*), either by singing songs that encourage competition and laughter<sup>27</sup>, or by play dancing or conducting role plays. Arsi songs are all composed of poetry, with musical composition that emphasizes the poetry and the participation of the group. Women have several repertoires that are performed in groups, such as different wedding songs that prepare the bride for marriage and welcome a new bride into her new husband and clan's home and territory. In these songs, some of the verses make reference to the difficulties the bride may encounter domestically. Sometimes, particularly with youth repertoires, young

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<sup>27</sup> One repertoire that is practiced in closed spaces between women is called *tirrii* (not to be confused with *tirrii* repertoires sung by youth) and it is performed in conjunction with the song called *tisolee*. When the group stops singing, two lead women facing each other jump slightly, making quick up and down gestures with their heads, while making punctuated glottal sounds. They do this until one of them stops in laughter (see Qashu 2004, 2009).



women will refer to past problems experienced by their friends who became new brides (Qashu 2009).<sup>28</sup>

(4) In addition to the group songs, women also have individual sung repertoires through which they can express personal frustration or release themselves from daily routine and chores. *Baye-bayee* (leaving songs, sung by women before they leave their families for marriage) and *faaruu daima* (lullabies) are important examples of such repertoires. Although these repertoires may not result in direct or immediate resolutions to problems, they are means through which women speak out and declare potential frustrations with situations in or aspects of their lives. I've previously written at length on these types of women's songs (See Qashu 2004, 2009).

(5) Protest and expression can also be felt through acts of silence, a powerful means of expression. As Foucault has emphasized, silence remains alongside what is spoken as an integral part of discourse:

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name; the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which types of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1, The Repressive Hypothesis, in Rabinow 1984, 309-310).

Some women publicly and vocally protest injustices or go to the women's council to claim rights, but I also know other Arsi women who use more "hidden" forms of protest. These can be discursive, through quiet asides or facial expressions as well as through silent actions. One woman I know who is the first wife of two co-wives, was financially

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<sup>28</sup> See Qashu (2004, 2009) for more information on Arsi youth and women's song verses, particularly in respect to weddings.

neglected by her husband for many years and became independent through her own business developments. She did not fight her situation verbally, but quietly, through acts such as not cooking for him or keeping special foods aside for a later dinner to share with her children. She also saved certain amounts of money secretly and over time was able to make clothing, household and farm purchases and provide for her children's education. Although she still faces injustices with regards to her livelihood and property, she has used a silent and pervasive manner of keeping her ground and retaliating.

In the West, feminism and feminist theory are concepts that have been continually redefined, reinterpreted and repositioned over the years, shifting from “early feminists [who] challenged social and political inequities between men and women by valorizing their role and responsibilities as women” to “later feminists [who] would shift from celebrating difference to emphasizing similarities” (St. Denis 2007, 35). Over time, feminist theorists and advocates from different backgrounds have focused on the rights and equality of women and gender as a “social organizing process” (Green 2007, 21)—that is, how women organize and mobilize to defend and promote their rights and, in some oppressive contexts, to gain more rights. “Feminism is also a social movement fuelled by theory dedicated to action, to transformation—to praxis” (ibid, 21).<sup>29</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, I define feminism/feminist theory as discussions relevant to women, their cultures, and to their just and fair positioning in their societies.

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<sup>29</sup> In anthropological feminism, there have been several waves: (1) historical works that sought to include women (e.g., Margaret Mead); (2) studies of culturally specific definitions of gender and gender asymmetry, with an aim to challenge binary descriptions of women in their societies (e.g., Lamphere and Rosaldo 1974, Ortner 1974, Strathern 1987); (3) studies of ways different genders construct their worlds, the processes of engendering, and the politics of representation (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993, Moore 1988); (4) recent indigenous and post-colonial studies (e.g., Arnfred 2011, Abu-Lughod 2013, Green 2007, Hodgson 2005, 2011a, b, and c, Mahmood 2005).

Although different forms of women's activism and feminism have existed in practice for many years and in many, if not all, parts of the world, theoretical discussions were first written and disseminated in the West, based on western notions and experiences. At times contested and rejected, these theoretical discussions are also prominent among feminist theorists in other cultures. When I began my research, I would have argued that feminism is not relevant for the Arsi Oromo context because Arsi women have their own terms and actions.<sup>30</sup> To that end, there has been much debate among scholars and activists as to whether feminism is a legitimate term or concept to be used in non-western contexts (Denis 2007, Green 2007, Nnaemeka 1998, Oyewùmí 2003, Smith 2007, Strathern 1987). Through an exploration of intercultural and interdisciplinary feminist literatures, I have found that some of the scholars and activists' most salient critiques of western feminism can be summed up as follows<sup>31</sup>:

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<sup>30</sup> Scholars and activists have questioned the relevance of feminism (e.g. St. Denis 2007, 33). According to St. Denis, many women critiqued feminist theory while at the same time they "claimed a feminist identity and politics" (ibid., 33) and were writing from a feminist approach.

<sup>31</sup> Cree and Metis education scholar Verna St. Denis (2007) describes six critiques of feminism by Canadian Aboriginal women: (1) "some Aboriginal women contest the feminist claim that male domination is universal" (37); (2) "some Aboriginal women claim that one important difference between Aboriginal and Euro-western cultures is the distinct valorizing of maternalism and motherhood in Aboriginal cultures" (38); (3) "some Aboriginal scholars, citing historical and cultural traditions, claim that the concept of equality is neither relevant nor necessary for Aboriginal women in Aboriginal societies" (38); (4) "related to the rejection of gender equality, some Aboriginal women interpret equality as meaning reproducing the Euro-centric patriarchal system" (39); (5) "some Aboriginal women regard it as unnecessary to appeal for the attainment of the same rights as men; rather they appeal for the restoration and reclaiming of cultural traditions and self-government that would allow Aboriginal women to be restored to their once and continuing revered position" (39); (6) "some Aboriginal women state that gender inequality is neither the only nor the most important form of oppression they face" (40). Similarly, Obioma Nnaemeka echoes similar areas of contention identified by African feminists (1998, 6-7). Women's and gender studies scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) also offers a detailed critique of universals in Western feminism. See also sociologist Diane Wolf's edited volume (1996) for a review of feminist literature, discussions on the problems of hierarchies of power in feminist ethnography, and specific ethnographic examples of feminism in relation to fieldwork.

- For those who do not identify with the historic origins of feminism in the West, it can be perceived as a western conceptual term and as a western women's-driven movement because of its origins and the social contexts in which it developed.
- Similarly, since much of the theory originated in the West, like other historic-colonialist actions, it has been perceived by some Indigenous and African scholars and activists as an idea imposed on other cultures (Nnaemeka 1998, St. Denis 2007).
- Feminism may not be the most important issue. Some researchers pit theories and actions related to women's rights against broader human rights. Some women within indigenous, minority cultures may assert sovereignty/decolonization as taking priority over more specific women's issues (Green 2007, Hodgson 2011). In the context of this research, that would mean looking at Oromo people's struggle first, then women. Basic needs, such as food and clean water may also be a higher priority. The manner in which women prioritize rights may also be relevant. For example, women may place their rights as a priority in one context or space and not in another (Nanyonga-Tamusuza 2005). For example, Hodgson explains how Maasai women did not want to take part in the national campaign focusing on FGM (female genital mutilation) because clean water and food security were more important issues for them (Hodgson 2011). In African feminist circles, Nnaemeka points to this disagreement over priorities. "I argue that African women see and address

such issues first as they configure in and relate to their own lives and immediate surroundings” (Nnaemeka 1998, 7).<sup>32</sup>

- In some discourses, women have been depicted as one homogenous, universal group to defend and promote, when in fact womanhood is different in each society.<sup>33</sup> This becomes particularly apparent in universal rights texts, such as those produced by the United Nations. Though necessary for the advancement of universal rights, these texts and documents neglect or purposefully choose not to take local and individual perspectives into account. Some scholarly feminist approaches have also been critiqued for their failure to take into account local and unique cultural perspectives. In the context of Africa, Nnaemeka has described this as a “failure to define African feminism on its own terms” (ibid, 7).
- There have been many misrepresentations of gender due to a failure to look at the entire picture. Many studies have failed to pay attention to men, and to the ways societies view women and men and their relation to each other. From the outside, what may seem to be a patriarchal society in which women are denied autonomy, may in fact be a society with complex gender relations that need to

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<sup>32</sup> Andrea Smith (2007) discusses this critique, offering the following quote from Lorelei Decora Means, one of the founders of Women of All Red Nations (WARN), as part of the discussion: “We are *American Indian* women, in that order. We are oppressed, first and foremost, as American Indians, as peoples colonized by the United States of America, *not* as women. As Indians, we can never forget that. Our survival, the survival of every one of us – man, woman and child – as *Indians* depends on it. Decolonization is the agenda, the whole agenda, and until it is accomplished, it is the *only* agenda that counts for American Indians... (quoted in Jaimes and Halsey 1992, 314, 332, and in Smith 2007, 94). Smith observes that many Native American women make use of feminist theory, however, in the end, it is really a personal decision.

<sup>33</sup> Lamphere and Rosaldo’s seminal work first garnered attention to women in different societies (1974), though previous studies, such as those by Margaret Mead, had focused on women in specific cultural contexts.

be examined within the cultural context (Abu-Lughod 1986, Arnfred 2011, Green 2007, Hodgson 2005, Mohanty 1984, Nnaemeka 1998, Oyewùmí 2003, Smith 2007).

These critiques are directed towards studies and arguments that do not take into account specific individuals and situations in their historic, cultural and personal contexts. While it is necessary to acknowledge these critiques as a cautionary tale, there are, of course, many examples of academic research that avoid such pitfalls. I will be exploring literature from many disciplines, but as an example, in the domain of ethnomusicology, many works have been dedicated towards the portrayal of local, case-specific and culturally sensitive representations of women and the socio-cultural contexts of their music making (Diamond and Moisala 2000, Hayes 2010, Kisliuk 1998, Koskoff 1989, Magrini 2003, Shelemay 1991, Sugarman 1997). These works addressed such issues as: how scholars can go past the male/female dichotomy to understand gender in a more complete way; how music engenders society; and how gender is not a fixed notion, changing in relation to society and the individuals within it. In anthropology there is a similarly large literature that demonstrates how a feminism/feminist/gender studies approach is useful for informing both theory and action (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1996, 1993, Hodgson 2000, 2005, Lamphere and Rosaldo 1974, Mahmood 2005, Merry 2001, 2006, Ortner 1974, Strathern 1987).<sup>34</sup>

In some cases, colonial change brought on male domination and gender imbalances, so some activists and scholars argue for complete decolonization before looking at issues related to women. In her historical analysis of Maasai gender relations,

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<sup>34</sup> I only cite works I have found particularly useful and applicable to this research.

Hodgson (2000) demonstrates how in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Maasai had gender divisions but enjoyed a relatively gender-complementary society in terms of economic and political responsibilities. Women were in charge of much of the economic domain through their bartering of goods. Furthermore, although men tended to the public and political domains while women took care of the home, the Maasai did not see this as being hierarchical. It was the arrival of colonization that brought on some of these divisions. The Maasai didn't even perceive of public/private distinctions nor did they equate public/private with male/female and dominance/submission until the British came and imposed their patriarchal system (Hodgson 1999). The economically and politically unequal gender relations that exists in Maasai society today are, as Hodgson demonstrates through historical discoveries, a direct result of the Maasai and British interactions. Over time, the British pushed women out of their economic bartering roles, giving men more autonomy and authority by giving elders political power; dividing the interconnected male and female domains into hierarchically gendered domains of private vs. public/political; and consolidating men's control of the cattle so that, even in marriage, women had no cattle they could call their own. This shifted gendered power relations, pushing women out of the pastoral roles and devaluing them as people. In the Arsi Oromo case, Amhara political expansion and colonization of Oromo territory in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries created socio-political changes in many Oromo societies. Patrilineage and patrilocal living has always existed among the Arsi Oromo, and *ateetee* has continued to exist as long as *gadaa*, the Oromo male socio-political system has existed. However, before the erosion of *gadaa*, there may have been a greater degree of balance between men and

women than there is today. In this exploration of *ateetee*, I will look at gender relations in relation to historical and socio-political contexts.

Most current works continue to challenge gender binaries, because it is necessary to consider the entire picture (including women, men and children) in order to understand gender dynamics (Herndon 2000). Indeed, some ethnomusicologists suggest that it is through music that gender and culture are constituted (Small 1998). Jane Sugarman's work, for example, is ground-breaking because she portrays Prespa Albanian weddings as rituals that not only reinforce gender relations but create ideas of gender. She explains that she was trying to get away from descriptive ethnography of gender by trying to talk about it in relation to the broader view of the patrilineal society (Sugarman 1997, 31). In order to understand how music engenders individuals, she argues that one must also consider the *habitus*—the social knowledge—that is intrinsic to each person's body and trajectory in society (Bourdieu 1972). Her method consists of studying the “lived experience of gender” in order to understand how musical performance can shape that experience (ibid, 33).

On the one hand, we need to focus on the capacity of musical traditions not merely to reinforce gender relations within other domains but to actively *engender* those individuals who participate in them. Here the notion of *habitus* can be particularly helpful. Each of us as individuals [...] invariably carry with us through life what are often “residual” notions of gender (Williams 1977: 122-23): notions that vie with the more explicit, verbal formulations that we have developed for ourselves on an intellectual basis. [...] So long as we operate within gendered social worlds, gender is intrinsic to our musical performances, and any musical performance is thus also a performance of gender. (Sugarman 1997, 32)

Sugarman analyzes gender through men's and women's perspectives, demonstrating how the two genders are divided, yet complementary in the Albanian context she is studying.

Sugarman's findings have many parallels with Arsi Oromo values and practices. In most public situations, adult Arsi men and women inhabit different spaces and are



expected to speak and perform accordingly. The male and female differences in vocal production are not as pronounced for the Arsi as for the Prespa Albanians (ibid), but physical demeanour and culturally defined gestures are definitely factors. In dances, young men move with their lower bodies, while women move from the waist up. Once women are married, they are not to play the drum and should limit their dance movements in public but can clap their hands. I was once at an evening wedding dance rehearsal at a private home and a young woman joined in the youth dances. Although her husband didn't mind, this was frowned upon by elder men who saw her participating and it became a heated source of discussion. She did not care and was not bothered by the disapproving comments. Once men are married, they usually do not dance either. As with the Prespa Albanians, once women are older and past the reproductive age of life, they are not required to follow the same types of restraint (though many women do continue to follow the same mores of modesty).

While it is important to look at women's rights from inside a culture and help women promote their customs or traditions, it is also possible to use feminist/gender analysis to question the "veneration of tradition" (Green 2007, 23). Sometimes oppressive traditions can be defended and even institutionalized under the guise of maintaining culture and tradition. As Green points out, "Feminism has provided tools to critique oppressive traditions—and to claim and practise meaningful non-oppressive traditions" (ibid, 27). In the context of my research I have often been confronted with differing points of view on tradition and culture. Although most women agree on the usefulness and continued practice of the *ateetee* ritual, many are also questioning the historic roles of women and the ways women traditionally have been treated in their society. The national

Ethiopian debate around women's rights has been focused primarily on education and the constitutional rights of women, but tradition and culture have become topics of discussion in the countryside. For example, in Arsi society, though women appreciate having *ateetee* for their rights to respect and honour, they question what they deem unfair access to land, property, and sometimes divorce. I will continue to question *ateetee* in relation to Arsi traditions in this dissertation. Because societies are continually changing, there is an ongoing necessity to question tradition(s) and the way it is (they are) being used:

Today, there are a number of versions of tradition in Aboriginal communities. There are many who claim to be authoritative on this subject. They don't always agree, nor should they need to. But neither should they be permitted to deny others a voice. Too many Aboriginal women have been silenced or had their social and political roles minimized by invocations of appropriate tradition relative to women's voices and choices. [...]

Rejecting the rhetoric and institutions of the colonizer by embracing the symbols of one's culture and traditions is a strategy for reclaiming the primacy of one's own context in the world, against the imposition of colonialism. But, in the absence of an analysis of the power relations embedded in tradition, it is not necessarily a liberatory strategy. Each choice must be interrogated on its own merits, relative to the objective of a contemporary emancipatory formulation that will benefit Aboriginal men, women and children. Feminist critique is an essential part of this process.

At issue, then, is who decides what tradition is—and for whom. Many of us have multiple cultural heritages and historical experiences, and so there can never be a single cultural version of tradition. Secondly, we need to have conversations about the fact that not all Aboriginal people will choose traditional formulas.” (Green 2007, 27-28)

Green astutely warns about the dangers related to “tradition” and the usefulness of feminist critique in this process. Although Green refers to a North American Aboriginal context, these cautionary words are applicable to the Arsi Oromo context and, perhaps, other Indigenous contexts. Tradition and culture are not only complex words to define, but they are also tricky domains to negotiate in practice. I have heard people talk about the need to preserve tradition for political reasons, even when the practice could be oppressive or detrimental to those involved. But, as with the case of *ateetee* in some areas, I have also heard people call for traditions appreciated by community members to be

abandoned in the name of religious or political objectives. Green (2007) has pointed out that there are just as many ways of interpreting tradition and culture as there are individuals. And in the end, some individuals may not even be interested in preserving traditions, opting, instead, to move on to other cultural practices.

### *Women's Individual and Group Rights*

In the same manner, though members of Euro-western societies tend to concentrate on the rights of individuals, in other societies, community rights may take precedence. Though Arsi women express themselves individually in many different ways, as individuals they live in relation to others around them and their communities. Both individual and group discourses and actions are essential in the everyday and in ceremonies and processes such as *ateetee*. In many places around the world, individual and group rights are frequently discussed at local, community levels, but due to factors such as politics and funding, discourses and actions at the international level often take precedence. In order to understand how *ateetee* fits into these local, national and international discussions on rights, some consideration of local Arsi Oromo discourses on individual and group rights is necessary.

Local versus global, universalism versus cultural relativism, rights versus culture or tradition, insider versus outsider—these are all terms that come up in human rights debates. I know “culture” is a concept/term that has many different and often politicized meanings and implications depending on how it is used. Summed up well by Cowan et al. (2001), the use of language in human rights debates can quickly become complicated. As co-editors, they looked at how the notions of “rights” and “culture” have intersected

differently in the past and the present: as rights versus culture, the right to culture, rights as culture, and culture as “analytic” to rights (see also, Cowan 2006). The overall idea is that culture and rights should always be seen as fluid concepts. They also propose a culture of human rights to describe the various analyses of anthropologists in the area of human rights. The problem with universals is that culture is often seen as fixed and unchanging. Those who see culture in this way neglect the everyday, the reification of culture, and the fact that there are inherent hierarchies expressed through nationalist and other agendas that people can’t escape. Oromo nationalism is also very implicated in the debates related to tradition, culture, and rights among the Arsi Oromo. Because of the Oromo’s complicated and tumultuous history with the dominant ethnic groups of the Ethiopian state (see appendix 1), which included colonization and discriminatory policies towards the Oromo, holding onto and promoting “culture” has become a means for many Oromo to take a political stand, to assert power, and to negotiate rights with state actors. Though this is not the focus of this research, it is interconnected with questions about gender, rights, and the sustainability of ateetee, so I will address it at different points in the dissertation.

Though individual versus community rights has always been a debate included in those rights debates, in recent history, human rights discourses have been shifting from individual rights towards community rights, responding to developments at both local and global levels. In the introduction to her edited volume, Dorothy Hodgson discusses the implications of defining women’s rights as individual human rights and the consequences of individual rights-based approaches (2011):

So what does the analysis of gender, culture and rights in these chapters tell us about the potential and limits of a rights-based approach to gender justice? Intriguingly, the chapters suggest that the very sources of the power of human rights discourses, specifically “women’s rights are human rights” discourses, to produce social change are also the sources of its limitations. Thus, for example, part of the broad appeal and power of rights-based protocols have been that they promote and reinforce the autonomy and self-determination of individuals, especially against violations by collective entities (or their representatives) such as states or religious institutions. But the gendered and culturally specific parameters of this liberal rights-bearing “individual” as an autonomous, male, free-agent obscure other modes of being, belonging and agency, including a person’s various (and shifting) connections, obligations, affiliations, subjectivities, and positionings vis-à-vis overlapping collectivities such as their communities, political parties, families, friends, and co-workers. Women, for example, have often demanded collective self-determination, not individual rights, such as the right to speak and to be heard, the right to set priorities and be respected, and the right to land and livelihoods free from economic devastation produced by other agendas (Stephen, Hodgson). Male immigrant detainees in the United States invoke their membership in families and their relationships and commitments as fathers and husbands to frame their rights, emphasizing their interdependence and relationality with others, not their autonomy (Rodriguez). These and other examples suggest that there is perhaps no such thing as a neutral, generic, “individual” who exists outside culture, history, and relationships. Instead, we are all dynamic, complex beings with shifting alliances and allegiances, rights and responsibilities, as we age, love, marry, have children, learn, suffer, grieve, work, and more (Hodgson 2011, 11).

As seen here, it is essential to look at both individual and group rights on a case-by-case basis, rather than assuming that the individual rights always prevail. Hodgson also discusses how the generic “individual” may not exist since people always exist in relation to others. In relational theory, individuals, though autonomous thinkers, always exist in relation to others: “Relational theory in all of these topics is grounded in a shared core belief that the object/subject of attention should be understood in relation to others and as *being in relation to others*” (Downie and Llewellyn 2008, 195). Downie and Llewellyn go on to explain that the “relational self emerges from and is continuously shaped by the context of multiple relationships with other individuals and institutions—some of which can promote flourishing and some of which can oppress” (*ibid*, 197). If I apply these concepts to the Arsi Oromo, the self is definitely relational, but individual autonomy and

expression are also prominent. Individuals and their complex, multifaceted relationships are formed through actions and processes, such as ateetee.

For Arsi Oromo women, individual rights also represent the rights of the collective group, and vice versa. When one woman is insulted, she calls all women to join her for the ateetee ritual. An individual has her own rights, but her ateetee case is also defending and promoting the rights of all women. She may also be setting a precedent depending on the frequency and types of ateetee cases in her area. If an individual is emphasized, as may be the circumstance when two people go to court over a dispute, then the rights of the group and understanding and reconciliation between neighbours are left behind. For example, several women have told me stories about going to court over a dispute with a neighbour, but even with a favourable decision in court, nothing was really settled. Tensions, accusations and bad feelings remained between neighbours and the offender's general lack of respect towards his/her female neighbours had not been affected by the court process. I would, however, emphasize that in spite of this emphasis on individual/group relationships, for the Arsi Oromo, these interactions should not be considered as a binary but instead as a continuum of interactions that involve both group and individual prerogatives. From an outside, international perspective, if non-profits go in to "better the lives" of local women with the prerogative of individual women's rights, their actions may leave behind rituals, such as ateetee, that depend on the solidarity and actions of the group. This will be discussed in more detail in relation to an ateetee process in Chapter 6.

### *Ateetee as Part of Legal Pluralism*

Over the years, many Arsi women have demonstrated through storytelling and actions how *ateetee*, which was passed down to them through their mothers and their communities, is an effective means for them to defend their rights. The *ateetee* ritual process is and has been an active cultural and judicial practice of the Arsi Oromo for centuries.<sup>35</sup> It is part of the customary legal system (*seera ambaa/aadaa*) and the historic socio-political organization (*gadaa* system). Though the *gadaa* system is practiced to varying degrees in Oromia, it is still relevant culturally among the Arsi. Customary law is widely used in Arsi areas and it is used in parallel with the Ethiopian legal system. In Chapter 2, I will provide historic and contemporary overviews of the Arsi legal system and how *ateetee* fits into it. In order to better understand legally how the ritual, women's dispute resolution processes and women's rights work in relation to their communities, it is useful to look at *ateetee* in relation to Arsi Oromo perceptions of law and justice, as well as national and international research on law. One area of scholarship that has been particularly relevant to this research is indigenous studies. Many indigenous scholars and activists have documented the necessity of ritual in the expression of justice and law (Borrows 2010a, 2010b, Monet and Skanu'u 1991, Napoleon 2007, 2013, Regan 2010, Webber 2009). These are insightful analyses on existing tensions between indigenous customary law and Western law and the possibility of multiple justice systems. Furthermore, a central part of indigenous legal theories is related to perceiving law in relation to culture and worldviews (Napoleon 2013) and taking into account different

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<sup>35</sup> Different forms of *ateetee* exist among all the different Oromo subgroups, so this statement could be extended to the Oromo in general and not just the Arsi Oromo.

sources of law (Borrows 2010a). These studies, however, have not included analysis of the specifics of music, expressive arts or the rituals, and how the arts are justice. This study of ateetee adds this perspective to the corpus of both the indigenous and legal literatures.

I also examine ateetee in relation to restorative/alternative justice literature. Some of this literature overlaps with indigenous legal theories. Restorative justice proponents have urged the use of community conflict resolution and justice methods so that the entire community is involved in the process (Cayley 1998, Llewellyn 2012, Napoleon 2010). The main premise behind restorative justice is that a crime or wrongdoing is conceived as an offence against specific individuals or groups of people, not only the state. Cases all over the world have shown that there is often a much higher rate of recidivism if justice is merely seen as punishment, because no attention is paid to the offender's personal recognition of his/her misconduct. With restorative justice techniques, the aim is to focus on the needs of the victim, offender and community—to try to create a dialogue between the different parties involved and to restore a sense of balance to the community. It is, however, necessary to remember that not all people want to be involved in restorative justice or customary law procedures. Sometimes victims of crime fear that the offender may not be punished sufficiently under a restorative process, and other times it is the offender who is unwilling or unable to participate in these types of community reconciliation procedures. As some legal, anthropological and indigenous scholars have argued (Johnston 2006, Merry 2006, 2009, Napoleon 2010), the use of traditional resolution methods for gender abuse issues has to be approached with intensive



interdisciplinary and case-specific knowledge because of complex historical and culture-specific contexts.

Ateetee is a judicial measure, but it is also expressive. I examine it in relation to other studies of expressive arts. Studies of women in different cultural contexts have demonstrated how remediation is effected through expressive arts, such as theater (Garlough 2008, Lawless 2009), song duels (Eckertt and Newmark 1980, Askew 2002), discursive attacks (Rasmussen 1999, Savigliano 1995), village song rituals (Nordstrom 1998) and silent or anonymous protest, as in the case of the “Mothers of the Disappeared” in Chile (Agosin 1987). However, there have been very few cases that show how music is used judicially to settle disputes. Some examples include women’s songs that discourage violence in Somalia (UNESCO 2003, 106); *taarab*, sung poetry in Tanzania that women and men use to minimize conflict and negotiate or voice issues they cannot otherwise express in society (Askew 2002); and Tuareg women’s sung poetry that is used in retaliation when a man has offended women (Rasmussen 1991)

This research should provide a distinct contribution to studies related to the arts and justice. In his research, Dylan Robinson has been exploring how contemporary indigenous artists reclaim land and territory through the “doing” of the arts and how these actions are situated and interpreted in indigenous and non-indigenous legal parameters (2016, forthcoming). He explores how individual artistic acts do not just aestheticize but “enact treaty,” “enact healing,” or exist as a cultural expression of “sensitive sovereignty” (2016). Although Robinson has been exploring these issues with contemporary artists, to date, there has not been an ethnomusicological study that examines the enactment or “doing” of ritual as justice.

In the Arsi Oromo context, musical conflict resolution rituals are accessible to women who may not have recourse to larger legal or political structures (Gemeda 2000, Hussein 2004, Østebø 2009). Although they have access to the Ethiopian court system, many have told me they would not have the same support in the court system as they would with the *ateetee* process. They would not have the community support for the process, and the Ethiopian court system is slow and backlogged with bureaucracy, they could wait a long time before going to court (chapter 2). Furthermore, singing is an essential part of the process. In a culturally appropriate manner, the way in which women resolve many disputes is first through the act of singing, then through group negotiations. This is a telling example of how music, song and ritual are part of the legal fabric that is an essential part to dispute resolution. Ritual, singing, music, and other types of artistic expression can all be ways to enact law. A courtroom is not required to find law and formal dispute resolution. As some scholars have demonstrated, even in Western courts, the entire court process, which includes formalized dress, ceremony and procedures, is a ritual itself (Ibid., 179; Campbell and Moyers 1988, *The Power of Myth* xii-xiii).

### *Negotiating Spirituality and Rights*

For many Arsi in the rural highlands, it is difficult to disentangle spirituality from their worldview. As such, belief is a part of the vernacular legal and judicial systems and rights. Indigenous religion (specifically *Waaqefaanaa* – see Chapter 3) is also currently a space of contention and dispute. As I will describe in much more detail in Chapter 4, today there are more Christians and Muslims than proclaimed vernacular religion adherents. But many of the Christians and Muslims also practice vernacular religion or a

syncretic form of their own beliefs. In all cases, belief is a very specific, complex and dynamic area that requires much more contextualization.

I use the terms religion, spirituality and belief interchangeably. Though they are useful constructs to frame the topic, as Dorothy Hodgson has reflected, “They may not directly reflect the complicated categories, languages, or meanings of the people we are studying” (2005, 14). Similarly, I speak of indigenous or vernacular religion interchangeably. The Oromo use the term *amanti* for religion in general, but since belief or religion is such a part of the everyday worldview for many, it is described in other manners than one word or term. It is also important to remember that these beliefs and practices are quite varied, vibrant and individual in practice and must be taken into account in relation to the contemporary and historical contexts (Ibid.).

In Arsi vernacular religion, *vis à vis* men, women are seen as closer to *Waaqa* (God), and in this context they have power to conduct prayers for wrongdoings or problems in society. Arsi belief needs to be considered in its gender-specific and historical frameworks. I have found many similarities with Maasai women, and have particularly drawn on Hodgson’s analysis of Massai women’s central roles in moral, spiritual and ritual life and how this changed over time (Ibid.).<sup>36</sup> For the Arsi, group prayers have always been a major part of the fabric of society though the practice and frequency has changed over time. Many community members have seen prayers bring an end to disputes, war, famine, drought or sickness. Some Arsi women and men still gather by rivers or under sacred trees to conduct these prayer ceremonies. But prayers are also sung in very practical, legal or judicial contexts. Oromo women can defend their rights

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<sup>36</sup> See also Hodgson (2005).

and resolve disputes with sung prayers. It is important to see and understand spirituality in a more organic, and in many cases, practical way as the Arsi see and practice it. Belief is not confined to the act of prayer or times that people are gathered praying. It is part of how people treat each other, animals and their environment with respect and how they understand and communicate with those around them. As legal scholars Borrows and Napoleon have theorized, spirituality is one part of a number of elements that make up the (legal) fabric of society or “indigenous legal order” (Borrows 2014, Napoleon 2013). In her research, Zoe Todd also demonstrated how not only spirituality, but environmental elements can be seen as practical, or parts of the everyday (Todd 2014). The position of spirituality within society is so integral to understanding worldviews and the way ateetee works that it will be explored in much more detail in Chapter 3.

Arsi religious belief and spirituality are inextricably linked with individual and group rights. For example, for the Arsi, being able to gather and sing prayers is something that until recently was denied by national government authorities. Until the late 1970s, and particularly during the Haile Selassie regime, the Oromo were denied their rights to practice all aspects of their culture, including language, music, and religion (conversations with informants; Baxter 1978; Hassen 1996; Kumsa 1998). This changed with the beginning of the Derg military dictatorship during which there was a brief period of freedom before oppression and restrictions were enforced again. Throughout different periods of Oromo history, these same governments that restricted religious rights also restricted other rights. Now, amidst the rise and spread of other religions, many Oromo are returning to their vernacular religious practices and asserting their rights to do so. Although ateetee is practiced in conjunction with other religions, it is a part of the

Oromo belief system and the wider Oromo worldview, and women continue to assert their rights to practice it in conjunction with their overall belief system.

While conducting research, I found the most pressing issues for my informants were the recent rapid social changes in the Arsi highlands. These changes manifest mainly through religion, rural exodus, and local/national/international government and non-governmental organization politics. Women specifically have been negotiating ateetee practices in the face of opposition from mainstream religions. To explain some of these contemporary conflicts in relation to historical changes, in Chapter 4 I engage foundational studies on religion among the Oromo (Bartels 1983, Braükamper 2002); syncretism in Oromo belief systems (Geda 2013); Islam among the Bale Oromo (Østebø, T. 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013); and the history of Protestantism in Ethiopia, including among the Oromo (Haustein 2009, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). Geda's dissertation provides detailed descriptions and analyses of Oromo vernacular belief through different pilgrimages. I elaborate on his work in Chapter 3. Although Østebø analyzes the tensions between the Salafi and other Muslim practitioners in the Bale area of Oromia, he has not analyzed the problems and at times violent tensions between practitioners of vernacular Oromo belief and those who have become Salafi Muslims. Furthermore, these scholars have provided extensive information on Oromo vernacular religion, Salafism and Protestantism, but they have not focused on how these religious social changes and tensions affect Oromo women's expressive practices and the rights and position of Arsi Oromo women in their communities. Out of circumstance and necessity, I have explored ateetee practitioners' perceptions on ateetee and religion and the current tensions that exist between those who want to continue practicing ateetee and other, less tolerant Muslim and Protestant

community members who do not see a place for ateetee. I hope the findings from this study will provide new insights on how social changes due to religious tensions are being negotiated in the community. It provides information for broader discussions in other communities and situations.

### *Singing and performing ateetee to achieve results*

In this research I am looking at how ateetee goes beyond resistance and is used to achieve results. Resistance studies include a vast domain of research that crosses many disciplines, including many feminist and ethnomusicological approaches that view music as resistance (Muller 1999, Magrini 2003) or as a form of power outside the Western gender stereotype of dominant/submissive roles in patriarchal societies (Doubleday 1999, Jones 1999, Koskoff 1999, Robertson 1989, Sutton 1999). I am not implying that other types of musical resistance are not effective; there are many cases of successful musical political protest movements. There are many examples: musician and student gatherings in Brazil in the 1960s and its 2013 counterpart with contemporary music protests in Brazil; freedom songs as embodied and performed in participatory protests in civil rights movements in the US or contemporary protests in South Africa (Jolaosho 2012, 2015); and Buddhist monk chanted protests in Myanmar in 2010 (Douglas 2015). Many of these musical protests have been parts of bigger movements leading to political changes. It is certain that there is not really a line between resistance and results since any type of musical protest (hidden or public or somewhere in-between) may have an indirect or direct effect on a situation. Most studies of protest or resistance music focus on music as a participatory tool, as a mechanism to move the masses and to create social and emotive

connections between people. These musical connections and actions can eventually result in significant social and political changes, but it usually takes time. Most of these bigger protest movements involve all genders.

Arsi women's *ateetee* is exclusively led by women and can be used for immediate results. Informed by studies on gender, multiple justice systems, and indigenous belief, in this dissertation, I use the Oromo data to explore the way women create their own spaces (Abu Lughod 1986, 1991) and enact power and justice through the discursive and embodied acts of singing (Robinson 2016, forthcoming, Stoller 1989). In order to argue that singing and participating can enact or do something, I have drawn on research that has focused on ontological methodology and embodiment generally speaking. In their edited volume, *Thinking Things Through* (Henare, Holbraad and Wastel 2007), the authors use ontology to theorize how things and actions (such as singing) can have agency. What I am demonstrating is how singing can effect change beyond the actual action. Other religious scholars, such as Harvey (2012) have also used this approach. I draw on these theories in Chapters 3 and 5 to look at Arsi belief systems, and in Chapter 7. In that last chapter, I also use sources from scholars who would identify their works with improvisation studies, experiential ethnography (Hinson 2000, Sklar 1994, Stoller 1989), anthropology of the senses (Porcello 2010), phenomenology (Berger 2010), and performance studies (Meintjes 2002).

### **Some notes on the chapters**

In order to contextualize and represent the complexity of *ateetee* in relation to the Oromo worldview and contemporary and historic contexts, and in order to allow

sufficient space for the voices of Arsi community members, I have provided as much ethnographic detail as possible within the dissertation. These theoretical and contextualization chapters provide needed background for the contemporary context of ateetee. Furthermore, this thick ethnography sets the scene for demonstrating what makes ateetee effective as a dispute resolution mechanism and a means for women to defend and promote their rights. It is essential to understanding the historical, judicial, spiritual and everyday roles of ateetee in Arsi communities. Throughout this journey, while exploring how the process is effective, I discuss how social changes are modifying and at times conflicting with it.

In Chapter 2, I provide some general cultural and specific judicial backgrounds. I place ateetee within historical and contemporary Oromo practices of law and justice. I provide background on the Arsi *gadaa* system (the traditional socio-political and judicial system), how it was practiced historically, how it is interpreted in contemporary contexts and how ateetee fit(s) into this. Through examples, I demonstrate the importance of multiple justice systems, the changes that have ensued over time and how ateetee remains an effective system, in spite of the outside pressures and changes ateetee women are facing.

In Chapter 3, through many examples and explanations of *Waaqefaanaa* (Oromo vernacular religion), I aim to demonstrate how ateetee and the vernacular belief system are intertwined. I look at many of the religious materials and actions in terms of ontological analysis, in order to demonstrate how they are not just symbols, but have actual power. I also show how, in the eyes of many members of Arsi Oromo communities, women are seen as having a special, closer connection to God and, thus,



powers that men do not possess. However, because *ateetee* is also a part of the everyday and it is not required to practice Oromo belief in order to participate, I discuss the practical or everyday ways community members practice belief. The chapter finishes with examples of each of the different types of *ateetee* in order to provide contextualization of the different types of ritual processes.

Though social change is a central theme that I develop throughout the dissertation, in Chapter 4, I focus specifically on the historical and contemporary contexts and causes of rapid social change in the Arsi highlands. My interlocutors in the Arsi highlands expressed how these changes, mainly the result of tensions between mainstream religions, rural exoduses, and local/national/international politics, were the most problematic for them. Although all of these causes are significant and challenging for many community members, rising tensions in the past decade between Salafi Islam practitioners and Protestants have been the primary challenge for women and young women. Tensions surface, at times, in violent and volatile ways, threatening the social institutions Arsi women have grown up with. In order to understand why Muslim and Christian practitioners have recently become more oppositional towards *ateetee* practitioners, I specifically explore these changes in relation to the dramatic historical, political and economic shifts that occurred in the past century in Ethiopia and particularly among the Oromo.

*Siinqee* and the *siinqee* institution, are, historically, a part of Arsi legal and social parameters. *Siinqee*, a long stick women carry to *ateetee* ceremonies, is a material object, but it is also a means of action through which women can claim their rights. Sometimes *ateetee* and *siinqee* are used interchangeably. *Siinqee* or *siinqee* institution can refer to the

culture that is built around the object and the women who gather with it. Even though the object and the institution are not always used today, in chapter 5, I explore the object and concept that are foundational to understanding how women's respect and women's rights are conceived, practiced and effected in Arsi society.

Throughout the dissertation I have examples of ateetee processes. In order to understand and visualize what happens during an ateetee ritual process, Chapters 6 and 7 will focus in detail on the ceremony/process. In Chapter 6, through a detailed example of an inter-ethnic ateetee process, I provide information about and analyze the different parts of the process and the actors involved. I provide extensive field data complemented with theory from other Oromo/Oromoist scholars. Though most ateetee processes occur between Oromo community members, this case is distinctive because it involved a man from the Amhara ethnic group and an Arsi Oromo woman. This detailed description of the process also provides specific analyses of the effectiveness of the ceremony among different ethnic groups.

In Chapter 7, I present an embodied analysis of the ritual. Through a mixed methodological approach, which includes multisensory, textual and discourse analysis, combined with performance, embodiment and experiential ethnography studies, I explore how singing in the context of the ateetee ritual is a unique and necessary means of expressing Arsi womanhood, communicating, creating solidarity, and resolving disputes. Using my own experience in an ateetee ritual for support, I aim to give readers a sense of the embodied "doing" of ateetee. This detailed description includes an analysis of the music and words of the songs.

The last chapter is a space for concluding remarks on ateetee. Having provided the context and analysis throughout the dissertation, in this final chapter I return to the main theoretical areas of women's rights, multiple justice systems, and indigenous spirituality to reflect on how the process leads to results rather than merely resistance. This includes a discussion on impacts this study may have on theoretical areas. I open up to broader discussions of implications of the study of ateetee in other international contexts. I also look at what the future may hold for ateetee and the women who practice the process, particularly given the recent pressures from mainstream religions, and other rapid social changes or problems they may be facing. With this study I hope to give something back to the Arsi communities I worked with and make a contribution to the growing number of Oromo publications. I also aim for this research to contribute to discourses on how the expressive arts are fundamental in many situations and how they can be used for social justice.

## Chapter 2

### Women in Oromo Customary Law (*Seera Ambaa*) and the Gadaa System (*Sirna Gadaa*): Historic and Contemporary Spaces for Women's Expressions of Rights and Leadership

LQ: Ateetee jechuun maal jechuudha?

AS: Ateetee jechuun seera aadaa keenyattiiffi dubarttiin yookaan waa geexaan jechuun yoo waa xuqqaan kan mirga ofii argattu jechaadha.

LQ: What is ateetee?

AS: In our culture, ateetee is customary law in which our women claim their rights if they are abused.

(Amariich Shubee, interview, December 25, 2010)

In this chapter I give an overview of historic and contemporary practices of Arsi law and justice. Through the lens of Arsi customary law and historic and contemporary expressions of gadaa,<sup>37</sup> I will examine the different social and legal means through which women express their rights and are leaders in their communities. I will also include a more detailed examination of the people who negotiate and judge in the ateetee process. This discussion will be complemented with background information related to ateetee and customary law on women's specific societal status, religious plurality and the transitional nature of human rights. Though some of these topics will be fleshed out in much more detail in later chapters, this chapter will provide the background for a basic understanding of how ateetee fits into Arsi culture and traditional and contemporary Oromo legal systems.

Before beginning this discussion, I think it is important to re-emphasize three major cautionary points related to the dynamic and ever-changing positions of Arsi women:

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<sup>37</sup> Gadaa is the indigenous socio-political system by which many Oromo were governed in the past, before the Amhara conquests of the nineteenth century.

- (1) Though Arsi women did/do not have the same socio-political roles as men and do not intervene in the same manner, they are not completely absent from social, judicial and political decision making processes, official ceremonies and dispute resolution processes;
- (2) Historic and contemporary legal and judicial systems cannot be separated from religion/belief, whether the religion is *Waqqeffaanaa*, Christianity, Islam, a mixture or variations of these, or something else.
- (3) This discussion (and the representations of Arsi socio-political systems) is very localized. Though there may be similarities with the way other Arsi or Oromo peoples practice gadaa or equivalent socio-political organizations, every clan, community, family and individual is different. In some areas, vestiges of gadaa may still exist; in other areas it may no longer be a part of their culture; and in others, community members may never have known it.

Though it is not possible to be all encompassing, I have tried to include data that will help better situate Arsi Oromo women and the ateetee ritual and that will contribute to better understanding of their perspectives. Women's ateetee rituals have always been part of both the Arsi legal and governance system, and vernacular religion. Customary constitution and law (*heera fi seera*) constitute the Arsi legal and judicial systems, structures that were formerly encompassed by the gadaa system. In order to offer a representation of these historic and contemporary legal traditions, in this chapter I will discuss Arsi customary law (*seera ambaa*), customary dispute resolution institutions, and leaders. Then I will give an overview of the gadaa system.

## Understanding Arsi customary law and ateetee as indigenous legal systems

As the anthropologist Marco Bassi described in his book on the political and judicial processes among the Borana Oromo,<sup>38</sup> another Oromo subgroup and southern neighbour to the Arsi, though there is not an “autonomous judicial apparatus” or a distinct “legal code,” customary law includes all the discussions, negotiations and procedures that take place when someone has committed an act deemed morally wrong or in conflict with community morals and norms (Bassi 2005, 100). This description, though referencing the Borana Oromo, is also applicable to the Arsi Oromo. Before going further into this discussion, I think it is important to look at the indigenous terms for law. Law is a complex concept in any society, and it also has multiple meanings for the Arsi Oromo.

Mamo Hebo offers detailed explanations of the terminology as defined by his interlocutors:

In Oromo there are several terms that generally express the concept of law. One such term is *aadaa*, which literally means custom, tradition, and ways of life. The other is *seera* meaning law in the formal sense of the term (Hassen, 1994:16). Among Arsii Oromo we may identify more terms that imply the concept of law. *Uumaa*, which stands for such related concepts as creation and the Creator (or *Waaqa*), is one of the terms that stands for law, although it signifies more of ‘natural law’. *Uumaa* sometimes appears in conjunction with *xabboo* (traditions) as in the case of *uumaa-xabboo*. The combination of the two implies the linkage between custom and nature in Arsii Oromo worldview. The combination thus portrays what Arsii people are required to do both by the ‘laws of nature’ and by the ‘laws of custom’. Again, the concept of *aaloo* may also refer to law among Arsii Oromo. According to Abdurahman “It [*aaloo*] [is] an institution expressing custom, rules [...] and] general ways of life of the Arssi Oromo” (Abdurahman, 1991: 1). (Hebo 2006, 115)

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<sup>38</sup> The Borana are one of the Oromo groups who live in the south of Ethiopia and the north of Kenya. Though there are notable distinctions between Borana and Arsi societies and cultures, they share the same language and many aspects of culture and socio-political organization. Many scholars have researched and written about Borana culture and their practice of gadaa and, over time, this group has been interpreted as representative of how gadaa was and should be practiced for all Oromo. Though the Borana culture, socio-political and judicial systems remain strong points of reference with similarities to other Oromo groups, they should be understood as specific to Borana societies. For more information on Borana culture, see the works of the following scholars: Marco Bassi, PTW Baxter Gudhran Dahl, Oba Gufu, Aneessa Kassam, Asmarom Legesse, and Gemetchu Megerssa.

Hebo further notes that most of these terms, such as *aadaa*, *aaloo*, *uumaa* or *uumaa-xabboo*, may relate to law but essentially fall into the domain of customs, morals, and everyday life in society. However, as he explains, the term *law* as it is used in English is a just translation for the Oromo word *seera*. Generally *seera* is only understood by some people in society, such as the experts (Hebo 2006, 115). *Hayyuu*, an expert of customary laws, and *wayyuu*, an expert of the spiritual domain, are specialists of *seera*. “These ‘experts’ deal [...] with two realms of *seera* that Arsii Oromo distinguish as *seera ambaa*, literally ‘People’s law’ or ‘Oromo secular law’ and *seera wayyuu* ‘sacred’ or ‘spiritual law’ (Ibid., 116). Following discussions with Arsi elders, Hebo has concluded that *seera ambaa* signifies Oromo customary laws.<sup>39</sup> For many ateetee women, *seera* (law) is part of their discourse and the ateetee ritual is both a cultural custom and an enactment of law. Locally many of my female informants use *seera aadaa* (lit. cultural/customary law) similar to the way other Arsi legal ‘experts’ use *seera aadaa*. This could be literally translated as “cultural law” or “customary law,” and though it does evoke cultural/customary law, as I will explain in this chapter, it also signifies more.

Anishinabe legal scholar John Borrows and Cree legal scholar Val Napoleon are among a growing number of scholars in Canada who have theorized Indigenous law extensively.<sup>40</sup> Though these scholars work in different socio-cultural contexts than I do, I found their research applicable to the indigenous legal traditions of the Arsi. Many

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<sup>39</sup> As Hebo further explains: “To explicate this, Arsii Oromo frequently make distinction between *seera ambaa* and *seera mootummaa* (the state laws) which they sometimes refer to it as *seera diinaa* (laws of the ‘enemy’). Therefore, I use *seera ambaa* in this book to refer to Oromo nation’s law or Oromo customary law as distinguished from both the laws of the state and customary laws of other non-Oromo people” (Hebo 2006, 116).

<sup>40</sup> Other scholars include: Webber (2009), Mack (2011), Horn-Miller (2009, 2013), Jean LeClair (2011, 2013) and Andrée Boiselle (2010). There are, of course, many other scholars working in the field of indigenous law. Many of these scholars are referenced in the dissertation.

scholars, including Napoleon, have drawn from and built upon John Borrows' foundational work on Indigenous law, *Canada's Indigenous Constitution* (2010). In a discussion on the "sources" of Indigenous legal traditions in Canada, Borrows explains that:

The underpinnings of Indigenous law are entwined with the social, historical, political, biological, economic, and spiritual circumstances of each group. They are based on many sources, including sacred teachings, naturalistic observations, positivistic proclamations, deliberative practices, and local and national customs (Borrows 2010a, 24).

He goes on to describe each type and source, or foundation, of law in detail (sacred, natural, deliberative, positivistic and customary) (Ibid., 23–58), noting that Canadian Indigenous law usually involves the combination of two or more sources.<sup>41</sup> Arsi Oromo law is also conceived similarly to this manner. When the Arsi speak of *seera ambaa* or *seera aadaa* (cultural/customary law), it also includes sacred, natural, deliberative, positivistic and customary laws and more. Furthermore, as Borrows mentions, indigenous laws are interwoven with all the other practices and types of knowledge of the group. To illustrate this briefly, *ateetee* processes are held when *seera wayyuu* (law of what is 'sacred') is broken. In the *ateetee* ritual process, women have a special connection to Waaqa (God) and can sing prayers when their honour and respect are defiled. Praying to

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<sup>41</sup> Borrows (2010a) defines these sources of law in the following manner: sacred law comes from the Creator, creation stories, or ancient teachings (24); natural law originates in the surrounding physical world (28); deliberative law is formed through "processes of persuasion, deliberation, council, and discussion" (35); positivistic law is formed through "proclamations, rules, regulations, codes, teachings, and axioms that are regarded as binding or regulating people's behaviour" (46); and customary law refers to "practices developed through repetitive patterns of social interactions that are accepted as binding on those who participate in them" (51). The two sources that may seem similar are deliberative and positivistic law. Deliberative law refers to the discussions, while positivistic law involves the binding rules. I think his definition of deliberative law is particularly relevant to Arsi customary law. As he explains further, deliberative law involves the continual process of discussing and debating law and its applications: "[T]he proximate source of most Indigenous law is developed through people talking with one another. The human dimension of these laws means that recognition, enforcement, and implementation make them subject to re-examination and revision through the generations" (35).



Waaqa for resolution is part of sacred law (*seera Waaqa* (law of God)). The process involves the use of specific tools from the natural environment (e.g., the women's *siinqee* sticks carved from specific blessed trees) and must be conducted outside, in accordance with *seera lafaa* (natural law; lit. law of the earth/land), particularly when it involves prayers for rain. The *ateetee* process involves legal negotiations and deliberations between elders and women in what many legal scholars would refer to as customary legal interactions (grouped under the term *seera aadaa* or *seera ambaa*). However, I would disagree with either the use of the term customary law or the following, commonly used definition: ““practices developed through repetitive patterns of social interactions that are accepted as binding on those who participate in them” (Borrows 2010, 51). Instead it may be better to use the specific Arsi terms (*seera ambaa/aadaa*) or refer to *seera Arsi*– Arsi Oromo (indigenous) law.

In Napoleon's 2013 article on Canadian Indigenous legal orders, she argues that all laws are based on worldviews (see also 2007). She offers a very insightful discussion on how to let go of Western biases and look at law from the perspective of an Indigenous society:

Law is a not a thing; it is a process that people actually engage in. Indigenous peoples applied law to harvesting fish and game, access to and the distribution of berries, the management of rivers, and the management of all other aspects of political, economic, and social life. Since our legal orders and law are entirely created within our cultures, it can be difficult to see and understand law in other cultures. In other words, law is societally bound—it is only law within the society that created it. Gitksan law is not law to Cree peoples, and vice versa. (Napoleon 2013, 232)

As Napoleon describes it, law is a process that must be understood in its cultural context. Adding to this is Jeremy Webber's assertion that “customary law is the primary form of all law” (Webber 2009, 582). This means that even in western societies, where the law of

nation states dominates today, law originated from interactions between humans in particular cultural contexts.<sup>42</sup>

For the Arsi Oromo, the legal system and *ateetee* are intertwined with worldviews and societal norms. The laws that govern *ateetee* ceremonies and women's rights are part of the customary legal system. For example, the following are included in the *ateetee* laws: a son can never insult or abuse his mother; a husband cannot abuse his wife when she has just given birth and in the months following childbirth; men and women cannot insult or abuse another woman; and a woman is particularly protected and cannot be insulted while she is carrying her *siinqee* stick or heading to an *ateetee* ceremony. These are just a few examples, but generally, women are to be respected and honoured. Many studies on *ateetee* describe very specific circumstances for the ritual, such as violations of the ones listed above, based on abuses of the moral code (*wayyuu*) set out in customary law.

*Wayyuu* (what is sacred or blessed) and *saffuu* (moral or ethical violations) are at the centre of *ateetee* processes. Østebø, who has extensively written about *wayyuu*, describes its relationship to customary law in the following way:

A number of taboos—what Dorothy Hodgson terms ‘codes of morality and respect’ (2000: 8)—regulate the roles and behaviour of men and women among the Arsi. These moral codes are embedded in *wayyuu*, a central concept in the Arsi Oromo worldview (Østebø 2007, 2010). Assigned to deities, nature, persons, social relationships and material items, *wayyuu* is a term used to describe something or someone who should be sacredly respected. When something or someone is said to be *wayyuu* it implies that there are particular laws and moral principles to be followed. When, how and where these moral codes are applied is not only determined by gender, but also by factors such as age, marital status and kinship relations. The law of *wayyuu* (*seeraa wayyuu*) is an inherent part of the customary law system. However, *wayyuu* and its related laws are not commonly

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<sup>42</sup> Webber defines customary law broadly, as law that comes out of human interactions and decisions and that is culture-specific. He emphasizes the cultural and customary origins of all law. This differs from the inductive source of law that Borrowes refers to in the following: “Customary law can be defined as those practices developed through repetitive patterns of social interaction that are accepted as binding on those who participate in them” (Borrowes 2010a, 51).

articulated; only experts of the Oromo law (*seera*) and culture (*aada*), the *hayyuu*, would provide thick descriptions of the concept. One can say that *wayyuu* is best described as a kind of habitus, a part of a taken for granted, tacit worldview (Østebø 2015, 452).

I will discuss the concepts of *wayyuu* and *saffuu* more extensively in chapter 3, in the context of Arsi Oromo vernacular belief systems.

In the very condensed chart below, Napoleon (2013) offers a way of thinking about sources of law different from Borrows. I have included Oromo examples in the bottom row in italics:

Law from Central Processes of Enactment (Legal Positivism)	Law from Social Interaction	Law From the Divine or from within Human Beings
Known as Posited Law	Known as Customary Law	Known as Natural Law
Law comes from a central authority through a formal process. (E.g., Canadian Constitutions, Indian Act, etc.)	Law comes from the interaction between human beings that enables people to generally predict behaviours in a group. (E.g., Resource management law of decentralized peoples)	Law comes from a divine authority or from basic human nature characteristics. (E.g. Ecclesiastical law, etc.)
E.g., The Ethiopian Constitution; Ethiopian justice and court system ( <i>seera mootummaa</i> —the state laws) <sup>43</sup> ; the Oromo Gadaa System laws ( <i>seera gadaa</i> ); <i>heera</i> (historically common law under gadaa); <i>seera</i> (law)	E.g., Oromo cultural/customary laws ( <i>seera ambaa</i> and <i>seera aadaa</i> ); laws of respect ( <i>seera wayyuu</i> )	E.g., Law of Earth and <i>Waaqa</i> (God) ( <i>seera Waaqa-lafaaa</i> ); Oromo <i>Qaalluu</i> institutions; Oromo spiritual leaders and elders; <i>Ateetee</i> ; <i>Wayyuu</i> (expert in the spiritual domain); <i>seera wayyuu</i> (sacred/spiritual laws)

In this chart there are not as many sources for the indigenous laws as in Borrows’ description. However, it does place Arsi indigenous laws in relation to the State government. My additions to the chart also demonstrate how legal pluralism does not

<sup>43</sup> The Arsi sometimes “refer to these state laws as *seera diinaa* (laws of the ‘enemy’)” (Hebo 2006, 116).

only refer to the Ethiopian government laws and customary legal processes. Within the Arsi legal structure there were/are multiple justice systems. Overarching common law exists alongside customary laws and natural laws.

In Arsi societies, the gadaa system and today's customary legal system have many legal domains, including but not limited to: marriage, (divorce), abuse, abduction, murder, inheritance, land tenure, property rights and inter and intraethnic fighting. Mamo Hebo has conducted extensive research on customary law and government dispute resolution processes related to land ownership of the Arsi Oromo in the Kokkossa district, his native area. He has also examined continuity and change in relation to land rights of Arsi Oromo women (Hebo 2006, Chapter 5, Hebo and Shigeta 2014). Hebo explains,

Arsii Oromo elders claim that formal divorce (in a customary setting) is itself a new phenomenon among Arsii-Oromo. Ideally marriage is meant for life among this society. That is why, Arsii Oromo elders further contend, that in the olden days Arsii Oromo did not instituted [sic] laws regulating divorce. Rather, Arsii's marriage ceremonies are full of rituals and symbols dedicated to fertility and marriage stability. However, regardless of what might had [sic] been stipulated in the early indigenous laws, currently one comes across quasi-laws introduced to Oromo customary laws which facilitate divorce in the framework of Arsii custom. Local people further assert that the laws were created relatively recently by "corrupt" gadaa officials and eventually have become a part of the customary law." (Hebo 2006, 88-89)

Due to the patrilineal and patrilocal marriage customs in Arsi society (see the summary of Arsi weddings in chapter 1), a woman's land rights are connected to her husband's land and thus to his clan. As Hebo states, the divorcees' land rights are not "clear-cut" (Ibid.). Women often leave their former husband's clan (*gosa*) after divorce and remarry in another clan (*gosa*); in this circumstance she does not keep land rights since she is no longer attached to the clan of marriage. This is a means of safeguarding the land that belongs to the clans and not giving it to non-clan members (Hebo 2006, 89).

Hebo and Shigeta offer a contemporary discussion of Arsi Oromo women's rights to livestock and land in the pluralistic legal setting of Arsi customs/traditions (and customary law) and Ethiopian law (*seera mootummaa*, or "government law" as often called by the Arsi) (Hebo and Shigeta 2014). As the authors demonstrate, though women would have more land rights by applying Ethiopian constitutional rights (and equality of the sexes for property ownership), many remain loyal to traditional norms and customs that deny them the same rights. Some of these traditional norms and customs are also difficult to displace even if women wanted to demand their constitutional rights. In one such example, the Arsi cultural norms of the livestock market as a male domain make it difficult for women to sell livestock at the market even though they have the right under Ethiopian law (Hebo and Shigeta 2014, 25-26). Hebo and Shigeta also point out that negotiating women's rights through customary law is tricky because the Arsi traditional values and customs that lead to "unequal" rights in terms of land ownership/inheritance, also include *ateetee*, which women use to protect and promote their rights when they have been abused. However, I would argue that women do not need to choose certain rights over others, but they will need to challenge certain norms or values. As values and norms change to allow women more access to property and land, so will customary laws in this regard. At the same time, women's respect, honour, and rights are values that are shared by proponents of Arsi traditional norms, the Ethiopian constitution, and international human rights. In effect, men and women may reject traditional norms that would not allow women to sell cattle, for example, but keep *ateetee* as a justice process that allows women to restore their respect and honour when insulted. What makes these changes more difficult for women than men is that women will have to challenge certain norms

and traditions in order to effectuate change, but men will not have the same battle since they have all their rights.

From time to time, the Arsi Oromo reiterate and redefine regionally centralized laws in their society, both informally and formally, through organized meetings (see the ceremony described at the beginning of Chapter 4). Similarly, the Borana Oromo spend much time reviewing and revising culture (aadaa) and when needed, they make new laws (Asmarom Legesse 1973, 8; Bassi 2005, 103). Bassi explains this Borana process of revision, which is also used by the Arsi Oromo:

Oral laws, by the very fact of being oral, are all too likely to be forgotten if they are not reaffirmed by constant political-judicial discussion. Even in the course of just one generation, with the death of the elders, all the oral laws can potentially be forgotten. This, however, does not happen in the case of Borana oral law, because the laws get systematically recalled and reformulated in various assemblies, due to the necessity of dealing with specific situations. Through this process the laws inevitably get adapted to the new situations and thus modified.

Customary law, subject to this continual process of revision, is more dynamic than codified laws. This process of law reformulation, however, is always strongly conditioned by a broad gamut of general principles—explicitly or implicitly formulated, symbolically expressed values, various types of ideological constructs, kinship terminology and so on—all that comes under the very broad heading of aadaa *Boranaa*.

This heritage assures continuity in the process of renewing substantive law, but the heritage itself is in its turn subject to change. The need to maintain coherence within the entire normative sphere so that it continues to make sense, whatever the changes—done essentially through progressive adjustments—is normally slow. (Bassi 2005, 103)

Bassi goes on to describe informal and formal legislative processes in greater detail. As he explains, when there is a violation of aadaa (culture), an assembly must gather to debate how they will apply a traditional rule or norm (Ibid., 104). The sentence or law, which are both called seera in Oromo, is determined after much debate and discussion. Since a “body of law” with a codified list of laws does not exist, every sentence is based on the individual assembly’s debate of pre-existing norms and the creation and application of new norms through participant consensus. A leader who is an expert in law, ritual and culture prepares and articulates the law (Ibid.). With this in view, seera can be

further defined as the following: “that specific category of norms, expressed verbally, which get elaborated and applied in assemblies” (Ibid., 105).

In Arsi customary law, it is necessary to constantly discuss and debate the application of various codes, laws, ethics and norms. For example, *ateetee* may be practiced all over a large region, but I have seen and heard about variations in interpretations. Elder men have told me that, according to the *gadaa* system, women can call for the ceremony when their husbands abuse them during pregnancy and within a five-to-six month period following childbirth (while they are wearing a beaded headband called *qanafaa*) but not at other times (Imishu Kephu, interview, April 2011). This is a proscriptive and customary law that continues to be spoken, but if followed verbatim, would not condemn abuse that exists outside of this pregnancy and post-partum period.<sup>44</sup> In practice, women can call *ateetee* whenever their husbands have abused them, and not just during this designated time.

As Napoleon explains in reference to Canadian Aboriginal contexts, customary law processes need to be considered in their complexity:

Much of the literature about Aboriginal legal orders reflects a general narrowness in thinking about customary law. Customary law is not an easily codified set of rules for what to do and not to do. Nor is it simply “an expression of the ‘force of habit’ that ‘prevails in the early history of the race.’” Rather, customary law inheres in each Aboriginal cultural system as a whole, forming legal orders that enable large groups of people to live together and to manage themselves accordingly. Failure to fully appreciate the complexities and intellectual processes involved with decision making, law making, dispute resolution, and conflict management in Aboriginal legal orders can characterize Aboriginal societies as one-dimensional: their members are either naturally in agreement on all things and exemplary in all their behaviours or at risk of being considered inauthentic. Simplistic characterization of Aboriginal legal orders not only ignores history

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<sup>44</sup> In another group interview with elder men and judges/customary legal experts in the Kokkossa area (2012), they told me that this was the cultural/customary law. When I asked if it would be possible for a man to hit or abuse his wife at any time when she were not in this pregnancy/post-partum period, they said it was permissible.

and constant cultural change, but it also flattens the diversity of cultures and obscures the tremendous depth and scope of human experience. (Napoleon 2010, 45–46)

Napoleon raises several other significant points that are particularly relevant to the Oromo context: law is a collaborative process; law is never static—it is always changing and adapting to contexts, circumstances and people; and law is about thinking. “Law is the intellectual process of deliberating and reasoning to apply rules according to the context” (Napoleon 2013, 232). Several Canadian indigenous legal scholars, including Borrows, Napoleon and Webber, have also demonstrated that the everyday practice of law involves continual disagreements and negotiations. “Disagreement can be an important part of the law, as long as there are sufficient convergences to produce continuous interim settlements” (Borrows 2010, 24). Similarly, for the Arsi Oromo, just as Bassi demonstrated with the Borana, what could be referred to as law or legal norms are constantly being discussed and debated in general and on a case-by-case basis. In the *ateetee* process, the women’s *saddeetta* (council) negotiates with the men’s *saddeetta* to come to a decision. Generally the two sides express their opinions, continuing to discuss and debate until they reach convergences. The councils generally vote democratically to decide if there have been enough convergences to settle the matter.

All of these points are clearly demonstrated when Arsi women and men gather for ceremonial rituals, such as gatherings focused on the *gadaa* system, prayers for rain and dispute resolution processes (such as *ateetee*). Men and women from the community can gather in groups, separately and together, to discuss and debate issues. In certain debates, elected councils and elders also represent community members, but anyone can be actively involved in the debate on how to apply rules in specific contexts. In many *ateetee*



ceremonies, for example, the women's saddeetta (council) negotiates with the men's saddeetta in order to receive satisfactory compensation. This could be a cow instead of a sheep or two cows instead of one. I attended one saddeetta meeting in which the women were asking for the men to provide a cow instead of sheep for an *ateetee fala* (prayers/sacrifice) ceremony. These negotiations in the legal councils will be illustrated through examples of these discussions in the saddeetta section below.

Napoleon has examined how members of the Gitksan First Nation in Canada resolve disputes through the ritual process and how legal reasoning is embedded in the ritual. She describes the process in the following manner:

The embedded legal reasoning process [...] enables the Gitksan to create a dialogic construct of consent for the foundation of their society. This process of discussion, disagreement, affirmation, and reconciliation, performed at intervals whenever important actions or decisions were required, constituted a form of engaged reason that serves the roles often attributed by political theorists to consent. Indeed, it can be seen as a continual renewal of adherence, a continual and purposeful re-creation of the fabric of community, through deliberation on that community's structure and commitments, all against a backdrop of kin relations and an ethic of respect (Napoleon 2010, 46).

Indeed, similar to Napoleon's example, the Arsi Oromo ateetee ritual is part of a network that includes community renewal and the creation of societal rules against a similar background of clan and family relations and moral ethics and respect. This worldview, including how the community reasons and debates these issues, will be explored in more detail in the following chapters. The idea that justice is both process and product is central to this thesis. In the case of ateetee, holding the ceremony is active law. And singing prayers is law and justice. I explore how music in the ritual is central to this process of the making and reshaping of local laws and justice and to the overall dispute resolution process.

### **The relationships between gadaa, customary law and ateetee**

Customary law, created at a place called Odaa Roobaa,<sup>45</sup> may have preceded the establishment of the Arsi gadaa system (Endessa 2011, 38). Endessa argues that customary law was part of the original gadaa system, but there are varying oral testimonies related to whether ateetee (or the siinqee institution as it is sometimes called), preceded the gadaa system and customary law, was part of their creation, or came after their formation. The order in which these institutions were established may vary depending on the geographic location. In the Kokkossa area, some of my interlocutors told me the same story that Tolosa Mamuye heard from the majority of his informants: the *qaalluu* (spiritual leader) gave the *Abbaa Bokkuu* (the leader of the gadaa system) the *bokkuu* (sceptre held by the head of gadaa) and the siinqee stick, and told him to keep the bokkuu and give the siinqee to his wife (Mamuye 2010, 42) (Chapter 5). However, according to other interlocutors in the Nansabo district and in the Langano area, ateetee's role emerged as part of seera ambaa rather than an element of the gadaa system. This account of institutional history was also put forth by some of Endessa's informants (Endessa 2010, 4). As Endessa remarks, all of these institutions—including *qaalluu*, ateetee/siinqee, gadaa, *gumaa* (compensation ceremony for issues of extreme violence)—fall under the umbrella of seera ambaa. Most interlocutors agree that, because women did not have the same access to political power as men, they were given spiritual power through ateetee (Kumsa 1999, Legesse 1973, Megerssa 1994). I will explore this later in

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<sup>45</sup> This is now in Bale zone, near a town called Gindhir (Endessa 2011, 38). *Odaa* is a sycamore tree. It is considered to have spiritual importance. In the past, there were specific *oda* that the Oromo gathered under for gadaa administration (Endessa 2011, 27-28, 38-45).

this chapter and the dissertation. What is significant for this study is that the laws and *ateetee* have existed for centuries.

The *gadaa* system was based on what was called customary constitution and law (*heera fi seera*) (Endessa 2011, 15). According to Hussein, these elements differed according to whether they were administered locally or regionally: “The difference between the *heera*’ (common law) and *seera* (local or customary law) is that, *heera* is more general than *seera* in terms of its content. It addresses common pan-Oromo issues in general, while *seera* is a local customary law. Therefore each and every Oda administration recognized the ‘*heera*’ as the “common law” of the Oromo people” (Ibid., 39). In contemporary contexts this differentiation is made between *seera* (law, or common law) and *seera ambaa* or *seera aadaa* (customary law).

There are many remaining vestiges of *gadaa* or even variations that have developed over time. Hebo discusses historic changes to what he refers to as indigenous laws (pre-conquest laws of *gadaa*) that then transformed them into what he and others call customary laws (Ibid., 111). He explains the connection between *gadaa*-based laws and *seera ambaa* that are in practice today:

With the decline and transformation of the *gadaa* system, *gosa*<sup>46</sup> have risen to prominence in this part of Oromo land. However, among Arsii Oromo, *gadaa*-based laws (perhaps as has been the case among many other branches of the Oromo) did not merely wither away. Rather these laws have been diluted and have persisted as integral parts of the various institutions, its core being survived and maintained as *seera ambaa* and practiced by the institutions of *jaarsa* and *wayyuu*. (Hebo 2006, 112)

In effect, though many aspects of the *gadaa* system are only practiced ritually today, key elements can be found in Arsi culture, morals, values and customary laws (*seera aadaa/ambaa*). *Ateetee* descended from the *gadaa* system but is part of a number of

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<sup>46</sup> *Gosa* is the Oromo word for clan.

customary legal practices used today. Hebo sees legal pluralism as a recent development that includes Arsi customary law, secular Ethiopian government structures, and religious laws, like Shariya law (Ibid.).

Before returning to the specifics of Arsi Oromo systems for dispute resolution, some background about historical systems of governance, law, and social organization is necessary. Namely, in the next section I will discuss the gadaa system in more detail.

### **The gadaa and Arsi gadaa system(s): history and changes**

The gadaa is the indigenous Oromo generation-based socio-political system that was historically practiced—to varying degrees—among the different Oromo groups. In this system, which was established in many Oromo areas of what is now Ethiopia as early as the sixteenth century, one male generational group assumed new political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual powers every eight years (Legesse 1973). Legesse defines it in the following manner: “The gada system is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities. Each gada class remains in power during a specific term (*gada*) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony” (1973, 8). The particularity of the Oromo gadaa systems is that they contain both socio-political classes (groups of people who share the same socio-political status and who perform rites of passage together) and age grades or sets (the stages of social development through which the members of the groups pass) (Legesse 1973, 51). According to Hussein Endessa and his informants, the Arsi gadaa system was created at a time of social crises, when there was no law and order and some people were looking to establish a system of governance. At

that time, spiritual leaders, elders (with or without divine influence) or a combination of both of these groups recommended that the law and gadaa system be created.<sup>47</sup>

Age class systems are practiced throughout East Africa and are often very complex; their practices can vary radically from one area to another. Because of its complexity and interconnectedness to Oromo culture and society, gadaa has been one of the most researched areas in Oromo studies. Asmarom Legesse's research on gadaa practiced by the Borana Oromo in the south of Ethiopia was (and still is to some extent) the reference for the gadaa system (1973). Many other scholars have referred to his representation of the Borana gadaa system as the model for the gadaa for all Oromo—as the “pure” system, seeing any other form of gadaa as a variation of this original gadaa system.<sup>48</sup> This “Boorananorm” (“Boorananormé”) approach, as Osmond dubs it, includes views of a declining Borana gadaa system and “distorted” or “disappearing” systems of other Oromo groups (Osmond 2003, 83).<sup>49</sup> Nationalist discourse and pan-Oromo identity has also drawn on this one gadaa system of reference.

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<sup>47</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to look into the history of the creation of the Arsi gadaa system. For a more detailed history of the Arsi gadaa system, see Hussein Hindeesa's master's thesis (2011). Endessa, who wrote a master's thesis on the Arsi gadaa system of the Arsi highlands, explored the system from the Arsi perspective, discussing some of its historic and current manifestations in Arsi highland areas (2011). There are many other works on the Oromo gadaa system, but most of the others are based on the Borana gadaa system. See Asmarom Legesse's works for more information on gadaa as practiced by the Borana Oromo (1973, 2000, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> See Ficquet (2003) and Osmond (2003) for excellent critiques of this view of the Borana gadaa—and Borana Oromo culture more generally—as the “pure” Oromo culture. Much research that has been conducted recently has built on and added to this first study of gadaa. See Bassi (2005) for a detailed study of the political and judicial processes of the Borana Oromo; and Endessa's (2011) M.A. thesis for an in depth study of the Arsi gadaa system.

<sup>49</sup> For some examples of other works that refer to this decline in this Borana gadaa model among other groups, see Blackhurst (1978) Knutsson's study on the Macca Oromo (1967) and Lewis's work among the Arsi Oromo (1984).

It is important to note that the gadaa system does not exist in the same way today as it may have historically. Years of conquest under the Emperor Menelik II's rule (1889-1913), internal colonization, prohibition of cultural practices and gadaa, and imposition of a national governance system gradually led to the decline of the Oromo socio-political system (Gnamo 2014). In some areas, this decline began hundreds of years ago. In other areas it is more recent. The system disappeared more or less completely in certain areas, while in other locales it continues to be practiced, remembered, and used through meetings and ceremonies.<sup>50</sup> And in some areas gadaa may have never had much prominence.<sup>51</sup> Some scholars have indicated that the Arsi gadaa had so severely declined it no longer had much socio-political importance (Legesse 1973, Popp 2005). In spite of the weakening of the system, some vestiges still remain in Arsi, at the very least as a social and cultural concept (Hebo 2006, Østebø 2007). I can also confirm that among the Arsi, different aspects of gadaa are referenced in conversations, dispute resolution processes, and ceremonies like the one I attended in Faccaa'aa (chapter 4). Furthermore, the *Cidha* Gadaa (ceremony for the passage from one age group to another) is still practiced every eight years in some Arsi areas.

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<sup>50</sup> Cultural and geographic differences also need to be taken into account. Although this is only a hypothesis, it is also possible that in some Arsi areas, there may not have even been an official gadaa system. People in one village or area may have governed themselves with something slightly different, such as a neighbouring ethnic group's system. Since the larger gadaa system was created and originally administered in what is present-day Bale zone (hundreds of kilometers from some Arsi areas), it seems probable that it may not have been translated in the same way or, even at all, in some areas. Because the Arsi gadaa system has, so far, only been researched in some highland areas by one master's student, I do not think it is possible to generalize to all of Arsi.

<sup>51</sup> In the lowlands, some elders have told me that they were never part of the gadaa system (personal communications). Eloi Ficquet (2003, 248) provides the following hypothesis: the Arsi in the lowlands could have originally been those who were excluded from the gadaa system practiced by the Arsi in the highlands. As a result they may have had to go herd their cattle in the less fertile lowlands.

Today in many of the Oromia government offices and cities, there are statues, halls and centres that reference gadaa, such as the immense arched structure of the *galma abbaa gadaa* (gadaa chairman/leader hall)<sup>52</sup> in the Oromia government's headquarters in Adama, Ethiopia. In recent years the Oromia Culture and Tourism offices have sent cultural workers out to conduct research on the gadaa system and they have been trying to reinstate some of the gadaa practices by selecting and training local leaders to restore or initiate gadaa practices (Tayere Godana, interview, December 25, 2010). Most recently the Oromia Government, the Oromia Culture and Tourism Office, and the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (a department of the Ethiopian Government), have turned in an application for UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status for the Oromo gadaa system.

Oromo customary law and vestiges of the gadaa system remain relevant to Arsi women: they encompass and frame *ateetee* and other dispute resolution ceremonies. These are also the systems that women apply to for support when they assert and defend their rights. In this chapter I focus on the age grades (not the socio-political classes), since that is what paralleled societal roles historically. Though women technically were not included in the gadaa age grades, they did have other complementary roles that paralleled the age grades (Kumsa 1997, Legesse 1973, personal communications). What I try to ask through the lens of gadaa is what can be revealed about Arsi women's and men's relationships and the applications of *ateetee* through the way women's parallel gadaa roles were negotiated.

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<sup>52</sup> *Abbaa gadaa* literally means "father of gadaa." This is called *Abbaa bokku* for the Arsi.

### Age grades and their corresponding social roles in Arsi society

The foundational idea of the gadaa system is that a son would ideally enter the first age grade when his father was 40 and in the fifth and governing age grade. Of course since children were born at different times, this was probably variable in practice (Ficquet 2003). There are also theories that those children who did not fit into the system may have been sent to occupy less desirable lands in lowland areas (Ibid.). Those from the same age group went through their social life and responsibilities together, and moved onto another age group through rituals (Ficquet 2003, 238). Hussein describes eight distinct male age grade groups that chronologically followed their societal roles and responsibilities (i.e., youth, young men who would go to war, men who would enter politics, politicians, and elders who judged).<sup>53</sup> These were undoubtedly applied to varying degrees among the Arsi of different geographical areas. Even today in Arsi society, different age groups tend to stay together and they have different social responsibilities and activities.<sup>54</sup> Though I will not be describing the musical rituals in this chapter, I think it is important to note that each age group in society has differing song and dance repertoires and each rite of passage is conducted with songs.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> According to Hussein Endessa's informants in Arsi, the age grades were the following: *dabballee* for males and *qarree* for females (ages 1-8); *gaammee diqqaa* (ages 8-16); *gaammee guddaa* (ages 16-24); *kuusaa* (ages 24-32); *doori* (ages 32-40); *abbaa lubaa* (ages 40-48); *yuuba duraa* (ages 48-56); *yuuba lammaffaa* (ages 56-64); *jarsa* (ages 64-80); and *seera-fixeessa* (above age 80) (Hussein Hindeesa 2011, 59).

