

Songs of Exile

Singing the Past Into the Future

Martha Kuwee Kumsa

REVISED EDITION

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SONGS OF EXILE.

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Preface to the Revised Edition

In just a few months after its first appearance, *Songs of Exile* is coming out again in a revised edition. Oromos, youth and elders alike, grabbed it with keen interest just as they did its companion CD, *Safuu*. The enthusiastic response culminated at my presentation at the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) annual conference on 3 August 2013 at Howard University, Washington DC. Although the agonizing youth violence and the suffering of the Oromo communities I was presenting on generated a good discussion, it was the healing connection in the *Songs of Exile* that grabbed much attention. The fired up audience requested that I sing one of the songs. Odd as it was to perform the women's birth ritual of *dalaga* with an academic audience, I chose to perform *Gurraalee woo* [O the Black ones] with the women on my panel. Better yet, I requested the predominantly male audience to perform the women's call-and-response *dalaga* with us. The audience erupted into singing and applauding. The enthusiasm was full to the brim.

This led to a two-part interview with Jaallanee Gammadaa of the Radio Voice of America's (VOA) Oromo Service and to a small YouTube video clip of the OSA performance going viral. Critical comments and suggestions poured in from around the world, including the Oromo homeland. People wanted *Songs of Exile* to be sent to as many libraries as possible. Youth offered to digitize and put it on the Internet to make it accessible to as many people as possible. This revised edition is the result of all these recommendations. It integrates the critical comments and suggestions people offered. Thanks to the youthful energy offered, *Songs of Exile* will also be available on the Internet soon. Moreover, the youth project also garnered the much needed support. Therefore the series will continue after *Songs of Exile*. I am sincerely grateful for all this. Indeed I am humbled.

Martha Kuwee Kumsa
November 2013

Last Word First

Du'a beekanii nagaa hin dhaamanii

We don't know when we die, so we can't say good bye.

May *Songs of Exile* find you very well and inspired. May it come to you as my loving gift. I don't know whether I die now as I write these lines or whether I will live longer. But I intend *Songs of Exile* to be the first of a series. If I die now, it will be my last word for you and I thank *Waaqa*¹ for this beginning.

Songs of Exile draws from the deep wells of our ancestors' ways of being in the world. It is like a tiny drop from that vast ocean but it gives a flavour of the Oromo worldview pertaining to women's and girls' songs, rites and rituals. It gives a taste of how our foremothers related to their creator, to all creation, to each other and to others.

In the cold winter of 2011, a strange excruciating pain visited me in the middle of the night. *Waaqa* has blessed me with wellbeing so I don't often complain about my health. But that night, I thought I was going to die. I felt I was not ready to go yet. I had seen the deep hunger and thirst young Oromos expressed for our ancestor's culture and spirituality. I had particularly promised groups of young women to pass on the little I knew of our foremother's songs but I did not. This broken promise hit me through the twisting pain that night and I prayed to *Waaqa* to let me honour my word.

You would think I would go to the doctor, right? When the pain eased a bit at daybreak, I grabbed my computer and searched for local recording studios. I wished the songs were recorded in some beautiful voices but alas! I had to record them in my own. I did not need a band or musical instruments, not even a rehearsal. I just booked a studio and sang away --pure and raw. The songs were on the CD I called *Safuu*,² which found its way not only to the young women but also to young men and community elders both in the Oromo diaspora and in the homeland. Many received it with enthusiasm. Some of the younger people loved it but did not understand the language or

¹ *Waaqa* is akin to God in English. Details will be discussed in Chapter 2 under Oromo Cosmology.

² *Safuu* will be discussed in some depth in Chapter 2.

the depth of the philosophy from which the songs spring. *Songs of Exile* is a companion to *Safuu* to help young Oromos understand our foremothers' songs and rites and rituals.

Our foremothers left us the most soothing sweet melodies of the ancient times. They have the most beautiful lyrics I've ever seen, lyrics so rich with rhythms and rhymes ranging from loose structures where just the last syllables rhyme to highly structured lyrics where every syllable in the entire line rhymes. *Songs of Exile* is full of these sweet melodies and amazing rhythms and rhymes. I present it to you with deep love for our ancestors' incredibly rich heritage and with gratitude to *Waaqa* for the gift. Please take it with love and make it your own in your own way for your own context.

Dear Young Oromos

To the most amazing young women and men so fired up with a burning desire to connect to your ancestors' heritage – I say thank you for your heart warming responses to *Safuu* and for your words of love. Your burning passion inspires me so profoundly. Nothing makes an elder happier, really, than passing on what they know and being received with such enthusiasm. Because of your beautiful youthful spirit, I will die a very happy woman. *Songs of Exile* is drawn from the deep wellsprings of the spirit you fired up in me. So it is my loving gift back to you.

To those who love your ancestral heritage despite the fact that you feel disconnected from your roots and do not know enough Oromo language and culture to access them – I say thank you for your fiery spirit. *Songs of Exile* is particularly crafted for you as a loving gift. I would not have bothered with English translation if it was not for you. You are at the front and center of *Songs of Exile*. My English translation may not make much sense to you but please do not give up. If you keep up the fiery spirit you will understand it, bye and bye.

To those who are behind strange bars in strange lands and longing to connect with your ancestors' heritage – I say I love you more than words can say. You may have made some bad choices but you are not bad. My heart

bleeds for you; my spirit is restless. *Songs of Exile* is particularly for you. May the spirits of our ancestors seep into the darkness of the prisons and nurture your beautiful spirits. May the darkness of prison transform into the darkness of *Waaqa Gurraacha* [Black God] for you. May you walk in Its holiest and most brilliant darkness. *Songs of Exile* is my loving gift to you.

To those who are skeptical about our ancestors' knowledge and wisdom but keep searching for it and keep questioning it – I say I love your spirit. I love your skepticism and inquisitiveness but I love your searching the most. Please keep searching. *Songs of Exile* is for you to question and critically engage. Do not believe what I say without a question. Find out for yourself. Grab it and make it your own in your own creative inquisitive ways in your own unique context. *Songs of Exile* is my loving gift to you.

To those whose religious beliefs made you oppose the revival of our ancestral heritage – I love your opposition. That is precisely where I started; so I relate to your struggles very much. I was against my own ancestors' heritage until I realized the depth of the knowledge we were losing and started asking why. *Songs of Exile* is my loving gift to you too. Please do not dismiss it before you understand the depth of the well from which it is drawn. Make sense of it, engage it and then oppose it on matters of principle.

To those who despise our ancestral heritage because you see it as backward – I say I relate to your struggles very much. I too despised my heritage because I was taught it was heathen, pagan, savage, backward and what not. I believed that crap until I started questioning the teachings I received. That was when pangs of realization jolted me. The world that destroyed our ancestors' ways did not give us a better way of being in the world or relating to others. It just imposed its own. So, if anyone despises your culture, it is not because your culture is backward. Please do not be fooled. They must have other reasons. Look behind and beneath their words. You will see what I mean. Your culture is one of the finest and most profound ways of being in the world. Do not believe a word of what I say. Grab *Songs of Exile* and find out for yourself. It is my loving gift to you too.

To those who have disconnected from your roots and those who feel hurt because we elders call you “the lost generation” -- I say I am deeply sorry. Calling you “the lost generation” reflects more the ignorance and loss of our

own generation rather than yours. But we do not understand this fully. *Abbaan of hin argu* [one cannot see oneself], as an Oromo proverb says. Now I am beginning to understand and I hope you understand and forgive your elders too. It is not fair to call you “lost” without giving you the tools to retrieve the loss of my own generation. If you are lost, it is because we are lost. Thank you for teaching us that there are many ways of being and becoming Oromo in this world, many more ways than we could ever imagine. Thank you for opening our eyes to the creative possibilities of exile. *Songs of Exile* is my loving gift to you to help reconnect us back to each other, for the sake of our survival, for the sake of our healing.

To those who are displaced in your own place, those rendered homeless in your own homes, those languishing in Ethiopian prisons, and those forced out of your people’s land and roam the deserts and danger-infested lands of others, those persecuted and tortured because you searched for your ancestors’ ways of life – I say thank you for your burning passion and for your incredible sacrifice. You inspire me like no other soul does. Your suffering bleeds my heart but your strength gives me strength. Our spirits are joyful together in searching for the lost paths of our ancestors. *Songs of Exile* is for you to add to your growing repertoire. May my heartfelt love part these ominous clouds and soothe you in your moments of distress and touch you where you want to be touched.

Dear Oromo Elders

To those of us who roam the world of diaspora or the homeland, some aimlessly, some searching, others with well-defined goals – I say I belong to you and I love you all. Your strengths are my strengths and your weaknesses my weaknesses. We are all in this together as long as we share the name Oromo. Either we tear each other down and perish together or we lift each other up and survive together as a people. *Songs of Exile* is for you. It is my loving gift to you to start lifting each other up in our ancestors’ ways.

To those who deeply feel the excruciating pain of losing our heritage and profoundly believe in revaluing, reclaiming and reworking it, to those

who are collecting and putting it together-- by bits and fragments, tiny word by tiny word, fragment of story by fragment of story – I say well done! I love your burning passion. I am inspired by the fiery energy that keeps you going and working on our heritage, despite our all-consuming circumstances of life. *Songs of Exile* is my loving gift to you to encourage you on.

To those who have always wanted to document some bits and fragments of our heritage and pass them on to the next generation, to those who have that burning passion but do not have the time to put it to work, to those who have the deep desire to dig up and lift up our culture against all odds but remain consumed by the vagaries of everyday life – to you I say I share your deepest passions and relate to your struggles very much. *Songs of Exile* is my precious gift handed to you with so much love. I present it to you as *didhaa*. I mean *didhaa* not as a challenge but as an inspiration to move us forward and produce more bits and fragments. As an Oromo proverb goes: *mucha muchaa baatee aannan taati* [What becomes milk is what comes out of the teats by drips and drops]. It is what we each contribute tiny bit by tiny bit that brings the rebirth of our lost culture and way of life. Let us inspire each other and fire up the search!

Please join me...

...in thanking some incredibly precious and unforgettable people who have been instrumental in midwifing *Songs of Exile*. I'd like to send my most heartfelt thanks to:

First and foremost, Oromos involved in the grassroots movement in the homeland, who stood up to the Ethiopian repression and risked their lives, and sometimes lost their precious lives in the struggle for the rebirth of our ancestral ways of life – Thanks to the bitter sacrifices you made, the rebirth is now in full swing and no force can stop it.

Oromos in the diaspora who are involved in fiery grassroots movements for the rebirth of our culture and spirituality – I particularly thank those involved in the various faces of the Oromo liberation struggle, those

organizing *Irreecha*³ annually and those who organized the *Waaqeffatoo*⁴ from around the world. You are true examples of our rebirth as a people.

The youth, women, and men of Toronto who came out with fiery energy to address youth violence and bring about community healing – Thank you for giving of yourself so generously in developing the Heal and Connect (HAC) programs and creating Oromo Coalition against Youth Alienation (OCAYA⁵) and *Addooyyee*⁶ Toronto. *Songs of Exile* are your songs. They come out of the deep wounds of our suffering nation that you expressed so eloquently. They are inspired by your profound collective search for our ancestor’s ways of healing our collective wounds. You are the soul of *Songs of Exile*.

The Oromo women in the grassroots movements throughout the Oromo diaspora from Africa and Australia to Europe and North America, the women who have embraced and spread the flames of Oromo culture and spirituality – Thank you for opening your homes and your hearts to the celebration of *Ateetee*⁷ rituals. *Songs of Exile* are your songs. I am deeply grateful to you for your burning passion.

The numerous Oromo websites that have put invaluable information out there in the World Wide Web – Thank you for making this gem available to searchers like me and thank you for providing open access to them. Please keep up the good work.

The women of *Yabus*⁸ who defiantly continued to practice your ancestral culture and spirituality, even as the totalitarian Ethiopian regime evicted you from your land and threw you out of your homes – Your sacred stories are my sacred stories; your strength is my inspiration; your songs are my revival. I especially thank you for celebrating *Ateetee* in your displaced

³ *Irreecha* is Oromo annual celebration of thanksgiving and prayers.

⁴ The word *Waaqeffatoo* signifies people who worship *Waaqa*. It is the inclusive plural form of *Waaqeffataa* (male) and *Waaqeffattuu* (female).

⁵ Initially, OCAYA started out as Oromos Concerned about Youth Alienation and evolved into Oromo Coalition against Youth Alienation through broader affiliations of various Oromo youth organizations as well as community and scholarly associations.

⁶ *Addooyyee* signifies girls’ institutions in traditional Oromo society. Here it represents the organizations that Oromo girls in the diaspora have created for solidarity and support.

⁷ *Ateetee* is the female deity/divinity in traditional oromo society

⁸ *Yabus* is a locality in western Oromo land where the women stayed in refugee displaced camps.

refugee camp, thank you for having it recorded so the rest of us can access it. The precious songs of your *Ateetee* are now circulating among Oromos widely. Your *Ateetee* is now our *Ateetee*. Thank you!

Ayyaanaa Niftalem Leencaa who introduced me to the voices of the women of Yabus and who shared the sacred stories of their displacement – Ayyaanaa, you are a true and passionate lover of your people’s rebirth. And I thank you from the bottom of my heart for that one audio recording of the women of Yabus which means a whole world to me.

Etobssie Wako, a passionate young Oromo woman – Etobssie, thank you for your wonderful interest in Oromo poetry and your insightful contribution to my own learning. I especially thank you for the brimming enthusiasm you bring to our foremothers’ *Ateetee*. Thank you for all your efforts in making the Yabus Women’s *Ateetee* visible and accessible on the Internet.

Herbert Lewis who studied the *Qaalluu* institution in the Ambo area of *Macca* Oromo in the 1960s – He has made some excellent resources available on the Internet, including the beautiful pictures of Oromo mothers in this book. He has also sent me his handwritten field notes and the lyrics of the *Ateetee* songs he recorded. Herb, these are precious materials. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I hope you make more materials available to Oromos who are passionately searching.

My mother, sisters, daughters and granddaughters and the strong women of Oromo land and the Oromo diaspora, especially the strong women of Lancaster and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – you are strong women whose presence in my life grounds me. Your strength is my inspiration. Just sitting here alone and thinking about you, I feel heartwarming and soul-nurturing connections with you all. Your beautiful voices ring in my ears and my loneliness is gone in an instant. Knowing that you are there gives me hope. Thank you for the beauty of your spirits. Thank you for being there.

Numerous people who donated monographs, wedding songs, stories, fragments of lyrics, audio recordings of old birth songs from their family collections – To you all, I say thank you with all my heart. The bits and fragments you contributed are woven into *Songs of Exile*. I hope you recognize them and approve of how I wove them together.

Maartaa Yooseef Jootee, Abbi Iticha and Hannah Tolaa whose beautiful voices and sweet melodies are so inspiring – You are the store house of our culture; you are precious gems. I hope we will record the sweet melodious songs of our foremothers in your beautiful voices one day.

Aagaa Ruudaa whose beautiful spirit and burning passion for our ancestors' spirituality and culture is exceptional. Aagaa, you have inspired me in more ways than you would ever imagine. Thank you for the *Asaabalee* prayer song. Aagaa, you are the heart and soul of *Songs of Exile*. I pray that someday we will document more songs together.

To the circle of beautiful women in the cover picture of this book: Burtukan, Amartii, Etoobbie, Margitu, Milko, Ruhama, Giiftii, Goolii and Miskii and all the women who did not appear in this particular picture – Thank you for celebrating the birth of my newest granddaughter, precious Biilee. And thank you for granting your permission to use this picture. Welcome little Biilee! Thank you Biilee's mother, Rebecca, for inviting us to your *Ateetee*. Thank you Biilee's father, Robale, for your warm-hearted and playful companionship. Thank you Abel Wako for your amazing enthusiasm, your generosity of spirit, and for taking all the wonderful pictures. Thank you all for your fiery spirits and rivers of passion.

The Songs

In *Songs of Exile* you will find the most beautiful lyrics of Oromo poetry and the sweetest melodies of ancient times. They come out of the finest and deepest wells of Oromo culture. A people's poetry reflects their profound philosophy and ways of being in the world. Many praise the melodic finesse of Oromo songs and the lyric beauty of Oromo poetry (Aberra 2003; Bartels 1969; Cerulli 1922; Dibaba 2011; Tegegn 2006). You will find both depth and beauty in *Songs of Exile*. Most of these songs follow the beautiful melodies of the performance style some scholars identify as *call-and-response*, a performance where a lead singer sings the verses in solo supported by an ensemble of chorus singing the refrain. This style is deeply rooted in ancient

African cultures, which also follows them into slavery and is common among contemporary African Americans (Sidran 1971; Southern 1997). Likewise, the beautiful style has followed us Oromos into the uniqueness of our own exile.

Songs of Exile offers Oromo women's songs in their original Oromo language and in their translated English versions. Some of these songs are on the *Safuu* CD but some are songs for the next set of CDs. They are all songs that I have been collecting over many years. Most are from just one locality of the Oromo land where I grew up. I am offering what I have at this point. I do not want to wait until I get the opportunity to collect songs from all parts of our vast homeland. Even if I were able to do that now, *Songs of Exile* would still be incomplete without your input but somebody must start somewhere. I will continue to collect and improvise and reinvent these songs. But I give this to you with the hope that you will join me in the search and retrieval, as well as in the improvisation and reinvention. We need to decolonize our minds and revalue the rich and beautiful heritage of our foremothers.

Why focus on women? There is an inspiring explosion of Oromo songs right now, both cultural and spiritual. No amount of colonial repression can stop the force with which our ancestors are coming back for us. It's the return of the repressed as some call it (Hall 1996 a, b) and I concur. For me, it is also our active and creative engagement in the process of decolonization; it is our symbolic return to the roots (Labelle 2005). Our ancestors' egalitarian *gadaa* socio-political and cultural system is being actively reclaimed and reworked for our unique contemporary contexts. Their *Waaqa* spirituality is being reclaimed and revitalized in an amazing fiery spirit.

In all these wonderfully inspiring grassroots movements of Oromo rebirth, however, our foremothers' voice and legacy is conspicuously missing. Only recently have some aspects of their *siiqqee* institution (Baxter 1979; Deressa 2003; Kelly 1992; Kumsa 1997; Østebø 2001, 2009; Qashu 2009; Qumbi 1989; Waaqayyo 1991; Wako 2003), their cultural representation (Hussein, 2004), their own voices in the Oromo liberation struggle (Debella and Kassam 1996; Gamada 1991, 1998; Issa 1998), their human rights (Dugassa 2005), their songs (Dibaba 2011; Tegegn 2006), their arts and crafts and clothes and adornments (Klemm 2009, 2011; Labelle 2005) begun to appear in the literature -- tiny bit by tiny fragment.

Contrary to the dearth in the literature, there is an explosion of Oromo women's songs in the audiovisual media and the Internet in what others call *mediascape* (Appandurai 1996; Gow 2004). YouTube is a goldmine for Oromo women's songs. For example, Ilfinash Qannoo, Hallo Daawwee, and Shaabbee Sheekkoo who survived years of imprisonment and torture in Ethiopia continue to sing and inspire Oromos. Younger up-and-coming singers like Amartii Waarii and Saliha Sami are singing with amazing fiery spirits. From all the grassroots movements and *mediascapes* and from all the variety and richness of culture in these songs, however, our foremothers' songs of rituals and rites are again noticeably missing.

Songs of Exile is meant to address this critical gap in Oromo rebirth. It joins the inspiring efforts of young *Waaqeffattuu* singers like Ayyaantuu Ittisaa, Caaltuu, and Galaanee Bulbulaa. The songs in *Songs of Exile* are not exactly what our foremothers sang. They cannot be. Our mothers did not sing them in exactly the same way that their mothers sang them. Oromo songs and poetry offer a living and creative space of performance. Every singer and every performer adds to the creative lyrics and embellishes the melodies through the uniqueness of their own voices. Seen in this light, then, the songs in *Songs of Exile* are our renditions and improvisations inflected by our exilic realities. They are reflective of how we appropriate our mothers' songs, how we sing them in our own voices and how we perform them to soothe the wounds of our own contexts of exile. For example, herding cattle and milking cows do not mean to us what they meant to our ancestors but we embrace the relationships involved in the performances of these activities. Our mothers' songs are not dead and gone. They continue to live on through the multiple cycles of renditions and improvisations of multiple Oromo generations. They reflect simultaneous transmission and transformation.

Just to touch on one thread of such transmission and transformation: socio-cultural, economic, political and spiritual practices of these songs were inseparably intertwined for our foremothers in what we consider traditional Oromo contexts. While the overall spirit of contemporary Oromo revival movements transmits all these aspects of Oromo reality, Oromo individuals and groups are not embracing everything that comes their way. They are creatively and selectively weaving it into their sense of self and identity. Some

grab the political, some the socio-cultural and spiritual threads to weave their identities. Some grab only the spiritual and others only the cultural to suit their current needs of identity. There is a rich multiplicity and diversity both in the variety of the songs presented here and in our appropriation of them. It is *Waaqa's* abundant blessings that we have all these resources from which to choose what we desire the most.

The songs in this book are organized into the middle five chapters with three chapters serving as bookends. The first two chapters are offered to ground the songs both in the current suffering of our people and in the ancient depth of Oromo cosmology. The last chapter is offered to weave together the seemingly disparate chapters and wrap the book by opening it up into the future. Accordingly, Chapter 1 Songs of Exile presents the current suffering of Oromos, particularly focussing on the Oromo community of Toronto. It is offered to foreground the current longing for our ancestors' culture in *Songs of Exile*. Chapter 2 Oromo Cosmology is offered to deepen the understanding of the songs by tracing them to their spiritual and philosophical roots. Chapter 3 *Kadhata* presents some prayer songs. Chapter 4 *Dalaga* presents a variety of women's praise and prayer songs related to birth and children. Chapter 5 *Sossobata* offers lullabies. Chapter 6 *Weedduu* presents love songs. Chapter 7 *Gaa'ila* brings you various types of girls' wedding songs. Finally, Chapter 8 *Finding Home in Exile*, pulls together the presentations of each chapter and wraps up the book.

Note on Translation

I found it extremely difficult to translate the delicate beauty and finesse of Oromo poetry into English. There were many reasons for this. First, words are not just words. They are signified by the rich context of culture and philosophy in which they are immersed. Secondly, more often than not, English does not have words for many of the Oromo words and expressions. Sometimes even the concepts do not exist in English. Thirdly, even if there were matching words, translating words without also translating the context and culture in which they are uttered renders them meaningless. I found the

context and culture nearly impossible to translate. Fourthly, sometimes the meanings of words and expressions have been lost even within the Oromo culture but we sing them in the songs anyway because they make so much sense within the totality of the culture and the holistic context of the poetry.

These challenges notwithstanding, I attempted to combine both literal and contextual translations to get as close as possible to the Oromo meaning the way I understood it. I must acknowledge, however, that “lost in translation” is a very true expression. I find that translation really flattens out the rich contours of the poetry and snuffs life out of the culture. It renders meaning meaningless. No one knows this better than the Oromos engaged in translating Oromo poems and whose wonderful works inspire me: Asafa Dibaba (2011), Injifata Tegegn (2006) and Zelealem Aberra (2003). Ode to you *Obbos!* Some of your translations have been very helpful in my own work.

Note on Insult Songs and Mock Fights

I would like to highlight the difficulty of contextual and cultural translation, particularly in one genre of Oromo poetry sung in insult songs and mock fights. Insults and mock fights have deep philosophical meanings and they serve important socio-cultural and spiritual functions in the Oromo society. Just like curses and blessings, they are used to maintain the egalitarian checks and balances of *safuu* in Oromo cosmology and as social and moral control in Oromo culture. I will discuss these in more depth in the oncoming chapters but let me just mention here that some of these insult songs are very obscene and they may sound abusive when heard from the different context of our contemporary reality. Aberra (2003), Dibaba (2011) and Tegegn (2006) have wrestled with the difficulties of such cross-cultural translation in their own works. For example, here is a quote from Aberra (2003: 133):

There are types of poetry that sound abusive, but play important role in Oromo social life.... Poetry that is heard during marriage ceremonies or wedding songs are not as abusive to an Oromo ear as they might be to the ear of a foreigner. They are rather teasing or ire-testing songs which the bride or the groom should proudly bear and maintain their cool;

they usually are soon to be followed with reconciliatory and praise songs.

Insult songs are seen as “ire-testing” and the receiving parties “proudly bear and maintain their cool” only when the socio-cultural context sanctions them and when the consequences are rewards and not punishments. Indeed, Tegegn (2006) documents a case where a bride was beaten on her wedding day because she hurled insult songs at the bridegroom as part of her culture.

Obscene insults and mock fights permeate some of the songs in this book. For example, some of girls’ wedding songs and women’s birth songs are steeped with very obscene insult songs and symbolic fights. I reclaim them with so much fascination and enthusiasm. However, I present them here with caution because I am aware that, even within Oromo communities, there are many who reject this face of our culture as an abusive and savage tradition from which we need to wean ourselves. I believe that they are ashamed of this aspect of our culture because they see it through the eyes of others who see it as abuse. They also see it through the lens of our current context of Oromo reality rather than positioning it within the socio-cultural and spiritual context in which this genre is shaped and functioned. Some Oromos may not reject it but they simply do not know what role it plays in social integration. This prompts me to shed some light from the little I know of the socio-cultural and spiritual functions of insults.

My own love and enthusiasm for insult songs and mock fights come not only from the deep philosophy of the Oromo worldview in which they are rooted but also from the profoundly liberating role insults can play in our contemporary world. Every society has its own strategies of managing conflicts and violence. Tuso (1998, 2000) documents elaborate strategies of Oromo conflict management and how Oromo women play a crucial role both in the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

Insults and mock fights are strategies of conflict prevention, deeply rooted in the traditional Oromo worldview. The Oromo culture releases tensions by allowing the open expression of volatile emotions, taboos and obscene behaviours through insult songs, mock fights and obscene dances. The culture releases the pressure valves and facilitates these expressions

periodically and in joyful environments like birth and wedding rituals and other rites of passage like the wild and youthful obscene dances of the *Foollee*. If these emotions are repressed, they are bound to erupt in violent conflicts.

It doesn't really matter whether individuals are naturally aggressive and violent or whether society socializes them into violence. Nor does it matter whether these wild emotions are repressed instincts (as in Freudian formulations) or whether they are reflections of societal repression (as in Foucaultian reformulations). What matters most to me is that what is repressed must come out in violent eruptions. And this is the kind of violent eruption that the Oromo culture prevents from happening by finding joyful outlets for these inherently violent potential conflicts. If women hurl insult songs and perform mock fights in joyful settings, this has enormous potential to prevent real conflict from erupting. Therefore, my suggestion for readers of *Songs of Exile* is to refract these insult songs and mock fights through the prism of their own cultural and philosophical contexts.

Note on Spelling

I must add a note on the spelling of Oromo words. Our language is rooted in elaborate and rich oral tradition. One of the reasons Oromos adopted the Latin script for writing *Afaan Oromo* [the Oromo language] is its phonetic flexibility to express some of the sounds of Oromo orality. Whenever possible, I attempted to follow the Oromo sounds by playing with long and short vowels in spelling Oromo words. As a result, the same words may be spelled differently. For example, *ayyaana* can be spelled as *ayyaanaa* with a long final vowel depending on the sound it makes in relation to other words in the specific sentence.

However, some words are spelled differently in different sentences (or even within the same sentence) simply because a different spelling makes a different meaning. Meaning making is truly fluid and creative in the Oromo language, particularly in the poetry. For example, *Waaq* is a short form for *Waaqa* but *Waaqayyo* is diminutive for *Waaqa* – used for endearment, for making it so small and lovable, and for making it into the liminal female

gender. So *Waaqayyo* is both endearment and diminutive for *Waaqa* – just as *muqayyo* is for *mucaa* and *gurbayyo* is for *gurbaa*.

Chapter 1 -- Songs of Exile

Songs of Exile is born from the confluence of two scholarly works. The first one is a study exploring Oromo diaspora women's grassroots movement to reclaim their foremothers' culture and spirituality. This is part of the larger ongoing Oromo movements of rebirth. The second work is a community-based study in response to Toronto's youth violence.

The overarching findings from both studies indicate a profound sense of loss and longing for home. This deep loss is expressed in various ways as loss of community, loss of culture, loss of homeland, loss of place, loss of freedom, loss of status and profound loss of sense of self and identity. This sense of loss evokes a profound sense of longing for home, which is manifest in the deep longing to belong, longing for justice, longing for liberation, searching for a dignified sense of self and identity.

While these findings affirm the sense of generalized loss and longing among diasporic communities, what makes the Oromo case peculiar is the continued injustice and relentless suffering in the diaspora. The Oromo search for their ancestors' culture and spirituality is a longing away from spaces of oppression and injustice towards spaces of healing, liberation and justice – a longing towards home. It shows in their ambivalent relationship to their new countries, longing to belong but longing away from injustice at the same time.

In both of these studies, I met weeping mothers and saw the harrowing weeping womb of the suffering Mother Nation. Women wept as they prayed for *bilisummaa* [liberation] and asked God to return them to their homeland. I witnessed and lived the profound suffering of communities -- uprooted by colonial aggression, displaced from the richness of their ancestral heritage and flung far and wide into the recolonizing globalized world.

As others attest, no amount of integration into a new country can heal the profound wounds of such violent loss of meaning, identity and home (Ahmed 2000; Clifford 1997; Chambers 1994; Said 1978). To add insult to injury, I also witnessed youth violence becoming a reliving of state terror for the men and women who thought they found a sanctuary in Canada, a home away from home. They too wept as they felt the deep suffering of their children who were consumed by Toronto's youth violence.

As a way of licking their wounds and soothing their souls, I witnessed many women and men, youth and adults, desperately seeking out and clinging tight to their ancestors' culture and spirituality. This is a performance of soothing their current pains and healing their communities from the historical trauma that befell their people. *Songs of Exile* comes out of such profound lamentations of a community. Most of the songs are from the first study on grassroots women's movement. They make only one thin string connecting us to one little aspect in the vast richness of our ancestors' heritage but the songs echoing through the pages of this book are simple indications of profound connections nonetheless. *Songs of Exile* adds to the resource materials for reworking and recreating a sense of self, identity and home.

In this chapter we will hear the raw and sore voices of women, youth and men involved in the various youth projects within the Oromo community of Toronto. Some were involved in a community initiated Participatory Action Research (PAR) in response of Toronto's so-called escalating youth violence in 2006. Some participated in the creation of Oromo Coalition against Youth Alienation (OCAYA), a group that emerged from the said PAR. Some went on and developed the Heal and Connect (HAC) programs and secured close to \$100,000 grant from the Government of Ontario's Youth Challenge Fund (YCF) to run the healing programs. Others were involved in creating and sustaining *Addooyyee*, young women's organization, also securing significant funds from the City of Toronto. The funds for OCAYA and *Addooyyee* were unprecedented significant government support for Oromo youth programs in Toronto, for which the youths were grateful. In 2010, youth leaders and community elders were invited to reflect on their experiences in these projects. And they generously shared their reflections both in writing and in oral conversations. You will find some poignant excerpts from these reflections in the remainder of this chapter.

Listen intently to each story. Each reflection comes out of a deep suffering reflecting a paradoxical life where simultaneous joy and pain intertwine. The ambivalence in each voice of longing and belonging is shot through with the contradictory discourses of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, justice and injustice, freedom and bondage. And this reflects the paradoxical context of the contemporary global world in which they are

deeply immersed and soaked to their bones. As you will find, there is a diversity of voices. Even within the multilocality of these voices, however, exilic lamentations weave through each and every one of them.

In its own particularity, each story is immersed in its own unique loss and mourning. Each story is sacred; each voice sings a song of exile. Listen intensely to the intensities of the narratives and feel deeply the depth of the suffering.

Lamentations: Toronto Women

Rumiya Osman

In the first place, we must admit that we are a people in crisis. Then we can ask ourselves: How did we get into this crisis and how can we get out of it? Many of our youths don't understand the depth of the anguish we suffer as a nation. We need to understand the source of where the pain is coming from before we even think about healing. We don't want our children to suffer the pain of our past but we do want them to understand why we are in pain and how we are suffering. We need to tell them the stories of our people. This is our history and our children must know it.

I need to tell them the harrowing violence I survived... I left my homeland in 1977. I was very young. War was raging between Ethiopia and Somalia. Suddenly, my hometown was a slaughterhouse. Men, women, and children were killed but we had no time to bury our loved ones. We had to run for our lives with just the rags on our backs...

Our suffering starts with the loss of our homeland. But how and why did we lose it? Why do we roam in other countries? Why do we suffer wherever we go? Why don't we have our own country? Our people suffer in Ethiopia. They are herded in jail for wanting to be Oromo. Every day, Oromos run away from that land, especially educated Oromo youth. Some are killed before they escape. Others are eaten by wild animals and perish in foreign lands where they don't know the terrain. Oromos suffer wherever they go...

Youth violence is consuming us in other people's lands because we lost our own land to violence. This is the heart of the matter! We must all understand this first in order to find a healing way out of youth violence.

Fantaye Goobanaa

Maal nuu wayyaa? Maal nuu wayyaa? Maaluma nuu wayyaa? We must gather and ask ourselves. What is the solution? What shall we do to get well? How can we heal from this suffering, buried deep in our guts and etched into our bones? Women are supposed to be the adhesive glue for our community. We are the ones who bring people together. But we have no place to gather, no place to cry for our dead, no place to grieve in our deepest sorrows, no place to sing and dance in our joyous moments. When our loved ones die we cry in our homes; when our nation dies where do we gather and cry?

We are Mother Hens with no wings under which we gather and protect our children. Our vulnerable youths are plucked away from us and torn up by the vultures. We left our homeland in the darkest of nights with children in our wombs, children in our backs, children in our bosoms and holding children in our hands. The beasts are snatching away our children! O God deliver us from harm; let us survive!

We are a suffering community. *Biyya dhabne; biyyoo dhabne* [We lost our country; we lost our soil/land]. *Biyya dhabuun mana dhabuu dha; mana dhabuun nama dhabuu dha; nama dhabuun namummaa dhabuu dha* [The loss of country is the loss of home; the loss of home is the loss of what's human; the loss of what's human is the loss of humanness]. *Yaa Rabbi manaa baaftee karaatti nu hin hambisin* [O God you've led us out of our home; don't leave us on the road]. *Yaa Rabbi biyya dhabnee biyyoo nu hin dhowwatin* [O God we've lost our country; don't deny us soil/land].

I know crying and praying alone does not bring us home but that's my solace. I know we come from a good people. Our people are a peaceful people. Only God knows why we have to suffer in the lands of others. Only God knows why our youth are in such chronic pain. When our children were just babies we thought youth violence was the problem of Caribbean communities. That

was a big sin! May God forgive us! Before we knew it, our children are grown and youth violence is now ours. It has come and entered our families in broad daylight. Everyone points it to the underdogs below them. Now we are at the bottommost with no one below us to point to. We are the underdogs. Youth violence is now ours to deal with. It is now our deepest ailment.

Aysha Guysa

We are hurting so deeply but we don't seek outside help. We are in denial. First of all, we have to admit that we need outside help. If not, we end up hurting our children. Worse still, our children learn denial from us and hide their needs for help...

Yes youth violence is ravaging our community but how do we heal as a community? First of all as women, our cultural role is to gather our fragmented community.... We heal through connections and women are the glue that holds it together. We do that through caring and nurturing. Women are the mothers of our suffering nation. By nurturing our youth, we nurture our nation. It is not enough to assert that youth are the future of our nation. We must come together and nurture our youth. A nation that loses its youth loses its future. As women our role is also to hold together the past and the future, the old and the young... That is how we heal our youth and ourselves.

Safia Korree

You ask me to talk about youth violence? Well, youth violence is not something out there that I talk about. It is a wound I live deep in my body, deep in my soul. It's like a lance tearing right through my heart. My heart bleeds always. I suffer from the pain always. It is an injury I walk with every day. It follows me to bed every night. I cry to God day and night. I cry alone and I cry with other mothers.

My son is in jail... He is a good son. I raised him alone. I have been with him in the thick and thin. I know him like the palm of my hand. I look into his eyes long and hard and I know he is innocent...

In our community, women are mothers or grandmothers, sisters or wives, daughters or nieces, aunties or cousins. There is no woman who is not related to our youth in some way. We all worry about them. We cry alone and we cry together.... When our youth are wounded we are wounded. Our spirits are broken. Our heads look down and we fear to lift them up. We gather together and cry to Allah. This is how we heal together. We come together and cry out in our songs: *magan, magan, magan!* We cry out to Allah: merci, merci, merci!

We live in a strange land. We don't know the culture we don't know the country. We don't know the system. The country is strange. The culture is strange. The system is strange. When we ran away from the hellfire of Ethiopia and landed here, we thought we found a paradise... Now it feels like...jumping from one fire right into another one.

We are a people in crisis.... We need to find ways of connecting to our mothers' *siiqqee*⁹. It is the legacy our mothers left us but we have lost it. Our community has lost the *gadaa* culture of our ancestors. We are lost because we lost our soothing culture. Our youth are lost because we are lost. They are alienated because we are alienated. They are fragmented because we are fragmented. They are confused because we are confused.

We are dispersed in strange lands, wandering and roaming where the paths are hidden by the thickest underbrush. We have to get our acts together and clear the pathways to our healing culture.

⁹ *Siiqqee* is the traditional Oromo women's institution in the *gadaa* system. *Siiqqee* and *gadaa* will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Lamentations: Toronto Youth

Iddoosan Urfo

Hi! My name is Iddoosan. My artist name is King-O-Boy! I was born in Oromia; came to Canada when I was 16. Life has not been easy – not in Oromia, not in Canada...Youth violence hurts so much. I have seen the ugly face of it. That's why I joined this project. I was hopeful because people want to listen to youth... that is history! I'll tell you why...

My saddest memory...I was in Grade 5 in Oromia when my joyous world turned upside down. I was woken up when it was still dark. My aunt was screaming. Then there were other people screaming and many people coming. I was so scared and confused. No one tells children what's going on, you know.... I realized that my beloved uncle was killed. What? He was gunned down in cold blood. No way! He was my hero, the bravest man in the world. Nobody could kill him. It was now daybreak. People were gathering and there was a big crowd. But still no one tells children anything. And I could not see anything in the crowded forest of adults. I ran to the tallest tree near our house and climbed high into the branches. Then I got a glimpse of what's going on. There was my beloved uncle, my mom's only brother, my grandma's only son, my hero lying limp and still. People were wrapping him in a white sheet. It was the saddest image in my life...

After the refugee camp, we came to Canada. Life was not easy in Canada either. Western culture is very tricky.... You go to school but you don't know what the kids do. Kids go through a lot, you know, and they take advantage of you when you are a newcomer. School is not like back home. There is a lot of bad stuff going on but parents don't get it. When you tell them, they say just go and learn; its school. But it's not school! And they don't listen to us!

I had many friends at school, good friends and bad friends. I was going through a lot of stress. I have seen a lot and done a lot. I have not finished high school but I have seen the inside of jails. I know what it looks like in there. It is horrible! I don't want my little brother to go down that path. I don't want any youth to go there, period! That's why I am talking about my experience; so our

youth can learn from my mistakes... I'm taking responsibility, trying to make change for the next generation, be a good role model...

I know why youth run to violence. They are really frustrated because no one listens to them... I wanted to create good understanding between youth and adults. There are lots of hyenas out there. These kids are going to get caught and lose their minds and parents won't know anything. They have no clue what their kids are going through. Many adults don't listen... They don't talk to kids. They don't trust them...

It really hurts when adults don't know that we love our country and our culture too, in our own way. A lot of these kids are really *sabboontota* [proud of who they are]. They all say they are Oromo and they are from Oromia. I never say I'm from Ethiopia, you know but it also hurts when other people don't know where I am from; it really hurts. I know I'm in somebody else's country. Everyone around me celebrates their country but I cannot. It hurts not having your country. It really hurts but who am I gonna blame, you know?

But adults never include youth in their meetings. They say youth are the future of our nation but they are hurting our future! They never even ask young people what they think. They talk *gadaa* democracy but they don't do it... *Gadaa* means involving children and youth but here it's adults getting together and bickering over nothing! That's what I pick up from them and that's what I give back to them. I don't wanna pick up nonsense and give back nonsense. I wanna change things.... A lot of kids are really frustrated!

And you get hurt out there too. You had your finger burnt; you had your lesson learnt; and now you are trying to be a good role model for younger kids. Trouble is, once you are marked, you are doomed forever. It comes to you from all angles. You are working hard to make a living and the police just pick you up. Wallahi sometimes they pick you up because you are a skin color. Sometimes other young bloods want to save their friends and point to you and you just get picked up.

But I don't want to blame. Jail has taught me too... Surviving difficult experience is a gift of life, you know. I am now working hard to turn my life around and to heal the wounds – my own wounds, the wounds of other youth, and the wounds in our community and our society.... my main healing is through music making. I am a man of my word, you know. I have no reason to

do crime. I have experienced terrible things but I have persevered and achieved some of my goals in life. I already have music CDs out. I write my own songs and I am getting out my messages. I am happy that my music is received well...

When I write my songs, I don't sugarcoat. I don't sing dreamlike songs. Some people don't like me because I sing the naked truth as it is. There is one song that people in our community seem to like... The lyrics lament the indignities we suffer as Oromos in other people's countries. The refrain underscores the importance of having our own country:

Mee achi ilaali jiruu biyya ormaa [Look at your life in strange lands]
Biyyuma ufii qabaachuu wayyaa [Better to have your own country]

People tell me I am Ali Birraa and Qamar. No, I am not! There is only one Ali Birra and only one Qamar. I'm not even like them! I'm King-O-Boy! I'm creating a new style with my right hand partner. He too went through a lot and learned a lot. We don't take out our anger on people or property anymore. We work our way out of it through music making. I'm really good with melody and style... I am King-O-Boy! I have my own style and youth like it. O Boy was an exclamation for my songs but soon everyone took it up and O-Boy became Oromo-Boy. So my artist name became King-O-Boy! And I love it!

Uma Gobana

Hi! I am Uma Gobana. I started out as a research participant in the original PAR. Then I was invited back to become one of the founding members of OCAYA. I was ecstatic about both the research and the project that emerged out of it. Why? Because I was really concerned that youth violence was destroying us and nobody was seeking out the voices of youth to address it. We are in pain but most adults don't listen to youth in our community...

This project encouraged us to speak in our own voices and seek remedy from our own perspectives. To me, this project was breaking a new path and I wanted to be a part of it. I was grateful that somebody wanted to listen to what

youth had to say and I shared my stories with so much hope that things will change. I was involved in the planning and developing of HAC programs as a member of OCAYA within the community.

I was elected as the president when OCAYA youth created their own space with the hope of becoming a youth organization independent of the community.... I served until OCAYA was registered as a legal youth organization.... I worked with my whole heart, serving and uplifting the youth in our community. The challenges I encountered helped me to grow and become a better person. I consider it a privilege serving the youth in my community and I couldn't be more blessed.

I remember how some elders in the community supported us by coaching us for leadership and giving us the tools at their disposal. I remember with so much enthusiasm when another young Oromo and I became the first among our team of youth to take a leadership role in our community in organizing and leading the 2007 *Irreecha*¹⁰ celebration. I was amazed by the amount of trust elders invested in us as we led the rituals for the entire day! It is a very good feeling, very heart warming. That connection to our people's cultural heritage was one big healing for me... I have never missed *Irreecha* since... It feels like a lifeline that I cannot let go, for my own survival.

*Argan Beeko*¹¹

I know some of the stories I wanna tell here are contrary to everything we've worked on in this project. But they must be told. They are the kind of stories most of us don't like to hear or tell. But I believe unless we tell them in public and heal from the wounds and move on, we will be denying them forever. We talk about healing, right? Well, healing must start from the acknowledgement of hurts and pains.... I believed that we heal when we bond and connect with each other and with our culture... I am the one who strongly argued for an Oromo home base for Oromo youth in which we could heal our wounds and

¹⁰ Irreecha is the annual Oromo prayer and thanksgiving celebration.

¹¹ Of all the names in this chapter, Argan Beeko is the only pseudonym. This is a youth who did not wish to be identified by a real name, of course for understandable reasons obvious from the unique unpopular stand this youth took.

feel safe and from which we could venture out and relate to others. However, the healing stories I share here are quite the contrary...

I remember having a happy childhood back home... I had happy memories in Canada too. I went to the Oromo Office where I met lots of Oromos, adults and kids and there were lots of vibrant activities. It felt like back home and I enjoyed it thoroughly... I met inspiring groups of Oromo youth actively engaged in Oromo cultural practices.... I had bitter experience with youth later on... but what happens among youth comes from the adults. They like to tear each other down instead of lifting each other up.... I see elders doing silly things I don't even expect from a child. What's happening to Oromos? Some disease has come to Toronto! I feel sick to my stomach.

When your elders do that, something inside of you dies, something just drops and dies. And you don't even know what just died in you. But you know something very precious just died. Is it my dream that died? Is it my hope? Is it my future? Is it my past? I get so confused when I think about it. I just feel something very deep but I don't know what to call it. Is it hatred? But how can I hate my own elders? They are victims themselves. We imagine ourselves and our role so high, we desire so big, and we care about our *bilisummaa* so much. I guess when you care too much you can go crazy, really.

We will never achieve our liberation because we are busy bringing each other down. We spend all our energy on that. I do my research, you know, and I observe history. Look at all our neighbours who started their liberation struggle after our people. They have already achieved their liberation. Look at Djibouti; look at Eritrea; look at Tigre; Look at South Sudan. Look at Darfur, even. Darfur started way after our own people's struggle. Everybody talks about Darfur now. It is in the news always. Why does no one talk about us? Why are we always lagging behind? Why are we not in the news when our people die every day? This is the real crux of the matter. What are we doing?

I know things will change in the future, but at this point in my journey, I find my healing by disconnecting myself from Oromos. Now that is contrary to our project's theory of heal and connect. But I do not want to associate with Oromos... People wonder if I am running away from myself. I say no. There are many other ways of being Oromo in this world. *Bilisummaa* is a big healer for Oromos. Looking at how we tear each other down, I say *bilisummaa* is dead.

It's like a casket with the mummies. I have to mourn and grieve the loss of one kind of *bilisummaa* to imagine a new one. Right now *bilisummaa* for me is *bilisummaa* from Oromos not with them. That is my healing.

Bonsitu Kitaba

I was born in Canada. My father is Oromo from Oromia, Ethiopia. My mother is East Indian from Guyana. I come out of a confluence of all these wonderful cultures. Growing up in multicultural Toronto, my boundaries are far more fluid than what these rigid cultural identifies define.... I am Hindu by religion but I also appreciate other religions, including the Oromo culture and spirituality of *Irreecha*.

Born in multicultural Canada from two recent immigrants, culture has played a large part in the making of my identity. Being a part of two historically oppressed peoples, I have seen injustice... We Oromos have yet to find an identifiable niche in Canadian society... The indigenous Oromo people have been tortured, oppressed, and silenced for centuries in Ethiopia. This is the course of history that Oromos here in Canada and around the world have been trying to change, and this is a challenge in which I am entirely engulfed.... Oromos must take their rightful place in the world. This is an issue of equity and justice... this sense of doing justice brought me to OCAYA. I looked at the injustices our youth are suffering and committed to alleviating the community suffering... I have served as the president of OCAYA since it is registered as a legal youth organization.

I regret that I did not grow up speaking my father's native tongue. But I am taking *Afaan Oromoo* classes now and I'm pursuing it with passion. I value my culture so much; that's why a deeper understanding of *Afaan Oromoo* is very important to me... Growing up, I felt like an outsider who did not belong in any culture, whether it is Oromo, Guyanese, or Canadian. I felt the alienation very deeply. It is like the gut wounds we try to address in our healing program of HAC. Actually HAC was primarily for me as it healed me from the violence of cultural alienation and connected me to my culture. OCAYA became my home where I felt I belonged and where I got to learn

about my culture. It fostered within me an increased sense of self that I knew translated across my peers.

In our HAC programs, we really do a great deal of healing and connecting. We actively and creatively engage a great many of our children to keep them off the streets and out of harm's way... When we learn our people's language and culture, we are healing ourselves by connecting back to what has been violently taken away from us. When we organize *Irreecha* celebrations and recognition events and bring together the entire community, we nurture a sense of community healing.

The recent Arab Spring inspired me beyond belief. Nothing makes me happier than seeing youth take leadership in the struggle against injustice, getting rid of tyrants, and changing their societies for the better... My father and his generation started struggling against injustice when they were youth. We are now raising awareness on the atrocities committed against our people. Our healing is tied to the healing of our people. As long as our people are in shackles in Oromia, we cannot be free here.

AnafLello Wako

I was born and raised in Toronto...My family lost many loved ones in the Oromo struggle.... a lot of sadness in the stories of my family, a lot of pain and a lot of tears.

Akkoo [Grandma] tells me all the stories. She has buried a lot of violence in her body and a lot of pain in her soul. She has buried many of her dearly loved ones too. She buried her youngest son just recently, right here in Toronto. He is my favourite uncle too. I loved him so much and I miss him so much now. *Akkoo* sheds a lot of tears to cleanse all the bitterness. We cry together sometimes. I feel lucky to have been raised with my *akkoo* around me. She calls me her friend and confides in me a lot. I remember as a child sitting with her and absorbing her stories like a dry sponge.

It hurts me deeply when I see her in pain. She tells me how her husband was murdered. That's my *akaakaa* [Grandpa]! She tells me how her firstborn was martyred in the Oromo struggle. That's my uncle! And boy was he a brave

man! He was active in the Ethiopian student movements too. At one time he was the president of university students.... He spoke out against all forms of injustice. His people loved him; others envied his courage and charisma. Why would anybody murder such a great leader? I don't think I will ever understand that but I totally understand the excruciating pain in his mother's broken heart... I feel very deeply for *Akkoo*. And I miss my uncle though I never met him. I wish I grew up with him. I wish he held me and told me his stories.

I remember my mom and dad telling me that I am so like my uncle. My dad and I would be engaged in an animated conversation and all of a sudden he would stop talking and stare into my eyes so piercingly for an intense moment and say that I was so like my uncle... Of course *Akkoo* has her own ways of likening me to the son she lost... I would be playing with my friends and they would all say: like her uncle, she is a born leader.... It is this spirit of creative leadership that I bring to creating *Addooyyee* Toronto and to volunteering for OCAYA....

I have not directly experienced the horrors of Oromo colonization and ongoing oppression. These are my family's and my people's stories. But I feel they are a part of who I am too.... But racism is rampant in Canada. I know Black youths are constantly profiled. I understand the pain of newcomers. The sense of community that needs to be built upon arrival in a new country is not always immediate. Many come from so much violence but healing is not guaranteed here either.... Youth may feel that they have nowhere to turn to, and may resort to violence as an outlet for their frustrations....we need to show leadership in role modeling other creative ways of healing.

The sexism in our community is outrageous, even among youth! ...Exclusion hurts so much! How we cope with it is different for each of us.... I respond by creating women's own space, a space for women by women about women. *Addooyyee* is a practice of healing for me. I would also like to see *Addooyyee* reach out and bond with our Oromo mothers' *siiqqee* organizations. They are excluded too and needed to create their own *siiqqee* space... I love the bonding among similar women in our *Addooyyee*. It is a very nurturing space. But I also like the challenges of difference. I grew up in a multicultural society and I very much cherish the richness of every culture and every

people... we can learn from each other if we relate to each other with true mutual respect. I want us to network with young women's groups in Toronto, Canada, and the world.

Bektu Abidta

Hi! I'm Bektu. I am a blend of Oromo and Eritrean. My father is Oromo and my mother is Eritrean. I love both my heritages...

For as long as I can remember, I had a feeling of not being Oromo... but I never addressed my feelings about my Oromo-ness until *Addooyyee* Toronto was brought to my attention in the summer of 2010. It was described as the little sister organization to the already established OCAYA.... When I thought of *Addooyyee*, I envisioned a group of first generation Canadian Oromo females, coming together and building a space that encouraged creativity, networking and sisterhood... I had this belief that I could be an excellent mentor to Oromo girls and that I could help them get through the cultural, academic, and economic struggles they might be facing in their lives. It was this belief that I had something to offer other Oromo girls that made *Addooyyee* appealing to me. In my mind, *Addooyyee* was the perfect way for me to re-enter the Oromo community on my own terms; and to give back to the Oromo community in my own special way.

When I first met the *Addooyyee* group and spoke with them I was greatly surprised at what they had to say. Everyone felt frustrations at how older Oromos had mismanaged things and fragmented the community. I was so impressed by how each young female Oromo was able to clearly articulate what she thought was missing in the Oromo community and more importantly, I was impressed by how they all had a real vision of how we can carve a new future for the Oromo community in Toronto...

One issue that I wanted addressed in *Addooyyee* was the lack of Oromo female leaders in the GTA and how this was affecting our ability to achieve higher goals and positions as Oromo female youth....the *Addooyyees* shared my sentiment. Other members also came forward expressing their disappointment at the pitiful number of Oromo women in Toronto acting as visible role models

for young Oromo girls. With so many young Oromo females exploring their identities as youth, as women, and as people of colour, we decided that one of *Addooyyee's* goals should be creating a support system for these girls so that they can explore their identities in a positive and nurturing space.

One of the biggest draw backs of dealing with a fragmented Oromo community is being confronted with many conflicting opinions of what it is to be Oromo and what it is to be an Oromo woman....our struggles with the larger Oromo community. We have had squabbles and agenda setbacks because of our inexperience but overall we've been able to pull through and work through our differences for the good of the organization.

Needless to say, my own issues have less to do with the youth group and more to do with the parents and elders of the Oromo community. Besides the 'clash of culture', I feel as though I couldn't discuss too loudly issues that are deemed 'feminist' in nature. Despite the clear gender basis of *Addooyyee*, in our community the term 'feminist' is associated with extremism. I am constantly at odds with myself over what is ok to say and what will bring the most heat to *Addooyyee*.... I fear the only dialogues in *Addooyyee* will be ones that do not honestly address the real issues that these girls are facing, often alone.

Once there was a hot opposition when *Addooyyee* decided to host its outing dinner at an Ethiopian restaurant... It became a hot political issue... people thought we were ignoring past injustices... and colluding with the oppressors of the Oromo people.... I know healing starts from the recognition of hurts and pains and I do not wish to disrespect anyone's feelings of hurt....To address these feelings of resentment, we need to reassure parents that *Addooyyee* is not ignoring past injustices but rather forging healthier relationships with non-Oromos in order to create a brighter future for all of us in Toronto. Until this happens, sad as it is, I don't see *Addooyyee* going beyond the Oromo community and connecting with other groups. I am nevertheless hopeful that *Addooyyee* will make lasting impressions not only on the Oromo community but also the larger Canadian society....

I do have a long term vision for *Addooyyee* within the Oromo community. I want *Addooyyee* to be an adhesive that glues together all Oromos, young and old, male and female. I was taught that the traditional role of Oromo women is to hold everyone together.... I want us to purchase a community

centre big enough to act as an Oromo hub...I envision within this centre a library, so that Oromos, young and old, can come and find literature on the Oromo culture. I want it to be a place where speakers could come and where dialogue could be started to heal the community and its many rifts.

Lamentations: Toronto Men

Aberra Makonnen

Oromo youth in Toronto have unique challenges which set them apart from most Canadian youth. Their parents were traumatized refugees who fled the violence in Ethiopia and they were mostly uneducated with enormous language and cultural barriers. Unable to find employment, most depended on social assistance and lived in crime infested social housings.... Many Oromo youths experienced unfortunate family breakups and separations. Most parents didn't have sufficient education or knowhow to provide appropriate guidance in their children's education. Some youths dropped out of schools and became teen parents. Others ran away from home and became homeless and vulnerable targets for youth violence and organized crime...

I have worked in the Oromo-Canadian Community Association of the Greater Toronto Area (OCCA-GTA) both as a volunteer and as the Executive Director for years... I have seen several Oromo youth organizations come and go over the years but it was in 2005 in the face of the raging youth gun violence in Toronto that we felt an acute need to revive our youth organizations.... We initiated a needs assessment project which grew into a Participatory Action Research (PAR) and later developed into the Heal and Connect (HAC) project run by Oromo Coalition against Youth alienation (OCAYA).

In the major finding of the research phase, youth expressed the loss of community as the cause of their deepest alienation and pain. As community elders, we felt this as a deep sense of loss and pain too. In response to this finding, the goal of the action phase was to revitalize the Oromo community so

that our youth have a strong community to support them and heal them from the violence of alienation.... We organized OCAYA from scratch by bringing together members of our research team, OCCA, and various Oromo youth groups to spearhead the HAC project...

To me, OCAYA was a big disappointment... Why? Because we planned to lift up our community together and revitalize the Oromo community and heal Oromo youth within their own community. But OCAYA youth refused to work with us and decided to work with other youth organizations... To my further disappointment, OCAYA went further and legally registered as an independent youth organization rather than working as one unit within OCCA-GTA, the mother organization. What's wrong with working together? This is how many ethnic organizations function and this is how they grow together. The youth bring vitality and the mother organization provides ancestral culture, security and protection...

Honestly, the Oromo community has serious problems regarding working together as a united people. We have a serious issue of unity... I take my share of the responsibility and admit that as a community association we have not had good programs to engage our youth. I can also open my mind and accept that OCAYA youth need independent space of their own. However, I don't believe that separation from the mother community is a good path to healing. I fear it will expose them to more youth violence. A house divided cannot protect our youth from violence. For me, healing comes with coming together, building a strong community and connecting to our ancestral culture.

Hordofaa Guysa

I'm not at all surprised if our youth felt that the loss of community is their deepest pain. With no support of their community at their back, they are vulnerable to youth violence. As a professional of social services, I have a sense of the harsh realities that youth face in this city. I work in substance abuse and harm reduction. Substance abuse is at the heart of youth violence but it often slips under the radar, especially in our community...

We Oromos thought that everything was going to be golden when we arrived in Toronto but we quickly found out that it wasn't so. We came to a rich country and thought people get everything by waving a magic wand but we learned the hard way that it wasn't so. And we worked very hard to make ends meet. We were struck by how fast we were changing in response to our new conditions. We were called upon to deal with the stresses of culture and language barrier and the loss of extended families. In the face of these rapid changes, we felt a deep urge to hang on to our Oromo culture and language like a lifeline. As our top priority became preserving our identity, the terrible fact that we were losing our teens to the culture of drug and alcohol abuse never crossed our mind.

Teenage substance abuse has devastated the Oromo community. While many tough issues strike fear in the hearts of parents, I think teen drug use is the number one issue evoking fear. Most families in our community deal with it often by denial. Often fear is the reason why parents deny or ignore the problem. But we can't allow fear to force us to deny drug concerns in our teens' lives. By shaking off fear and taking positive action now, we can ensure their smooth transition to successful, healthy, and well-adjusted adults. Preventing teen substance abuse is preventing youth violence. Getting teens cleaned from substance abuse is healing youth from violence.

While many serious problems fly at us from all directions in today's world, I must stress that our denial is the one crisis that is getting far less attention. Denial cuts straight into our core, and if left unaddressed, the prospects of our success will be slim. We can fix the money problems, the environmental issues, and the political problems but if we don't fix this core problem, we will not be able to pass *Oromummaa*¹² to the younger generation. Our denial impacts on what type of people our children will become and it is implicated in how we've lost our ability to be good parents.

We must admit that we are in crisis as a community and that we need help. We need to approach our youth in a good way. We need to understand and respect them just as we want them to understand and respect us. The knife cuts both ways. We need to stop imposing on youth what we blindly call

¹² *Oromummaa* means a sense of Oromo-ness.

our culture. We must realize that some of what passes for our culture is what we learned from our colonizers. Often it is the oppressive culture we are fighting hard to liberate ourselves from. Why do we burden our youth with it? We need to trust them in what they do. We need to get respectable people to advise our youths. We need to provide our kids with good role models. We need to strengthen our families and revitalize our community. We need to raise our awareness and get a good sense of substance abuse and violence, issues in which our youth are immersed.

Fekadu Ebbaa

I understand the argument about fear and denial. It is very strong in our community. However, there are a number of issues I would like to raise about drug concerns. In the first place, it is not fair to point to low-income neighborhoods as breeding ground for drug abuse. Drug abuse is everywhere. Besides, many of our families live in low-income neighborhoods and still raise outstanding drug-free kids. If we have fear, it is more the fear of easy cash that comes with drugs than just the abuse of drugs. Living in poverty, our youth might be tempted by the easy cash and get involved. That is our biggest fear.

Regarding our ignoring or minimizing youth violence, I think it is too simplistic to reduce our experiences to fear and denial. Oromos in our community could be ignoring youth violence for any number of reasons. I mean, what about the historical trauma of our people that we carry deep in our bones? What about the personal trauma we carry deep in our bodies and souls? Most members of our community are survivors of this trauma... At least for me personally, surviving the genocide of our people as an Oromo and surviving thirteen years of torture and imprisonment as an individual, I can see how all these traumatic experiences influence the way I respond to youth violence in Toronto.

Oromos have been experiencing tragic forms of subjugation and violence for many generations both as a nation and as individuals. Our history, following the colonization of our people and land, is a history of violence and trauma that continues to this day. This trauma follows us to our new country

and it influences how we make sense of the youth violence here in Toronto. War, murder, assassination, *harma muraa* and *harka muraa* [the mutilation of women's breasts and men's arms], mass rape, psychological and physical torture, serfdom and property expropriation, dispossession and destitution, poverty and deprivation of basic necessities, evictions from ancestral lands, internal displacement and being homeless at home, being refugees in own homeland, fleeing our homeland and becoming refugees. These are only some forms of the trauma and violence Oromos continue to face in Oromia and the neighboring countries.

Most parents of the Oromo youth in Toronto and in fact some of the youths themselves are direct victims and survivors of these atrocities in one form or another.... The severity of what they lived far outweighs the youth violence they see here in Toronto. As a result, many Oromo parents may not see it as crisis at all. They are not motivated to search for solution, not because they fear it but because they have lived worse fears, not because they deny it but because they see it as a bearable reality.... Please don't get me wrong, though. I do not condone silence or doing nothing about it. Doing nothing or being complacent will not stop the troubling youth violence... We need to be sensitive and proactive in our search for solutions. We cannot afford to lose the future of our nation.

My involvement with Oromo youth in Toronto goes back to 1993 when I arrived in Toronto as a political refugee claimant with my family... I have served the Toronto Oromo community as the chair of Oromo Relief Organization in Ontario (ORAQ), as newcomer's settlement counselor, and as an immigration interpreter. I have served as the Executive Director of OCCA-GTA for seven years and lately I have also been involved in developing strategic healing initiatives for the HAC programs run by OCAYA.

I have worked with many Oromo youths; I know some of their struggles and challenges as well as their successes and rewards. Our youth have been phenomenal in practicing and staging Oromo cultural shows not only in our community but also at Afro-Fest and Ontario Folk Arts Festival in the broader Canadian multicultural society... They have experienced the healing effects of connecting to our ancestral culture... Unfortunately, I have also witnessed the sad reality of our youths' dwindling enthusiasm and their hard struggles...

some have fallen through the cracks...various reasons, including weakening community support as a result of cuts to government funds and shortage of volunteers, increasing family and youth unemployment, growing number and vulnerability of Oromo youth, and increasing mainstream youth violence in Toronto...

What I want to say is that the problem of youth violence is much bigger than the OCCA community and OCAYA youth. We need to address it in its multiple layers with multiple levels of governments as well as humanitarian and human rights organizations.

Abdulhamid Mohammed & Kitaba Megersa

What is said about the violence we bring from our past and how it influences our response to youth violence here in Toronto is very true. What is said about the initiatives our youths have taken over the years, in spite of the violence they suffer, is also very true. However, we want to highlight the fact that Oromo youth generated most of these impressive initiatives in the dire absence of an Oromo community. The overarching finding of the community research tells us, in no uncertain terms, that Oromo youth suffer from loss of community. This is also very real, very painfully real. There is a long history leading to our youth feeling this profound loss of community. We both serve in the leadership of our community but we also work with our youth groups as they have trusted us enough to make us their elder advisors. We try to understand this loss of community from both sides. In this piece we will dive into the murky waters of this profound loss with the hope that we will come out at the other end with the healing stories of our lost-and-found community.

Delving into the depth of loss, we find that the loss of community that youth expressed has several layers that we need to cut through and unpack in order to understand their pain and chart out pathways to healing. First, compounding the primary *loss of the homeland*, there is another deep loss in the fact that Oromos in Toronto did not have a unified community until the year 2000. So the first layer of this loss is the *loss of unity*. What was touted as Oromo community before 2000 was a euphemism for a politically divided and

tension-ridden cluster of Oromos, gathering around two main groups: The Oromo Community Organization in Ontario (OCOO) and Oromo-Canadian Community Association (OCCA). A strong commonality that both groups shared was the burning fiery desire for the liberation of their people and their homeland, Oromia. Despite this burning common passion and the countless efforts to unite the two communities, however, the two organizations stayed separate for over ten years.

The major bone of contention itself was the issue of settlement in Canada. For some OCCA leaders, building a strong community and settling in Canada meant diverting the much needed attention away from the liberation struggle back home. It was abandoning their long suffering Oromo people in the face of Ethiopian genocide. Many were also feeling the intrusive pressure of Western culture and the loss of their children to the system. For them, the solution was to support the liberation struggle and go back home as fast as they could, rather than settle and build a community here. On the other hand, some OCOO leaders saw a different reality and argued that they could settle and build a strong community here without abandoning the liberation struggle back home.... For them the solution was to leave politics out of the equation entirely and bring the two communities together to create an economically, socially, and culturally viable Oromo community able to nurture strong Oromo children and youth and support the Oromo liberation struggle in Oromia more strongly.

The sad reality for youth, in the meantime, was the *loss of attention* to their deepest needs of identity, their alienation from their ancestral culture. Youth being a period of fiery passion to create their own identity different from the identities of their families and communities and different from the broader Canadian identity, our youth were left without community support in this difficult struggle. Youth being an innovative period of initiatives, however, Oromo youth have been resourceful in using their fiery energy to take their own innovative initiatives and search for their own identity and their own place in the world. They are the fiery spirit of our nation. However, while the bickering and wrangling continued between and within each community group, the political landscape was rapidly worsening back in Oromia just as the economic landscape of cut backs on social programs was rapidly

worsening in Toronto. This led to the shrinking physical space at OCCA. This *loss of a gathering space* for Oromo youth also meant the *loss of a soothing care* to the deep pains they suffer both within their families and communities and in the broader Canadian society.

Further deepening the crisis, there is the *loss of families* leading to the *loss of Self* and the *loss of loss itself*. This was compounded by the loss of socio-cultural, political and spiritual institutions of the homeland. Parents' commitment to the political struggles of their people back home led them to direct their children's dreams homewards as well. Youth were torn apart by the intense struggle between meeting the demands of their parents and taking on the challenges of the broader Canadian society. When they could not withstand the intense pressures of the larger society, youth found it easier to revolt against the softer target of their families... But the old ways of disciplining their children became abuse and innocent actions of parents resulted in the involvement of Children's Aid Society and forced parents to appear in courts. Relations between husbands and wives met similar fates, landing parties in courts and increasing the rates of divorce and separation. While some husbands abused their wives, some wives also took advantage of the legal system in ways that hurt husbands to the extent that denial of access to children became the norm for Oromo fathers. In this way, the *loss of families* left many youth in confusion, vulnerability, and total alienation even from their own sense of self.

To tease out yet another wrinkle of loss, it is important to examine the compounding *loss of recognition*. When we arrived in Canada, there was hostility between Ethiopians and those of us who identified as Oromos. Ethiopians hated us for refusing to identify as Ethiopians and for forming a separate Oromo community. They were not willing to recognize the genocide that Ethiopia perpetrates against our people. In the absence of such recognition, forming a community with Ethiopians felt like condoning the genocide against our people. When extremist Ethiopians unleashed their hatred against our communities, the initiatives of Oromo youths were equally targeted. Youth who tried to showcase their Oromo identity at school multicultural events encountered violence from Ethiopians. Youth who tried to stage their Oromo cultural show at Afro-Fest were met with intense hatred

when Ethiopians demanded the cancellation of Oromo shows. The organizers asked the Ethiopians to stage their own show rather than demanding the cancellation of the show of another group but the Ethiopians withdrew their own show rather than share the same forum with Oromos. When the hatred went to that depth, the Oromo youths were as baffled as the organizers.

We believe that healing and connecting starts with the recognition of pain and the redress of injustice. However, what we got from many Ethiopians was the perpetuation of pain and injustice. Nor was recognition of pain forthcoming from Canadian institutions beyond the government's initial resettlement of Oromo refugees. Although government policies did not deny us the right to organize as Oromos, the settlement resources we could mobilize were dismal compared to what goes to country-based organizations like Ethiopians. The feeling in the Oromo communities was that Canada and, indeed many Western countries, reward Ethiopia for its genocide against our people. To add insult to injury, Western countries awarded the tyrant Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia. Baffling us intensely, his accolades included an award for good governance. We experienced this not as passive *loss of recognition* but as active reward for genocide -- a bitter slap in the face for us and Oromo youth. Even as they revolted against their parents' values, Oromo youth felt this perpetuation of injustice as hurtful beyond any measure.

We've looked at multiple layers of loss: *loss of homeland, loss of unity, loss of attention, loss of family, loss of self, loss of recognition, and loss of loss itself* where our people forget the cause of their loss and tear each other up. We know that by unpacking loss in this way, we risk highlighting the victimization of youth and concealing their fiery agency and generative healing activities. Even as they were profoundly hurt by these intense layers of loss, however, youth have also moved far beyond their loss and actively created their own unique paths to healing... As elders, we have also learnt bitter lessons and taken crucial first steps to heal our communities and support our youth... We have looked at ourselves long and hard and asked: What can we do differently to retain our cultural heritage but at the same time bridge the rift it created between us and our youths?

Out of this healing process, we created a united community called the Oromo-Canadian Community Association of Greater Toronto Area (OCCA-

GTA) and attained legal status in 2000. For the first time in the history of Oromos in North America, Oromo groups with differing political affiliations embraced each other in the shade of our united community. Oromo youths have also broken out of their traumatizing bind and taken leadership in creating spaces of connecting with other youth, with their families and communities. Beyond organizing into local soccer teams and participating in North American Soccer Tournaments and staging cultural and fashion shows, youth have also brought their fiery energy to organizing OCAYA and charting innovative HAC programs. They are reclaiming their Oromo heritage on their own terms and they have taken leadership in organizing the annual Oromo *Irreecha* celebrations.... Youth are our connectors to the various communities. The closer we work with our youth, the closer we get to the wellbeing of our community, our Canadian society, and our Oromo people back home.

We know that we have been unconsciously pressing down our youth with the oppressive culture we learned from our colonizers but we also know that we can no longer blame it on the unconscious. It is our responsibility to decolonize our minds and reclaim our egalitarian *gadaa* culture and pass that on to our children. We must trust our youth when they forge their own *Oromummaa*. We must learn how to embrace their processes of opening up and extending *Oromummaa* beyond our own narrow definitions.... We will make sure we give them the tools and resources at our disposal but we also need to trust the ability of our youth to forge their future in their own ways...

After long years of suffering and longing for a gathering place, we have now purchased a property to realize our dream of the Oromia Centre. It will be a symbolic anchor of the homeland we lost along with its institutional, cultural and spiritual resources. It will be where we gather and celebrate our living and mourn our dead. It will be where we gather to care for each other and lick our wounds and heal....

As we were preparing to open the doors of Oromia Center for the inaugural blessings and celebrations, a very active elder who worked tirelessly to make the center a reality suddenly passed away. Instead of opening the doors for celebration, we had to open them for mourning our dead. It was a profound symbolic reminder of the inextricable link between life and death, between the fate of our people back home and our community

here. We cannot have full and pure celebration while our people are bleeding there. We have to mourn as we celebrate and celebrate as we mourn.

Longing for Home

In each of these stories, I hear a deep longing for home. In the burning desire gushing out of its own uniqueness, each voice imagines home in a particular way. Each voice laments exile and cries out for home. But the notions of home and exile conceal more than they reveal. We need to tease out the various layers to understand both the lamentations and the longings in these voices. Here I pull out four interwoven threads from the tangled web of meanings. The longing for home comes across as: *crying out for the nation*, *crying out for liberation*, *crying out for identity*, and *crying out for the roots*.