<sup>54</sup> As Anne-Marie Peatrik has pointed out, this is a common social organization: all societies recognize different age categories, organized either by birth order (oldest/youngest relationship) or by age grades and age grade levels (Peatrik 1995, 17).

<sup>55</sup> For more specifics on the musical repertoires of the different members of society (youths, women and men) in the context of Arsi Oromo weddings, see Qashu 2004, 2009; and for details on male repertoires (boys, youth and men), see Qashu 2006, 2007.



Many scholars have claimed that, historically, women were excluded from the gadaa age grades that led to political powers. They did not have a gadaa grade at birth but could marry into one. They are considered *halaga* (outsiders) to the *gosa* (clan) (Legesse 1973, Kumsa 1997, 119). In spite of this, women did and do have their own corresponding powers in the domestic, spiritual and ritual realms.<sup>56</sup> However, I would continue to question whether these domestic and spiritual powers provided a similar type of agency and power as the men had in their socio-political roles. Or, were these realms of women merely a social means of keeping them in a less advantageous or inferior position in society. Though women may not have been part of gadaa age grades, many of my interlocutors have told me that women also had (and sometimes continue to have) their own generational organization that corresponds to that of the men (Tayere Godana, interview, 25 December 2010 and Gemetchu Megerssa, personal communication). Some interlocutors also point to women's rites of passage and their roles within gadaa ceremonies as part of their generational organization (Kadiro Ganamo, Imishu Kephu, interviews).

In order to understand how this system is relevant to contemporary contexts where gadaa is mainly used ritually, I think it is useful to take a look at the age groups that are the most visible today (youths, married men and women, those with political and legal power, and elders), focusing on their characteristics and the roles that are most relevant to

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<sup>56</sup> As I will explain later in the chapter and in the dissertation (chapter 3), women are considered to have a particular status that grants them special spiritual powers.

this study.<sup>57</sup> The gadaa grades I discuss are male grades, but I also note the corresponding generational roles—both historic and contemporary—of women.

*Children and youths: all girls, then all boys*

In Arsi culture, from a very young age, children are expected to help their parents with cattle tending, farming, cooking and childcare. This first age group is *dabballee* for males and *qarree* for females (Endessa 2011, 59). For most Oromo groups it is only referred to as *dabballee* for both genders. While cooking, milking the cows and childcare are generally only the domain of girls (and women), both young boys and girls can herd the cattle and help with the farming. In the gadaa system, according to several informants and as documented by Legesse (1973), up until age eight all children are considered to be like girls and are addressed in the feminine gender. In the past they also had long hair and were dressed like girls during this time (Gemetchu Megerssa, personal communication). According to Gemechu, this was part of the gadaa system. This gadaa grade and the later grade of elders are considered to be the most sacred, or wayyuu (Østebø 2007, 68). Because young children had not officially entered the system yet, they were wayyuu, in a sort of protected state before they had to take on official roles. One question I asked in relation to this status is why the female gender is associated with children and protection.

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<sup>57</sup> For a relevant and detailed description of Arsi girls' and boys' socialization in the Dodola area (adjacent and overlapping areas where I researched), see Deressa 2002. His research shows traditional socialization of girls to focus on being soft spoken, able domestics, and geared toward marriage. Boys are socialized to be courageous and aim for public work (59–64). Though I have found that similar patterns of socialization persist today, many more girls are going further with their education, marrying later, and demonstrating more autonomy in their decisions.

Why is the male gender not perceived in such a manner? I will explore these questions further in this section.

In the next cycle (*gaammee diqqaa*)—between the ages of eight and sixteen<sup>58</sup>—all children are considered to be boys. I discovered this through interviews about participation in ateetee ceremonies. The following statement is typical of responses I received when I asked why unmarried girls don't participate in ateetee:

LQ: Dubarttoonni hin heerrumnee maaliif irraatti hin hirmaanne?

M: Shaammarraan hin heerruumnee akka dhiirratti waan iraa lamaniif.

LQ: Why don't unmarried girls participate (in ateetee)?

M: Unmarried girls are considered to be boys.  
(Momina Mudee, interview, May 18, 2009)

Gobane went further to say that unmarried girls were boys. Girls, however, can dance.

This is something that is not allowed once they are married:

LQ: Maliif dubarttin ateetee hin sirbiitu? Ateetee dubarttin maaliif ateetee hin sirbitu kan hin heerrumne?

G: Ateetee hin taane kaa isiin ammaa dhiira jechuudha. Isiin dhiira jechuudha. Yoo giize sirba sirbite male yoo fala taphate malee hin baafatu durbi hin baafatu.

LQ: Why can't girls sing ateetee? Why can't unmarried girls sing ateetee?

G: Ateetee is not possible because now she is male. This means she is a male. She can dance. She can go to *fala* (prayers). She cannot do this (sing ateetee). Girls cannot do this.

(Gobane Ogato, interview, October 2010)

This would not apply to a woman of adult age who is not married. Though not married, she would be considered a woman and would be accepted by other women into the

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<sup>58</sup> During this period, youth tend to help with tasks around the house, livestock herding, the harvest and the market. The interior domestic sphere and milking the cows is still the domain of young women.

ateetee circle. As Gemetchu Megerssa explained, the fact that girls and boys are all considered to be boys was also part of the gadaa system and what was permitted during the different age grades. Although many youth have boyfriends or girlfriends, sex before marriage is prohibited. This cultural rule is enforced by the notion of girls being perceived as boys until they are of age to marry. Intercourse with a girl that is not married would be seen as having a sexual relationship with a boy, which is something highly frowned upon among the Oromo (Gemetchu Megerssa, personal communication).<sup>59</sup> This would also be a means of protecting unmarried girls from abduction marriages or other abuses. However, I have to wonder if premarital sex is perceived as wrong either way, why would the gender make such a difference? Abductions of unmarried girls still take place in spite of this status. Could the status of girls being perceived as boys before marriage also be a way for a girl to have autonomy and agency before entering into the more constrained status of an adult woman? Historically during this age range, both girls and boys took on more responsibilities, preparing themselves for the time when they would marry. Now most youth aim to further their studies if they can, but still help around their homestead in rural areas.

### *Becoming an adult*

The next gadaa grade, *gaammee guddaa* (ages 16-24), was the transition to adulthood. Then there were two other age groups before men entered politics: *kuusaa* (ages 24-32) and *doori* (ages 32-40). During this time, men would begin to acquire their

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<sup>59</sup> Of course in spite of these restrictions, I have heard many stories of pre-marital sexual relations among youth. Even when some youth do not speak of it directly, it is referenced privately in youth song repertoires, such as *weeduu jaalala* (love songs) and some of the wedding repertoires.

own fields and cattle and prepare themselves for marriage, though they still lived in their mother's home. Some men would begin to have a voice in local politics (but not have an active political role) and, if possible, go hunting for the first time.

In parallel with these age grades, women married or prepared for marriage, concurrently working within their own homestead, and taking care of domestic chores and the cattle. Marriage was (and remains) extremely important for women in the gadaa system as it signified the transition to womanhood and adulthood and it was marked by a series of rituals (Baxter 1986, Qashu 2009). When elders have talked to me about women's gadaa grades, marriage was considered a major transition (Kadiro Ganamo, interview, May 11, 2009; Imishu Kephu, interview, May 12, 2009). Married women would begin to participate in their own spiritual and political rituals through ateetee. Historically there was no alternative to marriage. A woman could marry to become a man's first wife or one of several wives. If a woman did not marry it would have been because she had a disability that did not allow her to perform her conjugal duties. An unmarried woman was considered outside of the gadaa system and remained dependant on her parents, the land her father gave her, and her clan. Technically she was considered to be like a child until she passed a certain age and eventually became accepted as a woman. If she had a child out of wedlock (which was completely unacceptable) she would have also eventually been given some sort of status. I have not found specific historic examples related to unmarried women, but most likely an unmarried woman remained with her birth clan and her immediate family or she took on a special role that did not require marriage, such as becoming a *qallicha* (spiritual leader).

Today, though many of the social roles for both genders still exist (such as living in their birth home and beginning to work, acquiring fields, and becoming active in local politics), preparation for hunting and war is replaced by education, marriage, farming, work in shops in towns or further afield. Many young women still marry at a young age, and they do help with their homestead or home in town, but many also have the opportunity to attend school. In the past, married women in rural areas did not attend school, but today, married women with supportive families do sometimes continue or go back to school. Often it takes a long time because they stop their studies when they have a baby and return after the baby is older. In this way, it is not uncommon to find elementary school-goers who range between the ages of five and twenty or more. Many young women look for employment or working in shops and government offices in towns, and as teachers and health care workers in rural areas. Some women express themselves spiritually and politically through ateetee. Others are involved in women's issues through work in government positions such as local and rural women's affairs officers or cultural officers.

Today women who do not marry tend to leave the rural areas to attend school or work in towns and cities. On only a few occasions I met older women who had never married. One of these women was deaf, so she lived with her aunt and helped her on her farm. Often women will adopt relatives with disabilities if the child's family cannot support her/him or all the immediate family had died. Widowed or older women also tend to appreciate having the extra company and help on the farm. I only met some young women who were not yet married helping on their families' farms or working in nearby businesses or hotels. All young women are still expected to marry, but this expectation is

changing. In rural areas I never encountered an unmarried woman at an ateetee ceremony, but if an older, unmarried woman had wanted to attend she probably would have been accepted. Ateetee practices are dynamic, even though women speak of rigid terms of participation and practice. Ateetee was and is a married woman's justice process, but it can and must adapt in the future as women's statuses and lifestyles continue to change. I think the future role and adaptation of ateetee is a question that needs to be continually asked not only in the context of the dissertation, but over time.

### *Political responsibilities*

After this period—before and at the fifth age grade of the system (called *abbaa lubaa*)—when men were reaching the age of forty, they took on political responsibilities. Their judicial and legal roles followed when they knew Oromo law in more detail, often in the next age grade. These roles roughly correspond to the same ages today, although there are bright, younger men who enter local politics because what they say is representative of and respected by others in their community. When in power, the men in this age group made decisions collectively. In this type of system, making political decisions was relatively democratic, and social trajectories of the individuals were systemized and independent of factors such as economic wealth.<sup>60</sup>

Whatever the actual application of the gadaa system among the Arsi of different areas, contemporary Arsi society has very little hierarchy. The clans do not have chiefs and differences in social status are generally minimally marked. On their own initiative

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<sup>60</sup> According to Anne Peatrik, age-grade systems are “neither of the State nor acephalous, but of collective power” (“ni étatique ni acéphale, mais à pouvoirs collectifs”) (1995, 15).

(or with the encouragement of their friends), some men take on political roles. For example, one man may be chosen by others to represent them in the district or the administrative capital. But if a man takes on these political functions, this does not translate into hierarchized social status.

Women do not have an equivalent for this age grade in the system. They were/are considered married women and their status is linked to that of the elders in the next category. As I explained in the last section, historically if women were not married, they were outside of the system. They could eventually be considered as women, similar to a woman who is married, but not the same. Today this is still the same case. In this manner, even though it is historically and technically not allowed, an unmarried woman could participate in an *ateetee* ceremony. Though womanhood and marriage is a strict category in Arsi society, there is some room for flexibility and adaptation. In addition to marriage, some women had/have considerable leadership roles (see below).

#### *Liminality and mukaa laaftuu: Children, elders and women*

In the Arsi system, elders are mainly in the age grade called *jaarsaa* (lit. elder).<sup>61</sup> Historically, male elders were retired from active politics and law making, but they played essential roles as mediators. Even today, elders known for their wisdom in decision-making and dispute resolution make up groups of elders (*jaarsuumaa/jaarsa biyyaa*) that take part in resolving disputes (see below). Although women are not part of the active judicial and legal age group of men discussed above, like male elders, female elders are active as decision makers and dispute mediators.

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<sup>61</sup> Among other Oromo groups, this age grade is called *gadaamojii* (Asmarom Legesse 1973).



What is of particular interest for the discussion of women in relation to gadaa and Oromo law is how the Arsi consider the category of elders (*gadaamojjii/jarsaa*) and that of children (*daballe*) as liminal, or transitional grades in the gadaa system and how they are related to the female domain. Aneesa Kassam offers a description of these social categories in an analysis of gadaa rites of passage among the Borana Oromo:

These two liminal grades represent mirror images of each other: as the *gadaam-mojjii* are preparing to exit the cycle of social time, the *dabballee* are entering it. The term *gadaammojjii*, a compound noun composed of *gada* and *mojjii*, means, in fact, those who 'no longer know the gadaa'. 'Knowing' implies, here, no longer to abide by or to practise the *gadaa* (Megerssa, personal communication). Similarly, until they are initiated into the cycle and named, the *dabballee* are treated as social non-entities who are outside the system (cf. Legesse, 1973: 115). Moreover, both these groups of men are considered to belong to the sacred domain of the female (*issi*) and are referred to by the female pronoun (Kassam 1999, 494).

Anthropologists Asmarom Legesse (1973) and Jan Hinnant (1977) have also described *gadaamojjii* and *daballe* grades as liminal, transitory stages, lacking in socio-political leadership, but endowed with important religious roles. Children and men were seen as intermediaries between men and Waaqa (Legesse 1973, 117). My Arsi interlocutors have confirmed this notion that the class of male elders and that of young boys are culturally considered to occupy a temporary, or liminal state, and to be considered more feminine. This association with the feminine is directly linked to women's status of being seen as closer to Waaqa (God) (chapter 3). Several scholars have also defined women as both liminal, because they do not have the same political power as men and are outside of the gadaa political system, and endowed with a special spiritual status (Kelly 1992, Kumsa 1997, Østebø 2007, 2009). Through my research, I have found that Arsi women hold this particular spiritual status of

being closer to Waaqa (God) and can mediate with the help of Waaqa (see chapter 3). However, I do not think Arsi womanhood is liminal, or a temporary, transitory status. Liminal or liminality is a term that comes with a considerable anthropological history (see, for example, the foundational works of Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1969, 1974)). Many works that discuss liminality focus on liminal, or temporary periods in a person or group of people's life, such as rites of passage. Bjorn Thomassen published an entire study dedicated to liminality in which he analyzes Van Gennep and Turner's works and offers models of different types of liminality, including "epoch" or "life-span duration" liminality (Thomassen 2014, 90). Thomassen does not offer detail or examples of epoch liminality, so the only way it could potentially be applied to Arsi women would be to interpret their in-between state between the everyday and the spiritual realm as something that lasts during their married lifetime.

Instead of talking about liminality, I would opt for the Arsi description. The Arsi have their own term for women's status: *mukaa laaftuu* (lit. soft wood).<sup>62</sup> I have defined this as soft wood, which is a possible literal definition of the term. Soft wood, as opposed to hard wood, has positive qualities since it is malleable and adaptable to different situations. However, some of my interlocutors used this word in the sense of "weak wood," describing women as physically weak but spiritually strong. Associating women with a physically

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<sup>62</sup> *Muka lafaa* has been documented by scholars (Hinnant 1977, Legesse 1973, Megerssa 1994, Kumsa 1997, Østebø 2007) and many of my interlocutors have mentioned it (personal communications).

and biologically weaker status or a status that is closer to nature in opposition with men who are stronger, and thus more socially and politically viable, creates an unfair distinction. This in turn can be used to relegate women to a submissive position in which they may have less power than men. In the following passage, Gemetchu Megerssa describes *mukaa laaftuu* as part of a conceptual and hierarchical classification based on physical abilities that could change depending on the circumstances or the views of the women or men:

Division of labour based on sexual differentiation divided the family into male and female working members. In Oromo, however, this original distinction is not made strictly according to biological criteria. Gender is socially and culturally constructed and determines the roles and status of male and female in the society. Traditional Oromo law thus placed women and children under eight years of age and old men above eighty into the female category and in the Oromo language this group of people was addressed by the female pronoun. Similarly, all men between the age of eight and eighty belonged to the male category and were addressed using the male pronoun. The logical explanation for this distinction is one obviously based on physical strength. Women are referred to as the weaker "tree" (*muka laafa*), in opposition to men. Therefore all those who belonged to the female category, women, children and retired elders, required the protection of the physically stronger male group. In every day practical life, this classification into male and female at the conceptual level, could be modified to suit changing circumstances or reflect the dominant penchant of men and women alike. Although, the division into male and female may sound a sort of polarity with positive and negative attributes, the attributes are never fixed.

Based on this conceptual division of the family, the activities of its members also tended to be polarized into two opposing spheres, relating to the work indoors and outdoors. Indoor activities were led and dominated by the female head of the house. Similarly, the father had absolute command over decisions regarding outdoor activities. The authority of the mother over the family members, both male and female, was second only to that of her husband. Her power could only be exceeded by the eldest son at the death of the father of the homestead (Gemetchu Megerssa 1994, 164).

Like the soft wood it evokes, according to Gemetchu, *mukaa laaftuu* seems to be a malleable status, which can be shaped or interpreted in different ways depending on the interests of those involved. At the same time, Gemetchu seems to be indicating that in spite of being able to shape their gendered status, women ultimately have less power and authority than their husbands. Of course women do

not just have one status but many. The question here is not about what mukaa laaftuu is, but how men and women, their assumptions, opinions, and actions, shape this category. As the feminist anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo argued,

[a] woman's place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she does (or even less a function of what, biologically, she is) but of the meaning her activities acquire through concrete social interactions. And the significances women assign to the activities of their lives are things that we can only grasp through an analysis of the relationships that women forge, the social contexts they (along with men) create-and within which they are defined (1980, 400).

Though this is no longer a novel idea in gender analysis, it is an excellent reminder of the complexities of gender construction and gendered relationships, and it is relevant to this discussion. Mukaa laaftuu can be defined in positive manners, but many of my interlocutors used it to mean weak, gentle, or soft in the sense of physically dependent and politically meek and quiet. I was even more confused by these uses because Arsi women are definitely not weak or meek.

Could mukaa laaftuu be a mechanism in the patrilineal society to keep women in an inferior position to that of men? A minority of male elders has even told me that women are like children (and need to be disciplined as such). In ever-changing social contexts with shifting values and mores in relation to the patrilineal structures of Arsi culture, some interlocutors may see women as inferior to men and see them as having a lesser social status. Certain interlocutors would use this discourse and these marginalizing definitions of mukaa laaftuu to keep women in this inferior position. However, for most other interlocutors, women's close connection to Waaqa gives them a special spiritual status that was at least historically considered as powerful, like political statuses of men. In addition to politics, men still dominate domains such as property and land tenure

and livestock purchases and sales. Women did/do, however, control sales of milk and butter in markets, though on the highest level, male brokers travel the longest distances to sell the butter in markets further afield. Historically and still in many areas today, women hold spiritual and ritual statuses that are more powerful than those of men. All of these domains of men and women are considered to be different - not equal, but one is not more valued than another. Of course this is constantly shifting, particularly today with all the influences from mainstream religions. And these shifts are not all negative (see chapter 4). Women are finding equivalent or even stronger positions in other religious cultures.

Asymmetries in Arsi gender relations have been explained in different ways. The Oromo scholar Kuwee Kumsa attributes Oromo women's historically marginal position in society to two main socio-cultural elements: (1) women were excluded from having a political voice within the men's system; and (2) women married into another lineage and clan, so they are considered *halaga* (outsiders, strangers) in their husband's clan (Kumsa 1997, 119). Within this context, the only connection they had to their husband's lineage is through childbirth, as their children were members of the husband's lineage. I think these explanations provide an answer to the "what" some of the gender inequalities were, but they do not demonstrate how they were negotiated or conceived by women and men.

As a legal balance to the negative connotations of women as mukaa laaftuu women could use ateetee to restore and promote their respect and honour. Summarizing her interview with Gemetchu Megerssa, Kumsa describes the checks

and balances of women's siinqee institution (ateetee).<sup>63</sup>

Megerssa asserts that there was a check and balance mechanism built into the *gadaa* system by which *siinqee* was institutionalized, and women formed parallel organizations of their own which actively excluded men. [...] Although women were considered strangers, Megerssa states, they were also regarded as *muka laaftuu* (soft wood—a depiction of their liminality) and the law for those categorized as such protected them. *Siinqee*, he asserts, was the weapon by which Oromo women fought for their rights. *Gadaa* laws provided for them and society honored it. Thus the *siinqee* institution functioned hand in hand with the *Gadaa* system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances.” (Interview with Gemetchu Megerssa in Kuwee Kumsa 1997, 119)

If historically ateetee was a means of compensating for women's precarious social position as a stranger in their husbands' clans, it remains just as important today as values and norms shift. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter 3, this concept of women's closeness to Waaqa and their spiritual powers gave them political powers that men did not have.

### **Women's leadership roles in gadaa**

Some women took on considerable leadership responsibilities that complemented those of men. In his thesis, Hussein provides a description of the internal leadership of the Arsi gadaa system (Endessa 2011). There is one main body, the council of the gadaa system (*yaa'a* or *chaffe*), under which the others fall.<sup>64</sup> There are several leadership roles that relate directly to Arsi women, their rights, and their dispute resolution processes. These are *urji dubarti*, *haadha siinqee*, *haadha nagayaa*, *jaarsumma*, *jaarsa biyyaa*, and *saddeetta*. I will focus my discussion in this chapter on three of these roles—*urjii dubarti*

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<sup>63</sup> I have also confirmed this through conversations and interviews (Gemetchu Megerssa, personal communication). Some other interlocutors who have confirmed this include: Guyyee Kadir, Imishu Kephu, Kadiro Ganamo, and Tayere Godana. Informally, most ateetee women and elders with whom I discussed the ateetee process and women's positions in society emphasized the significance of the institution in maintaining the balance of power in Arsi society.

<sup>64</sup> In customary law, *yaa'a* is also the name for the assembly or gathering.

(star of the women), *haadha siinqee* (mother of the siinqee) and *haadha nagayaa* (mother of peace)—and their historic responsibilities. These were all women’s roles that were specifically assigned to them within a predominantly male system. *Urjii dubarti* was a female leader who represented women in the gadaa council. Today, there are still female leaders who represent women, but it is more often in conjunction with *saddeetta* (council of eight).

The other two female roles (mother of the siinqee and mother of peace) were specifically connected to dispute resolution processes (male and female) and to stopping wars. As Hussein Endessa explains, “*Haada siinqee* and *Urji dubarti* were both members of the gadaa council.” (2011, 54-55). *Urji dubarti* was more like a contemporary women’s affairs officer, dealing with women’s affairs and rituals. *Haadha siinqee* had a role that was directly linked to peacemaking and the protection of women’s rights. In the gadaa system and seera ambaa, siinqee was institutionalized so it was a legal requirement to show respect to siinqee. When there were large-scale conflicts, the mother of siinqee (*haadha siinqee*) would come between the two fighting groups with her siinqee in her hand. It is mandated under Arsi customary law that each warring side was required to stop fighting when the siinqee came between them. After this, the *haadha siinqee* was supposed to help the wounded, find the dead, and facilitate the peace and reconciliation process (Endessa 2011, 54-44). In the Nansabo area, many of the women told me about a woman named Baritee in the town of Yemensira. She was the last *Haadha malkaa* (lit. mother of the river) who had passed away a few years previous. She was seen by many women as a leader in women’s affairs and in rituals. In their descriptions, *Haadha malkaa* had the same role as *Haadha siinqee*. When I was conducting fieldwork, some people

said that another elder woman had this role, but I did not have the opportunity to meet her.

### ***Jaarsummaa*: customary institution for conflict resolution**

*Jaarsummaa* is the customary legal institution that is used to resolve disputes and conflicts. It is composed of *jaarsa* (male elders), also called *jaarsa biyyaa* (elders of the country). When a dispute first erupts between a woman and another person, *jaarsa* (male elders) come or are often requested. In addition to the *saddeetta*, they are also often present at the *ateetee* ceremony. When there is a conflict or dispute, *jaarsa* are called to gather for the resolution ceremony. Any *jaarsa* available can either be solicited or volunteer, gathering and disbanding when the process is finished. *Jaarsa* and the customary dispute resolution process are often solicited by the police and sometimes the court system (Sultan, interview, April 2011). The two legal systems work together in this respect. Mamo Hebo explains that although these men are called elders (*jaarsa*), they are not necessarily of old age (Mamo Hebo, 2008, 118), and can be divided into two categories: (1) *jaarsa biyyaa* (elders of the country) or *hayyuu* (expert of customary laws)<sup>65</sup> and (2) *wayyuu* (spiritual dispute settler) (113). The former tends to deal with more secular customary laws and the latter with more spiritual laws, though each can intervene in the others' domains (Ibid.). The overlap in domains is demonstrative of the tendency for Arsi customary law to include spiritual sources and references.

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<sup>65</sup> *Jaarsa biyyaa* tend to have a more general knowledge of customary laws, whereas *Haayyuu* and *Wayyuu* tend to have "socially acknowledged 'expertise' of customary laws" (Hebo 2006, 118).



Dispute resolution ceremonies are held in open spaces and anyone can attend. The ceremonies are composed of *himataa* (“plaintiff”) and *himatamaa* (“defendant”), the *qora* (facilitators) and the *yaa’a* (assembly at large). The two *qora* and the disputants sit facing each other (Ibid., 120). *Jaarsummaa* can be held for any type of dispute or crime at any time, including offenses against women that do not involve abuse, such as land or property issues. Women are not directly involved in these ceremonies, but when specific clan issues arise, the women’s *taa* (council representing the clan) can negotiate with the male *saddeetta*. Women’s *saddeetta* is also an essential part of the *ateetee* process.

### **Belief and Gadaa**

All Arsi may not have practiced Arsi vernacular belief, but it is important to take belief into account when discussing the gadaa system and customary law. Although, today, some would say that religion is not related to the governance systems, most agree that historically it was an integral part of the gadaa system. There still are *qaalluu* (feminine, *qaallittii*), or high spiritual dignitaries, throughout Arsi areas. According to many Oromo scholars, the *qaalluu* institution and gadaa were the two inseparable governing bodies of the Oromo (Legesse 1973, Megerssa 1983). *Qaalluu* were specialists of Oromo vernacular belief who inherited their spiritual-religious positions and powers. In some Arsi areas, the *qaalluu* was heavily involved in political, electoral and ritual activities—meaning that he would have controlled gadaa activities, elections and Oromo belief ceremonies (Asmarom 2000, 2006, Endessa 2011).

Over time, and depending on local practices of gadaa and external influences, the roles of the *qaalluu* changed. As Thomas Osmond demonstrates in his dissertation on

*qaalluu* religious dignitaries, depending on the Oromo groups and even the local communities, *qaalluu* continue to have many different roles, responsibilities, functions and even spiritual orientations. Some are more or less directly connected to the gadaa system, some are adherents of different religions other than *Waaqeffannaa*, and in some areas the institution no longer exists (Osmond 2003).<sup>66</sup> The *qaalluu* that I met in Arsi areas are still given considerable honour and power in their communities today as leaders of *Waaqeffannaa*, the indigenous belief system (see chapter 3).

### ***Saddeetta* negotiating in the ateetee process**

*Saddeetta*<sup>67</sup> were formerly a group of up to eight representatives of the clan/community, who worked with the gadaa leaders on a daily basis. They were part of the administrative council and facilitated communication between the council and the people (Endessa 2011, 52). In present day situations, the *saddeetta* have a vital role to play in the community. In the highland communities where I worked, there were always two elected *saddeetta* councils: one comprising women and the other men. Each of these councils has a leader. Some women called the women's council leader *haadha saddeetta* ("mother of the *saddeetta*"). *Saddeetta* literally means group of eight in Oromo (*saddeeti* is eight). Although, in theory, these councils are to be composed of eight members, some

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<sup>66</sup> For more information on continuity and change of the *qaalluu* institution as it was and is practiced in many different areas of Oromia, I recommend Thomas Osmond's detailed study and films (2003). For earlier studies on *qaalluu*, see Knutsson (1967), Asmarom Legesse (1973) and Gemetchu Megerssa (1984).

<sup>67</sup> Arsi ateetee practitioners sometimes mention *shanachaa* interchangeably with *saddeetta*, but, historically, these constituted two groups with different roles in the gadaa system. In some Arsi communities, it is possible to meet *shanachaa* members who also participate in rituals like the *saddeetta*.

of my interlocutors spoke of numbers that varied. Tolosa Mamuye also noted that these councils could have between 8 and 16 people (2010).

The councils gather to discuss problems in the communities, including problems that would necessitate an ateetee ceremony or problems during the actual ceremony. Councils may meet on their own, but at other times include members of the community. Members are also respected representatives for ceremonies. For example, at Sof Umaar Gutoo, a pilgrimage site for followers of Sheikh Hussein, the men's saddeetta presides over all the different events during the week. The women's council can be present for all types of ceremonies, but specifically represent women's issues. They also conduct ceremonies involving the entire community (such as prayers by the river or meetings with the men's council). In the case of prayers or other ceremonies, such as the ceremony reiterating the gadaa laws, women give the blessing that will allow the ceremony to begin. When women's and men's saddeetta meet, women sit in a semi-circle behind the men or to the side. I have participated in this seating, which men and women attribute to aadaa Arsi (Arsi culture). They also do not look the men in the eye and turn their heads to the side to speak. However, there is an implicit hierarchy in the arrangement. When men are in front of women, they command the conversation. When the two councils negotiate for ateetee ceremonies, however, the women's saddeetta sits to the left of the men's in a U shape. Though they turn their heads to the side to speak to the men, they are in a more direct, face to face position, which reflects the women's power to control the situation.

Saddeetta is an area of community governance and customary law in which women hold a considerable amount of power. They exercise a political role in these councils: they can effectively voice their opinions on matters that concern them directly.

According to members of the communities I worked in, the women's *saddeetta* has worked and functioned this way for as long as the *gadaa* system has existed. These women serve as the main representatives for other women in the community and they are directly involved in women's dispute resolution processes. If a woman has been abused or insulted by someone, she first approaches the *saddeetta* to tell the members what happened. The *saddeetta* decides whether the offense merits an *ateetee* ceremony according to *Arsi* customary law—that is, if the women's *saddeetta* considers that the offense constitutes a violation of the law, or a wrong (*yakka*) and the offender has not shown regret or offered an apology, then they can call for an *ateetee* protest against the offender. In less serious cases, the women's council may decide that the conflict can be resolved among the *saddeetta* and elder peacemaker groups.

Yoo walqixa faatee yoo ateetee lakka  
sadeenni suni yookaanif ararseetti yoo taa  
qalmaa hin geenye taatee asummaa  
buuqeen buuqee biitee mata dhungate afaan  
dhungaatee baqa buuqeen ararsaa  
saddeettini kuni taa dubbartiillee shan  
taateetti. Taa dhirallee yookin shan taa'etti  
dubbatani fixanii buuqeen ii saddeen suni  
buuqeen ararseetti galti manatti dhifte.

The *ateetee* might be the type of *ateetee* that will not reach the level of slaying cattle.<sup>68</sup> It may be concluded with reconciliation. It may be that the *saddeetta* brings peace by settling the case of the women and then going home.

(Bujja and Ruffo, interview, April 2011)

The *saddeetta* is in charge of mobilizing the women in the community. They can use coercive and aggressive methods to enlist all the eligible women so that there is an appropriate mass present for the *ateetee* ritual.

LQ: Akkam jette yaafiti saddeenni suni?

LQ: How does the *saddeetta* gather (women)?

SN: Arabsanirrani ebaluun jette gadi yaati.  
*Oboree tiyyaa, maaf naraa, haafte,*

SN: They say, 'someone (a woman) has been insulted.' She says, 'do not stay at

<sup>68</sup> This is the conclusion of the dispute resolution ritual/process.

*obboollee tiiyyaa* jedhatuma. Manarraa deemani, worqqii nyaatatuma, anna dhugaa.

LQ: Yoo baa'uu didee hoo?

SN: Otee cabsani mana dafani iqaa aannan dhuganni mana goganni yaa'an.

LQ: Mana amba seettan moo?

SN: Mana amba seenaanii yoo baa'uu didee? Ee yoo baa'uu diide.

LQ: Hin baa'u jette yoo diidee hoo isiin?

SN: Hin baa'u jettee hoo didee mana fixanni lixan kaa.

LQ: Mana balleessittanni?

SN: Eeyyee. Aadaa oromoo taa isin tuufatan biiyyaa birayyuu qooqa jiranni.

home; come out my sister.' They go around to the houses, eat *worqqii*<sup>69</sup> and drink milk.

LQ: What happens if (the women) refuse?

SN: (*Saddeetta* women) will go into their houses and break their pot, mess up their house and drink their milk.

LQ: Do you go into people's homes?

SN: Do I go in when they refuse to come out/gather? Yes, when they refuse to come out/gather.

LQ: What happens if they refuse to come out?

SN: If they refuse to come out, then we rob their houses.

LQ: You ruin her house?

SN: Yes. This is Oromo culture that she wasn't accepting.

(Sinni Nabi, interview, April 2011)

By using force to bring unwilling women out of their homes, the *saddeetta* leaders ensure that there is a maximum number of participants for the ateetee ritual. Some women have even told me they would turn down their siinqee and curse women who do not come to participate. The reason participation is enforced in this manner is that it is considered the collective duty of all women to join together in solidarity of the woman or women who have been abused. Refusal to participate would weaken the system (Mamuye 2010, 57).

Large numbers of women representing all women in the area demonstrate a physical and

<sup>69</sup> Literally *worqqii* means gold. This is a local dish made from the ensete plant (*ensete ventricosum*), which is also called false banana, butter and salt. Ensete is a local staple (Hebo 2006, 13–14).

psychological force. Their numbers remind the offender of how many people were affected by his/her wrong, and help them be more successful in achieving justice.

Most interlocutors have said that male and female elders select *saddeetta* members, choosing “women who know, who are strong, who know how to speak, and who know how matters go” (*dubbarttin namuuma dubbii beekuu beekuu, nama ciimoomate dubbi beekuu, kanuuma keessa filanni*). As seen above, strength is a necessity when enforcing participation by going from house to house. Furthermore, debating and negotiating with men and the men’s *saddeetta* requires women with the ability to speak up.<sup>70</sup> At a ceremony I attended which was hosted by a man who had insulted a large group of female bystanders by using bad language, Shuru, my friend and *saddeetta* leader, was the main speaker for the large group of women who assembled with the group of male elders. She had to lead the debate with the male leaders, arguing for the women to receive two cows as compensation instead of one. When the group of men and the group of women separated for private discussions, Shuru listened to what the women had to say, talking with them and finally leading a group decision. As a representative of the women and a negotiator with the men, she had to speak in front of a large group, defend the interests of the women, and negotiate these interests through convincing arguments to the men. In order to be persuasive, she had to accurately refer to her cultural knowledge of Arsi women’s rights and the *siinqee* institution, while responding quickly and intelligently to any counter-arguments that the men raised.

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<sup>70</sup> That said, I have met many women who are not in these councils but who are very strong and speak out for themselves and members of their community.

When the ateetee participants and the women's saddeetta arrive at the house of the offender for the ateetee ritual, the men's saddeetta arrives soon after. When any of them arrive, they must take *sardoo* (blessed grass) from the ground and throw it towards their host, saying *dhiltee dhinnaa* (lit. save us from your eyes and allow us to enter). This is answered with a greeting from the host. Traditionally the greeting would be *hofkalii* (survive and proceed) (Chapter 6).

Although the women initiate and control the ultimate outcome of the ateetee ceremonies, men are involved and have an important role in the dispute resolution process. The *saddeetta* leaders must negotiate with the groups of men during the ateetee ceremonies. As Tolosa Mamuye explains, "The main reason why men's saddeetta is needed is that it is impossible for the offender to face and have conversation with the women's gathering who are protesting against him. Thus, he communicates everything with men's saddeetta to handle the conflict" (2010, 58). At the same ateetee ceremony described above, the men's saddeetta defended the man's point of view, arguing that he was ready to apologize and one cow was enough compensation. The large group of women, followed by small groups of saddeetta women defended the women's interests, insisting on more compensation. These discussions are carried out peacefully, ending in a joint decision between the men's and women's saddeetta. Sometimes these discussions and the decision-making processes can be resolved within a few hours or a day, and other times they have to make an appointment to reconvene.

When all the women arrive at the ateetee ceremony, they sit with the elder men in a semi-circle. At the beginning of the discussion between the two saddeetta, as with any Arsi ceremony, there is a series of formulaic, rhythmic questions and responses that ask

for permission to begin and present the first grievance. The male leaders voice their opinions and try to defend the offender if the women are asking for more compensation. The women's elected leaders respond to the men's points and arguments. Prior to the ritual, if the elders have already discussed and negotiated with the offender, and the offender and ateetee women have agreed on the compensation, then the discussion during the actual ritual will be a reiteration of what offense was committed and what compensation has been agreed upon. If the women decide that they want more compensation during this discussion with all the elders, everyone will eventually break into groups. Men will discuss in one area while women go to another area. Then, if the negotiations are not finished, male and female elders will break into smaller groups of discussion, consisting of four to eight women and the same number of men in each group.

At the end of the process, the men's and women's *saddeetta* will announce a verdict for the wrongdoer, which is usually to slaughter a cow. The offender will then slaughter the cow and smear the blood on the women's foreheads. The male elders and *saddeetta* members will assist in cutting up the meat and distributing it to the women and cutting up the hide of the cows to put on their siinqee sticks. These hides are called *meexichaa*. At the end of any ateetee process, the women bless the offender and his clansmen, give them fresh grass (*sardoo*) and touch their arms with their siinqee while singing a blessing (Chapter 3).





Members of the men's *saddeetta* discussing with the women's *saddeetta* at an ateetee ceremony in Dikki. January 2012.



The women's *saddeetta* and ateetee women with Shuru Koree, *saddeetta* leader, negotiating at the ateetee ceremony in Dikkii. January, 2012.





Shuru leading the break out negotiations at the ateetee ceremony in Dikkii. January, 2012.

## **Ethiopian Constitutional Rights: Legal Pluralism and Women's Rights**

Whether in the gadaa system or in customary law, Arsi women had and have spaces for community leadership and means of speaking for their rights. Having some historic background on gadaa systems and their contemporary manifestations allows for a better understanding of how it worked with both customary law and society. Though women were not part of the same gadaa groups as the men, they did have their generational groups that were connected with their positions in society. Today, uncontextualized, their shared status with elders and children and their categorization as mukaa laaftuu, a soft wood in society, could be seen as problematic since in both the Ethiopian constitution and the international human rights declaration, women are accorded legal equality with men. By being associated with elders, children and soft wood, has Arsi society found a way to marginalize women even more and keep them in an inferior position in society? Interpreted in a different manner, this mukaa laaftuu status was seen as a spiritually endowed position, which gives women their own powers in rituals and conflict resolution. In many contexts today, the mukaa laaftuu status is still interpreted as giving women special powers. A third perspective would be that of some of the Arsi women, who see their agency and spiritual status legitimized through the concept of mukaa laaftuu, created as such by Waaqa, but given strength through what they sometimes described as physical weakness. In their perspective, this strength allows them to bear children (if they can), to support other women, and to bring about solutions with ateetee (personal communications). There are undoubtedly other individual perspectives that could offer other viewpoints too. Drawing on Ellen Koskoff's (1993) analysis of

multiple perspectives and interpretations of ethnographic data and the inherent power relationships in those portrait portrayals, I can also analyze the different layers of power here. Arsi women may also be interpreting and communicating their position in society in different manners depending on the person they have in front of them, myself included. Women may offer me the depiction of this particular mukaa laaftuu status, which gives ateetee women power and agency, knowing that it will be presented to the outside, including potentially national and international authorities, in such a manner. At the same time, in face of a national government, which has historical links to discriminatory politics towards their ethnic group and traditional practices, women may see this type of discussion as an opportunity to reject rights granted by the Ethiopian constitution (such as land, property, and divorce) in favour of traditional norms. These traditional norms and values include them being associated with mukaa laaftuu, spirituality, the domestic sphere, and ateetee, but not with battles that will enable them to, for example, ensure that they have the same access to certain resources as their husbands.

Customary law (seera *amba* or seera *aadaa*), in both historic and contemporary contexts has worked in conjunction with the gadaa system. Though women are actively involved in some aspects of customary law, such as ateetee, as I have demonstrated, property rights and land ownership are still the domain of the patrilineal clan and the traditional cultural norms and values that are still expressed today (Hebo and Shigeta 2014). *Jaarsaa biyyaa* and the *jaarsuummaa* institution govern many dispute resolution ceremonies, but women are actively involved in *saddeetta* and in ateetee ceremonies. *Saddeetta* gives space to women with strong voices who can represent and promote the rights of women in their community. These female leaders also have the task of bringing

together all women for the ateetee ceremony in order for the process to be effective and for negotiations with the offender and the men's saddeetta to be successful.

In order to understand how ateetee is effective as a customary law process and applicable in national contexts, it is necessary to take a brief look at legal pluralism in Ethiopia. In 1994, the Ethiopian transitional government<sup>71</sup> drafted a Constitution of Ethiopia, which came into effect in 1995 under the newly elected government, led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).<sup>72</sup> This constitution mandates a parliament composed of two houses and nine member states (ethnic-based regions), which are semi-autonomous and can conduct their affairs in their ethnic languages. The constitution gives "equal state recognition" to all Ethiopian languages. The EPRDF has promoted and pioneered "ethnic federalism" in which the federal government holds overarching authority, while the regions are governed by their ethnic majorities.

Legal pluralism is accommodated within this constitution, but with certain caveats. On the one hand, some space for customary law is made, but on the other hand, the Ethiopian "rule of law" provides the overarching legal framework. In his article on customary dispute resolution mechanisms (CDRM) and the rule of law, Assefa Fiseha explains:

To put the discussion in context, perhaps it is vital to highlight the complex relationship between CDRMs, the constitution and the rule of law within the existing constitutional and legal framework in Ethiopia. The Preamble to the 1995 FDRE Constitution commits itself to "...building a political community founded on the rule of law..." The Constitution guarantees individual as well as group rights and provides various institutional mechanisms of enforcement. Unlike other constitutional

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<sup>71</sup> The Transitional Government of Ethiopia followed the fall of the Derg (1974–1991): the communist military junta led by the dictator, Mengistu Haile Mariam.

<sup>72</sup> The EPRDF is the party that is still ruling today. Meles Zenawi served as Prime Minister from 1995 until his death in 2012. Hailemariam Desalegn Boshe is the current Prime Minister.

systems where such guarantees are stipulated by laws other than the constitution, human rights in Ethiopia are constitutionally guaranteed. Right to equality and specific rights related to women and children are clearly stipulated in the constitution and this puts both theoretical and practical challenges to some of the religious and customary practices within the different communities. It is declared that “The constitution is the supreme law of the land. Any law, customary practice... which contravenes this constitution shall be of no effect.” It is true that the constitution opens some space for religious and customary based norms and institutions (Arts 34, 78). Yet the same constitution dictates that such norms and institutions or practices can only be valid in so far as they do not violate norms in the Constitution. (Fiseha 2013, 112)

While Fiseha exposes the ambiguity of legal pluralism in the Constitution, he also explains that the country has had five constitutions over six decades, the previous four of which failed. Due to this instability, he explains, constitutionalism and the rule of law are relatively new for people and thus there is space for multiple justice systems to exist (Ibid., 113). In practice, this is what happens: local authorities allow for customary dispute resolution procedures for cases related to family and religion since they are often more effective and more culturally relevant. However, more egregious violations such as rape or murder are handled in the government court system. The mechanics of many different forms of vernacular justice in Ethiopia have been described in much more detail, through case studies in Pankhurst and Assefa’s edited volume, *Grass-roots Justice in Ethiopia: The Contribution of Customary Dispute Resolution* (2008). In the case of Arsi Oromo, though the state court system does exist, most participants prefer ateetee since the entire community can be involved in the process. In areas where ateetee is practiced, the only women I have heard that use the courts for disputes or abuse adhered to other religions and did not practice ateetee. Women’s odds of success are usually better than with the court system. Even the police and the courts recommend ateetee for those who know and use the process (personal communication). The problem with the courts is the delays are very long, the process is not as efficient because of the bureaucracy, and it

involves people from outside the community. For cases that ateetee does not deal with, like rape, divorce, property claims, and land tenure, women must use the government courts.

To this very brief introduction to legal pluralism in Ethiopia, let me add the complexities of women's rights. Hebo and Shigeta conducted a revealing study on the recognition and changes of property rights among Arsi Oromo women in the Kokossa and Kofale districts of the Arsi Oromo highlands (2014). As they explain, current government policies and the 1994 constitution aim to improve the precarious situation of women in Ethiopia:

Cognizant of the overall prevailing gender asymmetry and the vulnerability of women, the Ethiopian government has been implementing policies and taking legal steps to ameliorate this situation. The first clear step in this direction was probably the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW), which was introduced in the early 1990s. The objectives of this policy included, among other goals, enhancing equality between men and women and ensuring their human rights, including the right to property (see Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008; Sosen & Tsahai 2008). The 1994 constitution is another major document in which women's rights were clearly articulated. Article 35(3) asserts, "The historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia taken into account, women, in order to remedy this legacy, are entitled to affirmative measures." Article 35(7) of the constitution states that women have the "right to acquire, administer, control and transfer property." These provisions stipulate that the rights of women are equal to those of men with regard to the inheritance of property, including land. The 2000 Revised Family Code of Ethiopia also contains several provisions on women's rights. (Hebo and Shigeta 2014, 18)

As Hebo and Shigeta also demonstrated in their study, women have significant power and rights against abuse through customary/traditional institutions. However, according to Arsi tradition and confirmed through their interviews, actual property ownership, transfer and access to property after divorce is male-dominated and very unbalanced.

The majority of women are aware of their constitutional rights and some are slowly beginning to claim property rights through state-based laws. But women are reticent to take advantage of these federal rights and often remain torn between their traditions and the state (Hebo and Shigeta 2014, 18). As discussed above, some of this reticence is linked with the fact that the constitutional rights are coming from the outside, from the state and other international organizations. The state is associated with a past history of discrimination and erasure of Oromo cultures, so why would they want to easily adopt what the government proposes? Furthermore, many women do not want to lose the rights (honour and respect) that they can ensure socially and spiritually through *ateetee*, but at the same time, they do not see a way forward—how can they continue safeguarding those rights while attempting to change other norms and values in order to access other rights? Finally, as Hebo and Shigeta outlined, some women have difficulties letting go of values that they deem to be morally correct or incorrect for genders to perform. For example, generally a man does not cook or clean the house, a woman does not sell cattle, and men and women do not negotiate marriage agreements with another clan together. Those are just a few examples of many. There may, however, be room for traditional practices and values to coexist with constitutionally enshrined rights. As Østebø (2015) has pointed out, many men and women do engage in conjugal dialogue and they make decisions together. From my experiences I know this is not a recent development. Every family, couple and individual is different, so in spite of societal norms and values, in the home couples have different ways of negotiating their relationships and problems. While claiming government-established rights, such as rights to property, women can also continue to employ the musical, sacred and cooperative



aspects of ateetee in order to resolve disputes and to advocate and claim their rights and power as women in their communities.

### Chapter 3

#### Arsi vernacular beliefs



*Ateetee fala, Gutoo, April 15, 2011.*

#### Video 1<sup>73</sup>

*It was winter, so there had not been much rain. The land was still very green but the grass was beginning to yellow. In March and April, as the days reached towards the*

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<sup>73</sup> All the audio and video files can be accessed at the following link :  
[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nibl2fve7hgiokj/AABTqYFNpgyWb\\_HMCmY2IAy2a?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nibl2fve7hgiokj/AABTqYFNpgyWb_HMCmY2IAy2a?dl=0)

*summer season and rain was scarce, local farmers, practicing Oromo vernacular belief, began to pray for the rains to come. Women and men gathered by the river for prayers. I was invited by an organizer and saddeetta member to join one of these rituals. He came to find us by the main road. We walked a couple kilometers further with him, through fields, across small streams, past ibises and cows, and finally out into a large open valley. From a distance, I could see the women gathered in a circle, with men gathering further behind. It was a beautiful scene to look out on, with people assembling in groups, the green countryside all around, and the mountains in the background. As we approached, we started hearing the sounds of the women singing ateetee prayers for rain. At the same time, we could see other women coming from different directions, approaching the circle, some with their bonkoo (cowhide capes) on their shoulders and their siinquee in their hands.*

*Soon we were upon the circle of women, who were inviting me to join in, playing or recording their songs. Holding the bottom of their siinquee in their right hand and over their right shoulders, the women turned counterclockwise in the large circle. They leaned back as they put down their left foot, then forward as they shifted to their right foot. The slow two step rhythm of the dance gave the pulse to the music. Sometimes one woman would go in the centre. She would pull out some grass and throw it towards another woman, inviting her to dance and play in the center of the circle. The two women in the centre faced each other, swaying back and forth in a mirror image. They moved from one foot to the other, bending up and down as they shifted their weight, laughing and singing*

until they were tired.<sup>74</sup> After about an hour, the group of women had grown much larger.

During this time, they were singing (audio track 1)<sup>75</sup>:

Ateetee qororo diiraa  
Aadaa bareeduu oromoo tiyyaa  
Ee ayyoo guddoo qororo diiraa  
Qororo diiraa  
Aadaa bareeduu oromoo tiyyaa  
Ee ayyoo guddoo qororo tiyyaa  
Oromoo tiyyaa  
Aadaa bareeduu oromoo tiyyaa  
Dummeessaa gurree qororo diiraa  
Qororo diiraa  
Aadaa bareeduu oromoo tiyyaa  
Ee ayyoo guddoo oromoo tiyyaa

Ateetee, Ashooka eedee  
Ashookaa eedee  
Gaanyaana gayyaana atootan deemee  
Jala jalato'o ashooka eehee  
Ashooka eehee  
[...]  
Warana hin qabuu ashooka deemee,  
ashooka deemee  
Gaanyaana gayyaana atootaan deemee illillii  
Saayyoolleen galee hawwootni kiyyaa,  
hawwootni kiyyaa

Ateetee,<sup>76</sup> the qororo<sup>77</sup> in the early morning  
My beautiful Oromo culture  
Yes, elder mother, the early morning  
qororo  
The qororo of the early morning  
My beautiful Oromo culture  
Yes, elder mother, my qororo  
My Oromo  
My beautiful Oromo culture  
Clouds are gathering, the early morning  
qororo  
the early morning qororo  
My beautiful Oromo culture  
Yes, elder mother,<sup>78</sup> my beautiful Oromo  
culture  
Ateetee, waiting for Ashooka<sup>79</sup>  
Waiting for Ashookaa  
We, women, will gather for grace  
Oh the loved, yes, Ashooka  
Yes, Ashooka  
[...]  
I don't have a spear; I went to Ashooka  
I went to Ashooka  
We women will gather, for results,<sup>80</sup> illilli<sup>81</sup>

<sup>74</sup> See chapter 7 for a detailed explanation of *tappachu* (lit. play), when women dance in the centre of the circle.

<sup>75</sup> All the audio and video files can be accessed at the following link :

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nibl2fve7hgiokj/AABTqYFNpgyWb\\_HMCmY2IAy2a?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nibl2fve7hgiokj/AABTqYFNpgyWb_HMCmY2IAy2a?dl=0)

<sup>76</sup> Ateetee is a word that has many meanings for different Oromo women. For many, Ateetee is a female spirit who looks over them, and she is also sometimes referred to through other names such as: Mother (*Hadha*; *Ayyoo*), Elder Mother (*Ayyoo Guddoo*) Grandmother (*Akko*), or Maryam. The latter has taken been interchangeably used by Christian Oromo in some areas with the Virgin Mary (*Gemetchu Megerssa*, personal communication).

<sup>77</sup> *Qororo* is a rope used to tie a difficult cow in order to milk her. *Gaadii* is another word more commonly used for this piece of leather or rope. It is often carried with other tools and weapons for pilgrimages and ceremonies.

<sup>78</sup> This is a literal translation. The elder mother (*ayyoo guddoo*) here is the same as *ateetee*, or the spirit mother and protector of the women.

<sup>79</sup> This is a river, which is one of the tributaries of the Shebelle River.

<sup>80</sup> The women gather to sing *ateetee* in order to bring rain.

<sup>81</sup> This is the ululation sound women make during the ceremonies.

Wamadha marga rabbitti iyyaa  
saayyoolleen galee hawwootni kiyyaa,  
hawwotni kiyyaa

[...]

*Ateetee*, gootollee dirraa

Gootollee dirraa

Anaa haa dhufuu gootollee kiyyaa

Ee ayyoo gudoo gootollee dirraa

Gootollee dirraa

Anaa haa dhufuu gootollee kiyyaa

Dummeessaa gurree gootollee dirraa

Gootollee dirraa

Anaa haa dhufuu gootollee kiyyaa

[...]

Nuu nama tolte hoo

arguu guyyuu [...]

Wayyuu guurachaa cicoon meexa qabdi

arguu guyyuu

Arguu guyyuu kiyyaa wayyuu guurachaa

Cicoon meexa qabdi arguu guyyuu

sitti dheessee rabbi

Shaanqullee faracu'uu nuu baassu waan

jabdu'uu argu guyyuu

The cows have come home, my mothers,  
My mothers

Tell God to bring grass

The cows have come home, my mothers,

My mothers

[...]

*Ateetee*, the hide<sup>82</sup> of the courageous

Hide of the courageous

Welcome, the hide of the courageous

Yes, elder mother, the hide of the  
courageous

Hide of the courageous

Welcome, the hide of the courageous

The clouds are gathering, the hide of the  
courageous

Welcome, the hide of the courageous

[...]

you comfort us

looking to you [...]

Looking to you at the blessed Guurachaa  
place with the decorated ciiccoo<sup>83</sup>

Looking to you at the blessed Guurachaa  
place, I have the decorated milk container

I come close to you, God

Shaanqullee of Faracu'uu,<sup>84</sup> save us from  
bad things

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<sup>82</sup> This refers to the hide cut from the animal sacrificed for the ceremony. It is then cut into strips (*meexichaa*) that are attached to the women's siinqee.

<sup>83</sup> Ciiccoo is a milk container made of wood, straw and leather. Milk is very symbolic because it is a product of cattle and a blessing for prosperity and fortune. If the rains come, the grass grows and the cows eat well, producing milk.

<sup>84</sup> Shaanqullee is a person from Faracu'uu, a rainy area that is known for its cattle. Farachu is also an Arsi clan.

$\text{♩} = 120$

**L.1**

A - tee - tee-ee qo-ro-ro dii-raa Aa-daa ba-ree-duu O-ro-moo ti yyaa

**L.1** **Ch.1**

10 Ee Ayy-oo gu dd - oo\_ qo-ro-ro dii-raa qo-ro-ro dii-raa

**Ch.1** **Ch.2**

21 Aa-daa ba-ree-duu o-ro-moo ti -yyaa\_ Ee ayy-oo gu dd - o - o o-ro-moo

**Ch.1** **Ch.1**

31 ti- yaa\_ o-ro-moo ti- yaa\_ Aa-daa ba-ree-duu o-ro-moo ti-yaa

**Ch.2** **Ch.1** **Ch.2**

41 Duu mmee-saa guu-ree qo-ro-ro di-raa qo-ro-ro di- raa\_ Aa-daa

**Ch.1**

50 ba-ree-duu o-ro-moo ti- yaa\_ Ee ayy-oo gu dd - o - o o-ro-moo ti- yaa

**L.1** **Ch.1** **Ch.2**

60 \_ A - tee - tee-ee a-sho-ka ee d - e - e\_ a-sho-ka ee-d - e - e

**Ch.1** **Ch.1**

71 gaan-yaan ga-yyaa-na a - too-taan dee- mee\_ ja - la - jal - to' o

**Ch.2**

78 A-shoo-ka ee hee\_ A-shoo-ka ee hee

The song above is one of many prayers that the women sang during the ceremony. I provide details here and will provide examples throughout the dissertation, but for more information on ateetee songs and the song leaders (*afolee*), see chapter 7. The transcription above is a skeleton version of the song. It only follows the first part of the song, because the melody generally stays the same for the rest. Above each line of the transcription, I have indicated L.1 for the leader (*afolee*) of the first choir, Ch.1 for the first choir, and Ch.2 for the second choir. In this passage the leader of the second choir sings with the choir, so an individual voice isn't really distinguishable. I will give details about the song and the repertoire in general, but what is probably the most important characteristic of all ateetee repertoires is for many women to be able to sing together over a long period of time. Their voices need to be heard, together, so that Waaqa will hear them and grant them rain (or whatever is the object of their prayers), and in the case of dispute resolution, so they will obtain justice. As can be seen above and heard in the recording, the two choirs work together to sing the song. They alternate between choirs throughout the song, one choir repeating or finishing off the verse of the previous one. In this particular excerpt Leader 1 and Choir 1 are in charge of the song. It takes L.1 a couple of tries to get the women to begin singing because everyone is talking, which is why it is difficult to hear her at the beginning. After that she is followed by Ch.1 and the alternation begins soon after. Ch. 2 always finishes off the verses and lets Ch.1 start again. At one point, on the word "ateetee," leader 1 begins another verse of the song alone until the others join her.

The ateetee texts and melodies vary from prayer to prayer, but they are all recognizable as part of the ateetee repertoire. This is the case whether it is ateetee prayers for rain, for dispute resolution, or for other purposes. Ateetee songs have the following common attributes: (1) the texts refer to Ateetee, associated prayers, and specificities of the ceremony such as the purpose, the geographic location, and the people involved; (2) the rhythm is in duple metre, which corresponds to the dance movement of the women. It provides the pulse for the song. Sometimes if women are not dancing, they clap their hands to the same duple pulse. The rhythm is also flexible, which facilitates adjustments when words have more or less syllables; (3) the songs are antiphonal: two choirs, each with a leader, respond to each other during the entire song, though this is characteristic of all Arsi group songs; (4) melodies are in a comfortable range and pentatonic; (4) there are portamentos throughout the songs, allowing women to slide between approximate pitches; and (5) the songs are punctuated by ululations. To listen to some of the similarities (and differences) between ateetee songs I have included some of the other songs from the ceremony in appendix 3 (audio tracks 2, 3, and 4). Throughout the dissertation there will also be other examples of ateetee songs.

Though ateetee songs follow a very recognizable structure, they are flexible and allow for individual and group improvisation in order to facilitate the task of singing together. The ateetee repertoires are in a standardized form, with verses that can be chosen from a large repertoire of common verses. Though there are variations from region to region, the antiphonal and repetitive nature of the songs allows women to quickly join the singing. If women are from very different areas, as was the case in Bishaan Gurracha where I attended a tourism event (chapter 4), there tends to be much



more repetition. In those situations, the women can stay on one or two verses for several minutes or more.

The goal is for as many women as possible to sing together, to pray to Ateetee and Waaqa for the best results. The women want Waaqa to hear and respond to the prayers. All of the musical features I mentioned above facilitate this task. The most notable for the purpose of this research are the comfortable range, the portamentos, and the antiphonal structure of the songs. Both comfortable range and flexible rhythm allow for adaptability in the songs. Though the songs are different, it is possible to use verses in any of the songs by adapting the melody and syllables to the rhythmic structure of the song. If a leader (*afolee*) forgets verses of a particular song, she can insert others. The verses do not follow a specific order, so there is also flexibility within a song. The portamentos also allow for flexibility on the pitches, which makes it easier for anyone to participate. As heard in the excerpt above, the singers slide in or out of the pitches or have the option of sliding on pitches between the syllables in each word. I have noted the main notes and tonal centres, and the main slides from the recording in the transcription above with the understanding that many of the singers can alter the pitches on any of the notes. Though the *afolee* need to know the songs, the antiphonal structure of the songs allows virtually anyone to participate. Since one choir response with the end of the verse of the first choir, they just need to listen to be able to reciprocate.

Ateetee women often stop and start at different times. There are moments in the song when the song leaders start singing a new verse before the previous verse has finished. This is a way of interjecting a new verse of the song. The pulse of the music is strong and clear. In the transcription above, the downbeat of each “measure” (and the first

syllable of each word) corresponds to the placement of the right foot in the dance and the forward movement of the body. The pulse is defined but the rhythm is slightly flexible so it moves with the women's singing and movements. Though I indicated groupings of three notes above, these are loose. Accented syllables tend to have slightly longer rhythmic values, so these groups of three vary accordingly. Initially, the songs feel heterophonic because of all the different women beginning to join in the song at different moments, and because of all the participatory divergences in the music. Over time the song and the voices become more solid in unison. This unison, however, depends on what is going on around the singing. When there are people nearby interjecting speech and prayers, the song may be disrupted or it may even stop and pick up again afterwards. Because the ritual was punctuated by group prayers, going to the river, and receiving the blood, meat and skin of the slayed animal, the songs would start and stop. When many women are present ateetee prayers can continue uninterrupted for hours, varying only in the number of participants.

At times the songs are punctuated by ululations. For the Arsi, ululating is exclusive to women and can be used to express different sentiments depending on the contexts. During prayer ceremonies, ululating is often used to express positive feelings such as happiness, praise or blessings. Women use the ululations here to call Ateetee or Waaqa. It can also be a call or a reminder that there should be good things coming for the women, such as rain, the sacrifice of the cow and the *meexicaa* (leather strips) for their *siinqee*, and ultimately the recognition of their respect and honor. But ululating can also

be used to demonstrate the wrath of the ateetee women.<sup>85</sup> When a woman has been abused, women can gather in the countryside through the loud outdoors call of ululations, then they can continue, marching to the house of the offender while singing ateetee prayers alternating with ululations. Thus, during the ateetee ceremonies, ululations may convey multiple messages, including: happiness, praise, anger, and reproach. Ululation is also an essential part of cursing, used in that case to call Waaqa for the curse. Sometimes these ululations serve as a refrain in the songs and other times they serve as more casual interjections. Ululating a specific number of times in a row marks a special blessing. In this case, the blessing is for the river and Waaqa. In another context, when a baby girl is born, women ululate five times, and for a baby boy they ululate seven times. The gender assymetry is marked from birth with the difference in the numbers of ululations. It is also possible to wonder about the gendered aspect of ululations. Yes, women have this specific form of communication with Waaqa. But because men cannot ululate, I wonder if women are able to communicate sentiments through ululation that they otherwise would not be able to.

*While the women sang ateetee, further away, more men had gathered in the grass. They too were singing prayers. Two group choirs sang in polyphony, with one overlapping the verses of the other. Sometimes one voice would rise above the two choirs, singing out one of the verses in a higher pitch, making it stand out and soar above the low pitched overlapping choirs of the group. I have included the verses below of the choir that is the most audible in the recording (audio track 5):*

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<sup>85</sup> There is technically no difference between the sound of ululations for happiness or those used for sadness or anger. However, if someone is angry and not speaking, just as with speech, the ululations may sound sharper.

[...]  
 Arguu guuyyuu [...]
 Waayyuu guurachaa, cicoon meexa qabdi,  
 Arguu guyyuu sitti dheessee Rabbi  
 [...]  
 Kiyyaa waayyuu guurachaa, cicoon meexa qabdi  
 Arguu guyyuu sitti dheessee Rabbi  
 Kiyyaa waayyuu guurachaa, cicoon meexa qabdi  
 Arguu guuyyuu sitti dheessee Rabbi  
 Shaaqullee faracu'uu, nuu baassi waan jabdu'uu  
 [...]  
 [...] Arguu guuyyuu sitti dheessee Rabbi

[...]  
 Seeing daily [...]  
 The black, sacred one [Waaqa/Rabbi - God],<sup>86</sup> I have the decorated ciicoo [milk container]  
 Looking to you, I am sheltered by you Rabbi [God]  
 [...]  
 My black sacred one [Waaqa], I have the decorated ciicoo [milk container]  
 Looking to you, I am sheltered by you Rabbi  
 My black sacred one [Waaqa], I have the decorated ciicoo [milk container]  
 Looking to you, I am sheltered by you Rabbi  
 Shaanqullee of Faracu'uu, save us from bad things  
 [...]  
 [...] Looking to you, I am sheltered by you Rabbi

*The men ended their singing with the following chanted prayers:*

Yaa Rabbi araroo!  
 Yaa Rabbi araroo! [...]  
 Yaa Rabbi, rooba naggaa nuu roobi!  
 Yaa Rabbi!  
 Yaa Rabbi rooba naggaa nuu roobi!  
 Yaa Rabbi, aadaa nu deebissi!  
 Yaa Rabbi umee nuu deebissi!  
 Yaa Rabbi nuu atooteessi!  
 Yaa Rabbi nuu araramii!

Oh Rabbi, excuse us!  
 Oh Rabbi, excuse us! [many times]  
 Oh Rabbi, give us peaceful rain!  
 Oh Rabbi!  
 Oh Rabbi, give us peaceful rain!  
 Oh Rabbi, restore our culture to us!  
 Oh Rabbi, restore nature to us!  
 Oh Rabbi, make us productive!  
 Oh Rabbi, reconcile us! [be merciful]

*After these prayers, the men rose, came over to the women, and spoke of the gathering. They talked about how they had all gathered for the prayers and how they hoped their prayers for rain and prosperity would be heard. After these initial speeches, a*

<sup>86</sup> In Arsi vernacular belief, Waaqa/Rabbi is black. He does not show himself to people, so he cannot be seen. Black here can mean what is not visible or literally the colour black (Geda 2013).

group of men left to go to the river. Soon after, the saddeetta leaders of the women motioned that it was time to go to the river, so everyone began moving over there. Many women continued singing ateetee prayers. Some were talking as they went over. Some were calling out prayers. Though the river was more like a small stream at this time of year, it was still a powerful symbol of life and blessings. The women gathered on one end and the men further up, so they were all in a line. Standing in front of the river, the women sang the verses below to express their love to the river and to God. As I will explain further in the chapter, nature and Waaqa/Rabbi are interconnected. They punctuated these verses with ululations:

<i>Malka irreessaa asseennaa, iltama Rabbi adeemaa</i>	Get into the ceremonial river. Excuse us Rabbi
<i>Illilli (x5)</i>	Illilli [ululations] (x5)
<i>Malka naanaa dhiiltee dhiinaa, sii jaalanee ni deebinaa</i>	How are you, river? Loving you, we will return
<i>Illilli, illilli</i>	
<i>Ayyoo guddoo dhiiltee dhiinaa, sii jaalanee ni deebinaa</i>	Illilli, illilli
<i>Kayyoon galte dhilte dhinaa, sii jaalanee ni deebinaa</i>	Elder mother, how are you? Loving you, we will return
	Chance is at hand. How are you? Loving you, we will return

The women continued singing as they bent down and placed their siinqee in piles at the edge of the water, covering them with mud (qarruu) and grass (sardoo) (audio tracks 3 and 4). They then squatted and sat down on the bank in front of the river. Further down the line, male elders had the women's hanfalaa (belt) and recipients with milk and butter laid in front of them. Then male and female elders began to take honeywine (daadhii) in their mouths to spray on others and the land around them. This blessing gradually made it down the line. The male and female elders led the prayers in the following way:

Yaa rabbi araroo, yaa rabbi araroo,  
 rooba nagaa nuu roobi, yaa rabbi,  
 Yaa rabbi rooba nagaa nuu roobbi  
 Aadaa nuu deebissi,  
 yaa rabbi umee nuu deebbissi  
 yaa rabbi nuu atooteessi  
 yaa rabbi nuu ararami

Oh God give us mercy, God give us mercy  
 Give us peaceful rain, oh God  
 Oh God, give us peaceful rain  
 Bring our culture back to us  
 Oh God restore true nature to us  
 Oh God make us productive  
 Oh God be merciful to us

*After this blessing, everyone moved back to their previous areas. The women gathered in a circle singing prayers, while the men sat in small groups further away, some of them gathering the sheep to kill. Once the sheep were killed and skinned, some of the male elders began cutting the skin into strips for the women's siinqee, while others prepared fires to cook the meat. Still another small group of senior elders looked at the skin of the sheep gut, projecting the fortunes of rain for the upcoming year. A few elders gathered the sheep blood in containers and approached the women's groups, offering to brush blood on their foreheads with the grass as blessings and protection. Another elder came later to distribute pieces of meat. At the end of the ritual, once the women's siinqee had been returned to them with the blessed strip of sheep hide (meetixaa), the women all went towards the river to gather sardoo (grass) to offer the male elders, myself, women around them and themselves. As they distribute the grass, they touch the arm of the person they are blessing with their siinqee. When they distribute the grass, they sing the following (audio track 6):*

sardoo, sardoo jenna  
 gosa sardoo keennaa

We say sardoo, sardoo (blessed grass)  
 Give the sardoo to the clan members

*That night, the women went home and put it under their sleeping mat or bedding as a prayer for recovery from sickness or misfortunes, or as a prayer for continuing fortune.*

*Some women returned to the ateetee song circle, and some sat near it, continuing to sing prayers until the sky, which had been gradually darkening over time, began to let out the first drops of rain. Everyone dispersed quickly as the rain threatened to come. Some arrived home before it poured. Others returned home wet, but happy from the afternoon of sung prayers. (Ateetee fala<sup>87</sup> in Guutuu, April 15, 2011)*



Women and men lined up for the blessings at the stream, *Ateetee fala* Gutoo, April 15, 2011.

For the Arsi, group prayers have always been a major part of the fabric of society,

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<sup>87</sup> *Fala* literally means sacrifice. These are ateetee prayer ceremonies, which are often held to pray for rain when there is a drought or before the rains have arrived. They can also be used to pray for other problems, such as someone who is sick, someone who cannot bear a child, or other personal or natural disasters.

though the practice and frequency has changed over time. Many community members have seen prayers bring an end to disputes, war, famine, drought or sickness. Some Arsi women and men still gather by rivers or under sacred trees to conduct these prayer ceremonies. But prayers are also sung in very practical, legal or judicial contexts. Oromo women can defend their rights and resolve disputes with sung prayers. The Arsi understand and practice spirituality in an organic and, in many cases, practical way. Belief is not confined to the act of prayer or times that people are gathered praying. It is part of how people treat each other, animals and the environment with respect, and how they understand and communicate with those around them. As Canadian Indigenous legal scholars Borrows and Napoleon have theorized separately in reference to Canadian indigenous contexts, spirituality is one part of a number of elements that make up the (legal) fabric of society, or, “indigenous legal order” (Borrows 2005, Napoleon 2007, 2013).<sup>88</sup> I find this applicable to the Arsi context, where spirituality is also an essential part of conceiving law and justice.

Historically ateetee has always been spiritually based and has had a role in maintaining women’s rights. All ateetee processes, not just prayers for rain or sickness, include prayers and blessings. Furthermore, the sacred and the secular are often intertwined in the Arsi everyday. A closer look at Arsi Oromo vernacular belief systems is necessary to understanding Arsi worldviews, ateetee, and, in particular, women’s connections with ateetee and the spiritual world. In Arsi vernacular religion, *vis à vis*

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<sup>88</sup> Napoleon refers to legal order as: “law that is embedded in social, political, economic, and spiritual institutions” “Indigenous law is a part of and derives from an Indigenous legal order” (Napoleon 2007, 2). In many of his publications, Borrows speaks to the multiple foundations, or sources, of law (2010a). These sources were outlined in Chapter 3 of the dissertation. Borrows also speaks of indigenous oral histories and everyday lives as contributing to indigenous legal traditions (2005, 2010b).



men, women are understood as closer to *Waaqa* (God) than men, and, in this context, they have power to conduct prayers for wrongdoings or problems in society.<sup>89</sup> In this chapter I will demonstrate how the notions of relationality and reciprocity and key elements of Arsi vernacular beliefs are essential to the *ateetee* process and its success. I will explore women's involvement in spiritual ceremonies and cursing, and relational views of spiritual, moral and ethical codes from the perspectives of the Arsi. Specifically, I will focus on the following four areas of Arsi vernacular belief to elaborate the connections between Arsi women, *ateetee*, and Arsi indigenous belief: environmental expressions of belief; moral/ethical codes that are connected to both spiritual and secular domains; women's close relationship with God; and women's ritual power. As well, this chapter describes some of the main concepts of Oromo religious belief, drawing on my informants' words, my experiences and observations of rituals, and other scholars' works.

Religious studies scholar Graham Harvey's research focuses on indigenous religious traditions. In different indigenous religious traditions, he has looked at everyday and relational aspects of belief (2002, 2005, 2013). In the passage below, Harvey points to the everyday and relational aspects of indigenous religious traditions:

Casual indigenous statements (especially when supported by habitual actions expressive of relationality) can reveal more than formal and elite claims. Attention to the casual may aid academics to learn what their hosts already know. In seeking to understand what aspects of human life, or what acts of human living, are identified by the word religion, we may be greatly aided by noticing what people casually do and say with and to the things around them. There is little new in the claim that indigenous religious traditions are not focused on the supernatural but include relational engagement with everyday things and even artefacts. Perhaps all religions are like this. Some encouragement to pay attention to simple acts and to hear the self-evident in indigenous equations ('this house is an ancestor', 'this rock is active'), may support a re-visioning of what other vernacular religious activities and discourses entail. Object persons and human persons, along with animal persons and a host of other-than-human persons, casually make the world that all beings then

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<sup>89</sup> I have found many similarities with Maasai women, and have particularly drawn on Hodgson's analysis of Maasai women's central roles in moral, spiritual, and ritual life, and how these roles have changed over time (Hodgson 2005).

have to negotiate living in as they continue their constructive, destructive and re-constructive work (Harvey 2012, 208–209).

As Harvey explains, this relational world is shared between humans and “other-than-human” (Hallowell 1960) persons. There are, of course, many other scholars of indigenous belief traditions that have spoken of the everyday and relational aspects of belief.<sup>90</sup> What is important here in reference to the Arsi Oromo is the concept of relationality. Similar to many other indigenous belief systems (Bowman and Valk 2012, Harvey 2002), relationality is intrinsic to Arsi Oromo belief (Bartels 1983, Geda 2013). There are connections between the spiritual and physical worlds, between Waaqa (God) and lafaa (the earth), and between people, objects and places. Though there are some material and physical symbols in Arsi rituals and ceremonies, many objects and actions need to be considered as more than a symbol: as actual expressions of belief, prayers, power, or the return of these prayers (Bartels 1983, Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007). The status and power of women in Arsi society is connected in large part to Arsi spirituality, but also to ethical and moral codes that are part of the overall worldview.

Belief/religion is a vast domain and, as with any belief system, Oromo belief systems are extremely complex, even for those from within the culture. Practices vary from person to person, but all those people belong to a society with specific norms and

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<sup>90</sup> There are many scholars who have worked on relationality as part of worldviews in indigenous religious traditions. For some works on Oromo indigenous belief systems that also speak to relationality, see Bartels 1983, Braukämper 1992, 2002, Geda 2007, 2013, Knutsson 1967, Lewis 1984, Megerssa 1994, Megerssa and Kassam 2005, and Osmond 2003. For other works focusing on other indigenous religious traditions in Africa, see, for example, Ben-Amos 1995, Blakely 1995, Muller 1999, 2003, and Okereke 1994, E. Turner 2002, 2004. And for indigenous religious traditions in other parts of the world, see Hallowell 1960, Harvey 2002, 2005, and Tawhai 1988. Many of the indigenous legal scholars also speak to the everyday uses of spirituality and the way belief relates to other aspects of the culture, including the legal order (see Borrows 2005, 2010a, 2010b, Napoleon 2007, 2013, Webber 2009). Many other indigenous scholarly and literary writings attest to the everyday and relation natures of belief in different indigenous worldviews or cosmologies.

values, so even the variations are recognizable. I can only provide a cursory introduction here, but it is important to note that Oromo vernacular beliefs remain an extremely vital part of Arsi ceremonies. Today adherents of vernacular Arsi religion may express their beliefs through personal and group prayers. Adherents of other religions may participate in the cultural aspects of the belief ceremonies, while offering their prayers to their own God. Another factor to be taken into account is that some of the terms, the rituals, and the practices may vary (or not exist) depending on the individuals, the Oromo subgroup, the geographic region, the extent to which they are practiced today, or other influences.<sup>91</sup> Finally, because concepts are extremely complex, as an outsider who has been learning this culture for not even half of my life, I can only claim that I am attempting to describe and translate them as best as I can. But I do so because I think it is important for other outsiders to know and it is necessary to understanding Arsi women's rituals and rights.

### ***Waaqeffannaa* and its Socio-Political Contexts**

The Oromo indigenous belief system (or systems, depending on who and how it is practiced) has been practiced for centuries and to varying extents in many areas of Oromiya. However, today only a minority of Oromo exclusively practice indigenous Arsi beliefs. These religious practices are called *Waaqeffannaa* (lit. “we celebrate Waaqa”) by many. The adherents of this religion are often called *Waaqeffataa*, which literally means “the followers of Waaqa” (Osmond 2003). In many areas where Arsi indigenous beliefs

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<sup>91</sup> Some of these influences include but are not limited to: political changes that limited or banned vernacular religion practices; evangelization and spread of other religions, such as Protestantism, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Islam; and modernization/globalization of more rural areas.

have been practiced for centuries, followers of Waaqa will say they follow Waaqa or *Rabbi*, also a synonym for God.<sup>92</sup>

In the narrative of social change and as a precursor for chapter 4, below is a very brief introduction to the complex social and political layers behind Waaqeffannaa. Oromo indigenous religion has been intertwined with human rights and legal debates since it has entered the national scene as an official religion.<sup>93</sup> Before 1991 (during the *Derg* and even previously under other regimes) the practice of Waaqeffannaa as a religion was illegal, so it was practiced in hiding from government officials. After the overthrow of the *Derg* regime, Oromo returned to practicing Waaqeffannaa publicly. Over time, specific practices and definitions of Waaqeffannaa were codified in reaction to oppressive political movements towards the Oromo and in an effort to safeguard Oromo cultural practices.<sup>94</sup> Government authorities soon came to associate Waaqeffannaa with the Oromo Liberation Front political party, the Oromo nationalist party, and the religious manifestations were seen as a threat to the state (Aga 2015). Though the Ethiopian Constitution and international human rights allowed for religious freedom,

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<sup>92</sup> In Thomas Osmond's research in rural Shewa, whenever he asked, "What is your religion?" most people responded either "*Waaqa-Laafa*" (God-Earth understood as one unit) or *Waaqa inkadhanna* (we pray to God) (Osmond 2003, 420). I had a similar experience with my interlocutors. They would either speak these terms Thomas mentioned, or they would simply talk about praying to *Waaqa* or to *Rabbi*.

<sup>93</sup> I would refer interested readers to Bedassa Gebissa Aga's article (2015) for a thorough historic, legal and human rights-based discussion of religious freedom to practice Waaqeffannaa in Ethiopia. Thomas Osmond's dissertation (2003) provides an extensive discussion of Oromo nationalist ideologies. For more detailed discussions on indigenous religions and human rights, see Niezen 2012 and Hackett 2015.

<sup>94</sup> In effect, Waaqeffannaa and Waaqeffataa may be more recent terms that have come into use with the Waaqeffannaa Religion Followers Association (WRFA), a national association founded in 1995 to promote the practice of the Oromo indigenous religion (Osmond 2003, 418–421). Osmond also places this association within both an ideological Oromo nationalist movement and regional afrocentrist ideologies. This nationalist movement can be traced back to the 1960s when it was expressed through associations and political movements (Osmond 2003, 419). However, as he demonstrates, the Waaqeffannaa Association and its agenda are relatively new.

Waaqeffannaa, the religion, was declared illegal by the Federal Ministry of Justice in 2004 (Ibid., 10).

Some of my interlocutors who were aware of this national ban experienced its repercussions. For example, in 2010–2011, different Oromo indigenous belief practitioners who wanted to hold *irreecha* (thanksgiving) celebrations in conjunction with the local culture and tourism offices were denied the permits allowing them to do so. They would have been arrested if they had gone in groups to pray and to practice their beliefs. Gemetchu Megerssa told me about one such banned *irreecha* in the Gambella area, in the East of Ethiopia (personal communication). However, during the time of all these political and legal repressions, some informal manifestations of the Oromo indigenous religion continued to take place in the Ethiopian countryside. Since rural areas are often very isolated and lack infrastructure, such as roads and transportation, it was difficult for government officials to enforce control. Furthermore, many of those rural practitioners, when confronted, would say that they are praying to *Waaqa* or *Rabbi* and either not self-identify as Waaqeffanna adherents or self-identify as a Muslim or a Christian. In Oromo-governed districts, sometimes religious ceremonies were able to take place under the guise of culture and tourism (*aadaa fi turiizimii*) (see Chapter 4). The Ethiopian government only officially recognized Waaqeffannaa as a religion in 2013 (Ibid.).

### **Waaqa and Waaqeffannaa**

Waaqa is believed to be the creator of the universe. Waaqa is the overarching Supreme Being, the term “God” only approximating the meaning. As Oromo religion

scholar and Catholic Father Lambert Bartels explains: “It comprises more, since it includes countless particular manifestations of *Waaqa* in this world, particularizations of his creative work which are conceived as beings. Hence the word ‘divinity’ will often be a better translation than ‘God’” (Ibid, 89).<sup>95</sup>

According to Oromo religious studies scholar, Gemechu Geda, Waaqeffannaa is founded on three premises: it only involves one God; Waaqa exists because of his actions, such as providing weather for the success of crops; and the Oromo thank Waaqa by traveling to natural sites he created, such as sources of water and mountains (Geda 2013, 48). Practitioners pray and give offerings not only to show gratitude, but as reciprocity for what Waaqa gave them (e.g., rain, good crops, good health, etc.). Waaqeffataa pray both to Waaqa and to the earth (*lafaa*). These two are seen inseparable and are indicated as so in the prayers (Ibid.). As explained above, the elements from the environment that Waaqa created are central to the belief practices. This was also demonstrated through the use of elements from the earth (e.g., grass and mud) in the description of the ateetee *fala* ceremony at the beginning of this chapter. Often these elements are also mentioned in the prayers.

If asked about their faith, most Arsi would say they are Muslims or Christians (Geda 2013, personal communications). At the same time, many Arsi mix Islam or Christianity with traditional beliefs. This may include praying to Waaqa, participating in

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<sup>95</sup> “The traditional Oromo believed in a monotheistic God, creator of the world, whom they call *Waaqa* Tokkicha, meaning ‘the One God’”. This term may be used in more than one context. When it is used with the name of the Creator it carries the sense of “that one before which nothing existed” (Gemetchu Megerssa 1993, 96). The Matcha Oromo thought that at the beginning of time *Waaqa* used to walk among people, but because of errors and transgressions of man he pulled away and went to the sky (Bartels 1983).

different types of ateetee prayers, going to irreecha rituals, or going on pilgrimages (*muuda*).<sup>96</sup> According to many of my informants in the Arsi highlands, the number of Waaqeffanna practitioners has decreased significantly. This decline is visible in the rituals (such as the one described earlier). The organizer lamented to me that a few years prior to that time the entire valley would have been full of community members praying for the rains to come. He attributed the decrease in participants to the increasing influence of Christian churches and “Shariya” Islam in the area. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the recent pressures from mainstream religions are current sources of changes, but historic and socio-political factors also contributed to the decline in indigenous belief practitioners. The religion’s illegal status for many years significantly contributed to its decline. However, I did meet many people who said they were Muslim or Christian, but who had recently returned to some Oromo religion (Waaqeffanna) practices. As Gemechu Geda discovered in his research on Arsi religious syncretism, in some areas, the numbers of Oromo returning to Oromo vernacular belief systems is increasing.<sup>97</sup> This is particularly noticeable with the irreecha ceremony in Bishoftu, to which tens of thousands of people now flock each year.

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<sup>96</sup> Differences between those who declare themselves Waaqeffataa and syncretic practitioners can manifest in burial rituals. According to Geda’s informants, though Waaqeffannaa practitioners do not mind who buries them, even moderate Muslims would not want the corpse to be touched by those who were not converted to Islam.

<sup>97</sup> In October 2010, I went to the *irreecha* ceremony in Bishoftu, Ethiopia. This is an annual thanksgiving pilgrimage to a lake that has become a Pan-Oromo vernacular belief practice. Thousands of Oromo came for the event. Although many attend because it has been very politicized and become popular as an Oromo event to attend, many attendees say that they are believers of Oromo indigenous religion. Gemechu Geda is a researcher exploring these questions who recently completed a PhD thesis on Oromo belief systems (2013). I had the good fortune of conducting some field research with him in Bishan Gurracha and Sof Umaar. He had met many people who were prohibited from practicing their Oromo belief system during the Derg and Haile Selassie regimes but who were returning to it now that they had the freedom to do so (Geda 2003, personal communication).

Gemechu Geda's dissertation is the only extensive work to date that focuses specifically on current manifestations of Waaqeffannaa and Arsi indigenous religious traditions from the perspective of pilgrimages. Religious studies scholar Ulrich Braukämper also focuses on Arsi Oromo beliefs, including some research dedicated to religious syncretism (1992, 2002). The other significant studies on Oromo religion focus do not specifically address Waaqeffannaa.<sup>98</sup>

### *Seera Waaqa-lafaa*

Many religious terms and concepts in Oromo become clear through informants' examples and narratives. It is not in the scope of this chapter to provide all the examples for each religious term,<sup>99</sup> but I will explain some of the applications of the concepts that are most important to understanding the Oromo worldview and how ateetee fits into this.

In Geda's extensive description of Waaqa, he discusses the one law that exists in the Oromo indigenous belief system: *seera Waaqa-lafaa* (lit. the law of Waaqa and the earth). According to his informants, *seera Waaqa-lafaa* is basically a law of nature. His informant's description of Waaqa-lafaa reveals the naturally inherent and unorganized nature of believing in Waaqa:

Think of a newly born calf. The moment it is born, it tries to feed on the udder of its mother. Who taught it before it is born that there is milk in the udder? Who showed it where the udder is situated? *Waaqa* did not write rules for his creatures. He also did not send people to teach us. Everything is

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<sup>98</sup> For some of the most pertinent and relevant information, see Lambert Bartels (1983) and Gemetchu Megerssa (1993). These studies are both based on the Matcha Oromo belief system and attempt to convey the belief system in connection with the Oromo worldview. Gemetchu's thesis and subsequent paper explain and explore the main Oromo concepts in more depth. More recently, some master's and doctoral students have conducted research on specific case studies of Oromo belief. See, for example, Gemechu Geda (2006).

<sup>99</sup> For more examples and descriptions of each of terms explored in this chapter, see: Bartels 1983, Braukämper 2002, Geda 2013, Knutsson 1967, Lewis 1984, Megerssa 1993, and Osmond 2002.



within and with us. He created the rules within us the moment he created us. We have abandoned the ability and the knowledge *Waaqa* gave us from the beginning and accepted what people teach us. Hence we have forgotten the difference between the creator and the created (Legese N., personal interview, in Geda 2013, 53).

This description and the concept of *Waaqa-lafaa* are crucial to understanding Arsi religion. Furthermore, the *gadaa* system (*sirna gadaa*) and customary laws (*seera amba*) reflect this rule of not breaking the moral codes and values of society. I will return to the moral codes and values with the discussion of *saffuu*.

### ***Waaqa* and nature**

There is a close connection between *Waaqa* and *lafa* (earth). This synergy and the relations between practitioners, God, and earth is experienced through the choice and power of the locations, the offerings that are brought and taken, the libations that are given to the earth, the ceremonial clothing, and even the colour of the animal chosen to slaughter. Throughout all of these rites and everyday practices, prayers and songs are used to refer to and praise these natural elements.

In general, in Oromo ceremonies, natural, outdoor locations—places created by *Waaqa*—are preferred. Oromo religion scholar Gemechu Geda explains this connection between *Waaqeffannaa* and the natural world in the following excerpt:

The Oromo belief of the existence of *Waaqa* is based on observing what they call his works, such as the presence of various seasons, rain, sun, darkness, growing of crops, existence of water bodies, mountains, trees and other living things. Contrary to Christianity, Islam, and other religions, *Waaqeffannaa* does not require the construction of religious houses for the veneration of *Waaqa* or for thanking him for his good deeds. Instead, the Oromo who are followers of *Waaqeffannaa* thank *Waaqa* by travelling to natural physical bodies such as rivers, lakes, forests, and mountains, which they believe are created by *Waaqa* himself. (Geda 2013, i)

Ateetee prayers for problems such as drought, sickness, hardship, and fertility are also conducted outside, by bodies of water, such as rivers or lakes.

For many Oromo, water is seen as the source of all life (Kumsa 1997, Megerssa 1994). As Gemetchu Megerssa describes,

Oromo myths of origin take different forms to accommodate the diverse human and natural phenomena. In terms of the origin of the Oromo people, the cosmic category of water is anthropomorphized and becomes the apical ancestor *Horo*. In another context, the first Oromo rises out of water or is associated with the water body he crosses. It is therefore in this sense that *Wallaabu*, the original water out of which *Waaqa* created the universe becomes the origin of life and therefore of the Oromo. It is in this sense also that the five sons of *Horo* take their identities from the rivers they crossed together. (Megerssa 1993, 152)

According to these myths, these five sons created the five Oromo groups of origin, for which rivers (and river crossings) were a natural separation. Even for ateetee ceremonies for dispute resolution, the women assemble outside. They try to choose a location next to the offender's house that is on higher ground or near a tree. The *odaa* tree (figus or sycamore) is particularly symbolic for Oromo ceremonies. These trees are said to have significant spiritual power and can contribute to the success of a ritual and to the fertility, health and prosperity of its participants.

All of these manifestations of belief and the surrounding environment, whether they be individually practiced or in a group, are enacted with spoken and/or sung prayers. As seen in the introductory ateetee *fala* song, there are references to the surrounding environment, the cattle (and cattle herding heritage), ancestors (people and the cattle) and Waaqa's works. Some of these manifestations of Waaqa are manifested through direct references to the cattle, cultural items such as the milk container (*ciicoo*), and Waaqa restoring the nature and balance with rain. Because Waaqa is said to be listening to the women's communications (sung prayers), they receive positive responses in the form of offerings from his natural creations. These may include rain, good crops, healthy cows and more. Stobart (2006) also refers to this direct connection between music and the

environment in his work in the Bolivian Andes. For example, *waynu* tunes are connected with “specific generations of potatoes” and he further mentions how this music is used during the rains to “make the crops grow” (246). Unlike *waynu* music, *ateetee* prayers for rain can be sung at any time of the year, during the rainy or wet seasons. The song words would, however, be modified depending on the participants’ needs (i.e., drought, floods, sickness, wellbeing).

Waaqeffannaa practitioners bring products of nature as offerings and take them home as sources of blessings. In *irreecha* (thanksgiving) ceremonies, most worshippers carry green grass and flowers. The grass symbolizes fertility and productivity as cows eat grass to grow strong and produce milk and offspring (Geda 2013, 173; personal communications). According to Geda’s informants, the flowers symbolize life and love (Geda 2013, 173). In different ceremonies, the grass has different names. In *irreecha* ceremonies, it can be referred to as *marga* (grass) and is taken by the body of water. At pilgrimages, such as the one to the cave Sof Umar Guutoo<sup>100</sup> I attended, the grass is called *shifaa*. It is spiritual grass that is made from specific, spiritually endowed trees. In *ateetee fala* ceremonies the participants referred to the grass as *sardoo* and it was to be taken from a fertile location, such as a riverbed. At the end of the *ateetee fala* ceremonies, such as the prayers for rain, all of the women gave the male *saddeetta* members grass while saying blessings.

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<sup>100</sup> This is a localized annual pilgrimage to the cave called Sof Umar Guutoo in the Hareenna forest in the Nansabo district. It is a site dedicated to Sof Umar, a disciple of Sheikh Hussein. Pilgrims to the sites of Sheikh Hussein practice a combination of Sufi Islam and Oromo indigenous religion. I went on this pilgrimage in December 2010. Sheikh Hussein is an Islamic religious leader from Bale who may have lived in the twelfth century (Braukämper (2002: 130-131, Geda 2013, 72). Many of Gemchu Geda’s interlocutors believe he played a major role in the introduction and expansion of Islam in Arsi Oromo areas (Geda 2013, 69).



*Sardoo* (grass) offered at the end of the *ateetee fala* Gutoo ceremony, April 15, 2011.

Mud (*qarruu*) is an essential part of the *ateetee* prayers by bodies of water.<sup>101</sup>

Women place their *siinqee* in water, and then cover them with mud and grass. This mud regenerates the power of the *siinqee*.<sup>102</sup> Mud is also a blessing for fertility, prosperity and good fortune and is specifically used in all women's *ateetee* ceremonies for a woman who cannot conceive a child and as a blessing for women who have just had one. In some

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<sup>101</sup> Literally, *qarruu* is the cream of the milk, or the top layer and best part of something. In Arsi highlands, many women used this word to refer to ritual mud from the stream, river or lake that is blessed and can bring prosperity and good fortune to the holders of the *siinqee*, those participating in the ritual, and those blessed by the participants. *Dhoqee* is the general word for mud.

<sup>102</sup> *Siinqee* will be explored in much more detail in Chapter 5.

ceremonies the participants paint it on each other's foreheads.<sup>103</sup>

Animal biproducts are also given to Waaqa. Usually these are in the forms of *anaan* (milk) and *killa* (coffee beans with butter). The milk symbolizes fullness and prosperity, as only a full, healthy cow will produce milk. It is taken in the mouth and sprayed on the ground and on the participants as blessings for fertility and prosperity. The *killa* is a wooden container that holds melted butter and roasted coffee beans. The use of it in ceremonies is referred to as *killa qallu* ("slaughtering" of the coffee). The butter (*dhaadhaa*) is given to eat and placed on the foreheads of participants as a blessing and protection. As Geda explains, "Coffee is considered to be like a *korma* [bull], which is why the Oromo use the same term for coffee. In Arsi Oromo tradition, *killa* and *korma* are placed on equal footing. That is why it is referred to as *killa qaluu* (slaughtering *killa*)" (2013, 126). The following is a description of *killa* as it is used in *ateetee fala* (audio track 7 has the song):

SK: Saadeenni kuni saddeenni kuni yoo  
dhuufettiin jedhee baqa warana ofitti  
deebiilee aadaa ofittiin dhufee. Dubarttiin  
yoo malka qabate malka qabate, baqa malka  
kana dubartiin siinqee kana akkanatti  
qabdee, baqa siinqee kana mata isii gara,  
lafti bariitu kana deebiiftee akkana yoo  
waaqa itti waamate, kiilla akana fide, kiillaa  
kana buuqqiftee baqa dubbarttiin tunii  
kunoo akkana jettuu.  
Ammaa dhiirrti achiin dhuftee dhiirrti afurii  
asiin teetee dhiirrti afurillee achiin teetee  
afuriillee asin teetee. Ammaa dubbartti  
asummaatti kiillaa kana buuqiiftee, yoo

SK: The committee members will have  
their spears. The women will stand in a line  
near the river, with their siinqee in their  
hands. They will turn their siinqee to the  
sunrise. Turning there they will call to  
Waaqa. They use full *killa* with toasted  
coffee and butter. They open the *killa* [...]

The men then come there. Four men sit on  
one side and four men sit on the other. The  
women will open the *killa* and the men take  
the that *killa* there and hold it and say:

<sup>103</sup> In the cave of Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrims collect *jawaara* (holy soil), which has the ability to prevent and heal illnesses. *Jawaara* is the wet, grey pasty mud that is found in pools inside the cave. It is the result of the moisture in the cave and the sediment on the floor of the cave. Pilgrims apply it to their bodies or to the cattle or mix it with water and drink it (Geda 2013, 137 ; personal communications).

jettee dhiirrtti dhufte assitti kiillaa kana asiti  
qabatti kuno.

Kiilli nuu dhagayyii  
Bunii nuu dhagayyii  
Waan aadaa kana  
Faaruu malka nuu dhagayyii  
Tulluun nuu dhagayyii  
Boona nuu gaababsii  
Mana nuu qaqeessii  
Waranaa nuu qaqeessii  
Mana qaqqatti nuu bulchii  
Saangaa nuu gaabiisii  
Orfo nuu suukeessii

Suukkii nuu gaabii  
Bara nuu nageessii  
Boona nuu laaffissi  
Malka nuu dhagayyi  
Talluun nuu dhagaayyi  
... Jette akkassin

Yoo jette achirratti baqa dubarttinille...

Killaan baayyee  
Siirraa dahee  
Raabbiiyyoo jennee  
Raabbiiyyoo aramee jira hoo hin naayiinaa  
Kiillaa feessee  
Siitti, dheessee Raabbiiyyoo  
Waa soodannee jabbatee Raabbiiyyoo  
Waa soodannee nuu baftee Raabbiiyyoo  
Kiillaan baayee siirraa dahee Raabbiiyyoo

Jenne akkanatti baqa waaqa keenya  
farfanna dhiirrtillee achiirratti darmmaa  
dhawwate darma isani sana suusumtee  
malka kana dhiira dubartti wal dhiiqanni,  
akkassiin baqa malka. Tulluutti galannii,  
tulluullee yoo baayyanni kiilluu. Maa kana  
fiidanii, killuuma kana buuqiissannii, akana  
baqa tuullittillee, baqa akkanummaan  
bayaani buna itti qalatanni. [...]  
Rabbin wawamee, Waaqni waan nuu

[Singing (audio track 7)]

*Killa*, listen to us  
Coffee, listen to us  
About the culture  
River, listen to us  
Hill, listen to us  
Shorten the winter  
Touch our house  
Touch our spears  
Keep us in our touched house  
Let the bull become fat  
Let the *orfo* (milk container) be full (of  
butter)  
Multiply our milk  
Let the century be peaceful  
Let the winter be peaceful  
River, listen to us  
Hill, listen to us  
... this is what they say

Then the women sing:

Bring the *killaa*  
I got from you  
Oh God  
God says I reconcile you; do not be afraid  
I made beautiful *killaa*  
And come close to you God  
We become afraid, oh God  
You saved us from our fears, oh God  
I brought *killaa* and got help from you, oh  
God

Saying this, we ask our God. We sing. The  
men too. They say their own song in the  
line, moving here and there. Then we wash  
each other by the river's water and go up  
the hill. They bring the small container  
called *killaa*, with toasted coffee and butter  
and they worship.

[...]

We call Rabbi [God] in this way. We call



waamanee, sanii nuu geessaa. Boonnallee nuu laafiissaa, baqa roobnillee yoo guuddattee biifummaa sanini baqa akkana waaqa keenya waamana baqa.

Waaqa. He gives us the rain and what we need and desire. This is how we call to our God.

(Shuru Koree, interview, April 16, 2011)



Killaa, Sof Umar Gutoo, December 2010. Photo by Gemechu Geda.

When the animal is sacrificed or slayed during the ateetee ceremony or other rituals, the men divide into groups. As described in the fala ceremony above, the men cut up the meat and hide and distribute it to ritual participants. The blood from the sacrificed animal is placed on the women's foreheads as a blessing. In the Sof Umar Guutoo pilgrimage, this rite is called *dhiiga tuquu* (touching blood) and any participant can come up to put the blood on their foreheads (Geda 2013, 120).

An animal is slayed (*qallu*) at the end of all ateetee ceremonies. This animal is

preferably a bull or a cow. According to Gemechu Geda's informants, the preferred colours are red, grey, white and black (2013, 159). One woman explained the specific colour choices in the following way:

D: Yoo aadaaf falaaf baanuu horii qalanuu bifa hin filana. Bifa filachu'un maaliif barbaachisa mee? Horiin buleem maaliif filatamaa? Buleen bultidhaa tola. Seerii kuni nuu haa buluu. Namichi seera kana adeemsiisuu haa buluu jechaa. Horiin baruun bara nuu baasa, bara nuu jijjiiraa – jechu'uun maanguddoon Rabbiin kadhatti. Biftii hundinuu hiikkaa gara garaa qaba. Tasibeenuu – buleen nuu bulchi. Adiin naga nuu fidii. Gurrachaan umrii jiruu keenyaa nuu dheeressi jechu'uu kaawama. Horiin buleen yoo falatan nazibee nuu oolchii jedhan. Horiin arawaa qalachuun namni tokko hanqisa dimmaa, ajalaa akka hin duuneef, kana irraa isa hambisii jedhaa ittiin falanaa. Biyyee diimituu awwaalaaf qophoofituu irraa nuu hambisii jedhaa falanaa.

D: When we come together for worship, we choose the colour of a cow that should be slayed. Why is it necessary to choose the colour? Why use the purple colour (*bule*)? It has been used for a very long time—let this culture be restored. Let us continue with it. A cow with black and white spots is used to get past a year with hardships. Elders pray to God for this. All colours of the cattle have different meanings. Just as we use the glass beads (of different colours) in our hands to worship. The white is to bring us peace. We say that the black one lengthens our lives. The purple colour is to save our lives and to have a good day. When we slay the red cow, we abstain. Actually, we save that cow and pray to it. We say, save us from the red soil that is prepared for our burial. We say this and worship.

(Haliimaa Badhassoo, interview, December 2010)

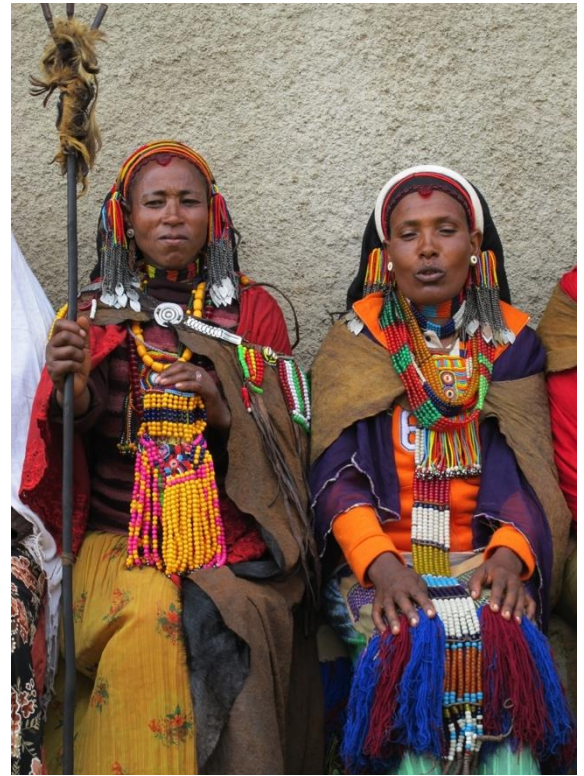
Practitioners of Arsi indigenous belief still communicate with Waaqa and nature holding their ritual sticks (*ulee*) which originated from specific trees. Men hold *eboo* (spear) or *waaddeessa* (stick given upon marriage) and women have *siinqee*. *Siinqee*, which will be specifically detailed in Chapter 5, is born when it is cut from these spiritually powerful trees. Women bring their *siinqee* to the ceremonies because they are the essence of respect and power and they are used to communicate with God (personal communications). Women may also carry the leather rope used to tie the back legs of a cow while milking (*gaadii* or *qororo*).



Clothing and jewellery are also spiritually significant. Many of these items are seen as having power and are used in conjunction with prayers so that Waaqa hears them. Historically, many of the clothing items were made of leather from cows or spun from cotton that grows in fields in Ethiopia. Women wear *bonkoo*, a cape made from the hide of a cow, sometimes decorated with cowry shells; and *hanfalaa*, a spiritually significant leather belt. Both of these can be given and blessed on her wedding day. Some women also make them later to wear to the ceremonies. Additionally, women wear many different types of *callee* (beaded necklaces), many of which are passed down to them from their mothers. They also make them or buy them at the markets. Different *callee* have different names and are designated for specific purposes. Many women wear *callee* *ateetee*, designated for *ateetee* prayers. Like the colours of the cows, the different colours of the beads hold specific significance.<sup>104</sup> Some elder male indigenous religion practitioners still dress traditionally—barefoot and wearing only *buluko*, a very long and thick cotton wrap with nothing underneath. According to Guyyee Kadir, an elder who still dresses this way, most of the Arsi used to walk barefoot. For him, wearing shoes and breaking this code is morally wrong (*saffuu*) (Geda 2013, 57, personal communications).

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<sup>104</sup> There is not a published study on Arsi ceremonial dress, jewellery and sticks, though many Oromo cultural office workers have written reports on these topics. There are some published references on other Oromo groups that have similar cultural items. See Kassam and Megerssa for studies of Borana ornaments (1989) and Borana sticks (1986). For a detailed study on dress, jewelry (including *callee*) and body art among Afran Qallo Oromo women, with general references to other Oromo groups, see Peri Klemm (2002).



Addee Obbo and Addee Urjii, Worqaa, Nansabo, January 2011.



Shuru Koree and neighbour, April 16, 2011.



Guyyee Kadir, Dikkii, April 2011.

### *Wayyuu and Saffuu*

All of the concepts explored up until now are necessary for contextualization of the Oromo indigenous belief system and ateetee. Of primary concern for ateetee and Arsi women's rights are the concepts of wayyuu and saffuu (also described by some scholars with the spellings *woyyu* or *saffu*) (Dahl 1996, Hebo 2006, Kumsa 1997, Leus & Salvadori 2006, Østebø 2007, 2009), which are described in more detail below.

According to my interlocutors and my observations, for the Arsi in the Kokkossa and Nansaboo highlands, wayyuu and saffuu are different but related concepts: Wayyuu can be used to describe someone or something that is blessed, but saffuu is a moral and ethical code that is part of the Oromo law system. For example, a woman who is pregnant is considered wayyuu, so hitting her would be saffuu.<sup>105</sup>

Why are these terms so important for understanding women's rights within Arsi Oromo society? As I seek to convey through my informants' descriptions and other examples from the field, these concepts are the foundation of the ethical and moral codes, and define how women and their rights are respected within these codes. They are also concepts in the Arsi legal tradition. If someone violates or disrespects a woman, the action is treated seriously because it is also considered a violation to all other women. In this code, a woman is wayyuu (respected, sacred, blessed) and to dishonor her is saffuu, or culturally and morally inappropriate and unacceptable.

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<sup>105</sup> Marit Østebø offers a very thorough analysis of these terms in her thesis. Using several definitions, she argues that wayyuu and saffuu are very similar, varying in name depending on the Oromo group. She does, however, state that *wayyuu*, *woyyu* and *saffuu* are time and context specific and may have different meanings depending on the researchers' interpretations (Østebø 2007, 49). I found the Arsi Oromo of the Kokkossa and Nansabo highlands used these terms to mean different ideas. Although these terms are very close and interrelated, each time I asked "what is wayyuu?" or "what is saffuu?" my informants were quick to provide examples that clearly differentiated between the two terms.

## Wayyuu

LQ: Wayyuu jechuun maal jechuudha?  
SK: Wayyuu jechuun kabajaa wayyuu, kabajaa ulfata namni wal kabaajaa, wal kabaaja kabaja irraan kan ka'e baqa wal-keessuummeessa irraa kan ka'ee wayyuu jechaan. Wal ulfeefata ulfinaan aadaa biyyaa teenyaatti. Wal hin uguu baqa akka kallatti jiru maran waliitti hin deemuu baqa wal kabaja.

LQ: What does wayyuu mean?  
SK: Wayyuu means respect; people honor and respect each other; they show respect. With respect, people host guests, which is *wayyuu*. Showing honor like this is the culture of our country. [...]

(Shuru Koree, interview, April 16, 2011)

Another way of describing wayyuu is that all of these manifestations are spiritually sacred. In a conversation with Buldhaa, an elder woman from Dikki, near Kokkossa, we talked about what wayyuu meant to her. According to her, wayyuu is given by Waaqa and is sacred. It is interrelated with the respect given to God. If someone does not show this respect to Waaqa, then it is not possible to respect the other manifestations of creation. (Song on audio track 8).

LQ: Wayyuu jechuun maal jechuu dha?  
BK: Wayyuu jechoon akka haadha akka abbaa akka finnaa ammaa ati naa waan sii gahee wayyuu naa'a ani sii wayyuu. Wayyuumni akkas jira hangafa mandhaa irraattii, haadha, abbaayyuu, kunii raabii caalaan irratti.

*Ateetee*, waayyoo ehee,  
wayyuun nuu guubaa jira,  
nuu waayee jira jenna waaqan

Guuddaan nuu guubaa ira jechuudha

LQ: What does wayyuu mean?  
BK: Wayyuu is, for example: mother, father, son-in-law; now you have become wayyuu to me. Wayyuu focuses on the elder and the young, the mother, the father; these are most precious to God.<sup>106</sup>

[Singing (audio track 8)]  
*Ateetee* is waayyoo, yes  
Wayyuu is all around us,  
Waaqa made us wayyuu

[Speaking]  
It means the almighty (Waaqa) is the main one over us,

<sup>106</sup> This is literally translated. Another translation could be: "they are the most sacred, blessed or respected."

Wayyuu guuddaan kan soodatanii isaa	The main wayyuu that we fear (respect)
Nama isa soodateetuu wayyuu haadha abbaa soodata. Yoo Waaqa hin soodanee haadha abbaa soodachuu hin dand'anii.	The person who respects him (God) will find his mother and father wayyuu (will respect them). The person who doesn't fear/respect Waaqa cannot show respect to his mother or father.
<i>Ateetee</i> , waal hagara suuraa, wayyuuma qabaa...aa, yoo jaarsa dura.	[Singing] Ateetee,... the image is wayyuu...aa, the elders of the past
Uumaa rabbi kaa durii wayyuuma jabaa qabdi dubbarttin	The creation of Rabbi (God), elders and women have respect; they are wayyuu
	(Interview with Buldhaa Keroo, April 12, 2011)

In a very general sense, wayyuu can be understood as things or people that need to be respected. But this notion of respect is a special God-given respect. It can also be something that is feared, sacred, or revered. Wayyuu is a vital term to understanding Arsi women's rights because it is one of the main cultural notions that defines women's rights. Østebø (2007, 2009) provides a comprehensive ethnography of this term because, as she astutely argues, "In order to grasp the respect, the rights and the politico-religious role of women in a 'traditional' Arsi society, this religious connotation of wayyuu emerges as vital." (Østebø 2007, 51).<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, ateetee ceremonies take place when someone wayyuu is disrespected.

Østebø is the first scholar to have contributed such a thorough analysis of the concept. As she explains, her informants could not give a "philosophical" definition such

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<sup>107</sup> I had the good fortune of meeting Marit Østebø and attending her paper presentation at the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Trondheim in 2007. She has continued with her research, which not only offers thorough analysis but also an extremely respectful and well researched approach to siinqee and Arsi women's sexual health. Our discussion was very productive as she pointed out ways in which Arsi women have more respect and rights within their society than is initially apparent.



as many scholars have used, but instead listed what they considered wayyuu. Among other references, her list of examples includes: God, the land, father, mother, unmarried women, married women, pregnant women and women's cultural material, such as siinqee.<sup>108</sup>

In order to see how my informants responded to the same question, and because the term often came up in interviews in relation to ateetee, I also asked what wayyuu meant. I also found that many informants did not give an exact definition or description of the term, but instead began to list what was wayyuu. Many informants provided me with a long list of people, animals and objects that were wayyuu, of which I have selected the following:

- *Dubartiinii wayyuu* – women are wayyuu
- *Korma loonii wayyuu* – a bull is wayyuu
- *Fardii, fardii yabatta wayyuu* – horses, horses you ride are wayyuu
- *Jarsii gouda wayyuu* – male elders are wayyuu
- *Hatiinii abaaff wayyuu* – female elders are wayyuu
- *Laftii tu nuu wayyuu* – our earth/land is wayyuu
- *Abbaa wayyuu* – a father is wayyuu
- *Haatii wayyuu* – a mother is wayyuu
- *Seeraa aadaa wayyuu* – our cultural “law” is wayyuu
- *Siinqee wayyuu* – Siinqee, the spiritual stick is wayyuu.
- *Qanafaa wayyuu* – Qanafaa, a beaded leather band women wear on their forehead up to five months after birth, is wayyuu

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<sup>108</sup> See Østebø 2007, 2009 for more extensive descriptions of the concept wayyuu.

One elder, Imishu, went on to explain that all of these people, animals and objects are understood in relation to seera Arsi (Arsi law). He then went back over the list to explain each example of wayyuu in relation to Arsi law. In other words, according to Arsi law, all these people, animals and spiritual objects should be treated with respect.

Many informants gave me lists to define wayyuu, but some also talked about the concept in terms of relationships. Wayyuu is conveyed through shared qualities/attributes, and through things, concepts, and beings that demand a respectful relationship from each other. Wayyuu can be the relationship of respect that is shown to honoured people or that two people show each other. For example, a son-in-law must show utmost respect to his in-laws. He cannot enter the inner part of his mother-in-law's home and he must show respect by looking down and not speaking to her. Women are highly respected but they also show respect towards elders and other men. Although they are very candid and speak freely in the privacy of their homes, in public spaces or in places where they do not know people, they may remain very quiet and may look uninterested. In this way, a loud, outgoing woman may suddenly become quiet and withdrawn in the presence of others who are wayyuu to her. A younger woman should always let an elder woman go before her on a path, a bridge or in a building. Elder saddeeta members are highly respected. In the same way, a child should show a respect towards his/her father or mother, demonstrated by referring to him/her with certain terms of respect or by showing awe and sometimes fear in his/her presence. For example, if an older son disrespects his mother by calling her a bad name or hitting her, she can gather with other women to perform an ateetee ceremony in which he must offer his apology. These are only some examples of

the many relationships of respect and the codes of conduct that must be followed among the Arsi Oromo. Many times in the countryside I have seen these relationships enacted.<sup>109</sup>

The following descriptions elaborate wayyuu as a relational concept. In the second excerpt, this concept is applied to the body.

LQ: Wayyuu jechuun maal jechuu dha?

B: Wayyuun isiin dubbartin wayyuu, mata isiitu wayyuu mata isitu wayyuu wayyuumma qabdii wayyuu.

Wayyuun jechoon nama lafichoon wayyuu jecha moo. Lamaa ee, isiin lamaa wayyuun - tokko abbaa fi ilma jira. Abbaa fi ilmiillee walii wayyuu. Haatiillee fi innillee waal wayyuu. Haati fi innillee walii wayyuu abbaannini fi illaa abbaa qabdi. Ilma moo raa qabdii abbaa qabdi aloo qabdii, ilma mooraa qabdii. Ammaa abbaa jenna kaa junoo abbaan nuu oluun wayyuu; kaa ilmatti ammaa qaayyuuni haa abbaa jedhuullee edoo tana jira as jirata. Yoo kiniif obboolleessi kiyyaallee ni jirata kaan wal qixa'e dubbatu obboolleessaa kiyyaan dubbadhaanii waan barbaadu isaan dubbadha obboolleessaa kaa, gosa ammaa abbaannillee ni jira abbaa jenna ni soodaana. Abbaa jenna yookin kaa abbaa jennuu kan nuu arabsaa. Yookin kaa ilmoo jennuu kana ilma keenyaa nuu arabsee yoo ilmii keenyaa nuu arabsee, yoo abaan keenyaa.

LQ: What does wayyuu mean?

B: Women are wayyuu, they themselves are wayyuu.

Wayyuu means simply or ordinarily we say wayyuu. Wayyuu is two—one is the father and the son. The father and the son are wayyuu. The mother and the son are wayyuu. The son-in-law is wayyuu. Any person considered to be a father is wayyuu to us; the other who is considered to be a son-in-law is wayyuu to us. [...] I can only speak equally with my brother, who is the same age as me. I only speak equally with him. We have to respect our father and to fear him. We may not say his name. We don't name him. We have to respect him. When our son abuses us we gather together and (ululate) on him.

(Bujjaa Badhee, interview, April 14, 2011)

LQ: Kan bira dubbarttoota kan bira kaa wayyuu dha? Kan hin deenyee?

SK: Dubbarttiin gama maratuu wayyuuma, dubarttii gama maratu wayyuuma; isii wayyuuma baqa intala gurgurtti kan intala isi fudhee ni dhufaa waayyu soddaa dha.

LQ: Is any woman wayyuu? Even those who haven't given birth?

SK: In all respects women are wayyuu, all women are wayyuu. The one who married a girl is wayyuu to the mother/father of the girl. This is called *soddaa*. He must wear

<sup>109</sup> For more descriptions of these relationships, see Marit Østebø's fieldwork descriptions (2007, 47 – 53).



Haadha tiyyaa jedha. Wayyuu uffata malee hin yaatu maqaa issiittiin hin waamuu ayyaa jedha. Isinillee maqaa isattini hin waamtuu yookaan idaayyaa jetti yookaan harma jetti maqaa adda itti baafate, maqaa isattin hin waamtuu isa biratti baqa kaffana mulqate hin batuu, bonkoo kana guddaa uffate akka qaamni isii dhokatuu akka kaneennillee mul'isuu hin qabatuu bifa kanan baqa wayyuu innillee jechaadha.

clothes and he can't say the name of the girl's mother. The boy's mother can't call the girl by her name and instead calls her *idaayyaa* [bride] or *harma* or gives her a special cultural name. The bride doesn't call her [mother-in-law] by her name, she can't go in front of her husband naked, she wears a bonkoo to hide her body. She is not supposed to show her body. The body itself is wayyuu.

(Shuru Koree, interview, April 16, 2011)

### *Mukaa laaftuu (soft wood), and closer to Waaqa*

Laaftuu rabbiiti dubartiin. Silaaftuu jabatu sikeessaa baye. Atin jabeenna qaba jetta malee si laaftuu uumee. Dhiira jabaa sikeessa baase rabbiin.

Women are not strong enough; their strength is only Rabbi. Though you claim that you are strong enough, [God] created you weak. However, the toughness [strength] comes out of you. Rabbi brought the strong man from you.<sup>110</sup>

(Aashaa Baatii, interview, October 30, 2010)

In the long list of wayyuu, most of my informants reiterated that women, elders and children are wayyuu. When I asked for further information, some people told me that these categories of people are considered laafa (lit. weak, soft).<sup>111</sup> As Aashaa Baatii, an elder from the Adaba area, expresses above, though women are created weak (laafa), they also have strength. She indicates it is women's connection with Waaqa/Rabbi (God) that gives them strength. As explained in chapter 2, historically in the gadaa system (and still often in society), though women, elders, children, and those with disabilities did not have formal

<sup>110</sup> This means "God gave you the ability to give birth to the strong man."

<sup>111</sup> Though mukaa laaftuu was discussed in chapter 2 in the context of gadaa, here I am focusing on women's close connection with Waaqa and their spiritual power.

political power and, in general, were considered to be on the outskirts of socio-political decisions, they did have important religious roles and power. Scholars have explained how women had and continue to have a special sacredness and respect, which is similar to the elders' gadaa generational classes: *daballe* and *gadaamojjii* (Dahl 1996, Kumsa 1997, Legesse 1973, Østebø 2007) (see chapter 2). As Østebø notes, "Since the features and the religious role of the *daballe* and *gadaamojjii* are very similar to that of women and appear to be rather feminine, this may indicate that the feminine seems to be a category which holds a special religious position; the feminine is perceived to be closer to God than the masculine" (2007, 8). Marit Østebø asked some of her informants directly if women were considered closer to God, and they confirmed this:

My informants expressed great fear for the *sinqee* which I came to understand was due to perceptions of *sinqee* having spiritual power. As I started to realize that the fear and the respect that my informants expressed for the *sinqee* also applied to women, I one day happened to ask a question which I initially thought was absurd: "Are women closer to God than men?" The question was however immediately confirmed, and the notion was continuously supported by all the informants who were asked the same and similar questions, in turn sustaining the idea that women among the Arsi have had and still have a crucial religious role. All my informants, both men and women said that women are feared and respected because of their religious power. The religious superiority of women compared to men where explained by their closeness to God. Women are closer to God because they are more humble and weak; they are soft, they are innocent and they will not fight. It was underscored that "their spirits are with God" (*hafuura Waaqa wajjiin qaban*). These are qualities which contribute to the fact that God will listen more to women than to men: "What a woman blesses will be blessed, what she curses will be cursed. (1997, 66–67)

Though this status gives immense power to women in Arsi society and it is perceived by many as a position of high honour, the descriptors of women can be questioned. Østebø's interlocutors attributed women's particular spiritual status with their being humble, weak, soft, innocent, and not involved in physical fighting. According to them, God will listen more because of these qualities. All of these qualities can be seen as logical attributes of

someone who can bless and call for peace. But some of these terms hold negative connotations for adult women. For example, innocence and weakness, even in Arsi culture, are also associated with children and seen as attributes that prevent people from understanding things or being able to physically perform tasks. This particular status and the descriptions of women can and are used to justify male domination in certain domains, for example, as to why women should not take part in politics or resource management, in the form of land and cattle holdings. I think it is possible to understand this particular spiritual status of women as a relational status with Waaqa, one of women being wayyuu but it is also necessary to be wary of the ways it has been interpreted and applied by certain members of society.

When I asked about women's relationship to Waaqa, I also received a confirmation similar to Østebø's from the elders I interviewed. Women are seen as mediators between men and Waaqa (Legesse 1973, 117, Østebø 2007, 1055) and have "an enormous moral and ritual authority" (Østebø 2007, 1055). Women have the ability to bless and curse. Women's close connection with Waaqa became apparent through my observation of different ceremonies and events. In ceremonies, such as the one described at the beginning of this chapter, the men must wait for the women's blessings in order to begin. Whether a ceremony is being held to reiterate rules or change leaders of the socio-political gadaa system, to pray for rain, or to celebrate a marriage, men must formally ask women for their blessing. For example, when I attended a gadaa ceremony in the village of Faccaa'aa (see chapter 4), at the beginning everyone gathered by the water, with the men on one side of the stream and the women on the opposite bank. The women gathered their siinqee sticks, placing them in the mud of the stream and gathered ceremonial grass

near the water to tap the ground as they offered their blessing. They sang *ateetee* prayers while offering their blessing. In the case of a wedding, women bless the bride before she leaves her home and women from the groom's family bless her as she arrives. Later in this chapter I will also explore how women's spiritual power and close connection with their God gives them the power to curse.

This particular spiritual status of women is not exclusive to the Arsi Oromo. In many other cultural contexts, women's spiritual status allows them to communicate and mediate directly with a higher being. For example, through *sitaat* repertoires, Somali women can communicate directly with famous Islamic female ancestors (Kapteijns 1996). In another context, that of a religious cult in South Africa, from the very beginning of the religion women held a special spiritual status. Religious songs were sent to the male leader of the cult through the voices of girls (Muller 1999). In Ijesa (sub-ethnic group of Yoruba) culture, women perform the most important rite of transition (Opefeyitimi 1989). Those are a few examples of many. What I question with all of these examples and even the Arsi example is why women and not men are endowed with such a spiritual status. In some contexts, the status is attributed to women's ability to have children (Okereke 1994, Opefeyitimi 1989), but what about women who cannot have children? In the Arsi context, for example, even if a woman cannot have children she is still *mukaa laaftuu*, and still considered closer to *Waaqa*. Another related question is why elders often share this status with women? For the Arsi, women and elders are *wayyuu* and are seen as having particular positive attributes, such as being able to listen, adjudicate, and help people emotionally and developmentally; these all contribute to them being able to communicate with *Waaqa* and be heard. For women, *ateetee* is the more

obvious process that calls upon these particular attributes and their close connection with Waaqa.

### *Saffuu*

*Siinqee* tiyyaa lootii qabadha  
kaa laallee rabbi kiyyaa mooti amanee  
saffuu tiyyaa hin laaliinni naa waalaliinii  
*Siinqee* tiyyaa lootii qabadha  
Rabbi kiyyaa mooti kadhadaa  
Saffuu tiyyaa hin laaliinni naa waalallinii

With my beautiful *siinqee*  
That God, I trust, sees what I do  
That he doesn't see my faults [saffuu]  
I carry my beautiful *siinqee*  
My God, I pray to you  
Do not consider [see] saffuu [my  
faults/wrong doings]

(Verses from an *ateetee* song)

If wayyuu are manifestations of God to be respected, saffuu are the cultural values and moral codes that are not to be broken. Knowing what is wayyuu and saffuu, and why these manifestations should be respected, represents a code of ethics actively expressed among the Oromo. This knowledge also falls into the domain of customary law (*seera amba* and *seera aadaa*). If any of these arenas of respect are disrupted, then members of society can call for sanctions or ceremonies so that the balance and respect may be restored. Although this concept also varies depending on the region or informant, Gemetchu Megerssa concisely sums it up: “*Saffuu* is a moral category, based on Oromo notions of distance and respect for all things. The concept of *saffuu* is not merely an abstract category: it constitutes the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded; it is that which directs one on the right path; it shows the way in which life can best be lived within the context of the Oromo world” (2005, 74). Like wayyuu, saffuu is a relational concept. It is defined by and inheres in relationships between people and things. Furthermore, for some actions that are considered saffuu, the person must do something to restore respect/balance (i.e. pray and offer grass to Waaqa, apologize).

I began to ask informants about this term *saffuu* because it is mentioned in the sung verses of *ateetee*: *saffuu tiyyaa hin laaliinni naa waalaliinii* (Do not consider [see] *saffuu* [my faults/wrong doings]). Another translation could be, “that Waaqa does not see my faults.” Similar to other terms, many interlocutors did not define it directly but gave examples of *saffuu*. Siinii Nabii, a *saddetta* member and *ateetee* leader gave the example of not valuing what you have, or always wanting more as *saffuu*:

LQ: *Saffuu jechuun maal jechuudha?*

SN: *Saffuun qabeenya tuufatanni, qabeenya taffatanni namni, gize qabeenya qabullee maal qabana jedhannimi saffuu jechuun nama waa tuufatu qabeenya ofitu tuffatanni.*

LQ: What does *saffuu* mean?

SN: *Saffuu* is when people despise what they have, despise what they have. When someone has many resources but says he has none, this is *saffuu*; despising what someone has.

(Siinii Nabii, interview, April 12, 2011)

During my conversations with Gemetchu Megerssa, he described *saffuu* through examples of cultural wrongdoings. For example, my assistant, who is an Oromo woman, wore pants even when she went to the countryside. According to Gemetchu this would be considered *saffuu*, or a cultural wrongdoing—culturally, Oromo women are expected to wear skirts or dresses. In the case of my assistant, there was no underlying meaning to this action because she was from the city and this was how she had always dressed. I have actually never met a young Arsi woman from a rural area who would ever wear pants in the countryside. It is considered *saffuu* to such an extent that they do not even consider it. However, if a woman does decide to break this type of rule or other gender-defining regulations, it could definitely be seen as a statement or resistance against gendered categories and potentially against oppressive family or clan members. Another example of *saffuu* behaviour is the use the informal “you” form to address an elder. Because I am an Oromo as a second language speaker, I have been guilty of breaking this code of

conduct. In my case, the elder corrects me and it is only considered as an innocent mistake. Although saffuu can include innocent mistakes or digressions from the ethical code such as these, it can also include serious offences, such as hitting a person or verbally insulting an elder. Guyee Kadir, an elder who is also a follower of Waaqeffannaa offered the following example:

LQ: Waan badaa ta'uu saffuu jechuun?

GK: Ee, saffuun nama qabdi, nama hin busheessan. Namatti hin kolfan, hin gorsan malee. Ati badaa hin jedhan. Akasiin saffuun yoo nama busheessan, yoo namatti kolfan. Nama badaatti hin kolfan, nama hiyyoomate itti hin kolfan.

LQ: Is saffuu something bad?

GK: Yes. Saffuu is about people. You do not undermine people. You do not laugh at people but instead advise them. You do not say to someone, 'you are bad.' Like that, it is saffuu to undermine someone or to laugh at someone. You do not laugh at bad people, as you do not laugh at the poor.

(Guyee Kadir, interview, April 12, 2011)

In her research Østebø found that saffuu and wayyuu were very similar terms. I would put emphasis on their interrelatedness, but because my informants made a clear distinction between the two terms, I would place wayyuu (the sacred, blessed, honored or feared object or person) within saffuu (the moral and ethical code). Again, these concepts may be defined this way in the Kokkossa and Nansabo countryside but differently in other areas. And different individuals may also offer definitions that vary.

### ***Women's rights as the balance of power in seera Waaqa***

According to Kuwee Kumsa, in the past, women were able to use what was called the siinqee institution (ateetee)<sup>112</sup> when saffuu was lost and seera Waaqa (the law of God) was violated, as a weapon to fight for their rights (Kumsa 1997, 123). This is very much

<sup>112</sup> According to her historical description, the siinqee institution is the equivalent of ateetee, but it included more categories of rights than ateetee does today.

the case today in areas where ateetee is still practiced. Some of the contexts in which women would use (and still use) ateetee included: property rights, control over their sexuality and fertility (the right to have a lover), social rights (they formed a siinqee sisterhood and could gather when they see fit), and religious and moral authority (Ibid). This society that Kumsa describes includes more social rights than ateetee. Today ateetee is really only used for different types of abuse. In the past, according to Kumsa and her informants, if any of the women's rights were violated, a woman could go out and scream (*iyya siiqqee*—*siqqee* scream), then other women would drop everything they were doing to join the woman who started the scream. Kumsa called this a scream, but most of my interlocutors told me that this consists of very high-pitched ululations. Though women, like men, can call out to friends/relatives in the countryside, or even in town, I do not know of any other time that women would make such a specific and loud call. Only women can ululate. Women have told me it is the way they can communicate to Waaqa and can be heard. For them this vocalization is particularly powerful, like the songs. The first ululation, like an alarm, is meant to call women in their area, but to also alert Ateetee and Waaqa of the forecoming event. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, other ululations in the ateete ceremony can also keep the attention focused on the ceremony and granting the answer to the women's prayers. Though men can sing loudly, they do not ululate or scream, with the exception of funerals where they arrive singing out the name of the deceased in a cry. There is a clear distinction in Arsi society that ululation is a women's-only vocalization. Could it be a means for women to express happiness, anger, and pain in ways that they otherwise could not in speech?



After the scream or ululations when women's rights were violated in the historical *siinqee* institution, an elder man would be sent to try to negotiate and make peace with the women, and, if this failed, the women could begin what was called a *godaansa siiqqee* (*siiqqee* trek) during which they would take refuge with a neighbouring clan. They would leave their husbands to tend to women's duties, such as preparing food and milking the cows. Their husbands would not look favorably upon these tasks and would want the women to come home as soon as possible. If the problem was not resolved, this could result in a war between clans (Ibid, 129–132). This was obviously a very serious affair, demonstrating the potential political power of the women's institution: "But, even if no war is declared, Megerssa claims, a community minus its women has already collapsed as a community. It is not a community any more. But social sanctions do go as far as declaring war to protect women's rights in the balance of power Waaq created" (Ibid, 132).

### ***Qanafaa* and spiritual power after childbearing**

Arsi Oromo women's close position to God is not specific to Oromo women. In many societies in Africa, and certainly other parts of the world, women are seen as being closer to their divinities or spiritual worlds. Whether it is because of their child-rearing role, the particular space they occupy in society, or that their place in society provides a reciprocity to the powers and positions of others, both human and other than human, there are many indigenous examples showing that women hold spiritual powers, sometimes even powers that outweigh those of men.

For the Arsi Oromo, childbirth is a life-giving action that is connected with Waaqa or a higher being. Women are considered to be closer to these higher powers and are seen as wayyuu or especially blessed or sacred during this time. During women's postpartum period—up to five or six months following their delivery (and sometimes more)—they wear qanafaa, a beaded string of leather that is tied around their foreheads (currently, many women wear red plastic beaded bands instead). In most areas, for the first month (and up to seven or eight weeks) following childbirth, the woman does not even leave her home. In Arsi, the one or two-month period of ritual seclusion and special status is called *ulmaa*. Other female family and friends bring food for her and help her in her home. During this time a woman and her baby are considered both vulnerable (to sickness and evil intentions of others) and particularly sacred. The qanafaa the new mother wears becomes a symbol of her status. Tolosa Mamuye explains further:

During her *ulmaa* period, she is considered weak because [of] what she experienced during child delivery and due to this she needs a special care not only from her husband but also from the community. Hence, she ties *qanafaa*, which distinguishes her from other women. Among the Arsii Oromo, a woman with *qanafaa* is given priority in any service like fetching water and in marketing places. In addition to this, when people come to her on the way, it is considered as a sign [of] good luck and they bless her and show her respect. According to my informants, anybody who is quarrelling stops when the woman with *qanafaa* comes across them [sic] (Tolosa Mamuye 2010, 54).

During this time it is especially forbidden for anyone to disrespect a woman, as she has this child birthing and nurturing role.<sup>113</sup> If a woman with qanafaa is abused, she can ululate to call other women, then sing:

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<sup>113</sup> In practice, a woman should never be disrespected or abused in any way. Women can gather together to hold an ateetee ceremony when faced with disrespect, though, when discussing ateetee with Imishu Kephu, an elder, he said that under Oromo traditional law, a husband's disrespect or beating of his wife is only punishable when women are wearing qanafaa. When I asked him directly whether men could hit their wives at other times, he said yes. Even if this is the rule stated in Oromo law, there is no law condoning the abuse of women. Women are wayyuu and are protected under this notion of respect —

*Intala aayaa dhageetree?*  
*Oduun sigeetee?*  
*Ana dhaananii dhageetee?*  
*Oduun sigeetee?*  
*Ana waamanii dhageetee?*  
*Oduun sigeetee?*  
*Uumaa na dabsee?*  
*Oduun sigeetee?*  
*Qanafaa cabsee dhegetee?*  
*Oduun sigeetee?*

My sisters, have you heard?  
 Has the (bad) news reached you?  
 Have you heard that (he) hit (me)?  
 Has the news reached you?  
 I have been called, have you heard?  
 Has the news reached you?  
 A lactating mother has been beaten,  
 Has the news reached you?  
 He has broken my *qanafaa*, have you  
 heard?  
 Has the news reached you?

(Verses from ateetee for a woman with  
*qanafaa* who has been abused)

These are the first verses of the ateetee song that announces that a woman wearing *qanafaa* was abused by her husband. The first three couplets of verses are relatively standardized and are sung in the Arsi highlands and lowlands. The other verses may vary depending on the women and the location. Women who hear the song respond in kind, by saying they had heard and would gather with the women's council and the victim to hear her story.

SG: Waan iba dhisii sii hiima jarsi kiiyyaa.  
 Qanaaffaa kanayyuu yoo naa dhayyee  
 ka'ama qara yoo qanaaffan naa tuumee itti  
 illiilliffana qanaaffa saniini qaayyuuma  
 tuqqee ni qallee ya'a.

SG: I will tell you a story about my  
 husband. When I was wearing a *qanafaa*  
 after birth, he hit me, so we ululated on him  
 because hitting someone with *qanafaa* is  
 not permitted. He slayed (a cow) for the  
 women.

(Shunkaa Gababa, interview, April 12,  
 2011)

Many people told me stories about attending a ceremony for a woman who had  
 been hit while she was wearing *qanafaa*. In Arsi Oromo culture this is an immediately

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women historically have, and will continue to, organized together when their rights and physical bodies  
 were abused.

punishable offence. The victim can leave her house immediately, abandoning children, cooking and any other responsibilities. The ceremony proceeds in the same way as for another insult or abuse, but the women gather in front of the husband's main house (if he has several wives) or the victim's house while the victim stays with other family. Shuru explains it here (audio track 9 has the song):

SK: Yoo abbaan mana keenya tuumuu,  
abbaan mana keenyaa ammaa giize deenyee  
qanafaa akana kunoo, qanafaa akassi sana  
yoo goodhanuu, qanafaa sanii hangaa ji'a  
shanii dubartti biiyyaa teenya, tuumu hin  
danda'ani hin tuumani waan takka abbaan  
manallee matii tiyyaa jedhee, haadha mana  
kiiyyaa jedhee siin yaakaa fettellee,  
dalagdee hin tuumuu ammaa yoo taasaa  
ta'ee tuume.

SK: Now if our husbands beat a woman  
who has given birth and has qanafaa like  
this one (gesturing to another woman's  
qanafaa), it is a crime. We wear qanafaa  
like this (gesture). In our country, women  
wear qanafaa until the fifth month (after  
birth) and it is not possible to hit her. Her  
husband cannot beat her, nor can he kick  
her, as it is a crime.

Qanaafaa... aboo  
Natti boochiissee  
Qanaafaa... dhaahee  
Naa worwaachiissee

[Singing (track 9)]

Qanaafaa... authority  
A baby cried  
Qanaafaa... he beat me  
Let him leave me alone

SK: Abbaa mana keenyaattillee bifa kanan  
yaa'ani. Yoo inni baqa itti yaana nuu qallaa  
baqa qabeenyumma keenyaa sana keessaa  
nuu qallee ammaa deemne isa sannillee  
ebisaatummaa kanee gala faarruu ateetee  
kana:

SK: (Women) gather and go to (ululate) on  
the husband. When this happens, he slays  
for us. He slays for the women from our  
cattle and then the women bless him. This  
is the type of ateetee song:

Kataraa xaboo...  
waayyuu hin dhanannii  
maaf dhantee abboo

kataraa xaboo...  
the *waayyuu* (sacred) must not be hit  
Why, man, did you beat her...

jenne akkanaa baqa itti yaana kana  
fakkata.

We say this; we come to him in this way

(Shuru Koree and neighbours, April 16,  
2011)

There are many other examples in the world demonstrating the link between the sacred status of women and motherhood. For example, childbearing is seen as divine and essential for asserting womanhood in many other African contexts (Bianco 1991, Okereke 1994, Llewelyn-Davies 1985). In many East African societies, motherhood is a perceived as a blessed destiny, often confirming a person's entrance into womanhood or her higher status in society. For example, similar to the Oromo, the Pokot women of Kenya (Green 1999) and the Maasai women of Kenya and Tanzania (Llewelyn-Davies 1985) confer special statuses to mothers and they both have blessing ceremonies for childbirth and for women who would like to become pregnant. For Arsi women who cannot have children, they can still have the sacred status of being a woman. Traditionally a woman could arrange to adopt a baby from another woman who had many children. The woman who wanted to adopt went with a group of women to the house of the mother of the baby. There they would sing prayers, blessings and ask her for permission to have the baby in a ritualized adoption ceremony.

### **Cursing (*Abarsaa*)**

*In the area of Langano Lake, a group of women told me about how they had gathered one day to go to the lake to pray. They passed by one man's house and they greeted him. But he did not return their greeting. When they insisted, greeting him again, he returned their greeting with an insult. The women wanted to hold an ateetee ritual, but the man said he refused since he was Muslim. The women gathered together by his house*

*and cursed him. Some days later, there were strong winds and dust devils that came through and blew the roof off of his house.*

(Fieldnotes, October 2010)

Women can call for ateetee rituals, but if the person does not respond to their demands, they can also use insults to publicly shame the person and if there is still no response, as a last resort they can curse: women have the power to give life, but they can also use power to bring harm upon those who do not want to abide by the moral and ethical codes in their society. Cursing remains a revered and powerful ability of women, deterring people even further from breaking the ethical code and wrongly insulting or offending a woman. “Megerssa notes that the more liminal an Oromo is, the more endowed she/he is with power to curse and bless. The weaker they grow physically, the more powerful they became spiritually” (Kumsa 1997, 128). This statement returns to the notion of mukaa laftuu, which I have opted for over liminality. The connection with *Waaqa* is directly correlated with having this particular status. It is as if there is divine assistance in the form of spiritual power to compensate for the physical power. This is what protects some women, their respect, and rights. Cursing is seen as an ability to connect with a higher being: women can call for these severe actions when respect and honor is not given to them. Although cursing is not very common, most women who participate in ateetee ceremonies have stories about cursing.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> In all the different interviews and discussions I had with women, only one said that cursing was not good. She told me that those who cursed would, as a consequence, bring sorrow and bad things upon themselves. In all the other discussions, women told me stories about how they had participated in curses and they gave examples of how they worked. In chapter 4 I discuss a story of a Protestant man who did

LQ: Abarsa biiyyaa kanani jira?  
 SK: Ni abarraa, ee ni arabsiinaa.  
 LQ: Yoom? Yoom abartani?  
 SK: Yoo dhugaan keenyaa nuu gawwuu  
 bate ni abaraa ee. Soodatte fiixata deebiilee.  
 Akka barbaannee abaraa mirga qabna akka  
 barbanneetti abbaa mana keenyallee yoo  
 ta'ee ilmallee yoo ta'ee ni abara.

Guudeelcha siirkaan caccabee guudeeda  
 mirga jedhaa shameesse shitee gurban  
 shamme ciicittee Arsiin jibbite jenne, bifa  
 kanan baqa abara. Bifuma ta'e maran.  
 Yayyoo bilatee jenne lakki as kottuu  
 yayyiin sii nyaate jenne baqa. Sarreen sii  
 samtee jenne bifa kanan.

LQ: Maal ta'aa mee namichi sunii?

SK: Namiichi suni yoo abarree bira lixnee  
 baqa dhugaa keenya nuu gawwuu dadhabee  
 shammeellee ciicituu danda'a. Tabala sha'e  
 bada qumtinallee godhaatte ciicitullee ni  
 danda'a. Fayyaa bifa birattinnillee dhabuu  
 ni danda'a yookin nabsee ofiillee du'u  
 danda'a nuu sababa waaqni itti goodhuu  
 waan takka ni tabala sha'a malee nama hin  
 ta'uu ee.

LQ: Is there cursing in this area?  
 SK: Yes, we curse, we dispute.  
 LQ: When? When do you curse?  
 SK: When they do not fill our needs, we  
 curse. He became afraid and later on we  
 cursed him. We have the right to do it; we  
 can curse our husbands or our sons.

We say...the big wooden piece of the right  
 leg is becoming pungent. We say, the boy  
 is becoming pungent and the Arsi hate him.  
 These are the ways we curse. Yayo of  
 bilate, we say, come here, the wolf will eat  
 you. Then dogs will snatch you. These are  
 ways we say them.

LQ: What will happen to this man?

SK: When this person is cursed and goes  
 home, he may become diseased and his  
 body may split into pieces. He can be  
 disfigured, he may become a leper, he may  
 break into pieces. He can lose his health or  
 he can lose his life and die. God may bring  
 something on him. He may not be healthy  
 again.

(Shuru Koree, interview, April 16, 2011)

When women curse, they raise their siinqee, but unlike when they bless, they turn it down to the ground. Bujjaa and Ruffoo, two women I spent time with in the Kokossa countryside, described cursing in this manner (audio track 10):

B&R: Abartee beerri jennanni, ni abartii,  
 ni arabsaa. Nuulfeessuu didee, nuu qalluu  
 didee, gaanyaa as deebii'e arabsee jeenan  
 siinqee tana abartee gombifte abartee  
 jeenaan kassarrera, ni kassarra.

B&R: When the women cursed him, he had  
 insulted us. He had refused to respect us, he  
 had refused to slay (a cow) for us, he  
 insulted the women again, so then we  
 turned down our siinqee and cursed him. He  
 went bankrupt.

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not want to perform the ateetee ceremony. The women cursed him and said that it worked because he had problems at work afterwards.

LQ: Yeroo abarsaa siinqee barabaachisuu?

B&R: Eeyyee ni gombissaan illaa isi tana akanatti gadi gombissani abaranni.

Kattarraa gubbaa, kassarrii gurbaa jenna

Ee ayyoo guddoo, kattarraa gubbaa  
kassarri gurbaa  
Saangaan gaafa baakeessee gurbaan  
rabbi raateessee maaf nagameessee jenna  
yoo arabsiinuu.

LQ: Raateesse jechuun maal jechuudha?

B&R: Abarsaa kana raatayyii jechuudha.  
Raatayyi du'ii jechuudha. Nama keessaa  
baayyi jechuudha.

LQ: Is siinqee necessary during cursing?

B&R: Yes, you turn down siinqee like this (gesture); you turn it down to curse.

(Singing):

On Kataraa, that you become bankrupt, boy.  
We say this.

Yes, strong/elder mother, Kataraa, that you  
become bankrupt boy

A bull encircling his horn, you boy, let God  
confuse you (drive you mad), loitering here  
and there. This is what we say when we  
insult.

LQ: What does *raateesse* mean?

B&R: It is a curse that means to become  
insane/mad/confused. It means a death from  
confusion. It means to have a lot of people  
(in your head).

(Bujjaa and Ruffoo, interview, April 14,  
2011)

As one informant told me, after they have used their siinqee for cursing, they go to the river to wash them. The power and regeneration of siinqee will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5. Washing siinqee after cursing is necessary because the siinqee and the women are inherently full of respect. Cursing is something considered disrespectful, but it is still used at times as a last resort. In the following, Sinni Nabbi told me about someone who was cursed:

LQ: Nama arabsee, maal maalitu isaraa gaha?

SN: Dhiibeen, waani tabalashaa'e bada bu'a hin argatu.

LQ: Argitanni nama akan ta'e isin?

LQ: What happens to someone who has been cursed?

SN: He may become diseased.

LQ: Have you seen such a person?



SN: Ee. Gurba wayyiitu ateetee itti yaate abartee. Qe'e lixe dhokate. Nageellummaa dhaqee karratti du'e shumulloo ni beektami shumulloo garbe'e. Achi du'e jennaan hin tureeyyuu hosuu du'e namni dubarttin abartee ni tuunifamaa, siinqee goombifte abartee jeenaan hin toluu.

SN: Yes. They cursed that boy. He left the area. When he went to the Negele town, he died on the road. His name is Shumullo. He died there. Women cursed him. While turning down their siinqee they cursed him.

(Sinni Nabbi, interview, April 12, 2011)

In a belief system and culture that centres on reciprocity and respect, cursing is really a last resort. Because it is a power-laden process, which can inflict physical and emotional pain, it is really a war-like technique women use to make sure their respect is maintained in society. Just as men can physically fight or kill someone, women can use words to curse. This, of course, genders the ways people can inflict pain. Women are permitted to cause harm with words, but not physically. In spite of the extremely negative implications, people usually do not try to intervene when ateetee women decide to curse someone. They would fear the repercussions from the women. Women never told me they went too far by cursing someone. There would, however, be further questions to explore here. For example, can the cursed individual reintegrate in society? How do the women feel after they curse? Many men I spoke to were afraid of women's power to turn their siinqee down as a curse. Many see cursing as a punishment from Waqaa for those who do not respect women and their rights. It is an even more powerful deterrant than the ateetee ceremony because stories abound of offenders who did not agree to participate in an ateetee ceremony and sometimes suffered permanent consequences from the curses.

### ***Praying to ateetee***

LQ: *Ateetee* jechuun maal jechuudha isiinif?

LQ: What is ateetee/does ateetee mean for you?

BK: Illiillii jechoodha. *Ateeteen* tokko kaa waaqa wammatanni, tokkoo kaa gaafa namni nama arabsuutti; seerraa lammaa qabdii. *Ateeteenni* tokko roobaafi caamaf, roobni jabatee, yoo camni jabatee, kaa kanatti waaqa wammataa. Tokko yoo naa arabsanni akka seerraa ammaa gara mootummaa dhaqanni kaasasanni kana. Saddeetta qabna sanitti dhaqne yoo himanee. Yoo inni gaafate jennanni diideettiin jedhee itti yaa'u barbaana.

BK: It means ululating. There are two laws of *ateetee*: one type of *ateetee* is to call (pray) to God, another is when someone abuses a person. One *ateetee* is for when the rain hasn't come, to bring rain when there is a drought, for this we tell (pray to) God. Another (*ateetee*) is when someone has been abused; now some people apply the government laws and charge the person. [In our *ateetee*] we have the *saddeetta* (councils of elders) to go tell. If the accused person refuses this council, then we [women] arrange to gather on him/her.

(Buldhaa Kerroo, interview, April 12, 2011)

According to many Arsi women, the *ateetee* ceremonies are a direct communication with God. As one woman told me:

*Ateeteen* arnyaa mee arnyaa rabbi nuu garagaarii mee jedhaa deemina. Illilii.

*Ateetee* is the power, the power of God to help us. *Illilii* [ululations].

(Shangu Gobana, interview Sof Umar Gutoo, December 21, 2010)

According to *ateetee* practitioners, these communications with *Waqaa* must be done through song “so that *Waqaa* (God) hears us” (*Waqaa nuu dhagayaa*). Often at the end of the day, after women gathered to pray for rains, singing with their *siinqee*, the rains came. Rain is *Waqaa*'s response to sung prayers (as demonstrated through the example at Faccaa'aa described in Chapter 3, and the transcribed prayers at the beginning of this chapter). The actual power of singing to bring forth results will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7, but the direct connection between singing to *Waqaa* and receiving a response in return needs to be mentioned here. The results *Waqaa* grants are mentioned in the prayer songs. *Waqaa* is first asked for help or a solution to problems, then

acknowledged and thanked at the end. The material and praise offerings to Waqaa contribute to this success. Women's siinqee sticks, which have a particularly sacred status and connection with Waqaa, also assist in the singing. This relationship will be explored further in the next chapter.

The prayers can be used in all situations of life with the exception of funerals. Women, as life bearers, have spiritual power connected to the living, so they do not bring their siinqee to funerals. During the ceremonies, although most women say they are praying or communicating directly to Waaqa, some say that they pray to Ateetee or Maryam (or Maram), whom some call the female deity.<sup>115</sup> I have asked women if ateetee is a person, to which many respond that it is the ritual. However, many other women and elders have evoked Ateetee as a person, either the first holder of the siinqee, or a female deity or mother of all women (*ayyoo guddoo*—strong or great mother) to whom women

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<sup>115</sup> Although it is sometimes used in Arsi (probably in conjunction with Christian influence), Maram is a term I had previously heard in relation to other Oromo subgroups. Bartels describes Maram's position among the Matcha Oromo, an Oromo subgroup in the west of Ethiopia: Maram is the "divinity of motherhood. She is invoked and addressed in song by the women at any birth ritual. Another ritual at which she is invoked is the one called 'Atete' which, in former times, was performed by every woman in a neighbourhood who wished to be pregnant. At both rituals, similar songs are sung" (Bartels 1983, 124). I think the following description by Gemetchu Megerssa sums up, not only what Maram is for the Matcha Oromo, but what she (evoked with many other names such as ateetee or mother) is for Arsi Oromo women: "Maram is not Waqa. She does not create the child in the woman's womb. So women also pray to Waqa for the gift of children. However, after Waqa has given the child, everything is in Maram's hands. It is Maram who helps and sustains the mother during the months of her pregnancy, who keeps the child healthy in her womb and who assists her in childbirth. Her help is essential for any child to be safely born. So if we say: 'O Maram, give a child to the childless woman', we do not mean that Maram creates the child. Maram is virgin and, at the same time, the mother of all mothers. People never refer to her as a married woman (*dubarti*). They never speak of sex in connection with Maram. We feel that Waqa approves of Maram and that he trusts her and leaves everything to her. Because of this, we never pray: 'O Waqa, make Maram have pity on our child.' Maram can ask Waqa whatever she wants. Women are happy to have Maram as their mother, a mother with whom they share the secrets of motherhood: menstruation, pregnancy, diseases which prevent them from bearing healthy children (thus leaving them childless), and particularly the pains of labour. They consider her to be someone exclusively their own. Men have nothing to do with Maram. Maram surpasses all ayana. She is not, however, to be seen as a lesser Waqa or a kind of 'female Waqa'. She is Maram" (Gemetchu Megerssa in Bartels 1983, 127).

pray. When asked about ateetee, several male elders told me, “ateetee *namadha*” (ateetee is a person). Women pray to this female divinity, who in turn communicates with God. Only women can communicate with her and she has powers to help them, but she is different from God.

LQ: Namootni tokko tokko naan jedhee (Ateetee) akka waaqqaa, yoo kadhatan moo?  
 SN: Ee, rabbit gargaara. Ee isa jechuu.  
 DB: Ateetee fi waaqni garagaraayii?  
 SN: Rabbiin kadhatti kaa. Isiin rabbiin ni-dhagahaaf. Yoo roobee waan fedhellee yoo taate waanii ijoolleen yoo dhukkubsatteltee, ateetee jedhamtu jira.

LQ: Some people have told me that (Ateetee) is like God; can they pray to her?  
 SN: Yes, it helps God. Yes, that is it.  
 DB: Is Ateetee different than God?  
 SN: Of course Ateetee prays to God. God hears her (ateetee). If it rains, or whatever it is, if children are sick, there is a particular ateetee (ceremony) to be undertaken.

(Sinii Nabii, interview, January 12, 2011)

In the lowlands, women often talk about *Faxiimee*, either interchangeably with ateetee or as another deity or spiritual person to pray to for specific occasions.

GA: Faximee jedhanninii. *Ateetee* gachanna keenya faxiimee jedhanniinii hadhaa loonni jedhanniin. Hadha deetuu jedhanninii.

GA: She is called *Faximee*. Ateetee is our protection that saves us from different things. *Faximee* is called the mother of cattle and the mother of our children.

GA: Aadaa ateeteetti. Ateeteellee Amaraa irrattiillee maramii jedhannii. Arsooma oromoo irrattiillee ateetee jedhamtii kanaaf yoo isiin deetu faxxime shubo kana goone funne keenya.

GA: In the culture of Ateetee, the Amharas celebrate her as Mary. In Arsi Oromo culture, we call her Ateetee and *Faxxime* when a mother is giving birth.  
 (Guljaa Anoota, interview, October 30, 2010)

In the verses of the songs, such as the following example from a gathering in Bishaan Gurracha, women invoke this person or spirit:

*Ateetee*, waaluumaan deemna,  
 ee nooraa ayyoo,

Ateetee, we will go together  
 yes, welcome mother,

ayyaani har'a,  
haawaasaa deemna

to today's ceremony  
we will go to Hawassa

The different types of ateetee ceremonies allow women to communicate directly to Waaqa or to a divine intermediary (Ateetee) through sung prayers and through their offerings of gifts from the natural world. In exchange the women may receive what they ask for or they may be granted the direct power to achieve their results.