Crying out for the Nation

In *crying out for the nation*, people lament exile as a space of loss, denigration and suffering and they long for home away from the pains of all these wounds. In this sense, people embrace the dominant binary construction of home/exile and homeland/diaspora (Ahmed 2000; Gow 2002, 2004; Kumsa 2006; 2008). Most narratives are characterized by a deep sense of national loss¹³ and, old and young alike, they cry out for the nation – a nation of their own, a nation away from the hurting nations of others. This is explicitly expressed in Iddoosan’s new song and Bonsitu’s reflections as well as in the lamentations of elders, including Rumiya, Fantaye, Fekadu, Abdulhamid, and Kitaba.

¹³ National loss? How can this be a loss when we never had a nation? How can we lose what we never had in the first place? To me, loss of the dream of having a nation itself is a loss but the greatest loss of losses is that of desiring deeply what everyone agreed humans must have but not achieving it. That loss seeps deep into the bones. It doesn’t matter that the nation is not working even for those who invented it. What matters is the possibility of having it and experimenting with it to see whether or not it works for our particular context. That is an issue of justice.

The global family of nations flaunts the nation as *the* only desirable model of human organization, which implies that those who do not have it are less than human. Oromos desire the nation and embark on an anticolonial national liberation struggle as a process of re-humanization (Cabral 1970; Fanon 1963, 1967; Freire 2003, 2007). However, the same global family of nations (Malkki 2001) that flaunts the nation in their face also blocks every possible path to achieving such humanness outside its prescription of the global pecking order. This global family authorizes itself to grant or deny nationhood and membership in its national/natural order of things (Malkki 2001). Oromos are barred from membership either because they are the “wrong/bad” nation or because they espouse the “wrong/bad” nationalism (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001). Oromos become the Other of nations in the nations of Others, as the “good” nations and nationalisms whip up highly charged patriotic emotions to defend their purity against the contamination of “bad” Others (Ahmed 2000, 2004) or primitive Others (Bergland 2000; Gelder and Jacobs 1998).

Brutally excluded from these disciplined spaces (Foucault 1979) and nested hierarchies of nations, the burning desire for a nation continues to consume Oromos. As Daniel (1997) would argue when the illusive nation becomes unavailable to Oromos both in the land of their ancestors and in the land of Others, some Oromos will radically question the very notion of nationhood and opt out of the national project altogether. Indeed Daniel predicts that the nation-averse displaced person will be the norm for the twenty-first century. We see this in Argan Beeko’s reflection. Paradoxically, however; even in Argan Beeko’s case, the intense aversion for nation is inseparably twined with equally intense burning desire for nation. In response to the paradoxical discourses of “all are human but some are more human” and “all are equal but some are more equal” (di Tomasso 2012), then, Oromos both resist and embrace the nation at one and the same time.

Crying out for Liberation

Interwoven with other threads of home, *crying out for liberation* pours out from spaces of oppression and discrimination. It gushes out as a form of creative resistance engaging continued displacement and recolonization in the land of others where Oromos feel they are the Others of all Others (Ahmed 2000, 2004). Indeed Fantaye laments, “we are at the bottommost... we are the underdogs.” Homogenizing processes of globalization move them across national and continental borders while simultaneous processes of localization slot them into hierarchical categories of age, class, culture, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, spirituality, sexuality, etc. Bauman (1998) expresses such glocalization and its inequities as a binary opposition between the movements of tourists and vagabonds. Instead of opening up possibilities of social justice and liberation then, in the case of Oromos, these glocalizing movements slot most Oromos into the category of vagabonds who are stuck while lifting only a few into the category of tourists who move freely. As Patterson and Kelley (2000) argue, the African diaspora plays out both as process and as condition, indicating both movement in the ongoing interactions and fixity in its location within global hierarchies of power. For Oromos, then, diaspora is an unfinished process where they ride the winds of movement and engage the enduring stasis of inequities in their tangled global webs of marginalization.

Here again, liberation is creatively imagined in textured and layered ways as liberation of the homeland, liberation of women (Mies 1982), liberation of Oromos as groups and as individuals, and liberation from Oromos. They imagine the liberation of the homeland both in real geographical and geopolitical spaces and in what Foucault (1986) would call spaces of *heterotopia*-- other imaginary spaces somewhere between the real and the unreal utopia. The creative energies of Oromos are directed towards both. The real space of liberation is expressed in Rumiya, Fantaye, and Bektu’s call for an Oromo center and in Abdulhamid and Kitaba’s reflection of creating such a center. *Heterotopic* spaces of liberation include a melding of virtual and imaginary spaces of the nation as instantiated in what Herbst (2004) calls *GadaNet* and Gow (2002) calls postmodern nation.

Incredible amount of energy goes into the liberation of groups and individuals, liberation from all forms of oppression and dehumanization both outside and inside Oromo communities. Oromos refuse to give up hope. Despite the deep anguish they suffer, they nurture the hope of liberation and develop creative strategies to subvert the dystopia of dehumanization and facilitate their own re-humanization (Cabral 1970; Fanon 1963, 1967; Freire 2003, 2007). These efforts are captured well by the narratives of youth like Anaf Lello, Bektu, Bonsitu, Iddoosan, and Umaa.

In Argan Beeko's poignant reflections, liberation is expressed as a personal liberation from Oromos, not with them. Perhaps this is what others theorize as the increasing individualization of youth in a cosmopolitan world (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2009) or as the tension between individual freedom and community entanglement (Bauman 2001, 2004; Kumsa et al. 2013). As Argan Beeko claims, Argan Beeko is simply being Oromo in Argan Beeko's own unique way as Daniel (1984, 1997) would concur.

Crying out for Identity

The profound longing for home also comes out as a profound *crying out for identity*. It comes out of a profound sense of loss and continued denigration and invisibility of the Oromo identity. In textual and oral literature, in songs and movies, in academic conferences and internet chatrooms, in paltalks and in ordinary face-to-face conversations, Oromo discourses are steeped with loss of identity. Oromo community elders and nationalist scholars drum it into every medium they can grab. They say that a people without its identity is a lost people. They lament that Oromos respect everyone but themselves. They warn that no one will respect Oromos if Oromos do not respect themselves. What comes across loud and clear is the need to revalue our denigrated peoplehood and selfhood and reconstruct *Oromummaa* (Oromo-ness) for our profound needs of identity. And the voices in this chapter reflect this broader Oromo discourse.

Beyond the discourses of loss, however, Oromo identity is also imagined and performed as multilayered and textured. Some imagine *Oromummaa* as

an essentialist identity; others imagine it as constructed and rework-able. Some see it as a fixed state of being and others see it as an ongoing process of perpetual becoming. Some imagine *Oromummaa* as a space of homogeneity and harmony; others experience it as a space of heterogeneity and discord. For some, *Oromummaa* is a collective national project; for others it is a profoundly individual and personal project. This parallels the philosophical debates in the broader social theories of identity.

In the context of colonization and recolonization, crying out for identity pours from the deep pain of the loss of recognition and this comes across poignantly in the reflections of Iddoosan and Argan Beeko. As Iddoosan laments, "I never say I'm from Ethiopia, you know, but it also hurts when other people don't know where I am from; it really hurts." In a similar vein, Argan Beeko asks: "why does no one talk about us? Why are we always lagging behind? Why are we not in the news when our people die every day?" Loss of recognition multiplies as loss of identity, loss of place, loss of country.

This generalized sense of placelessness and homelessness also comes out as a profound loss of personhood. In my own experience, I remember a student¹⁴ of mine sensing my deep sense of loss and bringing me Neil Diamond's CD (the Millennium Collection) and insisting that we listen to the "I am... I said" track together. I find these lines particularly poignant:

... nowadays I'm lost between two shores
LA's fine but it ain't home
New York's home,
But it ain't mine no more

"I am," I said,
To no one there.
And no one heard at all -
Not even the chair.

¹⁴ Many thanks to Flora Marcelo! Flora, somehow you understand the profound sense of loss in my soul -- the loss that many people don't see or understand -- Perhaps you also harbour your own profound loss.

"I am," I cried, "I am," said I.
And I am lost and I can't
Even say why –
Leaving' me lonely still.

...

"I am," I said.
"I am," I cried!
"I am."

Such cry for identity and recognition permeates the narratives of men and women, younger and older Oromos alike. When Neil Diamond says "I am lost and I can't even say why," it resonates with the "loss of loss" that Abdulhamid and Kitaba express so eloquently. When the loss is lost but the pain remains excruciatingly real and the people in pain tear at each other, it evokes the kind of pain that comes gushing out of Argan Beeko's profound realization that "something inside of you dies, something just drops and dies. And you don't even know what just died in you. But you know something precious just died."

To deal with such profound loss, some of us slip into cosmopolitan discourses and declare that we are citizens of the world. As many Oromos are painfully aware and as others (Ahmed 2000; Bauman 1998) contend, this sense of placelessness and loss among tourists, cosmopolitan nomads, and global trotters is radically different from the homelessness, placelessness, and loss that refugee communities experience. And we need to make note of that in order to refrain from homogenizing the very different experiences of loss.

Crying out for the Roots

Most profoundly, the longing for home is expressed as *crying out for the roots*, which is crying out for the depths of our ancestors' cultural and spiritual resources. This too comes out of the profound loss, insecurity, and longing for belonging. It comes gushing out from painful experiences of displacement and de-territorialization (Clifford 1997; Malkki 2001) and the profound need for

connection and safety (Bauman 2001, 2004), re-territorialization (Kale 2004) and emplacement (Escobar 2001, 2004). This comes across as a profound search for meaning in a world where their truths are turned upside down. For Oromos, this displacement of meaning is a complex process meandering through historical and ongoing traumatic experiences.

Displaced and detached from the deepest meanings of their ancestors' culture and spirituality – historically by colonization and currently by recolonizing processes euphemized as globalization – Oromos cry out for the roots. As Safiya poignantly instantiates this:

We are a people in crisis... we need to find ways of connecting to our mothers' *siiqqee*... We are dispersed in strange lands, wandering and roaming where the paths are hidden by the thickest underbrush. We have to get our acts together and clear the pathways to our healing culture.

And as Fantaye's question cries out: "*maal nuu wyyaa? maaluma nuu wayyaa?*" Oromos search for the very existential meaning of life in their ancestors' ways of being in the world.

As Abdulhamid and Kitaba so neatly analyze the meaning of the loss of meaning and as others argue (Butler 2003; Eng and Kazanjian 2003; Frost and Hoggett 2008), multiplicities of loss and displacement cannot stop human agency from imagining and performing new ways of being in the world. Indeed, Oromos, young and old alike, seek out and perform their ancestors' culture and spirituality in a new way in their own context of displacement. They make new meanings in a world where their meanings are turned upside down. This is exemplified in Bonsitu and Umaa's reflections of reclaiming and performing the *Irreecha* thanksgiving as a way of reconnecting to our ancestors' culture and spirituality and as agentic performance of healing from our current trauma. This is also an embodiment of the very spirit of the grassroots movements of Oromo rebirth and this is at the very heart and soul of this book, *Songs of Exile*.

As in all processes of Oromo rebirth, however, the reclaiming of *Irreecha* has its own multivocality among both youth and elders. In some, the very

name of *Irreecha* creates an aversion and they do not want to touch it with a ten-meter stick. For them it evokes discourses of devil worship, pagan, savage, backward, and uncivilized. From among those who do revalue and reclaim *Irreecha*, some reclaim both the cultural and spiritual, some only the spiritual, and others only the cultural aspects. A common thread, however, is that they all perform *Irreecha* as a gesture of solidarity with their people's struggle back home where part of reclaiming *Irreecha* has become a show of political resistance against ongoing colonial domination. Despite the brutal repression in Ethiopia, *Irreecha* has grown increasingly popular over the past two decades (Bulcha 1998, 2011). Every year, millions of ordinary Oromos from the homeland and the Oromo diaspora gather to celebrate. Some arrive on horsebacks, by cars, busses, trains, and planes while others arrive on foot, walking for months just to get to the cultural and spiritual gathering at the sacred place of *Hora Harsadii*. Although *Irreecha* has also been celebrated at other sites in the homeland and in many places in the diaspora, in the last five years alone, it has spread like wildfire in an amazing speed and *Irreecha* is now celebrated in Africa, Australia, Europe, and North America.

I must note, however, that even among the political enthusiasts, there is no homogeneity of voice in reclaiming *Irreecha* as a space of resistance. Here, a particularly poignant dissenting voice questioning *Irreecha* deserves a mention. When I invited Dheekko, a young Oromo in Toronto, to the 2010 annual *Irreecha*, this was how he responded:

Why? Why should I celebrate *Irreecha*? For the food I eat? For the water I drink? For the air I breathe? If for these, I say no *Irreecha*, thank you! Even animals have all these... but I am human.... For keeping us under Habesha domination, then? For SLAVERY? No, thank you! No *Irreecha* for me please. When *Waaqa* helps us get our land back and our *bilisummaa* [liberation], then I will celebrate. Otherwise no *Irreecha* for me! *Bilisummaan kadhaan hindhufu* [liberation doesn't come through prayer/begging].

Weaving them back together

I hear harmony in the very discord of these voices and in the ways in which each narrative constructs home. Home is not just the warm and comfortable place where a person is at-home and in-comfort. And exile is not just the desolate place where a person is out-of-place and experiences loss and anguish. Home and exile are not mutually exclusive (Ararssa 2013; Ahmed 2000; Gow 2002; Kumsa 2007). Yes exile is a space of suffering for many of us Oromos but it is also a space of creative possibilities where we not only imagine but also perform home. *Songs of Exile* comes out of such space of creative possibilities and it is offered to younger generation of Oromos to rework and perform home in any form of exile in their own new ways.

Songs of Exile transgresses boundaries and weaves together the ancient past and the distant future, the long deceased but present ancestors and the born and unborn children of the Oromo youth it engages. In this, as Armstead (2008) would argue, *Songs of Exile* is a transgressive spatial and temporal practice. It engages contemporary time-space compression by blurring the dualisms created between older and younger generations, the deceased and the unborn, the spiritual and the cultural, the individual and the collective, the past and the future (time), the here and there (space/place), and homeland and diaspora. More than passionate longing and burning desire, *Songs of Exile* is a transgressive practice of resistance and solidarity. Reclaiming these songs as resources of healing from both historical and contemporary trauma is also a practice of liberation. Indeed, in *Songs of Exile*, not only do we reclaim and perform the songs of our foremothers but we also weave them back into the deeper webs of Oromo cosmology from which they hail. And you will find this weaving discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 -- Oromo Cosmology

Songs of Exile did not just drop from the sky. These songs are deeply woven into what I understand as the fabric of Oromo philosophical thought which is, in turn, deeply woven into Oromo Cosmology. To understand the deeper meanings of these songs, we need to understand the sociocultural, spiritual and philosophical depths from which they are drawn. I will present this here in three sections. In the first section, *Females in Oromo Society*, I provide the broad contours of Oromo women's sociocultural roles and locations in the Oromo society. In the second section, I position this sociocultural map in its deeper *Spiritual Roots*. In the third section, *Images of Aayyolee*, I provide some images of our foremothers that I discovered in the Internet and wove into my soul to soothe my deepest longing for home.

I must note here that focusing on Oromo women's sociocultural and spiritual experiences is not to deny the geopolitical, political, economic and other material aspects of Oromo reality. It is rather to selectively address one critically missing dimension of the holistic system, one little piece at a time. Denying or excluding other realities is impossible, even self-defeating, because what I am trying to reclaim here is a holistic system where everything and everyone matters, where nothing can get lost. The songs we sing, the stories we tell, the works we do, the clothes we wear and the ornaments with which we adorn ourselves are all deeply and meaningfully woven into the fabric of this holistic system of Oromo cosmology.

Females in Oromo Society

As a child of her people, the Galla¹⁵ [Oromo] woman feels deep in her bones that she is living, so to speak, in a magnetic field. All living beings are charged with power; all influence each other, each according to its own kind... (Bartels 1969: 407)

By using the metaphor of a *magnetic field*, Bartels (1969) is pointing to the intimate interconnectedness of everyone and everything in Oromo cosmology. Not only are “all living beings charged with power” and “influence each other” as Bartels argues, but all things and objects normally considered non-living are also charged with such spiritual power. Everything and everyone has a unique spirit of its own and the spirit of everyone and everything in the cosmos also inheres in each unique spirit (Kumsa Boro 2009). Everything and everyone are all interconnected; everything and everyone all influence each other; and everything and everyone has its own unique place in the cosmos. *Safuu* signifies the peaceful and balanced state where everything and everyone is in its unique place, influencing each other from relationships of respectful distance (Megerssa 1993). *Safuu* is said to be lost when these respectful boundaries are transgressed and the unique place of everyone and everything is violated. Loss of *safuu* is loss of balance and interconnectedness. Such intimate interconnectedness of everything and everyone is poignantly highlighted in women’s prayer songs in the next chapter.

Indeed, as Bartels (1969) asserts, women play a central role in nurturing these intimate interconnections. To start with the socio-cultural roles of Oromo women in maintaining interconnectedness, as Fantaye, Aysha and Bektu alluded to in the last chapter, women are the glue that connect and hold their people together. They weave together the *gosa* [clans] and *qomoo* [sub-clans] of the various communities. Oromo communities are communities

¹⁵ Bartels writes in 1969 using *Galla*, the derogatory name by which Ethiopian colonial historiography introduced Oromos to the world. Since the 1974 Ethiopian revolution Oromos have reclaimed the name by which they have always known themselves. The Ethiopian State has officially banned *Galla* and inscribed Oromo as the official name of the people.

of men interconnected and woven together by women (Legesse, 1973). While these communities are linked through marriage, in the exogamous Oromo culture, girls cannot be married within their lineages (Bartels 1983, 1969; Gidada 1984; Holcomb 1973; Legesse 1973). They are given away to men¹⁶ seven generations away from their fathers' lineages and five generations away from their mothers' lineages. In effect, girls must go to strange countries¹⁷ and start life from scratch among the strange people of their husbands' clans and sub-clans.

Newly married women must give birth to children in order to establish their status and belonging in the new country among the strange people. This is because blood relations are more important than affinal relations in the traditional Oromo society (Bartels 1969, 1983). Her children are her gifts of citizenship and belonging. The woman who came from other clans and is without children has no place anywhere in a world woven from blood relations. She has to produce some kind of blood ties to weave herself into the clans and sub-clans. And that comes with bearing children.

This explains why Oromo women value children more than anything in the world and they celebrate birth with such elaborate rituals. As the birth songs in Chapter 4 show, the solidarity with and intense prayer for childless women is as elaborate as the celebration of birth. Women sing to the childless woman: "while our wombs give children, you will not be childless" and they go as far as naming and demanding children from families who have many and give them to childless women to raise them as their own (Kumsa 1997). Indeed *guddifachaa* [adoption] is as elaborate as birth in its rituals and it is as socially and legally sanctioned as birth. Although the birth and adoption of all children is celebrated equally, boys are valued more than girls because the Oromo society is patrilocal where men stay in the community and continue the generations. Girls are given away to continue the generations of other clans. For the mother of girls, then, her blood citizenship lasts only until her

¹⁶ Yes girls are given to men. Heteronormativity is dominant here as elsewhere in the world.

¹⁷ Country in this sense does not signify the modern nation-state system on the maps and atlases of the contemporary world. Rather it signifies the Oromo concept of *biyya*, which simply means a place that is the land of some people. Land is known by its people. *Biyya* can be any land of any Oromo clan or sub clan. *Biyya armaa*, literally translated as foreign land, means the land of others and these others can be any Oromo clan, not necessarily foreigners.

girls are given away. After that, she is left as any other stranger with no blood ties to the community. This explains why a woman's ultimate payer is for a son and this permeates the songs in Chapter 4. However, the unacknowledged prayer of communities is for girls because communities are woven together through their girls.

Indeed it is through marrying and giving children to the clans and sub-clans that women weave together the various disparate Oromo communities. Women's social role of bonding and weaving communities together is also tied into the most profound depth of Oromo cosmology where women's bonding role parallels the bonding role of *safuu*. To make sense of this, let us take a glimpse of traditional¹⁸ Oromo society.

The Oromo *gadaa* functioned as an egalitarian holistic system that wove together the entire Oromo society from very intricate threads of relationships. One of these threads is the moiety generational relationships where the entire Oromo society is divided into two generations (Bartels 1983; Legesse 1973; Megerssa 1993). Consecutive generations formed active opposition and alternate generations formed active collaboration and alliance. Another moiety relationship is between the religious institution led by the *Qaalluu*¹⁹ and the political institution led by the *Abbaa Bokkuu*. The religious office is hereditary while the political office is inhabited by elected officials who are replaced every eight years. There are multiple other layers of relationships in which an individual Oromo is deeply and inextricably immersed. To explain the density of these multiple layers, Bartels (1983) uses the metaphor of a thick forest with many levels of tall trees and thick undergrowth.

Oromos of the pre-colonial times had been developing and practicing their *gadaa* as an egalitarian system for many thousands of years. In its political face, *gadaa* is a uniquely democratic age-grade system where power rotates among five age-grade parties (Legesse 1973; Melba 1980). Every party rules for 8 years, after which power is ceremonially transferred to the next

¹⁸ Traditional is a contested term because societies are in constant change and it is hard which one to call "the traditional" society. In this book, I use "traditional" to signify pre-colonial times when Oromo socio-economic, religious and political institutions functioned together coherently.

¹⁹ *Qaalluu* is the name of the religious institution as well as the name of the male spiritual leader. The corresponding female name for *Qaalluu* is *Qaallittii*.

party in festive celebrations of peoples' assemblies. Each party comes to power only 40 years later after all the other four had their moments in the sun, thus making it impossible to transfer power from parents' generation to children's generation. Many intricate checks and balances are put in place to safeguard the holistic and egalitarian practices of *gadaa*. These include the balances of power between the political and the spiritual, the human and the divine, the male and the female, the young and the old, as well as animate and inanimate nature.

The egalitarian political culture of these *gadaa* parties was based on male age-grade sets that actively excluded females; hence the functional necessity to create male-female checks and balances to safeguard egalitarian practices. As a group, women and girls were seen as *halagaa* [strangers/outside] in the patrilineal Oromo society and, as such, they were protected by the laws of *muka laaftuu* [soft wood]. This law protected vulnerable groups because of their structural liminality. Girls were seen as *halagaa* in their communities of birth because they would soon be given away in marriage. Women were seen as *halagaa* in their communities of marriage because, not being born there, they would come from somewhere else. Not belonging anywhere, then, females were seen as the floating glue belonging everywhere and holding together the disparate communities of men.

This bonding role of women parallels the broader spiritual bonding role of *safuu* in Oromo cosmology. Simply put, *safuu* is the power of *Waaqa* [God] that holds together everything and everyone in the cosmos in a well-balanced egalitarian order. The same concept of *safuu* is understood as *wayyuu* or *woyyuu* in some areas of the Oromo land²⁰ (e.g. Hinnant 1977; Østebø 2007, 2009). Drawing their power of bonding their disparate communities from *Waaqa's* bonding power of *safuu*, female bonding is likened to *safuu* bonding and females are deemed closer to *Waaqa* and revered. Paralleling the egalitarian cosmic order of *safuu*, then, pre-colonial Oromo society governed itself by integrating many layers of checks and balances into the *gadaa* egalitarian and holistic system. In *gadaa*, women's rights and wellbeing were

²⁰ I use Oromo land to emphasize the role of the earth in Oromo cosmology and the land-based nature of Oromo struggle. I use Oromiya/Oromia to emphasize the current ongoing anti-colonial Oromo political struggle for liberation.

protected by the *siiqqee* institution, as both Anaf and Safiya alluded to in the last chapter. *Gadaa* and *siiqqee* maintained the male-female checks and balances within the larger cosmic order of *safuu* (Kumsa 1997). While *siiqqee* is an institution of married women, *gadaa* also has the transitional institution of *addooyyee* for unmarried girls (Kumsa 2004).

Even though *gadaa* is a holistic system, most male anthropologists and ethnographers studied only male institutional practices to the detriment of female institutions. Other studies have documented such invisibility of women in male-centered approaches, making visible women's power and resistance (Abu-Lughod 1989, 1991). Oromo women's role in *gadaa* is only recently appearing in the literature (Kelly 1992; Kumsa 1997, 2009; Østebø 2001, 2009; Qashu 2009; Qumbi 1989; Waaqayyo 1991; Wako 2003). While the study of *siiqqee* has begun and is currently in its infancy, the study of the *addooyyee* institution remains untouched to the best of my knowledge. It is my contention, however, that *siiqqee* and *addooyyee* functioned together in *gadaa* as female institutions (Kumsa 2004) and, together, they paralleled the bonding function of *safuu*. Pre-colonial Oromos believed that society would collapse if *safuu* was lost. Therefore, both males and females considered it their sacred duty to maintain the male-female checks and balances in order to maintain the multiplicity of the overall checks and balances of *safuu*. I will now turn to the female institutions of *siiqqee* and *addooyyee*.

The Siiqqee Institution

Siiqqee is the stick a girl receives as a gift on her wedding day through a blessing ceremony. It marks her transition from the girlhood of *addooyyee* into the womanhood of *siiqqee*. The mother holds one end of the *siiqqee* as she chants blessings and the daughter holds the other end repeating *haa ta'u* [may it be so] or amen after every chant. While *siiqqee* signifies the mother-daughter bond in this ritual, there are broader socio-cultural and spiritual meanings to *siiqqee* rituals beyond the bond of the mother-daughter dyad.

First, such gift giving and blessing rituals of *siiqqee* are the oath females take to remind each other of the matriarchal reign of *Akkoo Manooyyee*

[Grandma *Manooyyee*], the legendary matriarch whose egalitarian rule touched all Oromos (Bulcha 2011). *Akkoo Manooyyee* is known by different names in different parts of Oromoland. For example she is known as *Habanoye* in Boorana, Kenya (Wako 2003). It is storied that power-greedy men overthrew her sweet rule, distorting her story and debasing her character (Wako 2003).²¹ To this day, *Akkoo Manooyyee* is laughed at and ridiculed to satirize and regulate women. Quietly refusing this caricature, then, women use every *siiqqee* ritual to re-member the glorious matriarchy of their grandmother, *Akkoo Manooyyee*, and to pass her memory on to next generations of females.

In its second meaning, *siiqqee* symbolizes the mother and broader female ties between all mothers and all daughters. Thirdly, standing for the universal mother, *siiqqee* also symbolizes the broader female ties among all *halagaa* females in all clans and sub-clans. Fourthly and at a more profoundly spiritual level, *siiqqee* represents the spirit of *Ateetee*, the female deity²² and women cling to their *siiqqee* when they pray to *Waaqa* (Assefa 2008, Kumsa 1997, Østebø 2007, 2009; Qashu 2009). This chorus of a song provides a poignant example:

Siiqqee tiyya lootii qabadhee [I hold my beautiful *siiqqee*]
Rabbii kiyya mootii kadhadhe [I pray to my almighty God²³]

In all these roles, sociocultural and spiritual, *siiqqee* represents the image of the mother -- and all women call each other *Intala Aayyaa* [Daughters of a Mother]. If her rights are violated or her wellbeing is hurt in anyway, a woman grabs her *siiqqee* and screams:

²¹ Fugich Wako (2003) presents the story of Habanoye, the name by which Akkoo Manyooeee is known among the Boorana Oromo of Kenya. The names of Akkoo Manooyyee differ in different parts of Oromo land but the stories are essentially the same (Bulcha 2011).

²² The divinity of Ateetee is disputed in the literature. P.T.W. Baxter (1979) asserts that Ateetee is not a divinity although both earlier (Knutsson 1969) and later studies (Assefa 2008, Bartels 1983, Kumsa 1997, Qashu 2009) affirm that Ateetee signifies the female diety.

²³ Here I translate '*mootii*' as almighty god as opposed to the literal translation of '*mootii*' as king. King is a relatively more recent phenomenon in Oromo society as traditional institutions of *gadaa* egalitarianism do not support the hierarchical organization of kings and kingdoms.

Intala Aayyaa dhageettee? [Mother's Daughter, have you heard?!]
Oduun si geettee? [Did the news reach you?!]

This is called *iyya siiqqee* [the *siiqqee* scream]. Upon hearing the *siiqqee* scream of their sister, all women grab their own *siiqqees* in solidarity and come out screaming:

Eeyee dhagahee! [Yes I've heard!]
Oduun na gahee! [The news did reach me!].

In some parts of the Oromo land, women ululate to communicate the message to each other. It is said *dubartiin itti ililfatti*, meaning women ululate on the person infringing on a woman's rights and wellbeing. If a woman raises her *siiqqee* and screams or ululates, it means the cosmic balance of *safuu* is upset and everyone, women and men alike, must interrupt everything they are doing because *safuu* must be restored before any normal life activity could resume. Women consider it their sacred duty to restore *safuu* and, with their raised *siiqqees*, they gather under a *qilxuu* tree.²⁴ They listen to the current violation, recount past infringements, quote the law of *muka laaftuu* [soft wood] invoked at the time, and pass their verdict.

Also considering it their sacred duty to restore *safuu*, men send respectable elders immediately to hear the women's *siiqqee* verdict and fulfill their demands. If not, women vow to leave the community. They vow to cross the river and go on *godaansa siiqqee* [the *siiqqee* trek]. Here, vowing to cross the river has a profound spiritual meaning because water symbolizes the very source of life. By vowing to cross the river, then, women are affirming their readiness to cross the threshold of life and die, their readiness to sacrifice their lives in order to restore the *safuu* of *Waaqa*. The consequences of the *siiqqee* trek are hefty as neighbouring communities also consider it their sacred duty to restore *safuu* to the extent that they would declare war on the community that failed or delayed to fulfil the women's *siiqqee* demands.

²⁴ *Qilxuu* is a type of oak tree symbolizing the generic female.

Siiqqee women are revered and feared, ironically, because of their liminality, which parallels the subtle liminality of *safuu* and because females are considered to be closer to *Waaqa* and endowed with a special spiritual power. Indeed their institutions are considered sacred and revered as a result of this closeness to *Waaqa* (Kelly 1992; Kumsa 1997, Østebø 2007, 2009). It is at this spiritual depth and within such intricate interwoven-ness of female liminality, sacredness and *safuu* that, I believe, *gadaa* and *siiqqee* are constituted into inseparably interwoven institutions.

In *safuu*, the laws of *nama* [humans] cannot be separated from the laws of *Waaqa* [God]; rather, they mutually reinforce each other. Indeed law of *muka laaftuu* [soft wood], upholding the protection of liminal groups, is one among *seera nama* [human laws] which must be reinforced with deeper spiritual *seera Waaqa* [law of God]. I believe what Østebø (2009) describes as the prayer of *ayyaana hanfala laafaa* [the spirit of the soft belt/sash/girdle] is a contemporary practice of this spiritual aspect of female power. According to Østebø, praying through the spirit of *hanfala laafaa* “expresses the spirit of all women as a collective marker. To pray to God through the soft and humble spirit of all women, seems to be a way to strengthen their prayers” (2009: 1055). As another liminal female group, I believe this applies equally to the *addooyee* institution of unmarried Oromo girls as well.

The Addooyee Institution

Very little is studied about the *addooyee* institution of unmarried Oromo girls, whether in pre-colonial times or in contemporary Oromo studies.²⁵ I have used the concept in the analysis of my doctoral dissertation (Kumsa 2004) because the data I generated with young Oromo women necessitated that I lay claim to the analysis of the *addooyee* institution. Other than that, except in the recent *Addooyee* groups flourishing in the Oromo diaspora, I have not come across the word or concept in the literature. Perhaps it is

²⁵ Thanks to my daughter Goolii who challenged me into thinking about the *addooyee* institution of Oromo girls. Just as those who were actively reclaiming *gadaa* left the *siiqqee* institution invisible, in my active reclaiming of *siiqqee*, in my turn, I too left *addooyee* invisible. Thank you Goolii! I’m grateful for your inquisitive energy and sharp insights.

known by other names in other parts of the Oromo land and I have not discovered it. However, in my little locality where I grew up, girls actively practiced *addooyyee*, and that includes me and my peers. Let me offer a re-constituted description of *addooyyee* from what I re-member growing up, however sketchy it might be, and from the conversations I've had over the years with some custodians of Oromo culture. I do hope that others will pick it up and address the various gaps I leave open in this book.

Addooyyee has at least two layers of meaning. First, *addooyyee* refers to the practice of *addooyyee* girlhood itself -- the *addooyyee* institution of sisterhood. In its second layer, *addooyyee* means a girl's intimate girlfriend. Within this meaning, there are levels of *addooyyee* intimacy where *saakumee* signifies the most intimate of *addooyyees*. Girls become *addooyyee* to each other by taking an oath to support each other, protect each other, accompany each other, share secrets and protect each other's secrets. They pull out a grass called *migira addooyyee*, hold it between them and break it as they say: *yoo an si gane akkas na haa kutu* [if I betray you, my I be broken like this]. This is an oath of sisterhood and solidarity. Once they take this oath, they do not call each other by their personal names; they just call each other *addooyyee*. They go to dance parties together; they sing together; they go to market, field work and school together; they fetch water and firewood together. The secrets they share are often the secrets of their sweethearts.

I know *addooyyee* is a transitional practice that girls perform between the time they become girls and the time they are married but I do not remember exactly at what age girls enter the *addooyyeehood*. I re-member older girls teasing me for being too young when I took my first *addooyyee* oath. Girls are not born into *addooyyee*; they become *addooyyee* at a certain age. My speculation, which also links to the *gadaa* age-grade system for males, is that girls enter *addooyyeehood* when they are 8 years old. That is, when the *halagaa* [strangers] start eyeing them.

As the uniquely fluid Oromo gender system supports my speculation, I find it important to draw on it here (Kassam 1987; Kumsa 1997; Legesse 1973; Wood 1999). Up to 8 years of age, all children, boys and girls alike, are referred to as 'she' Indeed in all the ancient birth songs in Chapter 4 of this book, both boys and girls are referred to as 'she'. Here 'she' indicates

liminality, not femaleness. After they complete their active *gadaa* political cycles and retire into the advisory council (become *gadamooggi*), men go through a rite of passage where their heads are shaven and they are referred to as 'she'. Here again 'she' refers to their liminal status rather than their biological sex. On the contrary, women are referred to as 'he' after they complete the parallel cycles of their husbands' *gadaa*. In this case, 'he' refers to women's increasing spiritual power, their coming out of liminality. Rather than the anatomy of sex, then, 'she' and 'he' refer to liminality and power respectively.

In this light, it makes sense to say that Oromo girls enter *addooyeehood* at age 8 and become *real* girls and *real* 'she'. For girls the new 'she' signifies both their continued liminality and their transition from childhood into girlhood. This is when they start moving farther and farther away from the home area and away from the protection of their mothers and women folks slowly by slowly. This is when they need the protection of their *addooyee* peers as they start going out to fetch water and firewood and school or herd sheep and goats and other small animals. For boys, age 8 is a transition from 'she' to 'he' and from childhood to boyhood. Boys become real 'he' as their *Dabballee* hair is shaven and they are initiated into *Foollee*, their first *gadaa* age-grade, as *real* males. *Dabballee* signifies the liminal stage of childhood where boys are referred to as 'she'.

For girls, this is when they start shaving their hair into *qarree* style and become *real* girls. *Qarree* [tonsure] is a round shaven part at the crown of a girl's head (Bartels 1983). Girls in other parts of the Oromo land wear their *qarree* differently. For example, Holcomb describes *qarree* as "the small portion of hair at the crown braided separately from the other hair. This is shaved at marriage" (1973: 125). Where I was growing up, *qarree* is the shaved part and it is shaved for the last time at the girl's marriage. From then on, she becomes a woman and hair grows where *qarree* used to be. *Qarree* symbolizes the unmarried status of marriageable girls. It also symbolizes virginity. The *Addooyee* songs in Chapter 7 of this book are replete with *qarree* symbolisms and haunting wails of mourning for the loss of *qarree*.

The *addooyee* girlhood blossoms in full when girls court *dargaggeessa* [young men] and when they go to night time dance parties in full moon.