## Conclusion

Through this brief overview of Arsi vernacular religion (Waaqeffannaa), I aimed to demonstrate how relationality between living and other than human beings (in the forms of exchange, gifts/prayers, respect, morals/ethics, and spiritual power) is intrinsic to the belief system and how those relations are in turn connected to women, their wayyuu status in society, and their use of ateetee and cursing. Women use ateetee to restore some sense of balance when it is lost, but they can also curse as punishment to those who do not abide by the laws of respect. Within this system of belief are wayyuu (sacred status) and saaffuu (moral and ethical codes) that are linked to Arsi customary law and justice. When these are broken or disrespected, women can use ateetee to sing to Waaqa for power to restore their respect and ensure their rights. As I will explore in chapter 7, their singing and movements in the ateetee process are imbued with the power to restore this balance. What ties this all together from a spiritual perspective is the Arsi view that women are mukaa laaftuu and closer to Waaqa. They should be given the utmost respect by other members of society. When women are holding siinqee, their weapons, at the ateetee ceremonies, they are particularly powerful.

## Chapter 4

### Complexities and Negotiations in Relation to Social Changes



Women singing ateetee while walking down to the stream at the *gadaa* ceremony in Faccaa'aa, March 2011.



Men gathered at Faccaa'aa for the ceremony reiterating *gadaa* laws. March 2011.





Women gathered by the stream to give the blessing for the Faccaa'aa *gadaa* ceremony to begin. March 2011.



Women offering their blessing for the ceremony in Faccaa'aa. Their *siinqee* and *sardoo* (grass) are in the creek bed.



*I was traveling with friends and family to a gadaa ceremony in Faccaa'aa, a small rural town nestled in a remote valley, about 60 km by foot from any larger municipality. According to elders, the Faccaa'aa gadaa ceremony had existed for hundreds of years. It was used to practice and reiterate laws of the gadaa system. Tayere, the Abbaa Gadaa (lit. father of gadaa, or leader of gadaa for his area) told us that the ceremony had stopped about ten years before due to a heavy Salafi Islamic presence in the area. Recently, places like Faccaa'aa have started to hold their rituals again because of new interest in the culture, the gadaa system and Waaqeffannaa (belief in Waaqqa and the Oromo vernacular belief system). The ceremony took place at the new cultural*



*gathering site, a large piece of land on a hill that slopes down to a creek bed in the plains on the outskirts of the town. Trees hadn't been planted yet, so by midday, we all could feel the heat of the sun.*

*On the day of the ceremony, most of the inhabitants of the town and the surrounding area gathered in the ceremonial field. After the usual waiting around, my friends and I went to see the men who were under a small tent cover, discussing various gadaa laws. Women gradually began gathering in spaces outside, partially in the downhill direction of the slope. They were singing ateetee prayers and slowly making their way down to the stream at the bottom of the hill. (The stream was really just a small muddy pit since it hadn't rained for a while.) On their way, they stopped and continued to sing ateetee, breaking into two circular groups. They sang general ateetee verses, prayers for siinquee and prayers for rain. Before the official ceremony could begin, the women needed to give their blessings. When we arrived down by the water, the women gathered all their siinquee sticks and put them in the muddy water with the ritual grass (sardoo) and mud (qarruu), singing prayers and blessings. They also took the muddy grass to their faces for blessings. The men came down and stood on the other bank of the creek, formally asking for the women's permission before they began the ceremony.*

*During the afternoon, the men reiterated the oral laws and discussed the gadaa system, the traditional Oromo socio-political system, as they have existed for hundreds of years. These ceremonies had been held in the past, to maintain and update the customary law and to review the gadaa regulations, but one had not been held in decades due to political and religious changes in the region. By gathering together, the elders shared their knowledge, which encompassed historial, political and cultural aspects, and passed*

*on what they knew to younger generations. Later in the day, while the men were sitting under a large tree up the hill discussing the gadaa laws, I went to find the women. They were further up the hill, some sitting, but many standing in small groups singing different song repertoires, including ateetee. When I set out to find them, the sky was very clear but, after a few minutes, it began pouring. I stayed with the women, sheltered by their umbrellas, laughing as we sang under the pouring rain. After the downpour and even later, after the event, the women and other townspeople would say that it was because the women sang prayers for rain that it poured.*

*A month later, Dirriba, my friend and colleague in the cultural office, came to visit my family in Adama. During our conversations, he told me about several problematic incidents involving religious tensions in the Nansabo district. He said that after we left Faccaa'aa, some men from the mosque, who were enraged by the talk around town about the power of ateetee prayers to bring rain, burned the grass and fledging trees in the town's cultural gathering area where the ceremony had been performed just days before. Apparently some of the mosque members were afraid that Oromo vernacular religion would come back in vogue and that people would stop believing in Islam and, particularly, the Salafi Islamic practices advocated by mosque members.*

Change can be as positive and beneficial as it can be problematic. Ateetee rituals are not static, nor are the ateetee women. In this dissertation I focus on many elements of adaptation and modification that Arsi community members practice every day and what this means for ateetee. Even within the ritual, women are constantly modifying and

adjusting words, gestures and ritual elements in relation to personal, group or societal needs. As introduced through the story above, the changes I am discussing in this chapter are often problematic for the ateetee women. They have complained to me about these confrontations, so, in addition to discussing a very contemporary, culturally and politically sensitive topic, I feel a responsibility to respond to the complaints and questions raised by some of the women.

Changes develop, at times in violent and volatile ways, threatening the social institutions that the women have grown up knowing. When the rituals are threatened, so, too, are the traditional rights and powers afforded women in the Arsi spirituality and the justice system. Of course, as values and beliefs shift in society, so will many women's places, spaces and the ways in which they promote their rights. Not all women want to assert their rights publicly through ateetee rituals; they may in fact prefer other religious or governmental processes. Sometimes the state-based justice system will help them achieve more, as is the case with property rights (Hebo and Shigeta 2014).

Social changes will continue to be a major thread through the different parts of this thesis, but in this chapter I focus specifically on changes that affect whether women can practice the ritual at all, the resistance they face when they try to practice ateetee, and how they accept the changes or try to circumvent hostile resistances or barriers. I will focus on three areas—issues that my discussions with community members have led me to understand as both the most consequential and the most contested: 1. religion; 2. rural exodus and urbanization; and 3. local/national/international government and/or non governmental organization politics. Of these three, religion is the most pressing issue.

The introductory story in this chapter is, unfortunately, only one of many of the religious contestations facing Arsi women practicing ateetee today. When I have discussed the perception of ateetee in the community with different Arsi community members, inevitably the majority of women complain about the Salafi<sup>116</sup> Muslims (locally called “Shariyyaa” or “Whaahhabis,” though the latter has negative connotations) and the Protestants. Most of the time I do not even need to raise the question because, during conversations about ateetee, women discuss impediments to rituals, pointing to the problematic relations with other religious practitioners. Because these tensions became apparent through experiences in Kokossa and Nansabo areas, I also began to interview local religious leaders: the Sheikh and Imam of the mosque in Kokossa, organizational members and pastors of several evangelical churches, and Oromo vernacular religion practitioners. I have also spoken to some Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) adherents. However, in these Arsi areas at least, there have not been visible conflicts between Orthodox Christians and vernacular Oromo religious practitioners.

Islamic religious studies scholar, Terje Østebø’s writings have been crucial in providing localized information and analyses of the changes related to the arrival of Salafism to the Arsi Oromo living in the Bale region in Ethiopia. This area is just east of the West Arsi highlands where I worked. Concentrating on agents of change as related to local, national and transnational factors over time (T. Østebø 2012), his study “sees localities as interacting and layers of contexts as intersected” and “thus seeks to

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<sup>116</sup> Terje Østebø defines “Salafi” in the following manner: “The word Salafi stems from the Arabic al-salaf al-salih, ‘the pious ancestor,’ and relates usually to what is perceived as the authentic Islam. In this case it refers to the particular teaching of Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and should not be confused with the nineteenth-century Egyptian Salafiyya movement” (Østebø 2012, 629).

demonstrate how different localities have influenced each other in dialectic processes and how they have been shaped by each other” (Ibid, 3). He seeks to “move beyond one-sided approaches and too stringent structuralist perspectives” (Ibid). As he explains, “I argue in favour of a bottom-up approach, which sees locality as a point of departure and through which I seek to forward some suggestions for a localized conceptualisation of religious change” (Ibid). I find Østebø’s approach very useful since I also emphasize a localized, ground-up approach to research in this dissertation. I have used his writings as inspiration for the religious part of this chapter. In the process of doing so, I found in order to understand some of the complexities at the local level, it is essential to present the different national (and international) historical layers and then try to understand and represent perspectives and motivations of the local actors.

### **Some contemporary statistics on religion in Ethiopia**

According to the 2007 census in Ethiopia, the majority of the population is Christian (62.8%, of which 43.5% are Orthodox and 18.6% Protestant), followed by Muslim (33.9%) and the remaining minority practices traditional religions (Population Census Commission 2008). Muslims have represented about one third of the population of Ethiopia since the first population surveys in the 1960s and their numbers are growing (Ficquet 2015, 94). Today Oromiya has the largest Ethiopian Muslim population at 51%, and Muslims make up 48% of Oromiya. Among the Arsi Oromo of Bale, Muslims are the majority at 82%, followed by Orthodox, Protestants, Catholics and Traditional (vernacular religion practitioners) (Population Census Commission 2008). This last category—Traditional—mainly comprises people who declare their belief as *Waaqeffannaa*,

the Oromo vernacular belief system. In the Kokossa district (*wereda*) the 2007 statistics are the following: Muslims (77%), Protestants (14%), Traditional (.04%) and Orthodox (.02%). In the Nansabo district, Muslims (63%) are the majority, followed by Protestants (24%), Orthodox (.09%) and Traditional (.09%) In these highland Arsi areas, I can confirm that Muslims constitute the majority, but, depending on the area, Orthodox or Protestants may constitute the next most populous group. The 2007 census indicates Protestants as the next largest group in both areas, which I find reflective of the Kokossa area, but surprising for the Nansabo district, where I rarely encountered Protestants.

Though they provide a good base reference, official State statistics involving religion and ethnic groups should be considered with caution. As Østebø has stated (T. Østebø 2012), the overall percentage of Muslims in Ethiopia is most likely higher than what the 2007 census stated. Furthermore, in Arsi areas, many people who declare allegiance to one religion, also may be practitioners of Arsi vernacular belief. Some of these dual religious adherents are actually syncretic believers. Others may give a pretense of religious affiliation when they do not adhere to a particular religion or do not want to reveal their beliefs.

### **Historical background on religions of the Arsi Oromo**

In order to understand how religious practices have changed, and why Muslims and Christians have become more oppositional and confrontational towards ateetee practitioners in recent years, the historical evolution of religion in the area provides

essential context.<sup>117</sup> This historical snapshot needs to be prefaced with two considerations. First, the dominant narratives in Ethiopian history, until recently, have been told and written from Amhara and Ethiopian Orthodox Christian perspectives; Oromo and Islam, which are both political minorities, were not the focus of research until relatively recently.<sup>118</sup> Second, written history of the Oromo is scarce or, as in the case of my research, almost non-existent. Because my field research did not focus on oral histories related to religion, I must rely on data from anthropologists who have worked in the same geographical areas;<sup>119</sup> historians working in neighbouring Arsi areas;<sup>120</sup> scholars who have written globally about religion among the Oromo in Ethiopia; and the oral history I gathered. Though I haven't documented many historical details except when related to ateetee, there are many residents of these areas who are oral history bearers and others who have written unpublished papers or notes about their local histories.

The earliest documentation of Islam in the Bale area of Oromiya is based on tombstones in Arabic, dating to the beginning of the fourteenth century (Braukämper

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<sup>117</sup> For a more detailed history of Islam in Oromo-inhabited areas of Ethiopia, see the works of: Hussein Ahmed, Ulrich Braukämper, Terje Østebø, and J. Spencer Trimingham. See also: Cerulli 1941, Desplat 2005, 2012, Desplat and Østebø 2013, Fauvelle-Aymar 2004, 2011a, 2011b, Ficquet 2015, Geda 2013, Abbas Haji Gnamo 1991, 2002, 2014, and Hirsch 2010.

<sup>118</sup> See the previous footnote for more references. Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch further elaborated on reasons for the lack of interest in history of Islam in Ethiopia in their article: "First, the place of Islam in Ethiopia has been perceived in the context of a grande narrative elaborated as early as the medieval time by clerics around the Christian royal court, thus bringing about a history that can be defined as "Christian-centric." Second, the Muslims have always been, *politically* speaking, minorities in the history of Ethiopia, as is the case in the most recent period even though they may be *demographically* dominant. As a result, modern historians tended to consider the historical data regarding the Muslim spaces as simple complements to be articulated in the dominant historiography. Furthermore, the Arab sources concerning the Horn, which are already few in number, often exist only in old editions and translations" (2011 [2004], 27).

<sup>119</sup> These scholars include: Mamo Hebo, Gemechu Geda, Hussein Endessa, Tolosa Mamuye, Daniel Deressa and Marit Østebø.

<sup>120</sup> These scholars include: Hussein Ahmed; Enrico Cerulli, Terje Østebø (who has been researching in Bale, just east of where I have conducted research); Ulrich Braukämper; and John Spencer Trimingham.

2002, 155, Huntingford 1955)—an era that corresponds with the southern expansion of Muslims. However, archaeology, oral histories and present day scholars point to a much earlier Islamic presence in the area, perhaps even as early as the first waves of Islamization in early medieval times (Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch 2004). Among the first documented interactions with Islam were Muslim merchants (*naggadi*) who came to what is now Ethiopia to trade and sell (Braukämper 2002, Østebø 2011, Trimmingham 2008). Much of the initial introduction and expansion of Islam is due to the Muslim presence in the city of Harar, in the east, and the interactions between the Oromo and Harar's merchants (Ibid, Braukämper 2002, Trimmingham 2008).

After the Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century marginalized Islamic practices, an Islamic renaissance began in the eighteenth century via Harar (Østebø 2011). At this point, there were already some Salafi influences coming from the East. Because Salafism expanded rapidly in Ethiopia in the 1990s, many people have assumed it is a recent occurrence. Østebø contests polarizing accounts that pit Salafi Islam against the more tolerant, “local” Islam. As he explains, the arrival of Salafism, just like the arrival of Sufism to Arsi areas, needs to be approached from a multiplicity of perspectives. It was not just something that arrived from the outside, forming a static dichotomy with local practices:

The Islamisation of the Bale Oromo was a relatively recent phenomenon, and must be seen in relation to the general Sufi revival in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which had a clear impact on Ethiopia. Whereas other Muslim communities in Ethiopia were more directly affected, the impact on Bale was of an indirect nature. Sufism reached Bale from its neighbouring areas, where it already had been interpreted and moulded within these localities. Representations such as the Sufi main *turuq* never played any major role in Bale and neither was there a development of any trans-local identity of affiliation to the different brotherhoods. Rather, Sufism revolved around particular shrines, like that of Sheikh Hussein, and with Sufism developing into a popularised and localised form. Through this process of Islamisation, Muslims and adherents of the Oromo religion came to live side by side, in turn resulting in a gradual accommodation to the new faith. An intrinsic part of the Islamisation



process was thus the infusion of pre-Islamic Oromo elements into Islam; either in the form of Oromo religious practices becoming Islamised, or as survivals in a more “purer” form. This inevitably encumbered the development of Islamic scholarship in Bale, conformity to the main sunni doctrines and the performance of the obligatory Islamic practices. (T. Østebø 2009, 465-6)

This summary of the slow process of Islamization to the area is indicative for both this chapter and the dissertation. For this chapter, it points to the idea that many different religious practices may have been in coexistence for a long time. Østebø is referring to the Oromo in Bale, but slow processes of different types of religious change may have also been occurring in other areas of Oromiya. This understanding of historicity and constant processes of change are also essential for the study of ateetee. Even in areas where ateetee may have always been in practice, it was never static. It was undoubtedly always being influenced by other beliefs, cultures, and changes.

The first Christian missionaries to come to Ethiopia in the sixteenth century were Jesuit; they left their mark on the Ethiopian kingdom, but were forced to leave in the 1630s: “Although Ethiopia did not become, following such upheavals, a closed country, as is often asserted, it categorically rejected any kind of religious mission organised by Europeans. The strength of this refusal was witnessed by the few Westerners who reached Ethiopia in the subsequent centuries” (Böll et al. 2005, xvii). The early part of the nineteenth century marked the first reappearance of missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant. They were, however, under the watch of the Orthodox clergy and limited in their proselytism (Böll et al. 2005, xvii).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> For detailed information on the history of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, see Jörg Haustein’s works (2009, 2011, 2013a and b). His 2011 book, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, provides a very detailed history of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia. His webpages on Pentacostal and charismatic movements in Ethiopia also provide pertinent information and references. These are located on the website of the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism (GloPent). This is an interdisciplinary academic initiative coordinated by Pentecostalism experts at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the University of Birmingham,

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the introduction of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) in Oromo areas, and the rise of Salafism and Ethiopian Protestant churches are noteworthy. Though it is not possible to address all of the aspects of change in detail, it is important to remember that all of these religious interactions were intricately embedded in dramatic and concurrent political and economic changes. By the end of the nineteenth century, Islam was the main religion for many Eastern Arsi (Braukämper 2002, Geda 2013). This would have included Salafism (Sunni) and Sufi traditions, such as the worship of and pilgrimages to the cult of Sheikh Hussein. The latter was mixed with vernacular Oromo cultural-religious practices. In Western Arsi, however, people continued to practice vernacular Oromo religion through the 1930s (Ibid.).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), which was synonymous with the Ethiopian Imperial Government up until the 1974 revolution, only began to spread to Arsi Oromo areas in the late nineteenth century after the conquest of Arsi Oromo lands (Haji 1995, Hassen 1994).<sup>122</sup> In an internal colonization campaign, the Imperial government placed pro-Imperial merchants (mainly of the Amhara ethnic group) in rural areas of Oromiya (Haji 1998). They brought Orthodox Christianity with them, building churches for their followers and affirming the role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. From the time of Menelik's nineteenth-century colonization, Arsi Oromo socio-cultural and political practices, including religion and government (*gadaa* system), went into a slow

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the University of Heidelberg, and the University of Uppsala. For Haustein's data, see: <https://www.glopent.net/Members/jhaustein/ethiopia/pentecostal-and-charismatic-movements-in-ethiopia> (accessed 1 July 2014).

<sup>122</sup> The Arsi waged strong campaigns of resistance against Menelik II's army, so these bloody battles and conquests of the lands lasted for about six years, until Menelik II's armies defeated the Arsi in 1887. These battles were particularly violent, as documented through historians' recordings of oral testimonies of the Arsi: Menelik II's army used maiming tactics in order to achieve Arsi submission and killed many people to conquer lands in other areas of the country (Haji 1995, 12, Melba 1980, 43, Bulcha 1988, 40).

decline. At this time, there were incidents of mass forced conversion to Orthodox Christianity, with the result that many Arsi Oromo *Waaqeffannaa* believers converted to Islam in protest (Ibid.). Many of my Arsi informants, as well as other Oromo I have met in different areas of Ethiopia, have confirmed these written reports, sharing their memories of their conversions (or resistances to them) and those of their parents or grandparents. Though the percentage of EOC members in Arsi is a minority today, the colonizing presence of the EOC remains in living memory.

During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936–1941), the occupiers reinforced and promoted Islam in the south of the country in order to encourage opposition to the Christian Amhara, who were against the Italian occupation, and to seek support from the Saudis (Braukämper 2002, 159, Geda 2013, 233, Østebø 2009). The Italians subsidized Muslim pilgrimages to holy cities, which brought Salafism to Harar. According to Østebø, pilgrims from Bale were low, but many of them went to Harar to train, bringing Salafism home that way (2009, 2012). The Italians built infrastructures throughout Ethiopia, also contributing to the expansion of Islam and Salafism since people could travel around easier. The Arsi highlands (with the exception of the town of Kokkossa), however, remain difficult to access to this day, perhaps explaining why the spread of Salafism and Protestant faiths are more recent to these areas.

More Orthodox Christians came to Oromiya in the early 1950s by way of the Shewa Oromo exodus from Shoa. At this time, Shewa Oromo began to settle in Bale as sharecroppers for the Arsi Oromo before purchasing their lands. Most of them were from north of Addis Ababa, landless and fleeing harsh treatment from nobility in Shoa: “The

Shoa Oromo came to constitute a group caught between the Amhara rulers and the Oromo Muslims” (Østebø 2012:137, Blackhurst 1974, 1980).

After early, unsuccessful attempts to bring Protestant missions to Oromo populations in Ethiopia in the nineteenth century (Haustein 2011), the missionaries’ efforts did not begin to take root until the 1920s with the work of such missions as the Evangelical Lutheran Mission, the American United Presbyterian Mission and the Sudan Interior Mission (Haustein 2011, 12–13). These were followed by the Mennonite missionaries in 1945 and Swedish Pentecostal missions in the 1950s and 1960s. Pentacostal/Charismatic movements also spread and their views are now incorporated into most other Ethiopian protestant church services (Ibid., Haustein 2011, 2013). Many of these first foreign-directed churches managed to remain in the country or return after being driven away by the Imperial government. Over time, Ethiopian evangelical churches were established and developed out of these first missions. There are now 280 religious associations registered with the Ministry of Justice and many of these are Pentacostal/Charismatic (Ibid., 17). Pentacostal/Charismatic movements have spread to such an extent that their views are now incorporated into most other Ethiopian Protestant church services (Haustein 2009, 2013).

Though Protestant and Islamic religious practices took root in different parts of the country (Protestants in the west and southwest; Islam in the south and east), during the twentieth century, the Imperial government was “not interested in representing religious diversity” (Haustein 2009, 118). Though not supported or encouraged, a certain degree of religious tolerance emerged for a brief period under the Imperial Government of Haile Selassie (1940s and ‘50s). Once the Derg (the communist military junta, 1974–1991),

took hold of the country, all of the Pentecostal churches, many of the other Protestant churches, and Muslims (who were accused of having allegiances with the Somalis) were shut down (Haustein and Østebø 2012).

During the 1975 Derg Regime land reform, the Shewa Oromo (i.e., mainly Orthodox Christians who had resettled in Arsi lands during the 1950s), benefited dramatically from the reforms, which granted them cattle and land, eventually led them to side with the government rather than the Oromo in subsequent uprisings (Østebø 2012: 210, 214). At the same time, however, those land reforms and Derg policies dispossessed the EOC of its land and political power. In general, though there was ambiguity towards religious practices at the beginning of the Derg, the regime became more hostile towards all religions over time (Østebø 2012, 198).

Since the nineteenth century, the Ethiopian Empire's conquest of Oromo areas and the spread of Christianity and Islam, many traditional practices (such as Oromo vernacular religion, *ateetee*, and even the Oromo *Gadaa* system) have been in steady decline and, in some areas, have disappeared. During the Derg Regime, these vernacular practices continued to be discouraged. With the fall of the Derg in 1991, the EPRDF, the new government, quickly allowed for many religious and cultural liberties (Ibid). What is particularly important in relation to *ateetee* (and to other Arsi Oromo vernacular practices), is how much social change occurred over the course of the twentieth century due to extreme repressions by different political regimes. In many areas, these repressions reduced or erased what vernacular systems they had known, leaving a void. As Terje Østebø explains through his research on Islam in Bale, during the Derg regime a Marxist scientific aesthetic was promoted: all religions were repressed and travels to the *hajj* were

not allowed. The policy under the Derg had “rationalized and de-mystified” reality, erasing the past and pointing towards a future based on the people’s work (Ibid., 427, Girma 2012, 62). After the fall of this regime, people were lost and searching for new references; religion was a natural path (T. Østebø 2012):

Directly addressing this reality, the different reform movements were effectively filling a vacuum by providing alternatives, which in turn demonstrates how religion came to constitute a compelling force correcting the world-view and self-image of the audience. It clearly shaped the respondents' abilities to cope with their reality, whereby Islam became a determinant factor. It moreover demonstrates how the introduction of a new religious teaching dialectically interacted with their history and immediate circumstances. It provided the individuals with new religious references and affiliations, which could be objectified, articulated and distinguished from past references. (T. Østebø 2008, 428)

For many in Eastern Oromiya, Salafism was chosen because it was the only alternative available. Traditional religions and structures of leadership fell victim to the Derg’s repressive policies (Ibid).

While inhabitants of the Kokossa and Nansabo districts in West Arsi are majority Muslim, those who practice indigenized, syncretic forms of Islam, such as Sheikh Hussein,<sup>123</sup> pilgrimages to different religious sites, and localized Sufi-inspired Islam, are still the majority. Over time, I have witnessed the growing influence of Salafism and evangelical Protestantism; in some villages or remote rural areas, the majority now practice these religions, though influence is not as widespread as in Eastern Arsi. Furthermore, it is important to remember that many Oromo continue to practice

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<sup>123</sup> Sheikh Hussein is an Islamic religious leader from Bale who may have lived in the twelfth century (Braukämper (2002: 130-131, Geda 2013, 72). Many of Gemchu Geda’s interlocutors believe he played a major role in the introduction and expansion of Islam in Arsi Oromo areas (Geda 2013, 69). Today there are pilgrimages to the historic sites related to Sheikh Hussein

vernacular belief: some who had to abandon it due to past political oppressions are returning to it and some are even joining for the first time.<sup>124</sup>

## Current religious negotiations and tensions

### *Salafi Islam practitioners*

With a brief summary of the complex historic-religious context in place, we can take a closer look at current tensions. The following commentary from a woman in the Kokkossa area is one of several I heard describing the rising concern:

Idaa kaa kiiristaanatu waayyaa, kaa islama baay'iinaan nutti ulfateera, baay'ina nutti ulfatee. Nutti islama baay'iinaan sheexanaa lagaa jedhanni. Sheexanaaf deemtanii siinqee qabatanii, sheexanaaf deemtanii jedhuu. Kana kanatti nuu ittisseerraa, kana kana nuu ittisee malee.

The Christians are better than the Muslims who are very hard on us; they are very hard on us. The Muslims call the river [ateetee we pray to] Satan. They say we carry *siinqee* to Satan...that we go to Satan. They block us and we are unprotected.

(Shunkaa Gababaa, Interview, April 17, 2011).

The religious distinction she is making here is widely discussed in the area. Because the Arsi are majority Muslim<sup>125</sup> (though historically they have practiced more syncretic forms of Islam<sup>126</sup>), Salafi Islam has been spreading more expansively in Arsi than the Protestant religions. This is not to negate the anti-ateetee or anti-vernacular practice rhetoric and

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<sup>124</sup> The growing numbers of pan-Oromo vernacular belief practitioners can be seen in the increased attendance of the *Ireecha* (thanksgiving) festival in Bishoftu (about one hour south of Addis Ababa). For more information on *Ireecha* and the return/adoption of *Waaqeffannaa* by Oromo from different subgroups, see Gemechu Geda's dissertation (2013). According to Oromiya culture and tourism office officials, the numbers have been growing, but now millions of people attend. I attended it in 2010 and can attest to being there with hundreds of thousands of people, but cannot give a specific number.

<sup>125</sup> In some areas, such as the town of Kokkossa and some villages in the surrounding countryside there has been a definite increase in evangelical practitioners, and in others, such as Dikki village in the Kokkossa administrative area and Faccaa village in the Nansaboo region, Salafi Islam has spread.

<sup>126</sup> See Gemechu 2014 and Chapter 3 on belief.

actions used by some of the members and leaders of some Evangelical Protestant churches, but to demonstrate how powerful these mainstream religious forces are in intimidating and challenging vernacular Arsi beliefs. The main difference between different churches and mosques lies in whether their adherents feel they can participate in ateetee rituals, and, more specifically, whether it is accepted (even if it is not encouraged) by the religious institution. For Muslim practitioners of Sheik Hussein, Sufi Islam, or syncretic forms of Islam and *Waaqeffannaa* (vernacular Oromo religion), it is possible (and even encouraged) to practice ateetee.

This is not the case for Salafi Islam adherents. Although leaders and strict followers of Salafi Islam are not opposed to Arsi culture, their beliefs do not allow them to practice ateetee. Though the definition of the term Salafism is quite complex, in the views of the Arsi adherents I talked to, their focus is on a “pure” and true Islam, with a focus on life dedicated to *Rabbi* or God (T. Østebø 2012, 24-28). I had a discussion concerning the relationship between Salafi Islam and ateetee with Sheikh Imaamu Loolee, the head of regional Islamic Affairs Office in Kokkossa and leader of the main mosque in town. Today the main mosque and the Islamic Affairs in the Kokkossa area follow Shariyaa law (Salafi Islam). He was a gracious host, who invited me into his home. Well versed and eloquent, he was eager to express his views on Oromo culture and Islam:

Sheek IL: Gara oromoodhaatiin garaagarumma qaba jechaadha, amantaan Shariyaa keenaa. Maaliin garaagarummaa qabaa, yoo Oromoon malkaatti bahee falatuu, yoo Oromoon malkaatti bahee qalatuu, Shariyaan keenna hin dhooga jechaadha. Duniin keenna hin dhooga jechaadha. Waan rabbiifi Rauulli jedhe malee hin fudhanu jechaadha. Maaliif

Sheik IL: There are differences between Shariya religion and the Oromo path. If you look at the cultural activities practiced by the Oromo, such as going to slaughter for a sacrifice, or going to rivers to pray and glorify God, Sharia does not support these activities. Our rules forbid this practice. We do not accept something that is against Rasuli, or God’s rules. It does not



Shariyaa kennatu nu dhaage malee biyya sana yookiin biyya jibbuu biyaatii miti. Biyyaan amootuu wal-jaalala. Qabnaa amantaa keenna akka nu qabanneetti nu beekanii sirrii dhaa waan Shariyaan Islaanii murteessesse, waan rabbiin isaanii murteessesse, waan nabiyyiin isaanii murteesse jedhanii alaan nu qabnuun waliin jireenna biraa.

mean that we hate our country or our culture, but our Shariya will not allow us to do that. We have a good relationship with the community. They respect our religion. The community believes that it is our Shariya's order, that God dictates us, that what our prophet ordered is what we have been practicing. The relationship we have with the community is good.

SIL: Ateetee hin jiraa. Tokko Game Shariyaan keenna aadaa namaa hin tuqinee jedha. Hin arabsinaa jedha. Namni aadaa namaa tuqe, namni amantaa namaa tuqe, amantaa ofii sanillee tuqe jedha. Seeri Shariyaa keennaan tuquu hin qabdanii jedha. Nu daangeessa, nu seera, hin tuqinaa jedha. Yoo waan tosa tuqamu toratee, namni Islaama ta'ee, nama warra aadaa san yookiin dubartii waan tuqu yoo taatu akka aadaa biyya kanaatiitti dubartiin dubartiitti yaati yookiin dhiirattuu hin yaati jechuudha. Dhiratti yaatee na arabsee waan tokko nagadhee jettee itti yaateeti ateetee dhaa akka aadaa oromootiitti ateetee itti yaati jechoodha. Haayaatu malee suni aadaa isiiti jechoodha. Keenna omootuu aadaa sana hin fudhatuu hooriis isaanii qaluun Shariyaan jeenna hin dhooga. Rabbiin malee waa hin qalinaafi jedha. "Hattaa" yoo ofii qalatanuu, yoo ofii qalatanuu waan tokko yoo ofii qalatan. Maqaa rabbi guddate rabbi tokkocha, rabbi guddate olta'e jechaadhaan qora'an horiisan yoo kookee ofiitiif qalatanu.

SIL: There is ateetee. Our Shariya says not to interfere with someone's culture. It says not to insult another's culture. A person who hurts another's culture or religion has hurt his own beliefs. Our Shariya law says you should not hurt others' culture. It bounds us and rules us not to hurt others. If at some point a Muslim hurts women's culture, women will claim their rights through ateetee. They will gather with men and women. Ateetee women will gather with one another and demonstrate against men if they have been insulted or mistreated. They do this according to Oromo culture. Our religion will not allow us to follow that culture. Our Shariya will not allow us to slaughter animals for ateetee women. Our Shariya tells us to give all the sacrifice to *Rabbi* (the creator). When an animal is going to be slaughtered for someone it should be in the name of God. According to the Koran, when you slit the throat of a cow, it must be in the name of God (*Rabbi*), the great and only God, the great one.

(Sheikh Imaamu Loolee, interview, April 18, 2011)

As was apparent in the discussion with the Sheikh, his words are very respectful in regards to those who follow *Waaqeffannaa* (Oromo religion) and Oromo cultural practices. Salafi Muslims interact with other community members in everyday life and

live in peaceful co-existence. However, as he explains, ateetee and *Shariya* (Salafism) can co-exist in communities, but followers of *Shariya* cannot attend or participate in the ceremonies because those ceremonies are considered to be in the name of *Waaqa*. From a *Shariya* perspective, everything should be resolved and animals should be killed in the name of Allah, the one (Muslim) God. I have heard about cases of a *Shariya* offender not wanting to participate in the ateetee ritual due to religious belief. In that case, if the women insist on ateetee, there is pressure on the offender from the Culture and Tourism office workers and from local religious leaders and elders. If he still does not agree, as a last resort women can curse (*abarsa*) him (see Chapters 3 and 5).

Some of the *Shariya* adherents in the countryside do not show the same tolerance as the Sheikh. This is the case in the Kokkossa area, as Shunkaa attested to, and in the Nansaboo area<sup>127</sup>, as Amariich describes below:

LQ: Jijjiirama Ateeteef maaltuu sababaa ta'ee?

AS: Namnii amantaa adda addaa qabate. Amantaan adda addaa jijjiirama ateeteef sababaa nuu ta'e. Amantaa adda addaa qabachu'uun nuu fogoraa jira. Meeshaa aadaa yoo ufanuu biyya keessa socho'uu sodataa jira. Sababniis namni aadaa dhiisee Shari'aa hoo'isee jira. Isaan gara keenya deebi'aa nuun jedhan. Haalata shari'aatiin gofa malee rakkinni biraa hin jiru. Isa kanatuu nuu gufachiisee. Jeenata hin galan jedhanii nuuti kolfan. Nuun dinee aadaa keenyaaf sochoo'aa jira. Haguuganee waan deemnuuf hin qabinu. Aadaa keenya gadi hin dhiifinu jene. Mirgii nama maraafuu waan eegameef, feedhii keenya eeginee,

LQ: What has been the main cause for the changes to ateetee?

AS: People had different types of beliefs/religion. These different types of beliefs became the main cause for the changes to ateetee. With these different beliefs, we are insulted more. When we wear our cultural outfits we are afraid to move about. People have stopped their cultural practices and are promoting *Shariya*. They are telling us to follow their path. It is because of *Shariya* – there is no other problem. This may jeopardize our culture. They make fun of us, telling us that we will not get into heaven. We have refused and are being active with our culture. We don't want to cover/mask (veil)

<sup>127</sup> The incident of religious intolerance at the beginning of the chapter is one such illustration. But there are many more.

aadaa keenya dhaalaa keenyaaf dabArsiina.

ourselves. We have said that we are not leaving our culture. All our rights have been protected, our needs have been kept, and we are passing on our culture to our descendants.

(Amariich Shubee, Interview, December 28, 2010)

I have heard many comments similar to this one regarding the forceful intrusion of Salafi Islamic doctrines on community members' beliefs, culture and practices. As Amariich described, many women are scared to continue practicing *ateetee* in public. To fight against the problems they are facing in the community, Amariich supports an increase in Arsi cultural practices, vernacular belief practices and *ateetee* rituals. She would like to see more holidays (*ayyana*) and events specifically for the expression of Arsi culture and even the creation of a cultural centre. But she and others are a minority, caught in a complex web of religious, economic, demographic and political tensions. One group of women in the Nansaboo area described coming back from prayers by the river, walking down the road and singing when they ran into men from the mosque. The men practiced Shariya (Salafi) Islam and were opposed to the practice of *ateetee*. In this confrontation, they took some of the women's *siinqee* sticks and broke them. The women did not let this violent offense go unanswered. As the men would not respond to an *ateetee* ceremony at their door, the women took their case to the local police and cultural office authorities. After discussions and negotiations, the men were subsequently punished with temporary arrest and monetary fines to cover replacement of the broken sticks. Government workers in Nansaboo who were involved in the case confirmed this story and the end resolution (Personal communication, May 2, 2011). I asked the Sheikh about these types of

problems and he spoke strongly against those who undermine women in the name of Islam.

LQ: Namoonni aadaa amma dubartoonni tokko tokko akka nuu jedhani itti ateetee kanna irratti akka waan tuffii karaa ummata musliimaatiinii. Kana isiin haal kamiin laaltanii?

SIL: Ee sirrii dha. Tufatuun sirrii miti. Xiqqeessuun isii sirrii miti. Hin dhooqa. Shariyaan keenna hin dhooqa. Isii tuqatuu, isii arabsuu, hin dhooqe shariyaan keenna, maaliif haawoota teenna, haadha teenna. Yoo shariyaan kenna dhooqe. Isii tufatuu, isii arabsuu, isii jibuun hin ta'u. Itti hinuudha yeroo biraa, yeroo isii akkasiin aadaa godhatu sanii inumaa irraa caldhiisanii yookiin lixuudha. Itti himatanii ana shariyaa kiyyatu na dhooqe, hawooti tiyya, abootii tiyyaa, shariyaa kiyyatu na dhooqe jedhanii itti himuu malee isii tufatuun hin dhooqa shariyaan keenna. Sirrii miti doqqoqora dalaaq abbaan suni. Katufate, ka arabse, ka jeeqe suni sirrii miti. Abbaan suni doqqoqora qaba. Hin hubanne islaamummaa waan keessa nuqatiniif ta'e malee shariyaan keenna hin dhooqa waan akanaa.

LQ: As some women have told us, there is a tendency for some Muslim followers to undermine the culture of ateetee. How do you see this issue?

SIL: Yes, it is true. Undermining is not right. Revenge is not right. It is forbidden. Our Shariya forbids doing that. Our Shariya does not allow for us to insult or undermine a woman because they are our sisters; they are our mothers. In our Shariya it is not allowed to undermine her, to insult her or to mistreat her. This is not allowed by our Shariyaa laws. Such things are totally forbidden by Shariya and one should refrain from doing them. Men should tell women that Shariya law forbids them from being involved in some matters. But they must not undermine women. It is wrong to undermine, insult or disturb a woman. That person (who undermined woman) made a mistake. This person did not know the rules of Islam; such practices of mistreating women are not condoned by Shariya.

(Sheikh Imaamu Loolee, interview, April 18, 2011)

According to the Sheikh and Shariya law, undermining others' cultures and rights is prohibited. But in order to spread the Shariya beliefs and laws, members of the mosque allow Muslim practitioners of ateetee to continue holding their *siinqee* and practicing their rituals, while at the same time trying to teach them the Shariya path. In this proselytizing manner, they can slowly bring more Muslims to follow Shariya beliefs. This has also been the manner in which mosques have slowly turned away from more mystic,

Sufi influences led by Imams who have never been out of Ethiopia to study with Saudi-trained Salafi proponents. At the same time, religious leaders tell Shariya-practicing Muslims to show respect to the practices of those who do not claim to be Muslims and to try to give them what they want (without participating in ceremonies such as *ateetee*).

LQ: Sinqee dubartootaa isiin akkamiin laaltu?

SIL: Sinqee dubartootan dubartiin teenna qabatuu shariyaan hin dhooqa. Nu wanni nu qabanu ulee dhaa. [...] Ammootuu haaqabatuu malee eega qabatteellee siinqee akkanaa qabatteerte waan akkanaa qabteerta jennee tuquun hin ta'u, shariyaatu dhooqa. Tuquun hin ta'u. [...] Dhibbaa irra qeessuun isii tuquun; kabajuu barbaachiisa. Waan isiin qabate sana siinqee isii sanillee tuqee hin barbaachiisu. Kabajuu fi barbaachiisa. Seera shariyaatiin itti himuu nu barbaachiisa. Malee wanna kana waan badduu qabatte waan akkanaa qabatte jennee jalaa baleessuu, cabsuu, dhibbaa irra geessinee isii arabsuu hin barbaachiisu. Seera shariyaa shariyaan kenna nama hin xiqeessinaa jedha. Nama hin arabsinaa jedha. Nama kabajaa jedha. Kabakaan isii funee kaanee, meeshaa isiin qabdu sanillee funee kaanee waan shariyaa keennaa hin dhaqaaf hin dhooquu yoo islaama taate itti himna. Yoo nama kaawwan taate, geegeesineenii waan isiin haajamte kennineefi baqqa ofirraa geggeessina malee, tuquu hin barabaachisu. Kana gama amantaa keennestinillee isii kabaja isii seeraan kabajuu barbaachiisa jechoodha kana.

LQ: How do you see women's *siinqee*?

SIL: Shariya prohibits our women from holding *siinqee*. It forbids this for our women; we only hold a stick. [...] If some hold *siinqee*, we do not lecture on why they hold it or we do not force them not to do that. It is just that Shariya law forbids it. It is not appropriate to touch it. [...] There is no need to influence or undermine her. She must be given due respect. It is not necessary to touch her *siinqee*. We need to respect her rights. We need to teach her the Shariya laws. It is not allowed to dismiss what she holds, and not allowed to break her *siinqee* or to influence her; insulting her for her *siinqee* is not allowed. Our Shariya law says not to undermine people. It says not to insult people. It says to respect people. By giving her appropriate respect, we will take her with her *siinqee* and teach her the Shariya laws if she is a Muslim, teaching her why Shariya forbids her not to do that. If she is not a Muslim, we will give her what she asks for and send her on her way. There is no need to touch her. According to our religion, we need to show her respect. Even though we follow our religion (and cannot practice their culture) we must respect their laws and rights.

(Sheikh Imaamu Loolee, interview, April 18, 2011)

The Sheikh also told me that although Islam has been in the area for over 250 years, it has only been 25 or 26 years since the introduction of Shariya in the area. Corroborating Terje

Østebø's findings in Bale (2012), Sheikh Imaamu told me that the beginnings of Salafism during the Derg were difficult because religion was repressed; since 1991 they have had much more freedom (Sheikh Imaamu Loolee, interview, April 18, 2011). Before this time, the many forms of Islam in Ethiopia were Sufi-inspired or syncretic in practice, co-existing with many of the vernacular Oromo belief systems, customs and laws. Although I did not have time to conduct comprehensive interviews with many Sheikhs, I have had many conversations and shared experiences related to different belief systems, *ateetee* and conflicts between these with other Sheikhs, Imams, Shariya adherents, other Muslims and various other community members.

In effect, the Shariya adherents want to spread their beliefs to other Muslims, and their law does not have the same flexibility that some other religious practitioners may have. There is no compatibility between Shariya law and Oromo belief practices: those who call themselves Muslims and concurrently practice *ateetee* and other Oromo rituals that are connected with Oromo spirituality do not have a place in the Shariya system. Strong Shariya proponents will tell them that they need to let go of these practices. Salafi Islam supporters have incredible financial backing from some wealthy Muslim merchants in Ethiopia and from Saudi Arabia. These funding sources support the construction of mosques and the education of Imams, also providing support and employment for surrounding communities and members.

Furthermore, development of infrastructure and proselytizing efforts can be seen as direct efforts to undermine traditional cultural practices, as demonstrated in the examples from Hussein Endessa's research with practitioners of the *gadaa* system in the

Arsi highlands where I conducted research.<sup>128</sup> The problems he highlighted are targeting leaders and geographic areas of traditional practices through economic incentives, land annexing, deconstruction of the family structure, insults and scare tactics. Endessa writes:

As my informant put it the case of Kokkossaa is an elaboration to the widely co-ordinated effort under way to change and eradicate the remaining *gada* system in few continuity areas. In Kokkossaa a few years ago more than one hundred *gada* leaders and advocator had been sponsored by individuals from Saudi to visit Saudi Arabia and perform the religious ritual *hajji*. Upon their return home those individuals joined the fight against the traditional *gada* system (Abbaqoxe 2011).

Some individuals had constructed religious centres near traditional *gada* sites and created controversy on the ownership of the land thereby intentionally to hamper the continuity of *gada* system. The case of *lemman gurraachaa* *gada* centre of *Dodaa* clan in Kokkossaa is a good example. In this case the site was originally said to be a *gada* site. Later on a mosque [was] constructed near the site. The *gada* leaders didn't oppose the action, since they thought that the space is enough for both. But the leaders of the mosque secretly received certificate of ownership of the land and attempted to evict the *gada* from the site, although the issue was under administrative investigation.  
[...]

First religious centres (mosques) were constructed in every village. The religious agitations started from each family level. First, leaving alone the father who is participating in the *gada* system, his wife and his son, or his daughter, would be invoked. Then at the end of the day the family members living under one roof started denouncing each other, the father who has been made to remain alone eventually would be obliged to abandon one of the two, either, *gada* or his family. However, most of the family heads abandoned the *gada* rather than their families due to such intrigues (Nagesso 2011) (Endessa 2011, 88-89).

I do not intend to represent this situation as a binary of two extremes, since it is multifaceted. Indeed, there are many different individuals involved and varied ways of practicing the different religious beliefs. And different local historical, economic and political aspects must also be taken into account. As Østebø found in his research, there are continual struggles between adherents of these emerging forms of Salafism, who do not accept traditional Oromo practices as part of Islam, and those who adhere to the older, indigenized forms of Islam that mix Sufism and vernacular Oromo beliefs (Østebø 2011,

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<sup>128</sup> I have known Hussein Endessa since 2002, when I first began conducting research among the Arsi Oromo. He works for Oromiya Culture and Tourism. Over the years he has provided immense support for my research. He conducted this research on the Arsi Gadaa system as part of a M.A. Thesis in Social Anthropology at Addis Ababa University.

2012). Nevertheless, for ateetee women, the tensions with Shariya practitioners are pronounced. This is particularly the case in areas where the number of Shariya adherents is increasing. For many women I have spoken to, they perceive Shariya law as a threat to their rights and the way they can have their rights respected in their communities. On the one hand Shariya law advocates for respect of other cultures and respect of women, but on the other hand, in Shariya law, women do not actively organize and participate in dispute resolution activities. If women become practitioners of Shariya law, they must be ready to accept that they will no longer be able to invoke their rights and judicial processes available under Oromo customary law:

LQ: Dubartoota wajjiin wanti araarsan, dubartiin teessan achii keessatti wanti birmaatu jiraa?

SIL: Ee, gama araareetitti wanni hirmaattu hin jiru. Dhiirumatu bahee dubbateeti. Dubartiin teenna gama shariyaatiin baatee waan tokko dubbatuun shariyaanillee hin dhooqa.

LQ: Is there room for women to participate in the dispute resolution/mediation activities?

SIL: Yes, she does not participate in mediation activities. They are conducted by our men. Our Shariya prohibits women from speaking about such issues.

(Sheikh Imaamu Loolee, interview, April 18, 2011)

The Sheikh went on to explain how, if a husband has mistreated his wife, a council of male Shariya adhering elders and leaders conduct dispute resolution ceremonies.

Although women cannot lead the mediation processes, they are given much respect under Shariya and should always be shown this respect. In addition to differences between Oromo vernacular culture and Salafi Islam, the obvious major difference between ateetee ceremonies and this Shariya dispute resolution ritual is that women are not the ones leading the ceremony.



However, this is not to say that Oromo women following Shariya law do not have agency or ways of claiming their rights when they have been abused. In the Arsi countryside, I have seen many examples of strong, niqab-wearing women, who are actively making their spaces in the community. Through their actions and words, they are turning the Western notion of submissiveness and male domination upside down (Abu-Lughod 2013, Mahmood 2005). For example, I have seen more than one case of a Salafi-practicing woman confronting other community members on the street because she did not agree with something said or a particular action. Furthermore, as Østebø has revealed, Salafism has become, or is becoming (in the case of recent practitioners in West Arsi), indigenized in its practice. At my friend's drinking house for honey wine (*mana birisii*), I talked to a Gujii<sup>129</sup> woman who was sitting with her husband in a mixed-gender space, lifting her niqab to drink this alcoholic beverage.

Although I think it is important to acknowledge the differences between women's roles in the dispute resolution ceremonies of different belief systems, the crux of the argument here is focused on why there are confrontations, how Arsi women and other community members are negotiating confrontations between different cultures of belief, and how ateetee practitioners can continue to conduct their rituals and promote their rights. Even though the different religious cultures should show tolerance and respect to each other, as examples reveal, there are individuals who publicize and advocate their views by showing disrespect to the beings and spaces of others. Unfortunately, at the moment this is one-sided. All the confrontations I have heard about and witnessed,

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<sup>129</sup> Gujii is another subgroup of the Oromo. The Gujii area begins just south of the town of Worqaa in the Nansabo district, so during my research I spoke with a significant number of Gujii Oromo.

whether verbal or physical, have been directed towards women who continue to practice ateteetee and follow Oromo belief rituals.

There are, however, many individual and group examples of adaptation, resilience and syncretic practices of belief that allow for the coexistence of multiple interpretations of belief. Even Salafi Islam, with all its external influences and Saudi genesis, has adapted to its different local surroundings and become Oromo over time.<sup>130</sup> Aliyee, who lives in the Rift Valley and is from the family I have known for years, has told me about the mosque he attends. He is a practicing Muslim, who attends the mosque regularly and follows many of the teachings. Previously he learned Sufi Islam, but for the past fifteen years his mosque has been sponsored by proponents of Salafism. Aliyee is also a strong proponent of Arsi culture and law. He is an elder and a peacekeeper, often travelling to help resolve conflicts in different areas. As Aliyee has told me, he listens to some of the teachings at the mosque and just lets others go. When the Imam tells them that under Shariya law they should not sing traditional songs or continue with certain cultural practices, Aliyee told me he just doesn't listen to those words and that he can take what he wants. This may not be the case for all individuals and all communities, but it may also help that he lives in an area where people have different belief systems and combinations thereof. The difference between the areas with a long history of Salafism, such as farther east in Bale and the areas where I worked in the Kokkossa and Nansabo districts, is that,

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<sup>130</sup> See the works of Terje Østebø for more information on localising Salafism, particularly his 2012 book which was based on his dissertation work with Arsi Oromo in Bale (2012). Other scholars who have looked at syncretic forms of Arsi Oromo belief include: Gemechu Geda (2013) and Ulrich Braukämper (2002). Gemechu worked in the same areas as me for his dissertation and we even conducted some work together. Dorothy Hodgson's work is an excellent reference for an extensive gender-nuanced and localised view of Maasai encounters with the Catholic churches and missionaries in Tanzania (2005).

in the latter case, Salafism is much more recent (sometimes implemented in only the past ten years), and has not had the same time for adaptation and indigenization. Although many of the conflicts related to women's ateetee practices are confrontational and sometimes violent, all of the communities that I have travelled to are dynamic, and many individuals and their belief systems remain resilient and flexible.

### *Evangelical Protestant practitioners*

For ateetee women, Shariya law is not the only source of confrontation and negotiation. Community spaces and cultural practices are also being negotiated with Evangelical Protestants:

LQ: Ammaa garagaruummaa?

B&R: Ee, garagaruummaa ammantii.

LQ: Ammaa yeroo ammaa kanatti ateeteen hir'achaa deemti akka duranni miiti? Maaltu kana fide?

B&R: Maaltu fide kanaa waani fidee kunii waabbiyyi ta'e kuni kiristanaa ta'ee amanee. Akkassiin hafe jenaan, warrii diideetti meeshaa keenya hin dhiifnu jenne, warri didetti, ateetee basaa deemuu nuuyyi kanaafii hir'atee. Ammaa ammaa namni akana deemee akka waan goowwaa goodhanni. Ammaa warrii kiristana kana didee. Wabbiyyiiniillee kan diide islamni wabbiyyinillee diidee. Kana ammaa junoo nuu'u kunoo, nuu'u baay'ee nuu ciicatti, nuu'u baay'ee waaqan hin jirtanii jette, nuu ciicatti, nuu aadaa keenyaa hin dhiifnuu jenne, Meeshaa keenya mana goodhaanee teenyaa kunoo.

LQ: Now are there changes (with ateetee)?

B&R: Yes, there are changes due to beliefs/religion.

LQ: Now, because of this, the practice of ateetee is facing problems, isn't it? What has caused this?

B&R: Waahaabbii and Christian beliefs have brought this about. They have refused the ritual, but we have said that we will not let go of our culture (cultural materials). Some are not coming to ateetee rituals. This is how they have upset us. Now some people are like this, they call our actions foolish. Now Christians have refused. Wahhabbiis, Muslim Wahhabbiis have refused. They are very suspicious of us (not happy about us) spreading the rumour that we are without God and acting very suspicious of us (not happy about us). We say we won't leave our culture.

(Buujjaa and Ruuffoo, interview, April 14,

Although there are rarely stories of physically violent actions (such as breaking of *siinqee* sticks) by evangelical church congregants, I have talked to community members about confrontations involving verbal abuses and unwillingness to participate in the ateetee ritual in the name of religion. The following is a story about one such conflict from the Kokkossa area:

LQ: Yeroo fakkenyaaf isinifi namni porteentassi yookin namni muslimaa arabsaa?

B&R: Eeyee ni arabsani.

LQ: Ateetee hin barbaaduu maal hojjaatuu? Ammaa fakkeenyaaf namni islama ta'e, namni sirriitti muslima ta'e jechuudha, oduu isin arabsee isin maal gootu penxanillee ta'uu?

B&R: Itti yaana shiimaa goonee. Shiimaa goonee ni jira. Shimaa goonee balbala isa irraa galuu yoo baate dugda gooraa tana, mara ol baayaa gidi isatti. Kalloon, tuni korran kunii hin haafu waaggaa kana, Tadesse nuu arabsee, nuu arabsee.

LQ: Maal inni?

B&R: Intalti isa kana aadaa bada sarree jette kana. Aadaa bara sarree jette jennanni itti yaane. Iliillii jenne. Aadaa bada sarree jette nuu arabsiitte jennaan qe'e isatti gigisinee galgala galee. Achitti galee jennanni nuu tuumuu ule cabsatte dhufe. Innii nuu tuumuuf dhufe, jennaanni kiiristaana, inni kiristanaa dhufe jennana. Jala ka'uu diinee calliifnetti nurraa mare,

LQ: For example, if you and a Protestant or Muslim person have a dispute, is a dispute resolution (ateetee) necessary?

B&R: Yes, we have a dispute resolution ceremony.

LQ: If they do not want ateetee, what do you do? For example, in the case of a Muslim, a strict Muslim (Shariya) or a Pentacostal person who abuses you, what do you do?

B&R: We gather (for an ateetee ritual) on them. We gather on them. We gather at his door; we gather for dispute resolution, applying our culture. This year, Tadesse<sup>131</sup> insulted us, he insulted us.

LQ: How so?

B&R: His daughter abused someone by saying 'you dog'. We ululated (called for ateetee). It is bad culture to call someone a dog, so we gathered on her (for ateetee) in the evening. When we came and told him (her father), he pushed us and came and broke a walking stick. He came to push us, saying that he was Christian. He said he was Christian. We refused to stand, refused

<sup>131</sup> I have changed the name of the offender and omitted his surname for anonymity.

nurraa mare gambit karraanuu gate cufee karraa irraa bulee, karraa makinaa waana guuba, a kaa achiitti dirree san guba bulee, abara achiitti callifne, achiitti bulee ijibatani isaallee dadha bani dadhabanii. Ji'a geenye oduu achiitti yaanuu dadhabnee ijibanee dadhabnee. Birri dhibbaa afuri keennee dine jenne. Hin fuudannu, aadaan teenyaa biri hin qabdu jennee. Shan kenne dinee. Ijibate akka goodhuu dhabee himane waajiira mana poolisattittillee himane. Dufe foolisniillee mana fiiridibeettittillee himane aadaa teessanin xiichaatti goodinaa buna jenne. Kannee siinqee guurranee isuma gubbaa sani buufna mana sani irraa baleessina damoozaa inni hin nyaatu jenne.

LQ: Maal jettanniinn?

B&R: Ee aroo caafee, ee garba badi damoosaltee siirraa qabne jenna. Akkasu damoosini suni yoosu gubbaa. Gadi bu'etti qara kuma nyaata dhiba shaniitti gadeebbisanni dhiba shaniitti gadiideebisaani.

LQ: Isin qalluu diidee?

B&R: Ee, didee. Isibane oduma abaruu oduma abaruu. Ammallee kaa bira nuu arabsee, nuu arabsee jennan, duugduumaa sani itti yaane, itti yaane jennaanni lagaa hodami waan isaan jennee atii qoodami jennee, ammallee abarsa sani waan kanni hin jennee ati qoodami jennee.

LQ: Isiin hin qalleerree?

B&R: Hin qallee, laali goodina buuna jennee. Ammaa yaane dubarttin birri dhibaa dhibaan of qabne karraa bichaa deensaaf goodina deemna jennee. Dhibaa

to stand and so we sat there in a circle. But he couldn't beat us. We slept in the road; we slept there in the road. A month passed and we were still there. We were happy but tired. He said he would give us four hundred birr. We refused to take it because our culture doesn't take money, we told him. He said he would give us five hundred birr. We asked the police and the courts (government) for help. You can do according to your culture, you go on, they told us. We then planned to go to Shashemene. We planned to go with our *siinqee* and destroy his house and his (government) salary. We said this.

LQ: What did you tell him?

B&R: Yes, Aroo, the green land, you man, let you be destroyed. They (the government) decreased his salary. They decreased it from 1000 to 500 (Ethiopian Birr).

LQ: Did he refuse to slay a cow for you?<sup>132</sup>

B&R: Yes, he refused. We cursed him; we cursed him. He abused us; he abused us. So we assembled near his village, calling the river Hodam. You be split in two, we said and cursed him. We cursed him again and again.

LQ: Didn't he slay (a cow) for you then?

B&R: He didn't slay. We quarrelled and planned to go to Shashemene. He said he would give us 100 birr each to leave. A hundred birr each. [...] He begged us and

<sup>132</sup> "Slaying a cow" literally means to offer a cow to the ateetee women to be slayed, but it can also indicate agreeing to the ritual.

dhibaan of qabne jennan achi lamuu bade  
qabannii jedhanni damoosa sanillee irraa  
qulqulleessiine balleessina jenne, lamuu  
mirgo bite kunoo qalaf jedhee, kunoo  
ganda guututtu kennee achitti dhaqne  
buleessinee qallee irraa hikiinee galee.

bought the young cow for 500 birr and he  
slayed it. We blessed him and in the end,  
we brought a solution to the problem.

(Buujjaa and Ruuffoo, interview, April 14,  
2011)

I did meet the male offender involved in this story and, though he was willing to talk briefly about the ceremony, he never found time to sit down and provide details. This conflict reached unique and extreme levels of disputes, insults and cursing. Many people in town told me about this case because it lasted so long and because many other government workers became involved, including the police, the women's affairs office and the cultural office. Because the offender was a practicing Protestant, he did not want to use ateetee to resolve the dispute. It only ended because of the persuasion, persistence (and cursing) from the women, government officials and other community members. His case was not the only one. The women and several other community members mentioned the names of two other Protestant men who had conflicts with ateetee women.

The ateetee women were particularly coercive in this case, as is customary when the offender does not want to take part in the ateetee process. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, the offender is forced to take part in the process or face consequences (such as cursing). Though this can be seen as bullying from one angle, it is also a tactic to enforce the process. In this case, since some of the evangelization and conversion campaigns led by Christians and Muslims in the area are, themselves, unrelentlessly persistent, some of the ateetee women may have also seen their determination and tactics as par for the course.

Some evangelical churches and their leaders tolerate adherents practicing *ateetee* because they can pray to their Christian God when they go to ceremonies. They have also realized the evangelization potential of supporting *ateetee* ceremonies in the name of their churches; using the *ateetee* songs and other vernacular music in their services, education, and missionizing campaigns in the countryside; and replacing words like *Waaqa* (God) with Jesus. But this approach is not shared by all Protestant and Evangelical churches. I have, for example met Protestant congregants and conservative church leaders who take a more fundamentalist stance. In an interview with the Gospel Light Church pastor and his colleague in Kokkossa, they made it clear that they could not support *ateetee*; instead, they encourage their congregation to resolve disputes within their church or in the governmental court. For them the fundamental difference between their beliefs and *ateetee* is that all their prayers need to be in the name of Jesus, and not for other purposes.



Pastor Tefera, Gospel Light Church, Kokkossa, April 18, 2011.

LQ: Ateetee irratti amantiin wal-qabatee yaada akamii qabdaa?

Pastor Tefera: Ateeteerratti diqqo wantaa qabnu. Anillee diqqoo deebisuu danda'a, obleessi kiyyaallee na gargaara, akka sagalee waaqaati. Akka sagalee waaqaati, yookinillee akka waldaa kennatti, ateetee haagos marallee hin fudhannu. Maaliif sagaleen waaqaa waaqa tokkotu akka jiru. Waaqa sanitti akka waa qaaftannu, akka sagduu sagaleen waaqaa dubbata. Sunillee karaaniillee dhugaanillee gooftaa Iyaasuus kiriistoosiin jedha. Kanaaf ka ka'e isatti amanna. Karaa kanatti ateetee hin fuunu.

LQ: How do you see ateetee in relation to religion?

Pastor Tefera: I can only say a few things about ateetee. I can talk a little and my brother can help me a little, in accordance with the word of God. According to the word of God, or our denomination, we do not find (the lead of) ateetee acceptable. The reason is that the word of God orders us to worship and believe in only one God. The word of God says Jesus is the way, the truth and life. That is why we trust the word of God. With this path, we do not accept ateetee.

(Pastor Tefera, Gospel Light Church, interview, April 18, 2011)

Although individual leaders' and practitioners' views may differ, according to these leaders, ateetee and the teachings of their church are incompatible. This perception of incompatibility parallels the views of the Salafi Muslims whom I interviewed. Adherents from this church (and other denominations with similar views) may reject ateetee and even proselytize to other non-church adherents that ateetee is sinful and the devil's work. More than once when I was talking to church members of this denomination about my research in informal settings, I received friendly but concerned responses and then questions about my religious beliefs. One of the Gospel Light church leaders explained the incompatibility of ateetee with his beliefs in the following way:

Biniyam: Kunika amantaan dhooqquu jira. Nuyi karaan itiin deemnu karaa dhuqaatii haatatu malee. Dhunfaa keenyaan sagalee waaqaatiin ala hin deemnu. Ka amanaan nu dhooqu hin fudhanu, ka amantaan nu dhoowwiine hin fudhana. Kanaaf kan nu dheeqee keessaa. Ka namaa waaqa dhiisanii kanama faarsan, wantoota ka

Binyam: For this, religion prohibits us from following that type of practice. Since we follow the truth we cannot go against the word of God. [...] Those things, such as praising individuals and objects are sinful according to the word of God. That is why we do not acknowledge it and believe in it.



farsan, akka sagalee waaqaatti cuubudhe.  
Kanaaf kanarraa kan ka'e fudhachuu  
dhiifne.

(Biniyam, Gospel Light Church, interview,  
April 18, 2011)

These voices only provide a few snapshots into the discourses and practices of a particular Protestant denomination. Although the leaders of the church did spend some time with me, they were not eager to talk in more detail. As they presented it here and when the recorder was shut off, the word of Jesus was really the only path. From their view, there is no other way and there is no compatibility between traditional Arsi music and rituals and the path of their church. To this end, they advise church adherents against attending such rituals. Conversations with church members and other community members corroborate the totalizing nature of this stance.<sup>133</sup> Even without direct confrontations between ateetee practitioners and these more conservative evangelical adherents, the condemnation of ateetee upsets ateetee practitioners, leaving them searching for ways to ensure the ritual and justice system can continue to function.

The situation is not as simple as wholesale rejection of ateetee by evangelical church adherents. While not agreeing with all of the aspects of ateetee, some practitioners do support the reconciliation process as it is used to promote respect, women's rights, and resolve disputes. I formally discussed ateetee with two other church members: Simbiro, a church member and singer with the Kokkossa Mekane Eyesus Church; and Tuki, a manager for the Kokkossa Kalhiwot Church. They were both very passionate, joyous, and articulate in regards to their beliefs and their respect of Arsi culture and ateetee.

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<sup>133</sup> The Gospel Light Church is not the only evangelical church that disapproves of ateetee; there are many others.



Simbiro and Biniyam, Kokkossa, April 18, 2011.

LQ: Amma isiin amantaa kiristaanaatti, ateetee bifa kamiin laaltan?

Simbiro: Ateetee biqni nu laalluuni, ateeteen aadaa dha. Waaqa kadhattii achii keessatti hubannoo dhabiin saan waan tokko tokko haa itti maktu malee waaqa kadhatti, walaalaan jechaadha. Akuma duratti jedhe biblîi hin arganii, quraana hin arganii. Sana waan hin qabneef waaqa kadhatti waaqni ammo ilalaalaan waa isa kadhataniif waaqni guddaa waan ta'eef isaanii dhaqahaa ture. Lamaffoo ammo dubartii mirgi isii yoo jeqame, mirgi isii yoo sarbamee jedhe, dubartiin tuni mirga kiyyaa ofiitiif kan ittiin falmattu jechaadha. Ateeteen, ateeteen kan falmattuu. Isa san yoo deettuu qanafaan jedhamee godhattu jira, yemmuu sana abbaan manaa dhaqee qanafaa osoo qabdu waan qannu taate, yoo waan tumu taate, itti baatee himmattee irraa qalatti. Horii irraa qalattii isa sana aadaa qaariidhaa. Isa sana kalachaan waan wal himataa dhuftuuf. Wayuudha jechaa dha.

LQ: From a Christian perspective, how do you see ateetee?

Simbiro: We believe ateetee is a culture. It is prayers to God, although there are some unwanted things in it, it is prayers to God. By ignorance they do mix in some unwanted topics. As I mentioned before, they do not have exposure to the Bible or to the Quran. Since God is great and understanding, he understands because they pray to God out of ignorance. They do not know that God is there or that God exists. Secondly, if women's rights have been overlooked or if her rights have been undermined or broken, it is the way in which women fight for their rights. It is through ateetee that a woman fights for her rights. If a woman who has given birth and is wearing *qanafa* has her rights violated [...], or if she has been abused, she will ask for an animal to be slaughtered. According to culture, a cow will be slaughtered. She is considered to be *waayyuu*. *Waayyuu* means

Isiin wayyuu jechoon beektuu dha jechaa dha, kabajamtuu dha jechaa dha, sodaatamtuu dha jechaa dha. Isa akkasitti wanna jedhamaa ateetee yoo araanni jiraate, yoo isaan jidduu seenan hin araramanii hin sodaatanii waaqa waan kadhataniif jechaadha. Qanu ateetee keessatti aadaan akuma jirutti fa'eeti. Waaqeettannaan isiin qootu suni xiqqoo isii akka biyibillikaanitti hin barbaachisu jenna malee rakkoo biraa hin qabu.

that she is wise, that she is respected and that she is feared. Since ateetee women pray to God, we believe that they are given a fair hearing and fair attention. There are some variations of worships between ateetee women and the words of the bible. Since her prayers are not biblical, we do not accept some of them; otherwise we do not have any other problems with the practice.

(Simbiro, singer and member of the Mekane Eyesus Church, Interview, April 18, 2011)

There were a few similarities between the views of these church members and those of the Gospel Light Church, particularly in how they perceive prayers to God, but as can be seen from this discussion, the conversation here was completely different. Similar to other church members, they expressed their disapproval of certain aspects of the ateetee prayers, referring specifically to words in ateetee that evoke *ayyaanna*, or the multiple spirits and elements that can be found in the surrounding environment. These are evoked through prayers to the earth, to the mountains and to other natural objects and through offerings that are given to these elements in ceremonies. In contrast with the Gospel Light leaders, these church members did not call these prayers sinful, instead perceiving them as an ignorance that God would understand. They had a much more positive and inclusive view of local culture, recognizing how it could be used within their church services and respected, even in the name of God.

As for ateetee, from the viewpoints of these church members, this cultural and political ritual is in line with their beliefs and values of reconciliation and forgiveness. They support the ateetee ritual as a process that can be used for dispute resolution. We

discussed the fact that several Protestants, including Tadesse, had participated in ateetee ceremonies:

LQ: Maal godhan isaan kunniin?

Simbiro: Yeroo sani yaa'ii xiqqoo haali jiru akka ateetee wayii cubbuutii isii badii inni dalage saniif itti qolqachoo dhaa akka amanteetti. Baqqaa akkas jedhanii gizee nama yaaseen jira. Garuu yeroo sana, waan tokko tokko saniin kan ke'e nama gahuun isaa gogoggora. Gizee saniin dogoggora. Kan qaleef jira, kani yeroo sana dhogatee arabsiitee biraa lixe jira, abartee jechaa dha. Kanaaf amma haga xiqqoo waa'ee amantee kessa gadi buunee laalleetti. Isiin gahuun isaa yakka isii gahe saniif badii sana kaafatee isii ararfachuu qaba. Gama kaniinuu ararfatu qaba qalee haa araarfatu, lakki karaa biraatiin kadhatee amantaan na ha eyyamamu jedhee haa araarfatu. Waan ofii godhe saniif itti gaafatamaan nama sana.

Biniyam: Kunoo yoo wal-qabatee fakeenyaaf amantoonni waldaa keessetti tajaajiltootera fi warra hin tajaajilleetu jira. Kun amma yakka akanaa uumu. Wara waaqeeffannaa sani hordoofanii waaqeefattenni guttummaan odoo maccaafalhee hin dubbisan, gutummaan wannaallee hin qabanii. Qadi baanaan amani durii suni baay'ee waan dhiise hin jerreef. Jecha adda addaa hin jedha. Jechoota jedhe saniifi akka waldeetiitti wanti waldeen bakka buteetiin isaa wanna gootuuf hin jiru. Kanaafuu hin gaafatama. Qaluu taanaan gahee kennuu qaba, "indemuum" achiirretti. Akka ani amanutti, odoo amma waldaa kiyya keessaa namudeteeti, nama akkas godhe, nuu irra

LQ: What did they (the ateetee women) do to them (the Protestant offenders)?

Simbiro: At that time, in accordance with life, just as ateetee is sacred, it was seen that those people (the offenders) had committed sins according to their religion. They (the ateetee women) said that a man was sinful. As a result, some things that were done by those people were wrong. That was wrong. There are some (of the offenders) who slaughtered (a cow) and others who were insulted and went home, and some who were cursed. Because of this we are now out of what we can consider as something minor. (In this type of case), he (the offender) has to admit his mistakes and confess his mistakes, and finally he has to reconcile. He must be able to reconcile through all the possible ways, either by slaughtering an animal or by religious methods. Every person is accountable for every mistake he has made.

Biniyam: For example, in churches, there are some who participate in services and others who do not participate in services. This is creating a wrong in itself. The *waaqeeffatta* adherents may have difficulties because previous habits may not leave them. Since their past behaviour stayed with them, there is a greater influence on them culturally. Due to these challenges, churches cannot completely avoid these challenges. Therefore, they would be responsible/accountable. If he has to give a cow to be slaughtered, he must do that. According to my belief, if I come across such cases in my church, or if I see a member of our church doing that, I myself will take action on him. I do this because

dhaabadheeti akkas akka godhuuf barbaada. Maaliifii gara maal godhe, seeraan ala godhe isaanillee erga godhee. Walda fuyyuu ammootuu bakka biraatiin gaafatamuu qaba. Ajaja waldaattu qaluu qaba. Waldeenni namni nama arabse, waan tokko balleesse. Wanna itti kennitutu jira. Of eegannoo itti kennitutu jira. Sana godhee ka'ee asittillee. Of eegannoo walderraaallee fudhachuu qaba malee godhamuu hin qabudha.

he did it illegally. He must be questioned or charged, even by the church. The church must order him to slaughter (a cow). There is punishment given by the church to those who go against the law or commit crimes. The church gives a warning to the offender. Therefore, he must be punished culturally and additional warnings should be given from the church. He should not have done such things.

(Simbiro and Biniyam, interview, April 18, 2011)

### **Evangelical re-signifying and re-contextualizing of ateetee practices**

In the Kokkossa area, both Mekane Yesus and Kale Heywet churches support local Arsi Oromo culture and cultural practices to varying degrees.<sup>134</sup> In doing so, they use Arsi cultural practices and song melodies for various purposes, including health education, community gatherings, and evangelization and recruitment. During the past fifteen years, local and expatriated Christian Oromo leaders also have been engaged in missionary and cultural projects in the Kokkossa area. Among these leaders is Ato Jarso, a local Arsi man who worked as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus-Wabe Batu Synod (EECMY-WBS) Kokkossa project manager, and Dr. Urgessa Biru, founder of the Light of Hope Ministries (LOHM),<sup>135</sup> a Christian non-profit organization. Some of the outreach projects include: building a force of teachers and schools; completing a Bible

<sup>134</sup> The extent to which culture is supported depends on what it is and how it is being practiced. They would not support what many Arsi locally call *aadaa badaa* ("bad culture"), which includes female genital cutting and abduction marriages. Though ateetee is encouraged/supported, some of the affiliated practices (such as cursing) are not be supported. And praying to Jesus is definitely encouraged over praying to *Waaqa*.

<sup>135</sup> In the PFF's 2012 and 2015 newsletters, "The Frontier and You," most of the articles are dedicated to LOHM. While conducting my own field research in the Kokkossa area, I met Dr. Urgessa and had discussions with him on a few occasions.

translation; and holding gatherings and ceremonies to teach community members about different social issues, problems and the gospel through re-worded and re-contextualized traditional Arsi music and rituals.

Dr. Urgessa is from the Arsi countryside around Kokkossa. He strongly values both his Arsi culture and his Christian beliefs, and is working indefatigably to preserve Christian versions of Arsi Oromo cultural traditions. He also works to provide aid to the communities from his birth region. Through LOHM, founded in 2000, he has focused on evangelization through culture and education. LOHM partnered with the Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship (PFF) in 2005. LOHM has continued its missionary work, building forty-six elementary schools in six Arsi regions and training “teacher-evangelists” (“The Frontier and You,” December 2015). “Dr. Urgessa and his teacher-evangelists work to “share the story of God’s love through Christ in sensitive and respectful ways” (ibid.). While LOHM has a proselytizing mission, they also “promote peace and reconciliation” between the various Christian and Muslim factions in the region—an effort that has resulted in invitations to build schools and donations of land from Muslim interest groups (ibid.).

I have heard much praise for Dr. Urgessa’s projects in the rural areas around Kokkossa. The partnership between Christians and Muslims described in the newsletter, while initially seeming strange, can be explained by the fact the schools serve children of all faiths, promoting peaceable relations, and subtly evangelizing as opportunities arise.

Dr. Urgessa has travelled to rural areas to meet as many people as possible, assessing problems in the areas and documenting/recording traditional music and rituals (such as *ateetee*) that are then used by LOHM for their education and outreach projects.

Telile Fikru Badecha, the program coordinator, is an accomplished musician who has been transcribing and writing some of the Christian songs for the project. She has released CDs with LOHM, samples of which can be found on Youtube.<sup>136</sup> LOHM also has a choir, which “is creating praise songs using traditional melodies, instruments, and dances, in order to share the gospel in the cultural context” (“The Frontier and You,” December 2012). The choir has also produced albums of Christian versions of traditional Arsi Oromo music.

The other church program led by Ato Jarso, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus-Wabe Batu Synod (EECMY-WBS) Kokossa project manager, uses Arsi melodies such as *ateetee* to educate community members about health issues such as HIV/AIDS and contested cultural practices, such as female genital cutting (*kitanna*) and abduction marriage (*butaa*).<sup>137</sup> With members of Mekane Yesus Church, they also have taken traditional songs and prayers, such as *ateetee*, and recomposed them with words from Christian gospel.

While these church initiatives and missions respect and tolerate those who continue to practice the vernacular Oromo religion, their ultimate goal is to bring the gospel and Christian values to as many people as possible. I have seen and heard about cases of the *ateetee* ritual for dispute resolution being adapted to fit different religious beliefs. Songs are modified so they do not include words that mention prayers to the earth or to objects, and individuals can choose to pray to whatever they believe in, though the

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<sup>136</sup> The cd samples can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c778iN2ZoBA> (<date accessed>).

<sup>137</sup> I did not have the occasion to discuss this project in detail with organizers, but I did hear about it from many participants and church members living in the community.

church members would prefer participants learn the gospel and pray to Jesus. As a result, these churches are preserving culturally familiar forms of music and traditions and giving them new religious life through re-composition and re-contextualization.

I discussed the creation of these Christianized ateetee songs with Simbiro and Tuki, of Kokkossa Mekane Eyesus and Kalhiwot Churches. They also worked with Dr. Urgessa Biru and contributed to the production of a CD of these gospel-infused traditional repertoires. The following is an excerpt of this discussion, in which we consider the context and the process:

LQ: Mee, faaruun ateetee akka amantaa kessanitti hin barbaachiisaa? Fakenyaaf, faaruun hamomotaa, faaruun loonii, baye bayee, faruu ateetee akka amantaa kessanittitti karaa saniin waaqa keessan kadhachuu dandeessanii?

Tuki: Dandeenna ee, rakkina hin qabu. Hin dandeenna, Indowuum baay'ee akka naannoo keennattuu kan fudhatamuu qaba isa. Maliif amantaan martiinuu yaan alumarraa dhufe. As keessaa kan burqe hin jiru. Alaa yennaa dhufu faaruun adda addaa alaa dhuufu barachuudhaafi yeroo baay'ee kan hawwinu. Odoo nama yeroo hin fudhanne baranne nu barbaachiisu kanaannoo keennaati. Kan naannoo keennaa waan ta'eef. Fakeenyaaf faaru akkasii qabna. Kabaaseetiin jira farfataadhaan. Isa wajiin ta aneetii baaqne jira. Hin dhooqu amantaan keenna. Hin danda'ama yoo faaruullee faarsaa jettan faarsuu hin dandeenya.

T&S:  
Gooftaa kiyya, Mootii qabadhe  
Yesuus Kiristoos, mirkoo godhadhe  
Dina kiyya, isaan moo'adhe  
Gooftaa kiyyaa, Mootii qabadhe

LQ: With your religion, is it possible to sing ateetee prayers? For example, can you worship your God through such songs like *hamoomota* (the songs sung by men who go to get the bride), *faaruun loonii* (cattle praising songs), and ateetee prayers?

Tuki: Yes we can; there is no problem. More importantly, this is more acceptable in our place. The reason for this is that all religions came from foreigners. No religion originated here. Most of the time, when religions come from abroad, we want the songs that have come from there. If we take the example of an uneducated person, we can see that local songs are important since they were created locally. For example, we have a song that goes as follows. It has been produced in collaboration with a singer. It is not forbidden according to our religion. We can sing this song.

T&S (singing) (audio track 11):  
My Lord, My King I hold you.  
Jesus Christ, I hold you.  
My enemy, I defeated you.  
My Lord, I hold my King.



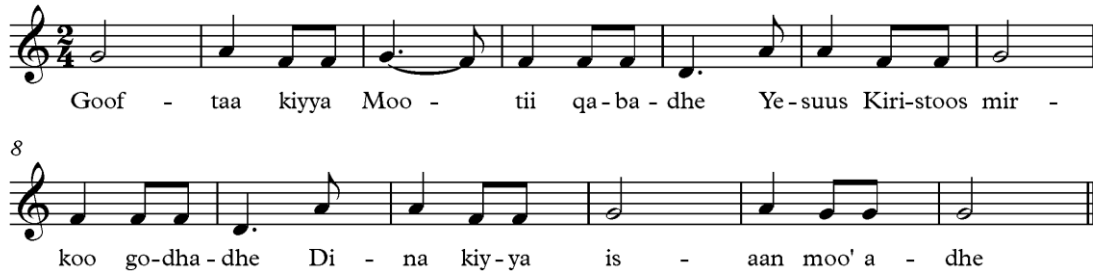
Yesuu kiyya, irkoo godhadhe  
Dina kiyyaa, isaan mo'adhe

S: Faarqannaan garuu ateetee fakkaataa  
faaruudha.

My Jesus, you are my provider.  
My enemy, I defeat you through Him.

S (speaking): This song resembles an  
ateetee song.

(Interview with Biniyam and Simbiro)



I do not have an example of the same song sung by the ateetee women. For comparison, I would, however, suggest listening to audio tracks 1 – 4, which were all ateetee songs sung at the fala ceremony in Guutuu (chapter 3). Though the songs are different, it offers a comparison with the Protestant version. As can be heard on the audio track and seen in the skeleton transcription above, the Christian ateetee prayer is sung in unison to a melody that is vaguely similar to the ateetee melodies. For local Arsi, it is recognizable as an ateetee melody, even though it has been transformed. The Protestant version still has an implied pentatonic scale though they only sing four of the notes of the scale. It also has portamentos (which I did not indicate above), so the singers can slide from one note to another. The pulse of the music is strong and clear. As with the Protestant example, it can be clapped.

The Protestant version is, most likely, influenced by the organization and structure of melodies sung in Western churches. Many of these church melodies are transcribed in order to be performed and sung by anyone, even those who are not familiar with the

original repertoires. They should also be easily accompanied by multiple instruments, including synthesizers, which are common in the Ethiopian Protestant churches. I can only hypothesize that the exact unison singing may convey a sense of order and perhaps obedience expected of adherents to the churches. Though the ateetee women's version is not chaotic, there is more fluidity and room for personal interpretation in the singing and the actions. Like "new music" (popular music in Ethiopia), interlocutors have also described these church versions of songs as "modern" (*ammayyaa*) or "new" (*haarawa*) interpretations. This comes with the unstated assumption that the women's ateetee singing may be considered outdated by some. From the viewpoint of the church members, the original ateetee songs may also be associated with a belief system to which they do not adhere.

In the original ateetee verses, words such as *Ateetee*, *Aayyoo guddoo* (elder mother), *Waqaa* or *Rabii* (Oromo terms for God) stood in place of Jesus. The verses are re-written to take out the references to Arsi Oromo deities or God and to include the references to Jesus. In this manner, leaders and musicians of these churches and missionaries have found an accessible means to support and encourage Christian faith through vernacular practices. The symbol has shifted with the removal of *Waaqa* and traditional belief and the context is dramatically altered, but new adherents will recognize the melodies and sometimes the cultural references in the verses. This attracts new followers of the faith in a seemingly peaceful manner, but it can also be contested because it is a process that is undermining vernacular belief practices and only preserving culturally familiar forms.

In April 2011, I attended an ateetee ceremony just outside of Kokkossa in which the community gathered to pray for rain (called ateetee *fala*). One of the elder organizers was looking around, lamenting the low numbers of attendees and commenting that ten years ago the numbers were over ten times as big. He attributed the change to the increase in adherents of Salafi Islam and evangelical Protestant faiths. For him the loss of participants was not only detrimental for the ritual, but also for the community, which traditionally depended on rituals such as ateetee to bring people together and to resolve disputes and other issues.

Still, although religion is an increasingly contested area in relation to vernacular spiritual and cultural practices, and there are rising numbers of disputes or conflicts with ateetee women in the name of religion, many individuals and groups in their communities remain respectful of each other's beliefs. In order to continue in this line of mutual respect and to deter spiritual persecution, healthy dialogue must continue among members of the communities, the religious institutions and government bodies. Of course this is easier said than done when, from certain religious perspectives, an adherent may think his/her path or way is the only valid way. It may just be that conflicts are the norm; before religious tensions existed there were other types of conflicts between different community members (Nader 2000). But perhaps a key to better understanding, respect, and co-existence between these different cultures is for opponents and practitioners of ateetee to acknowledge the flexibility of the ritual process and the rights of women to practice and promote this type of justice.

## **Urbanization and Rural Exodus**

The second area of rapid social change is that of urbanization and rural exodus. Towns and cities are growing very quickly in Ethiopia. Based on data from the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia and current population projections from the UN and NYU Stern project's Ethiopian Urban Expansion Initiative, the populations of many towns and cities in Ethiopia have doubled, tripled, or more over the past thirty years and are projected to continue on this trend.<sup>138</sup> Even during my comparatively short period of observation, the rate of changes in the capital and the cities and towns where I have lived and worked in Southern Ethiopia are perceptible. On the one hand this is very positive: rural communities are growing and receiving more services and resources from the government and private investors; an increasing number of youth are going on to acquire higher education in towns and the cities; and some farmers are investing their capital in small businesses in the growing towns. On the other hand, rapid urbanization poses a number of challenges: (1) City and town infrastructure is not always ready for the influx of people. For example, schools are having difficulty keeping up with the numbers of students with the result that there are not enough resources to ensure students' success.<sup>139</sup> (2) There are many reported cases of forced rural exodus and villagization of people

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<sup>138</sup> For more information and statistics, see Lamson-Hall et al. 2015 ([http://marroninstitute.nyu.edu/uploads/content/A\\_New\\_Plan\\_for\\_African\\_Cities\\_Oct\\_19\\_2015.pdf](http://marroninstitute.nyu.edu/uploads/content/A_New_Plan_for_African_Cities_Oct_19_2015.pdf)); the 2013 report of the Ethiopian Urban Expansion Initiative: <http://urbanizationproject.org/blog/the-ethiopia-urban-expansion-initiative#.VBBZRVZePZF>; [http://urbanizationproject.org/uploads/blog/Ethiopia\\_Interim\\_Report.pdf](http://urbanizationproject.org/uploads/blog/Ethiopia_Interim_Report.pdf); the Ethiopian Central Statistic Agency 1994 and 2007 Census and other reports: <http://www.csa.gov.et>; statistics compiled and updated by Dr. Aynalem Adugna: <http://www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org>; and the UN World Population Prospects: [http://esa.un.org/wpp/unpp/panel\\_population.htm](http://esa.un.org/wpp/unpp/panel_population.htm).

<sup>139</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, a high school class size usually consists of 90 or more students. This includes laboratory work, which is basically conducted by the teacher and observed by students because there are not enough resources to have equipment for everyone. In general, students learn by rote memorization. Once they reach high school, all of their subjects are in English, an unofficial language and a second or third language for the students.

because the Ethiopian government is taking land and selling off large tracts to foreign investors. Currently there are extreme tensions between protesters all over Oromia and the government over the land grabbing issue around Addis Ababa.<sup>140</sup> Fortunately land grabs are infrequent in the Arsi areas where I have been working, since they are relatively isolated and already have a number of prosperous businesses in areas such as cattle and coffee farming. (3) Urbanization and rural exodus often have become synonymous with leaving behind some rural cultural practices.

All of these processes challenge the practice of ateetee, but of course the last point affects it the most. When young people leave for the city and no longer want (or feel they need) to practice ateetee, are there adaptations or changes in the ritual that allow it to carry on, or is it transformed into something else? I cannot offer a detailed analysis of this issue, but it is important to address since it is an issue raised by some of the ateetee women, especially by those with children who are leaving for urban centres and forgetting (or choosing to leave) aspects of their culture.

The ateetee ritual is showing some resilience in areas where the population is majority Arsi. The particularity of the Arsi Oromo ateetee ritual is that it is public. Women go to claim and receive justice at the offender's house. In Nansaboo and Kokkossa, relatively large towns with over ten thousand inhabitants each, there have been

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<sup>140</sup> In addition to published academic sources on politics of land grabbing (see *The Lands of the Future* Research Network, Abbink et al. 2014, ) there are many current news articles, blogs and documentaries on these issues: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/06/britain-supporting-dictatorship-in-ethiopia>; <http://harpers.org/archive/2014/07/the-man-who-stole-the-nile/>; <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2014/01/ethiopia-land-sale-20141289498158575.html>; <http://www.ethiomeia.com/aug14/4061>. There are also specific articles on the Oromo land grabbing, and on current waves of protests and government force. Human Rights Watch published a recent article evaluating the unnecessary violence: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/18/ethiopia-lethal-force-against-protesters> (<date accessed, NB., include for all websites unless there's an available doi>).

cases of ateetee rituals happening within the town. These town ceremonies are not as common as the ones in the countryside because there are not as many people living and working in the towns who are practicing ateetee. Although there are more practitioners in the towns in the Arsi populated districts, towns tend to be more demographically and ethnically mixed; populations there are more subject to influence by the media, merchants, and foreigners whose cultures, such as the Amhara and Tigrayan cultures of Ethiopia and the West, dominate Oromo cultures. Aside from the occasional rituals in Arsi-dominant towns, there are also other types of ateetee practices that may offer adaptation for the future.

Prayers for *irreechaa*, the annual Oromo thanksgiving holidays are occasions when many Oromo of different subgroups travel from their towns and cities to areas in the countryside where they gather to celebrate Oromo culture and to pray (Geda 2013). Though these rituals are only held occasionally, they are increasingly becoming more popular and better attended. These rituals are attended by all Oromo subgroups, so they are very inclusive.

The way ateetee is practiced affects its continued practice. Through interviews and attending rituals, I have found that the Shewa Oromo practice ateetee in a way that is conducive to city life. Their rituals are more private, often held indoors in private homes or in community centres as a women's organized event. They hold prayer and blessing rituals for holidays and for the Ethiopian New Year in September. Because they do not have to go outside to a river or another natural space, the practice of ateetee is quite adaptable to a city context. Neither approach should be viewed as in competition with the other, but comparison does offer insight into reasons for resilience in changing contexts.

## **Government and Non-Governmental Politics**

The third area of change is occurring in relation to local/national and international government and non-governmental organization politics. These interactions are taking place in areas including, but not limited to: culture, tourism, investment, development, and women's rights. The Oromo government has offices with these names (except women's rights, which is called women's affairs) on local and national levels. In this respect, the Oromo governmental bureaucracy follows the lead set by national and international bureaucratic structures, which have offices/departments and projects bearing these same names. On national and local levels, the Oromo government is taking considerable interest in facilitating the expression and advertisements of *aadaa Oromo* (Oromo culture).

Although ethnic federalism came into effect with the 1994 Ethiopian constitution, it is only within the past ten to fifteen years that the Oromo have experienced a significant revival of their language, their vernacular religions, their traditional governance system, and other aspects of their culture. Combined with this cultural revival is a complex issue—the government and local community discourses related to culture and tourism. The interconnection of culture and tourism is outwardly apparent by the fact that the offices that promote culture and organize events are called Offices of Culture and Tourism. National and local government cultural office workers have been making active efforts to record, document, transmit and revive cultural practices. Some of the ways they are doing this include: local and national youth bands that perform vernacular/traditional music repertoires and dances; public song and dance representations on holidays;

promotional or even political events; national cultural heritage days; and concerted efforts to revive rituals in different locations, including towns and remote rural areas. All of these initiatives have helped to rebuild communities, by raising ethnic pride and increasing inter-ethnic understanding (Qashu 2011). Sometimes these initiatives are highly localized and sometimes they take place on a regional level. However, the ritual and musical representations tend to be a combination of local and top-down approaches, sometimes using local musicians but conforming to a coordinated representation that is reflective of more national Oromo standards.

Often culture and tourism are intertwined, particularly when they reach regional and national levels where political agendas are more pronounced. I have attended many events in which the Oromo culture and tourism offices and other government officials have been involved. One such event took place during late October 2010 in honor of National Tourism Day. I have chosen this event as an example not only because I spoke with many of the participants, but also because *ateetee* was a major part of the event.

The West Arsi Zone Oromo Regional Government Culture and Tourism department decided to organize a cultural festival in Bishaan Gurrachaa, one of the twelve rural or semi-rural districts in the zone, which is located off the main road heading south in Ethiopia, between the towns of Shashemene and Hawassa. Government and cultural office workers and participants came from the twelve districts to participate in the two-day event. From my observations and discussion with the local participants and government actors, they organized this event for several reasons. First, Bishaan Gurrachaa hosted this first event because it is close to the zone headquarters, as well as being a picturesque and culturally-relevant location by a lake: most cultural prayers and



beginnings of ceremonies happen by lakes or rivers, and near large trees, which this landscape provided. It may have also been the first host because the town wanted to develop tourism and the government wanted to stop some of the intra-ethnic fighting that has marked the area. Bishaan Gurracha is home to five different ethnic groups, some of whom have had a history of fighting. In fact, not long after the festival, conflict erupted in the countryside around the area, which resulted in prolonged fighting. Second, this event was organized to promote the potential for tourism and investment in tourism in the host location (although the only participants were politicians, government workers and people from rural areas throughout the district). The third argument for this event was to rebuild community (ethnic pride within the Oromo group and between the Oromo and other ethnic groups and promote inter-ethnic understanding). In effect, there were different accounts of the purpose of the event depending on whether I spoke with the local organizers, the head organizers, or the participants. And, even among organizers from any group, there seemed to be different discourses, depending on their governmental or political positions.

The first day of the event was centred on an exhibition hall with its craft and food displays from each district. Participants and attendees interacted in the hall and just outside it. Throughout the day, women and men gathered in groups inside and outside to sing different cultural songs including *ateetee*. Media came to film and interview participants throughout the afternoon. Cultural officers readily explained their stands and all the cultural highlights of their regions to participants passing by. At one point, zonal level politicians came in as the guests of honour; they were given the first tastes of the cultural foods, and they were shown the highlights of each stand. At this point it became

clear that the entire exhibition and show was really designed for them. In the case of festivals like this one, support can go both ways: local cultural offices are looking for financial support and personal advancement; and the politicians can use their support of this cultural revival to advance their position within their political party.

The second day began with everyone gathered by the lake. Groups of men and women were walking back and forth singing traditional song repertoires. The women were at the lake and nearby, singing *ateetee* prayers for many purposes.<sup>141</sup> Most Oromo ceremonies cannot begin until the women offer a blessing and give permission for the ceremony to begin. The prayers by the lake followed this rule. This blessing was followed by many speeches by the organizers and cultural officers. During the afternoon there was a traditional music and dance competition involving samples of songs and dances performed by groups from the different districts. Traditional forms alternated with an electric youth band and dancers who performed a more national Ethiopian media-influenced, rehearsed choreography of vernacular dances. There were risers filled with local attendees who were watching the show. But as with the first day, the guests of honour were the politicians who were under a tent directly facing the performers. They received verbal expressions of gratitude, food, water and gifts from the different organizers and district representatives. Both of these days were judged by festival officials for trophy prizes. Different categories of participants, such as men, women and youths, and the exhibition hall booths were judged.

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<sup>141</sup> As was explored in more detail in Chapter 3, *ateetee* can be used for different circumstances, including to thank *Waaqa* (God) and to pray for health, rain, and other needs or problems.

I had the opportunity to talk to some of the organizers, culture and tourism office officials, and participants in the event. The organizers and cultural officers/workers generally saw this as a good way to look towards the future of tourism and investment in their regions. Their interest in culture aligns with government objectives of economic growth. This was especially apparent in their speeches and the printed material some of them handed out, outlining the prosperity of their districts. They mentioned coffee factories, infrastructure and agricultural growth (providing samples of the types of seeds and products typical of their districts). They were eager to “sell” their district—to promote their regions—and to talk about culture and business. Aside from the brief interactions with the politician guests of honour, the cultural officers addressed fellow colleagues and participants. There were no tourists, nor did there seem to be any entrepreneurs. I also talked to the other participants, particularly in reference to ateetee. Most of them were happy to be there, sharing their culture and competing with their crafts, music and dances. Most of them received financial support, such as travel, hotel and a small per diem for their meals. Some of the participants talked about the event in these terms: it was a good way to promote culture, to keep their culture alive, and to regain some of what was lost. Several women told me that the government was helping them now, encouraging them to practice their culture, which was not always the case in the past (Interviews with participants).

Ateetee was a major part of this event. Some women were asked or told by cultural offices to congregate with the others to sing the prayers, but many gathered of their own volition. They took advantage of the opportunity to pray by the lake and to have the force of large groups of women to pray together for rain, health and other good

fortunes. These prayers were conducted outside of the competitions, in large groups by the lake. Though there were many moments of sincere practice, there were also theatrical moments, such as when male cultural officers told women to gather with others to sing *ateetee*, or, on the second day, when women sang the prayers out of context and in a competition in front of large audiences. This festival demonstrated many of the complex interactions around culture, tourism and politics. These types of gatherings or festivals inspire continued practice or learning of the *ateetee* ritual, but they also affect the way in which *ateetee* is perceived and practiced, over time potentially transforming it from a sung judicial process to a folkloric event. This change could be problematic for Arsi women if it neutralizes the way they can make claims for their respect, honour, and rights.

For many participants, the direct result of this festival was reaffirmation of social links and a means to build communities with others from their ethnic group. It was a real way for people to share their cultures, to make social links and become more integrated in larger society. On local and regional levels, the government organizers' stated agenda was to focus on culture as a means of promoting tourism and economic development, yet there were few tourists present at Bishaan Gurrachaa (and, indeed, at similar cultural events). While lack of tourists may be revealing of the limits of resources, tourism could also be a pretext for another type of agenda. The possibilities and potentialities are wide-ranging (if speculative). These events may be a means for the government to control potential political protests or expressions from a political minority group. In festival events, ethnic/religious expressions are under government control. Under this type of surveillance, national and nationally influenced regional governments can control Oromo nationalist political agendas by regulating the content of the performances and

suppressing potential Oromo political messages. Practitioners are provided with a safe space for expression, but content is more heavily regulated. The rehearsed versions of the music and dance in these cultural events may be a means for the government to advance an agenda of progress. Cultural forms in festival contexts are more rehearsed, “polished” and stylized versions, highly influenced by the media, city life and what the urban dominant politics expect.<sup>142</sup> Urban political leaders promote such representations as part of a discourse of progress against what is perceived as uneducated, outdated rural practices.

These politics of culture and revival have been played out in many different geographical and political contexts in the past. They have been heavily documented in nineteenth-century nationalist movements in Europe, to mid twentieth-century political movements in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, and, more recently, for places such as rural Ethiopia. Complexities of nationalism and folklorization in many different parts of the world have been extensively documented in ethnographic folklore and ethnomusicological works (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Rice 2002, Buchanan 2006, Qashu 2011). Though the Ethiopian and other geographical and political contexts are quite different, religious and ethnic politics, urbanization and government interference in traditional musical practices are important forces in many contexts.

National, regional and local politics related to the culture and tourism offices are only one example of the dramatic changes facing ateetee rituals. After the fall of the Derg in 1991, when the EPRDF took control, women’s rights returned to the government’s agenda. In 1993, the government started a National Policy on Women, but over time this

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<sup>142</sup> See Qashu 2011 for further discussion of these stylized performances.

gender focus became another political mechanism that produced bureaucracy without results. Women's Affairs offices were developed, first under the Prime Minister's office and later under the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs. Women's affairs offices have sprung up around Ethiopia in the last ten years at regional and sub-regional levels (zone, district (*worreda*) and village (*kebele*)) (Østebø 2015, 447). As the Assistant Director of the Kokossa Women's Affairs Office explained:

The main objective is to teach women about their rights and duties. In addition, the objective of the office is to solve women's problems that are related to politics and the economy. In the past, many women were under stress and oppressed. In order to fight this, our government has given it due attention and established a Women's and Children's Affairs Office in 1997 EC (2004). The aim is to solve every problem they face. It is just to teach women their rights and duties and to teach them how to become self-sufficient or independent. (interview, April 19, 2011)

Indeed, women's and children's affairs have become one of the newest government offices that can be found in many of the small towns throughout Oromia. This is part of the national objectives aiming to ameliorate the position of women in society, so that they have the opportunity to achieve equality, as stipulated in the Ethiopian Constitution. As the assistant director of the Kokkossa office continued to explain, when women and men come to their office, they help them reconcile. If they know the *ateetee* culture and want to use that process, the office will help them, but many times those who come to the office do so because they do not know or practice *ateetee*. Among the non-adherents of *ateetee*, the Assistant Director explained, are non-Oromo (mainly Amhara living in the area) and those who follow Salafi Islam.

These offices are obviously excellent resources for women because they can come for help, support, job training and other resources, and they can learn about their legal and constitutional rights as women. The ultimate goal for women's equality builds on a national and international agenda, which, itself, builds on Western views of equality. This

is an undeniably helpful and necessary resource, but it is important to note that these centres were built from a top down approach. Although women's affairs workers support ateetee ceremonies and the women involved in these rituals, their offices have not developed out of local understandings of women's rights. The mandate and texts the workers are advocating are based on national and western notions of gender equality. These include national government policies and campaigns to encourage the idea of progress and growth and discourage what are conceived as "backwards" customs. This is particularly relevant in terms of the government's aims to reach the United Nations Millenium Development Goals (MDG) economically and socially (M. Østebø 2015). Though ateetee is seen as a positive process by most local government workers, women's equality is more of a priority on a national level. This vision of equality and women's rights as individual rights does not necessarily take into account local perspectives on gender and women's rights as group rights (Hodgson 2011). Marit Østebø has offered an extremely nuanced view of this issue in her analysis on expanding the notion of vernacularization and translations of gender equality among the Arsi (2015). As she points out, the official government specialists on gender are promoting gender equality or sameness, while the "grassroots" or local women are talking about complementarity in their approach to gender. In the same way, the government workers focus on changing gendered divisions of labor, while local community members talk about collaborative work and agreement through conjugal dialogue (Østebø 2015). In effect, she argues that the local actors are constantly negotiating and translating concepts such as women's rights and they need to be considered as local agents in the process of vernacularization.

In the case of the ateetee ritual, women's rights are expressed through the process, meaning that the actual ateetee practice and the women's affairs offices can be quite complementary. The government offices can also be seen as another replacement for the ritual since they do not specifically promote ateetee, but women's rights in general. From another perspective, women's affairs offices and rural officers can be perceived as officials put in place by the government in order to make this transformation to solving disputes in government offices instead of solving them directly in the community. It is a step that could, potentially, lead to more social control of the countryside and more people who conform to the rules created by the government. This assertion is speculative, simply giving voice to the perceptions and views expressed by different actors in the community. Understanding the actual intentions of these government offices would require a more detailed study dedicated to this topic.

Local and regional investment and development offices also affect what is happening locally. There are local non-governmental organizations that are doing effective and sustainable work in rural areas (for example, Hussein Ambo and Halima Hussein are supporting agricultural start-up projects and many other local initiatives in the Nansaboo area; or the Hundee organization, which worked with local midwives and elders to eradicate FGM practices). But there are also outside national and international investments and non-governmental organizations working through top down approaches. These outside approaches sometimes neglect what is happening locally to the detriment of local traditions. For example, an NGO that comes in to "better the lives of women" in the area may not realize that there are already local mechanisms in place (Østebø 2009, 2015).



## **Conclusion**

Through these examples and discussions I have aimed to demonstrate how religion, rural exodus and urbanization, and political changes are affecting Oromo societies—changes that are simultaneously positive and problematic. With particular regard to religion, the tensions are at times highly contentious and violent. Change is to be expected in any society, or even any relationship, but this complex web of rapid changes makes it difficult for many ateetee practitioners to know what the future holds or how they can hope to remain in control of their ritual and justice system. How do they continue to practice and promote their beliefs when confronted with these other powerful forces? For many practitioners, the question becomes: what happens to these beliefs and rights when the ritual is no longer practiced?

The disappearance of rituals or culture is a very contentious topic. I certainly do not want to appear to be arguing an outdated, colonial notion of “saving” a cultural practice that is threatened with extinction. In fact, I would argue that cultural practices do not go extinct. Even if they change radically and no longer resemble their previous incarnations, they continue to live in the memories and oral history of those who knew them. This perspective has been validated by many ethnographic studies and by examples of reincarnations of cultural practices that have been presumed lost or had not been practiced for many years. To the same effect, it would be presumptuous to assume that every practice or person needs “saving”: sometimes community members do not want a particular ritual or cultural practice to be “saved” or would not want it saved by an outsider. In this case, ateetee practitioners have come to me with their fears and their

desires concerning ateetee. From another perspective, one could argue that the ateetee practitioners are not flexible and modern. But these women are open to dialogue and there is a certain amount of flexibility in the ritual process. They can and have adapted and changed over time. For example, their *siinqee* are no longer available or are too expensive, so many take umbrellas to the rituals. And women can make an appointment for an ateetee ritual now, so as to leave time for the offender to prepare the necessary compensation. The problem is that the same flexibility is not being offered from the oppositional forces of change, such as the mainstream religions. The forces of urbanization, similarly, challenge traditional practices without the flexibility of compromise. The threats to and potential decline of ateetee, as argued by practitioners and as experienced through work in communities, is what I am addressing here.

In some geographic areas, decline is not an issue: ateetee is alive and well. But in other areas, it is facing these problematic encounters from all sides. Amariich, the women's leader and ateetee practitioner, has argued for cultural promotion as a weapon in the fight for recognition and continued security of the ateetee practice. Some of the culture and tourism workers are also working in this vein. But of course the danger with this type of promotion lies in creating a static view of a dynamic cultural and legal process. Perhaps it will be necessary for the ateetee practitioners to adjust the way they conduct the ritual. The solution may lie in negotiation and dialogue and the continued practice of singing for justice. If all the community members involved continue having dialogues and negotiations related to ateetee, which are in the spirit of the ritual, some of these tensions and altercations could be eased or stopped. Confrontation is arguably an inherent part of any society (Nader 2000), but in order for women to continue to practice

ateetee and promote their rights in an environment of mutual respect, all the different communities' members, government workers and international actors must allow for education about ateetee and respectful discussions on the ground.

## Chapter 5. The Agency and Power of Siinqee

(Audio track 12)

Siinqee tiyyaa lootii hallalallee,  
Rabbi kiyyaa mooti amanee,  
Saafuu tiyyaa laaliinni naa waalaliinii.  
Siinqee tiyyaa lootii qabadha,  
Rabbi kiyyaa mooti kadhadaa,  
Saafuu tiyyaa laalinni naa waalalinii.  
Siinqee tiyyaa lootii galmuuma,  
Kadhuu mootiin raabumma.

Siinqee tiyyaa lootii galmuuma,  
Kadhuu mootiin rabbumma.

My beautiful siinqee,<sup>143</sup>  
I trust in Rabbi [God], my lord,  
Do not look at my faults.  
My siinqee, I carry the beautiful one,  
My Rabbi, I pray to my lord,  
Do not look at my faults.  
My beautiful siinqee of the ceremonial hall,  
I pray that Rabbi is rich [can answer  
prayers]  
My beautiful siinqee of the ceremonial hall,  
I pray that Rabbi is rich.

(Ateetee for siinqee, sung by Buldha  
Kerroot)<sup>144</sup>



<sup>143</sup> Lootii is the beaded headdress women wear for ceremonies. Siinqee is equated with the beauty of the headdress.

<sup>144</sup> Two other verses I have heard on different occasions are the following :

Siinqee tiyyaa lootii luuqissee,  
aadaa kiyyaa boonee mul'isee.  
Haa teete, qarafamtuu kan iji faayaa haa  
qaraxatuu.

I took out my beautiful siinqee,  
I am proud to show my culture.  
Take into your eyes her beauty.



**What is siinqee?**



Shunka Gababa, Dikki, April 2011; Buujaa and friend, Ciiqoo, April 2011; Sof Umaar Guutoo pilgrims, Dec. 2010.



LQ: Aadaa oromoo keessatti, siinquee jechuun maal jechuudha?

A: Siinqueen dubartiif warana, siinquee jechuun aadaa oromoo keessatti siinquee jechuun warana dubartitti, kan yoo lagattin baatu si kan yoo lagattin baatu mirga ofi ittin falmatuu, yoo durba gurgurraan siinqueen gurgurraan isii dhabuu hin qabatu durbi durii siinquee kana fudhatee lagan buutii. Yoo achii isii gadi baasanii siinqeentoonii bira hin haftu.

Siinqueen kan shamaraan yoo heeruman shifaa waliin fudhatanii gara mana abbaa warraa ittiin deeman. Siinquee gola teeti. Idaayaan ittiin heerumitti.

Siinqueen teenyaa wayyumaa qabdii. Siinqeetii irreensa keenninaa. Dubarttoonni gamaa gamanaa yoo walitti dhufinuu irreenssa walii kenniina. Walitti darbina. Achitii nyaanee. Malkaa irratti. Hanfala afanee, siinquee gaaguree falana. Waaqa kadhana.

LQ: In your Oromo culture, what does siinquee mean?

A: For a woman, siinquee is a weapon (spear); in our Oromo culture, siinquee is women's weapon that is carried when they go to the river, in their hand when they go to the river, When a girl gets married, she is married with siinquee. In the past (women) took siinquee with them to go to the river (to pray). When women go out they have siinquee in their hand.

(Amariich Shubee, interview, October 31, 2010)

Siinquee belongs to girls getting married. When she marries, she carries it (siinquee) with *shifaa* (green bamboo leaves)<sup>145</sup> to her husband's house. The siinquee stays in the *gola* (sleeping place).<sup>146</sup> The bride gets married.

(Women from Nansabo, interview, January 15, 2011)

Our siinquee is wayyuu (sacred, respected). We give green grass to it. When women gather from both sides, we give green grass to each other. We throw each other grass. We eat there. We lay down our *hanfala* (leather belt) and siinquee in the river for prayers. We pray to Waaqa (God).

(Milke Mamo, interview, Sof Umar Gutoo, Nansabo district, December 21, 2010)

The term "siinquee institution" (*aadaa* siinquee, or siinquee culture) is used interchangeably with *ateetee*; it was part of the *gadaa* system and is still part of customary

<sup>145</sup> *Shifaa* are bamboo leaves used for spiritual ceremonies or prayers.

<sup>146</sup> The *gola* is the sleeping corner in the house.

law. In Arsi Oromo culture, *siinqee* is considered to be a being. She is one of the most powerful objects and symbols, and it is perhaps the most powerful object for women, with both her secular and spiritual aspects: she represents women's rights and she *is* Waaqa-given power, through her direct link to Waaqa. *Siinqee* (or *siinqee*) designates: 1. a blessed *ulee* (stick) carved from a particular tree and given to a woman on her wedding day in a blessing ceremony, for her to keep as a sign of respect for her rights; 2. Waaqa-given power that is used in *ateetee* ceremonies to communicate with Waaqa, and to bless and curse; 2. an exclusively women's spiritual and political institution which parallels that of men.

Whenever I discussed *ateetee* with Arsi Oromo women, they would bring up the topic of *siinqee* by singing verses about or to *siinqee* and talking about the blessed sticks. Many verses of *ateetee* prayers venerate *siinqee*. As with the song sung by Buldhaa in the opening of the chapter, an entire *ateetee* song can be dedicated to *ateetee*. In practice, during *ateetee* ceremonies, women held their *siinqee* with pride and used them at key moments in the process. In effect, *siinqee* are essential elements in the discourse of *ateetee*. As sung in the verses above, *siinqee* are extremely powerful, highly respected and venerated, and they increase the honour and power in the women who carry them. They are often granted the status of individuals and are usually referred to in the feminine. Many Arsi believe in *siinqee*. Many believe that Waaqa gives women power through *siinqee*. *Siinqee* is power and vice versa. Women use this power to communicate with Waaqa. Women can use them to bless, curse, bring rain, stop fighting and resolve disputes. Men fear them and show reverence to women carrying them. In general, women wield power whenever they carry their *siinqee*, but they can specifically use them to

assert their rights and reclaim their respect when it has been violated. At the same time, even though some women no longer have siinqee, the memory and knowledge of the object and concept remains with them as they travel to and participate in ateetee gatherings. And in urban environments, where siinqee is no longer present, or rural settings, where the influence of Christianity and Islam has largely reduced the numbers of siinqee, the history and influence of siinqee remains in social and cultural practices (Østebø 2015).

As the religious studies scholar, Harvey (2012) puts forth: “Sacred ceremonies almost always entail the presence of objects. What difference would it make if instead of this inviting us to consider ‘material culture’ we thought about the ‘culture of things’? What if these objects are not simply present but actively participate?” (209). In this chapter, I aim to go beyond the symbolism and function of siinqee as an object to consider how, for the Arsi, siinqee is many things: it is a being, it is womanhood, it is power, and it is communication with God. This understanding encompasses how siinqee has agency and how it actively participates in contributing to its own meanings through ateetee and through women’s expressions of beliefs, respect and rights. Inspired by DeVale’s (1990) model of an instrument life cycle, observations of siinqee, and my interlocutors’ explanations of their views and relationships with siinqee, I will explain siinqee life’s cycle, its different levels of power, how women are connected to it at its different stages, and how women negotiate their relationships and position in Arsi society through their bond to siinqee.



## Origins of Siinqee

The original siinqee is the first one and the ancestor of all the other siinqee. In the life cycle, this could be seen as the birth of the ancestor (and matriarch). I have heard several origin stories for siinqee from my interlocutors. As recounted in Chapter 2, in the Kokossa district, Oromo elders generally agree that siinqee came with the gadaa institution. They say that the *Abbaa Bokkuu*, the male leader in the Oromo gadaa system, received siinqee and *bokkuu* (a staff held by the highest male leader) from the *Qaalluu* (spiritual leader). The male leader was to have *bokkuu* and his wife was to have siinqee. Though this is a common legend, there are many variations to it. The *Qaalluu*, being a religious leader, may have received these spiritual sticks from Waaqa (God) or may have been given instructions to make them.

Several of my female interlocutors in the area of Dikki, in the Kokkossa countryside, acknowledged the story about siinqee coming with the gadaa system, but also told me different versions related to siinqee crossing a large body of water (an ocean and/or a river). One esteemed elder gave the following version:

*Bara uumamaa keeyaa uumamni keenyaa, gamaa horiin biishaan garba irraa deemeetti, lagatti umuu ka'e, horin lagaatti umuuf kanaan akka ta'an walalanitti. Taa qanafaa, kalachaa qabduu, siinqee harkatti fidan. Daa'ima waliin bar gubbaa, bar jala dhawwamee, isin siinqee harkaa lamaa akanatti itti akeektee jennaani ol gadi jala, dhawwamee jennani kutee bute.*

At the time of creation, when we were created, when the cattle were created from the river water and drifted across the ocean, the legend is that they had *qanafaa* and *kalachaa*<sup>147</sup> and she, with her baby, crossed the ocean with siinqee in her hand. The legend is that siinqee sank in the ocean and after came to our country.

(Buldhaa Keroo, interview, April 12, 2011)

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<sup>147</sup> *Qanafaa* is a beaded ornament women wear on their head up to five months (sometimes longer) after giving birth. During this time they are considered to be particularly *waayyuu* (sacred/blessed and respected). *Kalachaa* may be referring here to the large phallic ornament worn by the *Abbaa Gadaa*. In this case, it would be the *Abbaa Gadaa* and his wife who were crossing the body of water.

And, another version from another local female leader in Dikki:

Abbaan mana hori jala bade, kutee jedhaan  
bar kute gamana as baayee bar kuute  
gamana as bayee jenan daa'iimaa qabdi ol  
gara galtee daa'ima fudhatee, qanaffa aadaa  
qabdi. Loon kiyya bira hin hafuu jette.  
Daa'immaaf siinqee akanumatti qabate  
waan bira hin fudhane loon fana qajeelte  
jedhaan bar jala akama sorree jedhe jedhan.  
Karraa kenneef jedhaan inni manatti figee  
wadeessa fi warana fudhaate, weeddeessa  
gaafa isi fudhee kan fudhatee fana bu'e  
gammana galte, siinqeen barkute bate  
jedhani himan.

When a husband lost his cattle, he crossed  
the ocean and came across to here. His  
wife, who had her *qanaffa* and her baby,  
said she would not survive there without  
her cattle. Holding her baby and her siinqee  
and nothing else, she instructed (her  
husband). He ran home to get his *wadeessa*  
and his *warana*; he took them. Then the  
story says that siinqee crossed the sea or  
ocean.

(Sinni Nabii, interview, April 12, 2011)

The idea that siinqee was created out of a body of water or that people crossed the water with siinqee corresponds to Oromo myths of origin of people and objects. Water is seen as the source of all life, so it is present in many myths, historic accounts and contemporary practices. River crossings and other bodies of water are also central to the myths related to the first movements of Oromo ancestors (humans, cows and other beings).

There are also other legends of origin for siinqee and ateetee. Hussein Endeessa stated that in some Arsi areas, siinqee and ateetee are said to have originated with customary law, which preceded the gadaa system (2011, 4). When I asked women about the origin of siinqee, many deferred to male elders. They told me that the elders know the story well and would be able to explain better. However, many add that siinqee have been passed down for generations from their mothers and grandmothers. Some of the women in the Nansabo district told me that siinqee descended from *Akkoo* Manooyyee

(Grandmother Manooyee).<sup>148</sup> Neither of these origin stories were confirmed by other Oromo in the area, so these versions could be specific to these particular locales or to these women's families.

## Creation of Siinqee

### *Selecting a spiritually significant and powerful tree source*

Before the actual “birth” or construction of siinqee, spiritually designated trees must be chosen. According to many of my interlocutors, for their weddings, their mothers or fathers purchase a siinqee from male merchants in the Nansabo district or other districts to the east in Bale. The merchants and/or makers specialize in cutting and crafting the wood.<sup>149</sup> Siinqee are classified as a type of *ulee* (stick) that is used for ritual.<sup>150</sup> As seen in the photos, siinqee can have different forms at the top, but they are all

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<sup>148</sup> According to Leus and Salvadori's dictionary of Borana Culture, under the entry “Qilee Manoyee,” this is the story of Akko Manoyee among the Borana Oromo: “According to legend, there was once a woman called Akko Manoyee who was a very powerful woman, wise and in charge of things. One day she killed a buffalo, and had all the honours of a hero, including buttering her hair. Since then all women butter their hair. She was so powerful that even the men were afraid of her and came to hate her. They dug a very deep pit (*qilee*) and covered it over, and when they were called for a meeting they put her, in her special chair, on top of the covered opening. She fell in the pit and died there.” When Arsi Oromo interlocutors spoke of this woman, they referred to her as a powerful woman, and some referred to her as the first holder of the siinqee. I have never heard this Borana legend from the Arsi, but I have also not inquired about her origins with elders.

<sup>149</sup> According to Kassam and Megerssa among the Borana Oromo, “When a man and a woman marry legitimately and within the bounds of custom and tradition in Oromo, new sticks are made for the couple by their respective fathers as a ‘symbol of the new twig ... about to start on the genealogical tree,’ as Bartels (1983:63) appropriately describes it” (Kassam and Megerssa 1996, 160). In some Arsi families, the fathers may craft the sticks, but most of my interlocutors talked to me about the merchants. They said that they would send a message to have a stick crafted by a specialist, then make an appointment to pick it up or have it delivered via friends, family or other merchants.

<sup>150</sup> *Ulee* is the overarching term for the different types of sticks that are made for different ceremonial, ritual and everyday functions. They are made from different types of trees, each of which are specific for the type of function the *ulee* will be used for. There are a number of different types of *ulee* in Oromo societies. For a detailed analysis of the different types of *ulee* and their uses in Borana society, see Kassam and Megerssa 1996.

made from blessed and culturally significant wood. Before siinqee is carved, specific trees must be chosen. As Kassam and Megerssa explain, wood is selected for its material, cultural, religious and historic qualities: “The significance attached to particular trees in the Oromo system of thought therefore predetermines part of the meaning of the objects fashioned from them. An object is not made only for its functional value, it is also made to situate man in cultural time and space and to enable him to communicate with the forces which flow through the life-giving trees of his land” (1996, 154). Many women from the highlands told me that siinqee must come from specific, spiritually significant trees called *harooressa* (white raisin or Malvaceae family)<sup>151</sup> or *daannissa* (pearwood)<sup>152</sup> (a variety of other trees are also used—usually with the caveat that they are the only type appropriate), The sticks, like people and cattle, are considered to have a genealogy. Kassam and Megerssa explain this connection in relation to the *harooressa* tree: “In the Oromo language, the words *hora*, a mineral source, Horo, the founder of all Horomo people, the *hororo* stick of a married man, *haro*, a pond in which cattle drink, and the *harooressa* tree are all conceptually linked and form a chain of symbolic and interconnected meanings” (Kassam and Megerssa 1996, 160).

Most of Kumsa’s informants claim that all types of Oromo sticks are made from the *harooressa* tree:

According to Megerssa, the name of this tree is a compound noun made of “hara” and “horeessa” (*hara* + *Horeessa* = *harooressa*). *Hara* means a body of water. In

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<sup>151</sup> This tree is *Grewia bicolor* or *G. Mollis*, “shrubby smallish trees that have tiny edible orange fruits” (Leus and Salvadori 2006, *Aadaa Borana. A Dictionary of Borana Culture*). *Grewia* genus is now usually categorized in the mallow plant family of Malvaceae. The wood is hard and elastic, so it is a good choice for walking sticks and spears.

<sup>152</sup> *Apodytes dimidiata* (pearwood): “the eponymous ritual sticks made from its straight branches, rather shorter than the normal walking stick” (Leus and Salvadori 2006 *Aadaa Borana. A Dictionary of Borana Culture*).

Oromo society, water is symbolically regarded as the source of all life. A *nama* (human being) deprived of *hara* is deprived of all the basic rights including the right to her/his life. *Hara-horeessa*, when traced to its roots in the traditional Oromo society, therefore, signifies the basic human rights to which an individual is entitled for as long as she/he lives.” (Kumsa 1997, 120–121)

As seen with this explanation, this tree, and thus the stick, is considered to guard and promote human rights for the lifetime of the individual who holds it. For *siinqee*, this guardianship of rights and the spiritual power *siinqee* holds and becomes are employed in the *ateetee* rituals. *Siinqee* has immense responsibility to enure these rights. Kassam and Megerssa also explain that the *siinqee*, as one of the Oromo ritual sticks, corresponds “to the most important stages in the life cycle of the individual: social achievement through marriage, renewal of the physical self through the birth of sons, and, later, withdrawal into the spiritual realm” (Kassam and Megerssa 1996, 160).

While many cultural workers and other scholars identify *harooressa* as the only culturally significant tree that could be used for *siinqee*, many of my interlocutors talked of the *daannissa* tree:

Siinqee kunii muka siinqeen jali muka.  
Muka oduu jedhantu muka addatti  
daannissa jedhama, muka bira muratanii  
siinqee ta’uu hin danda’uu karraa. Aanaa  
Naansaboo kanaa dhufaa.

This *siinqee* is from wood, beloved wooden *siinqee*. It is called wood, wood of the cultural *daannissa* (white pear/pearwood) tree; it is not possible to use another wood for *siinqee*. This (wood) comes from Nansabo region.  
(Shuru Koree, interview, April 16, 2011)

The reference to *daanisa* is also in verses of an *ateetee* song:

Siinqeen Daanisa  
Dubartiin Gaadiisa  
Rabbiitu Daaddiisa

*Siinqee* of (made from) *daanisa*  
Woman is shade/shelter  
God protects them  
(Verses from an *ateetee* song)

Through his observations and those of his informants, Oromo anthropologist and development worker Tolosa Mamuye explained why trees, such as *daannissa*, were preferred for the fabrication of siinqee:

According to Arabe Ibrahim (February 10, 2010), these trees are preferred for two reasons. First they have naturally straight and strong branches. These characteristics are preferred because siinqee can easily be made in a desired shape and thickness, and sticks made from these trees do not easily get cracked or broken. Second, these trees are locally classified as “muka falaa”—tree for rituals—such as rituals of good luck, health, fertility and others. Because of their ritual importance, these trees are accorded with some sacred qualities by the society. Consequently, these trees are not used for other material uses such as firewood, building house or fence construction. They mainly serve for siinqee, and other ritual purposes like birth rituals (for *qanaafa*, for instance) (Tolosa Mamuye, 41).<sup>153</sup>

And still other women have told me siinqee can only come from other types of trees such as *arabee* (*verprise dainelli*)<sup>154</sup>, *kaaroo* (*teclea pilosa*) or *baddeessa* (*syzygium guineense*).<sup>155</sup> The many times we discussed the trees that are used for siinqee, women were often adamant that it could only be made from one specific type of tree. During many conversations, such as the following with elders from Diikii and Adaba, respectively, women explained that the trees were chosen because God created them for this purpose.

LQ: Muka mali? Muka maqaan maali inni?	LQ: What type of wood? What is its name?
SG: Karroollee ta’ii, baddeessaa kani kannin irraa muranni karroo kanni nuuma gari guddaan korroma.	SG: This is called <i>kaaroo</i> , and this is cut from <i>baddeessaa</i> . Both are nice, large types of wood.
LQ: Karroo yokin baddeessaa kan bira ni dandeessa?	LQ: Is it possible to use other wood than <i>kaaroo</i> and <i>baddeessa</i> ?
SG: Hin danda’uu	SG: It’s not possible
LQ: Maalif? Maalif hin dadeenya barzaaffin fa’a?	LQ: Why? Why can’t we use eucalyptus?
SG: Hin toluu, ni baqaqaa. Isii qara mootti	SG: It is not good; it breaks. She (siinqee)

<sup>153</sup> Tolosa explains the symbolism of some of these trees. For instance, *Kaaroo* is associated with *kaayoo* which indicates good luck/omen or good spirit. *Daanisa* is symbolically associated with *gaadisa*, associated with shelter and protection. *Haroorea* is associated with *haroo* or water/wet which symbolizes fertility, prosperity and life” (Tolosa Mamuye 2010, 41).

<sup>154</sup> This is in the Rutaceae family.

<sup>155</sup> This is in the Myrtaceae family.

umme, isii mootti sanuma mukuma biratti umma, nama kana nama ta'eef umma Waaqaaf waan gahee qabuuf namni kaa dhaltu kaa sani.

was created by the lord (*mootti*). She was created from another tree. This person sat to create (*siinqee*). She was created (by God) with Waaqa's (God) honour. (*Siinqee*) is of women.

(Shunkaa Gababa, interview, April 13, 2011)

AB: Siinqeen muka arabee jedhanii, hirqammuu jedhanii, gatamee jedhanii, biyya dallootii karaa buuraatii bitamtee dhufiti.

AB: Siinqee is prepared from different trees like *Arabee*, *Hirqammuu*, *Gatamee*,<sup>156</sup> and it is purchased from *Dalloo* and *Buuraa* (*in Bale Zone*) and brought to us.

LQ: Maaliif muka biraa hin taane?

LQ: Why is it not prepared from another tree?

AB: Bareedaa fi aadaa durii sana kan muka rabbiin ganama isilaamaa kiristaanaa kennetti fayyadamuun gaarii jenne malee akka rakkinnaatti muka barbaadan siinqee godhuun ni danda'ama.

AB: It is for its beauty and traditional cultural belief and it is good if we prepare siinqee from the tree that God gave to both Muslims and Christians in the past. If there is a scarcity of trees, it is possible to prepare siinqee from any tree.

(Ashaa Batii, interview, October 30, 2010)

In spite of the cultural significance of all of these trees, I have seen women with bamboo (*leeman*) siinqee, general sticks (*ulee*), umbrellas, or nothing in their hands. There are often environmental, geographic and cultural variations that led to different trees being used for the spiritual sticks. As Ashaa Batii mentions above, when they do not have access to the specific wood or cannot afford them, they adapt to the situation. Bamboo, for example, is used in areas where it is abundant but other types of wood are not. When women carry umbrellas or nothing, it can also be due to economic problems or mainstream religious influences. A woman may not be able to afford the siinqee or she may not want to face disapproval or harassment from other religious practitioners in her

<sup>156</sup> This is *schefflera abyssinica* of the *Araliaceae* family.

family and community. Although some Arsi Oromo may frown upon women not carrying siinqee, I have never seen someone express disapproval to a woman carrying a bamboo siinqee, an umbrella, or nothing.

The reason I mention all of these different trees and some of the conversations around them is that I think it is indicative of how people make space to improvise, plan, adapt, challenge existing ideas and practices while building new meanings. In effect, the women's stories may reflect the "ideal" but not the actuality. Although many individuals may defend their one tree designation, it is possible for many meanings to coexist. These different trees can also coexist with the historic cultural model: the *harooreesa* tree in this case. Furthermore, I found that the idea of a single origin, though at times affirmed by specific populations, often neglects other origin stories.

As mentioned by Shuru (above), a majority of the women from different areas point to Nansabo region as the place where these spiritually significant trees grow and where the siinqee are made. The siinqee are bought by merchants who then transport them to other areas. East of Worqaa, the capital of the Nansabo district where I conducted extensive fieldwork, is the Hareenna Forest. It is a beautiful moist tropical forest—the largest one remaining in Ethiopia. I was able to travel through the forests and see all of the different types of woods. A recent study of satellite data and government documents from 1995 to 2011 reveals that the parts of the Hareenna Forest where I researched have decreased significantly, mainly due to migration to the area and the migrants' (and, increasingly, non-migrants') use of crop farming instead of pastoralism (Wakjira, Udine



and Crawford 2015).<sup>157</sup> These are important developments to take into account, not only due to the environmental impact of forest depletion and the disputes over remaining areas of forested land,<sup>158</sup> but also because of the potential for significant cultural losses. Many of these trees are seen as sacred and can be used to create cultural objects such as walking sticks, spears and food containers. Though many Arsi Oromo have adapted to changing surroundings by using other materials to create their cultural objects, in some cases Oromo completely abandon traditional material objects because the rapid change of the environment results in the loss or increased price of necessary materials. The missing material object potentially impacts cultural or ritual practices. However, the knowledge of the significance, power and respect of actions or sayings often overrides the need for the actual object.

### **Birth of Siinqee**

Many Arsi believe that God (Waaqa) gave siinqee power (*humna*) at its conception.

Ashaa Batii, an elder from Adaba, explains this power:

LQ: Ahaaree waaqa qabdi jechuudhaa siinqeen asirratti?

LQ: So, does it mean siinqee has a God?

AB: Ee baqqaa. Waaqa qabdi jechuudha; humna qabdi jechuudha.

AB: Definitely yes. It means siinqee has a God; it means it has power.

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<sup>157</sup> See the Wakjra, Udine and Crawford report for the International Institute for Sustainable Development (2015). Their study was conducted in the different parts of the Hareenna Forest which covers the area East of Worqaa and South of the Bale Mountain National Park.

<sup>158</sup> In the Nansabo region, some inhabitants of Riripa, a town at the edge of a large old-growth forest, were imprisoned because they were illegally cutting down trees from the protected forest. In the span of several months between two research trips in the area, I saw several patches of forest that had been burned and/or cut to prepare for illegal home settlement. The tension over the settlement of the protected land in this area has caused many disputes and bad feelings between settlers trying to find a way to support themselves in the region and the forestry division of the government that is trying to protect the land.

[...]

AB: Amma nullee rabbiin kadhannaa isinillee rabbiin kadhattanii irra caalaa nu waan rabbiin qabnuuf. Siinqeen kunillee kennama rabbiiti: kan nuuf kenname aadaa keenyaa, woraanillee aadaa keenya.

[...]

AB: Now we pray to God (*rabbi*); you also pray to God, but we stay close to him. This siinqee is also his gift: it is our culture that has been given to us.

(Ashaa Batii, interview, October 30, 2010)

Buldhaa Keroo, an elder from Dikki, further illustrates this connection between siinqee

and a higher power and/or spiritual essences:

LQ: Siinqeen tuunii human qabdii jettanii jirtanii durattii?

LQ: It has been said that siinqee has power?

BK: Eeyee.

BK: Yes.

LQ: Eessaa Keennameef?

LQ: Where is (this power) given?

BK: Ayyaanna qabdii.

BK: (She) has *ayyaanna* (guardian spirit/spiritual essence)<sup>159</sup>

LQ: Eessaa keennameef ayyanni suni?

LQ: Where does this *ayyaanna* come from?

BK: Ayyanii sunii gaafa barii kutee dhufte keen ameeff humna. Gaafa barrii sadi itti agamtee jennan jala bitaa mirgaa deebii'ee sanii gaafa san keennameef.

BK: This ayyaana was given when it was cut down. Three prongs (horns) are made. Rights came to her (siinqee) at this time.

LQ: Eenyuutu keennef?

LQ: Who gave these (spiritual power and rights)?

BK: Biyyatu keenneef ega siinqeen barrin kaa qara horii garbii dhumaa jiru jala dhooftte itti amantiinisii achii.

BK: The people gave it to siinqee. According to belief, this is at the time when the cattle crossed the body of water.

<sup>159</sup> *Ayyaana* is an extremely complex term and seems to be employed differently depending on the people, geographic area, and context. In general, I have found *ayyaana* can refer to different manifestations of the presence of Waaqa, such as the spirits of human or non-human ancestors. *Ayyaana* is often seen as a manifestation of Waaqa's presence, an immaterial reality that parallels our world. Megerssa explains that "the core meaning of ayyaana refers to that by and through which God (Waaqa) creates anything and everything" (2005, 69). The absence of life correlates to the absence of ayyaana: "The Oromo believe that Waaqa has created everything, be it human beings, rivers, mountains, and trees with their own *ayyaana* (guardian spirits). When water is not clear, when a tree is dry, or a certain thing or animal is dead, the Oromo believe that the *ayyaana* is not there" (Geda 2013, 174).

LQ: Biyyaatu keennef moo Waaqatu keenneef?

BK: Barriin jala dhahuu Waaqummatu goodheef.

LQ: Is it the people or God (Waaqa) who granted (siinqee's power)?

BK: The guardian spirit (power of this) was given to siinqee by God (Waaqa).

(Buldhaa Kerroo, interview, April 12, 2011)

Though Buldhaa speaks of both guardian spirits (*ayyaana*) and God-given power (*humna*), she recognizes the power that siinqee holds. To take this one step further, many interlocutors refer to siinqee as power. The blessed trees siinqee comes from have or are considered the same as power. That power is transferred when siinqee is cut from them. Born from this carving is a female being: siinqee. This entire process is seen as a creation of Waaqa (God). Above, Buldhaa references the origin story of siinqee crossing the water. The spirits (*ayyaana*) could be ancestors, or essences of the previous holders of siinqee. When the spiritually significant tree is cut into siinqee, though it is not yet blessed, the siinqee is already understood to have this spiritual power in its essence. This comes partly from the sacred tree but also partly from the act of creating siinqee. It is being created and born as a sacred object, from a tree that is only cut for religious purposes.

### *Construction and Beautification*

Siinqee can be made as a single straight stick or there can be two, three or four natural prongs on the top. Women often explain these differences as personal preferences or sometimes as chance, dependent on what they find at the market. What I found is that siinqee structures and descriptions and explanations of siinqee holders and purchasers varied depending on the locations and the individuals. In his thesis, Tolosa Mamuye

argued that although one of the senior Tourism Office cultural experts, Bonsamo Mieso, claimed that “siinqee’s structure may vary from place to place,” some siinqee with branches at the top and others without, he had found that the numbers of branches had distinct value for the Arsi Oromo. As he explains, “The three branches at the top of siinqee are found to have a fundamental symbolic value and expression among the Arsii Oromo. One of my informants, Birka Wallu (February 12, 2010), maintains that the three branches at the top of siinqee symbolically represent the three major components of the family: the husband, the wife and their children. So, siinqee symbolically represents not only a woman but also the entire family. As a single stick, it symbolizes the family’s unity as a united entity; with three branches, it depicts the structural components of the family unit” (Tolosa Mamuye, 39-40). I have never encountered an explanation such as this one and would be wary of the generalization that the branches have this fundamental symbolic value and expression among the Arsi Oromo. Although this may be the symbolism for the informant Birka, twenty other informants may have other explanations for the variations. I cited this example to show how each individual can have a noteworthy explanation but how generalizations can be dangerous, due to all the individual and regional variations.





Sinii Nabi with her siinqee



Ganame and friends, Gutuu, April 2011.



Ruffoo and Bujjaa, Cicco, April 2011





Shuru Koree and her mother, Dikki Horaa, April 2011



Tafo Tayiro, Dikki Horaa, April 2011



Buldhaa Keroo, Dikki, April 2011



Sometimes women decorate the top of the siinquee with bullet cartridges to make them more beautiful. Bujjaa, an elder from the Ciicoo area, explained the selection process to me, starting with the type of wood chosen, the location of the wood, where women and men purchase it, and the way they decorate it:

LQ: Maaliif mukni kuni hin tame ammaa barzaaffin kaa bira?

B: Hin ta'u, mukni bira hin ta'u, muka baasutu jira, muka siinquee. Tanaa daraaruutu jira, mukaa siinquee tana basuutu jira. Gaba bitan, biyyaa gammoojjiitti dhuffaa. Worqa dhufaa, kunoo biyyaa biroottii dhufa, achi bitanaa. Bitanni intalan heruumsisani akkassitti kunoo sooqani bitan yoo durba heerumsisuu, gahani isii sooqanni, biyyaa kunoo worqaa dhaqanni, biyyaa biroo junoo gammoojji laga dhaqannii, isii sooqanni isii bitanni achi galaniini. Achi galaninii midhaagsaani kunoo qalawwi gubbaatti dachaassanni itti goodhaanni gaafa gadi baasani intalaa gadi baasanni kunoo. Illaa kuni waan biratti xiyyitti kena itti goodhana illa kana.

LQ: Maaliif itti goodhaani?

B: Haa baareeduuf, haa miishooftuuf, bareedaaf.

LQ: Why don't you use this wood (pointing to a tree), eucalyptus or another wood (for siinquee)?

B: It isn't possible to use another wood; there is wood from which she grows, siinquee wood. This wood blossoms the siinquee itself. We buy (her – siinquee) at the market; she comes from the lowlands. (She) comes from Worqa,<sup>160</sup> from another area where we buy her. We look for her when we are marrying our daughters. When girls are marrying, we go looking for her (siinquee) in the area of Worqa, as she comes from the lowlands near the river. Then we buy her there and come back. After bringing her back, the elders beautify her by putting decorations like bullet cartridges on it and then the bride takes (her) out. Look, on this one they decorated the top.

LQ: Why do you decorate it?

B: So as to beautify (her), to make (her) good and beautiful.

(Bujjaa Badhee, April 14, 2011)

### **Beginning of Siinquee's life: a woman's wedding day**

Traditionally, when a family is preparing for a young woman's wedding, the bride's mother (or sometimes another relative) will travel to a market to purchase the siinquee. Alternatively, a male member of the bride's family can purchase it/her. The

<sup>160</sup> Worqa is a town and the capital of the Nansabo district.

siinqee is blessed by the bride's family and elders. On the day of the wedding, the bride's mother (in most cases) gives her siinqee and other materials such as *callee* (beaded necklaces), *bonkoo* (leather cape), *booratti* (head rest for sleeping), and *hanfala* (leather belt for women).<sup>161</sup> The siinqee and *booratti* are given just before she leaves her home, after a blessing ceremony. In this ritual, the bride's mother faces her daughter, uncovers her marriage veil and blesses her by spitting milk on her. The milk, like butter, is from a milk-producing cow. It symbolizes fertility and prosperity. As the bride and groom leave the house, the mother and/or father of the bride gives the groom the siinqee.<sup>162</sup> The groom is also given a legally and spiritually significant stick, called *waaddeessa*. Then when the bride and groom arrive at the groom's home, the groom gives the bride the siinqee and *booratti* before she enters his home.

The discussions below describe this process of purchasing the siinqee, giving it/her to the bride on her wedding day, and how the groom carries it/her to their new home. This is the beginning of siinqee's life cycle. She is an active participant in the wedding pact between the couple, their families and the clan. In the discussions below,

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<sup>161</sup> Hanfaala is a leather belt Arsi women wear on their wedding day and afterwards for ateetee prayers. The following is part of the description in the Leus and Salvadori Borana dictionary under the spelling *hanfaalaa*: "cowhide belt worn by women and girls [...] it must be cut from the hide of an animal sacrificed for a ceremony [...] normally the belt is worn only in the day, but after a woman has given birth, she wears it also at night for the whole period of ulma." When women go to pray at the river, they lay the belt down in front of them and sing prayers "so God will give (them) rain" (Sini Nabii, interview, April 12, 2011). The following are some of the prayers: *Hanfaalaa teba, jetti rabbiyyoo kadhaadha, an falaf deema* (Hanfaala, a hide, we say, we pray to God as we go to group prayers) (Ibid.).

<sup>162</sup> Most of my interlocutors told me that their mother prepared all of these items for their wedding. In the weddings I attended, the mother gave these items to the bride and either the father or both mother and father gave the siinqee and *boratti* to the groom as the couple left the bridal home. However, some interlocutors are divided on the identity of the gift-giver. This ambiguity is also what Daniel Deressa found in his research in the Dodola area, near my research sites (2002). Gemechu Megerssa has talked about the symbolism of the mother giving the siinqee to her daughter, each holding one end of the siinqee in a blessing ceremony (Kumsa 1997, 121-22). This approach may be practiced in some areas, but I have not seen siinqee handed over in this fashion.



one may wonder why I was asking women who the siinqee belongs to, when it holds so much significance and power for women and is given to women on their wedding days. Many women with whom I spoke would say siinqee belonged to women, to men, or they would vacillate between the two answers. Siinqee does belong to women and it represents their respect and power, but it is also a symbol of their womanhood, a status affirmed by their marriage to a man. Within each household, the material object stands as an agreement between a woman and her husband: he will show her and her siinqee the utmost respect. The following excerpts are taken from three different interviews with women who actively practice ateetee, have siinqee and are currently living in different parts of the Kokkossa district.

LQ: Akka seeraatti, siinqeen dhiiraaf moo kan dubarttitti?

SK: Dubbarttif, kan dubarttitti. Warana dubarttitti, isiin waarana dubbartti. Oduu taatuu gaafa fuudha heeruuma abbaa manatti keennatte gaafa fuudhee heeruuma, abbaa manatti keennatte gaafa fuudhee galuu isummatu qabate gala waarana ofii waalin. Qabatee galee yoo galeenni balbalatti itti kennaa isi mana ofiitin gaayee ka'e siinqee tana yoo itti kennee. Siinqee tana fuudhate mana seenti, siinqee fi booratti tana fuudhatee.

LQ: Isatu itti keennata jechuudha?

SK: Ee, inni ammaa isiinii giize gadii baatu isatti keennatti, isin yoo isatti keennate, inni amma hati itti keennitte, isin haadha waliin yoo balbala gadi bate; inni abbaan mana dhufe akanuma qophaa'ee ka'e kan isi fudhu suni kan isiin itti heeruuma jirtuu; yoo siinqee kana irraa fuudhee ammaa siinqee kana inni qabattetumaan galan baqa.

Guuchumee tolaf yookaan goodanyaa

LQ: According to culture, is siinqee for men or women?

SK: For women, [she] belongs to women. The spear of women, she is the spear of women. On the wedding day, [siinqee] is given to the husband to carry with his spear. With those in hand, when they've returned, in front of the door to his house, he gives [siinqee] to her. She takes the siinqee and goes into her [new] house; she takes her siinqee and booratti.

LQ: So it is he who gives [the siinqee] to her?

SK: Yes, when he's in front of her house, he is given [siinqee and booratii]. Now she has been given to him, he leaves the house with his wife and he has now become her husband and now is ready to take her and be [officially] married. When they are married by siinqee he then holds onto the siinqee until they return to his house.

ofittitti keennate inni siinqee fi warana ofii waliin waadeessa waliin, garanbaa waliin akka nummatti qabate gala.

LQ: Fudhu isallee maaliin beekama?

SK: Siinqee tanan kaa raasaa laaluullee illaa kaa fudhuu sanii kunoo siinqee harka qaba jechaanii bifa sanin beekama. Kana yoo balbala gaayee, baqa isii aanaan itti tuufaani. Mana akka aadaa keenyaattitti seensiisani isii siinqee tanan booratti tana ammaa isitti kenna fudhee. Isiin siinqeef booratti sana fudhate mana qarayyuu qabannii seensiisaanii baqa afaan golattitti sooddatti haadha isatti keennate katte gola lufte gadiciiftii.

She gives the *guchumaa* [milk container] to her companion or a friend and he (her husband), himself, carries the siinqee and the spear with waadeessa, and *garanba* leaves. He comes home carrying these.

LQ: How do we know he married?

SK: By looking at the siinqee (and other items) in his hand; he is known that way. When he reaches the door to his house, they (women) spit milk on him. In our cultural way, they enter the house and he gives her the siinqee and booratti. Inside the house, he never holds the siinqee and booratti; they enter and the mother of the groom is given the siinqee and booratti and the bride is shown the gola (sleeping place) to rest.

(Shuru Koree, interview, April 16, 2011)

Sinni Nabii also confirms that siinqee can only be held by a woman's husband on their wedding day:

LQ: Siinqee kaa eenyuu? Siinqee kan eenyuutti, kan dhiratti moo kaa dubartitti?

SN: Kaa dhiratti ni qabatetti ittin folatti malee taa dhiratti gaafa isii gurgurraan siinqee keennannif kaa siinqee fi booratti, walitti qabani keennaniif booratti isi boorafatu fudhatte lixan. Siinqeen waan isaatti.

LQ: Maalif qabatarree kaa dhiraa ega ta'e maalif inni hin qabanee?

SN: Qabate gaafar fudhe galaami ammaa aadaatu kawwoo qarra dubbarti sin dubbarti dhalate. Mallattoo isatti innillee akka fudhee gaafana arguumaf qabata; inni gaafa fudhuu malee gaafa bira hin qabatu. Aadaa irraa hin qabuu inni gaafumma fudhaa san aadaa qaba siinqee gaafar

LQ: To whom does siinqee belong? Is it the man's or the woman's (the husband's or the wife's)?

SN: During the wedding day, the husband carries it. He has it on the day of the wedding (lit. when she is sold—*gurgurraan*). He carries siinqee and booratti and leaves with these. Siinqee is his.

LQ: Why doesn't he always carry it?

SN: He has it on the wedding day, but siinqee is born for women. It is a symbol that he got married. He only carries it on his wedding day. He cannot carry it on other days, as that is not part of the culture. He only has it on the wedding day and carries it as they come home. He brings it

qabate galan inni. Qabate galee golga isi  
urge isin ciftuu duuba kayyee fi dhisa.

into the sleeping space in his house, where  
he then places it/her.

(Sinni Nabi, interview, April 12, 2011)

In Arsi society, the wedding day is also when a girl is considered to make a transition into womanhood. In this sense, marriage can be seen as the birth of the bride as a woman and the birth of the *siinqee*. In the comment above, Sinni even states that *siinqee* is born on this day. The bride receives her rights as a married woman through *siinqee*, but *siinqee* also gains her status. As mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, at least traditionally it was rare for a woman not to marry. However, if she did not marry, once past an eligible age of marriage (this varied historically and even varies today depending on the families and the areas) she would eventually be considered a woman. She would not, however, have a *siinqee* because she had never married. Though she could attend *ateetee* ceremonies, without *siinqee*, this leaves the question of whether an unmarried woman really has the same rights as other women. In a society where marriage is more or less imposed (where young women usually do not choose their partners, though this is changing) and women's rights are associated with marriage and *siinqee*, what place is there for a woman who is not married and does not have *siinqee*? Though there is no easy answer to this question, values and norms in Arsi society are changing and so will statuses and rights associated with different rites of passage, such as marriage.

On her wedding day, the bride also receives her rights in her husband's clan with what is called a *rakko* ceremony:

LQ: *Siinqeen tuni taa eenyuutti ammaa?*  
BB: *Taa gaanyaatti ... taa beerratti. Siinqee taana haadhatu bita taa intala gurgurttuu gaba dhaaqxee sooqee biiti.*

LQ: Who does this *siinqee* belong to now?  
BB: For women ... for women. This *siinqee* is bought by a daughter's mother at the market before her daughter marries.

LQ: Akka ummaa isiittitti siinqeen taa dhiratti moo kaa dubarttitti?

BB: Taa dubbarttitti, tiyyaa ammaa. Ee, gaafa du'a taa issaatti ammo. Ammaa zamana durii taa isatti siinqee tana isaaf cabsan gaafa inni du'e. Zamana kana kuni hin jiruu. Booratti gaafa isin itti keennitee sanifi siinqeen tuuni isa bira hin haftuu gaafa inni du'e isaaf darbaanni.

LQ: Kaa isatti jechuudha kaa?

BB: Kaa isatti ee. Kaa isatti gaafa inni du'e; gaafa har'a fuudhate, illaa ammaa gaafa fuudhate waaddeessaa taa isaa waalin gaafa fuudhate, akana inni ammaa gurbaan suni fakkeenyaaf kunoo harkatti qabate fardaa yaabate lixa, inni gaafa fardaa yaabate lixe, galleenni. Baqa kunoo yoo fardaa irraa bu'e siinqee isiitti deebisanni, fuudhate seenti manan seentii. Siinqee isi fuudhanni gola kayyaanni ammaa inni waaddeessaa mata isi garraa kayyaa. Mata isi garraa yoo kaayyee jedhee waaddeessi kaa isatti. Ganamaa yoo raakoo qaluu, ganamaa rakkoo, dhaadhaa mata irraa ka'anni yoo gadii naa baasanni dhaadhaa mata irraa naa ka'anni gadi baasannitti, siinqee kana harkatti naa qabachisanii, aanaan elamtuu, harkan naa qabachissanni sa'a elmee isa waalin taa isa ta'a rakkoo qaladhe ammaa. Ammaa inni waaddeessaa sani urge isin hanqifte xiqqoo. Ammaa waaddeessaa sanin dhaaqe dhigaan tuqe ka'e fideettin akana goodhee rakkoo rakadhu jedhe tuqan aadaan teenya taa duri. Aadaan teenya akkassii. Rakkoo jechun waa shikoo tuqanin santu rakkisa kunnoo gaanyaa keenyaa, ammaa deebi'e mooraa hoolaa san fudhee harma irraa ha'aa, harma irraa ka'a. Nama ilmattitu ka'a sannillee kaa mooraa hidhu jedhaan kaa ilmaa kaa biraa goodhanni. Mooraa hidhaa suni ilma

LQ: According to creation/nature, does siinqee belong to men or to women?

BB: For women; it is mine now. Yes, in the past it was for him (her husband) and was to be broken for him on the day he died. Now this no longer exists.<sup>163</sup> She gives him the booratti and the siinqee is not left with him. On the day he dies, it is thrown out for him.

LQ: Is siinqee for him then?

BB: Yes it is his. It is his on the day he dies; on the day he marries, see when he marries, he has it (siinqee) and *waaddeessa* (short stick), like, for example, that boy leaves carrying (the sticks) in his hand riding on horseback; he leaves for his home. When he gets down from the horse, he gives her the siinqee, which she takes then goes in (his) house. (The other women) take the siinqee from her and put it in the sleeping place with the *waaddeessaa* behind her head. Placed behind her head, the *waaddeessa* belongs to him. In the morning, when they kill the sheep, the rakkoo of the morning, (elders) put butter on his or her hair, she holds the siinqee in her hand, she milks the cow, then she comes to sit with him to slay rakkoo.

Then he touches the blood with the *waaddeessa* and brings it to me, doing like this [she demonstrates] saying *rakko-rakkadhuu*, as from the past in our culture. This is our culture. Rakkoo means the blood that he puts with *waddessa* on her ties things (unites the two). [...]

<sup>163</sup> Other women have told me stories of people breaking siinqee on the graves of their husbands, emphasizing that it is still customary practice. I think this may vary depending on the individuals and the areas.

mooraatti jedhaani.

(Bujjaa Badhee, interview, April 12, 2011)

The *rakko* or *rakko qallu* ceremony Bujjaa describes above is part of gadaa law that has been passed down and used for generations. It is what seals the marriage legally between the couple, the families and the clans. Since divorce did not traditionally exist and is still limited today, this ceremony is very difficult to undo (Hebo 2006, Hebo and Shigeta 2014). The *rakko* ceremony usually takes place inside the sleeping room of the groom's house after the couple has consummated the marriage and it involves slaughtering a cow or sometimes a goat and spreading the blood on the bride's forehead. In the *rakko*, the bride is blessed and given all her rights as a wife and woman in her husband's clan. With her *siinqee* in hand, this ceremony is seen as an essential part of her marital, clan and societal rights. The blood on her forehead marks the fact that she has become part of the clan she has joined by marriage (2002, 46).

As Ashaa Baati explains, *siinqee* is essential for a wedding, but there are changes that are resulting in its declining use:

LQ: Aadaan ateetee *siinqee* woliin maaliin wolqabata?

AB: Uumaa isiitituu kennama *siinqee* san rabbi kenneffii dubartiin duraanii sun akkayoon teenna qabatte. Worroonni duraanii sun akka kennama rabbiitti qabatani *siinqee* san. Yeroo intala gurguranillee intala *siinqee* hin qabne, ilma wodgeessa hin qabanne intalaa itti hin gurgurru hin dhoogganna.

LQ: Amma fakeeynaaf achirratti jechuudhaa dubartiin *siinqee* malee gurguramte maalii miidhaan isii irra gayu jiraa?

LQ: How are the cultures of ateetee and *siinqee* interwoven?

AB: Because of the nature of ateetee, *Rabbi* (God) gave her (*siinqee*) to our grandmothers from the beginning of creation and they hold it. Our ancestors hold *siinqee* as the gift of God. Thus, during the marriage ceremony no groom will marry a bride without *siinqee* and no bride will get married to the groom without *wodgeessaa*.

LQ: In relation to that, is it a problem if a woman gets married without *siinqee*?

AB: Miidhaan irra gayu hin jiruu garuu aadaa keennaa miti; uumaa keennaa miti jedhan malee. Ka akkasiin amma worri shariyaa ka akkasiin fuudhulle ni jira: Woddeessa maleellee siinqee maleellee. Innille woddeessa qabatee dhufa. Isiinille siinqee yeroo dhaamatan sana siinqee fi madaala wolbira baasanii itti kennan yeroo dhaamatan.

LQ: Aadaa oromoo keessatti dubartiin siinqee malee hin gurguramtu jechuu dha?

AB: Hin gurguramtu. Amma shariyaa kanatti ka irkifatan haga shariyaa kana jedhan. Siinqeellee yoo gad baasan inni fuudhuu hin dida; madaala callaa fudhata. Siinqee hin fudhatu.

AB: There is no harm that would happen to her, but it is not our culture; it is not our nature. However, now there are *Shariyaa* people who practice marriage without siinqee and *woddeessaa*. (Normally) he (the groom) comes up holding *woddeessaa*. She (the bride) is also given siinqee and *madaala*<sup>164</sup> at the time of *dhaamataa*.<sup>165</sup>

LQ: So, according to Oromo culture, does it mean women never get married without siinqee?

AB: She will not get married. Those who rely on *Shariyaa* stopped practising it recently: when he is given siinqee, the groom has refused to hold it; he takes only *madaala*. He never holds siinqee.

(Ashaa Batii, interview, October 30, 2010)

Though some customs are changing, particularly in urban contexts, siinqee and rakko are still part of marriages in the countryside. I have also attended a few weddings of couples who are living in urban centres but who travelled back to their rural homes to have a traditional wedding ceremony. There is much variability depending on the locations and the religions of the families. For mainstream religions, though *rakko* is still often performed, siinqee is not usually a part of the ceremony.