Although mothers do take the girls to these parties, they do not intrude into their private spaces when they dance with the young men they are courting. The girls are pretty much on their own and they are completely free to kiss and neck with the young men. Where I grew up, the practice of kissing and necking is known as *qabdo* and sometimes as *shaaxaraa*. Sexual intercourse however is strictly forbidden. Indeed virginity is highly valued and there are serious consequences for the girl who loses her virginity (Bartels 1983; Holcomb 1973; Legesse 1973; Qashu 2009) and of course for the man who takes her virginity as well. This is when the girls need the protection of their *addooyee* peers against the *dargaggeessa*, just in case they cross the line and go beyond necking and kissing. They also monitor each other in case the girls themselves are tempted to cross the boundary.

The transgression of this boundary, a boundary that keeps everyone and everything in its place and in peace, amounts to the loss of *safuu*. Everyone, girls, women and men alike consider it their sacred duty to protect the respectful boundaries of *safuu*. Since the loss of *safuu* has terrible consequences both in spiritual and cultural terms, girls protect each other to save each other from the terrible consequences of losing their *qarree* [virginity]. *Qarree* is praised and losing *qarree* is despised in the various *addooyee* songs in Chapter 7 of this book.

For a girl, the period of wearing *qarree* comes to an end in a very dramatic way on the day of her marriage. For weeks before her marriage, her *addooyee* peers gather in the evenings and sing elaborate songs and haunting wails of *seena* [farewell] songs. They sing together and cry together. They sing for the mother, the father and the eldest brother to plead with them not to give away their *addooyee*. If the girl has brothers, the eldest of her brothers is seen as a father figure (even if he is younger than her!) and he is involved in the decision to give her away. This is because he is the one who inherits the homestead.

In gut-wrenching lyrics and sweet melodies, the girls plead with them to spare their friend. They counsel their *addooyee* on what to do and what not to do and how to live among the *halagaa* [strangers] of her future husband's *gosa* [clan] and *qomoo* [sub-clan]. They prepare her psychologically for what is considered a very harsh traumatic transition (Bartels 1983; Holcomb 1973;

Kumsa 2004; Qashu 2009; Tegegn 2006). Not only does the girl go to a strange land, she also lives with the strange people of her husband's clan. Before she even starts that life, she has to go through the excruciating physical and emotional pain of being deflowered and losing her cherished *qarree*. Her *addooyee* peers support her in this transition up to the time when the *soddaa* [bridegroom] comes and takes her away.

On the last day, when this *halagaa* [stranger] comes to take away their *addooyee*, the *addooyee* peers come out and sing the most obscene insult songs in a desperate bid to prevent him from taking away their *addooyee*. They shame and embarrass the *soddaa* [bridegroom/in-law] and his *hamaamota* [bridegroom's party]. They insult him and his party and his clan and sub-clan. They insult them when they approach; they insult them when they sit down to eat. They refuse to let them in or come anywhere near their *addooyee*. They put up both physical and symbolic refusal by blocking the gate and then the door, all the while pouring down torrents of obscene insult songs on the bridegroom and his *hamaamota*. They continue to hurl insults at them to the very last minute of the bridegroom's departure with their beloved *addooyee*. While the spectacle of the symbolic resistance is playful and joyful and makes everyone laugh and often ends with songs of reconciliation, the separation of their friend is a gut-wrenching experience for the girlfriends (Abera 2003; Kumsa 2004; Tegegn 2006). They see her off with the most loving and haunting farewell song and come back crying inconsolably. Her beautiful *qarree* is lost, they sing. When *qarree* is lost we are lost, they sing. *Halagaa* has taken away their cherished *qarree*.

Their *addooyee* turned bride now faces the same obscene insult songs when she arrives in *biyya ormaa* [foreign country], the land of the bridegroom. She lands among *halagaa* and she is insulted by the *halaga* girls of the bridegroom's clans and sub-clans. There, she is the intruding *halagaa* alien. Also, the elaborate symbolic confrontation between girlhood and womanhood is played out there. Girls in the bridegroom's clan pour down obscene insults on her head. They insult her when she approaches, they insult her when she arrives, they insult her when she comes in and sits. They block the gate and then the door to refuse her entrance – a symbolic refusal of entrance into the clan and sub-clan system. They insult her for betraying the beauty of their

addooyyee girlhood and succumbing to the repulsive state of *nadhummaa* or *dubartummaa* [womanhood]. They protest the imminent transgression of *safuu* and they put up a symbolic fight to protect the sacred boundaries.

Although the new girl often cries profusely and she is taunted even for crying, here too the spectacle of symbolic refusal is playful and joyful and often ends with beautiful loving and welcoming songs of reconciliation. For the new girl, however, the *siiqqee* she is given that day opens the door to a whole new world of women. Once the confrontation is performed and she makes the transition into womanhood, she joins Oromo women who also have their own elaborate systems and institutions of *siiqqee* solidarity.

If *addooyyee* is a transitional institution that ends with the marriage of the girls, what happens if there is no marriage for a girl? While the normative goal for a girl is to get married and establish her belonging by giving birth, some girls may not get married for any number of reasons. If girls are *halagaa* [strangers] in their own families and clans, the unmarried girl that stays behind after all her *addooyyee* peers are gone is the *halagaa* of all *halagaas*. She is an oddity alienated and referred to as *haftuu* [spinster]. Normally girls are married by age 20 at the latest. After that, they become *haftuu* (Kumsa Boro 2009). If they marry after that, the marriage is referred to as *gaa'ila haftuu* [marriage of the spinster]. The *haftuu* is still *durba qarree* [virgin girl], still shaves and wears her *qarree* and is still in the *addooyyee* institution, although without her own set of *addooyyee* age-mates. Literally and pejoratively, *haftuu* means remainder and the girl is referred to as *isee ijaajjitee hafte* [one that remained standing]. Remaining standing signifies not having a place for sitting down and settling down in life. The *haftuu* remains standing to receive something that is still waiting to happen.

The Oromo culture has several quite elaborate paths to marriage, which opens up several possibilities for the *haftuu* (Bartels 1983; Gidada 1984; Holcomb 1973; Kumsa Boro 2009). In his critical analysis of *haftuu*, Kumsa Boro (2009: 272-275) offers sharp insights into the various types of marriage in traditional Oromo culture. He particularly elaborates on four types. First, *kennaa* [giving away] is when all parties, including families on both sides, agree to the marriage and the girl is given away. Second, *hiikkannoo* [eloping] is when the young man and woman love each other but the families do not

approve of the marriage and the two elope. Third, *butii* [kidnapping] is when the young man loves the young woman but she does not love him back and he kidnaps her. Finally, *aseennaa* is when the young woman loves the man but the man does not love her back and she forces him to marry her.

If *aseennaa* is the type of marriage that allows a girl to marry the man of her choice, then the *haftuu* can take this path if she wants to marry. She simply gathers *hiddii* [wild fruit symbolizing her fertility], goes to the man's house, spreads the *hiddii* under the *utubaa* [pole] to symbolize the many children she will give him, and announces that she came to marry this man. The man cannot refuse to marry her and the marriage is considered as respectable and socially and legally sanctioned as any of the other types of marriage. This is also one of the moments when female sacredness and spiritual power comes into play. The man cannot refuse to marry her because he honours the female power associated with *safuu* as well as her special closeness to *Waaqa* and the spiritual power that emanates from that closeness.

After all is said and done and after multiple forms of *addooyee* institutions have come and gone, the *addooyee* songs remain echoing through time and space as haunting and gut-wrenching songs of exile. I often wonder if it is just a coincidence that young women in the Oromo diaspora are picking up *addooyee* at this time and age in our people's journey or if they are intuitively connecting to the profound experience of exile. *Addooyee* songs are haunting songs of exile. They are known by different names in different parts of the Oromo land but they are all gut-wrenching wails of exile, separation from the homeland, and not belonging anywhere. In the old days, girls viewed marriage as exile since they were exiled at once from two interwoven strings constituting their cherished sense of home and identity.

First, marriage is exile because girls are separated from the world they have known as home, plucked out of the people they have known as relatives and taken to strange lands to live among *halagaa* [strangers]. Secondly, girls are also exiled from their cherished *addooyee* girlhood and thrown into what they see as despicable plight of womanhood. The *addooyee* songs in Chapter 7 accentuate this girlhood/womanhood binary in elaborate metaphors and images painting the beauty of girlhood and the ugliness of womanhood. The songs also speak to the ambivalent relationship of girls to womanhood – they

know it is inescapable but they also fear and despise it at the same time. And they deal with it in these elaborate rituals of songs and performances.

In this time and age, most Oromo girls marry only if they choose to and to the person of their choice. What does *addooyee* mean to them today in the Oromo diaspora? I intuit on the profound connections between the current conditions of exile, the generalized feelings of *halagummaa*²⁶ [not belonging anywhere, homeland or strange land], the socio-cultural and spiritual role of females in weaving together their disparate communities, and the parallel in the role of *safuu* in creating intricate egalitarian checks and balances. I see several paradoxes woven into these linkages.

First, it is ironic that girls who are considered *halagaa* in their own communities are also the very ones connecting communities that are *halagaa* to each other. Second, it is ironic that *halagaa* girls must first make a traumatic separation from their own communities in order to connect the various separated communities of *halagaa*. Third, it is ironic that females who do not belong anywhere are also the ones who belong everywhere. They are the ones who refuse the wars *halagaas* wage on each other.²⁷ I imagine hearing them tell the warring parties: *Stop it! That's my family out there!* In this, they play out the role of *safuu*, the floating glue that holds together everything and everyone in the cosmos. It is no accident, then, that both *addooyee* girls and *siiqqee* women consider it their sacred duty to restore *safuu* when it is disrupted. And all this is deeply rooted in the spiritual profundity of Oromo cosmology to which I now turn.

²⁶ Here the notion of *halagummaa* is closest to what Edward Said calls generalized sense of homelessness in the context of exile.

²⁷ I see strong parallel between the bonding role of females in Oromo society and the bonding role of refugees (perhaps even other migrants) in the contemporary globalized world.

The Spiritual Roots

My conceptualization of Oromo cosmology comes out of the various formal and informal studies and self-studies that I have conducted on and off over the last four decades. What I present to you in a condensed form here is what I wove together from bits and fragments of our ancestors' knowledge that I gathered from various revered oral sources and some written texts. It is full of holes at this point but it is coherent enough to help me make sense of our people's reality. I see it as a collective patchwork in progress waiting for the contribution of your generation. I invite you to grab it, rework it, make it your own and pass it on to the next generation. Here I will map out the themes of Oromo cosmology that I find relevant for understanding *Songs of Exile*. I will start with *Waaqa and Ayyaana* and touch on two deeply interwoven themes, *Safuu and Kobuu* and *Nama and Namummaa*. I then conclude with *Faajjii Walaabuu*, which I believe is the philosophical core of Oromo cosmology.

Waaqa and Ayyaana

For Oromos, *Waaqa* creates everything – animate and inanimate, material and non-material – and weaves them into an intricately interrelated, interdependent, and well-balanced egalitarian cosmic order. This totality of creation is referred to as *uumama* (Bartels 1983; Kumsa Boro 2009; Megerssa 1990, 1993, 2005; Ujuluu 2004). *Waaqa* is one but It²⁸ is also simultaneously many, as manifested in the myriad *Ayyaana*.²⁹ This sense of *Waaqa-Ayyana* dualism is tied in with the singularity-multiplicity paradox in the ancient Egyptian divinities, which Gadalla (2003) calls “the All who are the One”.

Waaqa and *ayyaana* have multiple interrelated meanings which form the deeply interwoven threads of Oromo cosmology. Everything and everybody in the entire cosmos is endowed with a unique *ayyaana* [spirit] of

²⁸ Here I use It not in the sense of thingness or third person neutral but in the sense of *Waaqa* that includes all genders and all persons. And I capitalize it not to signify greatness but to decipher it from the ordinary pronoun.

²⁹ *Ayyaana* means spirit. The deeper spiritual significance will be discussed further down.

its own (Bartels 1969, 1983; Knutsson 1967; Kumsa Boro 2009; Østebø 2007, 2009; Van de Loo 1991; Zitelmann 2005). God is one and eternal in *Waaqa* at the same time as It is many and finite in *ayyaana*. The spirit of singularity and multiplicity in these divinities permeates everything and everybody, including humans and nonhumans, flora and fauna, animate and inanimate beings in the cosmos. While *Waaqa* and *ayyaana* are understood in various ways, here I take *ayyana* to refer to the uniqueness of each being/body and *Waaqa* to refer to the oneness of all, as in the All who are the One (Gadalla 2003).

In one of its many meanings, *ayyaana* refers to a day, a specific day with a unique constellation of stars which gives the day its unique spirit. In this sense *ayyaana* also refers to the unique spirit of a specific day in the Oromo time-reckoning system of monthly cycle of thirty days. Each day of the month has its unique *ayyaana* spirit. Likewise, every person has a unique *ayyaana*, meaning born to a specific people, in a specific place, and on a specific day endowed with a unique constellation of stars and a unique spirit. The person takes the spirit of the day on which they are born. This is very much like what folks here refer to as their horoscope but with a much deeper spiritual connotation. In this sense, *ayyaana* could be viewed as one's luck or destiny. Thus, in reference to humans, every person is endowed with a unique spirit, comes into life and leaves life according to the finitude of *ayyaana*, but lives on according to the infinity and eternity of *Waaqa*. Yet in another twist, a person's *ayyaana* does not die even when the person dies. Moreover, besides their individual *ayyaana*, every human and nonhuman is also endowed with the *ayyaana* of everyone and everything in the entire cosmos, hence yet another thread weaving together the oneness of all.

Oromo child naming affirms the oneness of all and the uniqueness of each. When a child is born, it is given *maqaa ayyaana* [spirit name] by the *ayyaantu* [people of the spirit]. The *ayyaantu* listen for the spirits of the times, interpret the signs of the intricate interrelationships among cosmic constellations, intuit on the intimate intertwining of the human and the divine, and name the child. My own paternal grandfather, Boroo Labuu, was one such *ayyaantu* (Kumsa Boro 2009). Child naming practices differ in the different localities of Oromo land and there are important differences between a child's spirit name and ordinary name. As an Oromo proverb goes, *maqaan ayyaana*

hin tahu [a name cannot be an *ayyaana*]. This means that naming a child does not mean much unless the name reflects the *ayyaana*. Even if a child is given a different name, it is the *ayyaana* that takes hold. However, sometimes the *ayyaantu* intentionally give a child a name that does not reflect the *ayyaana* of the child. They do that with the hope and prayer that a good name may compensate for a bad *ayyaana* (Kumsa Boro 2009). This multiplicity of *ayyaana* and singularity of *Waaqa* in Oromo cosmology permeates the blessings and prayer songs in Chapter 3. In these songs, people refer to *Waaqa* as *tokkicha maqaa dhibbaa* [the one with a hundred names], which is a reference to the one-ness of *Waaqa* and the many-ness of *ayyaana*.

Whether god creates people in Its own image or people create god in their own image, it seems to me that there is a fundamental likeness between people and their gods. The Oromo notion of *nama* [human] reflects this likeness of Oromos with Oromo divinities. In this light, I take the Oromo *Waaqa* to reflect all the diversity of Oromos. Except for Megerssa (2012, 2013) who asserts that *Waaqa* is neither male nor female, students of Oromo religion, even those who seek further research into what the Oromo god looks like, refer to *Waaqa* as He (Aguilar 2009; Baldick 1997; Baxter and Kassam 2005, Bokku 2011, Van de Loo 1991). Multiple paradoxes emerge from the simultaneous one-ness and many-ness of god. For example, god is *nama* and god is not *nama*; god is gendered and not gendered; god is infinite and infinitesimal; god is old and new; god is change and fixity; god is here and there; god is everything and nothing; god is motion and stasis; god knows and knows not; god is the pull and the push of all cosmic bodies. And these are paradoxes as they are neither separable from nor reducible to each other.

The songs in the oncoming chapters, especially the birth songs in Chapter 4, are steeped with these paradoxes and ambiguities of Oromo divinities. Women evoke *Waaqa* both as plural and singular and as human and nonhuman. Especially in the *gurraalee* [the black ones] song, women play with these ambiguities as they welcome *gurraalee*, which is both plural and singular, both god and human, both the newborn child and all newborn children, both human and animal.³⁰ In the songs praising *Maaram*, the female

³⁰ *Gurraalee* [black ones] also refers to *gafarsa* [buffalo] in songs of bravery praising men for killing wild animals. It must be noted here that such killing also has spiritual function in Oromo

deity, women talk with *Maaram* and they tease her and play with her as just another human. And they praise the woman who gave birth as a divinity and play with the human-nonhuman and singularity-multiplicity of the *Waaqa-ayyaana* divinities. The ambiguities deeply ingrained in these simple songs come from the deep cosmic unity and diversity that seeps into the checks and balances of *safuu*, which in turn permeate all moral codes and ethical principles of *gadaa* egalitarianism. It regulates the everyday relations and the broader relations of Oromos with the divinities, with each other, with others, and with the totality of *uumama*, including animate and inanimate nature.

Safuu and Kobuu

I imagine *safuu* as the power of *Waaqa* that pulls together everything and everyone into a well ordered egalitarian balance. I see the *safuu* checks and balances as replete with simultaneous unity and diversity that hail from the simultaneous unity and diversity of Oromo divinities. In *safuu*, everything and everybody in the cosmos is in its own place in respectful distance and interdependence with each other (Bartels 1983; Hassen 1990; Megerssa 1993, 2005). Indeed Oromos believe that the unsettlement or loss of such intricately balanced interdependence signals the ultimate catastrophic chaos. I will tentatively name this apocalypse as *kobuu*³¹. In this light, then, *kobuu* signifies the transgression of these intricate boundaries and the fraying of the dynamic threads that weave together the disparate members of the entire diverse cosmos into a unified and balanced egalitarian order. If *safuu* is disrupted and unravelled, Oromos consider it their sacred duty to restore the balance before anything else in life. This is because *safuu* constitutes the precondition and the profound basis of life itself. Loss of *safuu* is loss of creation itself.

Thinking about *safuu* in such neat interconnectedness, interdependence, balance, and harmony among all cosmic beings paints a rosy utopic picture as in Bartels (1983), Hassen (1990), and Megerssa (1993, 2005). We desire *safuu*

cosmology where hunters must first give thanks to the *ayyana* of the animal before they even touch the animal for trophy or for meat. This is called *irreeffachuu*, giving thanks.

³¹ *Kobuu* is a specific transgression of *safuu* as I will discuss later.

so much that we deny *kobuu*, the elephant in the room. I argue, however, that *safuu* is only part of the story in the grand scheme of Oromo cosmology. To get a holistic view, we need to consider the notion of *kobuu*, the dystopia intimately twined with *safuu*. As survivors of colonial genocide whose ways of knowing and being in the world are on the verge of extinction, our contemporary reality demonstrates more the dystopia of *kobuu* than our deepest desires of *safuu*. Negating unity and balance, then, *kobuu* signifies fragmentation, separation, imbalance and discord within and among all cosmic beings. While *safuu* represents forces that pull together all cosmic beings, *kobuu* represents forces that tear them apart, much like the attraction and repulsion of centripetal and centrifugal forces in Newtonian physics. In my view, then, what holds everything together is not just *safuu* but the delicate balance jointly generated by both forces of push and forces of pull.

In the simultaneous stasis and motion and fixity and fluidity of the cosmos, *safuu* denotes the intricate checks and balances that hold them all together while in motion. It signifies intricate boundaries of respectful distance among all beings, again, while in motion. Intimately twined with harmonizing forces of checks and balances, however, I also see forces of chaos and disruption that upset the dynamic balance, forces that violate respectful distance whereby boundaries are transgressed and beings are spilled into each other, torn apart, or mend and blend.

At this point in time, I cannot find a unified Oromo word that represents all the forces of chaos and disruption. I did find several words like *haraamuu*, *kedii*, and *kobuu*³² all signifying various layers of boundary transgression, disruption of respectful distance, and loss of *safuu*. Megerssa (2012, 2013) asserts that there is no unified Oromo concept or phenomenon in opposition to *safuu* and representing total collapse and chaos. Perhaps loss of *safuu* is a denied dystopia with no name. Therefore, my use of *kobuu* as a unifying concept is arbitrary and tentative. I do hope, however that, as a people in search of our lost ways of knowing, we will come up with a concept in our ongoing process of innovation. We discover as we innovate and innovate as

³² I dug up these words from my conversations with Aagaa Magarsaa Ruudaa and Gammachu Magarsaa Ruudaa. These words signify boundary transgression in the specific context of sexual relations taboo within generations and across generations.

we discover. For us, these are not mutually exclusive but mutually constitutive and mutually transformative processes.

Conceptualizing *safuu* and *kobuu* in this way has a peculiar impact on the notions of time and space. In Oromo cosmology, time and space are far from linear; they are cyclical. They imply that the cosmos is in the process of ongoing wear and tear, rebirth, renewal and new beginnings. Oromos refer to these repetitive and cyclical natural processes as *mara* or *marsaa*. *Mara-marsaa* permeates all cycles from day and night to death and rebirth. In *mara-marsaa* cycles of rebirth and transformation, *safuu* signifies processes of unification and *kobuu* signifies processes of differentiation. Perhaps this is similar to Hegelian dialectics and its Marxist inversion in materialist dialectics. Indeed this has been picked up nicely in Oromo studies to signify *safuu* as the harmony of unity-in-diversity (Hassen 1990; Jalata 1993; Megerssa 1990). There are similarities in the notions of unity-in-diversity in dialectics and *safuu*. However, I want to note the differences as well because there are profound philosophical differences between the Hegelian-Marxist dialectics and the notion of unity-in-diversity in Oromo cosmology.

First, Hegelian and materialist dialectics wrestle over the primacy of consciousness and matter whereas in the Oromo notions of *safuu* and *kobuu*, matter and consciousness are inseparably interwoven, with neither one claiming primacy. Second, in dialectics, we see the struggle of opposites for dominance and subordination but in *safuu* and *kobuu* we see *gadaa* egalitarianism at the core of the checks and balances. Third, in dialectics, the source of social transformation is the tension between these oppositional struggles whereas in the *mara-marsaa* cycles of *safuu* and *kobuu*, active opposition (as in *Oboo* and *Cooraa* in consecutive generations, for example) is only one moment and only one face of the relational process. Thus dialectics leaves out the equally important face and moment of the process, namely active collaboration (as in *Oboo* and *Oboo* or *Cooraa* and *Coora* in the alternate generations). Intricate checks and balances are created between active opposition and active collaboration. Indeed it is these tensions in the various cycles of the *mara* that constitute social transformation.

In the natural *mara* of the precarious *safuu-kobuu* balance, ordinary cycles of incremental tensions build up to extraordinary ruptures periodically

(Megerssa 2012, 2013). This loss of *safuu* and the catastrophic explosion into *kobuu* signifies the rage of the totality known as *saglii*. According to custodians of Oromo culture, *saglii* comes from the number *sagal* [nine], which signifies the end of one cycle and the start of another (Megerssa 1993, 2005, 2012, 2013). *Sagliin marte* means nine has repeated/returned, a cycle is completed. Drastic disruption of the *safuu-kobuu* balance is a signal that the system cannot maintain itself, that it is heaving for renewal.

In the cyclical repetitions of the *gadaa* time reckoning system of *ayyaana*, 30 days repeat to make a month (the notion of weeks is contested in this tradition), 12 months repeat to make a year, 8 years repeat to make a *gadaa*, 5 *gadaas* repeat to make a *mara gadaa*, a full *gadaa* cycle (40 years). Incremental changes in the *safuu-kobuu* tensions of these ordinary cycles move into extraordinary disruption of *gadaa*, which Oromos call *gadaan jaatame* [*gadaa* turned 60], according to Megerssa (2012, 2013). Custodians of *ayyaana* say that this happens within the last *jaarraa* [century] of every 480 years (60 x 8). *Gadaa* turning sixty signals a time of utter violence and fundamental renewal and healing (Megerssa 1993, 2005, 2012, 2013). However, every renewal drastically differs from the previous cycle at the same time as it is also strikingly similar to it. And the paradox repeats itself.

The egalitarian principles of *gadaa* are based on the validation of the intimate relationship between such violence and healing, death and rebirth. *Gadaa* creates a delicate balance between the powers of the divine and the human, the human and other cosmic beings, the physical and the spiritual, the male and the female, the old and the young, the dead and the living, the born and the unborn, the present and the absent. When this egalitarian ethos is too stressed and the balance of powers is upset, the system unravels into *kobuu* signifying the rage of the totality. This rage is simultaneously a practice of healing and renewal to restore the egalitarian balance of *safuu*.

Beyond these natural *mara* cycles, however, *safuu* is also disrupted by human atrocities as in the violence of colonial aggression or the violence of domination by greedy and power lusty individuals and groups. In my view, it is the recognition of such human actions and to counter the violence in both natural disasters and human atrocities that the egalitarian ethos of *gadaa* were developed. Indeed there are two intimately related sets of law, *seera*

Waaqaa [God's law] and *seera namaa* [human law] to restore *safuu* in times of both ordinary and extraordinary disasters and atrocities (Kumsa1997; Kumsa Boro 2009; Megerssa 2005).

The Oromo culture also has elaborate strategies of releasing such systemic tensions and stresses to prevent violent eruptions and maintain the respectful boundaries of *safuu-kobuu* balance. As Tusso (1998, 2000) explains in the various Oromo conflict management strategies and as I suggest in my note on insult songs and mock fights, these cultural performances are Oromo conflict prevention strategies. You will see these in the birth songs of Chapter 4 and the wedding songs of Chapter 7. Here women and girls intentionally violate *safuu* and hurl obscene insults and engage in symbolic fights. Since social taboo is lifted in these joyous moments, they do wild things they would normally avoid and they laugh profusely. After they enjoy the performance and the release of societal pressure, they call out, *safu, safuu* and start singing songs of love and reconciliation. Intentionally inducing the transgression of respectful boundaries and releasing the pressure in joyous settings is a way of reducing the ongoing wear and tear to the intricate balance of *safuu-kobuu*.

Nama and Namummaa

The notions of *nama* [human] and *namummaa* [humanness] derive from the intricate checks and balances and cyclical repetitions of *safuu* and *kobuu* which permeate all facets of life and all relations between *nama* and *nama*, between *nama* and *uumama* [creation] and between *nama* and the divinities. *Nama* signifies simultaneous finitude and eternity, one-ness and many-ness drawn from in the simultaneous one-ness and many-ness of the Oromo divinities. Although no English word fully captures the meaning of *nama* or *namummaa*, my closest translation of *nama* is human. *Nama* is the root word of *namummaa*, my closest English meaning of which is becoming human or simply humanness. In English, human has a gendered subtext where man is the fundament on which wo-man is predicated. In *nama*, we see the egalitarian core of *gadaa* where *nama* signifies all humans without the gender

subtext. If we want to signify gender, we have to add the suffix *-ittii* for female (*namittii*) and *-icha* for male (*namicha*).³³

Three core concepts sit at the heart of the Oromo worldview according to Bartels (1983) and Megerssa (1993, 2005): *ayyaana*, *safuu* and *uumama*. *Uumama* represents the totality of creation while *nama* is a small part of *uumaa*. *Namummaa* is then a sense of being part of the greater *uumama*. While I dispute the human-centeredness in Bartels and Megerssa, I frame their concept of *uumama* as symbolizing the totality of the cosmos and *nama* as just one type among many cosmic beings/bodies. Unlike the sense of identical humanness (promoted by Frantz Fanon 1967) and insubstitutable uniqueness (promoted by Hannah Arendt 1958, 1969), *nama* integrates both uniqueness and similarity into an intricate balance.

Unlike the notion of humanness that signifies the human-centeredness in both Fanon and Arendt, *namummaa* signifies the human as one form among the myriad inseparably interrelated beings in the cosmos with no particular center, all as intricately woven together into a balanced orderly dynamic of *safuu*, thread by thread. This notion of *namummaa* is also different from the notion of *Ubuntu* in the humanist philosophy of some African peoples (Forster 2006; Gade 2012; Ramose 2003; Tutu, 1999) where human-centeredness is maintained and cosmic interconnectedness is subsumed under Christian theology. *Namummaa* is similar to other indigenous cosmologies, a good example of which is made available in *Heartsick for Country* (Morgan, Tjalaminu, and Kwaymullina 2008). Within *safuu*, then, *nama* is only one moment in the relational movement and just one face in the infinite multiplicity of the cosmos. This contests the living/nonliving binary, including the humanness/thingness in Fanon and humanness/animal-ness in Arendt.

These multiplicities permeate everyday life of *nama* where *namummaa* is signified and practiced within such inseparably interwoven, reverent and sacred interrelationships of everything and everybody. The songs in the oncoming chapters make visible these intimate interrelationships between everything and everybody. When girls and women sing about the vines and

³³ In the current context of postmodern theoretical developments in gender studies, the notion of multiple genders resonates with *nama*, to which many suffixes can be added to signify the many genders.

mountain creepers, they are singing about the inseparable interrelationships between these plants and the bonding roles that girls and women play in connecting their communities. The cosmic bodies, the ritual objects, the plants and animals, and the deities they evoke all show their *namummaa* in the intricate relations of *safuu* with all things and objects living and non-living.

The worst insult in Oromo *nama-to-nama* relations is *nama miti* [not *nama*]. Not being *nama* disrupts the sacred wholeness that *namummaa* stands for in the sacred relations of *safuu* between *nama* and *nama*, between *nama* and *uamama*, and between *nama* and the divinities. The worst curse in Oromo is: *nama hin tahin; lubbuu hin badin* [don't become *nama*; don't die]. Not becoming *nama* is meaningless existence that makes death a luxury for the cursed. Another proverb goes: *yoo an nama dhabe jaala naa taata jennaan, yoo an namummaa dhaben sii taha jedhe*. This proverb translates as a dialogue between two men where one man says to the other, "if I don't find *nama*, you will be my best man" and the other replies, "only if I lose my *nammummaa* will I be your best man." The erasure of *nama* (personhood) amounts to the erasure of the totality of *namummaa* and the loss of *namummaa* amounts to the loss of *safuu*. The inseparable interconnection between the individual and the collective in *nama-to-nama* relations simultaneously spills into the relation between *nama* and *uamama* and *nama* and the divinities.

It is my contention that this sense of sacred wholeness is lost when *namummaa* is reduced to *Oromummaa* [Oromoness]. In the context of the Oromo national liberation struggle, *Oromummaa* defines Oromos as one among other humans and claims their rights of equality with all human beings. I profoundly believe that this is a sacred duty in and of itself in Oromo cosmology. I argue, however, that, in reinforcing the narrow modernist notions of human-centered nationalism, we lose sight of the egalitarian wholeness and intimate interconnection with all beings and bodies, human and nonhuman. The Oromo notion of *namummaa* helps us break out of this confining box and reclaim the incredible multiplicity of beings, thus decentering both the human and the national.

Likewise, *bilisummaa* [freedom/independence] is signified as liberation from Abyssinian colonialism. In the multivocality of the Oromo struggle, at one end of the spectrum, some interpret *bilisummaa* as freedom from all

forms of oppression while at the other end others give it the narrow statist definition of creating an independent Oromo state without reference to freedom from other forms of oppression. Again, I profoundly believe that the struggle for freedom, including flag independence, would be considered a sacred duty in Oromo cosmology. I argue, however, that here *bilisummaa* remains confined within the colonial/anticolonial context of nationalism. This sense of *bilisummaa* does reflect the modernist and liberal humanist notions of freedom and equality. However, in its human-centeredness, it reduces the intricate checks and balances in the simultaneous freedom and interwovenness of everything and everybody in *safuu*.

Faajjii Walaabuu

This holistic sense of unity-in-diversity and inseparable interwovenness of the entire cosmos permeates every facet of Oromo thinking and being in the world. It weaves through their sense of self and their inseparable relationship with each other, with others, with their divinities, and with all creation living and nonliving. Indeed, this holistic philosophy is crystallized in the Oromo language, culture, metaphors, riddles, proverbs, stories and songs (Kumsa Boro 2009). It is simplified and codified into the colors of the *Faajjii Walaabu* and passed on from generation to generation.

As I understand it, *Faajjii Walaabu* represents the emblem of Oromo cosmology. The word *faajjii* means emblem or flag. *Walaabu* is the Oromo place of origin in the Oromo myth of origin. As an Oromo saying goes, *uummeen Walaabu baate* [nature/life sprang out of *Walaabu*]. Many Oromos believe that their distant ancestors came from *Madda Walaabu* [the *Walaabu* Spring], a geographic place located in the south central part of the Oromo land (Bartels 1983; Kumsa Boro 2009). According to Megerssa (2012, 2013), however, the deeper meaning of *Walaabu* is the water of life out of which all of creation springs. I believe *Faajjii Walaabuu* ties into this myth of origin.

As a people who lost a whole way of life through colonial genocide, we are now searching, reinterpreting and reclaiming parts of our history, culture, and ancestral spirituality by bits and fragments. *Faajjii Walaabu* is one such

fragment, which, I argue, also sits at the heart of our ancestors' worldview. In my view, the core principles of Oromo cosmology are codified in the three primary colors of the *Faajjii Walaabu*: white, red, and black. These colors signify the temporal, spatial and spiritual orientations of Oromo relations. People narrated *Faajjii Walaabu* into their identity stories and wove it into children's stories and riddles, it into their songs and dances, it into their arts and crafts and clothes. They wore it on their bodies and wove it into their souls and carried it to wherever life took them.

The narratives of *Faajjii Walaabu* reflect the diverse multilocality and multivocality of the Oromo people. The color symbolisms are expressed slightly differently in different Oromo localities. For example in some areas white, red and black represent the three life-giving liquids in Oromo life – milk, blood and water. White stands for milk, red stands for blood, and black stands for water. The white and red symbolisms look sensible but black standing for water looks odd for the ordinary person. In the spiritual sense of Oromo sensibilities, however, it makes good sense. This is because water symbolizes the beginning of all life; it sustains all life; and it signifies the end of life. The miracle of how water stands for all this is likened to the unknown and unknowable darkness of *Waaqa*. In this light, black represents water, which represents the purity and mystery of *Waaqa*.

There is another version of the *Faajjii Walaabuu* color symbolism that I reinterpret from the teachings of a revered custodian of Oromo culture and respected elder, the late Dhinsa Lephisa Abba Jobir, may he rest in peace. I recorded, produced and broadcast this story as part of my journalistic work in the late 1970s. I owe it to the spirit of this revered elder, to the youth craving the teachings, and to my people to pass on his invaluable teachings, albeit limited and constrained by my limited understanding and interpreted from my uniquely globalized *ayyaana*. Baldick (1997) notes that the symbolism of these Faajjii colors has an ancient Afroasiatic root. However, the core meanings of the black God he describes are contrary to the teachings I received from this elder. While I have engaged Baldick's meanings in another work, here I follow my elder, in signifying *Fajjii Walaabu* as symbolizing Oromo cosmology. According to this elder, the inseparable interrelatedness of

all cosmic beings is reflected in the simple color symbolism of *adii* [white], *diimaa* [red], and *gurraacha* [black]:

Adii [White]

Adii [white] symbolizes the past, the ashes that remain behind after the living fire flickers out. White represents the remains of the past, *ekeraa* - the bones and the teeth and the skulls that remain behind after life flickers out and the flesh is shed. White represents our ancestors, the skeleton on which we are built and on which we stand up and walk around, the frame on which we build our life, and the trusted pillar on which we lean when in doubt. White symbolizes our ancestors that are gone and past but never gone and past, ancestors that are living and not living at the same time, and ancestors that are ever present in the endless eternal cycles of *maraa-marsaa* repetitions. White symbolizes cycles of coming and going, endless cycles of days and nights, infinite cycles of seasons, of life and death, of birth and rebirth, of germination and renewal.