### **Life of siinqee: ceremonies, rituals and regeneration; blessing and cursing**

<sup>164</sup> This is a milk recipient woven from fibres. It is like the *ciicoo*, another milkpot.

<sup>165</sup> *Dhamata* (lit. life giving) or *gunguma* is the part of the wedding ceremony when the father and relatives of the bride officially speak about giving her to the groom and the groom's clan.

Siinqee, like the women that carry them, have a full life cycle that includes attending and participating in ceremonies and physically acting to bless and curse. Women who have siinqee carry them to most ceremonies and rituals with the exception of funerals. Siinqee is thus associated with activities of life but not death (Kumsa 1997, 123; personal communications). Some people associate this connection between siinqee and life with the symbolism and origins of the different types of wood from which siinqee is constructed (Ibid.). In the same manner, women are spiritually connected with life-giving activities in Arsi Oromo culture (Ibid.). These activities include, but are not limited to, prayers for fertility, rain, and dispute resolution.<sup>166</sup> Siinqee stand by their female human partners for all of these ceremonies, assisting them in their communication with Waaqa and being the power the women need to achieve the results they desire.

As seen in many of the examples of ateetee ceremonies, the presence of women and their siinqee are necessary for the commencement of rituals and ceremonies. In ateetee *fala* (prayers for rain) and *ciidha* gadaa (gadaa ceremony transferring power), for example, women sing ateetee prayers as they go to the river, stream, or lake. They then lay their siinqee down on the edge of the water with ritual mud (*qarruu*)<sup>167</sup> and grass (*sardoo*). Ritual mud is said to bring prosperity and good fortune. It can be rubbed on the faces of the participants as blessings and prayers. Green grass in all Arsi rituals is a sign of fertility and production; the cattle eat the grass then produce the milk that people drink.

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<sup>166</sup> This spiritual bond between womanhood and life (and fertility) is not a new concept. It has been discussed by many scholars of religion, in general, and with references to indigenous cultures throughout the world (see, for example, Hodgson 2005, Jones 1993, Llewelyn-Davies 1985, Okereke 1994, Schwartz 2012, Stobart 2008).

<sup>167</sup> *Qarruu* is, literally, the cream of the milk, or the top layer and best part of something. In Arsi highlands, many women used this word to refer to ritual mud from the stream, river or lake that is blessed and can bring prosperity and good fortune to the holders of the siinqee, those participating in the ritual, and those blessed by the participants. *Dhoqee* is the general word for mud.

The siinqee, mud, grass and water are part of a prayer for good fortune and blessings from God (personal communications). What is noteworthy in relation to siinqee is that, traditionally, these rituals and ceremonies cannot take place without women with siinqee. Women and their siinqee transfer the blessing from Waaqa (God) that allows the ceremony to proceed.<sup>168</sup>



Women placing their siinqee on the stream bank in an ateetee fala ceremony.

Siinqee are used in all ateetee processes. My interlocutors have said they are part of what helps to bring a good result to the process. Women's power is given divinely, but it is also physically present with siinqee; siinqee is a physical symbol but it also is actual

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<sup>168</sup> Tolosa Mamuye's focus group participants also emphasized this (2011).



power that can bring blessings and curses. Women are more respected and feared when they are carrying *siinquee*. Many Arsi men told me that they fear *siinquee* and show respect by staying out of its path when a woman is holding it and walking with it. No matter who crosses *siinquee* and women who are going out for *ateetee*, they must stop and throw grass (*sardoo*) as a sign of respect and greeting (personal communications). Furthermore, *siinquee* can be used to come between people fighting. There are historical accounts of women going to the battlefield to stop the fighting with their *siinquee* in hand. Because the *siinquee* and the women are so respected and hold this power, the two fighting sides are obliged to stop. Today there are accounts of women immediately breaking up fights with or without their *siinquee* in hand (in the latter case the power to stop the fight is held by the woman).<sup>169</sup>

In many conversations, women often talked about the respect (*kabajaa*) held by *siinquee*. As they explained, when they walk in the street with their *siinquee*, they are supposed to receive the utmost respect. If someone insults a woman while she is carrying her *siinquee*, this is seen as a great insult, immediately necessitating an *ateetee* ceremony. If someone insults the *siinquee* itself, or harms it (her) in any way, it is as if s/he has insulted the woman carrying the *siinquee*. I have heard several accounts from women who participated in *ateetee* ceremonies after another person had insulted their *siinquee* or their ceremonial dress. In this passage, Bujjaa explains the respect that needs to be given to *siinquee*:

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<sup>169</sup> In her thesis, Marit Østebø gives an account of women breaking up a fight between two men without their *siinquee* : The women were still given respect and the two fighting parties had to stop (2007, 62).

BB: Siinqee kanana nuu salfaataa kaa nuu salfatuullee. Amma yoo harka qabannee ani takkatti yoo asi kaa'e Kokkoosa dhaqe noor, noor jedhanii siinqee tiyya. Siinqee tiyyaa waan aloo durii taateef kabaja qabdin isin illaa ammaa osoo illillifate katamaa ol qajeelee kaatamaan muluu soor nuu jala jetti nuu afoo hin dhabatanni gaafa siinqee harkatti qabanne. Noor jetti ni soodatti. Ammaa yoo illa takkatti tana qabadhe kunoo takkatti tana yoon qabadhee deemee naa kabajan kabajaa qaba, kajamtuudha. Isiirratti siinqee tiyyaa irratti kabajamtuu. Aadaa meeshaa kiiyyaa uffadhee ammaa meeshaa kanaani ni kabajamna. Ammaa nuu meeshaa keenyaa kanaana kabajaa qabna. Aloo durii irraa jirtii aloo qabna aloo teenyaa nuu kabajaan siinqeen tuni kabajamtuu waan illaa aloo amba keessaa jirtuuf siinqeen tiyyaa kabajamtuu. Aloo ambaa hin dhiisin jedhaan sanif haggaa ammaa illaa kabajaa qabdi yoo biroollee dhaqxu kabajamtuudha. Warri aloo amba sana beeku. Siinqeen tunii baate duuwaa hin deebiitu, duuwaa akananii hin dhiisanni, hin deebiitu itti qalana malee siinqeen duuwaa hin deebiitu yoo baatee jette, siinqeen duuwaa googeetti hin galtuu jedhaani.

BB: We are not shy to have siinqee; it is an honour to carry it. When I go to Kokkossa with it in my hand, people say welcome, welcome (and give my siinqee respect). Siinqee has descended from the past with honour. If we go to town ululating (for an ateetee ceremony), with siinqee in our hands, people will leave the road, making way for us. They are afraid and welcome us (they leave the road to us). Now even if I go alone with my siinqee in hand, they respect me; I am given a great amount of respect. Furthermore, my siinqee, herself, has respect. With this siinqee I will have respect (*kabajaa*). I wear my cultural clothes and have my cultural materials that have respect. This siinqee (*kabajaa*) is respected and is in line with norms passed down to us. Siinqee has respect. We cannot disregard the ancient norms of our people. Where siinqee goes it is respected. It is said that if siinqee leaves its house, it must not return without benefits; it cannot return with nothing; it cannot return without the slaying (of a cow). When it is carried out it cannot return without *meexichaa* they say.

(Bujja Badhee, interview, April 14, 2011)

Siinqee's respect is transferable to women. Even if they do not hold siinqee—which is often the case in today's changing social contexts—moral and ethical codes and cultural ways of knowing remain. Understanding siinqee's different ways of existing through Arsi interlocutors' words and actions also leads to understandings of Arsi women's perspectives in their culture. For women, just like siinqee, the respect is in their beings:

Namni kabajaa dhaa; namni kamuu kabajaa isaatiin akka guddatee mudhatu.

People are respect; the entire make up of people is the respect that they take in as

they are growing up.

(Amariich Shubee, interview, October 30, 2010)

As can be seen in the accounts above, respect (*kabajaa*) can be interpreted as the moral makeup of an individual, and, by consequence, failing to honour it is a moral and ethical violation (*safuu*). Just as people grow up learning from their parents and the community what is right and wrong, they also learn to show respect to others. *Ulfina* (honour) is another concept that many Oromo use in conjunction with respect. To honour an elder or *siinqee*, for example, is to show him/her the highest respect. In many discussions and interviews, women focused on this notion of *kabajaa*, respect. According to the women and many of the men, *ateetee* and *siinqee* is a way of maintaining respect for women. The ceremony is a reminder to all members of society that there are consequences if due respect is not given to them. If the respect of one woman or a group of women is violated, both are seen as offenses against women in general. Women can and will gather with their *siinqee*, discuss the issue, and, if it's deemed necessary, perform a public ceremony to remind and teach the public of all ages about their respect and rights.

As seen through these examples, *siinqee* are given the same rights and respect as the women. They can even be used to represent the *ateetee* women. One example of this is when women need to make an appointment for an *ateetee* ceremony. When I was staying with my friend, Shuru, in the Dikki area of the Kokossa district, several *ateetee* ceremonies had taken place and more were being organized to take place in the future. One day we went to visit the home of one of the appointments. As pictured in the photo below, the women's *siinqee* were all attached to the central post in the house, waiting for

the appointment day. When they are left like that, they ensure that the ateetee will take place soon. Unlike the ateetee women, siinqee in their material form can stay for days attached to the post, ensuring that women's respect and honour prevail. They can also create fear for the offender. They serve as a constant reminder to the offender of the wrong s/he committed and the urgency to obtain the cow and food for the ceremony.



Shuru standing next to the siinqee waiting in the offender's home for an ateetee appointment.

Part of siinqee's life cycle includes cycles of blessing. At the end of each ateetee ceremony—whether prayers for rain or a dispute resolution process—siinqee are often a major part of the process. I previously discussed the blessings with siinqee at the

beginning of the ceremony, but there are also blessings at the end of the ceremony.

Women give grass (*sardoo*) to the participants (and to the offender if it is part of a dispute resolution ceremony). The siinqee also participate in the blessing ceremony. The women say or sing blessings while the siinqee touch the arms of the elders and the offender.



Women blessing men at the end of an ateetee ceremony.

A difficult part of siinqee's life is when she must be used for harm. If an offender does not comply and will not cooperate with the women holding siinqee, they can choose to curse him/her. Cursing was discussed in chapter 3, but I mention it here as part of the lifecycle. Most women told me that cursing was rare, but most women also had real examples of cursing in which they had participated. Without siinqee, they told me, cursing was not possible. The siinqee has the needed force to realize the curse. When

siinqee is used for cursing, the prongs are turned down towards the ground, as in the description below:

LQ: Yeroo abarssaa siinqee barbaachissuu?

SK: Siinqee barbaachissa ee. Siinqee googeetti jenne.  
 Siinqee *googeetti*  
*Loolaa bobeetti*  
 jenne. Akka duratti namichi qeenfate cooqoon jedu saniitti. Akkassin baqa warranni keenyaa waan siinqee ta'eef, warrana keenya kana akkana goonee baqa yoo akki innillee nuu qaluu diidee jenne. Siinqee keenya kana goombiifne mata isii muulu isii siinqee dubbarttiin qabatte kana mulu mata isii mure. Lafatti goombifne lafa dhiiha ilaalchiifne amma. Adduun tuni garanan seenti mii akkassitti baqa abboo sii goombifne goombiifami amba keessa jenne baqa illillii illiillii jennee. Ammaa akkassiin malka dhaqne malka jala siinqee keenya kana dibamnee jii fanee. Akkassin baqa siinqee kana miicane kannee galaa. Akka kannaa isa abbarree kannee.

LQ: Is siinqee necessary for cursing?

SK: Yes, it is necessary. We call it the dry siinqee.  
 (Singing) *A dry siinqee, it burns to quarrel*  
 This is what was said when preparing for quarrelling; it is turned upside down. But our spear (weapon) is siinqee. Our spear is siinqee. Siinqee is our spear. This is what happens when he will not slaughter an animal for us. We turn down our siinqee. We cut the tips off of all the women's siinqee. We turn down the siinqee and turn its face to the West and we ululate. We turn down the siinqee and we say, "Let you be upside down." And we say *illiilii illiilii* (ululations). Then we go to the river and we put our siinqee in the river and wash them. After that we go back to our homes after cursing him.

(Shuru Koree, interview, April 16, 2011)

### Regeneration of Power

As Shuru describes, after cursing siinqee needs to be cleaned. This process of cleaning it in the river, a significant source of creation and life, regenerates its power and its ability to bless. As a siinqee lives, attends ceremonies and gets older, she needs this regeneration. In blessing ceremonies and prayers for rain, siinqee are bathed in water (*bishaan*), grass (*sardoo*) and mud (*qaruu*).





Siinqee receiving meexichaa at an ateetee *fala* ceremony, Gutuu, April 2011



Covering siinqee with *meexichaa* at an ateetee ceremony.

In the lifecycle of siinqee, in addition to blessing her with water, there are other ways to regenerate power. As seen in the photos, siinqee are often covered with pieces of cowhide called *meexichaa*. Sometimes, instead of *meexichaa*, women cover their siinqee with grass they have blessed by the river (called *sardoo*). This is practiced at some spiritual ceremonies, in areas where women do not have *meexichaa*, or sometimes by women who have lost their pieces of cowhide.<sup>170</sup>

LQ: Siinqee kaa erbee kuni maali kan mulata jiru?

SN: Erbiin ka qalanni qara itti dachafne.

LQ: Maali dha maqaan isa?

SN: Erbin ii meexicha

LQ: Maaliif as irratti goodhamuun barbaachiise?

SN: Fala gaafa falone galuu akasumaan itti goodhana bifa bifumaan yoo lamallee qalani yoo sadillee qalanee afurrillee qalane bifa bifa saniin itti goodhana.

LQ: What is this on the siinqee, the hide on it?

SN: It is the hide of the animal killed (for the ateetee ceremony) that is folded on there.

LQ: What is it called?

SN: Hide, uh, *meexichaa*

LQ: Why is it necessary to put (the hide) on (siinqee)?

SN: We ask for (*meexichaa*) at the prayer ceremonies we attend, and this is how we get the different types (of *meexichaa*); if two cows have been killed, three killed, four killed, then these different types (of *meexichaa*) are put on it (the siinqee).

(Sinni Nabi, interview, April 12, 2011)

At the different ateetee ceremonies, whether for a dispute or prayers for rain, after the cow is killed, elders prepare the meat and cut the hide into small pieces. They gather the women's siinqee and put a small strip of hide on the top of each siinqee. Siinqee that have prongs on top are designed to hold the cowhide strips, which are woven through the rungs and hang down.

<sup>170</sup> One woman, who borrowed her neighbour's siinqee for a photo because it had many pieces of *meexichaa* hanging from it, told me that rats had eaten off the pieces of *meexichaa* on her siinqee.



For many Arsi, *meexichaa* holds visual recognition, respect and actual power. Women carrying *siinqee* with many *meexichaa* can visually demonstrate their honour and be given respect as they walk because everyone who sees them knows they have attended many *ateetee* ceremonies and have been successful in asserting their rights. *Meexichaa* can also be a reminder of the origin of *ateetee* and *siinqee* and cultural values. The strips of hide come from the cow, which is a reminder of the ancestral cattle that first crossed the water with *siinqee*.

*Meexichaa* is also perceived as a reward for the success of the ceremony. This reward can also be perceived as gratitude towards the *siinqee*, the female holders, and God (*Waqaa*).

LQ: Maalii faayidaan isaa *siinqee* irratti ta'u kun?

AB: Amma an kafina argadhee mii? Ee, isiiniillee waan baateef sana argattee milkeessitee jirtii; gammachuuf itti godhatan.

LQ: What is the use of putting it (*meexichaa*) on the *siinqee*?

AB: Now I received a positive response of what I asked from God, yeah? Yes, so as she (*siinqee*) brought us a good fortune, we put a slit of skin on its top for happiness.

(Ashaa Batii, interview, October 30, 2010)

### **Breaking of *siinqee*—death of a person**

According to many interlocutors, if a person breaks a woman's *siinqee* in anger or spite, it is comparable to the death of a person. The *siinqee* was born in a blessing ceremony and stood as a testament to a woman's life and respect. The consequences of breaking it are severe. According to *gadaa* laws, the penalty is seven cows. In contemporary contexts I have not heard of someone giving a woman seven cows. Generally an *ateetee* ceremony is held and the offender must offer at least one animal to be slain. One woman told me the following:

B: Abbaan warraa kiyya siinqeen naa tumee.  
Yoo siinqeen tiyya cabidee, dubarttoota iti yaasee, itti iliilifanee. Daadhii buusee dhuginee, horii nuutii qalee, kabajaan gala. Beerii naati birmaatee kabajaa argadhee. Dubarttoonii gigiisitee yaatii. Hin hafituu.

B: My husband beat me with my siinqee. When he broke it, I assembled with the women and ululated on him. He prepared wine we drank, he slayed a cow for us, and respect came. When women assembled for me, I gained respect. Women came in great numbers. They came.  
(Woman in Sof Umaar Guutoo, interview, December 23, 2010)

### Death of siinqee

Upon the death of siinqee's owner or the owner's husband, the siinqee also dies.

The power (and the object as a being) thus dies with the person (Kumsa 1997, 121).

Because siinqee is part of an agreement between a husband and wife, when a husband dies, this shared connection with the material object and being also dies: "When he dies, according to tradition, we break the siinqee in his honour" (*Inni hin jire akka aadaa warraa durittitti siinqeen kunillee deebine isii tana* – Shuru Kore, interview, April 16, 2011). All of the women with whom I spoke agreed on this point: the siinqee and sometimes the *boratti* (head rest) is broken on their husbands' graves. If the wife dies before her husband, siinqee would be broken on her grave. Most women agreed that, after a period of mourning, a woman can ask for relatives to buy her another siinqee or she can buy one for herself. However, some elders told me it was not possible to buy another siinqee since it represents the agreement of marriage. Widowed women would be shown just as much respect and could attend any ceremony, but they would do so without a siinqee in their hand, carrying, perhaps, only a walking stick. This divine power, which is given to women through siinqee is individually destined.

## Conclusion

Guljaa: Ateetee mirga ofii egiisiifachuu danda'uu. Ammaa akka fakkeenyaattitti siinqeen kunii kunoo waraana keenya jechuudha. Dhiirtii eboo qabdii dubartiif waraana jechuudha.

Siinqeen tuunii warana dubartitti jenne jira, warana dubartti ega jenne ammaa fakkeenyaaf dubarttoonni siinqee kanaffi faayyadamtee mirga ishii egiisiifati jenne jira.

Siinqeen kunillee kennama rabbiiti: kan nuuf kenname aadaa keenyaa, woraanillee aadaa keenya, halangeen dhiiraa kennamtellee aadaa Oromootii.

Verses from an ateetee prayer:

BK: Ateetee, siinqee gaagguuraa ee  
Nooraa ayyoo rabiyyoo kadhaa  
Kanaa duraa, siinqee tiyya looti

i tiyya  
Laalee rabbi

Guljaa: Ateetee can maintain one's rights. Now, it is like this siinqee, which is our spear. As men have spears (*eboo*), women have their spears (*waraana*).

This siinqee is a woman's weapon (*waraana* – spear), a woman's weapon so that means a woman who holds this siinqee speaks for her rights.  
(Guljaa, interview, October 30, 2010)

This siinqee is also God's gift: it is our culture that has been given to us; this spear is also our culture, *halangee* that has been given to men is also culture of Oromo.

(Ashoo, interview, October 30, 2010)

BK: Ateetee, that God blesses siinqee  
I pray to God for mother's heart  
In the past, with my beautiful siinqee  
That God sees what I'm doing

(Buldhoo Kerroo, interview, April 12, 2011)

As different Arsi interlocutors describe, siinqee is many things. She, siinqee, is an ancestor whose spirit manifests in women's siinqee to give them the respect and power to defend their rights. She is also a material object and is described as such. She is addressed as a female by many. Born and carefully carved from specific trees that ensure her connection with Waaqa (God), she receives sorrows and blessings and delivers power through blessings, respect, and cursing when needed. She is *wayyuu* (respected, sacred) and is honoured by those who carry her and by those who cross her path. Grass (*sardoo*),

mud (*qarruu*), milk (*anaan*) are given to her in thanks and as food for her blessings.

Siinqee also receives gratitude with songs and song verses that are dedicated to her. But she is also a weapon (*waranna*) and can empower songs and people with her presence, spiritually and physically giving women strength for blessings and ceremonies. Her life only lasts as long as that of her holder or her holder's husband. When she dies her physical power may die with her, but her spiritual essence remains.

In a description of Hinemihi, a Maori meeting house brought to England in the nineteenth century, Harvey (2012) discusses the culture of the object:

Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito (to use her full name) is an ancestor. She is pleased to see her descendants. She welcomes respectful visitors and works with Maori to turn respectful visitors into guests. Maori introduce others to Hinemihi in a personal way. They can point to Hinemihi's welcoming arms, visible as the bargeboards that descend from an apex where the ancestral face observes those who come to visit her. [...] Maori can talk about Hinemihi as a human artefact [...] Multiple understandings and appreciations are regular features of Maori knowledge systems. Indeed, Hinemihi is constructed to play significant roles in these multiple discourses. It is, then, possible to say that Hinemihi is an ancestor and a meeting house. The ancestor lived in the past in human form and continues to exist in the same human but post-mortem form as other Maori ancestors. (Harvey 2012, 206)

Just as a meeting house can *be* both a meeting house and an ancestor, siinqee *is* an object, a life force and power. As seen in this chapter, siinqee is not only an object but it is also a being: she is the rights and respect women carry.

For followers of *waaqefatta*, the Oromo vernacular belief system, women and especially women with their siinqee are seen as having a special connection with their God. They can hold the siinqee with the prongs or tip facing up while they bestow a blessing, just as they can turn it downwards to curse. For those who are not followers of the vernacular spiritual belief, women's siinqee is still sacred. As described in chapter 4, rapid social changes, particularly in the form of mainstream religions, have affected siinqee's existence. Intolerance of different ways of being and expressing respect and

faith with siinqee become difficult for ateetee women and their siinqee to reconcile. In many contemporary manifestations of ateetee, women holding siinqee stand alongside those without. Whether women are holding it or not, siinqee and the women they represent are still highly honoured and respected. Siinqee have been an omnipresent part of Arsi oral history, *seera* gadaa and customary law. They are intricately linked with the rights of Arsi women. For their holders and the women with them, the respect (*kabajaa*) and power (*humna*) that siinqee holds and brings can contribute to successful results for ateetee processes.

## Chapter 6

### “My Ateetee which Anguishes the People, this is not Mine... it is of the People”: Restoring Balance through an Interethnic Ateetee Ceremony

*One day I arrived in Kokossa town to find that a large ateetee gooraa<sup>171</sup> (ceremony for a dispute, lit. ateetee to avenge) had just taken place in the centre of town.<sup>172</sup> A remarkable aspect in this case was that the offender, a shop owner named Hailu, was Amhara and the woman was Oromo, constituting an interethnic dispute. Within hours of my arrival, I heard about the quarrel through friends and local government workers: a shop owner had verbally insulted a woman from a nearby district while they were arguing in his shop. The insulted woman, Ayantu,<sup>173</sup> went home that evening and told her husband, who was upset about the situation. She also told the women's saddeetta members who deemed the offense serious enough for the ritual. After some discussions with the jarsaa and men's saddeetta, they agreed to hold an ateetee process.*

*Two days later, Ayantu took her siinqee and put on the bonkoo (cowhide cape), ululated and then announced to the other women in her area: “He did not only insult me. He insulted all women” (Ana bichaa hin arabsine, gaanyaa hunda arabee). Other women quickly gathered and began walking towards Hailu's home, ululating, singing and calling*

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<sup>171</sup> Depending on the interlocutor and/or the area, these ceremonies are referred to in different ways. The three most common names I heard were *ateetee gooraa*, *arabsa*, and *deemsisa*. *Ateetee gooraa* literally means to avenge. Though this term may appear to be the most aggressive in translation, the ceremony does not differ because of the term. It is not any more aggressive or violent. *Arabsa* means to insult/dispute. *Arabsa* or *gooraa* are the terms often used in the highlands where I worked. *Deemsisa* literally means to go, referring to the fact that women leave their home and duties to go join other women and fight for their rights through ateetee. This term is more commonly used in the lowlands. Some people also call these ceremonies *ateetee araara*, which means ateetee for dispute resolution or reconciliation.

<sup>172</sup> This opening should be treated as general background information of the dispute, narratives, and sung verses that will be developed throughout the chapter.

<sup>173</sup> I have given pseudonyms to the two main participants of this ateetee ceremony.

*out for other women to come. The group of women stopped near homesteads to gather all the women possible. Most of the women who joined the group had heard the news and were ready. On the way they sang insults directed towards the offender. Ateetee is the only time women can sing public insults in this manner. Slowly, as they walked, the women grew in numbers. They arrived at Hailu's house, singing ateetee prayers there. When the women first arrived at his door, Hailu fled in fear. The large group of women was terrifying for him and, because he was from a different ethnic group, he was not used to the process.*

*Over the course of two days, around two hundred women gathered in front of his door and around the house. This is usual for an ateetee ceremony since any able married woman is supposed to come in support. Since his shop is in town, according to the bystanders, large numbers of women were taking up all the space in the road between his shop and the one across the street. The women stayed there all day, gathered around Hailu's shop and home. They slept overnight in houses and spaces offered to them by locals. They sang ateetee waiting for Hailu's response (see later in this chapter for the verses of the particular songs).<sup>174</sup> Men who knew the women—husbands, neighbours, elders, and even government workers—brought honey wine for them to drink and some food. The local women's affairs office also contributed 330 Ethiopian birr for food and drinks for the women.*

*Male elders sought Hailu out in his hiding. In general, elders take part in all ateetee ceremonies because offenders are often nervous, apprehensive, or querulous*

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<sup>174</sup> To avoid repetition, the larger ateetee music analyses are in chapters 3 and 7. However, throughout the dissertation I make reference to specificities of particular songs.

*about the process. In this particular case, since Hailu was Amhara, they helped him through every step. Hailu agreed to participate in the ceremony and provide what was needed to solve the dispute with the women. He did this on the third day. The ritual in front of his house ended with him offering a cow as a sacrifice and apology. After this, the meat and hide were cut up and distributed to the women. This was followed by the women blessing him. Then when Ayantu returned home singing of her success, her husband killed a cow to hold a feast for the ateetee women and the male saddeetta. This was a celebration for the restoration of Ayantu's rights and respect.*

Many women talk about ateetee ceremonies in which they have participated, but this case is particularly noteworthy because it was interethnic, recent, and it took place in a town. Though interethnic cases probably exist, I have never heard of another example like this. I did not attend this ceremony but I was very involved in discussions surrounding its aftermath. All of the main participants in this event and the government workers and religious leaders who could offer perspectives on the ceremony lived near the town and were available so I was able to talk to them. In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, I have sought to provide thick ethnographic contexts and analyses for ateetee. In the next two chapters I focus more particularly on the ceremony itself: Chapter 6 is about the experiences and outcomes of participants, accounted for by both women and men of the community. Chapter 7 has a more performative focus, addressing the music and movement through which effects are achieved.

Through ateetee *gooraa/deemsisa* (such as this one), Arsi women have the space to publicly announce injustices, retaliate with insults, reclaim their honour, reestablish



their respect, and remind the community of their rights through the ceremony. Though Arsi women do not use the term “feminism,” they do have an equivalent for feminism and the actions they are taking: women’s rights (*mirgoota dubartootaa*), a term that has existed for years. Culturally sensitive approaches to local women’s expressions and movements in different parts of the world have shown that women have discourses about their rights, they are aware of outside discussions on women’s rights (Merry 2001, 2006), and they are using their own vernacular terminology and rituals to interact with these outside movements (Hodgson 2011, Østebø 2015). For Arsi women, part of what makes this process effective is that, as Ayantu claimed above, when one woman is abused or insulted, all women are insulted. As explained in chapter 2 and described for this case in this chapter, the original insult is determined and verified by the men’s and women’s *saddeetta*. Before proceeding with *ateetee*, members of the community make sure the incident merits *ateetee*. A woman is never alone in *ateetee*. The offense is against both her and all women. It is essential to shift away from individual/group dichotomies, instead understanding this process as a constant navigation between individual and group rights (Hodgson 2011) that is also relational (Downie and Llewellyn 2008). Men’s group rights are also protected by the clan in particular circumstances such as interethnic fighting. However, though they have dispute resolution processes, they do not have a ceremony like *ateetee*. Furthermore, the entire adult community is involved in the process, which is a major component of why it is effective. Many male and female members of the community have told me that they prefer the community dispute resolution ritual to the Ethiopian court system because the emphasis is on *araraa* (reconciliation).<sup>175</sup> Arsi could

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<sup>175</sup> This is not the case for all community members or for all types of infractions. Some community

also choose the Oromo dispute resolution process over the courts, because the courts were (and still are to some extent) managed by politically dominant and historically oppressive ethnic groups, including the Amhara (see appendix 1). Proponents of restorative dispute resolution procedures have demonstrated the effectiveness of community involvement and emphasis on reconciliation rather than retribution (Braithwaite 1989, Cayley 1998, Dembour 2007, Lillies 2002, Napoleon 2010). In this chapter, I apply theories of vernacular/indigenous feminism, relationality, and restorative/alternative justice to this interethnic ateetee and the discourses of community members involved in order to better understand if and (if applicable) how it is an effective process.

### **The dispute: Different sides to a story**

#### *Ayantu's version*

In an interview with Ayantu and two of her friends who helped her through the ceremony, she said Hailu, the owner of the shop, had called her a bad name when they had gotten into a fight over some money he would not return to her children. Ayantu recounted the story in the following manner:

<p>Duraan dhimma ganzzaba gatadhe, ganzaba gatadheeti, ganzabni dhibba afuriif jahaatama narra fixxe. Ijoolleen narra fixxee jennan Seera Arsii keenyaatiin dhaqnee gaafanne abbootii ijoollee gaafanne. Nu garaa, nuu gayyaa. Seeraan laalati fixaati ijoollee teessan qoradhaa nu</p>	<p>Back then the case was that I lost money, lost money. They wasted 460 [Ethiopian birr]. After [Hailu's] children wasted [the money] we went to the fathers<sup>176</sup> of the children in accordance with our Arsi custom and asked.<sup>177</sup> We asked them for mercy and told them to look at the matter</p>
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members do prefer using the court system.

<sup>176</sup> She said “fathers,” but I think she meant “father” and was referring to Hailu.

<sup>177</sup> According to Arsi customs, before going on to consult higher authorities, such as a council of elders, disputing individuals should try to sort out their problems together, through discussion.

deebisaa jenne. Akkas achii ga'e deebi'eeti achi dhiyaate deebi'ee, ishii jadhee ka'e ijoolleen tiyya hin hattu haadha walin Gaadaa oolte hin dhaqneyyuu jadhee. Dhaqxee jirti nu gaafadhuu nu deebisi si jennee jadhe. Ani sin hin janne ka si gaafate jadhe dhiira warra dhiiraatitti himi jadhee. Himi jennaan saree jadhe: Ati yoo sana essa jirtta? algaa irra jirtta. Yoo sana algaa irratti si fannisanii si huja'aa jirani, faaniisaani si godhaa jirani. Dhagayaa jirtu? fannisani si huj'aa jirani yo san. Fannisanii si huja'aa jirani. Eessa jirta yoo san. Algaa irraa jirta ati eessa of argita yoo san? Ka namaa si hanqannaan ka fardatti dhaqi naan jadhe. Kasin yaane seerraa keenyaan. Mufanne seeraa keenyaan yaane dhaqne seerraa keenyaan siinqee gurree dhaqne. Akkas qalanneeti dhugaan keenya bayee jennann galleera.

properly, investigate their children and give us an answer. He went there and upon his return he stated that his children did not steal and they stayed at home with their mother and did not go [to?]. I told him that they [the children] were gone and he should ask them and reply to us. He said that he did not say anything and I should [go] talk to myself. When I told him to do so, he called me a dog.<sup>178</sup> He said, "Where were you at that time? You were in bed. At that time they tied you to bed and working on you, they tied you and were doing you.<sup>179</sup> Are you listening? They tied you and were working on you at the time. They tied you and were working on you. Where were you at that time? You were in bed. How could you see that yourself at the time?" He [Hailu] said that if a man's [penis] is not enough for me, I should go to a horse.<sup>180</sup> We [the women] came to you [Hailu] in accordance with our custom. We were disappointed and according to our custom we collected siinqee and went. We slaughtered [a sacrificial animal], our truth is revealed, and we returned [to our homes].

(Ayantu, interview, April 11, 2011)

As seen in her account, she argued with the shop owner over money that his children supposedly lost. It is not clear what the money was for, whether it was some sort of business transaction or other use, but she did claim his children lost/took the money. It

<sup>178</sup> A dog is a very strong insult in Oromo cultures and has many meanings. A dog is considered a dirty animal that only sleeps outside. Additionally, it also means someone without a permanent home and owner, or someone who goes astray. Relating someone to a dog in the negative way might also be the influence of Islam, where a dog is considered unholy.

<sup>179</sup> This sentence refers to literally being tied to a bed and having sex or being in sexual activity.

<sup>180</sup> This is a very strong insult for both her and her husband because it may imply that: 1. Her husband does not provide enough sexual satisfaction so she needs to turn to a horse; or 2. That she has unsatiable sexual desire, which her husband could not fulfil because his penis is probably small. In this way the offender takes away her husband's manhood.

probably was money paid to his children for a service in the shop that he runs. She also asked him to ask his children for details on what happened. At this point, according to her, he began assailing her with very strong insults and making lewd references.<sup>181</sup>

### *Hailu's verison*

Ayantu said Hailu called her a dog, but Hailu referred to a different insult in his story. Although he was very nervous about having to recall the incident, Hailu explained the story to me as follows:

Gaafa sani ani balbaluma jiraayyuu isiin gabaa dhuftii. Gabaa osoo dhuuftuu asiin dura dhirsa waliin wal-dhabneerra. Isaa waliin dhuftee haaga dhufte nun duuba, innillee dhuufee na arabsee na arabsee jennaan isiin idduu seente. Hin deemtu atii naan jette. Naan jennaan essa deema balbalarra jedheeni? Jennaan hin deemtu asii deemi jennan. Atillee deemi jedheenii. Jennaanii deemi balbalarraa deemi jennaan. Essa deemaa jennaan. Deemi asii shamaa naan jette, naan jennaan.

Ani shamaa? Shamaa maaf naan jettaa, ani dhiiraamii. Atu shamtuu, deemii jedhanii! Achiin dubaa namni biraa hin deemani. Namni hin dhufa nu edduu dhufaniitii. Jidduu qabee ana gara manaa na deemsiiisani, isiillee fudhanii hin demanii. Guyyaa sadeessoo irratti hin dhufanii, balbalarratti hin iliilfatani seeraan seera aadaatiin iliilfalani, iliilfatani jennaan achii anillee seera hin beekuuyyuu. Namni baqqera diqoo jalaa dabalii ari'ii naan jedhani. Irraa dabalee jedhe. Achiin isaan guyyaa lamaa iliilfataa olanii. Iliilfataa yoo

On that day I was by the door [of my shop] and she was coming from the market. First she quarreled with her husband when she came from the market. When she came towards us she said that he had insulted her and then she came in between us. She asked me to leave but I said, "Where would I go since this is my door?" "You go," she said. I said to her, "You go yourself." At the same time I was asking her, "Where should I go?" she said, "Go away from the door, from me, you dirty/rotten one."

"I am rotten...rotten," I told her, "I am a man; it is you who is rotten. Get lost!" After that many other people came between us. People came, they came to see. They intervened, taking me home and taking her home. On the third day they [the women] came and ululated at my door according to their cultural law. They ululated but I did not know their culture. Some people told me to run away. The numbers of women increased and they ululated for two days. They continued to ululate. Some elder men came down. The elders looked for me,

<sup>181</sup> See chapter 4 for a discussion of vernacular religion and mores in Arsi society. In particular, I offer a discussion of the concepts of *wayyuu* and *saffuu* and how these relate to ateetee.

olanii jaarsii hin bahaa. Jaarsii ambaa hin yaa'aa. Achiin booda jaarsoonni haaga baateen duuba. Jaarsonni ana soqanii, nasoqaniiti kootu waan seera aadaatiin fixnaa naan jedhanii maarree lama jedhee hin jaaladhe. Jaarsonni walitti nu qabanii. Ana hojattuu, biraatii isaan balbalumarratti iliilfatti. Amma achiin hin deema. Jaarsonni hojatti nadhabde achiin duuba. Jaarsoonni waan jiru maali naan jedhanii. Jaarsonni haaga ana irraa fuute isaanii hin fidanii lama sana. Waan jettu maalii jettee maal siin jedhee akana akana naan jedhe jette. Jennaanii amma lamuu deebi aniitiin waan seeraa ati ballessaa qabdaa haateeti irraa qoriyyuu seeroof waan taa'eef amma hoolaa yookaan hin jedhanii horii qaliifii naan jedhan. Jedhanii jennaan horii baqqaa horii bitee ka'ee hin qalee isaanii, hin kenne. Aadaa saniin baqqaa aadaa saniin hin geegefadhe.

coming to solve the conflict according to the cultural law. They asked me to resolve the case through the cultural rules. I agreed with the idea of the elders. They [the women] continued to ululate at my door. Now I didn't go there. Then the elders made me stop working, and asked me about what happened. Secondly the elders wanted to take something from me to provide to the [ateetee] women. They had asked the women, "What did he do, what did he say to you?" They decided that I was guilty and should be penalized according to their cultural rules. They told me I needed to slaughter a sheep or a cow. I bought a cow, slaughtered it and gave it to [the women]. I solved that problem in the cultural way.

In this account, Hailu claims that he and Ayantu called each other *shamaa* (lit. decay), which is a strong insult because it refers to someone with bad hygiene, particularly with a foul smell. Similar to calling someone *saree* (dog), using these insults in front of women results in a violation of women's respect (*kabajaa*) and their status as *wayyuu*. The women then must organize an ateetee ceremony. Later in my interview with him, Hailu changed his account of the incident. He repeated his description of the dispute but said people came between him and Ayantu after she insulted him, thus omitting the part of the story where he returned the insult. He said that he and her husband were also on bad terms: her husband had already come and insulted him, claiming Hailu owed them money. After that he claimed she also came to insult him.

*Different sides to the story*

I will treat this dispute as a “diagnostic event” that, as described by Sally Falk Moore, “reveals ongoing contests and conflicts and competitions and the efforts to prevent, suppress, or repress these” (1987, 730). As Moore convincingly demonstrates when conducting ethnographic evaluations of process, it is diagnostic events, or noteworthy stories or events in the research that indicate underlying history and complex layers of meanings in a community. Contradictory or incomprehensible aspects of an event can often be examined for underlying and multiple layers of meaning. As Moore explains, “It is through that contiguity of contraries that ongoing struggles to control persons, things, and meanings often can be detected” (1987, 735).<sup>182</sup> In the case of Ayantu and Hailu, there were definitely underlying layers and tensions: personal and ethnic tensions between the two fighting parties; Hailu was pressured into participating in the ateetee ceremony; and the ceremony took place in the centre of the town, which brought more diversified attention to the situation than would have been the case in a rural, exclusively Arsi-populated setting.

The Amhara/Oromo ethnic tensions deserve particular attention here. As I described in Appendix 1, there has been a long history of Amhara/Oromo tensions, that developed over time through the Amhara conquest of Oromo lands, unfair treatment and discrimination of Oromo subjects, and even more recently, open or hidden political agendas that suppress Oromo decisions and autonomy. For average Ethiopian citizens, these tensions are not necessarily present and in the everyday, people coexist peacefully. However, the question becomes more complicated at more official levels. I have even

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<sup>182</sup> In her analysis of the case of Róisín McAliskey in Ireland as a diagnostic event, Robin Whitaker (2008) demonstrates how “truth” was mediated by different supporters, activists, and journalists (21).

received comments from people in potentially powerful positions, such as government officials or well-established business owners of the politically dominant ethnic groups (Amhara or Tigrayan). They ask in a critical manner why I am working with the Oromo. I have heard a number of comments that even express outright racism (and fear) towards the Oromo. It is important to remember that though the Oromo are a political minority, they are an ethnic demographic majority, so from the perspective of the national government, it is important to demonstrate authority in order to keep the status quo. Though the official national discourse is multiculturalism, multiethnic tolerance and equality, there are many layers underneath this. At the local level, different ethnic groups express their tolerance and generally co-exist peacefully, but intermarriage is still relatively uncommon and they do not necessarily socialize together. From time to time, fighting and violence erupts between ethnic groups, but these usually occur among other marginalized ethnic groups because the dominance of the Amhara and Tigray groups nationally result in severe repercussions if authority is challenged (see Appendix 1). Because of all these underlying tensions, even in areas of “peaceful” coexistence, negative historical and political associations with conflicting ethnicities can constitute part of the foundation for problems between individuals. As I unpack these different layers, I will explore some of these local meanings and tensions. I will also reference how these tensions are diagnostic of wider national and regional political contests and attempts to secure the status quo.

First, it is helpful to understand how the ateetee process can begin and proceed when the dispute accounts are so different. How does everyone reach a settlement that seems fair to all who are involved? Or is it an unbalanced process? As with any dispute or

conflict, there are several sides to a story. But, though the accounts from the two sides differ, what matters the most to the women and the elders (and to many other Arsi Oromo) is maintaining women's respect as dictated in Oromo culture and law (*seera ambaa/aadaa*). Because of women's status as *waayyuu*, even if a woman insults a man, a man does not have the right to return that insult because he will be insulting her honour (*ulfinaa*) and respect (*kabajaa*). At the same time, it is possible to wonder if women's right to sing insults in the *ateetee* process is an accommodation for the gender asymmetry and the fact that men control other domains of life (e.g. economic, educational, social). Even domestically, for example, I heard many stories and witnessed a man being verbally or physically abusive, or aggressive, towards his wife. I know this is not the case everywhere and it is hopefully changing, but domestic violence does exist. In society women can respond with *ateetee* and use insults in the process, but does this compensate for these cases of domestic violence and male dominance? Does it help change systemic problems in society? Does it lower the number of cases of abuse towards women? Though I do not have a direct answer for the numbers, what I can confirm is that in many cases the women who do not have access to *ateetee* and do not have the space to launch insults when their honour is defiled are definitely in an even more marginalized position. Being able to publicly vilify an offender and to tell the community what the person did gives a powerful space for women's voices and is quite a deterrent for future offenders.

In addition to having the right to insult, when a woman presents a complaint about an insult or abuse to the *saddeetta* members, her truth (*dhugaa*) should be respected. *Dhugaa*, or truth, as discussed briefly in previous chapters, is not the same as "telling the truth" in English. It means much more than what is factual. In Oromo culture and



spirituality, *dhugaa* is conceptually interwoven with justice and what is morally right. For some, Waqaa is seen as the guardian of *dhugaa* and can pull away from people who do not respect its sanctity (Bartels 1983, 102, Geda 2013, 51). *Dhugaa* can also mean something that is the absolute, or the base form of knowledge. Women's truth is seen as unquestionable. If they claim their rights have been abused this will be taken as truth. In situations of reconciliation, participants and mediators often talk about the restoration of this truth (*dhugaa*), which can mean both the recognition of what was accurate and the restoration of the foundation of what is morally right. The reestablishment of this truth is inextricably connected with restoring what is *waayyuu* (sacred, respected, blessed).

How can extreme differences of opinion and versions of the story be reconciled? In the case of Hailu and Ayantu, the principal participants had very different accounts of the dispute. There were definitely tensions and bad feelings between the people in this story: both described a volatile situation before the insults were even exchanged. As with many disputes where there are multiple versions of a story, the women's and men's *saddeetta* and sometimes male *jarsaa* (elders) play essential roles as mediators and judges. The women's *saddeetta* are there to listen to the woman's "truth" and determine whether it merits a ceremony, but the men's *saddeetta* goes between the offender and the offended, determining what constitutes the truth. The two *saddeetta* also meet and confer throughout the process. When I talked to members of the two *saddeetta* committees, they told me they decided Ayantu had been offended and was requesting the *ateetee* process. The male *saddeetta* members verified Ayantu's story by talking to witnesses and finished by approving her version. After this, they needed to convince Hailu to participate in the ceremony.

If Ayantu's version was a close interpretation of what happened that day (and it seems that it was accepted as such because it was verified by the *jarsaa* and *saddeetta*), I had to wonder why Hailu told me such a different story. When I spoke with him, he was very nervous about answering questions. He willingly agreed to talk about the dispute, but wanted to finish quickly. He denied her version of the story. However, if he did use such aggressive insults as she claimed, it would be understandable that he would not want to admit to it or repeat them again. There may have also been another layer to their relationship that I did not know. For example, perhaps they already knew each other in another context and there were preexisting tensions. This last hypothesis seems plausible due to the fact that the insults she accused him of using against both her and her husband were very specific and elaborate. In the end, it did not matter because Ayantu's word and truth were the most respected.

I will return to differing sides of the dispute later in the chapter in discussions of reconciliation and further examination of the process. For now, I would like to return to Ayantu and Hailu's *ateetee*.

### **Parts of the *ateetee* process**

An *ateetee gooraa/deemsisa* process involves a series of standardized steps, which were followed in the case of Ayantu and Hailu. In this section of the chapter, I list them and then offer detailed explanations and analysis of the case throughout the rest of the chapter. The steps below are in reference to this case:

1. After Ayantu was abused, she first tried to work the problem out directly with the offender.
2. Ayantu could not resolve the problem, so she informed members of her local women's *saddeeta*.
3. The *saddeetta* decided that the offense merited an *ateetee* ceremony.
4. Two days later (the Monday following the Friday dispute), Ayantu, *saddeetta* women, and other women from her area gathered, holding their *siinqee* and wearing their cultural dress (for those who had the clothing).
5. *Ateetee* women began walking to Hailu's house, singing verses urging women to gather and singing insults towards Hailu on the way.
6. When the *ateetee* women arrived at Hailu's house, they offered a greeting (*dhiltee dhinaa*) and sang *ateetee* prayers.
7. *Ateetee* women stayed in front of Hailu's house, singing all day and night. More women gathered during the day. This continued through the next day.
8. Once the offender was found and agreed to the ceremony, the women's *saddeetta* met with the men's *saddeetta* to negotiate the compensation.
9. On the third day, Hailu brought a cow for the women. It was killed and the *meexichaa* (strips of hide) and meat were given to the women. Blood was also put on their foreheads.
10. The women offered grass and blessings for Hailu and the *saddeetta* men.
11. Ayantu and the other women returned to their homes. At Ayantu's home, her husband killed a cow for her and the *ateetee* participants. They celebrated the return of her rights and respect.

### *Telling the saddeetta*

When Ayantu returned home, she told her husband what had happened. He saw Hailu's actions as an offense to himself too. He considered himself abused and questioned why they had been exposed in such a way. Ayantu and Hailu were so offended by the incident that they took the case to their respective saddeetta. The saddeetta takes part in initial negotiations, sometimes effecting reconciliation between the disputing parties and making the ceremony in which the offender slays a cow unnecessary.

### *Abusing one woman means abusing all women: gathering all the women to unite as a group*

On Monday, two days after the dispute, the saddeetta women and other neighbouring women gathered with Ayantu by her home. According to several interlocutors, about thirty women were initially gathered. Many were wearing their *bonkoo* (cowhide cape) and *callee* (beaded necklaces) and carrying their *siinqee*. Once they began assembling and ululating, it was a call to other women to join. While at times used for happy occasions, the ululations in these situations signal distress and they are a call recognized by all women as a sign to gather (audio track 13).<sup>183</sup>

Ateeteen tiyyaa taa amboo ciinqoo jenna  
Tuunii tiyyaa mitii...waan mandoo siirkoo  
jenna  
Ateetee tiyyaa taa amboo ciinqoo,

(Sung verses)

My ateetee which brings anguish to the  
area  
this is not mine...it is the group's matter

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<sup>183</sup> In the past, when men were going to war or when there was large scale fighting between ethnic groups, women would call and gather in this way. Since the Arsi in this region live in close proximity to the Sidamo ethnic group (less than 10 km), there have been several occasions in the past when there was large scale interethnic fighting.

tuun tiyyaa miti...taa mandoo sirkoo jenna	My ateetee which anguishes the people, this is not mine...it is of the people
L: Amma, ‘tun tiyyaa mitii taa mandoo siirkoo’ jechuun maalii?	L: Now, what does “This is not mine, it is of the people” mean?
R: Mandoo mara arabsiitee jechaadha, mandoo mara arabsiitee arabiini nama mara arabsiitee dubbartii mara gahee jechaadha. Ee, akkaasiin ummata mara gahee jechuudha. Taa isi caallaa hin taanee ummata mara gahee jechuudha. Taa isii caalaa hin taanee ummaata muluu akkassii.	R: It means you insulted the whole population; it means the abuse you said touched everyone, all women. Yes, it means it touched the whole population. The abuse is not only for her; it is for the whole population. In this way, the abuse is not only for her but for everyone.  (Bujjaa and Rufoo, interview, April 14, 2011)

As in the introductory description, the insult is considered to be an insult to not just one woman but to the honour and respect of all women. The women who gather with the victim are helping their friend and relative, but also are defending the honour of the group. In the ateetee process, individuals have autonomy, but the group is essential to achieving results. This is illustrated dramatically with the gathering of the women for ateetee by the saddeetta members (see chapter 2). As my interlocutors have told me, full participation of women is necessary in order to have sufficient representation to achieve successful results, which sometimes involves the bullying and threats from the *saddetta*. As seen in chapter 2, like compulsory voting, saddeetta women can go to other women’s home and threaten to break their household objects in order to get them to participate. Because of increasing mainstream religious and urban influences, in some areas, the saddeetta women are not able to assemble as many women as previously. However, if the

Hailu and Ayantu case is any indicator, there are still significant numbers of women who will still come to participate.<sup>184</sup>

Before continuing with specifics on Ayantu and Hailu's ateetee ceremony, it is valuable to briefly examine these group mechanisms as a part of the protection and promotion of Arsi women's rights (and honour and respect, as they describe in the vernacular). Ateetee women say that the group mobilization is critical to achieving justice (*dhuuga*). Women often refer to the restoration of their truth, or the attainment of justice as the successful end result of the process. This would also mean that Arsi women are using the group to assert both the rights of the individual (the one woman offended and each individual woman who could potentially be disrespected) and all the women (the group). Hodgson (2011), and many authors in her volume, support these vernacular, cultural means of asserting women's rights, though international agencies promoting women's rights tend to put more emphasis on the individual. Hodgson suggests that the concept of the human rights of the individual and discourses evoking human rights (and thus individual rights) as women's rights, in fact, can go against women's rights and cultural ways of practicing rights: 1) In some cultures, individual rights can represent the collective group and vice versa (individual rights are often dependant on a group); and 2) Humans are complex beings who always exist in relation to other people and things. The

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<sup>184</sup> Usually neighbours and any other women who hear about the ateetee ceremony will come out in support. The exception would be Salafi Muslims and evangelical Christians. Women from the same clan will quickly come out to support ateetee. Because of the tradition of exchanging and marrying women from the opposite clan (for example, Gambo and Habarnosa clans marrying each others' women) and other agreements (such as trade of specific goods), two clans can have strong alliances with each other. When the combination of the women and their clan are insulted, this becomes a serious ateetee offence. In January 2012 at a wedding, a man drank too much alcohol then proceeded to insult women from the Doda clan, yelling, in the presence of a large group of women from the Doda clan, that he didn't understand why any man would marry a woman from the Doda clan because women from that clan were bad (Conversation with Shuru).

self is understood in relation to others (Downie and Llewellyn 2008, Llewellyn and Philpott 2014). At the same time, relation to others can also be a means of understanding and imagining individuality. Arsi women are individuals with rights, but in Arsi culture women also exist in relation to others. Women effectively fight for the recognition of their rights and the restoration of their respect, *together*, through ateetee.

*Singing what you cannot say: Insulting or repeating the offender's insults publicly*

On the way to Hailu's house, Ayantu and the other women sang insults directed towards him (the first verses on audio track 14):

Gurcu balbala,  
ee balbala  
Qolan mandala'aa  
Saphiin dagala  
Huduun balbala  
Suulaan ol gala

A stump is in front of the house  
Yes, in front of the house  
The foreskin is ulcerated  
His pubic hair is overgrown  
His buttocks is very wide  
So the wind enters easily

(Ayantu, interview, April 11, 2011)

As can be heard in the recording (and also on audio tracks 15-17, the next examples of insults) insults are sung to short, simple melodico-rhythmic formulas that are repeated,

such as the following:  or . There can be

different permutations of the rhythms, with a held note instead of three short notes, for example. All the insults in the Kokkossa area have similar motifs. In a different geographic area, the motifs may sound quite different melodically and rhythmically. This has been my experience with other personalized Arsi repertoires, such as with *baye-bayee*

(departure songs for a bride). The repeated rhythm and notes make it easy for anyone to sing. Though there are many insult verses that are standardized, women also personalize the insults to the situation. The women can insert any words and adjust the syllables to the rhythm or vice versa. I will explain this in more detail below. Ateetee is the only space in which public insults are acceptable, and only women can sing them. Women do not always insult the offender (as they did in this case), but they often do. Insults constitute one of the main parts of the ateetee *gooraa*. One day, while sitting with a group of women following a group interview, we were discussing some of the possible insults that ateetee women could sing to punish the offender at the beginning of the ceremony. I wanted to confirm my suspicion that insults could only be sung and not spoken. My question to them did not hit the mark, so I gave an example by loudly calling out an insult in a spoken tone to an imaginary offender. Everyone burst into laughter and quickly assured me that speaking an insult in that manner was not possible: “You can’t speak these [insults], but you can sing them. This is Oromo culture and law,” they told me. I asked other Arsi community members about this and they confirmed that it is not right to speak insults but, as part of an ateetee ritual, women can sing insults towards the offender or sing out a description of the insults the offender used.

As can be heard on the recording, when Ayantu and her friends sang the verses above for me, they broke down in fits of laughter several times and had to repeat them. Whether sung in or out of context, the words can be embarrassing for many women to sing publicly.<sup>185</sup> These verses return insult with insult. Some women choose to respond in

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<sup>185</sup> I am not sure if Ayyuu and her friends actually sang these insults in front of many people because they are so strong and direct, filled with language Arsi women do not generally use publically.



this way, but many other women told me they would sing the offender's original insult so everyone could hear the words that initiated the ceremony; they would not further insult the offender. Ayantu and her friends explained their dramatic choice:

Gaafa nama arabsanni saalaa baayaani  
arbaa sani rifaane yaanettimneree seeraa  
keenya.

When anyone insults someone [a woman],  
we are not afraid to practice our culture  
[and ululate and insult him].

(Ayantu, interview, April 11, 2011)

They further justified these types of insults in the following manner:

Inni kana nuun jedhee jennan nuu kana  
jennee arabsiine, nullee deebiisiin seeraa  
keenya waan ta'eesiis, waan uma  
keenyaan waan qara, waan siinqee teenyaa  
baanee argannuuf kan jenne arabsiine jira  
ee.

He insulted us first, then we have to  
respond to him, insulting him according to  
our law/customs, with our siinqee, yes.

Aadaa keenyaan baaneetti ii. Aadaa  
keenya tuqe jeenetti, gaanyaa keenya  
tuuqe jenne, akkassiin baneetti seeraa  
jiruun baane qalane nuu arabsiinaan  
arabsiine jira.  
[...]

It is our culture. He hurt our culture; he hurt  
our women; that is how it began. According  
to our law, he then slays a cow for us and  
we reconcile.

[...]

Inni waan aloo waan nama hin jenne nuun  
jedhe nuu arabsee jennan, waan inni nuun  
jedhe arabsee san nuulee arabsiine  
deebiifnere malsii inni nuun jedhee itti  
deebiisaanii.

He insulted us with bad words, with a word  
a person shouldn't say to a person, so we  
replied [with our insult].

Malsiima inni nuun jedhee arabse kan mee  
ammaa, jenne arabsiineetti **dhugaa**  
keenyaan dhugaa yaakaa balleessa isatti  
muranii nuu fudhanni qallane, ulfinaan gale  
jira mana keenyaatti.

Because he insulted us with bad words and  
committed the crime of insulting our **truth**,  
he had to take and slay [a cow] for us. Then  
our honor was returned to us, to our homes.

As seen above, the insult that began the ateetee process is perceived as damaging on many levels: (1) the offender abused women; (2) he violated truth (and the respect and dignity of women); and (3) he hurt the culture. When the women speak of culture here, they are equating it with their rights as stipulated by cultural practices. Culturally, Arsi

individuals should show respect to other individuals, and particularly to women, who are *waayyuu* (sacred, blessed) members of society.

From an outside perspective, some of the insults that women direct toward an offender may be perceived as stigmatizing. However, because they are part of a restorative process and only used in this context, I think they can instead be seen as what criminologist and restorative justice proponent, John Braithwaite, theorizes as “reintegrative shaming” (1989, 2000). Reintegrative shaming is a positive method of focusing on the offender as an inherently good person who has performed bad actions, rather than focusing on the offender as a bad person (Braithwaite 2000, 282). Shaming to teach about the wrongs of crime is done with respect and reintegration in mind.

Braithwaite also argues that early exposure to the shamefulness of crime and, specifically, murder, makes crime unthinkable for many later in life. I have never met an Arsi Oromo man who was a repeat offender but the larger question, which I have not explored in detail, is in applicable cases whether this process helped change an offender’s behaviour and attitudes towards women in the long term. According to this theory of reintegrative shaming, those who instil this sense of shame do so with caring gestures; a judge standing at a distance is not in a position to do this (Braithwaite, 286-287). Ateetee, accordingly, can be seen as a reintegrative shaming process. The offender (and, by extension, future offenders) learns why it is wrong to insult and abuse women and about the consequences of doing so. The ateetee process ultimately aims to reintegrate the offender. The insults women direct towards the offender are not perceived as malicious. They are part of the shaming process, but are not perceived as stigmatizing because they are confined to the ritual process. Women were even hesitant to sing me examples outside of the ritual, and

they were certainly not going to use the names of past offenders in their sung examples. They made up names or used my colleague's name. In the end, in the case of Ayantu, these expressive gestures helped restore women's truth and reconcile the two parties.

The process of insulting, or shaming, takes place in the context of a ritual and can be seen as a "time out of time" (Falassi 1987). With the sung insults, in particular, *ateetee* is a space where women can act in ways that would normally not be permitted. This approach has also been observed in other cultures around the world. In her study of Tuareg women's insults, for example, Susan Rasmussen discusses how women engage in gendered social protest through songs (1991, 34). As she explains in her analysis, "All women enjoy [...] the power to make or break a man's reputation through song and poetry" (Ibid, 38). When a woman has grievances with her husband, she can succumb to "spirit" attacks<sup>186</sup> and can gather with other members of the community for a possession ritual in which she expresses her problems through poetry and song. Because in Tuareg society the Muslim clergy and elders don't see some acts (such as a husband's neglect of one of his wives) as a punishable offence, the ritual allows for an indirect expression of these problems. At the ritual, the audience talks and afterwards they gossip about the accused, humiliating him to such an extent that he is forced to reconcile.

The Pokot *kilapat* ritual in Kenya is another example of women who join forces to humiliate a man who has offended them: Pokot women in Kenya were also described as having a group method of restorative justice more than forty years ago. Based on Edgerton and Conant's (1964) article,<sup>187</sup> December Green (1999) describes the Pokot

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<sup>186</sup> This is when a spirit has possessed the woman and she must go through a ritual to free herself.

<sup>187</sup> Given that this is not recent research, I do not know if this practice is still in use by Pokot women.

“shaming party” (*kilapat*). This practice was used by wives towards their husbands when the latter had repeatedly misbehaved (Green 1999, 180). The victim gathered women in her community to subject the offender to an exaggerated demonstration of his fault or misdeed. The women could tie the man up, sing insulting songs to him, and cause physical humiliation, such as hitting him lightly. Women could use several methods of shame until they found an “acceptable resolution” (Ibid, 181). The goal of the shaming party was redemption of the offender, and, finally, reconciliation with the victim.

Singing insults to a male offender parallels other situations, special places, or moments that are reserved for dissent and resistance to violence, including festivals or carnivals (Bakhtin 1984, Roberts 2016, Stallybrass and White 1986). For example, Holland and Adhikari analyze how the songs of Tij in Nepal allow women to critique their social situation and life in public (1994). In this “women’s ritual” the participants voice their complaints through song. They express their hardships in relation to the patriarchal culture. It is unclear if there are actually results from this dissent, but it is clear that the festival becomes a “time out of time,” when women can dissent. In the Arsi Oromo case, in addition to reasserting their rights, women’s insults also ensure more successful negotiations with the offender. After being insulted, the offender will often do anything (e.g., buy a cow for the ceremony) to make sure that his/her name is clear of the shame and that s/he receives a final blessing. The insults can be managed. But when all else fails and the offender rejects the restorative process, at an even more extreme level, the offender can be cursed. And curses work (see chapters 3 and 5).

As Rufoo and Bujjaa explained, the insults can be sung at the offender's house if s/he does not want to admit his/her fault and pay the compensation. The following provides a general example (it is not specific to Hailu's case) (audio track 15):

R&B: Amma dhirti yoo yaate dubbatanni  
yoo irraa dhabani jedhani ni arabsiitti.  
Ammaa nama maqaa sani dha hanittiin inni  
ebaluunin dasee giigisa sarree ittisaa jenna.

L: Mee faaruu dhaani jiigumaa jedhaa?

R&B: Ammaa eenyuutti qabnaa nama sana  
ena egada kobo illi. Illillifane.

R&B: Kubbuun daasee dhiikisaa sarree  
ittisaa jenna, ee  
Kurree madalaa  
Kubbuu maxanaa, qaba sakallaa  
Jenna kurree maddalaa  
Kubbuun maxanaa, qaba sakallaa  
Jenna jenna

Bada hin arriffatii lama

Leephissii galaa  
Jenna isiin taa isatti edisii qabdi jedhee  
arabserraa  
Kubbuun... Nu argee edisii barra...jenna

R&B: When the male elders ask him to tell the truth, if he denies or becomes stingy, all women will insult him with names like: "he, wearing a heap of rags, protects the dog."

L: Can you show us by singing together?

R&B: Now to whom do we point while ululating? *Illii*. We ululated.

R&B: We say, Kubu, with a heap of rags watches for the dog  
The lid of a big milk container,  
Kubu is a lazy carrying horse  
We say tie it on his legs  
Kubu is a lazy carrying horse  
We say so

She is in a hurry

He is coming back from Leephisi<sup>188</sup>  
She has a disease, AIDS, but he abused her  
Kubu...saw us, [she was] jittery with AIDS  
...we say like this

(Bujjaa and Ruffo, interview, April 14, 2011)

When compared with audio track 13, which are also insults, it is clear that there are different melodic and rhythmic formulas that are possible to use for the insults. The women in singing on these two different tracks are from the same general geographic

<sup>188</sup> This is a hospital in Arsi Negele, a town on the road to Hawaassa.

area, so geographic variability is not an issue here. Like the ateetee prayers, there seem to be several different types of insult songs. However, I only heard a few different melodic and rhythmic formulas, so I do not think there is as much variability as with the ateetee prayer repertoire. The women can personalize verses by directly insulting the man, as seen above, or by quoting the insult he used on them. During interviews and discussions, I asked women for examples of the bad words or insults that could initiate an ateetee ceremony, so they gave me the examples by singing them into their songs. Again, these insults are not referring to Hailu.

Many insults refer to someone as dirty or stinky. When a woman is called one of these words, there is often an underlying reference to her sexual parts as dirty (*shamaa*) or to her reproductive organs being empty and unable to reproduce (*koonkaa*). If a woman is actually physically not able to reproduce, this insult could be doubly hurtful and would incur more wrath from the ateetee women. As seen before, a dog (*saree*) is also considered dirty. A donkey (*haree*) is considered a stubborn work animal that is constantly being hit and called bad words in order to do work,<sup>189</sup> so calling someone a donkey is like calling him/her an extremely stubborn, frustrating person who needs to be abused in order to be productive.

When I asked Ayantu about the other ateetee verses they sang during the ceremony, she and her friends gave me one more example of insults they sang in front of Hailu's house (audio track 16):

Mashaarraa bite,  
masaraan citee

He bought a machine  
but it was broken

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<sup>189</sup> Donkeys are viewed as work animals. They often have a very short life span in Ethiopia due to the hardships they endure.

Sariyyeen kiyyaa  
 Sariyyeen eenyuutti?  
 Abbaan eenyuu  
 zariyyee xilee  
 Sariyyee xilee  
 Saree yaabatee  
 mabaraaf liixee..ee  
 Ee ayyoo guddoo oo  
 Masaraan cixee ee

LQ: Maal jechuudha sarree yaabatee jechuun?

A: Sareen kaa itti hima kaa issiini sarree ni walaltani arsin keenya sarreen sarree kun kan gadi ari'an kaa kaa alaa bultuu macarasha

LQ: Maalif akana jettanin isiin?

A: Innillee waan hin jenne jedhe nuu arabsee jennan nullee waan jennu jenne arabsinera nuullee. Sarreen sareedha sarree nama gadidha akka sarree sani jedhe.

My dog  
 Whose dog?  
 Whose father  
 his name is Zerihun Tilahun  
 Tile (name), the dog  
 He rode the dog  
 and went to the meeting  
 Yes, big mother  
 the rope is untied

LQ: What does “riding a dog” mean?

A: When women say dog, I'll tell you what it means for Arsi. It is what is hated and should be chased. It sleeps outside.

LQ: Why do you say this?

A: Because he insulted us badly. It is our insult to reply. We are making him as something lower even than the status of a dog.

(Ayantu, interview, April 11, 2011)

Not all of the verses, and not all of the ateetee ceremonies contain insults. While walking to the offender's house, women may sing insults or they may sing a combination of regular ateetee verses and insults, or just the ateetee verses. Many of the ateetee verses contain toponyms, cultural, geographic and historic references<sup>190</sup> as seen in the following general verses Ayantu and her friends sang (these are not insults):

<sup>190</sup> Although focused on a different subject matter, Christiane Seydou has analyzed the spatial-temporal relationship evoked in the *jammooje na'i*, cattle praising songs of Peul cattle herders in Niger (1991). The same approach is applicable to Oromo verses (Qashu 2008). As seen in these verses of ateetee, these spatial-temporal, cultural, geographic and historic references are also an integral part of other Oromo repertoires. In fact, all Oromo song verses, though different in content and context, contain these cultural references that are common to and understood by many members of the community. Although the verses may contain references the community understands, they may also have very individual references that require further explanation or understanding of the song leader's background.

Ardaan shaliitee, ardaan shaliitee, ee yoo farda Yoo alga kortuu, ijan argiite, ee	The elders of Shalite (a village), yes, a horse When she sits on the chair (bed), have you seen her?
Barzaffi dheera Saruuniyaan haalanga beera, Hawwootti dheeraa, akka ee	A tall eucalyptus, Sara <sup>191</sup> is the leader of women, Tall mothers, <sup>192</sup> yes
Arda Gammaa, Batallee jedhee, Baqallee tiyyaa, Cacallee jedhee, cacalleen Afaa rifeensa, galchaan rimeesaa	The wide area, a field, I said My Baqale, Cacallee I said They prepared a young cow <sup>193</sup>

The verses above refer to the environmental surroundings (the village, the eucalyptus, and the field), female leaders (Sara, tall mothers), and the resolution for the ceremony (the cow). These verses are not insults, and though they speak to the surroundings and people in the community, they also speak of the resolution of the ceremony. General verses can become intermingled with the verses of insult and shame, and verses that recall the fact that the offender has disrespected the women. The verses below refer to a sad situation in which a boy ran away and went insane. The last verse below recalls the disrespect shown to the women. Regular ateetee verses will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. However, I mention them here to demonstrate how insults can be interspersed within the regular verses (audio track 17):

Laftillee boonnaa, Gurbaa...baqatee, Manninuu onnaa, Laftillee...soona, Gurban baqate, ee Inninuu hinjiru	The land is dry, The boy ran away, His house is empty/deserted, The land [...] The boy ran away, yes He is not there
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<sup>191</sup> This is referring to a local leader of women.

<sup>192</sup> These are the ateetee women, tall and strong like the eucalyptus.

<sup>193</sup> This is referring to the cow prepared for the ceremony.



Manninnu onnaa

Obboorree tiyyaa  
Gurban marate  
Hurummaa iiyyaa  
Ee ayyoo guddoo  
Obboorree tiyyaa  
Gurbaan marate  
Obboorro tiyyaa

Atuu nashiikeessittee,  
Wantoolleen dhufte, ee  
Tullaa naa shiixxeessittee  
Tullaa  
Gurxe naa dhaaqii  
Qunni itti naa makii, ii  
Bola naa naqqii

His house is empty

My Oboree<sup>194</sup>  
The boy becomes insane<sup>195</sup>  
Shout in the jungle  
Yes, great mother  
My Oboree  
The boy becomes mad  
My Oboree

You devalued me [lit. made me small]  
What has come  
Tullaa devalued me  
Tullaa  
[...]  
Mixing something sweet for me  
Pouring onto my...

(sung by Ayantu and friends, interview,  
April 11, 2011)

In the verses above, the dry land, the empty house, and the boy becoming insane are references for possible outcomes of ateetee women's cursing if the ateetee ceremony is not resolved. They are a warning to Hailu of what can happen to him if he does not reconcile. The women say: "you devalued me," reminding the offender of his insult and disrespect. The reference at the end to mixing something sweet is a way of asking for *dhaadhii* (honey wine) or *anaa* (milk) to drink during the ateetee ceremony. As I will explore more in the next chapter, though some of the ateetee verses can make references to shared cultural knowledge, such as objects, people, ancestors, the environment, and the cattle, there are also many references to the ceremony, the expectations of the ateetee women, and the consequences if their expectations are not met.

<sup>194</sup> This can be short for brother (*obbolessa*) or sister (*obbeletti*).

<sup>195</sup> Insanity can be a result of a curse and thus a punishment for disrespecting women. This can be referring to that.

*Dhilteedhinaa: Greetings upon arrival at Hailu's home*

When Ayantu and the first group of women arrived in front of Hailu's home, as is the custom, they offered their greeting to Hailu's family by saying, "*Dhiltee dhinaa!*" and offering some freshly picked grass. Throwing the grass towards the hosts is a greeting but it is also an apology for having "invaded their territory" (Hussein 2004, 114). As Hussein explains, "Sustained eye contact in front of a big gathering is often considered by the audience as shameless or bold. People thus say: *Dhiltee dhinnaa!* (save us from your eyes!), meaning, one's confidence or poise does not have to result in irreverence for the gathering" (2004, 137). In response to this greeting, the women of the house can say, "*Hobbaya, Ija irraa hafa*" (be saved and be free from the eyes / survive our eyes). As other women arrive at the ateetee ceremony they also offer greeting in this way. Similarly, when the men's saddeetta members and *jarsaa* arrive, they offer the same greeting to the ateetee women and the family in the house. This greeting is used before many types of Arsi ceremonies.

*Singing ateetee prayers in front of the offender's house*

In the ateetee ceremony for Ayantu and Hailu, the ateetee women sang a combination of different ateetee prayers and insults. When I asked Ayantu what she sang on the way to Hailu's and in front of his home, she continued to give examples of different insults. She did not know or was shy to sing other verses of ateetee. Her reserve was different from other interlocutors with whom I spoke, potentially indicating that she was afraid or apprehensive. She may have also been focusing on the sung insults, since they are what constitute the core of ateetee *goraa/deemsisa*. The more likely explanation

is that she does not know as much of the repertoire because she is not a song leader (*afolee*). Ayantu knows the ateetee process and participates in it. A practitioner of Arsi vernacular beliefs, she goes to the river to sing ateetee prayers with other women. However, she does not necessarily remember verses of the prayers on her own. Some women said they sing different verses depending on where they are in the ceremony: starting at the organizing woman's house, walking down the road, or standing in front of the man's house. Many elders in the lowlands, for example, told me that ateetee ceremonies began with the following verses: *Intala aayaa dhageetree? Oduun sigeetee?* (My sisters have you heard? Has the bad news reached you?). Those basic verses were then varied depending on what type of ateetee it was (e.g., for a husband who hit his wife who was wearing *qanafaa*, for a son who hit his mother, or for another person who abused a woman). Though some women may still begin the ceremonies in this fashion, my experience is that they are variable. Generally, the song leaders and participants from specific areas or of specific backgrounds will sing verses they know or verses that contain references they know.

However, in practice, many of these verses are interchangeable and can be sung at any time. In the case of Ayantu, the women sang insults as they walked down the road, then as they gathered in front of Hailu's house. They probably interspersed them with more standardized ateetee verses. Upon a first examination, the general ateetee verses, or those that could be used in any ceremony, contain many references that seem non-sequential or sometimes even incomprehensible. They are personalized and community based, so they contain references to known people, landmarks, and events (this will be explored further in the next chapter). Singing these verses together, women recall

common ancestors, events, landmarks, cultural references, and more. These shared songs are a major part of group cohesiveness for the ateetee women. It is also a way for the women to sing about the anticipated results of the ceremony, putting pressure on the offender and the male saddeetta to come through with a resolution.

*Community support during the wait for results*

On the Monday of the ceremony, Ayantu gathered with about two hundred other women in front of Hailu's house singing ateetee. As Ayantu explained, many of the women stayed to sleep in front of his house overnight, but some women had to go home to attend to their children. The ateetee women received help from many people: the Women's Affairs Office, the Office of Culture and Tourism, and other local government offices gave them money for food. As she explained,

A: Hojatan mootummaan kudhan kudhanin akka jiruun guree akka jiruun namni yaa'e. Amaara kan hin jenne ebalu, kan sani kan hin jennee guree kudhanin diigdamaan nuu guuretti kaanaan shantaman akkassin nuu guuree kanan gallee ulfannetti.

A: The government workers collected 10 birr each from community members. Even the Amhara gave money. They (government workers) collected 10 to 20 birr each. The committee also helped us.

(Ayantu, interview, April 11, 2011)

I share this description because it reveals some of the dynamics between the ethnic groups. Ayantu specifically stated, "Even the Amhara" gave money for their cause. In the past, Amhara community members may not have given money for this Oromo dispute resolution process. Or, they could have supported it but not been in a position to publically offer their support because of problematic relations between the Amhara (one of the dominant political groups) and the Oromo. Another possibility is that because of

the social and political tensions with the Amhara ethnic group, Oromo community members may just assume that Amhara community members will not take an interest in their affairs. These are only a few of the many layers that I will continue to discuss in this interethnic case.

Throughout the day and night, fifty elders and other male leaders gathered with the women to discuss the situation. As Ayantu recalled, they stayed with the women, supporting and negotiating with them:

Seeraa keenya waan ta'eef. Gaafa dubbarttin bate nuu irraa hin haafuu kaa nuu waliin bula, qora nuu waliin qoranne, o'liffanu nuu walin o'ilifane jigaa nuu waliin yaa'a seeraa keenya dubbattee dubbii kan fiixu isa, kan dubbii fiittullee ni jira jarssii ee.

It is our culture. They have to share our problem; they stay the night with us, harmed by the cold. They negotiate the matter according to our laws, then they bring forth resolution.

Although the ritual is initiated and performed by women, the male *saddeetta* and *jarsaa* (elder men) have an integral role to play (see discussion of the relationship between the councils in chapter 2). They discuss the crime with the offender and the victim(s) and help negotiate the compensation that will be given to the women. Usually, by tradition when many women have been offended, the *ateetee* women ask for two cows for compensation instead of one. Some elders told me that this was one way to always ensure positive results. Furthermore, many women are usually present, so they want to ensure that every woman has meat and *meexichaa* (strip of hide for their *siinqee*).<sup>196</sup>

<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, unless there are really too many women present, usually the male elders can be creative so that they distribute a piece of hide to every woman. Arguing that there is not enough cowhide for all of their *siinqee* sticks can always be a way for the women to ask for more compensation. This was the situation at the ceremony I attended in Dikkii district in 2012. Over a hundred women came to the ceremony, and the women decided that one cow would not be enough compensation for all of them.

*Closing the ceremony with apology and blessings*

Hailu bought a cow for 1200 Ethiopian birr in order to complete the ceremony and reconcile with the women. Although this is a considerable sum of money (roughly the equivalent of one month's salary for a government worker with a university bachelor's degree), in an Ethiopian court the offender would often be asked to pay the same amount in cash.<sup>197</sup> In their accounts of ceremonies, such as the one with Hailu, women involved often say the elders help negotiate so the offender will give them the truth (*dhuuga*). In accordance with Arsi ateetee tradition, when Hailu offered his apology in the form of a sacrificial cow, he lay down on the ground. As the women explained, Hailu brought the cow at 11 a.m. on Wednesday:

Isuumatu qabe ofee fide waatii maxi isa  
bali fatee waan abarreef ka fadhe jedhe  
diiriifatee ciisee iijjoollee isa guurate  
xiixiqqoo ofitti qiixeessee, jartti ofiitti  
qiixeeffatte anatu bade naa dhiisa jedheen  
akkassin jiigee nuu jaltii afatee.