Diimaa [Red]

Diimaa [red] symbolizes the present, the living fire, ember. Red represents the fire and energy of life, the living fire of the sun and the stars, the fiery energy in the womb of *Haadha Dachii* [Mother Earth], the magma and lava that spills out. Red represents flesh and blood, the flesh on our bones and the blood that courses our veins. It represents the blood spilt in wars, in sacrifice, in hunting, in killing, in eating, in birthing and in women's moon-ly cycles. It represents the invisible blood spilt when *Haadha Dachii* [Mother Earth] is wounded in farming, when trees and grasses are cut. Red symbolizes the invisible blood spilt in slaughtered coffee, the smokes absorbed, and the libations poured in elaborate rituals of sacrifice meant to maintain the balance of *safuu*. Red symbolizes interconnections of the elements in the blood that courses our veins, in the fiery energy the sun spits, the magma that *Haadha*

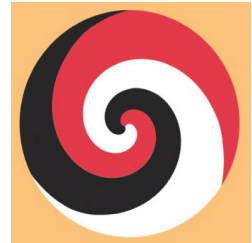
Dachii spits – the same elements that make the stars, the earth, the animals, and the plants. Red symbolizes the space of the living moment through which the past and the future and the far and the near whirl and twirl in endless cycles of *maraammartoo* [round and round turns].

Gurraacha [Black]

Gurraacha [Black] symbolizes the future, the unborn children, unborn children of the unborn children, unmade stars and planets, unopened seeds and unopened seeds of the unopened seeds. Black represents the interwoven ends and beginnings in the nine generations of *mara saglii* [completion of a cycle at nine] and the infinite cycles of *saglii* repetitions. Black symbolizes the unknown, the ineffable and the unknowable. Whatever is tentatively and cyclically known is known only in hindsight, as in the proverb: *beekkanneen gaafa jalaa bahan* [knowing is after surviving]. Black represents the various layers of knowing and not knowing, including the ineffable. Black represents the spirit, the pure, the holy, the sacred – *Waaqa*. Black represents God. When people ask for black water, they know water has no color but they mean pure water. When they ask for black coffee, they mean pure coffee without milk. Black symbolizes the spirit of uncertainty, not knowing, and vulnerability. The pitch black night is the path of God where people tread in blind trust. Black represents the dark space of peace and tranquility in deep space that, ironically, holds together the disparate agitations and movements of all the brilliant cosmic bodies.

How the colors of *Faajjii Walaabuu* are ordered in the Oromo flag is contested among contemporary Oromos. Some say the white must be on top followed by the red in the middle and placed on the black at the bottom. This narrative stresses the origin with the ancestors and their influence on the present generation and the rootedness of both in *Waaqa*. The other narrative flips this order and stresses beginning with the black on top as *Waaqa* is the source and beginning of everything. As a flag representation, I do not object to either side. However, I take issues with the linearity in both renditions when it

comes to emblematic representation. The spirit of *Faajjii Walaabuu* signifies inseparable interwoven-ness. However, in both of these linear presentations, the black and the white stay separated from each other as in the first two diagrams below. Neither ordering really captures the essence of the *maraa-marsaa* cycles at the deepest philosophical core of the *Faajjii*. I represent the emblem of the *Faajjii* in the spirit of the *maraa-marsaa* cycles as in the third diagram.³⁴ In this rendition, each moment in the dynamic cosmic movements of *Faajjii Walaabuu* weaves together the past and the future (time), the here and there (space), the human and the divine and the spiritual and the cultural.



³⁴ I thank Girma Gameda, an incredibly talented and gifted Oromo for his help in figuring out this particular representation. Girma, you are one precious person!

A Faajjii Walaabuu Story

The color symbolism of *Faajjii Walaabu* tells the stories of the All who are the One (Gadalla 2003), the story of *safuu* and *kobuu*, of *nama* and *namummaa*, of the individual and the totality, of unity and diversity. In the white, red, and white of the *Faajjii* colors, the bones form the frame of life; the flesh and blood form the life; the soul and spirit form the meaning of the life. Together they make the whole. In this holistic system, all three must exist together; if one is not, all are naught. The three colors and all they symbolize are inseparably interwoven and, therefore, separating the inseparable is a call for disaster. Oromos tell disastrous stories of separating the inseparable. I will retell in my own way a children's story that I grew up with, the story of the three oxen as narrated by my late father Kumsa Boro (2009: 84-86), may he rest in peace.

Once upon a time there were three oxen. They were white, red and black, the colors of Faajjii Walaabuu. Over the years the three oxen found the constant oppression of their owner so unbearable that they fled into the jungle. Shrugging off their oppression, there the three oxen lived enjoying their freedom. Whenever lions came to eat them, they put their behinds together and fought them off with their horns. With their behinds together at the center and their horns covering a full circle from the three angles, they were stronger than the strongest herd of lions. No lion could defeat or eat them. And the assembly of lions decided that it was only by dividing them that they could defeat and eat the oxen. And they sent a monkey to the oxen with the dividing mission.

The monkey went to visit with the oxen as a friend and was received well. He told them how good it was to have them in their jungle home and praised them for being good neighbors. But, he said, lately, the oxen had been attracting some dangerous wild beasts and that was disturbing for their neighbors. He told them that he was so concerned about their safety. Later on he took aside only the black and the red oxen and said to them: "Do you know why all these wild beasts come to eat you in the dark? It is because of the white one. You are as pitch black as the blackest night. You too are so dark even if you are red. Neither of you is visible in the dark. But

the white one is so white that all the beasts can spot him from afar. If you get rid of him, you will be safer. No lion will come and disturb the neighborhood anymore. You will live happily ever after.” So the black and red oxen told the white one to leave them alone and try it on his own. Alone, the white ox was devoured by the lions.

However, the black and the red oxen didn't live happily ever after. After all, the white ox was their strength, rather than their weakness. But the two continued to fight together. They still put their behinds together and fought with their horns. But this time they had to be more agile and move around to make up for the empty space of the white ox. It was much more stress on their part but still the wild beasts could not defeat them. So the lions sent the monkey again. This time the monkey called the black ox aside and told him why he thinks the lions are still fighting them. He told him that he was as black as the night. If he were alone the lions wouldn't even know he was there. It was the red one that was attracting the lions. If he got rid of him he would live happily ever after. So the black ox told the red one to go away. And the lions came and ate them both. Divided and separated, all the three oxen were eaten up one by one. The All who are the One is upset, safuu is lost -- and when one is eaten; all are eaten.

The lesson this story offers is multilayered. On the surface level, it is obvious that unity is strength and, yes, a divided house undoubtedly falls. However, there are much deeper lessons for us as Oromos.

Imagine what we would be without our skeleton – just a heap of flesh in a puddle of blood. What organizes us and gives us shape and form is our skeleton – our ancestors, our past, our history, our culture, our heritage, our ancestors' wisdom tested and tried through many thousands of years and passed on to us. It is the very frame of our life, the frame on which we stand and move around, that on which we stand tall and relate to others. Recall how the white ox was alienated and eaten first. When someone alienates us from our heritage and denigrates our ancestors' wisdom, *beware!* It is to devour us! Without our past, without our history and culture, we are reduced to dripping flesh and blood -- even with all the connecting tissues. Before they even get closer to our flesh and blood, colonial aggressors must first target our wisdom,

our history, culture, our knowledge system, and our entire way of being in the world. Once the discourse justifies the aggression, then they can get closer and devour us.

Now imagine what we would be without our flesh and blood, our immediate present. Without our red present, the very fire and energy of life itself is sucked out of us. Without the red vitality and activity of life, we are reduced to the bones and teeth lying in the cemeteries. We are dead. Life itself is lost. The attack on our flesh and blood is a brutal attack on the very physicality and materiality of life. It is the taking away of our land and homeland, our riches and natural resources, our lives and livelihoods. The discursive attack on our past has been accomplished. The attack is now on our bodies and lives. That is the source of our current suffering as individuals, as groups, and as a people.

Finally imagine what we would be without our spirit, without our future. Imagine *Waaqa's* people without the spirit of *Waaqa*. We are walking corpses, wandering about aimlessly and ceaselessly, drifting perpetually, not knowing where we're going or where we're coming from. The very essence of what we live for, our very meaning of life is lost. We drift through meaningless existence. We lose our spirit of *namummaa* along with all its intricate egalitarian interconnections with everything living and nonliving. When someone attacks our future, they are killing our hope, our sense of purpose, and our purpose of life. They are breaking our spirit. We are a people with broken spirit. Not knowing our own purpose of life, we become the purpose of life for others. Very sadly, this too is our current reality.

This is the deep wisdom of our ancestors encoded in *Faajjii Walaabuu* from the very little I have learned of it. When the intimate interconnectedness of everything and everybody is lost, when the egalitarian cosmic balance of *safuu* is lost, it is our sacred duty to restore it -- no matter how small we may feel in the face of the enormous challenge. We have enormous inspiration and hope encoded in the *maraa-marsaa* cycles of our ancestors' legacy. The current loss of *safuu* and the consequent suffering indicates the rage of the totality. The system is heaving for rebirth and renewal. Brighter days are ahead and we already have its foretaste in our people's movements of rebirth and in other peoples' movements around the world.

As you will find in the songs of the oncoming chapters, the *Faajjii Walaabuu* symbolism is woven into everyday lives and livelihoods of our people. The subtle and obvious references to the blackness of *Waaqa*, the references to the rain and the drought, the symbolisms of the plants and animals, the play with the moon the sun and the stars all signify the inseparable interwoven-ness of the entire cosmos. You will find these symbolisms of *Faajjii Walaabuu* in the songs; in the poems, poetic proses and lyrics; in the clothes people wear; in the stories they tell; in the food they eat and the environment in which they are immersed. There are deep economic, sociocultural and spiritual interconnections between people and their land, their livestock, and the entire environment (Kassam 1988; Klemm 2011; Labelle 2005). The clothes they wear, the ornaments they adorn themselves with are not just simple clothes and adornments. They express people's identities, sociocultural status and spiritual orientations. I hope this rendering of the Oromo cosmology will give you a bit of the depth from which the images and songs in the oncoming chapters are drawn.

Images of Ayyyolee

I would like to conclude this chapter by opening it up into the world of images, images that evoke the ancient and the spiritual in ways that speech and words cannot. These are images that I found in the deterritorialized space of the Internet but, ironically, they are powerful images that reterritorialize and re-root me. These are images of my foremothers that I have woven into the deepest fabric of my soul. I take them to presentations and conferences and put them on the screen as part of my greeting/blessing rituals. With my foremothers in my back – not coming towards me and intruding into my work, not walking away from me leaving me alienated, just being there and doing their own things – I feel grounded and centered enough to give my presentation confidently. I stand tall and walk about because they form the frame of my being and becoming. Thanking Herb Lewis for making them available, I pass on these images to you with a prayer that they evoke in you our foremothers' spirit and lead you into the songs of the oncoming chapters.



Older Oromo women from the 1960s Ambo area with their beautiful *siiqqee* sticks of honour and the colors of *Faajjii Walaabuu* woven into the fabrics of what they wear. Their distinctive hairstyle indicates that they are addressed as 'he' which indicates their increased spiritual power as they grow older. Photo credit – Herbert Lewis and University of Wisconsin–Madison. African Studies Program, Africa Focus.



Younger Oromo women from the 1960s Ambo area paying tribute to the Oromo Water Spirit *Ofa* by using their traditional musical instruments of bamboo flutes, making music and singing. Photo credit – Herbert Lewis and University of Wisconsin-Madison. African Studies Program, Africa Focus.



An older Oromo woman from the 1960s Ambo area bringing tribute to the Oromo Water Spirit. Photo credit – Herbert Lewis and University of Wisconsin–Madison. African Studies Program, Africa Focus.

Chapter 3 -- Kadhata [Prayer Songs]

A traditional Oromo woman starts her day with prayers and blessings. Women sing prayer songs for various purposes, including praying for rain, for children, for wellness, for cattle, for thanksgiving and for peace. And there are so many genres of prayer songs. Below you find three genres. The first one is *kadhata ganamaa* [morning prayer]. The second one is *asaabalee*³⁵ and it is an ordinary women's prayer song. Women sing this anytime. The third one is *Haadha Dachii* [Mother Earth]. Women sing this in praise of Mother Earth.

*Kadhata Ganamaa*³⁶

The first song is a representation of an Oromo woman's morning prayers in the old times. Typically, prayer songs start with calling on *Waaqa*. A woman begins her day by handing herself to the grace of *Waaqa*, the *Waaqa* of her ancestors – *Waaqa uumaa ummamaa* [the creator of everything and everyone], *Waaqa Gurraacha* [the Black God], *Waaqa Madda Walaabuu* [God of the *Walaabuu* Springs], the Oromo place-water of origin. She thanks *Waaqa* for the night of peace and prays for a day of peace. As she moves to wash her hands, wash her face, and open her gate, she prays to *Waaqa*: I wash my hands and leave myself in your hands; I wash my face and leave myself in your face. And so it goes as she goes through the rituals of every morning.

The version of the song I offer here is what we perform in the diaspora individually and collectively. It is our way of making home and connecting to our foremothers and creating a spiritual union with them from such a distance in time and space and culture. The intimate interconnectedness of everything and everyone in the cosmos comes out very clearly in this prayer song. I am blown away by the mesmerizing beauty of women singing together in this call-and-response style. It puts me in some sort of a trance. I really love it. The song begins with calling on the *Waaqa* of our ancestors, moves through the individual woman's morning rituals and dissolves into collective payers and blessings. It is really beautiful. Enjoy!

³⁵ *Asaabala* is the name of a small colorful bird. *Asaabalee* is an endearment for *asaabala*.

³⁶ *Kadhata ganamaa* means morning prayers.

Yaa Waaq dura sin waama woo
 Waaqa uumaa uumamaa
 Dura sin waama woo
 --- Yaa Waaq dura sin waama woo
 Waaqa uumaa ganamaa
 Dura sin waama woo
 --- Yaa Waaq dura sin waama woo
 Yaa Waaqa Gurraacha
 Dura sin waama woo
 --- Yaa Waaq dura sin waama woo
 Waaqa Madda Walaabuu
 Dura sin waama woo
 --- Yaa Waaq dura sin waama woo
 Nagaan nu bulchitee
 Nagaan nu oolchi mee
 --- Yaa Waaq nagaan nu oolchi mee

*O Waaq*³⁷ I call you first of all
O Waaqa creator of creation
 I call you first of all
 --- *O Waaq* I call you first of all
Waaqa creator of the morning³⁸
 I call you first of all
 --- *O Waaq* I call you first of all
O Black Waaqa
 I call you first of all
 --- *O Waaq* I call you first of all
O Waaqa of the *Walaabuu* Springs³⁹
 I call you first of all
 --- *O Waaq* I call you first of all
 You have given us a peaceful night
 Give us a peaceful day
 --- *O Waaq* give us a peaceful day

Karra koo banadhee
 Karra keetti hafe woo
 --- Yaa Waaq karra keetti hafe woo
 Fuulakoo dhiqadhee
 Fuula keetti hafe woo
 --- Yaa waaq fuula keetti hafe woo
 Harka koo dhiqadhee
 Harka keetti hafe woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafe woo

I have opened my gate
 I'm left at your gate
 --- *O Waaq* I'm left at your gate
 I have washed my face
 I'm left in your face
 --- *O Waaq* I'm left in your face
 I've washed my hands
 I'm left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* I'm left in your hands

³⁷ *Waaqa* is the Oromo word for god. *Waaq* is the short form for *Waaqa*. *Waaqayyo* is both endearment and diminutive.

³⁸ Morning here doubles as beginning, origin in the layered meanings of the Oromo language.

³⁹ *Madda Walaabuu* [the *Walaabuu* Springs] is the Oromo place of origin in the Oromo myth of creation. A common saying goes, *uummeen Walaabuu* baate, which means creation came out of *Walaabuu*. According to Megerssa (2012, 2013) *Madda Walaabuu* is not just the geographical place but it also symbolizes the original spring from which all life comes.

Gurraacha garaa garbaa
 Harka keetti hafe woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafe woo
 Guungumaa garaa roobaa
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafe woo
 Tokkicha maqaa dhibbaa
 Harka keeti hafe woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafe woo
 Ayyaana haadhaa abbaa
 Harka keetti hafe woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafe woo

Black whose belly is the ocean
 I'm left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* I'm left in your hands
 One whose belly grumbles with rain
 --- *O Waaq* I'm left in your hands
 The One with a hundred names⁴⁰
 I'm left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* I'm left in your hands
 The spirits of mothers and fathers
 I'm left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* I'm left in your hands

Dachiif qoolloon naggaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Bakkalchaa urjiin naggaa
 Harkakeetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harkakeetti hafne woo
 Biiftuu baatiin naggaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Caaccuu kallachaan naggaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keeti hafne woo
 Okolee ciicoo naggaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 ---- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo

Earth and heaven in peace⁴¹
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 The morning star and stars in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 The morning sun and the moon in
 peace --- We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
Caaccuu and *kallacha* in peace⁴²
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
Okolee and *ciicoo* in peace⁴³
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands

⁴⁰ Here the one with a hundred names refers to the one Waaqa and the many Ayyaana in the paradoxical monotheism and polytheism of god in Oromo religion. God is one in Waaqa and many in Ayyaana – just like Gadalla's the All who are the One (2003).

⁴¹ Here in peace also doubles as in place, meaning everything and everyone in their place and in their respectful distance in the intricate balance of safuu.

⁴² Caaccuu and kallacha are female and male symbols respectively. They are ritual objects used in rituals and celebrations.

⁴³ Okolee and ciicoo are utensils associated with milking and sipping respectively.

Maatii waatiin nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Alaa manaan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Guddaa xiqqaan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Sa'aa namaan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Horiif hormaataan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Binoof bineensaan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo

Children and calves in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Outside and inside in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Older and younger in peace
 We'er left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Cattle and people in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Animals and produce in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Wild beasts in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands

Tulluuf malkaan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Gaaraaf sululli nagaa
 Harkakeetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Roobaaf caamaan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Bubbeef qilleensaan nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo
 --- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo
 Margaaf biyyoon nagaa
 Harka keetti hafne woo

The hills and valleys in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 The mountains and basins in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Rains and dry times in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Winds and storms in peace
 We're left in your hands
 --- *O Waaq* we're left in your hands
 Grasses and soil in peace
 We're left in your hands

--- Yaa Waaq harka keeti hafne woo	--- <i>O Waaq</i> we're left in your hands
Minaaniif bishaaniin nagaa	Food and water in peace
Harka keetti hafne woo	We're left in your hands
--- Yaa Waaq harka keetti hafne woo	--- <i>O Waaq</i> We're left in your hands
Gara dhugaan kee oolte nu oolchi	Place us on the side of your truth
--- Nu oolchi	--- place us
Irraa-gora nu oolchi	Save us from deviating from it
--- Nu oolchi	--- Save us
Dogoggora nu oolchi	Guard us from slips and mistakes
--- Nu oolchi	--- Guard us
Waraana nu oolchi	Shield us from wars
--- Nu oolchi	--- Shield us
Waraansa nu oolchi	Shield us from pains
--- Nu oolchi	--- Shield us
Horree hoonga'uu nu oolchi	Save us from producing and losing
--- Nu oolchi	--- Save us
Badnee barbaada dhabuu nu oolchi	Save us from being lost and not having searchers --- Save us
--- Nu oolchi	
Fiignee hiiqa dhabuu nu oolchi	Save us from running and not getting farther – Save us
--- Nu oolchi	
Deemnee fiixa hanqachuunu oolchi	Save us from going and not reaching our goals – Save us
--- Nu oolchi	
Joorree milkii dhabuu nu oolchi	Save us from wandering and not finding success – Save us
--- Nu oolchi	
Beekaa nuu bulchi	Make our wise ones live longer
--- Nuu bulchi	--- Make them live longer
Wallaalaa nuu goomsi	Make our fools wiser
--- Nuu goomsi	--- Make them wiser
Nu baraari yaa Waaq	Deliver us <i>O Waaq</i>
--- Baraar baraar	--- Deliverance, deliverance

Asaabalee

Asaabalee is ordinary women's prayer song for anytime. *Asaabala* is the name of a small colorful bird. *Asaabalee* is an endearment for *Asaabala*. Birds symbolize the spirit of rising up, of flying and soaring high up, thus the prayers going up and soaring high. In this prayer song, women evoke this spirit and call *Asaabalee* to guide them to the dwelling of *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* is often not something abstract or some being that dwells so far away in the skies. This song plays with the tension between the abstract and the concrete, the far away and the intimate, the infinite and the infinitesimal.

Aagaa Ruudaa remembers her grandmother singing this song and praying to *Waaqa*. I did not grow up with this particular prayer song myself. I heard it for the first time in its Oromo nationalist rendition and fell in love with it. Our foremothers' *Asaabalee* song has been reinterpreted and appropriated in the Oromo national liberation struggle. It is sung to signify the revaluing and reclaiming of our ancestors' *gadaa* and Ali Birraa sings it so beautifully.

The rendition I present here is the version I learned from Aagaa Ruudaa. It is the version we sing and pray in the diaspora to connect to our foremothers and to soothe the wounds of our own current struggles.

Asaabalee, Gurraamala too *Asaabalee*, my colorful one
Karaan mana Waaq dhaqan eessaa? What road takes to *Waaq's* house?
Dhaqeen galmasaa jajjabeessaa I'll go and reinforce Its sanctuary⁴⁴

Utuullee cabee cabee Even if sticks break
Uleen cagadaa hin cabuu The thrashing stick does not break
Uleen cagada xaafii The thrashing stick of xaafii⁴⁵
Utuullee badee badee Even if things are lost
Dubbiin sagadaa hin baduu Things of *Waaq* are not lost
Dubbiin sagada Waaqii Things of prayers of *Waaq*

Asaabalee... *Asaabalee*...

Fal'aana cabaa cabaa The broken spoons of horn
Deegaa' gurguree guuree The poor⁴⁶ man collected and sold them
Deegaa' gurguree guuree The poor man collected and sold them
Dubbii Waaqaa seer jabaa Things of *Waaq* whose laws are strong
Wal'aalaan kolfee doofee The fool laughed and became ignorant
Beekaan uggumee goomee The wise bowed and became wiser

Asaabalee... *Asaabalee*...

Utuun unkuree unkuruu While I stirred and stirred
Utuun unkuree siphadhuu While I stirred and gobbled up
Yaa baftaa yaa baala dambii O the broad leaves of *Dambii*⁴⁷
Utuun uggumee uggumuu While I bow and bow (in prayer)
Utuun uggumee si kadhuu While I bow and pray to you
Na gattaa ya jaarsa Rabbii You dismiss me o old man of *Rabbii*⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Galma* translates both as sanctuary and dwelling/abode.

⁴⁵ *Xaafii* is a local grain, one of the staple crops of the region

⁴⁶ *Deegaa* does not really translate as poor. It is used in particular reference to someone who once had seen better days, one who has seen wealth and lost it

⁴⁷ *Dambii* is a broad-leaved tree. It is often used as a plate on which people eat ritual foods.

Asaabalee...

Jawween lowee lowee
Lowee mana naanna'ee
Lowee mana naanna'ee
Yaa Jabo jedhee iyyannaan
Yaa Waaq situ naa nayee
Yaa Waaq situ naa nayee

Asaabalee...

Dachii yaa haadha margaa
Irri kee min'aan baasaa
Jalli kee bishaan yaasaa
Qonnee sirraa nyaadhane
Horree sirra yaafannee
Ayyaana keen dhaabbannee

Asaabalee...

Asaabalee...

The python slithered and slithered
It slithered around the house
It slithered around the house
O the mighty one; I cried out
And you harkened for me *O Waaq*
And you harkened for me *O Waaq*

Asaabalee...

O Dachii (Earth), mother of grass
Your top produces food/crops
Your bottom pours/produces water
We farm and eat/live off you
We breed and flock on you
Standing strong in your spirit

Asaabalee...

⁴⁸ *Rabbii* is sometimes interchangeably used with *Waaqa*. It is of Semitic origin, perhaps introduced through Islam.

*Haadha Dachii*⁴⁹

This song is sung in praise of *Haadha Dachii* [Mother Earth]. *Haadha Dachii* is known by many names and she manifests herself in many forms. In the middle of the day at *Waaree* [Midday] when the sun is at Zenith, people believe that *Haadha Dachii* is asleep. They do not hit the ground, not to wake her up. Those who plough the land must rest their ploughs and rest so *Haadha Dachii* rests.

Zalealam Aberra has done a beautiful translation of a version of this song, which I found very useful. Thank you Obbo Zalealam! The version I present here is the version that I grew up with.

Dachii naga bultee?	<i>Dachii</i> , have you spent the night in peace?
Dachii naga ooltee?	<i>Dachii</i> , have you spent the day in peace?
Yaa isee niitii Waaqa;	O you wife of <i>Waaqaa</i>
Haadha burreef booqaa?	Mother of <i>burree</i> and <i>booqaa</i> ⁵⁰
Ati nagaan bultee?	Have you spent the night in peace?
Ati nagaan ooltee?	Have you spent the day in peace?
Dachii yaa haadha margaa	<i>Dachii</i> , mother of grass
Irri kee midhaanii	Your top is full of crops
Jalli kee bishaanii	Your bottom is full of water
Qonnee sirraa nyaannaa	We farm and eat/live off you
Horree sirra yaafnaa	We breed and flock on you
Ayyaana keen kaanaa	We are kept by your spirit

⁴⁹ *Haadha Dachii* means Mother Earth

⁵⁰ *Burree* and *booqaa* or sometimes said in the reverse as *booqaa* and *burree* expresses the diversity of colors; hence the diversity of people as well. When used separately, *burree* means colourful with many different spots of colors (usually white, red, and black). *Booqaa* means one big white spot (usually on the face of cattle) on the background of brown, black, or grey. When *booqaa* and *burree* are used together, it just means a diversity of colours; hence a diversity of people, characters, etc. In this particular context, it means Mother Earth is the mother of diversity, a diversity of children with many different characters

Du'aan sirra ciisaa
Jiraan sirra fiigaa
Yoo sitti awwaalan
Nan ajaaye hin jettu
Sirra yoo qotan
Nan madaaye hin jettu
Gara-bal'eetti koo

The dead lies on you
The living runs on you
If we bury in you
You don't say you stink
If we plough on you
You don't say you're wounded
O my forbearing one

Dachi yaa bal'eettii
Jaartii garaa meetii
Jiraa keenya baatta
Yaa sugeessituu koo
Du'aa keenya nyaatta
Yaa gumeessituu koo.

Dachii, O you the wide one
You old woman of silver belly
In life you carry us
O you mother of satiety
In death you gobble us
O you mother of tidiness

Sooressa abbaa shittoo
Natti urgaaye jettee
Ofitti fudhattee
Hiyyeessa abbaa cittoo
Natti ajaaye jettee
Deebiftee hin galchitu
Wal qixxeessituu koo

The rich full of fragrance
Because he smells good
You don't take him to you
The poor full of scabies
Because he smells bad
You do not send him back
Oh you mother of equity

Chapter 4 -- Dalaga [Birth Songs]

In this chapter, you will find various songs and dances that Oromo women perform at different points in the celebration of birth and motherhood and in prayers for childless women. Most of these performances are categorically referred to as *dalaga* in my locality and *wadaaja* in some parts of the Oromo land. *Dalaga* literally translates as work but in the context of spiritual ceremonies it signifies work performed for the *ayyaana* [spirit]. For example, in the context of *qaalluu* rituals Knutsson (1967: 90) describes *dalaga* as “ceremonial activity characterized by dance and ecstatic behaviour.” In the context of the *Ateetee* rituals he refers to these rituals as *dalaga Ateetee*.

In this chapter, *dalaga* means a prayer that combines singing and dancing. Most of the songs included here are the songs I grew up with. Women came and performed *dalaga* for my birth and they did it for the births of each one of my siblings. I remember these events as joyful and playful. This is a women-only space where men absent themselves or stick around only to run errands for the women. While colonial repression destroyed most of men’s rituals, women’s birth songs survived the worst repression, perhaps because they were considered women’s affairs as Bartels (1969, 1983) suggests.

Different rituals and songs are performed on different days in different parts of the Oromo land. In my locality, the day of the birth, the third day, the fifth day, and the ninth day are celebrated with various rituals. Odd numbers are sacred in Oromo spirituality and they are considered lucky (Bartels 1969, 1983). When labour starts, women come and untie the *saamita* (birth ritual food) as they chant a prayer: *Yaa Waaq nuti kan hiine hiiknee jirraa; ati kan hiite nuu hiiki* [O Waaq, we have untied what we have tied; you untie what you have tied].” *Hiiki* means untie the mother and child tied together in pregnancy. On the first day of the birth a few women perform *dalaga* to give thanks for the delivery. On the third day more women come and perform *dalaga*.

The fifth day is the day for *abaxaa* [cleansing broth] and *marqaa* [ritual porridge]. Women come and prepare *abaxaa* and make *marqaa*. Two women, one from the *Obo*⁵¹ moiety generation and the other from the *Coora* moiety come and collect fragrant medicinal herbs from seven different plants like *ulmaayii*, *urgeessaa*, *kusaayee*, and *yeroo* and creepers like *umbaawoo*, *kalaalaa*, and *saarbofii*. They boil them in water in a large pot until the mix becomes a thick broth. Then they wash the mother and child with the broth and massage their bodies. If there is a childless woman in the group, they wash her in the broth after the mother and child chanting prayers for children for the childless. Two women, again one *Obo* and one *Coora*, make the *marqaa*. They interlace their hands and scoop the flour together (four hands interlaced into two) and pour it into the boiled water in a ritual rhythm as women surround them and ululate every time they make the rhythmic move. The *Obo* and *Coora* women cut the very first bit of the *marqaa* called *askutii* and put it on a *dambii*⁵² or a *warqee*⁵³ leaf and feed it to the mother while chanting ritual blessings. Then all the women eat the remaining food, from *dambii* or *warqee* leaves and they sing and dance *dlaga*.

Obo and *Coora* women must perform all rituals and dances together. This symbolizes the inseparable interconnections of the generations and the intimate relations between everything and everyone. It is only during the insults and mock fights that *Obo* women and *Coora* women disrupt the *safuu*, violate the respectful distance, and erupt into obscene insult songs and dances and mock fights. These performances are ruckus, joyful and full of teary laughter. Then they return to normalcy saying “*sii safuu sii safuu* [*safuu* to you, *safuu* to you] obscene things have come out of our mouths now let us restore *safuu*.” They sing songs of reconciliation and praise for each other. This is part of the intentional disruption of *safuu* to release the repressed in a joyful setting so it won’t explode into violence at other times and in unwanted

⁵¹ *Obo* and *Coora* are the local names of the dual generation system into which the entire Oromo society is organized. *Obo* is the elder generation and *Coora* the younger. In other areas they moiety systems are named differently (see Legesse 1973, Megerssa 1993)

⁵² A tree with broad leaves

⁵³ False banana leaves

settings. The fifth day is women's-only day. Men absent themselves or linger about only to run errand for the celebrating women.

The ninth day is the day of *ulmaa baha* [coming out of seclusion] and *hammachiisa* [name giving]. Up to this point the mother and the child remain in the house. On the ninth day the women surround them in a procession and take them outside to greet the sun. *Obo* and *Coora* women perform some blessing rituals by using *buna qalaa* [slaughtered coffee] and anoint them with *dhadhaa bassaa* [scented butter]. In the Arsi area of Oromo land they tie *qanafa* [a protective whorl] on the mother's head. This is also a coming out and name-giving ceremony for the child, so the child is taken to the father or a male elder who embraces and names the child. The ninth day is everyone's day, men and women celebrate the child's coming out to the community. Both the mother and the child get showers of gifts on this day. There is no *marqaa* on this day, and everyone eats *buna qalaa* and enjoys other foods and drinks. As Gow (2002) observes, Oromo women in Australia perform *ulmaa baha* on the fortieth day. Indeed *ulmaa baha* is performed on different days in different parts of the Oromo land. In some parts it is performed on the fortieth day. The forty-day seclusion is a common theme that runs through Christianity, Islam, Judaism and many eastern spiritual practices.

In our fast-paced diaspora life, we condense all these rituals and perform them in just a small part of one day. Nonetheless, these are joyful and playful events even with the shortness of time. More often than not, we perform four categories of *dalaga*, some of which I present below. In the first group are songs in praise of *Maaram*. *Maaram* is the female deity associated with birth. In these songs, women give thanks to *Maaram*, pray to her, play with her, tease her, and cry to her. They evoke *Waaqa* in the same way. What comes out in these songs is that *Waaqa* is not just some invisible spirit women look for out there in the skies. It is also in their midst, inherent in the child, and in the mother. It is what they touch, and smell and feel and talk and play with. It is in the food, in the drinks, in the objects around them, and in their bodies. In the second group are *Ateetee* songs where women evoke *Ateetee* mostly in supplications and prayers for children. The third group of songs is of insult and mock fights. As I suggested earlier, insults and mock fights are part

of the rituals in broader strategies of Oromo conflict resolution. The fourth group is songs and chants of thanksgiving to the family and final blessings of the mother and child.

A note about *Ateetee* and *Maaram* is in order before we get into the songs. *Ateetee* and *Maaram* are both female deities and they are often used interchangeably (Bartels, 1969, 1983; Knutsson 1967). But it is also important to note important differences. Particularly in the context of the songs presented here, *Maaram* is evoked in association with labour and birthing while *Ateetee* is evoked as the goddess of fecundity associated with granting or denying children to women. In the broader Oromo society, both *Ateetee* and *Maaram* are evoked outside this association with children and birthing. *Ateetee* is an exclusively female deity. Only women pray to her and praise her on various occasions. Men do not. On the contrary, *Maaram* is evoked both by men and women, although she too is a female deity. According to Knutsson (1967) *Maaram* is the most revered of all deities in both women's and men's religious practices. Bartels (1969, 1983) and Knutsson (1967) wonder if *Maaram* is related to the Christian Mary but *Maaram* is a prominent deity in ancient Oromo songs and lyrics many thousands of years before Christianity or Islam arrived on the scene. Many of the songs in this chapter are full of such ancient lyrics evoking *Maaram*.

Praises to Maaram

These prayer songs and dances are the most joyful, playful and celebratory. They are all sung in prayer to or in praise of *Maaram*. Most are about birth and birthing and about mother and child but some verses also indicate the prayers of childless women. In this group, you will find five different songs.

*Hillaancoo*⁵⁴

This *dalaga* [song-dance] is performed after a woman gives birth. It is full of celebrations and praises of the mother for her bravery in delivering the child. The mother-child dyad is praised as *Hillaancoo*, which signifies ultimate beauty. *Maaram* the deity is evoked in several names of endearment, including *Maaree* and *Maarituu*. Women never forget to pray for the childless even in songs of praise and celebration.

⁵⁴ *Hillaancoo* means something beautiful. Van de Loo (1991) spells this as *iilanso* but the meaning seem to be different from what I present here. In this context *Hillaancoo* signifies the beauty of the mother with a child and the beauty of *Maaram*, the deity associated with childbirth. *Hillaancoo* also represents the ultimate beauty of *Maaram*. In *Hillaancoo*, then, the human and the divine are inseparable, as *Maaram* is the mother and child.

Yaa hillaancoo, бага ⁵⁵ hiikamtee Baga hoofkaltee, бага nuu galtee	<i>O Hillaanco</i> , good ⁵⁶ that you are untied ⁵⁷ Good that you are delivered, good that you have come home for us
Hillaancoo koomee qayyaa Gudee kee wajjiniin fayyaa Baga hiikamtee	<i>Hillaancoo</i> whose heels are of qayyaa ⁵⁸ Be well with your child Good that you are untied
Hillaancoo koomee meetii Gudeen dhalanaan keetii Baga hiikamtee	<i>Hillaancoo</i> whose heels are of silver When born the child is yours Good that you are untied
Yaa Hillaancoo....	<i>O Hillaancoo...</i>
Ijaa miixxattee deessee, Baga miidhagdee teessee Baga hiikamtee	Because you laboured and delivered Good that you sit beautified Good that you are untied
Urgeessaa siif haa murtuu Urgoofttee siif haa bultuu Baga hiikamtee	May she ⁵⁹ cut <i>urgeessaa</i> ⁶⁰ for you May she live with good scent for you Good that you are untied

⁵⁵ There is no English word for “*baga!*” or its equivalent: “*issho!*”. The closest expressions are: congratulations! Well done! Good! But, together and separately, they take away the sense of the Oromo expression. I will use “good” for now. I hope someone will come up with a better translation.

⁵⁶ Good here really flattens out the rich contours of ‘*baga*’ but it is the closest translation. The English doesn’t make sense. *Baga* is an expression of the joy and happiness of some achievement.

⁵⁷ Untied here is used in the sense that the mother and child were tied together for nine months and now they are untied to have separate lives.