He, himself brought the cow. [...] He brought his children and his wife with him and asked for his apology to be accepted; when he did this he lowered down to the ground and begged us.

The women blessed Hailu for his cooperation and accepted the cow by singing the following (audio track 19):

Ee qolloo durbaa  
Dhalee dagaagaa

Yes, sacred of the girls [Ateetee?]<sup>198</sup>  
The cow gave birth

<sup>197</sup> In Oromo vernacular ceremonies, cash should never be exchanged; should money be offered, women should refuse until they receive a cow. Rufoo and Bujjaa (interview, April 14, 2011) told me about a time when a man offered their group of women cash so they would go away because he didn't want to participate in the ateetee ceremony, but they refused, waiting until he finally agreed to perform the ceremony.

<sup>198</sup> Qolloo is a traditional cotton shirt or dress that is worn by girls. It has also been referenced as something spiritual, like the natural places that Waaqeffaanna practitioners pray to. Here it may be referencing Ateetee, the spiritual being. In this song and often in conversation Arsi women speak of girls and boys, but the people involved are really women and men.

Nuu fidee gurbaan  
 Jala jalto'oo  
 Ee qolloo durbaa  
 Dhalee dagaagaa  
 Nu fidee gurbaan  
 Situu nu umee  
 Ee qolloo durbaa  
 Dhalee dagaagaa  
 Nu fidee gurbaan  
 Illillii

The boy brought us a cow  
 Our lover  
 Yes, sacred of the girls  
 The cow gave birth  
 The boy brought us a cow  
 You [God] created us  
 Yes, sacred of the girls  
 The cow gave birth  
 The boy brought us a cow  
 Illilli

After that, the elders killed the cow and cut up the meat to cook and distribute to the women. The women waited, seated, until the men distributed the small pieces of meat to them. The elders also put blood from the cow on the women's foreheads as a sign of blessing and prosperity from God. At this point, the elders collected all the women's siinqee sticks; they proceeded to cut the *meexichaa* (cowhide strips) they attached to the individual siinqee. Once they finished eating, the women gathered soft grass by the river (*sardoo*)<sup>199</sup> to give Hailu as a blessing. They gave grass to him and his family, touching his arm, singing (audio track 18, sung by Ayantu and friends):

*sardoo, sardoo jenna*  
*gosa sardoo keennaa*

We say *sardoo, sardoo* (blessed grass)  
 Give the *sardoo* to the clan members



Usually this would be a blessing for the offender and his clan members. In the case of Hailu, the blessing was given to him and his family.

*Ayantu and the ateetee women's return home*

<sup>199</sup> *Sardoo* is a grass given and used as a blessing in all types of ateetee and other prayer ceremonies in Oromo culture.

Ayantu and the ateetee participants, including the elders returned to Ayantu's home

singing (audio track 20):

Qaladhuu jettee Akkoo ana dhamtee Qaladhee galee Masoo ijii jamtee	You said to slay [sacrifice the cow] Our grandmother told us I slayed and came home She became blind with envy
Ee ayyoo guddoo Akkoo ana dhamtee Qaladhee galee ee Masoo iji jamtee	My great/elder mother <sup>200</sup> My grandmother sent a message And I slayed and came home She became blind with envy
Warana hin qabu uu Akkoo naan daamtee Qaladhe galee ee Masoo iji jamtee	I do not have the spear My grandmother sent a message And I slayed and came home She became blind with envy
Ee bidoo dhira Ulfadhe galee Ee bida kiyyaa	Yes, the property of a man [the woman] My honour has returned Yes, my property
Ee ayyoo guddoo oo Ee biduu diraa Ulfina galee ee Bida kiyyaa	Yes, great mother [elder, person of honour] Yes, of different colours My honour has returned Yes, my property
Situu nuu umee Ee bidu diiraa Ulfinaan galee Ee bida kiyyaa	You created us Yes, the men's property Honour has returned Yes, my property
Jalaa jaltoo'oo Ee biiduu diiraa Ulfinaan galee Mootitti tiyyaa Galate galtee Mootitiin tiyyaa Koottoollee diiraa Qallate galte	The beloved Yes, of different colours Honour has returned My leader [king] <sup>201</sup> She slayed and came back My leader Come we say She slayed and came

<sup>200</sup> This and the next verse *Ayyoo guddoo* and *Akkoo*) are references to ateetee as an actual honoured, spiritual person.

<sup>201</sup> This is also a reference to Ateetee as the leader of women.



mootiitiin tiyyaa  
Ee ayyoo guddoo  
Koottoollee dirraa  
Galate galte  
Ee mootiittin tiyyaa

My leader  
Yes, honoured mother  
The hands of the men  
She [slayed] and returned  
My leader

(Ayantu, interview, April 11, 2011)

There are, of course, different variations for songs women sing when they return. The common theme is the honour and respect that has been returned to them. They sing above about their honour being their property. As many interlocutors have told me, *mirga argate galtee* (we restored our rights and came home). The song above also directly addresses Ateetee as a person: great mother, the person who created them, an honoured mother, and their leader. They are showing their gratitude directly to her for the reconciliation and the restoration of their honour (*ulfinaa*). Upon arrival at Ayantu's home, Ayantu's husband killed a cow to celebrate her restored honour. She and the ateetee participants shared the meat and offered sung blessings for her husband and after receiving the food.

### **Reconciliation or Interethnic Tensions?**

When interviewed about the process in the Hailu case, male elders were quick to explain, with slight smiles, that the man was not from the culture. An Oromo man generally would turn to the elders as quickly as possible in order to sort out the problem. Hailu, who was not Oromo and so did not understand how the custom worked, had what could be seen as a shameful response: to run away to a friend's house. According to Hailu's version of the

story, he followed someone's advice to run. The elders had to go find him and help him through the process.

In spite of not being Oromo, Hailu did not seem to hold regrets about participating in the ceremony. In fact, he seemed to think it was a better system than the courts. As he explained:

H: Dura yaaw namoonni aadaa kana waan godhaniif argee waan beebuuf akka yaaw akka asuma keesatti waan dhaladheef asitti waan guddadhuf waa'ee kana seenaa kana waan beekuuf, kanaaf jechoof saniif whanna jedhe.

LQ: Aadaanna kana jechuuf?

H: Aadaa kanaaf. Ee aadaa kana hordofuuf ani hordofachuuf soqadheeti. Ee [...]  
Aadaa waan jiruun duuba, gara murtii achii lufan malee, aadaa tana waliin aadaa kana waliin buluutu nu wayya jechuuf ee.

H: Before I have seen others practice such types of culture. [...] I was born here and grew up here. I know about their history and that is why I have respected it and being governed by their culture.

LQ: You mean this culture?

H: This culture. Yes, I follow this culture, I look to follow it. Yes.

[...] Since there is a previously established culture, instead of going to the court, it is better for us all to be governed according to that culture.

(Hailu, interview, April 13, 2011)

This story's uniqueness lies in the fact that the offender was from a different ethnic group.

But just as there may be flexibility in how ateetee can be used or called into practice, there is also the possibility that it can be used with non-Oromo if they are willing to participate. In this case, the offender grew up in the area, spoke the language fluently and was somewhat familiar with the Oromo rituals even though he didn't practice them. He explained:

Ani aadaa waan asumatti guddadheef, waan asuumatti waani seera kana beekuuf, ani ofii asumatti guddadhee. Ani arsii keessa odoo jiru. Amaarumaa, amarumaa baqqaa

Since I grew up here and I grew up according to the culture of this area, I decided to be governed by this culture. I am an Amhara but I grew up here in Arsi

seera kannaan mana sana durallee waan  
godhaniif seera kana baqqaa guddifachuuf.  
Seeraan duuba hin bulu jechuuf. Waan kana  
godhe. Waan seera kanaatiin aadaa  
kanaatiin, aadaan buuluuf aadaa kanaan  
iraachuuf jechuuf taa'eetiiin aadaa san.

and I adopted this culture. They have been  
practicing this cultural law for many years  
and I feel that I can't live without being  
governed by that rule. I can't be against the  
culture and I believe that I must live  
according to that culture [of those people].

(Hailu, interview, April 13, 2011)

This discussion with Hailu revealed another layer in this case. There are several reasons why his comments are surprising. Considering the history of internal colonization and cultural imposition in the country by the Amhara royal leaders, Hailu was in a rare position. Though part of an historically-dominant ethnic group, he was living under the local, customary legal jurisdiction of an ethnic group that constitutes a local majority but national minority. Today there are still many unspoken tensions among the ethnic groups that dominate or have dominated state politics and other ethnic groups. Privilege is often unfairly given to those in the dominant groups. Hailu's quick acceptance to participate in the ritual can be seen as a progressive move, but it could also be seen as a strategic choice. He may very well be invested in his community and in maintaining amity with other members of the community. At the same time, he distances himself from the same Arsi by referring to Arsi culture as *that* culture. Because he is a minority in the community (if not the country), following Arsi customary law may be more of a requirement than a choice. He was also a local business owner and thus had to participate and be positive in order to keep his business from being affected negatively. Underneath the acceptance (or resigned acceptance) of Arsi social and legal domination, Hailu potentially could be frustrated.

At the same time, though different ethnic and religious groups have coexisted in Ethiopia for a very long time, I would argue that there have always been tensions. Residents of towns are not ignorant of issues of ethnicity and social class. Hailu is from a historically dominant ethnic group and he runs a successful business in town. Historically—and even today—Amhara merchants have been successful in securing and maintaining business endeavors, even in towns dominated by other ethnicities; their success often relates to the economic and logistical facilities that they had as they established their businesses. Furthermore, in spite of living together in a given town, members of different ethnic groups tend to stay among themselves. This is particularly the case for non-Oromo groups living in Oromo territories. They usually speak only Amharic, their native language and the national language, while Oromo community members are more likely to speak both languages. Hailu is an exception to the rule since he grew up among Oromo and went to a school where he learned Oromo. When Ayantu commented that she was surprised that the Amhara community members contributed money to the ceremony, she may have also been reflecting on these tensions. In spite of historical (and current) socio-political interethnic tensions, Hailu's participation is a positive sign for the future. His recognition of the ritual as an integral part of the Oromo customs and laws, suggests that he, too, must abide by them if he wants to live peacefully together with his neighbours.

Sultan, the chief of police at that time in the town, told me that most disputes do not go further than his office because he offers his advice in resolving the dispute. Then, if this does not work or does not fit the situation, he recommends they settle their disputes through cultural mechanisms:

Wantoota akkuma dura jedhe kana wantoota gurgudhe tor'een alatti. Gargaarsa guddaa nuuf godhani. Naannoo kannatti kanaaf jaarsaaf iddoo guddatu kennama. Maaliif jeequmsa barbadhaa sadarkaa polisiititti to'atamuu hin dandeenye gonkumaa hin dandeenye. Jaarsoota kana edduu qabee araara busee qaluu ka denda'u. Kenarraa be'eetti dhiteenyaan wajjiin dalagne jechuudha. Kanarraallee derbee pooliisiin keennaayyuu. Polisi biyyaa biraatiin wanni adda isa godhu yoo jiraate. Yerkkoota sasalphaa ta'an kadhiisee tuna seera qafaan kan godhuulhee osoo hin ta'in. Waamee gaafatu kuni dogoggorri sibira jiraa. Araaramii jedhee haala yakkoota itti xiggaatteetti ararsu kan jiru ta'uu isaati. Akkana fakkaata jechaa.

Except big issues, we really give support to the cultural approach of settling crimes. There is a big place given to elders. There are cases, especially family cases which cannot be settled through the policemen, but that elders can easily settle peacefully. That is why we work closely with elders. Most of the time, the policeman assigned over there should have knowledge of that culture. That policeman should not bring everything before law; he should ask them and advise them that they committed crimes and they can settle their cases through negotiations. This is what it's like.

(Sultan, interview, April 19, 2011)

Although using *ateetee* and other Oromo vernacular dispute resolution processes are often the most effective means of resolving disputes and restoring respect between participants, there is potential for participants on all sides to be bullied into the process. The most obvious bullying is towards the offender, but as seen in this chapter, women can also be pressured into participating in *ateetee* rituals. Similarly, male elders, neighbours or relatives can be forced into the process because they know the women involved as members of their community or clan. Not participating or helping is frowned upon by the women and other practitioners of vernacular religion. This question of participation is relevant to discussions on the dynamics of individual and group rights (Hodgson 2011).<sup>202</sup> Though individual rights exist and are maintained in relation to the group in *Arsi* culture, group rights often prevail. Men usually participate because they are active in their

<sup>202</sup> For more information concerning individual and group rights in specific indigenous legal contexts, see : Cowan 2006, Merry 2013, Speed 2009, Strathern 2004.

community politics and they follow customary law. According to the Arsi concept of *dhugaa*, women's rights are mandated in customary law and by Waqaa. Their words and accusations are generally seen as true and worthy of defense.

In most cases, the *saddeetta* reviews the situation and decides if an *ateetee* ceremony is really necessary before it proceeds, but if the victim and the group of women with her are angry enough, they can go to the offender's house immediately and then later persuade the women's council that they needed to perform the ceremony. The offender then basically has a choice between: (1) a large-scale prolonged humiliation and wrath from women singing at his door, or, (2) discussing with the *saddeetta*, participating in the ceremony, offering a cow and an apology and coming to peaceful terms with the women. In the particular case of Hailu, although all participants are trying to be fair during the dispute resolution process, it is possible that their decision is tainted by the difficult history between these ethnic groups and by Oromo majority in the local community. Just as with any group decision in any situation in any society, it would be reassuring to think that decisions are always fair, but individual hesitations and even unspoken group coercions can lead to bullying and should always be considered a possibility, especially when the participants were historically politically and economically unequal.

### **Who helps? Peacemakers, women's affairs office, cultural office, police**

When the *ateetee* ceremonies take place in or near a town, like this one did, or when an offender does not want to participate in a ceremony, government offices often become involved. During the time of the Derg and then, subsequently, under the governance of former Derg leaders (1974–1987; 1987–1991), these ceremonies were

officially frowned upon by government officials. Today, though the state advocates the use of government courts for serious cases, ateetee is one of many vernacular dispute resolution practices that are used in Ethiopia: in other regions, where other ethnic groups comprise majorities, their traditional dispute resolution practices are still active today.<sup>203</sup>

Many people are involved in the ateetee ceremonies and support them when community members choose to use them. Local peacemakers are involved in the vernacular ceremonies, but also work in the police stations and courts to aid in the resolution of cases that have gone to the government offices. Vernacular justice remains strong within communities and the local police support it and use its methods in their work. Other government offices also provide additional support. Cultural and women's affairs offices provide help for those who are involved in an ateetee ceremony and for those who would like to seek other forms of mediation, such as through the courts. In the case of Ayyuu and Hailu, the women's affairs office provided financial support to the women participating in the ceremony to help defray the costs of food and drinks. Similarly, the cultural offices can provide financial support to the offender, or they can help explain the process as they helped Hailu. As another example, in the case of the man who had insulted his neighbour, the cultural office helped convince the man that the ceremony was the only way he was going to resolve the problem and restore peace.

Usually religious organizations do not interfere with the ceremonies but, if the ceremony involves someone from their place of worship and they are tolerant of ateetee practices, a representative may come to help that congregant during the process. In

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<sup>203</sup> See Pankhurst and Assefa's *Grassroots Justice in Ethiopia: The Contribution of Customary Dispute Resolution* (2008) for a selection of examples of vernacular justice practices across the country.

addition, family, neighbours, clan members and friends constitute the most important supporters of the ceremony. Whether they are forced to participate, as is the case with some of the women, or whether they do so voluntarily, they are present and involved until the dispute is resolved.

### **Does it work? Offender, victim, community perceptions**

Upon reflecting on the ateetee ceremony, Hailu, the women, and the elders thought that they had settled their disagreement. In Hailu's opinion, they were reconciled:

Dubartii waliin nu araarsanii, nu araarsanii  
waan kennu baqqaa wanna jedhanii na  
eebbisa nii dura na abaaraa turanii  
maayiirratti naa wannaa jedhanii,  
naatufanii. Naa eebbisanii achiin duuba  
anillee horii kenne. Achumaa isaan  
kadhatte achiin duuba, araara taanee  
addaan deemme ammallee waluumaan  
jirra.

Yes, the woman and I are reconciled. We  
fought before; I insulted her but in the end I  
was blessed and forgiven for my wrong  
deeds. They blessed me. After that I also  
gave them a cow. We settled our  
disagreement through cultural peacemaking  
and currently are living together [in  
agreement].

(Hailu, interview, April 13, 2011)

The women also agreed that once the man had offered them a cow and the women had blessed him, the ceremony was finished and they could be considered reconciled.

In discussions and interviews, I often asked people who had participated in ateetee ceremonies whether they thought they were effective means of resolving disputes. Almost everyone I talked to found them to be more effective than the government courts or resolving the dispute with the police. I asked Amariich, a leader of saddeetta in the Garanbambo area, the following:

LQ: Ateeteenii fi mannii murtii  
mootummaa garaa garummaa qabaa?  
Maalii innii?

LQ: Do ateetee and the court have  
differences? What are they?



AS: Akka mana murtiitii fi akka seera keennaa ka dubarttoota, seera keennatuu tara (caala) jenna. Maaliif? Dubarttoonni walitti birmaatee saddeettaan, wali-yaali chiifitee, duulaan yaatee waan gaggeeffamuuf.

LQ: Gamtaadhaanii?

AS: Ee, gamtaadhaan. Waan gaggeeffamuuf, gurmaa'innaan jechuu dhaa. Duulaan, gamta'an waan gaggeeffamuuf. Ta hafeellee, wali-irraa hin hafituu. Sadeettaan wali-irra deemitee wal-yaamitti – wal-yaaftii – duulaan; gageefatii; ta hafitee yoo jiraatee siinqee itti gaagurtti. Kanaaf yaatee hamma dhumaatti eegdii. Hirmaanaa, hirmaanaadhaan wali-yaaftii. Fakkeenaaf, haatii takka uduu mana seeraa (murtii) dhaqixee, warra seeraa qofatuu isii gargaara. Akka seera dubarttoota gurmaa'inaan wal-gargaaruun hin jiru. Dubarttoonni wal-ijaatee, waliin yaatee, qalchiifatti. Yoo inni'illee qaluu dide, saddeettaan wal-geetti, saddeennii seeraan galchaa. Kanaaf, ka aadaa seera dubarttoota tituu caala.

AS: Comparing the court and our women's law, our women's law is better. Why? Women rush together to help each other with the saddeetta committee, they gather, they make a campaign and activate it.

LQ: Is it done unified [with cooperation]?

AS: We activate in unity, which means we organize in the form of a campaign, in co-operation. We activate [serve]; they all come. We check on each other through the committee. We announce ourselves to each other—by the campaign and by activating ourselves. When some women are absent we turn down our siinqee on them. That is why they participate until the end. They move women to come out. For example, if one mother goes to court, the court members (judges) only help her. But with our women's law, women unite and cooperate. This mutual help is not in the court. (In ateetee), women cooperate, come together and help each other. If a person (the offender) does not want to kill a cow (participate in the ritual), the women go to the women's committee, and they will be handled well, in a cultural manner. This is why women's cultural law is better.

(Amariich, interview, January 15, 2011)

According to Amariich, a major part of ateetee is that it unifies women to fight together.

In a court, a woman faces the offender with only a few people, such as government workers, by her side. Some women also emphasize the bureaucracy of the courts. One told me that if you go to a court, the offender may pay and you just come out with a paper, but it doesn't reconcile people in the community. Another woman talked about some court appointments happening several years later. And yet another woman

mentioned the ineffectiveness of prison sentences, as the offender just serves his/her sentence, but s/he does not reconcile with people in the community.

Local government officials also see local restorative justice practices as effective.

As Sultan, the chief of police in Kokkossa, told me:

Irra caalaa amma, irra caalaa akuma beekannu. Aadaatu irra nama araarsa. Maaliif namni lamaa wal-himatu dhufe. Anaaf ati amma yoo wal-himannee seera afoo dhufne. Yookan atiif isiin wali himattanii yoo seera afoo dhuftan. Seerri maal jedhaa ebaluutuu balleessaa qabaa. Jedhee nama sanitti murteessa eega murteessee namni suni addabbii akka argatu godha. Jechii amma isiin lamaallee walitti araaramaa jedhee walitti isiin araarsu. Aasaan ammo nama balleessa qabu ittillee himu. Isaan deebii'anni akka gamtaa jireenna waliin akka jiraatan. Walitti araarsa, walitti firoomsa. Kanaaf walitti yoo firoomse namonii kuni booda akka gadoottii wal-hin barbaadan. Kana keessatti aadaan gahee guddaa laghata. Amma ka aadaa filatama qaba jedhuu. Edduuti araari aadaa araara seeraa irra. Araarri seeraa gama tokkocha wanna godhee biraa gala araarii aadaa gama larchuu walitti firoomsuu waan dandauuf irra caalaa fudhata marqaba. Ka seera caalsaa fudhatana qabe jechudha.

As it's known, it is culture that reconciles our people most of the time. Why, because if you go to the court, it will be inconvenient. For example, if you and I accuse one another and go to the court, the court will decide one of us is guilty and one of us will be sentenced to jail. After the court finds that person guilty then it will be decided that the one found guilty will be charged. Through cultural reconciliation systems it is possible to bring both of you to an agreement. Through culture you can tell the guilty his/her faults. After their conflict you can teach them to live together avoiding other conflicts. You bring them together and restore their familiarity. After you reconcile them and create familiarity between them, they will not consider themselves as enemies. Culture plays a significant role in doing this thing. It means that there is a good culture in reconciling people, where you can restore people's familiarity. There is a law of reconciling together. Culture brings together both sides. Due to this it is better than going to court. It means it is better than legal (government) laws.

(Sultan, interview, April 19, 2011)

Sultan brought up two significant points here: The first is that if you can bring the two angry parties together to solve their disputes through ritual and discussion, and through apology and reconciliation, then it creates a longer lasting sense of understanding among those people and in the community. The problem with the court or government system, as

many told me, is that one person gets punished but everyone still goes home with the same bad feelings. One woman in an area where ateetee is in decline told me, “Now I have a bad feeling. Now there are no results. Now there is no dispute resolution. You go to the court and other people write on a paper for you.” In effect, there is a lack of dialogue. As she further explained, this paper doesn’t bring back a better or good feeling between the people who were fighting. This brings me to the second important point from Sultan’s discourse. He mentions that culture is the way both fighting sides can come together and find peace. Among the Arsi, maintaining respect is part of a larger worldview of harmony and reciprocity in the culture. If one person insults another, that balance is disturbed. Culturally, there is a way to restore it. I do not, however, want to portray this ritual as utopian, because it does not always work; I have talked to a few participants who indicated that bad feelings remained after the ceremony. As well, Arsi society has its share of inherent violence, particularly in relation to women. Because this ritual and judicial process exists and is mostly effective, it works as both a deterrent for future transgressions and acts of violence and as a way to involve the entire community in the justice process.

### **Restorative justice, reciprocity and peace**

This interethnic ateetee ceremony is an example of a restorative justice process that has the particularity of also reconciling people from different ethnic groups. What made this ritual work well as a restorative process was the participation and cooperation of the community and the emphasis on reconciliation rather than retribution (Cayley 1998,

Dembour 2007, Lillies 2002). In the case of Hailu, the offense was seen as disrespect -- not just to one woman but to all women. The offense could also be seen on an interethnic level as one between the different ethnic groups. Instead of being stigmatized and punished, Hailu was taken through the entire process with an end result of blessings. As with other restorative justice processes, this one worked because it required the offender to recognize what he did wrong and offer compensation to the women and the community. In effect, restorative justice techniques focus on the needs of victim, offender and community, often creating a dialogue between the different parties involved and restoring a sense of balance to the community. However, problems can arise when a ritual practice becomes institutionalized and fixed, losing its dynamic nature.<sup>204</sup>

In any discussion of restorative justice or vernacular dispute resolution, the concept of harmony in society must be questioned. Is there is “balance” or “peace” to begin with? What is being restored? What is achieved by settling the dispute? What caused the imbalance or dispute in the first place? Does balance hold the same meaning for everyone? It would be possible to ask all of these questions for the ceremony in this chapter. Because the case is interethnic the question of balance is even more complicated. The power relations may have been unequal to begin with to the advantage of the non-Oromo man. By forcing him to participate in this ritual, the ateetee women may have compensated in some ways for this historical imbalance. Another issue is that balance is culturally determined and contingent. The Arsi Oromo have many terms evocative of the

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<sup>204</sup> Problems can arise when local or national governments institutionalize traditional justice practices yet continue to see the crime as an offence against the state. In the case of the *bulubulu* ritual Merry (2006) researched in Fiji, this was part of the problem. The newly-institutionalized use of *bulubulu* seemed to lose sight of the victim, thus hindering a dialogue between all parties involved.

outcomes of dispute resolution, including: balance (*qixxeesa*), agreement (*waliigaluu*), peace (*nagaa*), resolution (*fumaata*), and reconciliation (*araarama*). For example, a man may hit a woman and, after the ceremony, if they are reconciled and a sense of community balance is restored, this does not mean that women and men's roles in society will have changed. This may be the same case for the interethnic tensions, if they exist. The dispute may be reconciled, but this would not necessarily reconcile broader ethnic tensions in society.

In an article questioning the processes and definitions of restorative justice, Cree legal scholar Napoleon (2004) offers a critical discussion of the term "harmony" in respect to Canadian Indigenous contexts. I think this discussion is applicable here. Although it is not the same term as "balance," she says achieving harmony is similar to restoring balance or peace in society. Napoleon points out two main critiques of the liberal use of the term harmony. In restorative justice literature, harmony or restoration is often achieved through the offender recognizing and assuming responsibility for his/her crime, and the offender's apology. As Napoleon points out in her first critique, an individual does not exist without those around him/her, so responsibility must not lie in the offender alone but also in society in which s/he is embedded. Systemic social problems need to be addressed in order to fully deal with issues related to individual offenses (Napoleon 2004, 37-38).

In the Arsi Oromo cases, systemic problems in society are addressed and discussed through women's and men's councils, and through dispute resolution rituals. If disputes reoccur or if a specific person is a repeat offender, elders and community councils may look at the broader context and discuss improvements that need to be made.

These improvements can be within their community with or without outside assistance. For example, in one Oromo area in the Rift Valley, many community members who were opposed to *kittana* (female genital cutting) had discussions with midwives who were performing the surgeries. Huunde, a local non-profit assisted with the discussion process. Together everyone came to an agreement and decided to stop the practice. Although this is not an example of criminal activity or a specific dispute, it is an example of how a community came together to resolve what they saw as a collective problem instead of putting the blame on specific actors. Though *ateetee* is a process that occurs on an irregular basis, it can also be seen as a means of making sure people show respect to women and honour their rights. By taking part in these ceremonies from time to time, the community is reminded of the cultural norms and customary law.

Balance and harmony need to be interpreted in their cultural contexts. In her second critique, Napoleon is critical of situations in which “the ideology of harmony is applied collectively and coercively” (Ibid., 38). Although it may be difficult to come to terms with, one society or community’s notions of harmony and peace may not be congruent with other societies or their ways of “doing” justice. These outside notions of peace may be coercively applied in other cultural contexts. In many societies, a degree of conflict may be the norm, with local resolution procedures existing to control and limit conflict to an acceptable level. Ethnomusicologist Samuel Araujo has been conducting fascinating research exploring the questions of violence and rights (Araujo et al. 2006). Violence is often considered something abnormal that should be eliminated, but, in fact, there is violence inherent in all relationships to some degree. In Brazilian favelas, punk is associated with violence, but youth also listen to many other types of music (Araújo

2006). In the favela, punk and parties are banned by the police on the grounds that punk encourages violence through its lyrics and performance, and also because venues are associated with acts of violence. At the same time there is a market for this music with international labels, so people who aren't even living in the favelas are able to make a living off of it rather than, for example, turning to the drug economy for money. In Araújo's analysis he uses an applied project to approach issues of music and violence. Youth in the favelas took part in group discussions on music and violence in their communities. Araújo presents the different and sometimes contradictory views on violence that came out of the project. The youth refuted an exoticized view of the favelas and violence because they lived there and it was their everyday life, which some of them enjoyed. But they were also trying to negotiate issues of violence they lived with, through more or less violent sound and music they heard, such as samba and funk (Ibid.).

Even if it is not ideal, instead of pretending disagreement does not exist, there has to be some way of dealing with it in order for some sense of balance to be sought and maintained. In the Arsi case, in order for community members to remember the laws and be respectful, from time to time they must go through conflict and be reminded of the rules of respect through a restorative process. Legal anthropologist Laura Nader has explored the concept of harmony and peace through localized contexts, most notably in her fieldwork sites in Zapotec mountain villages, and in many international contexts, such as a conference dealing with peacemaking and conflict-management practices in Africa. For the latter, she found that international actors often misinterpret what is really going on in local communities, imposing an ideology of harmony as something naturally inherent

(Nader 2002, 122). Napoleon also uses Nader's arguments to demonstrate how harmony ideology is both useful and destructive to aboriginal communities:

Conciliation, harmony, and resolution have such different uses and consequences as to merit different labels. Harmony that leads to autonomy is different from harmony that leads to control or oppression or pacification; conciliation may lead to conflict as well as to peace; and resolution may lead to injustice as well as justice. (Nader 1990, 320-21; quoted in Napoleon 2004, 38)

On one side, declaring that social harmony is at the core of societal values among certain groups might discourage intrusion from the government. And on the other side, the discourse of needing to maintain and keep harmony in society can be used by government officials to encourage state intervention in cases such as protests and various rights movements.

Although the Arsi Oromo have many different dispute resolution ceremonies in which "peace" (*nagaa*) and reconciliation (*ararsa*) are the end goals, I agree that it is necessary to evaluate critically what it means to achieve balance or harmony in their society. I have been to many different types of Oromo ceremonies and gatherings, including, but not limited to: singing gatherings in bars or people's homes, religious prayers, legal councils, dispute resolutions, weddings, and funerals. During most of these events I have heard raised voices and disagreements, which sometimes led to physical fighting and pushing. For example, at almost every wedding I attended, young dancers would end up pushing each other and beginning a fight. And during the ceremonies that seal the marriage, I often ended up in the room with men yelling advice and pushing to try to get closer or see what was happening. Tension that flows over into clashes is very common in Arsi society. It makes events at times seem chaotic and unorganized, but it is also what allows



everyone to have a voice or a say in community processes.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, usually the potential for excessive verbalizations and disputes is put in check by the others present, Arsi values, and their indigenous or vernacular governing system.

In Arsi society this equilibrium between peace/tolerance and disputes/fighting is maintained through both belief systems and Arsi customary law (see chapters 2 and 3).<sup>206</sup> Physical and/or verbal violence exists in Arsi society, but these mechanisms are in place to balance those outbursts of chaos. Ateetee also operates in the same manner. It continues to exist and be used because acts of violence are directed towards women. Women also use acts of violence (their insults) in the process. Though many Arsi women are seen as strong, respected members of society who have their own roles in society, in the patrilineal system and, particularly in changing social contexts, they are at times the objects of acts of violence. However, even in contemporary, changing societies that are, at the best of times, bordering on peaceful and violent situations, ateetee is still very relevant. It is how women can restore and ensure a balance for their honour and rights.

## **Conclusion**

The interethnic ateetee ceremony detailed in this chapter remains a distinctive example of a full ateetee process. Culturally, women are seen as having regained their respect and truth, and the offender is blessed and at least verbally given back his/her

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<sup>205</sup> This spectrum of tension illustrates a point made in reference to customary law in Chapter 2: disagreement can be an important part of law (Borrows 2010a).

<sup>206</sup> I have known and discussed with many of these male peacemakers. With Aliyee, the father of the first host family I had and continue to see, I have had long conversations about his role as a peacemaker. He travels around, sometimes even considerable distances, to resolve disputes with other elders.

honour: balance, in other words, is restored. Hailu successfully completed the process in spite of not being from the same ethnic group. Hailu may have left the ceremony with positive feelings, but for the Arsi women involved in this case, it was successful in more ways than the usual ateetee process. They were resolving a violation of honour, not just with a man, but with someone from a different ethnic group that had a history of intolerance and discrimination towards the Arsi. In my nervous conversation with him and from the descriptions of his behaviour during the process, it was clear that he was aware of the underlying tensions associated with his participation in the ateetee ceremony.

Ateetee women must work as a group in order to reclaim respect and their rights. Though women have the ability to protest and distinguish themselves as individuals, the resolution process would not be as effective without the participation of the disputing parties, community members, and those who assist in judging the truth and facilitating the process. For all of those involved, participating and singing through the different parts of the justice process as a community is a major contributor to its success. As will be explored in the next chapter, singing songs and insults do not merely contribute to justice: they enact it.

## Chapter 7

### Singing for Results



Ateetee jechuun faaruu jechuu dhaa.

Ateetee means singing.

(Amariich Shubbee, interview, October 2011)

Ateetee garaagarummaa jechuun tuun tafalaaf baatu, tuun tagoora himataaf baatu, garaagarummaan isii. Morka jechuun gaafa waa isii tuqan. Garaagarummaa jechuun. Suni weettoo ofii jijjirtu ta arabaallee aarii isiitii, ta aarii isiitiin weedduu aarii hojaa qabdii, weedduu falaa hojan qabdi.

There are different types of ateetee. There are ateetee: to find solutions for problems, to tell problems, to argue when someone has been hit. There are different types. They (women) change their anger to music; she reflects on her anger through singing. They sing to find a solution.

(Kadiro, interview, January 2012)

Ateetee arnyaa mee arnyaa rabbi nuu garagaarii, mee jedhaa deemina. Iliilii.

Ateetee is the power, the power of *Rabbii* (God) to help us. We say so and go. *Iliilii*.

(Shangu Gobana, interview, December 21, 2010)

For Arsi women, ateetee cannot exist without song. Ateetee songs and the action of singing hold the power that solves problems. Within Arsi culture, ateetee is the only conflict resolution ritual organized and controlled by women and the only one that is sung. All the men's dispute resolution ceremonies are spoken, though they are punctuated with rhythmic speaking and call-and-response answers. What makes singing an effective means of dispute resolution for women? Is it power, harnessed through the women's close connection with a higher spiritual being (see Chapter 3), that makes sung prayers the most normal and effective mode of communication? Or, is it the ability to express concerns and sentiments that they normally would not do in the open, through song? Perhaps it is the performative nature of singing in a public ritual context that enables women to transcend everyday normative behaviours? From participation, observation and analysis, I found the effectiveness of singing can be a combination of these and other factors.

Investigating why women sing ateetee reveals Arsi women's emotional, spiritual and practical connections with ateetee. While important considerations, the most relevant questions for this research project are: "What makes ateetee work?" "How is it an effective means of resolving disputes?" Many indigenous scholars and activists have documented the role of ritual in the expression of justice and law (Borrows 2010, Monet and Skanu'u 1991, Napoleon 2007, 2010, Regan 2010, Webber 2009), but they have not included specifics about how music, expressive arts, and ritual *enact* justice. In recent research, Dylan Robinson (2016, forthcoming) explores how, in Canada, songs in certain First Nations traditions exist not just for the sake of performance or aesthetics, but for "doing" or "enacting" political relationships and legal treaties. Building on J. L. Austin's

(1962) theorization of speech acts, Robinson refers to particular expressive undertakings as “song acts” and “dance acts” (2016, 2). He specifies, “For Pacific Northwest First Nations in particular, our songs are legal expressions of land title, they enact forms of diplomacy between nations, they convey knowledge about the land, they are living documents of our history, and they provide healing” (ibid.). Robinson describes, for example, how Tahlthan Nation artist, Peter Morin, sang to his ancestors and the British Empire founders by literally singing to statues and landmarks in England (forthcoming). Robinson describes Morin’s site singing “as enacting forms of Indigenous nation-to-nation contact with ancestors” (page forthcoming). In effect, songs go beyond the aesthetic and enact—or “do”—politics or other actions.

In this chapter I build on this concept of song acts, specifically looking at how *ateetee* enacts or *is* justice. I use a mixed delivery approach, which combines video ethnography with a multisensory and poetic description, to explore how Arsi women sing *ateetee* to express themselves, create solidarity, and resolve disputes effectively. I have struggled to convey an understanding of the effectiveness of singing *ateetee* to readers who cannot be present at the ceremonies. A performance studies approach seems the most obvious choice because it goes beyond discourse analysis (analyzing performances as “texts”) to focus on the dynamic and interrelated nature of (human) activities. However, like the Arsi women who participate in the process, I am wary of treating *ateetee* merely as performance. Analyzing it (or her, as some women would say) exclusively as aesthetic performance denies *ateetee*’s agency and the agency of the women involved.<sup>207</sup> I do

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<sup>207</sup>In his article discussing the agency of the Idle No More musical expressions, Robinson (2016) voices similar discontent with performance studies’ normalization of Indigenous cultural practices. He resists

acknowledge, however, that performance and performative acts, by definition mean doing or enacting something and not just staging something, and that even in performance studies there is research in that domain, so I am not critiquing all types of performance analysis. Ateetee is ritual, process, power, and it holds a strong spiritual valence. As seen throughout this dissertation, among the Arsi discourses about ateetee refer to it as law (*seera*) or as the means by which law is enacted. Furthermore, the ontological nature of ateetee's actual spiritual efficacy and singing as judicial enactment may be missed through too narrow a focus on performance.

### **Individual and group aesthetics in Arsi music making**

In this chapter, I address how certain properties of Arsi music making and physical expressions are part of what makes ateetee effective. As I hope to demonstrate here, an aesthetic of group/community cooperation is essential to ateetee's power. I mentioned some of the musical characteristics of ateetee in chapter 3, but here I focus more on the sung poetry and the group.

Arsi music consists principally of sung poetry.<sup>208</sup> The poetic text defines the rules of the musical composition. Some of these features include: parallel melodic and rhythmic musical structures within a verse to match the rhyming words; repetition of musical endings so one chorus can respond to another; and rhythmic structures that match

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inclusion of his Indigenous methodology into performance studies and also resists "discourses, in performance studies and beyond, that tend to disassociate our dances, songs, oratory, and regalia from their ontological significance as living, sensate, and what I am here calling their 'instrumental' capacities to do things in the world" (3).

<sup>208</sup> The Arsi Oromo have very few instruments for traditional music making—drums (*dibbee*) and wood percussion (*kabala*)—though popular music performances and staged traditional music performances often use an amplified band with an electric keyboard, drums, and, sometimes, other instruments.

the words in a phrase. Most Arsi Oromo repertoires are performed in groups<sup>209</sup> and songs are executed in antiphonal style, with a song leader (*afolee*) or a group of leaders. In antiphonal songs, each choir has a leader and they respond to each other. By definition this is a relational style, which also contributes to the goal of the group justice. Ateetee generally uses this last form, with fewer people in the leading choir than the responding one. Each choir is expected to sing more or less together.

The term *afolee* literally means the person who created a song and passed it on from one generation to another, but it more commonly indicates a person who knows the repertoires well and can lead them. *Afolee* are generally those who have a good memory, can sing many different verses and frequently attend ceremonies. They also become leaders because they take initiative as individuals and do not hesitate to sing out, starting songs at ceremonies and inserting new verses in front of the group. There is a particular moment in the video when a leader is heard taking initiative by singing louder and inserting another verse (1'58" on the video). Leaders often come from families where there are other leaders of songs and other ceremonial cultures. But a woman who attends many (ateetee) ceremonies can also learn the repertoire and eventually become a song leader herself. *Afolee* often initiate songs, but they can be chosen to lead. Other women revere them for their musical and poetic knowledge.<sup>210</sup> In past research (Qashu 2006), I

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<sup>209</sup> Exceptions include: lullabies (*faaruu ijolee*), the bride's departure songs (*baye-bayee*), political songs, songs to give courage for hunting (*huumsaa*), and warrior praise songs (*geerarsa*).

<sup>210</sup> In ateetee, as with most Arsi repertoires, many of the verses have been passed down for generations. Over time, verses of the poetry can change and new ones can be inserted by singers. Memory is crucial since each song or prayer has many different verses and they are passed down aurally and experientially: daughters learn from listening to their mothers at home when they are young, from attending the ceremonies as children, from sneaking around the ceremonies they should not be attending as young women, and once they are married they learn by attending these ceremonies.

found that song leaders also tended to be leaders in other aspects of life.<sup>211</sup> For example, Shuru is a saddeetta leader and she is also a song leader. This is in large part because leaders must be outspoken, confident, and have a deep knowledge of the culture in order to guide others in socio-political and spiritual domains of life.

There are many different verses and for a good leader, the goal is to be able to remember and sing as many as possible. However, families that are known for having *afolee* would not lose their reputation because some family members do not have a good memory or are not interested in the repertoires. Over time, some verses have changed slightly, but their meaning and context usually remain unaltered. Sometimes, however, a singer may insert a variation, whether it be a personal reference or even a random word because she has forgotten the word that is usually sung. The only regional variations that I have noted in content are related to changes in toponyms and names of people.

History is an integral part of this process. The women pass down the songs to subsequent generations, but they also pass down the stories of the other events they have attended. Each event may be different, but when they participate in an ateetee ritual, the past ateetee events and participants are in their minds and actions. They are a part of what extends this justice process into the future. Clear historical precedents may exist. This is the case, for example, when ateetee women demand a specific type of compensation because it was given at the last ateetee ceremony they attended for a specific type of insult. But the past may be recalled more subtly, such as through references or toponyms in the songs. The high value of “precedence” in ateetee cases reveals an interesting parallel between customary law and state justice systems.

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<sup>211</sup> This is not a set rule, but it was true for the majority of *afolee* that I met.



Although there are song leaders, in practice the leaders and the responders merge together in ateetee ritual and song. Arsi songs have a group objective: everybody should try to sing the same verses together.<sup>212</sup> Though everyone aims to sing together in monophony, Arsi songs are slightly heterophonic in practice. This is mainly caused by: natural, unsynchronized departures; chorus members not knowing all the verses; one person singing louder than others to express herself or draw attention to her voice; or very large ateetee circles, where the sound literally takes time to travel across the circle (this can be seen in the last excerpt in the video). Most songs are based on anhemitonic pentatonic scales.<sup>213</sup> Melodies are short and they have a small range, which facilitates collective singing. The call at the beginning of the verses is often overlapped with the response, so it sounds like a continuous cycle of singing and exchange between the women. All women are expected to participate, repeating the opening verse, even if they do not know any other part of the song. The group chooses a comfortable note of departure and then they begin.<sup>214</sup> Rhythms are also short and measured, which facilitates both singing and dancing during the ateetee ceremony. The tempo is flexible but tends to be slow yet energetic. In this manner, the group stays together and can sway/dance slowly while singing.

Aesthetically, women should sing as loudly as possible and for as long as they can during the ateetee ritual. Their prayers and voices are directed towards Waaqaa (God),

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<sup>212</sup> Some of the musical characteristics that facilitate this task are: the scales, the melodies, the key, the range, the tempo and the dynamics.

<sup>213</sup> To determine the pentatonic scale, I use the conventional Brăiloiu (1973: 343-405) pycnon, which consists of 2 whole steps. If the scale has the pycnon but is missing one of the five notes, which is the case in many Arsi songs, using Brăiloiu's terminology it is a "defective" pentatonic scale, because harmonically it still sounds pentatonic.

<sup>214</sup> There is no formal process or specific pitches they must use.

then towards each other, the offender, the elders, and other community members who are listening. Because of the pressure applied on their vocal cords, the timbre can sometimes seem rough or forced. The songs should follow the general melodic contour and rhythm, but, in general, women choose any pitch that is in a comfortable vocal range and begin there. I have heard singers retake or adjust an *ateetee* prayer in progress in a slightly lower or higher pitch in order to render it more comfortably.

“So that God (*Waaqa*) hears us” (*Waaqaa nuu dhagayaa*) is what many women have answered when I ask them why they sing the prayers. Utterances, or words, as J. L. Austin (1962) has argued, can have power in themselves.<sup>215</sup> In spiritual actions, such as the *ateetee* ritual (or its opposite, that is, cursing), sung words carry considerable power. A seminal work in this respect is Favret-Saada’s (1980) study of witchcraft in the Bocage in the west of France. As she discovered, “The act, in witchcraft, is the word” (Ibid). As with cursing, words in witchcraft are inherently powerful: “Now, witchcraft is spoken words; but these spoken words are power, and not knowledge or information” (Ibid). Favret-Saada became directly involved in witchcraft during her fieldwork because she couldn’t do otherwise. As she explained, “In short, there is no neutral position with spoken words: in witchcraft, words wage war. Anyone talking about it is a belligerent, the ethnographer like everyone else. There is no room for uninvolved observers” (Ibid, 10). People would often ask her, “Are you strong enough?” when she would try to get people who had experience of witching stories to tell her about them (Ibid., 11). She explained that she had to move away from her dispassionate position if she wanted to do ethnography: “When total war is being waged with words, one must make up one’s mind

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<sup>215</sup> Later, Foucault (1980, 1984) also theorized on the power of discourse.

to engage in another kind of ethnography” (Ibid., 12). In her written account she analyzes discourse to demonstrate how people used the power of words to attack others, protect themselves from attack, and unwitch themselves or others. Because she discarded a more distanced position, Favret-Saada herself was eventually “attacked.”

This example, though geographically removed from the Arsi Oromo, is indicative of the power of words, discourse, and ritual. As I aim to demonstrate, ritual and justice can be the same thing. This connection between ritual and law in the same manner is not, however, universally acknowledged. In the context of the Canadian legal system, Paulette Regan has taken a closer look at conflicting values and failed understandings of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. She describes one famous case from 1991 in which the Gitksan and the Wet’suet’wen chose to use stories, ceremonies, songs, and rituals in litigation in a British Columbia courtroom (Regan 2010, 180) under a non-Aboriginal judge. In the end, the use of their culture failed due to the judge’s lack of intercultural understanding and due to his own “settler denial” (Ibid., 181). I have included this example to demonstrate how ritual and expressive oral culture, including singing, is regarded as law. Don Monet and Skanu’u (Ardythe Wilson) published a book on this famous court case (1992), which was, itself, a non-habitual way to document law and a three-and-a-half-year courtroom case (the book comprises photographs, maps, archival images, and courtroom drawings, speeches and proceedings).

In the ateetee ritual, I assert, the songs are justice. Singing words are acts of power for the other women, for Waaqa and for the community. The women sing the resolution. This unfolds literally at the end of the ceremony when the women sing to bless the offender. Only Arsi women can sing for justice as they hold an honoured, respected

position in society and hold a particular connection to Waaqa. Although most offenders do resolve disputes through ateetee, if they don't, women can place their siinqee in their left hands, turn them down and curse the offender. Not so dissimilar to Favret-Saada, I have also felt the impact of the songs and movement in the ateetee ritual: by being a woman involved in the community, I have been unable to keep a neutral position. I will provide a more detailed example later in this chapter.

### **Poetic analysis**

For the Arsi Oromo, sung poetry is a genre that allows people to express what they normally do not in everyday life. The social and cultural context and manner in which poetic words and narratives are delivered is different from the everyday, enabling people to reveal forms of social power and authority that otherwise are hidden. Furthermore, the texts of the songs and the discourses surrounding their execution often reveal much more than the spoken word. Through poetic analysis of ateetee song texts and music, I hope to offer a better understanding of how singing and the narratives around these songs can not only lead to, but be, action and results.

In her study of the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin's *ghinnāwa* (lit., little song), Abu-Lughod demonstrated how poetry is used in specific contexts to talk about Bedouin personal lives and express emotions. In their culture, emotional reactions to situations are frowned upon, but expressing emotions through poetry in private contexts is considered acceptable. Abu-Lughod calls this the "dual patterning of the expression of sentiment" (Ibid., 190). She explains:

[...] individuals use poetry in their everyday lives in a striking way: to express special sentiments, sentiments radically different from those they express about the same situations using nonpoetic language. Thus, each mode of expression can be considered a distinct discourse on personal life. *Discourse* here refers not simply to linguistic form, as in the distinction between formalized and everyday speech acts. Rather, I use the term more in the sense that Foucault (1972, 1980) uses it, to mean a set of statements, verbal and nonverbal, bound by rules and characterized by regularities, that both constructs and is patterned by social and personal reality. (Abu-Lughod 1986, 186)

As Abu-Lughod also mentions, Foucault went on to link discourse with power. Language can be used in relation to different hierarchies of power in many contexts. However, when it is used in a manner that differs from everyday speech, the intent is often to mark power-laden social distinctions that may be gendered, class-based, or age-delineated. If poetry or song allows for more freedom to express feelings and to criticize the normative system, this can empower the individual. In many cases, women in male-dominated societies<sup>216</sup> have been particularly empowered by these discursive forms (Abu-Lughod 1986, Rasmussen 1991). Arsi Oromo women, through sung poetry and narratives, have the liberty to express their feelings and discontent for social problems and injustices they live with. But this goes even further, because the song texts, narratives and rituals are part of the Oromo spiritual and governmental system and this mechanism allows women to achieve justice. In the description of the ritual below, I will comment on the poetic texts that are heard in the video.

### **Multisensory experience**

Building on the ethnographic descriptions, contextual information, and analyses included in previous chapters, I will combine thick multisensory interpretive experiences of the ritual with the (poetic/song) textual analyses. Through this combined methodology,

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<sup>216</sup> In this context, I mean societies that are economically and politically dominated by men.

I hope to provide the most insight as to how singing resolves disputes. Other communication media, such as film and sound, are essential to providing this multisensory experience. Scholars from different disciplines have used varied approaches to communicate a more complete picture of cultural ways of doing, apprehending, being and expressing. While setting up his own analysis of lived experience and culture-specific modes of making meaning, Harris Berger offers a detailed historiography of the use of phenomenology in the fields of ethnomusicology, folklore and anthropology (2009, 4–5; 137–139). My own approach is not phenomenological, *per se*, but leans in the directions of the anthropology of the senses, experiential ethnography, autoethnography, research-creation, and practice-based research (Feld 1990). Many works in these disciplinary sub-areas combine rich sensory analyses with other analytical techniques. For example, ethnomusicologist Louise Meintjes effectively combined structural analysis,<sup>217</sup> textual analysis and thick multisensory descriptions to offer a better understanding of Zulu *ngoma* song and dance and its political efficacy (2004). Her work, which is reflective of more than twenty years working and living with the community of dancers, artfully weaves together dancers' narratives, detailed evocations of the space and contexts of the dance, and analyses of poetic texts. Kay Shelemay has also made a powerful contribution to sensory and reflective studies in ethnomusicology with *Let Jasmine Rain Down* (1998), in which each chapter begins with personal descriptions of sounds and sights. And Jane Sugarman's (1997) detailed performance descriptions could also be added to this list. In

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<sup>217</sup> In order to effectively explain and uncover the hidden layers of socio-cultural phenomena (such as class, status, relationships, and power), structural analysis can be necessary. To this she added many other layers of thick ethnography, and text and performance analyses.

each case, the authors call upon their immersive experiences in sensory worlds that were sometimes rather new to them.<sup>218</sup>

As a pioneer of experiential ethnography, anthropologist Paul Stoller has argued for ethnographers to reflect, participate in, and act upon the sensory worlds of the people and communities they work with (1989, 1997). According to Stoller (and other experiential ethnographers<sup>219</sup>), the senses can allow the ethnographer to have a more global view and provide a better representation of the area being studied, sometimes allowing for the discovery of an aspect of the culture that is not otherwise apparent. Using this methodology sometimes results in sensorial combinations that outsiders would not have previously considered, such as feeling sound or hearing feelings or touch. When discussing sound, for example, Stoller uses examples of Songhay music to demonstrate how sound is a dimension of experience in itself because it allows for penetration into bodies during possession ceremonies. As he explains, “Sounds carry forces for us, which are not only good to think, but good to feel” (Stoller 1989, 112). Glenn Hinson (2000)

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<sup>218</sup> Many other scholars have used types of multisensory sometimes combined with textual analyses, such as, but not limited to: Fales (2005); Feld (1990, 1991, 1996); Howes (1991, 2003, 2009); Jackson (1989, 1996); Kapchan (2007), Porcello (1998); Samuels (2004); Wong (2004); Favret-Saada (1980); Hinson (2000); Kisiuk (1998); Neustadt (1994); R. Rosaldo (1984); Sklar (1994); Turner (1992). This brief—though hardly exhaustive—list demonstrates how scholars from different disciplines have been developing multisensory approaches for over thirty years.

<sup>219</sup> There are several branches of experiential ethnography and many different scholars. The following branches and lists of scholars are not exhaustive and are intended to give a references to this area of study: 1. Sensorial anthropology or anthropology of the senses, with its origins in Bronislaw Malinowski, then Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and more recently, Constance Classen, Stephen Feld, David Howes, Michael Jackson, Kathy Neustadt, Anthony Seeger and Paul Stoller; 2. Phenomenology/Anthropology of the body/Embodiment studies, originating in Alfred Shutz, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, then Michael Jackson, Diedre Sklar, and many other scholars who have worked on the anthropology of the body, including Thomas Csordas, Brenda Farnell, Anthony Synnott and Helen Thomas to name a few; 3. Belief/religious and super or extra-natural studies with David Hufford and Glenn Hinson; and 4. Emotion/Psychological studies with Renato Rosaldo, Paul Stoller. Edith Turner and other specific studies by psychologists. These areas also overlap, because when talking about the body, for example, one must consider the senses, and vice-versa. Stoller proposes an anthropology of the senses which draws arguments from phenomenologists.

published a well-crafted experiential ethnography on an African American gospel program. He uses a combination of techniques—including experiential ethnography—to describe the supernatural and the “experience” of belief. He argues that belief is not something that can be grasped without an experiential description because “feeling” God is a transcendent encounter (Hinson 2000). Although the experiential approach allows the ethnographer to let go and to try to really understand the situation through the senses, the problem is that, by concentrating on the senses, the ethnographer can imagine that her senses are more real than what she observes from a distance or how people describe the process to her, leading to the perception that she is closer to the experience and has an insider understanding of it. I am wary of the assumption that what I experience is what others also experience. Everyone has different experiences and these differ between cultures and within the same culture due to individual differences (Justice and Hadley 2015). Using a combination of ethnographic methods, rather than relying exclusively on experiential or sensory ethnography, balances out the “blind spots” of each approach.

In order to understand the effects/affects of the Arsi ateetee ceremonies, it is important to understand the influence of the ritual on its many actors. I cannot replicate the actual power and energy transmitted in these ceremonies, but I can offer a glimpse of the experience. This is why I have attempted to provide multisensory description—necessarily calling upon my own experiences of ateetee—in combination with textual analysis here, both of which should be read in conjunction with the video excerpt.



### **Experiencing ateetee at Booqatoo's home (video 3)**

Women had already come to Booqatoo's home protesting the fact that he used bad language around many women while he was fighting with another man in an outdoor, public washing area. They had even left their siinqee sticks in his house, as a promise that they would return to finish their business. We visited the house a few days before to gaze at the grouping of about twenty siinqee tied to the central post of the home. They stood there, reminding Booqatoo of his duty to give women the respect and honour they deserved. For a couple of weeks the women's council had been trying to assemble the female leaders and the elder men necessary for the ceremony. My presence may have expedited the need for the ceremony because a date was finally set after several discussions in my presence between Shuru, one of the women's leaders, and the elders. As most people move around tending to their farm or other business, some of the elders were contacted at their homes, at the market, or at the bars or cafes around the markets. The evening before the ceremony, I was returning from a market in the nearby Sidamo Region with Shuru, members of her family, her neighbours, and some male elders. Lit by the moon, gathered next to boulders that served as a resting spot at the crossroads of several traveling paths, we discussed the ateetee ceremony and confirmed the presence of one of the male elders who would bring other elders to the ceremony.

The next day Shuru spent the morning preparing. Although the departure for the ceremony was supposed to take place first thing in the morning, it happened later than intended. As a mother, leader of her house, butter merchant and women's council leader, Shuru had to take care of many affairs on a daily basis. That morning, the cows had to be milked, food and coffee made, children cared for, farm affairs tended to, and only then

could she begin getting dressed for the ceremony. Shuru spent over an hour preparing her intricate *meeshaa aadaa* (cultural items) or *waan bareeduu* (ceremonial clothing, lit. what is beautiful), which includes her different types of necklaces (including *callee*, *miidhoo*, *darbata*, *jomooree*, *hudhoo*), bracelets (*laka*, *bitoo*), earrings (*gurra*, *galxaxa*), the belt for women (*hanfalaa*), multiple headdresses (*gufitaa*, *lootuu*), the hanging beaded ornament extending to her feet (*derbeta*), her hand-embroidered smock (*wondebe /qolo*); and her leather cape (*bonkoo*). Women who were pregnant or who just had a baby also wore *qanafaa*, a beaded band around their forehead.



Shuru getting ready for the ateetee ceremony, Gaata, Ethiopia, January 2012.

After what seemed like a lengthy amount of time, Shuru, Gameda (from the cultural office), some neighbours, and I all set out towards the ceremony, which was several kilometers into the countryside. By this time, the sun was high in the sky and we could feel it shining down on us, apparent through the beads of perspiration on all of our faces. I could also smell a mixture of churned butter and fire smoke on the women's skin and clothing, and the animal hide from the leather cape (*bonkoo*) and *meexicaa* on the siinqee. On the way to the ceremony, we passed through green rolling countryside punctuated by houses made of bamboo or wood with thatched roofs. Shuru approached the gates or enclosures of each house we passed and called out to women to come join us. Or sometimes the children and neighbours sought out other neighboring women, then hurried to join us again. We would sometimes change our path to gather other women. As we grew in numbers, I could feel the general excitement increasing in anticipation of the ritual to come. As we neared our destination, we traveled down a large hill, past a stream and up another large hill, leading us to Booqattoo's house, which was perched on the edge of a hill. By the time we arrived at his house, we were a group of about twelve women.

Shuru and the other women assembled in a field bordered by tall bamboo plants next to Booqattoo's property. They began to sing. I left them for some time in order to go interview Booqattoo. As he explained (see below), he uttered a bad word in the presence of women, but did not insult any woman directly. As with many of the offenders I spoke to, he said he was initially nervous and angry about the process. Some of his frustration can be seen in the interview excerpt, where he denies having used bad language with the women. In the end he said he had accepted to participate in the process and was fine with it since it was Arsi culture (*aadaa*). The following is part of our conversation:

B: Ateetee aadaa nubiratti baay'ee ulfaattu keessaa takka. Beerri waan jedhamuu hinqabne jette naan jedhanii na himatan.

LQ: Maal jetteeni arrabsite(isi)?

B: An nama tokkoo hinargine yokin hinarrabsine. Nama tokkoonillee wal dhabees hinbeeku. Isaan ateetee bayaniit maqaa nu tuyxee jedhanii na himatan. Nama tokko jara keessa arrabsuun, akka waan hundi keenna arrabsamneetti laalla jedhan. Kanaafi, ka ala dhaabatanii na himatan.

LQ: Ati maal jetteen?

B: Homa an hin jedhin, jette jedhanii na himatan. Wanta jedhamuu hin mallee wayii nuun jettee jedhan.

LQ: Maal ture wantichi?

B: Waan qaama saalaa isaanii waa jette jedhanii na himatan.

LQ: At maa kaafteree?

B: An isaanin kana hin jenne. Nama wayiitin walitti buune. Achii wal lolle, an yoo san jedhe. Garuu, an maqaa namiitu dhayee, keessumattu nama tokkooyyuu arrabsee hinbeeku. Waan akkasi jedhuu sirra hin jiraatu ture jedhan isaan. Akka aadaa teennatti waan akkasii jechuu nama himachiisa, dubartiin teennaa ateetee namatti yaati.

LQ: Ateetee jalqaba ka si himachuuf sitti yaate yoomi?

B: Ateetee is one of the most respected traditions in our area. The women accused me of saying things that should not be said.

LQ: How did you insult them (her?)

B: I did not see or insult anyone. I also did not quarrel with anyone. They are performing ateetee accusing me of calling names. They said that insulting one of them is like insulting all of them and that is why they are out accusing me.

LQ: What did you say?

B: They are accusing me of something I did not say. They claim that I said something inappropriate.

LQ: What was that?

B: They accuse me of mentioning their genitalia. [The body part that is embarrassing to mention is the vagina (*muxxee*)]. It is in accordance with our tradition that the women are performing ateetee.

LQ: Why did you mention it then?

B: I did not say this to them. I had an altercation with someone. It led to a fight and I used the term. But I did not mention anyone by name and insult a particular person. They said that it is not allowed to use the term. According to our tradition, using the term leads to accusations and our women conduct ateetee.

LQ: When did they start performing ateetee to accuse you?

B: Nuun jette gaafa jedhanii guyyaa lamaan booda.

B: Two days after they said I used the word, they agreed to perform ateetee in two weeks' time and their appointment is today. They came to my house.

When I returned to the women, they were still singing and preparing to enter the property. While they were making their entrance, I could hear other women approaching, singing ateetee verses in the distance, which had the effect of creating a multisonorous, polyphonic musical texture in the air. As is customary, the women held their siinqee or umbrellas over their right shoulders, with their right hand. Only a few women had the leather cape (*bonkoo*), but the others had substituted blankets for the cape. Most of those with siinqee had *meexicaa* on the end. Led by Shuru and singing the following verses repeatedly, the women entered the offender's property, single file through a small gate, and stopped there, singing insults together. Some male elders were starting to gather on the grassy area near the gate. As the men arrived, some were still greeting each other while others sat down in the grass. I was recording and videotaping from that space, with my back to them. The ateetee women's singing was directed for all of us to hear. They were singing insults while entering the space of the offender's home, thus marking the beginning of the ritual. Each time other groups of women entered the space after this first group, they marked their entrance, directing the verses towards the elders and space belonging to the offender, before moving on to join the other women. In this manner, the women were taking the space as their own, for their ritual and their purpose as they entered (video 3; audio track 21).

Haadha heessee, heeseen takka baatee,

Mother/woman of the unknown, the  
strange stands out,

Argee hin beekuu, heessee natti taatee,

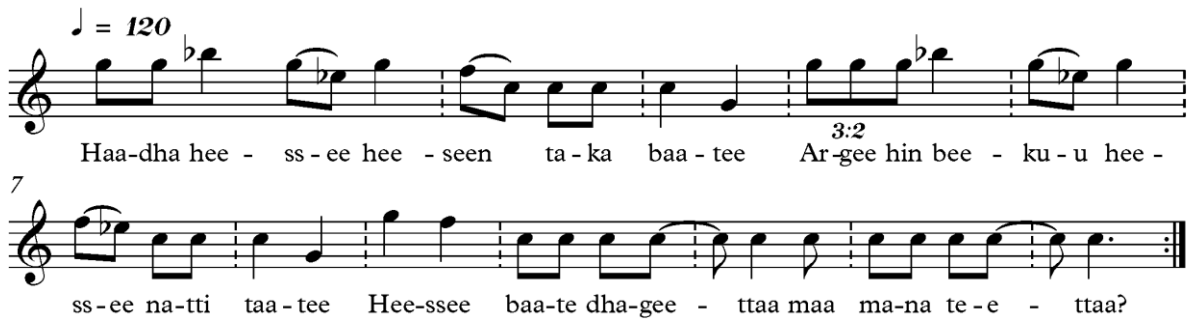
Heessee baate dhageettaa maa mana  
teettaa?

Ilililii.....

I have never seen such a thing, it sounded  
odd to me,

Did you hear that the 'strange' has come  
out, why do you sit up in the house?

Ilililii.....



According to some interlocutors and Gemechu Geda, *Heessee* means something new, unknown, strange, or unusual. In Oromo religion something unknown or strange is a powerful supernatural being, which is treated with respect and sometimes fear. For example, Waaqa is considered to be black by the Oromo, and black is something unknown and unseen. In the first use above, *heessee* is defined this way. It is referring to Ateetee as the mother or woman of the unknown. The second sense of *heessee* is something unknown in society. After the first mention, *heessee* is being used as an insult to Booqatoo. The ateetee women insult him calling him strange, meaning he says things that are not conform to the norms and traditions of society. This means he does things that people in society do not approve of. This could be a reference to the fact that he insulted all the women by speaking the word vagina out loud. But this could also just be a general insult in the context of ateetee and not specific to what he did to bring upon the ateetee ceremony. *Heessee* can also be used to insult someone simply by referring to him/her as different from the norm in society. For example, a woman who wears pants could be

considered strange for the majority of traditional, rural Oromo. Or someone who has what is considered widely to be a liberal attitude in a conservative Oromo community could be considered “strange” (Gemechu Geda, personal communication). In a discussion/interview, some women from a nearby rural area sang almost the exact same verses using the word *heessee* as the insult. It is one of the standard insults in the ateetee insult repertoire.

Sometimes the ateetee women can sing a variation of the offender’s name in the text, but they did not do so here. This insult is standardized. Women from different parts of the Kokossa district sang it for me. It is sung in unison and repeated as many times as necessary until they have been welcomed to the offender’s house. In the case of the Booqatoo ateetee, women arrived, singing these verses, which they directed towards Booqatoo. He was not physically present for their arrival. As is custom, the offender stays clear of the ateetee women until the negotiations have finished. After singing these first verses several times, marking their entrance and greeting, the women walked as a group over to the path that led up to the house. To their right there was a grassy spot where the male elders were gathering, and to the left the property sloped down a hill. From this vantage point we could gaze out on a vista of rolling hills, farmlands, grazing areas, and, further in the distance, mountains.

Once the ateetee women arrived at the path leading up to Booqatoo’s home, on the right they saw four other women from his home who came to greet them. In greeting, they stopped singing and began ululating (see chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of ululations). In this case, upon arrival, the ateetee women were praising their hostesses—relatives of the accused—and showing their happiness for the ritual to come. As is Arsi

custom, once the two groups of women arrived close to each other, the ateetee women and the hostesses bent down, pulled grass out and threw it towards each other. The ateetee women called out, *dhiltee dhinna* (lit. save us from your eyes and allow us to proceed), in greeting, after which one of the hostesses could be heard saying *Anaa dhufu* (welcome). This is a welcoming gesture: the group of ateetee women asks for permission to enter and the hostesses invite the women into their home space.

Led again by Shuru, the ateetee women began singing the same verses they had initially begun with, while simultaneously following the hosting women up a slight incline to a clearing by the house. Their singing broke off while the women talked to and greeted each other, and they chose a place to assemble for singing. They decided on a grassy open area in view of the home. As they began singing again, the women moved towards one place, just beyond a shelter for crops, and with fields of false banana—ensete (*worki*)—and the house in the distance. They slowly assembled in a tight circle, turned inwards, facing each other with their shoulders and the sides of their bodies flush against each other. Dancing in a rhythmic counter-clockwise circle, they moved smoothly and dynamically, about two shuffle steps per second. After two repetitions of this song and some ululations, Shuru, as a leader, initiated a different ateetee prayer. To begin the song and give all the women the time to catch on, the women sang the following verses twice (video 3; audio track 22):

Ateetiyoo faanoo shageellee,

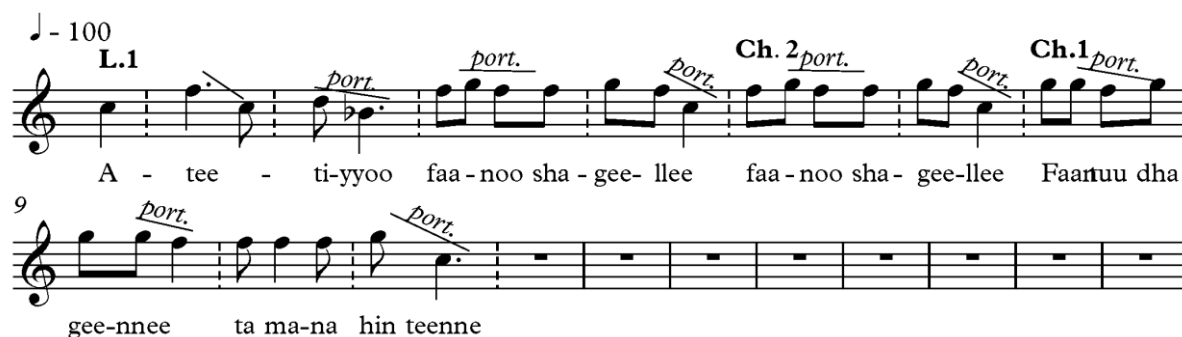
Ee faanoo shageellee  
Faantuu dhageennee ta mana hin teenne

Our, Ateetee, the guide to peace [the pace-setter of peace],

[Refrain]

Y...e...s, the guide to peace,  
We heard the unbearable thing, the [one we can't] put up with, is in the house.





The transcription above is a skeleton of the song. Pitch, rhythm, and tempo all have general parameters the women must follow (comfortable vocal range, rhythm that is vaguely duple metre and pulsation like the dance, and a tempo that is not too fast or too slow so the momentum of the dance continues but everyone can follow) but they are all flexible. I indicated the portamentos, which, as in most ateetee songs, are used liberally on almost every shift. I indicated a rhythm as a guide, but it, too, is flexible. As in chapter 3, I also indicated the leader as L1 (*afolee*) and the two choirs responding. As it is antiphonal, by definition everyone must work together to achieve a result (here it is their truth, or justice, at the end of the ceremony). As with all ateetee songs, the two choirs and the leaders work together, alternating between the main lines of the poem and the refrain. This gives everyone an opportunity to sing the full verses, but it also gives each choir time to rest in between the long verses. After this first set of three verses is sung twice, the first line changes, but the second two verses remain the same, sung as a refrain for the entire duration of the song. Generally, the women continue singing a song until they tire of it or until one of the *afolee* (leaders) decides to change it. This song is directed towards Ateetee, the spirit, who is expected to bring peace or reconciliation to the situation. In the refrain, the women always refer to Ateetee. They also sing that the offender—who is

unbearable to them because he insulted them—is in his house. After the initial three verses above (two times), each of the verses below was sung as a first verse and followed by the refrain each time (video 3; audio track 22):

Ee faanoo diraa, faanoo shageellee,	Yes, the peace is destabilized, the guide to peace [Ateetee/women] <sup>220</sup> ,
Mandooyyu Waaq uumee, faanoo shageellee,	God created Mandooyyu, the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Ta abaartu'uu faanoo shageellee,	That deserves cursing words, the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Woyyu na uumee faanoo shageellee,	I was created <i>wayyu</i> [by God], the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Tuni faantu'uu, faanoo shageellee,	This is weird, the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Dittoon na murtee faanoo shageellee,	The stump cut me <sup>221</sup> , the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Natuu si dayee faanoo shageellee,	I was born from you, the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Maaliin si gayee faanoo shageellee	Why do I come to you, the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Woyyoo gabbadhee faanoo shageellee	I am fat <sup>222</sup> and <i>wayyu</i> , the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Woyyu ani muree faanoo shageellee,	<i>Wayyu</i> , I passed a binding decision, the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Woyyooma xaxxee, faanoo shageellee	<i>Wayyu</i> complicating, the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Woyyu nu uumee, faanoo shageellee,	We were created <i>wayyu</i> [by God], the guide to peace
Ta gaara Suuraa, faanoo shageellee	Of the Sura Mountain <sup>223</sup> , the guide to peace [Ateetee]
Natuu si dayee, faanoo shageellee	It is me, you, the guide to peace [peace-
Yoo nyaassaa duraa faanoo shageellee	loving [Ateetee]

<sup>220</sup> Shageellee literally means good/peace. Faanoo shageellee could be translated as pace-setter of peace, pace-maker, mediator, a guide to peace, tranquility, stability, good luck, dignity and like. All these of qualities represent Ateete in the verse or stanza. This all may be a reference to Ateetee, the spiritual being, or to all women, represented by Ateetee. I put the word Ateetee in brackets in the translation because although the women do not say her name, that is who they are referencing.

<sup>221</sup> This is an insult to the offender who is described as a “stump.” It is also a reference to the offender disrespecting them with insults.

<sup>222</sup> Calling someone fat is a compliment, making reference to the person’s wealth and good fortune.

<sup>223</sup> This mountain is in the Bale Mountains, located south of the town of Robe in Bale.

As seen in these verses, the prayers are directed to Ateetee, their mediation or guide to peace. In this sense she is a person or divinity, who will bring them peace and reconciliation. If the verse is interpreted in the sense of her being a person, she represents women who will bring the reconciliation. As a higher being, or deity, Ateetee is either in communication with Waaqa, like an intermediary, or she is providing a direct solution. She is giving the women power to resolve the dispute. The women mention being “born from” Ateetee and being created as *wayyuu* (blessed, sacred). The other verses that speak of *wayyuu* are referencing the “binding decisions” and “complications” that are connected with someone disrespecting a woman who is *wayyuu*. The offender must reconcile through ateetee and offer food to eat and the cow at the end of the ceremony (referenced by “the eating” at the end). The verses praise Ateetee, remind the community of women’s *wayyuu* (blessed) status, reference the events necessary for reconciliation, and give other cultural and geographical references (e.g. Sura Mountain). Mixed into these references are the occasional insult to the offender (“the stump”), and a warning of the consequences (“that deserves cursing words”) if he does not go through the reconciliation process.



Ateetee women singing in a circle at the Booqatoo ateetee ceremony, Dikkii, Ethiopia, January, 2012.

After singing the first song, the women switched to another song. They used the same melody and rhythm as the first song. The excerpt below is the beginning (video 3; audio track 22, 3’50’):

[Sung 2 times]  
Ateetiyoo’oo, ee callee durbaa

Refrain:  
Ee, callee durbaa  
Natu si dayee, maal taate gurbaa

Verse 2:  
Dayyuu afuufee, ee callee durbaa  
[Refrain]

Verse 3:  
Jaalaa-jaaltu’oo, ee challe durba

[Refrain]

[Sung 2 times]  
Our Ateetee, who is like the beads  
[callee]<sup>224</sup> of girls,

Refrain:  
Y...e...s, the beads of girls,  
It is we [women] who gave birth to you,  
don’t you know that boy?<sup>225</sup>

Verse 2:  
I inflated dayyuu, y...e...s the beads of girls,  
[Refrain]

Verse 3:  
My relation to you is like the bride-  
groom’s best men and women<sup>226</sup>, y...e...s  
the beads of girls,  
[Refrain]

Aside from the one verse addressing the offender (“we gave birth to you”), these verses are addressing Ateetee, the deity or person, like a best friend. Similar to Arsi girls’ beaded necklaces, she is their friend, their support, and whom they love. The ateete women sing to praise Ateetee.

These songs show the different types of verses that can be heard. The topics include but are not limited to: geography and place names, relational cultural items (e.g. callee) the offender’s transgression, insults for the offender, warnings to the offender (e.g. cursing), references to the ateetee ceremony process, a reminder of the women’s

<sup>224</sup> Unmarried girls’ beaded necklaces are symbols of beauty, friendship and solidarity. Girls exchange them between themselves and make them for people they love.

<sup>225</sup> Here they are speaking to the offender. They are *wayyuu* and should be respected because they are women and mothers.

<sup>226</sup> This is also directed to Ateetee, speaking of the close relationship the ateetee women hold with her.

respected status (*wayyyuu*) and the customary law concerning disrespect to women, and praise and love for Ateetee (and Waaqa – God). The women sing these words “so that Waaqa can hear them.” Praising Ateetee (and Waaqa by extension) women can receive the results they have asked for. They also remind the offender and the community of their respect, the law, the insult, the ceremony that is due, and the consequences if it does not happen. By reminding the offender and community of the transgressions and the process, they are singing the actual justice or customary legal terms. I will explore this further in combination with the movements and actions as this Booqatoo ethnography unfolds further.

While the ateetee women continued singing, about twenty elder men filed in near them, in single or close-to-single file. In ceremonial mode, they were carrying their *eboo* (spears) or *ulee* (walking sticks) and wearing *gabii* (Ethiopian blanket) or, in some cases, generic blankets bought at the market. They sat down near the women and called out to them, but their attempts to get the ateetee women’s attention were drowned out by the singing. After another verse of the song, Shuru turned her attention towards the men. Hearing their calls she stopped the singing group. This began the negotiations.

Eventually everyone moved over to the first space, by the entrance gate, which was a bit more protected and shaded by the trees around the edge. Male elders (*saddeetta* and *jarsaa*) assembled in a U form, with the women’s *saddeetta* (council) representatives on the bottom right side of the U. Usually, when the women’s council and men’s council are meeting, men sit in a U form, but the women sit behind them and they discuss in this manner. As this was the women’s ateetee ritual, the women sat to one side, where they were able to see all the male elders. Other ateetee women, who continued arriving, were

gathering in the field on the other side of the fence. We could hear them from our area but could not see the numbers gathering because of the bamboo and trees around the field. Discussions with male elders began. The leaders of the elders went over the offences that the offender had committed and the compensation he now owed the women. Shuru, the head of the saddeetta spoke for the women; the women thought they should receive more than one cow because there were many women who had been offended and many were present. During these discussions, a background of singing could be heard from the waves of women who were arriving in the nearby field. The negotiations continued and the elders and women's council representatives finally decided to break everyone into small groups to facilitate more discussion and participation from all involved. At this point, everyone moved over to the area where the newly arrived ateetee women were gathering. And the singing women moved into the space they had previously occupied. In the breakout negotiations, a women's saddeetta (council) representative led each of the three small groups. In the small groups, everyone gathered in a huddle, with the leader in the middle, listening and initiating discussion. Discussions lasted about an hour, while the other women arriving to sing ateetee increased in numbers. When the saddeetta and the ateetee women joined together again, they still did not reach an agreement. Though it is tradition that ateetee women ask for more than one cow or more compensation, in this case, the women were not going to back down.