⁵⁸ *Qayyaa* is a fragrant tree. Women burn *qayyaa* kindlings and smoke their clothes and their bodies to have a pleasant scent.

⁵⁹ All children are referred to as “she” even if they are sons. It reflects back to the gender system under *gadaa* where all children under the age of 8 are referred to as “she”. Later on boys are referred to as “he” only after their *guduruu* locks are shaved and they are initiated into the *follee* grade of *gadaa*.

⁶⁰ *Urgeessaa* is a fragrant tree used for rituals

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

Waan Maaram namaa gootu
Haati ofii namaa hin gootu
Ya Maaree yaa kuullee koo
Kottuu taa'i fuullee koo

What *Maaram*⁶¹ does for me
My mother can't do for me
O *Maaree*, o my beautiful one
Come and sit in front of me

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

Maaree koo fuullee teenyee
Mucaa ija kuullee deenyee
Baga hiikamtee

We sat in front of *Maaree*
And birthed a child with beautiful eyes
Good that you're untied

Maaram Maaram hoo jettanii
Maaramtan hoo maal jettanii?
Baga hiikamtee

You've cried *Maaram, Maaram*
Now you are delivered, what do you say?
Good that you are untied

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

Waciiitii bantii sararaa
Bantii sararaansaa uraa
Ya giiftii bantii mananaa
Bantii mananaa naa bulaa
Baga hiikamtee

The pot whose center is lined,
The center whose line has orifice
The lady at the center of this house
May you live at the center of this house
Good that you are untied

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

Ya Maaree mucaa marartuu
Kan yeroo miixuu birmattuu
Ciniinsuu namaa laaffiftuu
Baga hiikamtee

O *Maaree* who treasures a child
Who comes to rescue in labour
Who lightens labour pain
Good you are untied

⁶¹ *Maaram* is the female deity associated with birth. *Maaree, Maarituu* and other variations are the endearments of *Maaram*.

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

Ya Maaree ya Maarituu
Yaa giiftii arba gaadituu
Deessuu dhaaf lookoo furi kaa
Dhabduu dhaaf gurdaa uri kaa
Baga hiikamtee

O Maaree O Maarituu
O the lady who straps the elephant
Open the outlet for the birthing woman
Puncture the membrane for the childless
Good that you are untied

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

Niitiin Maaramiin beektuu
Garaasee duwwaa hin teessuu
Yaa Maaree ya Maarituu
Duuba keenya hin qaarituu
Baga hiikamtee

The woman who knows *Maaram*
Does not live with her womb empty
O Maaree O Maarituu
Won't you come to our side too⁶²
Good that you are untied

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

Dhaqeen kusaayee buqqisaa
Kusaayee gaaraan buqqisaa
Ya Waaq dhabduuf kenni kaa
Isee tu ajaayee guddisaa
Baga hiikamtee

I'll go and pull out *kusaayee*⁶³
I'll pull out *kusaayee* of the mountains
O Waaq give children to the childless
She is the one who stinks and raises them
Good that you are untied

Yaa Hillaancoo...

O Hillaancoo...

⁶² This verse is often sung by a childless woman, pleading with Maaram to visit her womb too

⁶³ *Kusaayee* is a fragrant plant usually associated with girls and the scent and beauty of girlhood... for married women it is a curse rather than a blessing. The pulling out of *kusaayee* then is also a prayer to *Ateetee* to take away the beauty and scent of girlhood and bless this woman with fertility... Even beauty and fragrance becomes a curse if it is not in the appropriate time. The childless woman may be rich and beautiful and content in every way but without a child, she is not complete, as she will not have blood connections which will facilitate her belonging to the community.

Kuulleen Dhale

Kuulleen dhalee Yaa Maaram sinwaama fuulleen bahee	<i>Kuullee</i> ⁶⁴ gave birth <i>O Maaram</i> I call you, coming out to the front
Yaa Maaree sarbaa dumbullee Maaliif wal argaa bubbulle? Yaa Maaram sinwaama fuulleen bahee	<i>O Maaree</i> whose legs are full and lovely Why have we not seen each other lately? <i>O Maaram</i> I call you, coming out to the front
Kuulleen dhalee...	<i>Kuullee</i> gave birth...
Karaa kam dhufuu mana kee? Danqaraan cuffuu karra kee Waaq anaa cufuum dhala kee Waaq anaa cufuum dhala kee Ya Maaram sinwaama fuulleen bahee	How can I come to your house? They close your gate with a shaft May <i>Waaqa</i> close me as your child ⁶⁵ May <i>Waaqa</i> close me as your child <i>O Maaram</i> I call you, coming out to the front
Kuulleen dhalee...	<i>Kuullee</i> gave birth...
Karaan Naqamtee isa kami? An miiilla hin qabuu nan kufaa Karaan mana kee isa kami? An jiila hin qabuu nan dhufaa Ya Maaram sinwaama fuulleen bahee	Which one is the road to <i>Naqamtee</i> ⁶⁶ ? I have no feet; I will fall Which one is the road to your house? I have no grudge; I will come <i>O Maaram</i> I call you, coming out to the front

⁶⁴ *Kuullee* is a cow with beautiful brilliant eyes, eyes that look as though beautified with eye-liner called *kuulii*. In other contexts, *Kuullee* is also a girl's name with variants like *Kuulanii*, *Kuulii*, *Kuullittii*, *Kuulaa*, etc.

⁶⁵ Very odd translation that snuffs life out of the original but this is the closest I could get.

⁶⁶ A place

Kuulleen dhalee...

Hundee dibmilaala bakkee
Maaree koo jifaara warqee
Hammaareen garbuu shafshafaa
Maaree koo martuu jafjafaa
Ya Maaram sinwaama fuulleen
bahee

Kuullee gave birth....

The roots of the wild coriander
O Maaree with draping golden clothes
I scoop and pound barley
O Maaree with lovely locks.
O Maaram I call you, coming out to the
front

Kuulleen dhalee...

Yaa mana guddaa isa gamaa
Utuma ijeertuun jirtummoo
Arraagessi sinhaadhukaa
Anaa nyaatu yaa dhabduu koo
Utuma deessuun jirtummoo
Waraabessi sinnyaatukaa
Yaa Maaram sin waama fuulleen
bahee

Kuullee gave birth...

O the big house yonder (over there)
While there is one who fixes the thatches
The crow will not poke you
May it eat me⁶⁷⁶⁸, o my childless one
While there is a woman who births a child
The hyena will not eat you
O Maaram I call you, coming out to the
front

Kuulleen dhalee...

Kuullee gave birth...

⁶⁷ 'May it eat me' is a common expression of empathy and self-sacrifice. It means may I be eaten/harmed in your stead. In this particular context, it means may the hyena and the vultures that are supposed to eat you eat me instead. It is believed that a childless woman has no child (especially son) to look after her when she is alive and to mourn her when she dies, and hence the symbolism that her body will be eaten by hyenas and vultures. The woman with children takes an oath that her children will be hers. In their *siiqqee* solidarity, women do not just pray, they actually raise their *siiqqee* to "beg" and give children to the childless woman.

⁶⁸ 'May it eat me' is translated in Bartels (1969, 1983) as 'may your weeping womb eat me'.

Gurraalee woo

The spirit of this song is primarily of welcoming the new child, the divine child into the midst of humans. Women sing in awe of labour in which life and death are in intimate dance. They praise *Maaram* for deliverance. They praise the divine and the human simultaneously. *Gurraalee woo*, means o the black ones. Here *gurraalee* is both plural and singular. Grammatically *gurraalee* is the plural of *gurraacha*, which means black. It comes from *Waaqa Gurraacha*, Black *Waaqa*. The child that is born is black means the child comes from *Waaqa* and the child is *Waaqa*. The one who gives birth is *Waaqa*, thus showing the interwoven-ness of the human and the divine. *Gurree* is the diminutive, female form of both *gurraacha* and *gurraalee*. And therefore *gurree* is both singular and plural. It means this particular child that is the cause for this particular celebration and children in general, all of whom come from *Waaqa* and are *Waaqa*.

In the *dalaga* prayer-song-dance, women start by acknowledging the black ones as coming from the black god and then move on to acknowledging the black one as coming from the father the mother and the entire lineage. They call the names of the father, the mother, the uncles and aunts the grandparents and everyone one by one, singing the praises and affirming that *gurree* the child belongs to them all. In this way, they establish the simultaneous divine and human ancestry of the child. When we perform it in the diaspora, we playfully call the names of everyone we love and sing the praises and say the child belongs to us all.

- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Nooruu yaa gurraalee woo	Welcome, oh the black ones
Gurraalee ya rafrafee	The black ones, oh the joyous ones
Sin yaadee maalan rafee?	Missing you; how could I sleep?
Gurraaleen gurruu darsaa yee	The black ones with bulging udders
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Dhalee tu ilmoosaa marsaa yee	Give birth and circle/protect their babies
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Nooruu yaa Gurraalee woo...	Welcome oh the black ones...
Gurraaleen gurree dhalee yee	The black ones gave birth to black ones
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Gurreen kan Abbaa kootii yee	The black ones belong to my father
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Gurreen kan Risaa kootii yee	The black ones belong to my <i>Risaa</i> ⁶⁹
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Gurreen kan harmee kootii yee	The black ones belong to my mother
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Gurreen kan Guchii kootii yee	The black ones belong to my <i>Guchii</i> ⁷⁰
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Guutee koo tu yaasee galchaa yee	My <i>Guutee</i> ⁷¹ herds and brings them home
Qaroo koo tu taa'ee elmaa yee	My <i>Qaroo</i> ⁷² sits and milks them

⁶⁹ *Risaa* means eagle. I wanted to take a particular name as an example here. Please replace *Risaa* by name of the baby's grandfather and other males when you celebrate a particular child.

⁷⁰ *Guchii* means ostrich. Please replace it with the name of the grandmother and other females when celebrating a particular child.

⁷¹ *Guutee* is the endearment for *Guutamaa*, which means full to the brim. Please replace it by the names of the father, uncles and other males related to the particular child being celebrated.

⁷² *Qaroo* is the name of a girl in this context, usually the mother and aunts of the particular child being celebrated here. *Qaroo* means the pupil at the center of the iris in the human eye. A girl is named *Qaroo* to signify that she is brilliant, full of knowledge and wisdom. As an adjective, *qaroo/qarutee* also means wise, knowledgeable person/people. It comes from *qarummaa*, the noun form meaning knowledge, wisdom.

- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Nooruu yaa Gurraalee woo...	Welcome o the black ones
Ya Maaree ya Maarituu yee	<i>O Maaree, O Maarituu</i>
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Duuba keenya hin qaarituu yee?	Won't you swing by our part of the wood?
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Ya Maaree jedhee hin beekuu	<i>O Maaree</i> , I don't often call you
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Jedhee irraa dhabee hin beekuu	You never let me down when I call
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Manni Maaramii Qarkaa yee	<i>Maaram's</i> house is on a hanging cliff
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Deddeessuu tu dhatee argaa yee	Only those who give birth go and visit
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Ya Maaree anaa oosuu yee	<i>O Maaree</i> may pain make me scream ⁷³
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Kan maal argan siin qoosuu yee?	What pain have they seen who mock you?
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Nooruu yaa Gurraalee woo...	Welcome o the black ones...
Yammuttii bokkaan roobuu yee	When the rain was coming down
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones

⁷³ *Anaa oosuu (ana haa oosu)* here means may it make me scream with pain in your stead. In these two lines, the singer is expressing a dislike for those who trivialize the pain of labour, which she equates as trivializing *Maaram*, the deity who facilitates that pain. She asks, what pain have they suffered to make fun of you? This means that only those who go through it appreciate the pain it takes to bear a child. This follows the previous two lines where the singer shows that *Maaram's* house is on a hanging cliff hard to get to -- which means the woman in labour braves all the pain to claw her way up the hanging cliff to get to *Maaram's* house and receive her gift of a child. In short, it means that giving birth is a close dance with death to bring another life to this world. Any tiny slip can turn into either life or death. This should not be trivialized.

Gombisaa jalan jiraa yee	I was under the granary
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Bakakkaadhan sodaadhee yee	I was afraid of the thunder
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Hangaasuun birreeffadhee yee	I was frightened by the lightning
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Yammuttii deessuun deessuu yee	When the birth-giver was birthing
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Gulantaa jalan jiraa yee	I was under the threshold
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Daashoo keessaan maammadaa	I was pacing in the seclusion room
- Gurraaleewoo	O the black ones
Ciniinsuuseen sodhaadhee yee	I was awed by her gritting (labour)
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Miixuuseen birreeffadhee yee	I was frightened by her pushing (labour)
- Gurraalee woo	Oh the black ones
Ciniinsuu afaa butuu yee	When gritting, one grabs at the bed
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Miixuu dagalee butuu yee	When pushing, one clutches the walls
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Miixuu mixixii sanaa yee	O that pushing, that slippery pushing ⁷⁴
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Lubbuu mixirii sanaayee	That life, that precious life/soul
- Gurraaleevwoo	O the black ones
Yoo toleef gudee butuu yee	If lucky, one grabs a child
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Hammaates lubbuu buusuu yee	If not, one drops life (dies)
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones

⁷⁴ Here slippery pushing means that anything could happen while pushing to birth the child. Any tiny slip could mean either life or death. It is through the suffering of labour that the woman crosses to the other side to birth a child. Such intensity of labour pain has been minimized, even eliminated, in today's birth but it is not hard to appreciate the intensity in this context. It is the parallel for the life-and-death intensity in hunting wild animals for men. Women are praised and celebrated in the same way that men are praised for taking the life-and-death risk in hunting.

Nooruu yaa Gurraaleewoo...	Welcome o the black ones...
Anaa limmu yaa limmooyee	May it needle me; needle oh needle
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Limmoon maal namaa hin goone?	What is it that a needle can't do for us?
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Limmoo kafanii daaraa yee	Needle, the shield of garments/fabric
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Hoddhitee namaa goddiyyee	It stiches and covers the holes
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Goddee namaa sarartiiyee	It sews and pulls together
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Anaa ilmu yaa ilmoo yee	May it child me, child oh child
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Ilmoon maal namaa hin goonee?	What is it that a child can't do for us?
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Ilmoo kafanii haadhaa yee	A child is her mother's shield
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Bixxiltee namaa fiddii yee	She makes flatbread and feeds her mother -- O the black ones
- Gurraalee woo	
Hasaafttee namaa himtii yee	She whispers and tells her mother ⁷⁵
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Abbaa namaa sossobdiyyee	She soothes her father (mediates)
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Ilmoon maaf qoosaa taatee yee?	Why is a child taken so lightly?
- Gurraalee woo	O the black ones
Nooruu yaa Gurraaleewoo...	Welcome o the black ones...

⁷⁵ Often rumors and secrets that the mother can't access for any number of reasons.

*Sunqoo Sunqoo*⁷⁶

Sunqoo is one of the sacred spices used in birth rituals. Its deeper meaning of the ancient times seems to have been lost but women are making new meanings of it in these songs. The spirit of this song is that of playful teasing. Here *Maaram* teases women for calling on her and crying to her when in the distress of labour but forgetting her the moment the pain is over. Women laugh and tease each other while singing this song.

Sunqoo sunqoo jette Maaram woo
Sunqoo shiinii shan hammaarrattee
Yommuttii cinqii shan na
waammattee
Cinqiin baanaan na irraanfatee jette
Maaram woo

Sunqoo, sunqoo...

Sunqoo sunqoo jette Maaram woo
Sunqoo barruu shan hammaarrattee
Yommuttii lubbuu shan na
waammattee
Lubuu' baanaan na irraanfatee jette
Maaram woo

Sunqoo , sunqoo...

Sunqoo sunqoo, says Maaram
You scooped five cups of *sunqoo*
In your moment of distress, you called
me five times
When your distress is gone, you
forgot me, says *Maaram*

Sunqoo, sunqoo...

Sunqoo sunqoo, says Maaram
You scooped fived palms of *sunqoo*
In your moment of soul pain you
called me five times
But when your soul pain is gone, you
forgot me, says *Maaram*

Sunqoo, sunqoo...

⁷⁶ *Sunqoo* is an ancient sacred plant producing the seeds of a ritual spice known in English as fenugreek.

Sunqoo sunqoo jette Maaram woo
Sunqoo kaballaa shan hammaarrattee
Yommuttii nafaa shan na
waammattee
Nafaa baanaan na irraanfatee jette
Maaram woo

Sunqoo sunqoo...

Yaa buqqee dallaa jalaa
Yoomittuu cuurtanii?
Yoomittu cuuraa buuftanii?
Yaa dungee akka asaabalaa
Yoomittuu duultanii?
Yoomittuu duulaa galtanii?

Sunqoo, sunqoo

Sunqoo sunqoo, says *Maaram*
You scooped five handfuls of *sunqoo*
In your moment of panic you called
me five times
But when your panic is gone, you
forgot me, says *Maaram*

Sunqoo, sunqoo...

O the pumpkin vines at the trellis
How fast you formed your fruits⁷⁷
And how fast you made the gourds
Oh you graceful ones like *asaabalaa*⁷⁸
How fast you went to the fight
And how fast you fought and returned

Sunqoo, sunqoo...

⁷⁷ Here the pumpkin vine at the trellis forming fruits and making gourds symbolizes women being pregnant and giving birth. This entire verse praises the honour of making children for women and fighting and coming home in triumph for men. Women are honoured when they give birth and bring life men are honoured when they kill and take life. Killing could be the killing of enemies in defence of their families and communities or the killing of wild animals either for bravery or for food. Both bringing life (for women) and taking life (for men) serve important social and spiritual functions in the Oromo culture and both are honoured and celebrated with elaborate rituals.

⁷⁸ *Asaabala* is a beautiful multicolored small bird. The double 'a' at the end shows a long vowel

Killoo Bunaa

In this song, women call each other's names and plead with one another to stay a little longer and play some more. It is a very playful song where everyone's name gets to be called. They also get to call the names of others who are not able to attend. They plead with one another to play one more time for the sake of those who are not there.

Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa	Coffee <i>killoo</i> , o coffee <i>killoo</i> ⁷⁹
Kan nama bareechu ilmoodhumaa	What makes us beautiful is a child
Ilmoo dhaa jedhaa mee xinnoo	For the sake of the child, please stay (and play) a little longer
turaa, mee xinnoo turaa	
Deessuu dhaa jedhaa mee xinnoo	For the sake of the mother, please stay (and play) a little longer
turaa, mee xinnoo turaa	
Maaree dhaa jedhaa mee xinnoo	For the sake of <i>Maaree</i> , please stay (and play) a little longer
turaa, mee xinnoo turaa	

Killoo bulaa...

Coffee *killoo*...

Hundee dimbilaala bakkee	Under the bush of wild coriander
--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa	Coffee <i>killoo</i> , o coffee <i>killoo</i>
Maaree koo gilaasha warqee	O Maaree of the golden saddle cover
--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa	Coffee <i>killoo</i> , o coffee <i>killoo</i>
Hammaareen garbuu shafshafaa	I will scoop and pound barley
--- Killoo bunaa yyaa killoo bunaa	Coffee <i>killoo</i> , o coffee <i>killoo</i>
Maaree koo martuu jafjafaa	O <i>Maaree</i> of the lovely locks ⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Killoo* is the name given to the container of *buna qalaa* (slaughtered coffee). It is a sacred container that holds a sacred object. *Buna qalaa* is the major sacred ritual object offered to *Waaqa* and the *ayyaana* spirits in major rituals (for details see Bartels 1983; Yedes et al 2004; Wayessa 2011). Slaughtered coffee sounds odd because it is often animals that are slaughtered for sacrificial purposes. The word *qalaa* (slaughtered) signifies the sacrificial purpose here as well. *Buna qalaa* figures in ancient Oromo rituals. *Killoo bunaa* is often made of finely carved wood or calabash but both are neatly decorated with colorful beads, often white, red and black. *Killoo* soaks up the butter in the *buna qalaa* and turns into a shiny dark brown color.

⁸⁰ by lovely locks I mean to translate *jafjafa* which evokes two images. One is the flowing locks and the other is the locks soaked in and dripping with scented butter.

--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa

Coffee *killoo*, o coffee *killoo*...

Killoo bunaa....

Coffee *killoo*...

Dafaa daddalagaa hin gallaa

Pray-dance quickly; we got to go home

--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa

Coffee *killoo*, o coffee *killoo*

Abbaa warraatoo dheekkamaa

The husband will be angry

--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa

Coffee *killoo*, o coffee *killoo*

Afaan halagaa farraa kaa

The mouth of *halagaa*⁸¹ says evil/bad

--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa

Coffee *killoo*, o coffee *killoo*

Harkaa danqaraa qabaa kaa

He has a pole/stick in his hand

--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa

Coffee *killoo*, o coffee *killoo*

Ijoo mar'ataa saafaammoo

His eyes are of a midday venomous snake

--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa

Coffee *killoo*, o coffee *killoo*

Ittoo sossobaa bullammoo

Soothing him, we live with him

--- Killoo bunaa yaa killoo bunaa

Coffee *killoo*, o coffee *killoo*

Maaree dhaa jedhaa mee xinnoo
turaa, mee xinnoo turaa

For the sake of *Maaree*, please stay (and
play) a little longer

Killoo bunaa...

Coffee *killoo*...

⁸¹ *Halagaa* means a stranger, someone who is not a relative. Here the women refer to their husbands as *halagaa*, just as they are seen as *halagaa* in their husband's clans and sub-clans.

Prayers to Ateetee

Here you will find two variants of the *Ateetee* prayer songs. The first one is what the women with children sing as they pray for the childless women to get children. The second variant is where the childless women respond to the women with children. These songs have a mix of joy and sadness and some women sing them with tears streaming down their cheeks. Their melodies are the sweetest and most soothing.

Yaa Mi'ooftuu

Ateetee yaa mi'uoftuu	<i>Ateetee</i> , O the sweet one
Merre ayyaanisee kan si'ooftuu?	Won't you let her spirit fire us up ⁸² ?
Harargeettan sii nagadaa	I will trade for you in <i>Harargee</i> ⁸³
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu	<i>Ateetee</i> , O the sweet one
Biyya awwaarrisaa bolotuu	A land where the dust sizzles
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu	<i>Ateetee</i> , O the sweet one
Boroo keettan sii dalagaa	I will pray-dance for you in your <i>boroo</i> ⁸⁴
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu	<i>Ateetee</i> , O the sweet one
Galma keettan sii sagadaa	I will worship you in your sanctuary
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu	<i>Ateetee</i> , O the sweet one
Bakka ayyaanni kee boqotu	Where your spirit rests
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu	<i>Ateetee</i> , O the sweet one
Bakka ayyaanni kee boqotuu	Where your spirit rests
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu	<i>Ateetee</i> , O the sweet one
Merre ayyaanisee kan si'ooftuu...	Won't you let her spirit fire us up?

⁸² The lead singer is asking the women to fire it up, to make the day (celebration/prayer) of *Ateetee* a good one. She urges the women to sing and pray-dance with all their hearts and with all the passions in them.

⁸³ *Harargee* is part of eastern Oromo land

⁸⁴ *Boroo* is a place of honour at the back of the house

Ateetee...

Ya ungullaallii qamadii
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Yaa obboleetti daggalaa
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Mee ungulaalii dalagii
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Yaa obboleettii nan gala
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Meerre ayyaannisee kan si'ooftuu

Ateetee...

Dhagaa gugurbee lagaa
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Bishaan tu wal baachise
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Dhabduunoo dahuu hin didnee
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Maaram tu wal caalchise
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Meerre ayyaanisee kan si'ooftuu...

Ateetee...

Ya dhabduu siree dhommoqaa
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Ya deessuu siree corroqaa
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu
Siree dhommoqaa irraa bu'ii
- Ateetee yaa mi,ooftuu
Siree corroqaa irra bulii

Ateetee...

O the sorted chaff of wheat
Ateetee, O the sweet one
O you sister of the thickets
Ateetee O the sweet one
Pray-dance properly my sister
Ateetee O the sweet one
I have to go home soon
Ateetee, O the sweet one
Won't you let her spirit fire us up?

Ateetee...

The small stones in the river
Ateetee, O the sweet one
It's the water that piled them up
Ateetee, O the sweet one
The childless did not refuse to give birth
Ateetee, O the sweet one
It's *Maaram* who discriminated
Ateetee, O the sweet one
Won't you let her spirit fire us up?

Ateetee...

O childless woman with comfortable bed
Ateetee, O the sweet one
O mother of children with puddled bed
Ateetee, O the sweet one
Get off the comfortable bed
Ateetee, O the sweet one
Sleep in the puddled bed

- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Meerre ayyaannisee kan si'ooftuu? Won't you let her spirit fire us up?

Ateetee... *Ateetee*...

Dhaqeen kusaayee buqqisaa I will go and pull out *kusaayee*
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Kusaayee gaaraan buqqisaa Pull out *kusaayee* of the mountains
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Yaa Waaq dhabduuf kenni kaa O *Waaq*, give children to the childless
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Isee tu ajaayee guddisaa She is the one who stinks in raising them
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Meerre ayyaanisee kan si'ooftuu? Won't you let her spirit fire us up?

Ateetee... *Ateetee*...

Yaa mana guddaa gamaa O the big house yonder (over there)
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Utuma iijeertuun jirtuu While there is one who fixes the thatches
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Arraagessi si hin haadhuu The crow will not poke you
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Arraagessi si hin haadhuu The crow will not poke you
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Anaa nyaatu yaa dhabduu koo May it eat me; O my childless one
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Utuma deessuun jirtuu While there is a woman who births a
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu child -- *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Waraabessi si hin nyaatuu The hyena will not eat you
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Waraabessi si hin nyaatuu The hyena will not eat you
- Ateetee yaa mi'ooftuu *Ateetee*, O the sweet one
Meerre ayyaannisee kan si'ooftuu? Won't you let her spirit fire us up?

Sunqoon Asheete

Ateetee
Sunqoon boroo keetii asheetee

Deessuun akka naan jettee
Diinqa koo hin darbin naan jettee
Mucaa koo hin argin naanjettee
Maal yoon diinqaseetti ol darbe?
Maal yoon mucaasees argee?
Ijji koo budaa hin qabuu
Garaan koo mudaa hin dhabuu
Sunqoon boroo keetii asheetee

Ateetee...

Akka abbaa fardaan beekaa
Irraangadee kaacchisaa
Gooroo dalga baachisaa
Akka abbaa warraan beekaa
Niitii deessuu caalchisaa
Haadha ilmaa masifataa
Karrasaa dhaalchifataa

Ateetee
Sunqoo blossoms in your *boroo*⁸⁵

The woman with a child said to me
Don't come near my *diinqaa*⁸⁶
Don't look at my child
What if I get into her *diinqaa*?
What if I look at her child?
My eyes don't have evil
But my womb has some flaws⁸⁷
Sunqoo blossoms in your *boroo*

Ateetee...

I know the ways of a horseman
He gallops down the slopes
He has his *goorroo* carried sideways
I know the ways of a husband
He favours the childbearing woman
He endears the mother of a son
He makes them inherit the homestead

⁸⁵ *Boroo* in this context means *Maaram's* garden in her backyard. It's a prayer for *Maaram* to adorn the gardens of the women who pray to her. *Sunqoo* blossoms in *Maaram's* garden means that *Maaram* has plenty in the gift of children blossoming in her garden and she can give them to the childless woman if she wants to; hence the woman pleads with *Maaram* to give her only what she has in plenty and can give. She asks her to adorn her *boroo*. In broader Oromo ritual practices, *boroo* is a place of honour where all the sacred ritual objects are placed. It is a place where the *ayyaana* [spirit] of *Waaqa* rests, where all the *ayyaana* [spirits] rest.

⁸⁶ *Ddiinqa* is a place/room at the back of the house (*at boroo*) which is a place of honour and purity. The mother and child are celebrated in the *diinqaa* during this ceremony.

⁸⁷ Flaws because her womb did not produce a child and she is envious of those who bear children

Sunqoon borookeetii asheetee

Sunqoo blossoms in your boroo

Ateetee...

Ateetee...

Iilchituun hin deessuu
Yaa Maaram situ beekaa
Geerartuun hin ajjeftuu
Yaa Balas situ beekaa
Sunqoon borroo keetii asheetee

One who ululates does not give birth
O Maaram, only you know
One who sings *geerarsa*⁸⁸ does not kill
*O Balas*⁸⁹, only you know
Sunqoo blossoms in your boroo

Ateetee...

Ateetee...

Utuun unkuree unkuruu
Hoolaan qamaxxee gad lixee
Utuun uggumee kadhaddhuu
Maareen naan kajeeli jettee?
Sunqoon boroo keetii asheetee

While I stir and stir
The sheep got into *qamaxxee*⁹⁰
While I bow and bow in prayer
Maaree said I will still be longing
Sunqoo blossoms in your boroo

Ateetee...

Ateetee...

Hundee dimbilaala bakkee
Nan haame malee nan margee?
Maaree koo gilaasha warqee
Nan waame malee nan argee?
Sunqoon boroo keetii asheetee

O the roots of wild coriander
I cut them but I did not grow them
O my *Maaree* of the golden saddle
I called on her but did not see her⁹¹
Sunqoo blossoms in your boroo

Ateetee...

Ateetee...

⁸⁸ *Geerarsa* is a genre of Oromo bravery songs that men sing traditionally when they kill games or enemies in a war.

⁸⁹ *Balas* is the spirit of the wild that is believed to help or deprive hunters of a kill

⁹⁰ *Qamaxxee* is a kind of sticky small plant that hides itself among grasses and disseminates its seeds by sticking to moving objects, people or animals. People often avoid *qamaxxee* because it sticks hard and fast and it is hard to remove from clothes or animal bodies.

⁹¹ Meaning, she has prayed to her for a child but *Maaree* has yet to answer her prayers and give her a child.

Gombisaa duwwaa manna
Setoo daagujjaa wayyaa
Garaa duwwaa dhaa manna
Godee ilmoo raadaa wayyaa
Sunqoon boroo keetii asheetee

Ateetee...

Utuun Balasiin ta'ee
Balasii Boongaa ta'ee
Dhabaadhaaf mirga kenneen
Dhadhaa keessa lolaaseen
Akka geeraru argaa
Utuun Maaramiin ta'ee
Maaram Ateetee ta'ee
Dhabduu dhaa ilma kenneen
Finaan keessa isee ciibsee
Akka iseen taatu argaa
Sunqoon boroo keetii asheetee

Ateetee...

Rather than empty granary
It's better to have a little *daagujjaa*⁹²
Rather than empty womb
It's better to have an ugly girl child⁹³
Sunqoo blossoms in your *boroo*

Ateetee...

If I were *Balas*
Were *Balas* and *Boongaa*⁹⁴
I'll give an animal to the unsuccessful
(hunter)
I will soak him in butter (anointment)
And see how he sings *geerarsaa*
If I were *Maaram*,
Were *Maaram* and *Ateetee*
I'll give a son to the childless woman
I will soak her in puddles of urine
And see how she handles it
Sunqoo blossoms in your *boroo*

Ateetee...

⁹² *Daagujjaa* is a grain that people use for many things but especially for tough times as it is not easily destroyed by pests or environmental elements.

⁹³ What this line means is that a son is always preferred but a childless mother does not mind a girl

⁹⁴ Both *Balas* and *Boongaa* are spirits of the wild. They give or deny animals to hunters, just like *Maaram* and *Ateetee* can deny or give children to women. Women evoke *Balas* and *Boongaa* so hunters can be successful. The hunter's success in killing is believed to enhance women's success in fertility/fecundity.

Insult Songs and Mock Fights⁹⁵

In the Oromo *gadaa* system everything is organized into dual systems of moieties. Every man belongs to one of the dual generation systems and married women belong to the moiety of their husband's generation. The elder generation is *Obo* and the younger is *Coora*. If a father is *Obo*, the son is *Coora* and the grandson is *Obo* again. In this way alternate generations become allies and consecutive generations are in active opposition. Women get into their moiety camps and sing insult songs and perform mock fights. In the older days, such playful insult songs and mock fights are rampant in the Oromo society. They are ways of traditional conflict resolution where most tensions are resolved through playful call-and-response insult songs and dances. In our diasporic performances, these are the most animated song-dances.

⁹⁵ Mock fights are like playing any kind of the games and matches we see today. They are joyful; they are playful. They are also therapeutic.

Hin Dheessin!

Hin dheessin yee	Do not flee! ⁹⁶
Hin dheessin yaa Cooraa	Do not flee, o <i>Cooraa</i>
Garuu lolli hin ooltuu	But a fight is inevitable
Hin dheessin yee	Do not flee!
Hin dheessin yaa Oboo	Do not flee, o <i>Oboo</i>
Garuu lolli hin ooltuu	But a fight is inevitable

An jaldeettii hin jaalluu	I do not like a baboon
Obboleettii booyyee	The sister of a pig
An dabeettii hin jaalluu	I do not like a coward
Obboleettii koollee	Even if she is my sister

Hin dheessin yee...

Do not flee...

Obboleettiin Oboo	The sister of <i>Oboo</i> (a hero)
Eeboo darbateetoo	Throws the spear and
Loli obboo koo jettii	Encourages her brother to fight
Obboleettin Cooraa	The sister of <i>Cooraa</i> (a coward)
Marqaa qabatteetoo	Holds out porridge and
Naadhu obboo koo jettii	Encourages her brother to eat

Hin dheessin yee....

Do not flee....

Atoo sarbaa hin qabduu	You don't have calf muscles
Sarbaa miillaa hin qabduu	Calf muscles on your leg
Maaliin lafa dhiittaa?	How can you stomp the ground?
Atoo gamtaa hin qabduu	You don't have unity
Gamtaa firaa hin qabduu	Unity of your people
Maaliin nama miitaa?	How can you challenge anyone?

⁹⁶ Don't flee here is to say don't be a coward. It is to encourage the other side on for the mock fight.

Hin dheessin yee...

Utuun Baaroo galuu
Baaroo gamaa galuu
Illeentiin wal hootee
Biicheen wal hoosiftee
Utuun haadhoo qabuu
Haadhoo jabaa qabu
Hiyyeettii na gootee
Hiitee na doorsifte

Hin dheessin yee...

Obisee Obisee Coorattan roorrisee
Coorisee Coorisee Obottan roorrisee

Do not flee...

While coming home from *Baaroo*⁹⁷
Home from *Baaroo* and yonder
The rabbits sucked each other
The hares suckled each other
While I have a brother
Have a strong brother
You thought I was a loner
You tied and glared at me

Do not flee...

A good *Oboo*, I overpowered *Cooraa*
A good *Cooraa*, I overpowered *Oboo*

⁹⁷ *Baaroo* is a river, a major tributary of the *Abbayya* (the Blue Nile)

Malkaa si Dhowwadhe!

Ihii yaa Oboo	Hey <i>Oboo!</i>
Baga an malkaa si dhowwadhe!	It's good ⁹⁸ I deprived you of <i>malkaa</i> ⁹⁹
Ihii yaa Cooraa baga an malkaa si	Hey <i>Coora</i>
dhowwadhe	It's good I deprived you of the <i>malkaa</i>

Niitiin Cooraa koo tii	The wife of my <i>Cooraa</i>
Abasuuda daaktii	Grinds <i>abasuuda</i> ¹⁰⁰
Maal attam urgooftii!	She smells so wonderful!
Niitiin Oboo keetii	The wife of your <i>Oboo</i>
Sila hantuuta nyaattii	Does she eat rats?
Maal attam ajooftii!	She smells so foul/bad!

Ihii yaa Oboo...

Hey *Oboo*...

Qeensa ilkaaniin qoruu	Clipping nails with your teeth
Maal lallaaftuun kunii	See how soft it is
Leenca ilmaaniin loluu	A lion fighting along its cubs ¹⁰¹
Maal ayyaantuun kuni	See how lucky it is

Ihii yaa Oboo...

Hey *Oboo*....

⁹⁸ Here again translating '*baga*' as 'It's good' really flattens the rich texture of the Oromo expression. Here the *Coora* woman provokes the *Oboo* woman to fight her by saying I did well in blocking your way to the *malkaa*. And the *Oboo* woman repeats the same so the playful mock fight begins.

⁹⁹ *Malkaa* means river valley. But sometimes it refers to the river only or the valley only.

¹⁰⁰ *Abasuuda* is a spice with black seeds known in English as black cumin.

¹⁰¹ Here '*leenca ilmaaniin loluu*' can be translated into ways. One is that the lion fighting along its cubs is a lucky thing because they form a formidable group. The second meaning however is more embedded in the dual system of *Oboo* and *Cooraa*. It means the fight between the generations; *Oboo* is the father's generation and *Cooraa* is the son's generation. This playful fight is considered a symbolic fight between fathers and sons and this is lucky because they are all alive, ensuring the continuity and perpetuity of generations.

Minaan mooyye keessaa
Mooyyee mooyyee jetti
Niitiin Oboo keetii
Booyyee booyyee jettii

The grain in the mortar
Smells like the mortar
The wife of your *Oboo*
Smells like a pig

Ihii yaa Oboo...

Hey *Oboo*....

Coora malkaa bubuddussaa
Obo marqaa bubuddussaa
Obo malkaa bubuddussaa
Coora marqaa bubuddussaa

Obo draws water from the river
Coora gluts on porridge from the pot¹⁰²
Coora draws water from the river
Obo gluts on porridge from the pot

Coora koo booji'ee oofaa
Obo kee boojjitoo soofaa
Obo koo booji'ee oofaa
Coora kee boojjitoo soofaa

My *Coora* fights and takes captives
Your *Obo* carves *boojjitoo*¹⁰³
My *Obo* fights and takes captives
Your *Coora* carves *boojjitoo*

Coora koo too faacchaan galee
Obo kee too faarsaa galee
Obo koo too faachaan galee
Coora kee too faarsaa galee

My *Cooraa* came home with trophy
Your *Oboo* came home crying
My *Oboo* came home with trophy
Your *Cooraa* came home crying

Bada manshii mashashittii
Fidi manshii kee afanee irra
taphannaa

Hey you *manshii* and *mashashii*¹⁰⁴
Bring your *manshii*, we will spread it and
play on it

¹⁰² It is shameful to be glutting on porridge

¹⁰³ *Boojjitoo* is a stick with which women make porridge. It is shameful when men settle down for carving this stick, rather than fighting and defending their communities.

¹⁰⁴ *Manshii* is a woman's fabric of honour. Here the women are insulting the *manshii* and the woman by suggesting that they will spread it on the ground and play on it. It is like trashing the woman's honour.

Yaa amoolee woo Maali farroon kun yaa dhiiroo!	O the bar of salt! ¹⁰⁵ What is this shameless woman, o boy!
Hiriyaan hamaamottaa Maaf kaleen na dhaamotaa? Gurguddoon yaa haadha koo Xixinnoon yaa hiriyaa koo An Oboof Coora hin jennee Maal maqaan Obof cooraa Kottaa bulbulii goonaa!	Friends are like a wedding party Why does my side shiver with cold? Older ones o my mothers Younger ones o my friends I did not say <i>Oboo</i> and <i>Coora</i> What's the name <i>Oboo</i> and <i>Coora</i> ? Come let us merge everyone! ¹⁰⁶
Obo koo giiftii koo Coora koo giiftii koo Sii safuu sii safuu Kusaayee sii afuu? Shittooo sii rafrafuu?	<i>Obo</i> my lady ¹⁰⁷ <i>Coora</i> my lady May <i>safuu</i> (honour) be to you Shall I spread <i>kusaayee</i> ¹⁰⁸ for you? Shall I sprinkle perfume for you?

¹⁰⁵ *Amoolee* is a bar of salt. It is the prize that the winner gets. Bar of salt is one of the most expensive items in the old times. It makes the best gift at birth. At this time the *Cooraa* women flaunt a bar of salt in the face of the *Obo* women as both sides continue the insult songs, the *Cooraa* women flaunt the bar and the *Obo* women attempt to grab it. Finally the *Obo* woman grabs it but the *Cooraa* woman does not let it go. So the wrestling begins and they break the bar into two.

¹⁰⁶ After the mock fight the women must come together and make peace. They deny that they had ever mentioned *Oboo* and *Cooraa* and divided the women. '*Kottaa bulbulii goonaa*' is translated here as 'come let us merge' but there is another hidden meaning in that it also means come let us make the fight uglier and bloodier. It reflects the double meaning and the paradoxical oneness and twoness that permeate the Oromo society.

¹⁰⁷ This last verse signals that the mock fight is over. Women from both sides say to each other: *safuu* be to you. It's time for reconciliation and saying sweet soothing things to each other for the sake of *safuu*, for the sake of restoring the balance of the cosmic order of *Waaqa*.

¹⁰⁸ *Kusaayee* is a fragrant plant associated with unmarried girls, but here used as a sign of offering the beautiful fragrance and making peace and reconciliation after the mock fight.

Final Blessings

These two songs are performed at the end of the celebrations. The first one is of praising and giving thanks to the family that prepared the feast. The second one is the final integrative blessing where the women collectively bless the mother and the child before they go back to their homes.

Sugee Koo

Sugee koo	O my <i>Sugee</i> ¹⁰⁹
Minaan warranaa suga rooba	The food in this family rains satiety
Niitiin dhangaa kana	The woman of this feast
Harka kanaan naqxe	The hand that prepared it
Irboora naqaddhu	May you adorn it with ivory bracelet
Gudee dabaladdhu	May you have another child
Ilma siif haa kennu	May you have a son
Ilma lafee namaa	A son of your bones
Isa tu latee hafa	He is the one who sprouts and stays ¹¹⁰

Sugee koo...

O my *Sugee*...

Yaa warra goorroo duubaa	O those in the front room
Aduun dhiite moo jirtii?	Has the sun gone down; is she out there?
Yaa warra farsoo naqee	O those who made this beer
Farsoon dhumte moo jirtii?	Is the beer finished or is it still there?

¹⁰⁹ *Sugee* is the name of a bird. The noun “*suga*”, and therefore the bird, symbolizes satiety, contentment, fulfillment, and completeness. After eating, drinking, singing, and dancing the women are satisfied and grateful for the plenty.

¹¹⁰ A son marries and stays in the homestead and inherits it as opposed to a girl who will be given away in marriage and does not inherit the homestead

Sugee koo...

Safaraa qoonqoo koo tii
Safaraan gooftaa koo tii
Ateetee hin oolin jedhaa
Galtee na hin goolin jedhaa

Sugee koo...

Bakkeen gamaa shumburaa qabaa
Jala hin soofinii
Qe'een warranaa hundumaa qabaa
Baga hin oolinii

Sugee koo...

O my *Sugee*...

Anticipating the quench of my thirst
My jealous lord (husband) says
Do not miss *Ateetee*¹¹¹
But do not come home and disturb me

O my *Sugee*...

Those fields out there have chick peas
Don't weed underneath them
This house/family has everything
Good thing we didn't miss this plenty

O my *Sugee*...

¹¹¹ Husbands cannot prohibit their wives from going to *Ateetee*. *Ateetee* is their day and it is exclusively women's festival. Here the women are teasing each other about husbands who might be upset when they go home after having some beer at the feast.

Immoo Tarii

Immoo tarii Ammalee tarii	<i>Immoo tarii</i> ¹¹² Again <i>tarii</i>
Ammalee dayii Ammallee dabalii Immoo tarii...	Give birth again Add more again <i>Immoo tarii</i> ...
Jalduu biiroo ta'ii Qomaa duddaan bbaaddhuu	Be like the <i>biiroo</i> baboon ¹¹³ Carry children in your bosom and in your back ¹¹⁴
Immoo tarii...	<i>Immoo tarii</i> ...
Haadha hindaaqqoo ta'ii Faffacaasaa nyaaddhuu	Be like Mother Hen Scatter as you eat ¹¹⁵
Immoo tarii...	<i>Immoo tarii</i> ...
Haadha Gabbar ta'ii Harma aannannaayii Harma aannannaayii Harma Aannannaayii Harma aannannaayii Harma aannannaayii Harma aannannaayii...	Be like Mother <i>Gabbar</i> ¹¹⁶ May your breasts flow with milk ¹¹⁷ May your breasts flow with milk May your breasts flow with milk May your breasts flow with milk May your breasts flow with milk May your breasts flow with milk...

¹¹² *Immoo tarii* is a ritual language that I cannot translate. It may have a literal meaning but I do not know that at this point.

¹¹³ A specific kind of baboon, a species that reproduces prolifically.

¹¹⁴ Have many children

¹¹⁵ Give generously to everyone. It is believed that if you give in all directions, you also receive blessings from all directions; hence scatter in different directions as you eat. The opposite of this blessing is encoded in the proverb: '*kopha nyaattuun kophaa duuti*' which means those who eat alone will die alone, as they will not have friends.

¹¹⁶ *Gabbar* is a river. Here Mother *Gabbar* refers to the spirit of the river that makes the breasts flow with milk.

¹¹⁷ This is repeated seven times while all the previous verses are repeated three times each. Odd numbers are holy numbers, as Lambert (1983) argues. But why seven and not three or five or nine is unclear to me at this point.

Chapter 5 -- Sossobata [Lullabies]

The children whose birth we celebrated in the last chapter now need cuddling and nurturing and soothing. Here, then, you will find two variants of lullabies that women sing to soothe their children. The first one is sung to put children to sleep. The child is cuddled and there is so much caressing and stroking of the *guduruu* [dreadlocks] to soothe the child into sleep. There is total devotion of attention to the child. The second lullaby is sung to soothe children when they are in the backs of their mothers when mothers are working. It is sung when the child is crying for one thing or another. Sometimes children are not feeling well or they are just being children, just needing their spirits to be soothed. This lullaby fluctuates between soothing and rocking and playing, depending on the child's mood of the moment.

Lullabies serve various purposes. First and foremost, they are meant to soothe children. Secondly, lullabies are also prayer songs in that women direct their lyrics to the various divinities. Women pray to *Waaqa* and to the different deities to make their children healthy and well, to make them grow and to give them more children. Thirdly, women also sing to let out their deepest fears and desires through the sweet melodies of the lullabies. And the lullabies, at least the ones offered here seem to perform the soothing melodies of the flute. Women use the medium of the lullabies to communicate their desires, their joys, their fears and their complaints to their husbands and other members of their families. It is said that husbands hide and listen to women singing lullabies to understand what may be bothering them. Indeed, lullabies soothe not only the children but the women who sing them as well. In these songs, the distinction between culture and spirituality is thoroughly blurred.

*Sossobata Hirriba*¹¹⁸

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

*Shururuu ruruu ruruu...*¹¹⁹

Gudee guduruu dhibbaa
Maal tu guddisuu jibbaa?
Gudee guduruu dhibbaa
Maal tu si baachuu jibbaa?

Little one with a hundred dreadlocks
Who gets tired of raising you?
Little one with a hundred dreadlocks
Who gets tired of cuddling you?

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Gudee Gudar tu qabaa
Wal argaa Waaq tu qabaa
Wal argaa Waaq tu qabaa
Shurururuu ya dhibba koo
Maal tu dhaanee dhibba koo?
Shurururuu ya dhibba koo
Maal tu fidee jibba koo?

Gudar (river) has the little one
Waaqa knows whether we meet
Waaqa knows whether we meet
Shururuu, o my treasure¹²⁰
Who hit my treasure?
Shururuu, o my treasure
What caused your dislike for me?

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

¹¹⁸ This is the type of lullaby to soothe children into sleep. Hirriba means sleep. I thank Obbo Zelealem for his translation of a portion of this lullaby. I have drawn on his version.

¹¹⁹ *Shururuu*, also interchangeably pronounced as ururuu, is the name given to these lullabies in my area of Oromo land. It resembles the soothing melodious sounds of the flute. As a word, *shururuu* may have a particular meaning but I am not aware of that yet.

¹²⁰ Here the word “*dhibba*” means one hundred in its literal translation. Contextually, it means a treasure. Also, it is worth noting here that a hundred may not mean much in today’s monetary values. It is anybody’s guess what a treasure it is in ancient times, far away from our money-obsessed times.

Haati mucaa simbiraa
Simbiraa cuquliisaa
Obboroo kaatee waccii
Barii kaatee dubbattii
Haadha mucaa na godhii
Obboroo na dammaqsii
Barii na dudubbisii
Warra guddaa na godhii
Waarii natti dheeressii

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Haati gudayyoo hin qabnee
Baddu barbaada hin qabduu
Duutus awwaala hin qabduu
Haati gudayyoo qabduu
Baddu barbaada hin dhabduu
Duutus awwaala hin dhabduu

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Gudee Gudar tu qabaa
Kenna too namaa kenna
Waaqa tu namaa guddisaa
Kennaan galata mitii
Guddisatoo galataa
Galata kee hin balleessuu
Tola kee hin irraanfaddhuu
Yaa kenna naa kenni mee
Yaa Waaq naa guddisi mee

The mother of a child is a bird
She is the bird *cuquliisaa*¹²¹
She wakes up at daybreak chirps
She rises at dawn and chatters
Make me the mother of a child (*O Waaq*)
Wake me up at daybreak
Make me chat at dawn
Make me a big family
Make my nights longer

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

One who does not have little ones
No one looks for her if she is lost
No one cries for her when she dies
One who has little ones
She will have searchers if she is lost
She will have mourners when she dies

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Gudar (river) has the little ones
It's the giver that gives
It's *Waaqa* that makes them grow
Giving is not a cause for gratitude
Making them grow is
I will not be ungrateful
I will not forget your kindness
O giver please give me (children)
O *Waaq* please make them grow for me

¹²¹ *Cuquliisa* is a beautiful little bird with a shiny dark blue color. There is a symbolism here but it escapes me right now. We will find it bye and bye.

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Si hin binnee yaa si hin binnee
Si hin binnee dhibbi hin binnee
Dhibba baasee si hin binnee
Saani mooraa si hin binnee
Calleen golaa si hin binnee
Garaa tole tu si fidee
Garaa toleef haa tolu
Waaqa kenneef haa kennuu

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

You are not bought, o you're not bought
You are a treasure money cannot buy¹²²
I have not bought you with any treasure
You're not bought with all the cattle in the kraal
You're not bought with all the beads in the backroom
It's a kind womb that brought you
May the kind womb find more kindness
May *Waaqa* that gave be rewarded

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Gaafa gudeen dhalattee
Sirbituun dibbee gattee
Tiksituun ulee gattee
Elemtuun gaadii gattee
Sillim jedhii naa rafii
Bir jedhii naa dammaqii
Gudee koo yaa reera koo
Urursaan hin raffisuu
Ka'iin hin godaansisuu
Urursaa malee rafii
Ka'ii malee dammaqii
Lakkii yaa lama gudee koo

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

The day the little one was born
Drummers dropped their drums
Shepherds dropped their sticks
Cow milk-ers dropped their straps
Snooze and sleep for me
Stir and wake up for me
My little one, o my pasture (everything)
Lullabies don't make you sleep
Stirrings don't wake you up
Sleep without lullabies
Wake up without stirring
O my little one

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

¹²² Here *dhibba* means a hundred. The mother says "I did not buy you with a hundred". A hundred is a lot of money in the ancient times. In this context, however, a hundred takes the generic meaning of a treasure, rather than a monetary value. The entire verse is sung to tell the child that she is more precious than any wealth in the world.

Gudee guduruu reeraa
Gudoo qoma gororaa
Kallacchoo bixillee dhaa
Mudaamuddiin xurii dhaa
Muddhiin soonsa goromsaa
Tiksituun ulee reeraa
Elmituun gaadii reeraa
Qabduun okolee reeraa
Deddeessuun mucaa reeraa

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Little one with lovely dreadlocks
Little one with chest full of drools
The forehead is so small
The groins are dirty
The waist is of a virgin wasp
The shepherd with a lovely stick
The milk-er with a lovely strap
The holder of a lovely milk-jar
The bearer of a lovely child

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

*Sossobata Gabii*¹²³

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Gudee guduruu dhibbaa

Little one with a hundred dreadlocks

Maal tu guddisuu jibbaa?

Who gets tired of raising you?

Gudee guduruu dhibbaa

Little one with a hundred dreadlocks

Maal tu si baacchuu jibbaa?

Who gets tired of cuddling you?

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Aannanii boossu dhugii

Drink, if crying for milk

Qabeen qammana hin qabuu

The calabash has no bad smell

Qoraasee sii naqeeraa

I have smoked it for you

Hirribaa boossu rafii

Sleep, if you're crying for sleep

Itilleen huuba hin qabuu

The bed has no grits

Haxaawee sii afeeraa

I have swept it clean for you

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Si hin binnee yaa si hin binnee

You are not bought, o you're not

Si hin binnee dhibbi hin binnee

You are a gem money can't buy

Dhibba baasee si hin binnee

I have not bought you with any treasure

Saani mooraa si hin binnee

You're not bought with all the cattle in the kraal

Calleen gojaa si hin binnee

You're not bought with all the beads in the backroom

Garaa tole tu si fidee

Garaa toleef haa tolu

Waaqa kenneef haa kennuu

It's a kind womb that brought you

May the kind womb find more kindness

May Waaqa that gave be rewarded

¹²³ This is the lullaby to soothe the children to quiet them when they are crying. *Gabii* means quietness and tranquility.

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Ililchituun hin deessuu,
Yaa Maaram situ beekaa
Geerartuun hin ajjeftuu
Yaa Balas si tu beekaa
Yaa Boongaa si tu beekaa

One who ululates does not give birth
O Maaram, only you know
One who sings geerarsa does not kill
O Balas, only you know
O Boongaa, only you know

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Mataan kee bittimii
Galeen faaqqee tolchaa
Maqaa kee natti himii
Yaa isee daabee sorsaa
Galeen waamee itti obsaa

Your hair is growing wild
I'll go home and make a comb
Tell me your name
O you with fragrant dreadlocks
I'll call it and sooth myself

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Gudee koo maal tu dhaanee
Qananii' dhaane malee
Kooraa tu boosise malee
Kooraa boowuu lakkisii
Qananii hin lakkisinii
Xinnayyoon hamma qubaa
Urgaan dhama qumbii tii
Mi'aan kan soogiddaa tii

Who hit my little one?
Pampering hit my little one
Vanity made my little one cry
Let go of vanity
Hang on to pampering
You little one, small as a finger
Your smell is the juice of myrrh
Your sweetness is that of salt¹²⁴

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

Shururuu ruruu ruruu...

¹²⁴ Salt is a precious item in the ancient Oromo tradition. Here the sweetness of a salt has a double meaning. One is the sweetness of the salt, salt gives taste to the food, just as children give taste to life. The second meaning is the word *mi'aa*, which also means expensive. So the child is both sweet and precious (expensive item).

*Birbir guutee danfee
Walakkaa cabalii
Utuu lubbuun jirtuu
Wal argaa hin dhabanii
Sii dhufuu sii dhufuu?
Bararee sii dhufuu?
Sii dhufuu sii dhufuu?
Bararee sii dhufuu?*

*The Birbir (river) swelled and raged
At the center of Cabal
Those who are alive
Will no doubt meet someday
Shall I come; shall I come for you?
Shall I come for you flying?
Shall I come; shall I come for you?
Shall I come for you flying?*

Chapter 6 -- Weedduu [Love Songs]

The children we sang lullabies for in the last chapter have grown up in this one. They are young people courting each other. The girls are *addooyees* and the boys are *dargaggeessa*. They sing love songs to each other. But these songs are so immersed in the natural world around them that it is hard to separate the love songs from the spiritual ones. Here is another set of songs where the boundary between the cultural and the spiritual is blurred. There are many kinds of love songs in the Oromo culture performed both by men and women and young men and girls. Here you will find two kinds of girls' love songs. The first one is sung by girls individually or with their *addooyee* peers. The second one is a song young men sing for their sweethearts.

Ya Hiyyooshee

Ya hiyyooshee
Ko' ya roobaa
Yoo daraaree woo

*O hiyyooshee*¹²⁵
Come o rain
If you promise blossoms

Ya durba afaan geese roobaa
yoo daraaree woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

O girls are on the brink, come o rain¹²⁶
If you promise blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

Qarreen darbuu geese roobaa
yoo daraaree woo

Qarree is about to pass, come o rain¹²⁷
If you promise blossoms

¹²⁵ *Hiyyoo* as a word does not have a specific meaning as far as I know. I do not know if it is a specific kind of flower but the word appears in all kinds of songs symbolizing spring flowers and something beautiful, something associated with blossoming and flowering. *Hiyyooshee* is an endearment of *hiyyoo*. It is also a feminizing of *hiyyoo* as in *hiyyoo ishee*, which means her *hiyyo*.

¹²⁶ A girl on the brink of losing girlhood, ripe for marriage, ready for the transition into womanhood

¹²⁷ *Qarree* the symbolism of girlhood is about to pass. *Qarree* also symbolizes virginity; so this means she is about to lose her virginity, her purity of girlhood

Ya hoiyyooshee...
Tatamsaasaa sirbaa roobaa
yoo daraaree woo
Ya hiyyooshee...
Akka arfaasaa birraa roobaa
yoo daraaree woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Haramaa keessatti roobaa
yoo daraaree woo
Ya hiyyooshee...
Tuufoon hin margine roobaa
yoo daraaree woo
Ya hiyyooshee...
Keello hudhaa malee roobaa
yoo daraaree woo
Ya hiyyooshee...
Halagaa keessatti roobaa
yoo daraaree woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

O hiyyooshee...
Shake it up and dance, come o rain
If you promise blossoms
O hiyyooshee...
Like *arfaasaa* and *birraa*¹²⁸, come o rain
If you promise blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

Among the weeds, come o rain
If you promise blossoms
O hiyyooshee...
Tuufoo has not grown, come o rain
If you promise blossoms
O hiyyooshee...
Only budding *keelloo*, come o rain
If you promise blossoms
O hiyyooshee...
Among the *halagaa*¹²⁹, come o rain
If you promise blossoms
O hiyyooshee....

¹²⁸ *Arfaasaa* and *birraa* are seasons. Often *birraa* is translated as spring but this does not reflect either the characteristic of the season or the time of the season in other parts of the world. *Birraa* is the season (September, October, November) that comes right after the heavy rainy season *Ganna* (June, July, August). Things are lush in *Birraa* and the rains have stopped and people start coming together and connecting after the heavy rains have disconnected them for three months. This is when boys and girls come together and court and sing and dance. *Arfaasaa* is the season (March, April, May) right after the dry season *Bona* (December, January, February) where we just begin to see the promises of the coming of the rains. This is the season of light rain showers when young people can still come together and court and sing and dance. More often than not courting and marriages do not happen in the driest dry season and the heaviest rainy season; hence the girls call for singing and dancing in *Arfaasaa* and *Birraa*.

¹²⁹ *Halagaa* means strangers, people who are not relatives. It means people into whose clans and sub-clans the girls can marry. And marriage can only happen with such strangers, strangers that are seven generations apart on the father's lineage and five generations apart on the mother's lineage. Within these lineages, girls cannot marry because they are considered relatives, not strangers.

Suubboon nu hin argine roobaa yoo daraaree woo Ya hiyyooshee...	We haven't seen <i>suubboo</i> , ¹³⁰ come o rain If you promises blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>
Qeerroo mucaa malee roobaa yoo daraaree woo Ya hiyyooshee...	Only the young <i>qeerroo</i> , ¹³¹ come o rain If you promise blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>
Suubboon budaa baree roobaa yoo daraaree woo Ya hiyyooshee...	<i>Suubboo</i> has evil eyes, come o rain If you promise blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>
Nutoo mucaa qarree roobaa yoo daraaree woo Ya hiyyooshee...	But we are <i>qarree</i> girls, come o rain If you promise blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>
Dhangaggoo qaqayii roobaa yoo daraaree woo Ya hiyyooshee...	<i>Dhangaggoo</i> ¹³² is dry, come o rain If you promise blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>
Tuufoon daraareeraa roobaa yoo daraareewoo Ya hiyyooshee...	<i>Tuufoo</i> has blossomed If you promise blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>
Dargaggoo dhagayii roobaa yoo daraaree woo Ya hiyyooshee...	Listen <i>dargaggoo</i> (young men) If you promise blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>
Suubboon maraateeraa yoo daraaree woo Ya hiyyooshee...	<i>Suubboo</i> has gone crazy ¹³³ If you promise blossoms <i>O hiyyooshee...</i>

¹³⁰ *Suubboo* is a married man. Girls are disgusted by them and they fear they may be married to them.

¹³¹ *Qeerroo* is unmarried young man and girls sing love songs for *qeerroo*; they praise *qeerroo*. They desire *qeerroo*. They want to get married to them. *Qeerroo* is the treasure of young girls.

¹³² *Dhangaggoo* is a bitter plant that can be eaten but mostly used for coloring food.

¹³³ Crazy for even thinking of approaching us and courting us

Dargaggoon daannisa roobaa
yoo daraare woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Qalbii nama buta roobaa
yoo daraarewoo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Goofareen gaaddisa roobaa
yoo daraare woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Gabii namaa buusa roobaa
yoo daraare woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Qotiyyoon baddaa dhaa roobaa
yoo daraare woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Diiimaa barbadaa dha roobaa
yoo daraare woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Imimmaan jaalalaa roobaa
yoo daraare woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

Dhiigaan wal makaa dha roobaa
yoo daraare woo
Ya hiyyooshee...

*Dargaggo*¹³⁴ is *daannisa*¹³⁵, come o rain
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

He takes your breath away
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

His *goofaree* (hair style) is a shade
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

He brings cool and calming
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

The oxen from the highlands
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

They are crimson red
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

The tears shed for love
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

They are mixed with blood
If it promises blossoms
O hiyyooshee...

¹³⁴ *Dargaggo* is the plural of *dargaggeessa*, meaning a young man of courting age. Here *dargaggo* is used both as singular and as a generic plural.

¹³⁵ *Daannisa* is a strong built beautiful tree symbolizing the handsomeness and strength of young men

Washaawwashee

Washaawwashee koo
Washaawwasha kee itti dhiisii
Gororaan laphee na jiisii

Washaawwashee (my lovely spirited one)
Lase aside your playfulness
And flood my heart with your saliva

Dhaabi dhaabi goodarree kee
Jala deebituu caffee dhaa
Raasi raasi goofaree kee
Qabbaneessituu lapphee dhaa

Plant, plant your *goodarree*¹³⁶
It keeps the marsh at bay
Shake, shake your *goofaree*¹³⁷
You the calmer of my throbbing heart

Washaawwashee...

Washaawwashee...

Roobee roobeetuma caamaa
Kan magri hin magari maalii?
Boohee booheetuman dhaamaa
Kan wal hin agarre maalii?

It rains and it rains and it stops
Why is it that grass doesn't grow?
I cry and I cry and I send messages
Why is it that we don't see each other?

Washaawwashee...

Washaawwashee...

Utuu naa kuttee naa kuttee
Kalaalaa birraa naa kuttaa
Utuu naa dhuftee naa dhuftee
Karaa Waaq irraa naa dhuftaa
Karaan Waaqarraa hin deemsisuu
Garaan jaalalaa hin teesisuu

If you could cut and cut for me
You would cut for me spring *kalaalaa*¹³⁸
If you could come and come for me
You would come for me through the sky
The road in the sky is not navigable
But the loving heart cannot sit and wait

¹³⁶ A root tuber with beautiful broad leaves

¹³⁷ A hairstyle that can be referred to as Afro in today's language

¹³⁸ *Kalaalaa* is a lush mountain creeper. It has multiple meanings in this context. First, the creeping and reaching out nature of the vine symbolizes connection -- the reaching out and connecting people to people. *kalaalaa* is at its lush best in the spring right after the rainy season; hence *kalaalaa birraa* (spring *kalaalaa*). At this point it symbolizes the purity and beauty of girlhood. The way Oromo society is woven together is by connecting clans and sub-clans through marriage. Girls become instrumental in weaving the various communities together and spring is the best time for reaching out and connecting is the time of courting and love.

Washaawwashee...

Muree mureetan ijaaraa
Yoo kosorruun mana taatee
Lowee dhufetaan si ilaalaa
Jaalaltoo soogidda taatee

Washaawwashee...

Yaa sangaa daalaccha kuullee
Bibiriin naa cehi maaloo
Yaa Waaqa jaalala uumtee
Sillimii naa kenni maaloo

Washaawwashee...

Muka baddaa baala nyaatu
Naa ergi baala waleensuu
Quba qabdaa waan na raasu
Naa ergi waan na jabeessu

Washaawwashee...

Leenca dallaa biraa
Eenyu darbachuu jiraa
Yoo abbaa horii malee?
Qallaa nudhii keetii
Eenyu tu hammachuu jira
Yoo abbaa horii malee?
Ho yaa horii dhabaa
Shubbaa koo sin dhabaa?

Washaawwashee...

Washaawwashee...

I cut and cut and build
If *kosorru* makes a house
I'll crawl and come and see you
Love has become precious (as salt)

Washaawwashee...

O, the grey ox with beautiful eyes
Please cross the *Birbir* (river) for me
O the *Waaqa* who created love
Please grant me a little nap

Washaawwashee...

Of the mountain trees, one eats the leaves
Send me the leaves of *waleensuu* (tree)
You know why my heart trembles
Please send me words of enchantment

Washaawwashee...

The lion near the cattle enclosure
Who dares chase him
But the owner of the cattle?
Your slender waist
Who is going to embrace it
But the one with wealth?
Alas, o my lack of wealth
Am I going to lose you, my honey?

Washaawwashee...

Haa ijaaru abbaan ijaaree
An hin diigu dagalee koo
Ha hinaafu abbaan hinaafee
An hin dhiisu jaalallee koo

Washaawwashee...

Yaa Sibiilu yaa Sibiiluu
Maal sangaan baar gama hin
dheedne
Si hin ciniinu sin qimmiiduu
Maal sagaan jaalala hin beekne

Washaawwashee...

Manni abbaa kee Jimma keessaa
Kan naggaadeen bira yaatuu
Jaalala kee tu irrakeessa
Kan garaan kee jibba yaaduu

Washaawwashee...

Yommuu gugeen baala raaftu
Taa'een barreessee rigaa koo
Yoo ana bukkeen orma ilaaltu
Maalan balleesse hiriyyaa koo?

Let those who build go on building
I will not undo my walls
Let those who envy go on being jealous
I will not abandon my sweetheart

Washaawwashee...

*O Sibiiluu, o Sibiiluu*¹³⁹
What a bull; he does not graze yonder
Shall I bite you or shall I pinch you?¹⁴⁰
What a fool; you don't know love

Washaawwashee...

Your father's house is in *Jimma*
Where merchants pass by
Your love must be shallow
That's why your heart wants to dislike

Washaawwashee...

When the dove shook the leaves
I sat down and chewed my *rigaa*¹⁴¹
You look past me to another one
What wrong have I done, my friend?

¹³⁹ The name of a bull

¹⁴⁰ What can I do to tell you that I love you? You don't seem to know the signs of love

¹⁴¹ *Rigaa* is a natural toothbrush made of twigs

Chapter 7 -- Gaa'ila [Wedding Songs]

Now the time of courting is over; it's time for settling down in marriage. But marriage is not such a simple event for traditional Oromo girls. It is one of the most traumatic experiences of separation and exile. It is a time when her *addooyyee* girlhood is over for a girl and her transition into womanhood begins. Here you will find girls singing some gut-wrenching songs of *addooyyee* farewell in various sweet melodies. You will find three categories of *addooyyee* songs. In the first category, *Seenaa* [Farewell], there are two songs: *Seenaa Haadhaa* [Farewell to Mother] and *Seenaa Addooyyee* [Farewell to *Addooyyee*]. In the second category, *Mararoo* [Lamentations], there are two songs *Maradhee* [shall I curl up] and *Nagayaa* [Goodbye]. The third category, *Arrabsoo* [Insult] brings two insult songs, *Arrabsoo Soddaa* [Insult of the Bridegroom] and *Arrabsoo Intalaa* [Insult of the Bride].

Seenaa is really more than farewell. It has many meanings interwoven in just one word. It means history, message, lesson, advice, warning, confession, guidance, counsel, recommendation, lamentation, farewell, etc. For the particular context of girls' *seenaa* songs presented here the term that pulls together all these meanings is "last words". *Addooyyee* girls say last words to their families and to their *addooyyee* girlfriends when one of them leaves the girlhood to transition into womanhood. And this is a big rite of passage as it literally means separation and exile.

Seenaa

Seenaa Haadha¹⁴²

Heennaan haama yaa kaloo I'm cutting *heennaa*,¹⁴³ o you pasture
Baal harbuu lateera woo The leaves of the fig tree have budded
Seenaan dhaama yaa haadha koo I'm sending you seenaa, o Mother
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo For the time has come for us to part

Heennaan haama yaa kaloo I'm cutting *heennaa*, o you pasture
Hin afin ijeerraddhuu Do not spread it but thatch it together
Seenaan dhaama yaa haadha koo I'm sending you *seenaa* o my mother
Hin rafin dhaggeeffadhuu Do not sleep; listen to me
Yoo rafteef barreeffadhuu But if you sleep; hear me in your soul
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo For the time has come for us to part

Heennaan haama...

I'm cutting *heennaa*...

Hindaaqqoon kuluu jettee The chicken cackled
Gogorriin shokaa jettee The francolin bird tweeted
Baabboon gurgurruu jedhee Father said let's sell her (my friend)
Halagaan binnuu jedhee *Halagaa* [strangers] said let's buy her
Obboon koo birrii jedhee My brother said (he wants) money
Dayyoo koo atoo maal jettee? Mother, what did *you*¹⁴⁴ say?
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo For the time has come for us to part

Hennaan haama...

I'm cutting *heennaa*...

Dayyoo koollee yaa haadha koo Mother, o my mother
Birriin sibiilaa darbattee keessa Money is metal; you throw it away

¹⁴² This is a genre of seenaa sung for mothers.

¹⁴³ *Heennaa* is a small plant in green lush pastures and cutting *heennaa* is symbolic of severing relationships and parting ways.

¹⁴⁴ Girls send special appeal to mothers, they appeal to the female ties. They appeal to the wound she too had suffered when she separated from her own people.

Birriituun dhiiraa ergattee teessaa
Dulluma keessaa
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo

Heennaan haama...

Yaa baabboo koollee jennaan
Na hin oolfattuulee jennaan
Utubaa taataa mitii
Karra naa dhaalaa mitii
Dhaqi iddoo keellee jedhe
Dayyoo koollee siin jennaan
Na hin oolfattuulee jennaan
Daaraa naa hartaa mitii
Daakaa naa haftaa mitii
Dhaqi iddookeellee jettee
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo

Heennaan haama...

Dayyoo koo yaa haadha koo
Hiyyumni abbaa qarreerra deemaa
Hiyyumni haadhaa lafee aseena
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo

Heennaan haama...

Dayyoo koo yaa haadha koo
Wandaboo kee darbattee

*Birriituu is male (strong); she will
serve you -- In your old age
For the time has come for us to part*

I'm cutting heenna...

O my father, I said
Won't you save me,¹⁴⁵ I pleaded
You can't be the pole of the house
You can't inherit the homestead
Go to your place; he said
O my mother; I said to you
Won't you save me, I pleaded
You can't sweep my ashes forever
You can't grind my mills for ever
Go to your place; you said
For the time has come for us to part

I'm cutting heenna...

Mother, o my mother
The loss of a father hurts the *qarree*¹⁴⁶
But the loss of a mother seeps deep
into the bones¹⁴⁷
For the time has come for us to part

I'm cutting heenna...

Mother, o my mother
You throw your garment

¹⁴⁵ *Na hin oolfattuu* (won't you save me?) here can also be translated as won't you buy me out?

¹⁴⁶ *Qarree* is a girl's tonsure. It symbolizes virginity. Girls treasure *qarree* (see Chapter 2).

¹⁴⁷ Losing a father affects just my marriage and affinal relationships but losing a mother is much deeper; it seeps deep down into my bone marrows.

Diinqarra buufattee
Addooyyee koo darbattee
Diina harka buufattee
Halagaan diinaa haa dha koo
Halagaa garaa mukaa
Dadarbateetoo mugaa
Alanfateetoo tufaa
Halagaan qorsaa
Kabalee kolfaa
Dhiity hin malaasaa
Dhiisus garaasaa
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo

Heennaan haama...

Dayyoo koo yaa haadhakkoo
Yaa harmee harma dammaa
Gabaa dhaquufoo jirtaa
Gabaa galuufoo jirtaa
Mana duuba geesseemoo
Yaa mucaa koommoo jettaa
Waamtee dhabuufoo jirtaa
Teessee cophuufoo jirtaa
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo

Heennaan haama...