Time passed, the sun moved in the sky, and by this point several hours had passed and many more women had arrived. The initial twenty had increased to nearly two hundred and the circle of ateetee women expanded. Many women were singing and dancing in the large circle; others were singing or watching in another row behind the

main circle. Off to the sides, under the shade of the trees and bushes, some women were resting in the grass and acting differently: sitting quietly, watching, talking, singing, and tending to their babies.

In the large circle, in addition to singing some of the verses from the songs above, the first verse they can be heard singing on the video and audio excerpt is the following (video 3; audio track 23):

Ateetiyyoo ta Anshaa Dikkoo	Our Mediator, Ateete, residing in the Dikko Forest, <sup>227</sup>
Ee ta Anshaa Dikkoo	Y...e...s, living in the Dikko Forest,
Tun tiyyaa mitii, ta Mandoo Sikkoo	This [harm] is only to me, but also to the Mandoo Sikkoo [two Arsi lineages].

The melody and rhythm are still the same, but the pitch is higher. This higher pitch may have been a choice of a leader, but often what happens is over time the song gradually moves up in pitch. Sometimes the singers readjust it to a lower scale and tonal centre if it becomes too high. In these verses, the women are calling to Ateete who lives nearby in the forest—a spiritually powerful location (see chapter 3)—and is mediating the dispute resolution process. As in all ceremonies, and particularly the opening of a ceremony, the women remind everyone that the insult was not just to one woman but to all (see chapter 6). Here all the women take the form of the two lineages descending from the Arsi – Mandoo Sikkoo. This is a unification of a major force of women: one and many women, their clans, their lineages, and even all Arsi women. These words and the actual bodies create an even more powerful symbolic and literal force demanding that their respect be restored and truth (justice) be obtained.

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<sup>227</sup> Dikki is a neighbouring area to the one where the ceremony takes place.



In the large dancing and singing circle, women sang *ateetee* in call and response, with a smaller group of leaders (*afolee*), and a larger group responding. Sometimes when the *ateetee* groups are small, there may be as few as one or two leaders, but as the group grows in size, there are more. At times, a female elder or leader goes in the centre of the circle, pulls some grass out and throws it towards another woman to invite her to dance or “play.” Women call this dancing “playing” (*tapha*).<sup>228</sup> The two women then dance, swaying in the same direction, to one side and the other and, at the same time, in towards each other. Women play like this until they are tired and ready to stop. Sometimes there is more than one pair of women playing in the centre of a large circle.

LQ: Ammaa *ateetee* sana irratti jechuudha dubbarttoonni akkanatti marsitteetti taphatti miti dubarttin?

SK: Eeyyee

LQ: Dubbarttoonni lama immoo jidduu seenuu yeroo jidduu seentuu sana osoo hin seenninii dura marga fuute marga akanatti maal jechuudha kunii?

SK: Waanii waliitti darbittuufii ammaa dubbarttin tuni sirba jechaadha. Sirba taatee sirbiitu sanitti sirba jedhamee waani suni sirba jedhama.

LQ: During *ateetee*, women get in the circle to play, don’t they?

SK: Yes.

LQ: Two women go in the middle. One gives another grass before going to the centre of the circle. What does this mean?

SK: This is to get permission to play with each other. Dancing, this is called dance. We call it dance.

(Shuru Kephu, interview, January 2012)

<sup>228</sup> *Tapha* is the general word for play. It is used for children’s play as well as for adults. In Arsi culture, people of all ages speak of “playing” in terms of being social. The culture of playing can be extended to other Ethiopian contexts, since I have been invited to “play” in every context with friends. It basically means to sit around talking and laughing or simply to spend time together. For example, when I was at someone’s home or in a café or bar with a group of people, they would often say to me, “*taphadu*,” meaning I was expected to entertain the others by engaging in conversation, or telling jokes or stories. When women get together “to play,” it can also mean that a group of women get together at one woman’s house while her husband and the children are away and act out exaggerated scenarios of “play” sex. This can serve as a release from real situations with husbands who do not meet their needs, but it can also mimic real experiences with their lovers. I had the opportunity of observing this type of play when I traveled with some women for a cultural festival.

Shuru went on to explain how this dancing, or play, is essential to a successful ateetee ritual. There is actually only one word in Oromo for both music and dance: *siirba*. There are distinctions between (praise) songs (*faaruu*), songs (*weedu*) and general music (*siirba*), but not between music and dance. In Arsi culture, women generally cannot dance once they are married, except for small steps in repertoires such as ateetee. This *tapha* is the only moment when women have space to actively play or dance. They must still follow the general cultural rule of making smaller movements with their legs and mainly moving their upper bodies. However, in this *tapha*, they move their legs more than they do in any other dance.<sup>229</sup>

Songs, and particularly dance, are initiated and led by the elder women, who are both the leaders of the ceremony and the ones to whom the other ateetee women must show their utmost respect.

LQ: Amma sirbi kuni maal ta'a?

SK: sirba aadaa keenyaa waan ta'eefi sirbi suni ammaa waanaa qixetti taphaatan kan duchiissaa jedhama wal duchiftii, duchiifnii kun jidduu kanatti duchiisamuu malee ateeteen kuni ee hin bareedu.

SK: Ammaa waan taa sirbiitu suniin yookaan waan beerri gurguddoon manguuduunni akkana tunin waan sirba kana kaa qixexxi; sirbu kana duchiisa kan waan duchifte hin dandeenyeef. Duchiisa kana waan dubarttiin qacallee duchiiftuuf dubbartin gurguddoon tuni waanii caalliftee ilaaltuufi, 'ija wali irraa rabbi nuu

LQ: Why do you dance like this?

SK: This is a dance of our culture. The one who dances in the middle, initiates and motivates. Without this dancing and motivation, ateetee would not be as beautiful.

SK: Now it is the respected elder women who initiate the dance in the middle of the circle. It is not possible to stop those initiating in the centre of the circle. The elder women sometimes stay quiet, watching. Then they throw green grass like this [gesture], saying "let God save us from each other's eyes; let God save us from

<sup>229</sup> In Arsi culture it is expected that men or boys move their lower bodies—from their waists down—in dance, while women are only supposed to use their upper bodies, from their waists up. The danced repertoires conform to these cultural norms. These rules are linked with sexuality and moving/not moving certain areas of the body. There is also an aesthetic aspect when, for example, young women move their heads quickly in dances, spinning their intricate headdresses around.

haa hambisuu, rabbi isa walirraa, rabbi nuu  
hambiisuu' jenne, marga waliitti darbina  
akkasii. Sana fakkata sunillee aadaa isiitti  
sunillee sanii.

[...]

Ija nama gurguddatti jechaaf kabajaadha.  
Wal kabajuu.

each other's eyes."<sup>230</sup> This is their culture.

We respect the elders' eyes. They have  
respect.

(Shuru Kephu, interview, January 2012)

The ritual is about women's respect. The most revered women in all levels of Arsi society, including ritual, justice/government and vernacular religion, are elders. Their dancing and song leading in the ceremony, in addition to their voices in the negotiation process, are key to producing the results that all the women are waiting for. Results that, in the eyes of society and the eyes of Waaqa restore the balance of respect and honour, and result in reconciliation. Other members of society may see all women as closer to Waaqa (see chapter 3), but female elders are among the most respected (second only to *Qalluu* or *Qallichaa*, Oromo spiritual leaders).

In physical action, solidarity among women is formed in the singing circle, when the women sing, dance, play and connect with each other. The duple pulsation allows the women to move, dancing with the song. The tempo and rhythm also need to match the bodily movements: not too fast or too slow so the movements are coordinated and smooth. The tempo usually stays at about 60 beats or pulsations to a minute. Embodying and physically connecting through the music brings the participants together not just through the shared experience of the ceremony, but also through the physical experience of singing and moving together. Deirdre Sklar's describes this as "kinesthetic empathy," or, "the capacity to participate with another's movement or another's sensory experience

<sup>230</sup> This means that some women are old, while others are young. The young women should not begin the ceremony first. The elders should begin.

of movement” (1994, 14–15). In her article, Sklar begins with a description of being in the women’s section of a Hasidic service. All the women are pressing themselves against the viewing window. While trying to get “inside” the event and feel the delight with the other women, she only feels frustration, which subsides when she realizes that she has to distance herself first in order to understand that the women are communicating tactilely. This experience and her work on danced ritual in Tortugas are the examples that support her argument and methodology for researchers using kinesthetic empathy. She critiques the academic textual analysis or objectification of bodies in favour of bodylore, corporeal experience that forms a discourse in itself and treating of the body as a subject. Several ethnomusicologists have provided examples of how their physical participation in rituals brought them to an embodied understanding of the music and more insight into the culture (Babiracki 2008, Bakan 1999, Kisliuk 1998, 2000, Savigliano 1995b). However, as Sklar’s experienced in a Hasidic service (1994), she contends it is actually the ability of the ethnographer to step back and analyze her experience that provides insight.

At the Booqatoo ateetee ceremony, although I came with one of the women’s leaders, some of the women did not know me and questioned my presence. Though I had always been accepted and invited into the circle at other rituals as an observer, this time I felt the frustration of being on the outside of the circle, trying to glimpse in with my camera. At one point, when several of the younger women questioned my presence directly and with annoyance, one of the elders invited me to dance in the middle. At this point, I had to put down the video camera and recorder, to take off my ethnographer hat, and join the women. This was not just acceptance, but an invitation to help make a difference through my active participation in the ritual. I needed to feel it. Shuru gave me

her *bonkoo* (cape) and her *siinqee* and I danced for quite some time in the centre and then with the other women making up the circle. In the centre of the circle, I followed the woman facing me, going in and out and back and forth, until we both grew tired. But we shared that experience through our eyes, ears and feeling of movement; we laughed, danced, played and sang together. Other women also laughed at me but supported and approved my participation, with words such as *jabbatuu* (be strong). If only for that time, I felt what I believe was a shared connection.<sup>231</sup> We looked into each others' eyes, we laughed and sang, and we stood closely next to each other. Women pulled me over to dance next to them in the circle and confirmed that this was Arsi women's culture (*aadaa dubartoota*). We were contributing to the effort of all the women to have our voices and bodies heard. I was very tired (*dhadhabee*), but I imagine I was not alone. It had been a long day and the sun was still on us. We were all hot and I could smell and taste the sweat, leather, and butter in the air from our skin, clothing and *siinqee*. In the large circle, I could feel myself pressed between two other women, swaying with them, finding the rhythm of our collective movement and song. The effect of the experience was dizzying. But we were supporting and holding each other up through the connection between our bodies and through the songs. For me, entering the circle, rather than stepping back, was key to feeling the energy of the group and to being able to understand why it was so important for everyone to contribute what she could to that process.

Although we were all tired, nobody would admit to this. Another piece of what makes the ritual effective is this collective energy between women working together in all

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<sup>231</sup> Of course, one can never be sure since experience is very subjective. Even when women used words to express what they were feeling, it may not always be exactly what they are feeling.

respects. The full body motions and entire engagement of the self with the rest of the collectivity is the resolution process. When I asked women if they were fatigued, even if they appeared exhausted, they would say that they were not because they were there with everyone: they were waiting for good results (the sacrifice of the cow). As the women told me, more than anything, they were happy knowing that results would come. Some women also expressed this happiness through laughter and smiles. In this case, there had not been just one woman directly abused: Booqatoo's words had affected many women. Though this was the case of a large group of women having been insulted, I have not heard of an "abused" woman feeling vulnerable in a ceremony, because she is supported by such a mass of other women. Though she may feel angry or hesitant when she first arrives, over time, with the support and singing of all women, she fulfills her obligation to support the women, but also enjoy herself in the process. As described in previous chapters, participating in ateetee is mandatory. It is a civic service for women. However, singing, dancing, and praying are physical, emotional, and spiritual actions that connect the women on different levels to the other women, the space, the offender and Waaqa. Singing and moving together, with sacred siinquee in hand, driven by individual and collective forces, women can succeed in achieving their desired result of reconciliation.

Of course, all the women do not always agree. Small disagreements and annoyances can occur between women participating in the ritual, but generally the ateetee women leave their grievances with others aside when they come to participate in the ritual. And happiness is not key to results in the case of the ritual. All the women are not necessarily happy, nor could they pretend to be, due, at times, to personal problems or other small disputes. While problems are generally set aside to attend a ceremony,

sometimes being at a ceremony provides a way to work through the problems; ateetee prayers at a dispute resolution ceremony can help women with other issues such as sickness or trouble conceiving a child.

At the end of the ceremony, which was actually rescheduled for a later date due to the lengthy and inconclusive negotiations,<sup>232</sup> the cow was offered, the meat was distributed to the women, their siinqee were decorated with *meexicaa* and the women then offered Booqatoo and the elders grass from the ground and their words of blessing. There are not songs to mark this moment, but spoken prayers and blessings. This is a powerful moment of reconciliation, but at this point in the ritual, the main reconciliation work has already been accomplished. The women had already spent their energy singing and working together to achieve these results. The ateetee ritual is justice. The hours and days of group singing, dancing, feeling and being are seen as the height of the justice process; the sacrifice and blessings are the conclusion and closing.

At the end of the day at Booqatoo's house, when other women began leaving, I also had to leave. Some of those same women who had questioned my presence before held me back and asked me to stay. This was not just an example of the ethnographer being accepted into the group, but of an ateetee participant who was contributing physically and emotionally to the action of the ceremony. Any other participant would have been held back in the same way. We had achieved results together through our singing and swaying and through the sung poetry.

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<sup>232</sup> Women negotiating ateetee have the tradition of always asking for more than one cow as compensation, even if the norm is for the offender to give them one cow. In this case, the negotiations were strong and unresolved by the end of the day. Resolution of the negotiations and sacrifice of the cow were, of necessity, put off for another day.

## Conclusion

In *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, Paul Stoller explores different senses in the Songhay world of Niger, demonstrating how experiential ethnography or experience-ing is a method that allows ethnographers to talk about another culture. His example of Songhay music demonstrates how sound is a dimension of experience in itself because it penetrates bodies during possession ceremonies. What can be gleaned from the world of experiential or sensory ethnography is that by immersing oneself—trying to open all the senses and feel the enactment of the music and movements—it may be possible to better understand things in a culturally sensorial way. This approach offers different perspectives than observational ethnography. In *ateetee*, feeling and being are part of what makes the justice ceremony work. Women are not just singing in a ritual, but they are ritually enacting justice. In *ateetee*, sensing the bodies of other women pushing against one's own in the circle, hearing the response to one's poetic call, feeling the strain on one's vocal cords, smelling the cowhide *meexicaa* of so many *sinqqee* and *bonkoo*—all of these shared experiences are part of what makes the justice ceremony work. The emotional and conceptual understandings of the ceremony in action also contribute to the results. The critical mass is essential, not just by virtue of moving people with it, but with the heightened sense of being there and feeling the music. Imagine what it is like to be in the middle of a small singing group, let alone a group of hundreds of people singing. Even listening to and observing a group of this size can be moving. To understand this phenomenon, sometimes it is necessary to be in the midst of the group, swaying with everyone, moving and singing together.



In ceremonies like the one described in this chapter, Arsi women sing to denounce the offence; their concerted musical efforts serve to increase their cohesion and the strength of their message. All women were insulted, so they gathered, quickly increasing in numbers over time. Women share the experience of the ceremony. In physical action, solidarity among women is formed in the singing circle, when they share singing, dancing, playing, and non-verbal and verbal communication (Babiracki 2008, Wrazen 2007). Through song, all women can participate, while in discussion this is not possible since all women cannot talk at the same time and convey a message or achieve a result. The musical gathering for the ceremony is a unique opportunity for large numbers of women to come together and create a powerful force through their combined movement, voices, and energy. Participants also sing so Waaqa can hear and listen to what they have to say. They apply the Waaqa-given power afforded by their status as women through their very presence, through sung words, and through the powerful “weapons”—siinqee—they hold in their hands. Singing and channeling of power through their beings and cultural items constitutes the process of justice.



Dressed for ateetee by Shuru and the other ateetee women.

## Chapter 8 Concluding Remarks



Ateetee, jaajaboo luka  
yoo jaabatellee maltuu siin morka.  
Ana dhananii,  
jaajaboo lukaa  
yoo jaabatellee maltuu siin morka.  
Ana waamanii,  
jaajaboo lokaa  
yoo jaabatellee maltu siin moorka....illiillii  
Waa maalii?  
Waa maalii?  
Fooyyee naa seete jetti?  
Ammaa waal-gaayyee....illiillii jedhe.

Let us become strong with Ateetee  
and stand to struggle/compete with you.  
I was whipped,<sup>233</sup>  
let us become strong,  
who will compete with you?  
They call me,  
to stand strong with them;  
who will compete with you? ...illiillii...  
What is it?  
What is it?  
What is the solution for me?  
All (the women) come together ...illiillii...

<sup>233</sup> *Dhananii* means, literally, to whip. Here it can be interpreted to mean that the singer was abused in some way.

(Verses from an ateetee song sung by  
Gobane Ogeto, October 2010)

When I initially asked women what ateetee meant to them, the question elicited as many different responses as there were interlocutors. Over time, I also learned through experience that there were many different ways to understand the process and I have tried to convey them in this dissertation. Ateetee is many things. Arsi evoke it as a process or a person (she). In an ateetee ceremony, women sing insults to the offender and prayers to Waqaa in front of the entire community to ask for the restoration of their respect (kabajaa) and truth/justice (dhugaa). As a right given to women upon marriage, ateetee is part of both the gadaa system and customary law (seera amba/aadaa). Ateetee, much like compulsory voting, is a course of action that requires the participation of all eligible women. What is important is what it actually does for the ateetee women, for the offender, and for the community. Participation in actual ceremonies led me to think of ateetee as Arsi women do: songs and actions that constitute acts of power. In effect, ateetee is a highly political, expressive, collective process—initiated by and for women—that makes things happen. Building from Arsi women’s definitions and stories about ateetee, and from my lived experiences with Arsi culture in changing and contested social environments, I examined sung expressions of ateetee through several lenses—vernacular feminism, multiple justice systems, and indigenous spirituality—in order to understand how ateetee achieves results. In this chapter, I circle back to these three subject areas, broadening my discussion of Arsi women and ateetee, and drawing out contemporary and future implications.

Ateetee as an assertion and enactment of women's rights can be understood in both international and culturally specific terms. Culturally, I am speaking about rights as they are conceived of and produced by Arsi communities. Internationally, rights are often defined and determined by international bodies such as United Nations' human rights conventions as well as national, regional or local organizations that promote the rights and equality of women. Rights defined at international levels are often later vernacularized and adopted at national and local levels (Merry 2006, 2011). However, locally defined rights can also be translated and applied to national and international rights discussions (Østebø 2015). Of course, debates swirl around how to respect individual and group/cultural rights in relation to the different actors and their objectives (e.g., members of local societies, national and international governments and NGOs) (Cowan et al. 2001, Goodale 2006, Hodgson 2011, Johnston 2005, Merry 2009, Wilson and Mitchell 2003). These are not new considerations, and as social and political situations continue to change, these debates will continue. What is important to recognize in the Arsi case is that local Arsi women have their own discourses on rights and are capable of engaging in dialogue with national and international bodies on their own terms (Østebø 2015).

In Chapter 1, I introduced the concept of "vernacular feminism," a perspective that attempts to account for local perspectives rather than forcing an application of universal rights discourses. Vernacular feminism takes into account Arsi cultural systems and how women live their lives and promote their rights. It also recognizes how Arsi women conceptualize women's rights on their own terms. Throughout the dissertation, I've included examples of vernacular feminism as expressed in the lives of Arsi women.



For Arsi women, “equality” (*walqixxummaa*) is not part of daily discourse, but the concepts of sanctity (*wayyuu*), respect (*kabajaa*), honour (*ulfina*), and sometimes women’s rights (*mirga dubartoota*) are.

As a number of feminist scholars have observed, it is necessary to look at the complexity of gender relations in a society (Abu-Lughod 1986, Arnfred 2011, Green 2007, Hodgson 2005, Nnaemeka 1998, Oyewùmí 2003, Smith 2007). It is true that some Arsi women complain about what they perceive as injustices in their society, such as unfair access to property and land, polygyny, and male domination in the political realm (Hebo and Shigeta 2014). I argue that these perceived injustices may not have always existed and may have become more apparent over time with colonization, the demise of *gadaa* (and in some areas *ateetee*), and changing gender roles. In contemporary contexts, one way to respond to some injustices and transform male-biased mentalities is for women and men to learn about the other gender’s perspectives and work together. This is already being encouraged by national politics in Ethiopia (Østebø 2015). However, as Østebø’s (2015) work on Arsi perceptions of gender equality reveals, many Arsi women are not interested in doing the same exact work as men. National efforts to implant “equality” in gender roles without considering indigenous mechanisms already in place may be more disruptive than helpful (Østebø 2015). Arsi women would, however, like to continue to receive honour and respect for their domestic and farming work. I agree with Østebø (2015) that Arsi women who do not perceive gendered injustices may already engage in conjugal dialogue, make independent and conjugal decisions for their lives and livelihood, and continue to receive the respect they are due on a daily basis. This respect is also promoted through *ateetee*. In different but similar contexts for indigenous women

in Africa, scholars have argued that complementarity may be a more productive term than equality (Hodgson 2000, 2011, Østebø 2015, Oyewùmí 2003). In my research I found that while complementarity (defined here as reciprocal, interdependent, or completing a whole) may be a useful term to describe some gender relations, the specificity and variety of Arsi women's lives and social situations in relation to those of men cannot be captured by a single term or concept. What different women's experiences and narratives have shown me is that Arsi women's priority has always been to be treated fairly, to be shown honour and respect, and to have their "truth" (*dhugaa*) respected.

I found that some Arsi women's everyday and procedural approaches to affirming and maintaining their rights and their capacity to articulate truth emphasize their commitment to women's issues. Arsi women traditionally have had the *saddeetta* (council of eight), other women's councils (*gumii*), and women's meetings (*walgayyee dubartoota*) in which they discuss matters particular to women. Now, some local women are also working for the government in women's affairs offices, promoting equal access to government services, education, and work. While these formalized mechanisms exist for the protection of women's rights within Arsi society, there are also many ways through which Arsi women can voice their opinions, making sure they are heard, and fighting for their rights on an everyday basis.

Throughout this research, I have had the honour of working with a number of strong Arsi women who are leaders in their communities. Shuru, who was described in chapters 1 and 7, is one. Gobane, an elder from my first host family in the lowlands, is another. But there are many others whose voices appear in the narratives or interview excerpts. Others still were described anonymously. In fact, most of the active *ateetee*

women I know have distinct opinions, strong voices in their communities, and clear convictions about their rights. Even though the saddeetta pressures women into participating in the ateetee ritual, I found that Arsi women were committed to using ateetee. That said, I have never met a woman who had her pots broken by saddeetta members enforcing mandatory ateetee participation. I would imagine that such a woman might not have the same feelings about the process. With the exception of women who converted to mainstream religions, I have never met any women who grew up and lived in areas where ateetee was practiced who were opposed to the ritual or who felt it did not serve them well. Even some adherents of mainstream religions talk positively about ateetee and/or attend the ceremonies.

Essential to ateetee is an understanding of individual rights as inseparable from those of the community of women. Ateetee brings together a group of women claiming their rights. Arsi women's relational conception of themselves and their rights (cf. Hodgson 2011, Llewellyn and Philpott 2014) is a major part of what makes the ceremony effective. Women arrive, singing insults publicly in a large group, and feel the support from fellow members of the group. The assembly surrounds and engulfs the individuals, as they fight together to shame the offender. They ask for public acknowledgement of their respect and the restoration of their truth or justice (dhugaa). This support is felt physically and emotionally through the concerted effort of singing. Collective action reminds the entire community of the rights of all women, and it is evoked as both individual *and* group rights. This brings me back to debates about whether individual rights should prevail over group/community rights, or whether the community can also account for individual rights (Cowan et al. 2001, Merry 2009, Hodgson 2011). I agree



with recent studies demonstrating that the individual/group binary does not really need to exist (Hodgson 2011). Rights need to be evaluated on a case-to-case basis in accord with the perspective of local actors. From what ateetee women have told me, the ateetee process can only be effective for the individual and the community if group rights prevail.

Ateetee needs to be considered in relation to multiple coexisting justice systems. In chapters 2 and 6, I examined ateetee and Arsi justice from the complementary perspectives of Arsi customary law (*seera amba/aadaa*) and *gadaa*, Canadian First Nations Indigenous law (Borrows 2010a, Napoleon 2010), and restorative/alternative justice (Braithwaite 1989, Cayley 1998, Napoleon 2007) in order to explore the successful maintenance and promotion of women's rights through ateetee. I found that Borrows' (2010a) and Napoleon's (2007, 2013) definitions of the "sources," or foundations, of Canadian First Nations law were congruent with Arsi conceptions of Indigenous law. I considered Arsi law in relation to its different origins: spiritual/sacred, cultural, natural, and customary legal traditions. Though legal pluralism is practiced and even encouraged in Ethiopia, I argue that ateetee—with its emphasis on group rights and spirituality—is in a potentially precarious position in relation to the national judicial system and the Ethiopian constitution.

Ateetee is also a restorative/alternative judicial process in which relationality and reciprocity are key elements (Llewellyn 2012a). As discussions of restorative justice in this and other indigenous contexts demonstrate, having the entire community procedurally engaged is what contributes to effective, long-term results (Bianchi 1994, Braithwaite 1989, Cayley 1998, Napoleon 2010). This was the case with many of the ateetee examples in this dissertation (see chapter 6). Part of what makes Arsi women's

and men's group efforts succeed is a shared understanding of the different layers and meanings of *ateetee*. While this understanding is essential, the fear of shame is also an effective motivator. Knowing that offending one individual will be equated with offending a mass of women is a considerable deterrent. If that were not enough, the public insults are sung loudly and forcefully so that the offender's shame is known to all. As I examined in chapter 6, this type of "reintegrative shaming" (Braithwaite 1989, 2000) works because the insults are part of a restorative process. What makes *ateetee* truly exceptional as a restorative justice practice is that the women sing throughout. I will discuss this in more detail below.

Generally speaking, though the origins of justice may be traced to restorative proceedings like *ateetee* (Bianchi 1994, Cayley 1998), relational and restorative procedures remain an alternative to the retributive justice systems that are more typically employed in the West. The recent burgeoning of scholarly work and activist discussion on restorative justice correlates with recognition of the problems inherent in the retributive justice systems currently in vogue in western countries. "Western" concepts of justice are relevant here because the Ethiopian civil code was created by people from other countries, and justice, as it is conceived and practiced today, is modeled on international legal traditions. Customary law is tolerated in Ethiopia, albeit as an unofficial legal system, but it did provide some inspiration for the Ethiopian civil code (Abdella and Amenew 2008, Wondirad 2014).

Restorative justice and customary law are not preferred by all Arsi. As with any procedure, there are critiques. The only woman I met who was upset after an *ateetee* ceremony expressed frustration that she had not obtained two cows as compensation

(instead of one). This failure was likely her perception that the offender was not sufficiently apologetic to reinstate her respect. In that particular case, both parties continued to hold grudges. I did hear about a few other cases where women had chosen to go through the Ethiopian court system, but this was not common as *ateetee* was generally preferred. Though such a situation may exist, I never encountered a woman who felt more victimized by going through the ceremony. This may be because the “insulted woman” (individual), surrounded and supported by her community, always becomes “insulted women” (the group).

As I demonstrated through narratives featured in the dissertation, in Arsi communities, there are offenders who do not want to take part in *ateetee*. The fact that women’s truth (*dhugaa*) is seen as something to be highly respected can be problematic for some men. Men in Arsi Oromo communities may feel that they are unfairly bullied into the procedure or that *their* truth is not respected. In some cases, men may not want to participate and do so begrudgingly. This is why the *jarsaa* and *saddeetta* committees exist. They listen to both sides of the story and talk to witnesses to ensure that the truth is spoken. If there seem to be supported truths from each disputing side, then the process can also consist of constructing the truth, or coming to an agreement on what was true. Though it is very rare, I encountered one particular case in which a woman wrongly accused another woman of insulting her. The *jarsaa* and *saddeetta* investigated, constructed the truth from their discussions with those involved and with other community members, and realized that the claimant was not being completely truthful. The ceremony did not take place. However, in cases where elders investigate, confirm a woman’s truth and find that the offender is guilty, they proceed with the *ateetee* case.

Similar to some indigenous contexts in Canada (Borrows 2010a, Napoleon 2013), Arsi customary law and ateetee have a strong spiritual foundation. Relationality and reciprocity between living and other than human beings (Hallowell 2002, Harvey 2002, 2012) is a fundamental part of the Arsi belief system (chapters 3 and 5). Relationality is what makes reciprocity and a restoration of truth and justice necessary. Just as sardoo and siinqee are offered to a higher being and to other ceremony attendees as gifts and blessings, the ateetee process also has reciprocal attributes. This in turn is connected to women and their spiritual and ritual statuses in Arsi society. The Arsi express these relational notions through the indigenous concepts of wayyuu (sacred/blessed) and saffuu (the moral and ethical code). Women are perceived as being closer to Waaqa. They are referred to as mukaa laaftuu (soft wood), which gives them a special status to mediate between the everyday world and the spiritual world. Disrespect shown to Arsi women, who are wayyuu, can be seen as a breach of saffuu in customary law and the law of Waaqa. For Arsi women, their spiritual connections are part of what gives them, their siinqee, and their other tools power. Arsi women speak of the ability of this power to do things and generate results. I explored how objects like siinqee can be powerful and possess agency (Henare, Holbraad and Wasell 2007). I also extended the argument to singing in chapter 7.

Singing is the force that brings resolutions in the ateetee process. By virtue of being closer to Ateetee (a higher spiritual being) and Waaqa, women generate power through their sung words. They sing poetic songs, reminding the offender and the community of the dishonour that was rendered and its consequences in relation to cultural law. And they sing to Ateetee and to all women, asking them to give them the power to

resolve the dispute. They also garner spiritual, emotional, and physical force as a group, supporting each other and singing together in large numbers. Like Austin (1962) and Robinson (2016), I regard words and singing as acts that do things socially. In the case of ateetee, singing enacts and is justice. My mixed experiential/sensorial description in chapter 7 revealed some of the factors that enable the participants to feel strongly together as they sing to resolve an injustice.

In addition to opening up the conceptual possibilities of what singing can *do*, understanding singing as justice has implications for how one may understand expressive and performative arts in relation to law, and, more generally, on how the arts constitute a profoundly important foundation for sustaining a society. In terms of legal applications, the performative acts of singing, their relational nature, and the reciprocity that are core aspects of ateetee could be applied to other legal contexts. In Western contexts at least, a formal courtroom usually does not allow for multiple ways of enacting justice.

Furthermore, it is necessary to have a certain level of fluency with the court system in order to be able to navigate it successfully. As a result this court system can isolate people who do not know, use, or find value in a system that follows a culturally specific way of “doing” law. For women, indigenous people and other marginalized peoples, this may mean they will not succeed in having their truth recognized or heard. By consequence a victim’s protest may become an individual battle in which different ways of “doing” or expressing are not supported. Singing as justice constitutes a different way to challenge assumptions, perceptions and normalized ways of enacting. As documented in the Canadian context, some aboriginal groups have used singing, stories, and ritual in the courtroom (Monet and Wilson 1992, Regan 2010). The Arsi Oromo case adds to a

growing body of literature that demonstrates how the arts are intricately intertwined with other mechanisms of social life, and how they are thus indispensable in effectuating change. Governments often target the arts for budget cutbacks as they are seen as less economically productive than other activities. The ateetee process demonstrates how expressive/performative arts can make a significant impact and achieve results, not just for individuals, but for larger social groupings. In this regard, I believe this study offers essential information not only about Arsi Oromo women's involvement in justice in the Ethiopian context, but also about how, in principle, their performative actions can be applied to contexts and policy making in other communities, including Western societies.

### **How does this apply?**

Ateetee provides an incredible community of support on which women can rely. It is a process that deserves attention and support on its own terms and in its natal grounds, i.e., in Arsi communities and Ethiopia. Additionally, this system has the potential to serve as an example for other communities and countries, including Western contexts. In recent years, the Canadian media has highlighted many cases of gender-related violence. Missing Aboriginal women, abuses of women in Parliament, and acts of gender violence and harassment in the workplace, are just some of the stories that have come to light. Among the most prominent stories is that of Jian Ghomeshi, a superstar of the Canadian broadcasting world. Ghomeshi, host of a popular CBC radio show, was accused in 2014 of sexually abusing and threatening a number of women, both privately and in the workplace. Many people have asked why women kept their experiences secret, some for more than ten years. Why did they not go to the police or come out with their stories

earlier? As soon as the headlines broke, increasing numbers of victims related to this case and others stepped forward to share their accounts of abuse.

The Ghomeshi case ultimately went to court, but it did not end well for the women accusing the defendant. As many in the media commented, including senior journalist Anne Kingston, the Crown prosecution did not prepare the case properly and the judge's report included many stereotypes about sexual violence (Kingston 2016a). The complainants omitted information about seeing Ghomeshi or communicating with him after the acts of violence. Under oath, one complainant even repeatedly denied having had further contact with Ghomeshi even though she had contacted him after the assault (Garossino 2016b). Though many victim-support organizations argued that, in cases of stress and trauma, re-contacting the offender is quite common, the judge had to declare at least two of the complainants as unreliable witnesses because they withheld information or denied actions under oath. The judge wrote, "Expectation of how a victim of abuse will, or should, be expected to behave must not be assessed on the basis of stereotypical models." However, he followed up, stating, "Having said that, I have no hesitation in saying that the behaviour of this complainant is, at the very least, odd" (Kingston 2016a).<sup>234</sup> The judge ultimately reaffirmed stereotypes, such as the one above, that victims of sexual assault are expected to have specific types of behaviour. While stating that the courts must be cautious in evaluating the complainants' evidence, the judge also highlighted the "need to be vigilant in avoiding the equally dangerous false assumption that sexual assault complainants are always truthful." As journalist Kingston notes, it is

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<sup>234</sup> The full report by the judge can be consulted here : <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/read-the-judges-ruling-in-the-jian-ghomeshi-case/>. It is also available from: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/jian-ghomeshi/article28476713/>

troubling to highlight false accusations given that false accusations are very low and sexual abuse under-reporting is more problematic (Kingston 2016a). Furthermore, in this case, the accusations were not proven to be false. Two of the witnesses were deemed unreliable because they lied under oath and withheld information. This also led to unfair questioning about their truth concerning the original assaults. Though the victims were cross-examined, assumed to be lying, and judged on their behavior after the alleged attacks, for 18 months preceding the case and during the entire court proceedings, Ghomeshi, the accused, remained silent (Garossino 2016a).

The case demonstrated that the justice system was functioning as it was intended to function—there was not enough evidence for conviction—but this raised the question of how to deal with this type of case. In the aftermath there were discussions about how, legally, the case was handled in the criminal courts. Prosecutors and criminal lawyers agreed with the verdict from a judicial point of view but were disturbed by the failings of the case (Garossino 2016b). Handling this case in an alternative, specialized court, or treating it as a civic case may have been more appropriate. Because of the high-profile nature of the case, many people were watching and were quick to voice their opinions. Former Crown prosecutor and now associate editor of the *National Observer*, Sandy Garossino commented angrily that the complainants/witnesses “deliberately misled the court then played possum about it” (2016b). She further laid the blame on the complainants, describing them as “mature adults who needed to step up and own this” (Garossino 2016b). Though the complainants’ actions in court were not reliable from a legal perspective, I do not think this should discredit their truths about the original assaults. Women’s support organizations were outraged by the way the complainants’



characters were attacked. If newspaper article commentators are representative of general opinions, there were deep divisions about the outcome of the trial. In all cases, negative comments from the general public towards the complainants, the judge's critical opinion of the complainants in his report, and the fact that the perpetrator of violence was never required to apologize or acknowledge the violence of his behaviour, stand as deterrents for future complainants of sexual assault. The end result was that what could have been a step forward for victims of gender violence ended up being a devastating setback.

The Ghomeshi case is particularly relevant to the discussion of ateetee. Several problems (and distinctions from Arsi models of justice) became apparent from the time of the initial accusations: the Ghomeshi complainants had to go alone to the police, their characters were scrutinized and they were cross-examined, their truth(s) were discredited in the process, and, in the end, though the criminal court functioned as it was meant to, they were not treated respectfully by the judge or by some in the media. Only one sexual assault charge against Ghomeshi ended in a negotiated peace bond instead of a trial. In an interview with Anne Kingston, Kathryn Borel, the complainant and victim, provided an insightful summary of some of the problems with the criminal court process and the particularities of this case:

This seemed like the clearest path to the truth. I think that truth can be found within the judicial process, obviously. But I think as you said, the chances of finding it in sexual assault cases because the burden of proof is so high, there's just a much lower rate of conviction; we all know the numbers by now, it's a much lower rate of conviction. That's why people don't come forward, it's because at every turn you are doubted, and you are questioned, and you are told that you are liar, and you are told that you are out for fame, or out for money, at every turn there is a disincentive to participate in the legal process. [...] [I]n this case, because there was a very highly paid lawyer, because we were

dealing with a celebrity, because we were dealing with extenuating circumstances that were beyond just the facts of what happened, this seemed like the clearest path to the truth. (Kingston 2016b)<sup>235</sup>

I think this interview excerpt provides personal insight into problems I discussed above.

In addition to being a disturbing reflection of the many forms that violence against women takes, the Ghomeshi case that went to court is revealing of the lack of support many North American women face.<sup>236</sup> Arsi women, in contrast, are more frequently provided with ample community support through the justice process. Even during the Ghomeshi trial, some of the complainants were not prepared for the trial appropriately. Arsi women have a network of women, a women's council; their truth (dhuuga) is considered sacred and law; they are waayyuu, or sacred; they are joined together by singing; and the entire action is done with incredible support from all sides of the community. It is not a perfect process, but it is driven and supported by diverse community members, and it offers a supportive space for women. I think it is important to add that even though Arsi women's truth is considered a priority, the saddeetta leaders and jarsaa do evaluate the truth of the complaint before the ateetee ritual can begin.

Community support enables individuals to speak out against acts of violence. This needs to be on the community and judicial levels in order for it to be effective. If, for example, a woman does receive support from a group of people, but then must stand alone in an intimidating court situation in which her "truth" is challenged, this situation does not encourage other women to speak out about abuses they experienced. For those

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<sup>235</sup> The complete transcript of the interview can be found here :

<http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/kathryn-borel-it-was-death-by-a-thousand-cuts-thats-how-it-felt/>.

<sup>236</sup> Some of the media stories on this topic included:

<http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/episode/2014/11/03/beenrapedneverreported/>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/sandy-garossino/jian-ghomeshi-women-report-sex-assault\\_b\\_6059124.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/sandy-garossino/jian-ghomeshi-women-report-sex-assault_b_6059124.html)

who are willing, a restorative or alternative justice procedure can be a much more effective means of resolving a dispute since all of the community members are involved (Lillies 2002). This could also be a mechanism that allows for other expressive outlets, such as song or other ritual acts. However, just as in the Arsi cases, a restorative procedure does not always result in reconciliation and even justice for all involved. In the case of sentencing circles in Canada, some were set up without adequate planning, supervision or support, with the result that some female victims felt they were even more victimized by the process (Cayley 1998, 208). When the procedure was initiated within the community, the judge respected legal principles, and both offender and victim agreed to the process, the sentencing circles were often successful (Cayley 212). What is important to remember is that though restorative mechanisms can be a viable alternative to criminal courts, a restorative or reconciliatory procedure does not produce the same results for everyone involved, and may not even be perceived as reconciliation or a success for some. Those who do not want to take part in restorative processes have recourse to the Western judicial system.

As seen in the Ghomeshi case, alternative courts or systems may have been a better option for complainants. Since there is no DNA evidence and these trials often happen years after the fact, a criminal court makes the case very difficult to win. Furthermore, imprisonment is not necessarily the most productive punishment for all involved. I think this was demonstrated by the sexual assault charge against Ghomeshi, which did not go to trial but ended with a peace bond in which Ghomeshi had to read a public apology to the victim. As Kathryn Borel, the victim, explained, Ghomeshi described the sexual assault in rather elusive terms and the apology was negotiated, so it

may have not been sincere; nonetheless, he had to break his 18 months of silence in order to admit he had done something wrong and publicly apologise (Kingston 2016b). Borel was able to provide input on how the apology was crafted, and the apology was public so she found these aspects to be a success for her and other victims. As she explained, “I wanted to participate in the legal process, that’s why I came forward, but sometimes there are greater truths than what can be found in court” (Kingston 2016b). Obviously there are many complex layers to further uncover in relation to Western criminal courts, their alternatives, and fair, supportive, and respectful treatment of women and their truths. I think the emphases on respect, community support and reciprocity in ateetee can offer some ideas on how to question and offer alternatives to other judicial systems.

## **Futures**

At the beginning of this final section, I would like to consider ateetee from the perspective of its opponents. Ateetee is embedded in Arsi culture, law, and spirituality, which leaves its future vulnerable. To what extent can a process embedded in spirituality have a long-term future in a changing society with a parallel secular legal system that is sanctioned by the state?

Arsi Oromo increasingly live in changing social landscapes such that traditional practices like ateetee are directly challenged or not supported and understood; those who challenge or whose understandings erode, of course, may themselves be Arsi. Without an understanding of Arsi social systems and beliefs, there is potential for women’s close connection to Waaqa and their historic mukaa laaftuu (soft wood) status to be perceived as one of inferiority, making ateetee a product of their marginality rather than a tool to

overcome injustices. Why are married women the only ones who are able to sing insults? Could this be seen as a means of keeping them in a fixed position of lesser power in society? From such a perspective, the process could be seen as compensation for women's lack of political power in society rather than one of complementarity. Ateetee might also seem incompatible with international, liberal views of women's rights. The future of women's rights in the context of rapidly changing societies involves public and legal stakes that do not necessarily accept alternative views or alternative ways of "doing" (e.g. women having different work and responsibilities than men; spirituality as law) to the international norms of women's rights and law. For example, in the business of everyday life, how does ateetee or women's mukaa laaftuu status actually help them with problems related to land or property ownership, obtaining jobs or education, or being able to voice concerns in their community?

As for the spiritual aspects of the process, as indigenous legal scholars have argued, law has many different sources, including the spiritual or sacred domains (Borrows 2010). Even Western legal traditions are founded on religiously inspired beliefs of justice. Myths and narratives still exist as their foundations/sources, though legal practice has become secular (Webber 2009). In some areas religious tolerance of ateetee practitioners has been about adaptation. Because individuals' connections with and interpretations of indigenous spirituality are deeply personal, religious practices like ateetee may have more to do with showing respect for others and less to do with praying to a higher being. Though the connection with Waaqa may not be supported by all Arsi, today ateetee is sometimes practiced by women of different faiths, including those not adhering to a particular faith (though it is rare in Ethiopia). This individual adaptability

may help ensure its continuation. Most Arsi women and other community members see ateetee as being effective and they want it to continue.

Mainstream religious tensions also make me wonder what the future may hold for ateetee. With the exception of some of the highland areas—particularly in the Kokossa district—where ateetee is still alive and well, many women expressed concerns about their ability to maintain ateetee. I discussed these inquietudes in detail in Chapter 3, but also at other moments throughout the dissertation. I feel I have a duty to share this with readers because my Arsi ateetee practitioner friends and interlocutors asked me to do so. It is important to not disregard the words of some Arsi women as simply bemoaning the loss of a cultural “tradition” that no longer exists or that was bound to change profoundly over time. The Arsi women’s communities are changing but so are the ateetee practitioners. However, in this case, ateetee is part of the foundational cultural and customary legal system and it (or she, as some women would say) is threatened. In the areas where ateetee is vulnerable, practitioners are a minority. Ateetee women are afraid to publicly show that they are going to practice ateetee for fear of ridicule or threat from adherents of mainstream religions. In some areas these threats have even progressed to acts of violence, which make the women wary of carrying their siinqee and wearing their bonqoo, let alone organizing an ateetee ceremony. These areas of recent change consist of rural highlands where urbanization and education are not the first factors of change, but mainstream religions are. Lowlands that have experienced all factors of change (urbanization, education, religion, and more) have also seen the decline of ateetee practices.

Why is the decline or loss of *ateetee* a particularly significant problem? It is not just the loss of a cultural practice, but a legal institution for Arsi women. The Ethiopian judicial system can be problematic for many reasons. The most obvious is that it does not require reconciliation. The actual experience of reconciliation through the *ateetee* process may be debatable because one can never know what people are actually feeling. In some cases, reconciliation may not actually result in what is perceived as justice for all. For example, someone may say that the process went well and the case was resolved, but tensions could still remain. However, having an entire community involved holds the disputing parties accountable and creates a space where restoring balance and re-establishing good relations are paramount. The state legal system can also seem inaccessible and intimidating to women who do not know the process. Furthermore, when women use the courts they do not have the entourage of all the other *ateetee* women as support and defense. For Arsi women, a political and gender minority in Ethiopia, Ethiopian courts could be seen as doubly repressive and not really a viable option.

I hope it is clear now how many of the values and forms of social relationality associated with *ateetee* are relevant as components of justice beyond the Arsi cultural context. A question remains, however, about *ateetee*'s future. There are a number of examples of women's customary legal systems that have adapted with varying degrees of efficacy and to differing ends. In some cases, customary legal traditions have been institutionalized, as was the case with *Bulubulu*, a family dispute resolution process in Fiji (Merry 2006). Other cases involve revived or reinvented traditions, or the creation of spaces dedicated to women. One such revival is sentencing circles in First Nations communities in Canada. This procedure existed to varying degrees before Canadian

colonization as a restorative justice mechanism. In its current incarnation, a sentencing circle involves sitting willing offender(s), victim(s), members of the community and a judge in a circle to hear the perspectives and discuss the offense, the harms, and the punishment. The process can last for days and it follows the Canadian legal codes (Lillies 2002). Another example of a renewed tradition is *ho'oponopono*, an indigenous family problem-solving mechanism, which was brought back into use in the 1970s in Hawaii (Merry 2001). One other example is peace huts in Liberia, which receive support from UN Women. These actual huts were created by women in 2006 and are managed entirely by women to deal specifically with disputes, insults, or abuse directed towards women. Like *ateetee*, they do not deal with rape or murder. Singing is also used in their proceedings. Complainants bring their problems to the peace hut mediators. They sit under the hut with the accused, the mediators and other community members to present their points of view and come to an agreement or resolution (Douglas 2014).

Sometimes new, alternative legal processes are created. One example is the Nari Adalats in India. These are entirely female courts that were created to combat gender violence and create safe spaces for women to come with their grievances. They have existed for about twenty years now and have been relatively successful (Kethineni, Kakar and Srinivasan 2016). Though there are merits to the adaptations of customary legal systems, there are also many problems that can arise, including radical changes in associated values and meanings, which make the system less effective for all parties involved. Many of the problems have been documented by anthropologists (see, for example, Merry 2001, 2006). I would not advocate for an institutionalization of *ateetee*, since it could result in a radical change in its associated values, the way it is practiced and



its effectiveness. However, looking at the long-term effectiveness and community appreciation of these different types of processes and courts is useful for comparison and for ideas. These could point to potential directions for ateetee in an uncertain future.

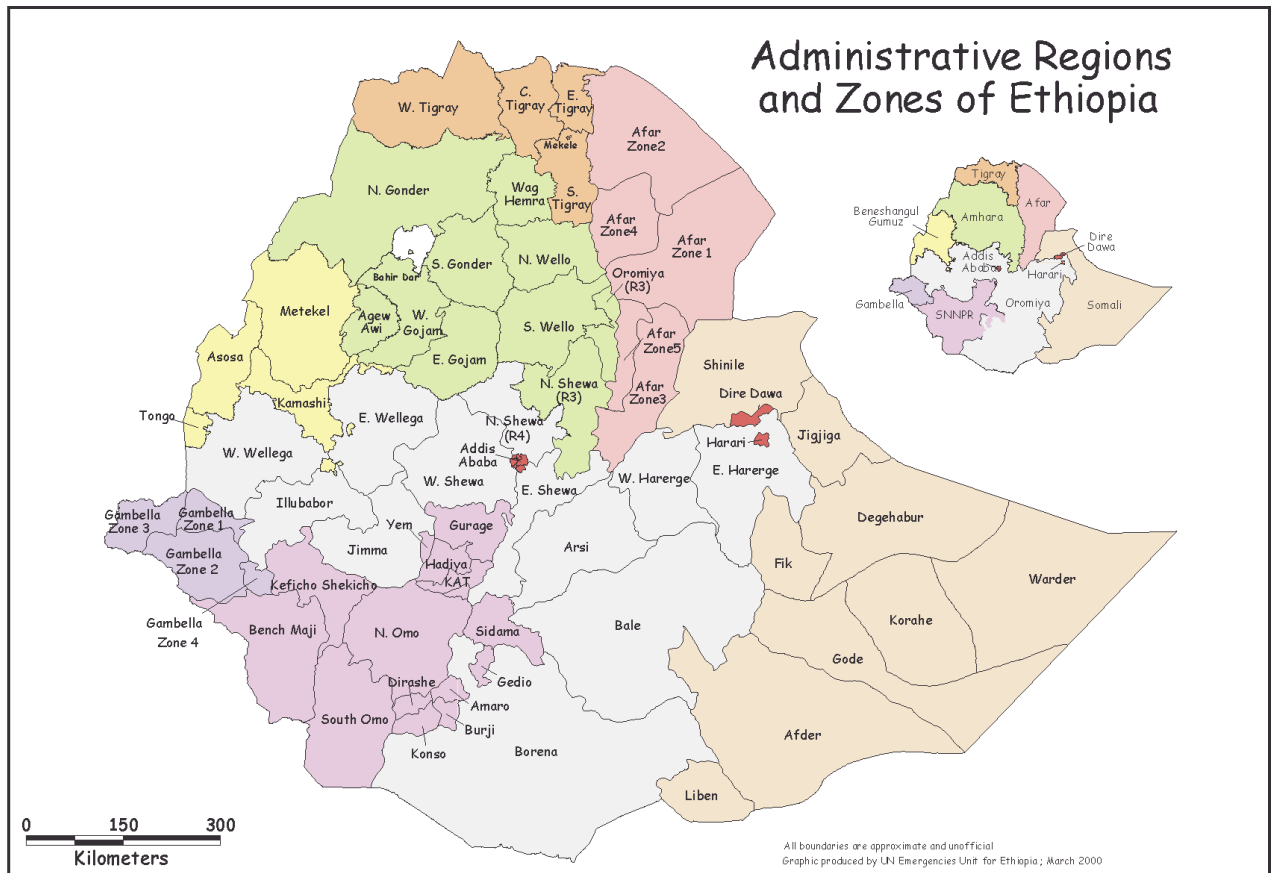
Passing ateetee on to future generations is an important step for many practitioners. Young children learn it with their mothers and then begin to practice once they are married. Though ateetee is often, but not always, conducted in periods of hardship, women enjoy the process, playing and having fun through the prayers and dances. The power of group singing and movement unites them and allows them to be better heard by powers above and by those around them. As with every new generation, however, young women are facing problems in changing social environments that their mothers did not previously experience. They are expressing their concerns about their situations or those of their friends through expressive arts and stories. Some of these concerns include marriage by abduction, economically imbalanced relationships, access to education, and ideological or religious differences with their family or community. Many of these problems are not new, but the ways that youth are experiencing them, and challenging them, and expressing their concerns are worth exploring. Faced with these problems, I think it would be helpful for youths to understand the inherent notions of relationality and respect embedded in the ateetee process. Ateetee can also stand as a powerful example of how women can actively defend and claim their respect by singing for justice. The ritual can show young women how they can be strong and fight for their rights, not only through ateetee, but in their lives generally. In this research I sought to extensively document and discuss ateetee through the perspectives of the participants and broader community. By paying close attention to ateetee, I hope this research has

demonstrated how it is an effective and valuable process, so that it will be maintained by future generations.

## Appendix 1

### Oromo Geography, History and Literature Review<sup>237</sup>

As can be seen on the map below, the Oromo region, which is divided into twelve administrative zones, extends from the highlands in the North of Ethiopia to the Ogaden and Somalia in the East, towards Sudan in the West, and down to the Tana River in Kenya (Baxter 1996, 7).



2000. Administrative Regions and Zones of Ethiopia. UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia.



## **General historic background on the Oromo**

A negative stereotype of the Oromo as it was depicted in early historical accounts endures in much of today's scholarly literature. Unfortunately many historic accounts of the Oromo of Ethiopia, written by Ethiopian Christians or European travelers, have depicted them as "fearsome warriors, outlaws, tricksters, pagans...in one word barbarians" (Ficquet et al. 2007, 55). These depictions are also related to their historical appearance because Oromo clans conquered many territories that were part of Muslim states in the East and the Christian empire in the West (ibid). The historical accounts of the Oromo are usually drawn from the narratives of the established state, which managed to quell these problematic groups. A general disregard for Oromo culture as contributing to the nation's identity has been reinforced by some scholarly work but is also apparent in everyday discourse and media representations. Furthermore, Ethiopia continues to uphold the politically dominant Amhara language and cultures and the high status of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Oromo-friendly historians have only recently begun to unearth the Oromo subgroups' histories and record them. With the exception of some historic accounts, most written Oromo history has been published in the last twenty years.

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There are multiple theories on the Oromo origins (Geda 2013) but the most common among Oromist scholars is that they came from an area in the south of Ethiopia where the Guji Oromo currently live, east of the Dawa River and west of the Genale

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<sup>238</sup> In his introduction to a volume of essays, Ezekiel Gebissa (2009) gives a summary on the history of scholarship of the Oromo: how Oromo history was moulded into an Ethiopianist discourse, how some Oromo scholarship began to emerge in the 1970s and 80s, and how Oromo studies has only really progressed since the early '90s.

River (Bassi 2005, 6, Østebø 2005, 18). As far as historians have been able to confirm, the Oromo are indigenous to their lands and, though they conquered some neighbouring lands, they were ultimately taken over during the Amhara conquests (Hassen 1990).<sup>239</sup> Oromo presence in the regions in which they currently live in Ethiopia have been documented in texts as early as the sixteenth century (Ficquet 2003, Hassen 1990). There is, however, ample evidence to suggest they are descendants of previous populations that arrived many centuries earlier (Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch 2011 [2004]). They are documented as having migrated in the mid-sixteenth century while assimilating and adopting other groups (Blackhurst 1996, 241).

In the late nineteenth century, when the Ethiopian Negus (King) Menelik II sought to expand the Abyssinian kingdom, his soldiers engaged in fierce battles with the Oromo, eventually winning and taking over their land (Abbas Haji Gnamo 1995). This is a pivotal time in history for the Oromo because, up until this point, the Oromo had different variations of the *gaada* system.<sup>240</sup> This system is inextricably tied with Oromo culture, its religion and rituals. Gradually, these governance systems were broken down under Menelik II and later, under Haile Selassie. An internal colonization campaign (often

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<sup>239</sup> Mohammed Hassen refutes the dominant historical narrative that the Oromo were invaders who came from elsewhere and that they weren't indigenous to what is now Ethiopia. Hassen puts forth the notion, supported by other scholars, that the Oromo originate from the Arsi-Bale Mountains in southern Ethiopia (Hassen 1990). In my discussions with Arsi elders, some have pointed to origins in the area and others have alluded to origin stories that indicate that they came from another land. I have heard several accounts on the origin of *siinqee* (women's spiritual stick) that mentioned crossing a large sea or body of water. This body of water could be one of the rivers in Ethiopia or it could be further afield. I am not sure if this is just a regional coincidence of accounts, if it is a myth, if the legend has been influenced by other religious beliefs or other stories or legends, or if these accounts may be pointing to something that should be further explored by historians.

<sup>240</sup> The *gadaa* system is documented as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Bahrey, an Abyssinian priest wrote *A History of the Galla*. Galla is a term that is no longer used to designate the Oromo due to its pejorative nature.

dubbed Amharization by Oromo scholars) that began under Menelik II, continued under Haile Selassie's imperial regime. Much of this history has been constructed from oral narratives and from what was indicated in historical documents.

Over time, Amhara workers were placed in Oromo-dominant areas of the country and the Oromo were not treated as the social equals of the politically dominant ethnic groups. As Mohammed Hassan, an Oromo historian explains, "From 1942 to 1974, Afaan Oromo [was the only language in Africa that] was banned from being used for preaching, teaching and production of literature (Hassen 1996, 71). Many Oromo were imprisoned during this time and, during the subsequent dictatorial period, for defying this system and trying to take up an Oromo cause. The ban on the language and culture created a difficult situation for scholars who were attempting to write about the Oromo, though notable attempts were made to write about their history and circumstances. Paul Baxter, an Ethiopianist scholar who wrote many articles that were sympathetic towards the Oromo and their causes, provides these anecdotes from the 1970s:

In court or before an official, an Oromo had to speak Amharinya or use an interpreter. Even a case between two Oromo before an Oromo speaking magistrate had to be heard in Amharinya. I sat through a mission church service at which the preacher and all the congregation were Oromo but at which the sermon, as well as the service, was given first in Amharinya, which few of the congregation understood at all, and then translated into Oromo. The farce had to be played out in case a Judas informed and the district officer fined or imprisoned the preacher." (1978: 288)

The suppression of the Oromo language is further explained by Mekuria Bulcha:

The administrative apparatus and the school system became the primary means in the implementation of the imperial regime's program of building an Ethiopian nation. To that end Amharic was declared the official national language of Ethiopia and the medium of instruction in all elementary schools throughout the empire in 1943; all other indigenous languages were proscribed and the use of Oromo literature for educational or religious purposes was banned. Christian missionary activities became the subject of an imperial decree which prohibited the use of the Oromo language for teaching and preaching. The possession of Oromo literature including the Bible became illegal (1997: 335; citing the Imperial Degree, no. 3. (1994)



The Oromo nationalist movement began in the late 1960s and 1970s, and although it was a necessary move for many of those struggling against societal oppression, many of the writings from this period reflect the nationalist perspective. However, the cultural movement was a means for Oromo scholars to write about expressive culture as a justification for national identity (Kumsa 1998, Jalata 2005).

In 1991, after the fall of the Derg, the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) government took power under Meles Zenawi, who served as prime minister from that time until his death in 2012. The EPRDF is still in power, now led by Hailemariam Desalegn, the former deputy prime minister. Since 1994 a new constitution has been in place, establishing ethnic federalism, in which each ethnic region has a certain amount of autonomy and the right to teach and use their mother tongue in their governments. This political and cultural freedom has enabled many Oromo and non-Oromo authors to write about Oromo culture and traditions. Although there are still some "dominant culture" accounts that try to legitimize current political and cultural power, most of the Oromo scholarly work is trying to depict and portray Oromo culture as an important independent group or as one of the different ethnic groups that constitute Ethiopia. Discrimination and inequities, however, do continue, and the political situation is far from ideal for the Oromo. In 2014, for example, many students protested the government's plan to expand the capital into Oromia and to seize the lands they needed



for this expansion. These peaceful protests were met with severe repression from the government. This is still continuing today.<sup>241</sup>

### **Oromo literature review**

In this dissertation, I draw from ethnomusicology and feminist anthropology in combination with interdisciplinary studies on the Oromo (Baxter 1986) to contribute to this neglected area of research. While many studies of Ethiopian music have focused on the politically- and culturally-dominant Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups (Kimberlin 2000, Shelemay 1997), there have not been as many studies on the practices of other cultural groups in Ethiopia. In the case of the Oromo, it is also important to emphasize that the language was banned until 1974, after which there was a dictatorship, stifling much research until its end in the early '90s. In 1994 a new Ethiopian constitution and government promoted ethnic federalism and thus more control of areas of the country by different ethnic groups and education in local languages. Unfortunately, this devolution of authority has not created a more egalitarian atmosphere, and research on the Oromo has been (and continues to be) discouraged by some scholars from dominant ethnic groups. I, too, am often questioned by non-Oromo in Ethiopia about my choice to conduct research among the Oromo.

I aim for this study to be an interdisciplinary contribution to research on and for the Oromo. Previous research on Oromo music has described the ethnographic context of

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<sup>241</sup> In 2014, Amnesty released an extensive report exposing the injustices: the <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/006/2014/en/>. (Accessed November 20, 2014). See also Human Rights Watch published a recent article evaluating the unnecessary violence: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/18/ethiopia-lethal-force-against-protesters> (Accessed December 20, 2015).

music-making (Baxter 1979, Holcomb 1973) or analyzed its poetic themes (Griefenow-Mewis 2004, Van de Loo 1991). There have been several studies of Oromo social and political systems (Bassi 2005, Baxter 1996, Haji 1994, Legesse 1973, Megerssa 1994), history (Hassen 1990), religious institutions (Bartels 1989, Megerssa 1994, Osmond 2004) and language (Griefenow-Mewis 2001). Many other works on the Oromo aim to represent voices and situations that have not been represented in the dominant discourse. For example, several authors have looked into women's roles in society (Hussein 2004, Kumsa 1997, Østebø 2009, 2013, 2015) because previous scholarly attention to women was negligible and often reinforced binary depictions of women in the domestic sphere and the men at war (Legesse 1973). Some of these recent works have shown the contrary: women had and, in some cases, still have much power by virtue of their spiritual responsibilities (Østebø 2009, 2015).

In the case of the Arsi Oromo, scholars have conducted research in the fields of anthropology and geography (Baxter 1986, Gascon 1998, Hultin 1975), literary analysis (Hussein 2005), history (Abbas Gnamo 1991, 2014, Hussein Endeesa 2011, Ficquet 2003), land rights and dispute resolution processes (Mamo Hebo 2006), ethnomusicology (Qashu 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008), women's access to land and property (Hebo 2006, Hebo and Shigeta 2014), and women's studies (Gemedo 2000, Hussein 2004, Østebø 2009, 2015). Mamo Hebo has conducted extensive work on Arsi Oromo dispute resolution processes and different gendered accesses to land and property in his native area in the Arsi highlands. Research from a women's studies perspective focuses on the place of Oromo women in society, their oral art forms (Hussein 2004, 2005), and human rights issues such as female genital mutilation (Hirut 2004) and violence against women

(Østebø 2009). Marit Østebø's work with Arsi Oromo women, and specifically her studies of *ateetee* and *waayyuu* (2009), has been extremely helpful for contextualization and theorization of this gendered ritual. She works with Arsi women in a very local, context-specific manner, writing on local and international views of gender equality (2015) and analyzing faith-based organizations' contributions to development (2013, 2014). This dissertation builds on these works to provide an interdisciplinary ethnomusicological approach.

## Appendix 2

### Different Types of Ateetee Ceremonies

<i>Ateetee fala</i> (prayers)	
Purpose	Location
drought ( <i>caamsa</i> )	By the river or lake
flooding ( <i>rooba guudatuu</i> )	By the river or lake
Oromo religious ceremonies ( <i>muuda</i> ; <i>Sheikh Hussein</i> )	On a hilltop; in the forest; under a sacred tree
birth ( <i>deetuu</i> ) and problems with conception and birth	In the house of the woman
sickness ( <i>dhuukuba</i> )	Gathered outside under a sacred tree, such as <i>odaa</i> (sycamore) by the river or in a private home
cattle ( <i>loonii</i> )	Outside, under an <i>odaa</i> tree (sycamore fig) or by the river – prayers for the cattle’s wellbeing
annual Oromo thanksgiving ceremonies ( <i>irrechaa</i> )	By the river; under sacred tree

<i>Ateetee gooraa/ararsa/deemsisa</i> (avenge, reconcile, leave)	
Purpose	Location
when a son abuses his mother	Prayers on the way and in front of the mother’s house
when a husband hits his wife who is wearing <i>qanafaa</i> (beaded band worn on the forehead while pregnant and months after birth)	On the way and in front of the woman and man’s house
when a person (woman or man) abuses a woman verbally or physically	On the way and in front of the offender’s house
war ( <i>dula</i> )	On the battlefield – women come to stop the battle with their <i>siinqee</i> in hand

### Appendix 3

#### Songs from Ateetee Fala in Guutuu Kokossa District

Below are different ateetee songs that were sung during the ateetee fala ceremony in Guutuu. Tracks 3 and 4 were sung down by the river. Track 4 has a mixture of singing, of men passing the honeywine and milk around (see the textual description in chapter 3) and, at towards the end of the track there is another song that begins. I have only included excerpts of the texts below since it is not in the scope of this chapter to do a full comparison of all of the songs:

<p>Ariyyoon dhalee ee, kaa ege yuuba</p> <p>Kaa ege yuuba</p> <p>Ulfina hin qabnuu kaa saayyaan duubaa</p> <p>Ariyyoon dhalee, kaa ege yuubaa</p> <p>Kaa ege yuuba</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>Track 2:</p> <p>The cow<sup>242</sup> gave birth to a calf with a beautiful tail</p> <p>The beautiful tail</p> <p>We have no honour without the cattle<sup>243</sup></p> <p>The cow gave birth to a calf with a beautiful tail</p> <p>The beautiful tail</p> <p>[...]</p>
<p>Buubee taanallee nuurraa raaffissii</p> <p>Warana hin qabuu taka gabbissi, ehee gabbissi</p> <p>Buubee taanallee nuurraa raaffissii</p> <p>Jala jaltoo'oo nuurraa gabbiissi, ehee gabbissi</p> <p>Buubee taanallee nuurraa raaffissii</p> <p>Warawadhuu hin dhabuu taka gabbissi,</p>	<p>Track 3:</p> <p>Please make this wind be calm for us<sup>244</sup></p> <p>I do not have a weapon, make this comfortable, yes comfortable</p> <p>Please make this wind be calm for us</p> <p>Oh the loved, make this comfortable</p> <p>Please make this wind be calm for us</p> <p>If I pray I do not miss out, make this comfortable</p> <p>Please make this wind be calm for us</p>

<sup>242</sup> *Ariyoo* is a name for the cow. Names that end with “yoo” (such as Ariyoo) are ways of marking relationships, such as a connection to a relative or terms of endearment. The cattle are their relatives.

<sup>243</sup> There are many references to cattle in all Oromo repertoires. These animals hold much cultural significance. Cattle are highly respected. Like people, they have ancestors and can be traced back generations. Historically they held high economic importance. They continue to be vital livelihood as producers of milk products and meat. If the women's prayers are answered, the rain will come, the grass will grow, and the cows will become large and produce much milk. Milk and butter are vital for living but also sacred for their symbolism in rituals. These cow products symbolize fertility and prosperity (Bartels 1983, Dahl 1990, Qashu 2007).

<sup>244</sup> In the Kokkossa area, the winter is very windy. Asking for the end of the winds means asking for the spring to come with the rains.

ehee gabbissi  
 Buubee taanallee nuurraa raaffissii  
 Ateetee tasfeeye kiitabaa, ehee kitaabaa  
 Ee ayyoo guddoo tasfeyyeen kiitabaa, ehee  
 kiitabaa  
 Biyyaa keenyaanaa falan ijabaa  
 Dummeessaa gurree tasfee kitabaa, ehee  
 kitabaa  
 Biyyaa keenyaarraa balaan ijabaa  
 [...]  
 Biyyaa teenyaa irraa balaan ijaaba  
 [...]

Ateetee [...] the book<sup>245</sup>, yes the book  
 Yes, elder mother, [...] the book, yes the  
 book

In our country, disaster has not happened  
 The clouds are collecting, [...] the book,  
 yes the book  
 In our country disaster cannot be seen  
 [...]  
 We wish for there not to be peril in our  
 country

Sii dalayaa yoo kadhee rabbi si danda'a  
 (x5)  
 Akana siinqee sii dalayaa yoo kadhee rabbi  
 sii danda'a  
 Sii dalayaa yoo kadhee rabbi si danda'a  
 Ee ayyoo guddoo, sii dalayaa yoo kadhee  
 rabbi si danda'a  
 Akana siinqee sii dalayaa yoo kadhee rabbi  
 sii danda'a  
 Sii dalayaa yoo kadhee rabbi si danda'a  
 Ee ayyoo guddoo sii dalayaa yoo kadhee  
 rabbi si danda'a  
 Akana siinqee sii dalayaa yoo kadhee rabbi  
 sii danda'a  
 Warana hin qabuu, sii dalayaa yoo kadhee  
 rabbi sii danda'a  
 [...]

Track 4:

You protect, if I pray to Rabbi I can obtain  
 [results]  
 Like this, I protect you with siinqee, if I  
 pray to Rabbi I can obtain [results]  
 You protect, if I pray to Rabbi I can obtain  
 [results]  
 Yes, elder mother, if I pray to you, you  
 protect  
 Like this, siinqee protects you, if I pray to  
 Rabbi I can obtain [results]  
 You protect, if I pray to Rabbi I can obtain  
 [...]  
 Yes, elder mother, if I pray to you, you  
 protect  
 Like this, siinqee protects you, if I pray to  
 Rabbi I can obtain [results]  
 I don't have a spear; you protect, if I pray  
 to Rabbi I can obtain [results]  
 [...]

Ee ayyoo guddoo ulee shiigibii, ee gosaa  
 kiyyaa buliittiittii

Yes, elder mother, there are many ulee  
 [sticks], yes, let our clan be sustained

<sup>245</sup> I am not sure what "the book" means here.



### List of Oral Informants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Place of Interview</b>
Abdo Godana	25 December 2010	Yemensira, Nansabo
Aliyee Ogeto	7 January 2012	Dhakka (Langano)
Aliyee Ogeto	10 June 2014	Dhakka (Langano)
Amariich Shubee and group of women	28 December 2010	Garanbambo, Nansabo
Amariich Shubee, Mamo Kabato (from Nansabo)	30 October 2010	Bishaan Gurracha
Amina	25 October 2010	Dhakka Hora Qadho (Langano)
Ashaa Baatii	30 October 2010	Shashemene
Ayantu and friends	11 April 2011	Guutuu, Kokossa district
Ayyan Duulee, Elimee Wakko, Shoee Bammee	12 May 2009	Guutuu
Bekele Gemed	13 January 2012	Kokossa
Binka Wabee	13 January 2012	Kokossa
Booqatoo	20 January 2012	Gaata, Kokossa district
Bujjaa Badhee, Ruffo and neighbours	14 April 2011	Ciiccoo, Kokossa district
Buldhaa Keroo (Haadha Nageessoo)	12 April 2011	Dikki, Kokossa district
Fatima, Shuru Kero	18 January 2012	Gaata, Kokossa district
Gemed	16 May 2009	Kokossa
Giibja Annoota (from Shashemene)	30 October 2010	Bishaan Gurracha
Girls in Facca'a (group)	3 March 2011	Facca'a, Nansabo
Girls in Garanbambo (group)	28 December 2010	Garanbambo, Nansabo
Girls in Guutuu (group)	13 April 2011	Guutuu, Kokossa district
Girls in Kokossa (group)	13 April 2011	Kokossa
Girls in Worqaa (group)	12 January 2011	Worqaa, Nansabo
Girls in Yemensira (group)	24 December 2010	Yemensira, Nansabo
Girma Galatoo Buttaa	14 May 2009	Kokossa
Gobane Geda	23 October 2010	Dhakka Hora Qadho (Langano)
Gobane Geda	24 October 2010	Dhakka Hora Qadho (Langano)
Guyyee Kadir	17 January 2012	Dikki, Kokossa district
Hadha Dirriba	3 February 2011	Huro, Nansabo
Hailu	13 April 2011	Kokossa



Imishu Kephuu	12 May 2009	Guutuu
Imishu Kephuu	15 January 2012	Guutuu, Kokossa district
Kadiro Ganamo, Guyyee Kadir	11 May 2009	Kokossa
Kadiro Ganamo, Nashi, and Ansha	16 January 2012	Kokossa
Kifile Gataa	18 May 2009	Kokossa
Martha Demisee	12 October 2010	Adama
Momina Muddee	18 May 2009	Kokossa
Pastor Tefera and Biniyam, Gospel Light Church	18 April 2011	Kokossa
Safayee Gelchuu	17 May 2009	Kokossa
Seroo (from Hebano)	1 November 2010	Bishaan Gurracha
Sheek Fano, Urjii, and her husband	14 January 2011	Worqaa, Nansabo
Sheikh Garadi	18 April 2011	Kokossa
Shuboo Arsee, Dulochoo Churisoo	14 May 2009	Guutuu
Shunkaa Gababa	17 April 2011	Dikki, Kokossa district
Shuru Kepo and friends	16 April 2011	Gaata, Kokossa district
Simbiro and Biniyam, Mekane Eyesus Church	18 April 2011	Kokossa
Sinni Nabii	12 April 2011	Dikki, Kokossa district
Sultan, Head of Police	19 April 2011	Kokossa
Tayeeba Amboo	12 January 2011	Worqaa, Nansabo
Tayere Godana	25 December 2010	Yemensira, Nansabo
Women from Bokkuu Shannan kebele	1 October 2010	Bokkuu Shannan, kebele near Adama
Women from Dhakka	24 October 2010	Dhaka Hora Qadho, near kebele office
Women from Dhakka Addii kebele	14 October 2010	Kebele Dhakkaa Addii, near Adama
Women from different areas of Nansabo (group)	15 January 2011	Worqaa, Nansabo
Women from Shashemene district	30 October 2010	Bishaan Gurracha
Women in Sof Umaar Guutoo (group)	23 December 2010	Sof Umaar Guutoo, Nansabo
Women in Yemensira (group)	25 December 2010	Yemensira, Nansabo
Youth from Ilka Wabee band	16 May 2009	Kokossa

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<sup>246</sup> In academic publications, it is practice in Ethiopia to list an author's first name first. This is usually reproduced internationally for Ethiopian-related publications. For the sake of consistency and to conform to dissertation formatting requirements, I have listed all the sources alphabetically starting with their last name. However, in many publications these authors are referenced with their first name first.

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## Audio and video files

All the audio and video files can be accessed at the following link :

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nibl2fve7hgiokj/AABTqYFNpgyWb\\_HMCmY2lAy2a?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nibl2fve7hgiokj/AABTqYFNpgyWb_HMCmY2lAy2a?dl=0)

### Audio Tracks

1. “Ateetee qororo diiraa,” Ateetee fala in Guutuu, Kokossa district, 14 April 2011
2. “Ariyyoon dhalee ee,” Ateetee fala in Guutuu, Kokossa district
3. “Buubee taanallee nuurraa raaffissii,” Ateetee fala in Guutuu, Kokossa district
4. “Sii dalayaa yoo kadhee rabbi si danda’a,” Ateetee fala in Guutuu, Kokossa district
5. “Arguu guyyuu sitti dheessee Rabbi,” Ateetee fala in Guutuu, Kokossa district
6. “Sardoo sardoo,” Ateetee fala in Guutuu, Kokossa district
7. “Killa qalluu,” Shuru Koree and friends, Gaataa, Kokossa district, 16 April 2011
8. “Ateetee wayyuu,” Buldhaa Kerroo, Dikki, Kokossa district, 12 April 2011
9. “Ateetee qanafaa,” Shuru Koree and friends, Gataa, Kokossa district, 16 April 2011
10. “Kattaarraa gubbaa,” Bujjaa and Ruffoo, Ciiccoo, Kokossa district, 14 April 2011
11. Protestant song, Simbiro and Biniyam, Kokossa, 18 April 2011
12. “Siinqee tiyyaa lootii,” Buldhaa Kerroo, Dikki, Kokossa district, 12 April 2011
13. “Ateetee tiyyaa,” Bujjaa and Ruffoo, Ciiccoo, Kokossa district, 14 April 2011
14. Insults 1, Ayantu and friends, Guutuu, Kokossa district, 11 April 2011
15. Insults, Bujjaa and Ruffoo, Viiccoo, Kokossa district, 14 April 2011
16. Insults 2, “Saree yabatee,” Ayantu and friends, Guutuu, Kokossa district, 11 April 2011
17. Insults 3, Ayantu and friends, Guutuu, Kokossa district, 11 April 2011
18. “Sardoo, Sardoo,” Ayantu and friends, Guutuu, Kokossa district, 11 April 2011
19. “Qolloo durbaa,” slaying of the cow, Ayantu and friends, Guutuu, Kokossa district, 11 April 2011
20. “Ayantu qaladhu jettee, Ayantu and friends, Guutuu, Kokossa district, 11 April 2011
21. “Haadha Eessee,” Ateetee Booqatoo, Gaataa, Kokossa district, 20 January 2012
22. “Ateetee fanoo shagelee,” Ateetee Booqatoo, Gaataa, Kokossa district, 20 January 2012
23. Ateetiyyoo ta Anshaa Dikkoo,” Ateetee Booqatoo, Gaataa, Kokossa district, 20 January 2012

### Videos:

Video 1: Ateetee fala in Guutuu, Kokossa district (chapter 3)

Video 2: Gadaa Ceremony in Faacca’a, Nansabo district (chapter 4)

Video 3: Ateetee Booqatoo, Gaataa, Kokossa district (chapter 7)