Dayyoo koo yaa haadha koo
Karaa mana kee daggalli haa margu
Anoo mana kee hin dhufuu
Ergii hiriyeen koo deemtee
Yennaan mana kee dhufee
Balballi kee naa tufuu
Boroon kee naa darbatuu

You toss it on the *diinqa*
You throw my *Addooyyee*
Into the hands of an enemy
A stranger is an enemy, my mother
Stranger of a hardened heart
He throws her out and dozes off
He chews her up and spits her out
A stranger is like cancer
He slaps her and laughs
He kicks her squashes her
He refrains only at his will
For the time has come for us to part

I'm cutting *heenna*...

Mother, o my mother
Mother with breasts of honey
You're going to go to the market
You're going to return from market
You're going to get near the house
You're going to call your daughter
You're going to call and not find her
You're going to sit and cry a river
For the time has come for us to part

I'm cutting *heenna*...

Mother, o my mother
May the path to your house be
covered with thickets
For I won't come to your house again
After my *hiriye* (girlfriend) leaves,
If I come to your house,
May your door spit me out

Wal dhabuun gaheera woo

May (the spirit of) your *boroo* shake
me up and throw me away
For the time has come for us to part

Heennaan haama...

I'm cutting *heenna*...

Mana kee duuba haadha koo
Baqariin ruufa
Qoddoon gaaddisaa
Dayyoo koo ya haadha koo
Erga hiriyeen koo deemtee
Iddoo ciisa isee
Baqarii afii
Qoddoo rafrafii
Faca'ii rafii
Wal dhabuun gaheera woo

Behind your house, o Mother
*Baqarii*¹⁴⁸ forms a canopy
*Qoddoo*¹⁴⁹ forms a shade
Mother, o my mother
After my *hiriyee* leaves
In her sleeping place
Spread *baqarii*
Sprinkle *qoddoo*
And spread yourself and sleep
For the time has come for us to part

Heennaan haama...

I'm cutting *heenna*...

Bishaan Abbayyaa galaana Gibee
Hin yaa'uu aseeni jettee aseene kunoo
Hin yaa'in malee
Garaan na didee kaloon na citee
Si hin yaadu adeemi jettee adeeme
kunoo
Na hin yaadin malee

Water of *Abbayyaa*, the sea of *Gibee*¹⁵⁰
Come in I will not flow, you said.
And here I enter; so do not flow
My heart trembles, my gut is
wrenched
Go and I will not miss you, you said.
And here I go; so do not miss me

¹⁴⁸ A fragrant plant of the basil type

¹⁴⁹ Another fragrant plant common in women's gardens

¹⁵⁰ *Gibee* and *Abbayyaa* are rivers

*Seenaa Addooyyee*¹⁵¹

Handoodee xobbee mukaa
Addooyyee sokkeen dhufaa
Hin rafin dhaggeeffadhuu
Yoo rafteef barreeffadhuu

*Handoodee*¹⁵², o tender wood
Addooyyee, I'll run away and come
Do not sleep; listen (for my whispers)
But if you sleep, hear me in your soul

Yaa Garjeeda Abbaa Gimbii
Jiini aduurra deemawoo
Nu marseera abbaan birrii
Nu dhabeera abbaan horee
Babbaduuf adeemna woo
Yoo rafteef barreeffadhuu

*O Garjeedha of Abbaa Gimbii*¹⁵³
The moon walks on the sun
Those with money have surrounded
us -- Those who raised us have lost us
We're about to vanish
But if you sleep, hear me in your soul

Handoodee...

Handoodee...

Nu durbeen keenyaa
Durbeen addooyyee keenyaa
Yommuu wal geenyyu
Wal geenyee teenyu
Nu gobii lolaa
Lafti ofiin tolaa
Yommuu gargar banummoo
Nu gogorrii dhaa
Gogorrii soraa
Lafti ofiin onaa
Yoo rafteef barreeffadhuu

We the girls of our girlhood
The girls of our *Addooyyee*
When we come together
Come together and sit in circles
We are like the swarm of an army
The place itself comes alive
But when we are dispersed
We are like francolin birds
Francolin birds that are scattered
The place itself turns desolate (ugly)
But if you sleep, hear me in your soul

¹⁵¹ This is a genre of seenaa sung with and for girlfriends

¹⁵² *Handoodee* is a type of blooming bush often processed and used as soap. Often these plants and animals and other things in the environment are used in symbolic ways to represent some cultural or spiritual elements. At this point, however, I do not know if handoodee is just used to rhyme with *addooyyee* or if it has other culturally/spiritually symbolic ties to the separation of *Addooyyees*.

¹⁵³ *Garjeeda* is the name of a place and *Abbaa Gimbii* is the name of a man (perhaps a *qaalluu* or a landlord in more recent times)

Handoodee...

Wallaggee gabaa shaarii
Yaa hinnee dhagaa gidduu
Wal dhabnee nagaan taa'ii
Egaa hin cittee garaa hiddhuu
Yaa baala geeshee rimaa
Goosuun daddaraarewoo
An maalan beekee himaa
Kooyyuu nan walaallewoo
Yoo rafteef bareeffadhuu.

Handoodee...

Sinsinnittii isee duraa
Surreesaa sii afaa
Kootii isii darrabaa
Sinsinniin baatee jennaan
Gulgubbee sii afaa
Doobbii sii dabalaa

Handoodee...

Addooyyee koo yaa hiriye
Wantin ani sii dhaamuu
Fal'aanattii cichaa
Laqqaamsattii dhirsaa
Afaan dhipphaddhuu

Handoodee...

Wallaggee at the market of *Shaarii*¹⁵⁴
O the *hinnee*¹⁵⁵ between the rocks
We're losing each other; farewell
It's inevitable; tighten your girdle
O the leaves of pregnant *geeshee*¹⁵⁶
Goosuu has bloomed everywhere
How do I know what to say to you
When I'm oblivious to my own fate
But if you sleep, hear me in your soul

Handoodee....

For the honeymoon
He will spread his pants for you
He will add his jacket on it
Once honeymoon is over
He will spread poison ivy for you
He will add hairy poison ivy on it

Handoodee...

Addooyyee, O my dear friend
Here is my advice for you
The horn spoon in the wall
The gluttonous greedy husband
Make your mouth narrow

¹⁵⁴ *Wallaggee* and *Shaarii* are both names of places

¹⁵⁵ *Hinnee* is a small plant

¹⁵⁶ *Geeshee*, sometimes also called *geeshoo*, is a plant with bitter leaves used as pops for alcoholic drinks. Here the bitterness of the leaves and pregnant *geeshee*, together, symbolize the bitterness of the separation about to happen to *Addooyyees*.

Garaa bal'addhuu
Sii kennan nyaaddhu
Siin jedhan baaddhu
Yoo rafteef barreeffadhuu

Handoodee...

Addooyyee koo yaa hiriye
Waantin ani sii dhaamuu
Manni kee hin aarinii
Yoo manni kee aaree
Maal nyaata sin jedhuu
Marmitees hin taa'inii
Yoo marmite teesse
Maal yaadda siin jedhuu
Hiriyyee yaa Addooyyee koo
Maal nyaattaa dhaa mannaa
Maal yaaddaallee sii wayyaa
Yoo rafteef barreeffadhuu

Handoodee...

Addooyyee koo yaa hiriye
Ibiddi kee hin dhaamini
Gandaallee si hin waminii
Ganda barte siin jedhaa
Warra yaadde siin jedhaa
Ganda barteedhaa manna
Warra yaaddeellee wayyaa
Yoo rafteef barreeffaadhuu

Handoodee...

Make your heart wide
Eat if they give you
Carry if they load you (with insults)
But if you sleep, hear me in your soul

Handoodee...

Addooyyee, O my dear friend
Here is my advice for you
Don't let smoke out of your house
For if smoke comes out of your house
They will say: what is she eating?
And do not sit curled up and slumped
For if you sit curled up and slumped
They will say: What is she thinking?
My friend, *O Addooyyee*
Rather than what is she eating
What is she thinking is better for you
But if you sleep, hear me in your soul

Handoodee...

Addooyyee, o my dear friend
Do not let your fire go out
Don't let them call you from away
He will think you learned the away
He'll think you're missing your family
Rather than learning the away
Missing your family is better for you
But if you sleep, hear me in your soul

Handoodee...

Bishaan Abbayyaa tuujuba Baaroo
Har'i woo har'umaa, lafti woo asumaa
Suutuma maaloo

O the water of *Abbayyaa*, the depth of
Baaroo
Today is just today, the place is just
close by
Slow down please (don't go so soon)

Mararoo

Maradhee

Mararoo yaa mararoo koo
Maradhee moo maladheen oola
Jettee boossi qarreenoo

*Mararoo, o my mararoo*¹⁵⁷
Shall I curl up or shall I scheme up to stay
Cries the *qarree*

Wallaggallee hin seenee
Wallagge kaa kunoo
Bakkee Jimmaattillee
Hiriyee yaa Addooyyee koo
Wal dhabnallee hin seenee
Wal dhabne kaa kunoo
Bakkee sirbaattillee
Maradheen oola jettee boossi
qareenoo

We didn't think it would come to this
But look how it is coming to this
Even in the fields of *Jimmaa* (place)
My dear friend, *O Addooyyee*
We didn't think we would lose each other
But look how we are losing each other
Even from our place of dancing
I will curl up and stay; cries the *qarree*

Mararoo...

Mararoo...

Hin geessu hin geessu jennaan,
Hingeenyee geese
Fagoon dhiyaattee
Geessee nu raaftee
Hiriyee yaa Addooyyee koo
Hundee caccabaa qilxuu
Garaa sabbataan hiddhuu

It won't be soon, it won't be soon we said
That which won't be soon has come
The faraway has come so close
It is here, trembling our hearts
My dear friend, *o Addooyyee*
At the bottom of broken *qilxuu*¹⁵⁸
Tighten your girdle (and bear it)

¹⁵⁷ *Mararoo* songs are lamentations of exile sung with and for *addooyyee* girlfriends. It narrates the grief and loss of girlhood. Girls mourn the loss through *mararoo* in anticipation of womanhood.

¹⁵⁸ *Qilxuu* is a big oak tree symbolizing women. Broken *qilxuu* is symbolic of broken female ties in this case mothers and daughters; hence the advice to tighten their girdles and beat the pain of separation

Bariitee yaa barii shaashaa
Lafti har'aa maa bariif kaataa?
Bariinaan wal dhabnaa laataa?
Maradheen oola jettee boossi
qarreenoo

Mararoo...

Agadattii balballaa
Wajjiniin nyaanna jedheen
Hammaaree gad naqee
Hiriye yaa Addooyyee koo
Ganna isee dooluu kanaa
Birraa gabaabduu kanaa
Wajjinin baanaa jedheen
Marmaareellee daddhabe
Bariitee yaa barii soomaa
Marii koo egaa hin bariitee
Maal walii goonaa?
Maradheen oola jettee boossi
qarreenoo

Mararoo...

It's day break now, o daybreak with clarity
Why does this place hurry for daybreak?
Do we lose each other at daybreak?¹⁵⁹
I will curl up and stay, cries the *qarree*

Mararoo...

The little *agadaa*¹⁶⁰ in the front garden
I meant for us to eat together
And I scooped and saw the seeds
My dear friend, *O Addooyyee*
O this stump of *ganna* (winter)
And this short *birraa* (spring)
I meant for us to spend together
I walked back and forth but I despaired¹⁶¹
It's daybreak, o daybreak of *soomaa*¹⁶²
Oh my confidant; it is now daybreak
What can we do for one another?
I will curl up and stay, cries the *qarree*

Mararoo...

¹⁵⁹ Girls stay up all nights singing *mararoo* and *seena*. The eve of the wedding day is particularly marked by this. Girls cry and sing as they listen for the signs of the dreaded daybreak. They sing to the cock crowing, they sing to the birds singing, and they sing to the daybreak. They want to make the night longer and delay the leaving of their *addooyye* but the dreaded day comes inevitably.

¹⁶⁰ *Agadaa* is a sweet plant in the family of sorghum and millet. It is eaten like one eats sugar cane. It also symbolizes the sweetness of girls in the context of love and courting.

¹⁶¹ To see if she would get the good news that the wedding was cancelled so they could enjoy their *agadaa* together. But nothing had changed and she had despaired.

¹⁶² My understanding of *barii soomaa* is as an expression which means several things, including long/protracted twilight, the twilight of breaking fast, etc.(in more recent Islamic sense). I'm not sure which meaning this word takes in this context.

Yaa utubaa mananaa
Anoo sittan hirkadhaa
Maa na jalaa jigdaa?
Yaa gurguddaa mananaa
Anoo sittan iyyadhaa
Maa na jalaa diddaa?

Mararoo...

Omborii dhaa manna
Garbuu jiidhaa wayyaa
Kan qola isaatti hafuu
Tumanoo hin shafshafuu
Nu durbee dhaa manna
Yertuu dhiiraa wayyaa
Kan karra abbaatti hafuu
Duunaanoo hin dhaallatu
Baala geeshee maraa daadhii
Yaa haadha deessee
Egaa hin geessee nagaan taa'ii

Mararoo...

Bar dheengaddaa yoonallee
Hiriyaa durbaa ti kaa
Michuu dargaggoo ti kaa
Baranamoo yoonallee
Hiriyee addooyyee koo
Hiriyaa reeffaa ti kaa
Michuu nadheenii ti kaa

Oh the big pole of this house
I'm leaning on you
Why do you collapse?
Oh you elders of this family
I'm pleading with you
Why do you ignore me?

Mararoo...

Rather than oats
Wet barley is better
It stays in its cover
When pounding, you just do it lightly
Rather than us girls
A weak boy is better
He stays in the homestead
And inherits it when his father dies
O the rolled *geeshee* leaves of *daadhii*¹⁶³
O you mother who birthed me
It is now over; so stay well

Mararoo...

Last year this time
You were the friend of girls
And the lover of young men
Next year this time
O Addooyyee my dear friend
You will be the friend of a corpse
And the companion of women

¹⁶³ *Daadhii* is alcoholic drink made of honey. The leaves of the *geeshee* plant are used as pop. Leaves on small stems are rolled and tied and boiled in water and added to the fermenting *daadhii*. The alcoholic drink is also known as mead or honey wine.

Mararoo...

Bitawoon gaarii dhaa
Keewwadhuu taa'i kaa
Hiriye yaa addooyyee koo
Booddeensee aarii dhaa
Beekkadhuu taa'I kaa

Mararoo...

Yaa qarree yaa qarruu
Kan gubbaansee barruu
Deebinee hin agarru

Muka arbaa yaa waleensuu koo
Qarree addooyyee
bareedduu koo
Egaa hin kateem adeemuufoo
Maladdheen oola jettee boossi
qarreenoo

Mararoo...

Mararoo...

A bracelet is good
Wear it and sit down
O Addooyyee my dear friend
Later it will bring anger
Know it and sit down (be warned)

Mararoo...

O qarree, o qarruu (endearment)
Her top is like the palm of the hand
We'll never see her again¹⁶⁴

Muka arbaa (tree), *o waleensuu* (tree)
O addooyyee's qarree
O my beautiful one
Are you getting up to leave?
I will curl up and stay, cries the *qarree*

Mararoo....

¹⁶⁴ Once the girl is married the tonsure will not be shaved. Instead they let it grow for some time and then cut the rest of the surrounding hair to make them equal with the hair growing on where the *qarree* was. This becomes *gunfura* or *goofaree*, which is what others know as Afro. Now a woman, the newly wed will have a woman's hairstyle, of which there are many.

Nagayaa [Goodbye]

Kuluu yaa kuluu ya iyya hindaaqqoo Cheep o cheep; it's cockscrow
Nagaa yaa nagaa biyya abbaa koo Farewell, o farewell, the land of my
Kan koo cittee rafuu diddeetti garaan father
koo Mine is over;¹⁶⁵ my heart had refused
to sleep

Yaa kalaalaa hidda gaaraa O *kalaalaa*,¹⁶⁶ you mountain creeper
Lafti halaalaa inni hamaa dhaa The land is so far, the man is so cruel
Halagaa dhaa He is a stranger
Na barbaadaa Look out for me
Jetti ilmon keessan dayee koo Says your daughter, o Mother

Kuluu yaa kuluu...

Cheep o cheep...

Nagaa yaa nagaa biyya Abbaa koo Farewell, farewell the land of my
Nagaa yaa nagaa biyya Abbaa koo father
Warqeen biyya Abbaa koo nagaa Farewell, farewell the land of my
nagaa father
The golden land of my father farewell,
farewell

Kan sooressi nyaatu dhadhaa What the rich eat is butter, butter
dhadhaa What cries and trembles is the heart,
Kan booyee nu raasu garaa garaa the heart
Hin booyin garaa koo adaraa adaraa Do not cry my heart, please, please
Warqeen biyya abbaa koo nagaa The golden land of my father farewell,
nagaa farewell

¹⁶⁵ *Kan koo citte* literally this translates as mine is cut – meaning that it has been decided; there is no way the decision can be reversed. The die is cast. They are giving me away.

¹⁶⁶ *Kalaalaa* is a creeper lush and symbolizes the girl's lush beauty and time of frivolity...

Warqeen biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The golden land of my fatherland farewell
Bakkeen biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The fields of my fatherland farewell
Dirreen biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The plains of my fatherland farewell
Gaarran biyya abbaa koo nagaan	Mountains of my fatherland farewell
Tulluun biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The hills of my fatherland farewell
Malkaan biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The basins of my fatherland farewell
Laggeen biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The rivers of my fatherland farewell
Binnoon biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The animals of my fatherland farewell
Mukken biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The trees of my fatherland farewell
Tusiin biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The shrubs of my fatherland farewell
Biyyoon biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The soil of my fatherland farewell
Nammeen biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The people of my fatherland farewell
Manneen biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The houses of my fatherland farewell
Ollaan biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The neighbourhoods of my fatherland farewell
Urjiin biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The stars of my fatherland farewell
Baatiin biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The moon of my fatherland farewell
Daandiin biyya abbaakoo nagaan	The paths of my fatherland farewell
Karaan biyya abbaa koo nagaan	The roads of my fatherland farewell

Arrabsoo [Insult Songs]

For a female in traditional Oromo society, wedding marks one of the most important, if not *the* most important rites of passage. And wedding songs are sites where the most intricate paradoxes that hold together the entire Oromo society are made visible. Females are *halagaa* outsiders/strangers belonging nowhere but they are also the most intimate of relatives holding together everyone and everything at the same time. This paradox weaves itself through all girls' wedding songs but they are particularly dramatic in insult songs. One minute girls are hurling the most obscene insult songs at the bridegroom and his party; the next minute they are singing welcoming songs of reconciliation and love. The same thing happens at the Bridegrooms place. Girls there do not spare the new bride coming to their land. One minute they insult and make her cry profusely and the next minute they sing her praises and offer her welcoming songs of reconciliation and love.

Holcomb (1973) and Qashu (2009) give details of their observations of Oromo weddings in western Oromo land and in Arsi respectively. These songs include the haunting wails of girls' farewell songs and the paradoxically joyous songs of reconciliation and welcoming. Lambert (1983) also touches on some of girls' wedding songs. However, the most obscene kinds of insult songs that I am trying to make visible in this chapter are fast disappearing and, to the best of my knowledge, they have not been published in the textual literature. This creates a gaping gap in the movements of Oromo rebirth.

Indeed, Tegegn (2006) notes how parents intervene when insult words become "thorny" and offensive. He observes how the parents stop the girls from hurling insults at the bridegroom for fear of the consequences. He also tells the story of how a young bride married to an older man sang insult songs and how the old man beat his new young bride on their wedding day because the old man felt hurt by the insults. This shows a drastic shift in the social and moral functions of insults and their consequences. It shows how the beliefs and values that sanctioned insults are fast disappearing and how the songs are being censored and sanitized.

On the other hand, Dibaba (2011) documents his observation of how women weave obscene insults into erotic songs and perform them as acts of protest and political resistance. He addresses a critical gap by making visible how contemporary Oromo women re-appropriate their traditional insult songs and use them in humorous ways to empower themselves and achieve political goals. He argues that insult songs serve important social functions in curbing violence. Instead of swallowing their hurt feelings and repressing their oppression, women express their repressed emotions and critique the interwoven violence of state repression and patriarchal structures.

Insult songs had important social functions in traditional expressive Oromo society. Expressing hurt feelings is a crucial strategy of preventing violent conflicts in Oromo culture and spirituality. If we want to understand our cultural and spiritual heritage and rework it for our present needs of identity, we need to reclaim them as holistically as possible. That way, we can sort what works and what does not work for our contemporary context. It is in this spirit of rebirth that I present these songs uncensored and un-sanitized. I hope you read and sing and perform them in this spirit too. I hope you do not take them out of this spirit or read them through lenses that are far removed from the context in which they were sung and performed. Enjoy!

*Arrabsoo Soddaa*¹⁶⁷

Baala geeshee Bakaree
Bantee lixxaa yaa ilma harree?
Karra abbaan koo danqaree?

The *geeshee*¹⁶⁸leaves of *Bakaree*
Are you going to open and enter? You
son of a donkey?
The gate my father blocked?

Hiriyeen sii hin mallee
Kan muddhii callee
Biraan sabbataa
Siif kan sii maltee
Fokkiftuu gadhee
Kan muddhiin jawwee
Biraan mar'ataa

My friend is not a match for you
She is with beaded waist
And a beautiful sash
Who is meant for you
Is the ugly bad one
With python waist
And a poisonous snake

Baala geeshee...

The *geeshee* leaves...

Akka waan qottee
Qottee as keessee
Haramaa dhuftee?
Akka waan hortee
Hortee as keessee
Falamaa dhuftee?

As if you ploughed/farmed
Ploughed/farmed and kept here
You came to weed?
As if you begat
Bogat and kept here
You came to claim?

Baala geeshee...

The *geeshee* leaves...

Utuu dur qottee
Dur qottee beektee
Hurgufaa dhuftaa
Utuu dur loltee

If you had ploughed before
And knew how to plough
You would come boasting
If you had fought before

¹⁶⁷ This genre of songs is sung to insult the *soddaa* [bridegroom]. *Soddaa* is a generic word meaning in-laws but in this context it means this particular bridegroom.

¹⁶⁸ *Geeshee* is a plant used as pop. *Bakaree* is the name of a man.

Dur loltee beektee
Gunfuraan dhuftaa

Baala geeshee...

Miilla kee kanaan
Somboo irra deemi
Somboo isa dheeraa
Siin cabaa mitii
Ija kee kanaan
Somba kajeeli
Somba harrootaa
Hambaa sarootaa
Si tu dhabaa mitii?

Baala geeshee...

Qeyee abbaa koo tii
Maal fuudhuu dhuftee?
Fuudhi waan lafaa
Maggaanyaa tafaa
Buusaa goromtii
Sirraa roqomtii

Baala geeshee...

Jiini aduu qabaa
Hin ifuuf malee
Inni oduu qabaa
Hin himuuf malee
Maal oduun kunii
Soddee tu ulfaayee

And knew how to fight
You would come with hero's hairstyle

The *geeshee* leaves...

With these feet of yours
Go walk on *somboo* (tree)
On the tall somboo
It won't break on you¹⁶⁹
With these eyes of yours
Go desire lungs (lowly meat)
Desire donkey's lungs
Leftover from the dogs
Your kind won't miss it¹⁷⁰

The *geeshee* leaves...

From my father's homestead
What did you come to take?
Take bad things of earth
Thigh paralysis
Take virgin malaria
Let it shake you up

The *geeshee* leaves...

The moon has light
It just doesn't shine
The man has some news
He just doesn't tell
What is this news?
The bridegroom got pregnant

¹⁶⁹ You are too light; you don't have much weight – meaning you don't have respect

¹⁷⁰ The dogs eating donkey's lungs are your likes, your friends; you won't miss them

Dawuu wallaalee
Yaa Maaram giiftii
Adaraa hiiki

Baala geeshee...

Soddaa wiwwixxee
Bofti hudduu lixxee
Harkifnaan cittee
Gad dhiifnaan lixxee
Mar'umaan fixxee

Baala geeshee...

Cinaan kee murree
Eeleen haxoofnaa
Eelee isa moofaa
Yoosuu hadoodaa
Qoollajjii abbaasaa
Yoos naccii kaasaa

Baala geeshee...

Qoraanan cabsaa,
qoraan waddeessaa
Galaana keessaa
Mee akkam addaataa
Soddee koo maaloo
Ilaa madaasaa
Fagaara keessaa
Attam ajaawaa
Narraa fageessaa
Dhayyeen fafeessaa

but doesn't know how to give birth
O Maaram my lady
Please deliver him

The *geeshee* leaves...

The slithering bridegroom
Snake entered his anus
Pulling made it sunder
Letting go made it enter
And eat up his guts

The *geeshee* leaves...

We will cut your balls
Rub the pan with it
Rub the older pan
So it will be numb
With that ugly mushy thing
The pan will give good bread

The *geeshee* leaves...

I break (collect) firewood
The firewood of *Waddeessaa* (tree)
From within the sea
Look how white it is
O my brother-in-law (bridegroom)
Look at the wound
In his anus
How it stinks
Keep him away from me
Or I will hit and cripple him

Baala geeshee...

Niitii kee taanaan
Hiitee nah in dhaantuu
Aarii kee hin baatuu
Maaf ija baaftaa?
Namni ija abaasu
Gumaa abbaa hin baasu

Baala geeshee...

Gamanaa yoo sareen duttee
Gamasii yoo sareen duttee
Gad kaatee cufaa jabeessaa
Ol kaatee ibidda bobeessaa
Fincaaniin daaraa basseessaa
Albaatiin cichaa balleessaa
Kun maqaa dhiiraa balleessa
Cabi kaa dhiira shan keeessaa

The geeshee leaves...

I am not your wife
You can't tie and beat me
and release your anger
Why do you glare at me?
A man who glares
Does not avenge his father's death

The geeshee leaves...

If the dogs bark from this side
and the dogs bark from that side
He runs to shut the door
He dashes back to light the fire
He puddles the ashes with his urine
He spoils the bed with his loose feces
He shames a man's name
May you be shamed among five men

*Arrabsoo Intalaa*¹⁷¹

Yaa bokkaa tiifuu galgalaa
Alangaan siiruu rarra'aa
Obboon koo siifuu maggalaa
Si hin qabnee yaaddoon galgalaa

O rain, the drizzle in the evening
The whip is hanging for you¹⁷²
My Brother is pacing for you
Are you not worried about the
evening?

Nu durbeen keenyaa
Yoo bishaan dhaqnuu
Yoo qoraan dhaqnuu
Dhaqas hin kaannaa
Galas hin kaannaa
Sayyuleen keenyaa
Yoo bishaan dhaqxuu
Yoo qoraan dhaqxuu
Dhaqas hin nyaattii
Galas hin nyaattii
Ol goruu jettii
Soqoluu jettii

We and our girls
When we go fetch water
When we go fetch firewood
We run when we go
We run when we return
Our sister-in-law
When she goes to fetch water
When she goes to fetch firewood
She eats when she goes
She eats when she returns
Shall I stop by, she says
Shall I strip my clothes, she says

Ya bokkaa...

O rain...

Niitiin biyya koo
Raafuu irra keessee
Buqqee murmurtii
Niitiin biyya kee
Karaarra teessee
Munnee gurgurtii

Woman of my country
Puts the kale on the stove
And cuts the pumpkin
Woman of your country
Sits on the road
And sells anus

¹⁷¹ *Intala* is a generic name for girls but in this context it means this particular girl, the bride.

¹⁷² *Alangaan* siifuu rarra'aa [the whip is hanging for you] has a double meaning here. It is the whip that is hanging and she will be beaten by it if she is not virgin. The hanging whip also represents the hanging male genital organ that is waiting to deflower her if she is virgin.

Ya bokkaa...

Mana abbaa kootii
Dhaadhii bulbuluu
Damma nyaachuufii
Mana abbaa keetii
Waarii guuungumuu
Nama nyaachuutii

Ya bokkaa...

An durba beekaa
Durba akka kootii
Harmi gobaa dhaa
Ijji goraa dhaa
Yaa sayyuu intalaa
An nadheen beekaa
Nadheen akka kee
Harmi doolloo dhaa
Ijji bolloo dhaa

Ya bokkaa...

Mataa koo hin dhooftaa
Hin hiiktu hin dhooftaa
Yaa qiciicittii
Maqaa koo hin dhooftaa
Hin dhiiftu hindhooftaa
Yaa miriixittii

Ya bokkaa...

O rain...

In my father's house
They make honey wine
And they eat honey
In your father's house
They grumble at midnight
And they eat people

O rain...

I know girls
Girls like me
Their breasts are like spear
Their eyes are like berry
O my sister-in-law
I know women
Women like you
Their breasts are flat
Their eyes are hollow

O rain...

You will braid my hair
You will not undo it; you will braid it
O you kinky hair
You will call my name
You will not refuse; you will call it
O you *miriixittii*¹⁷³

O rain...

¹⁷³ *Miriixittii* is the feminine adjective of the noun *miriixaa*. It is a terrible insult to someone who is considered a good girl. It means one with a voracious sexual appetite.

Yoo fiddee dhufteef
Araddaan keetii
Qoddoon hirmaataa
Yoo dhiiftee dhufteef
Alangaan keetii
Soottoo' si nyaata

Ya bokkaa...

Qobbo ati dhaabde
Kunoo hin muranii
Ko' tarkaanfaddhuu
Obboo ati waamte
Kunoo hin dhufanii
Ko' bargaanfaddhuu
Jarreen kudhanii

Ya bokkaa...

If you brought it (virginity)
This place is yours
You share the *qoddo* garden
If you don't have it (virginity)
That whip is yours
The flat stick will eat you

O rain...

The caster you planted
Look; they have cut it
Come and step over it
The *Obboo* you called
Look; they have come
Come open your legs
There is ten of them¹⁷⁴

O rain...

¹⁷⁴ You are so sexy you will not be satisfied with anything normal

Chapter 8 - Making Home in Exile

Songs of Exile came out of the suffering of Oromo communities in exile and particularly in response to the youth violence that hit Toronto in the mid 2000s. It is offered as an antidote and a healing connection to our ancestors' culture and spirituality. The violence Oromo youth suffer is multilayered: First there is the alienation of colonial violence that separates them from the homeland and its material, socio-cultural and spiritual resources. Secondly, there is the alienating violence of racialization and poverty that separates them from mainstream communities in their host countries in the West. Thirdly, there is the alienation of intergenerational violence separating them from the elders in their own families and communities. Fourthly, there is the alienation of intra-generational violence separating them from their peers. Fifth, there is the interpersonal violence alienating them from other individuals. Finally there is the intra-personal violence of the ultimate alienation from their own sense of self and identity.

These are not easy wounds to heal as they require multilayered and systematic healing over a long period of time. *Songs of Exile* is offered to begin such a journey towards healing. It is offered to set us on the decolonizing journey of reclaiming what has been rejected and revaluing what has been devalued. It is offered as one little thread connecting youth to the sociocultural and spiritual resources of their ancestral heritage. However, I must note here that *Songs of Exile* does not offer a static culture drawn from some ancient times. It does not present culture as a rock that is hard to change. It gives culture the metaphor of a flowing river that takes the color of the soil through which it flows. When it flows through red soil, it is muddied in red color; when it flows through black soil, it is muddied in black color. It is never pure even at its purest. Indeed, *Songs of Exile* is an improvisation, an innovative response to the context of exile, and as such, it represents a dynamic culture. It is muddied by the agonies of our context of exile.

There are many Oromo songs, proverbs and sayings expressing the agonies of exile and the pleasant comforts of one's own home and homeland.

While these binaries are critically engaged in broader social theories as well as in Oromo studies, I cannot discount the dire consequences of such binary understandings of home and exile. People suffer the excruciating agonies of exile because of such understandings. Indeed Oromos have so many songs expressing these binaries. Poignant among these are the late Wasanuu Didoo's songs, may he rest in peace. Here are two examples. The first is a verse from one of Wasanuu Didoo's songs and the second one is a line from the *geerarsa* genre of Oromo poetry.

<p>Biyya ormaa¹⁷⁵ yaa gaaddisa mukaa Aduun nama gubaa Biyya ofii yaa gaaddisa garbuu Aduun nama hin arguu</p>	<p>Exile O the shade of a big tree The sun is scorching Home [one's own country] O the shade of barley [grass] The scorching sun never gets to you</p>
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<p>Biyyi Ormaa Biyyattiin biyya mitii Biyya hantuuta nyaatanii Biyya abjuun maraatanii</p>	<p>In exile The country is not a country It is where you eat mice It is where you have mad [maddening] dreams</p>
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However, exile also offers a productive space where Oromos can creatively combine all kinds of cultures and all kinds of creative possibilities. My observation however is that many Oromos leave their ancestors' culture and take on other cultures. For example, they sing all kinds of lullabies from around the world but not their Oromo *shururuu* lullabies. They perform all kinds of bridal showers but not their Oromo *gaa'ila* songs and rituals. They perform all kinds of baby showers but not their beautiful Oromo women's *dalaga* birth rituals and celebrations. My argument is: it is fine to take other cultures. In fact it is helpful. But it should not come at the expense of our own culture. For me the popular dictum that "you won't know where you're going, if you don't know where you are coming from" is a very valid expression.

¹⁷⁵ Biyya Ormaa literally translates as "foreign country". Here I translate it contextually as exile.

I believe that balance is a key issue here. The central theme in the entirety of *Songs of Exile* and its companion CD is the balance of *safuu*. *Safuu* is the balance that is being lost when we take other peoples' cultures but lose our own. We need other cultures to augment and refine our own culture but not to replace it. When that balance is lost, *safuu* is lost and when *safuu* is lost, we are lost as a people. I believe it is such a loss of *safuu* that ultimately leads to youth alienation and youth violence.

Each of the songs in the preceding chapters is performed by Oromo women in the Oromo diaspora, far from the disciplined spaces of nation-states and disrupting and blurring a brood of their all-consuming boundaries. We reclaim and perform these songs as transgressive temporal and spatial practices. Ironically, most of us who cling on to these songs as our lifelines in the diaspora are the very ones who despised and rejected them as backward, primitive, and heathen practices of our pagan ancestors when we were back in the Oromo homeland.

What is it in the realities of exile that makes people revalue and reclaim what they had formerly rejected? I will leave the in-depth study of these questions to you, the younger generation of Oromos. Here, by way of wrapping up *Songs of Exile*, I will offer a brief note from the sense I got from my own reflexive self-observation.

The women with whom we perform these songs may not agree with my assertion here. In my view, however, these songs signify our ways of dealing with denigration and dehumanization – our ways of empowering ourselves to face the disempowering situations of our realities, our ways of reenergizing ourselves in the face of constant negation that relentlessly deplete our life energies.

These songs of exile are our performances of making home out of exile. These performances eloquently articulate our active agency and creative resistance as opposed to the discourses of Oromo women's victimization. They signify our symbolic return to the roots even through the objectifying gaze of the civilizing mission and contemporary empire.

We enjoy the profoundly nurturing and mesmerizing trance of *kadhata* [prayer songs] and we revel in the joyful and playful performances of *dalaga* [birth songs]. We soothe ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren through the sweet melodies of *soossobata* [lullabies] and we sing the love songs of *weedduu* anytime with both modern and ancient tunes. Through all these performances we make home out of exile.

What is most interesting in all this is our joyful and playful performance of the *gaa'ila* [wedding songs]. One interesting observation is that some of us are older women performing girls' wedding songs at Oromo weddings here in the Oromo diaspora. You may wonder why. I see two reasons for this oddity. I know we wish to transmit our cultural practices to the younger generation. It is joyful and playful and spiritually very nurturing all at once. At a more profound level, however, I think our hanging on to our cultural tradition even when it is odd is our way of making home out of exile.

For my sense of home and exile here, I would like to thank a young Oromo, Tsegaye R. Ararssa, who critically engaged and wonderfully extended my notion of home and exile in the various social media. Tsegaye, your articulation of home and exile is so eloquent and piercingly insightful. Thank you for your critical thoughts. I learned a great deal from them, as you might see some of your own thoughts reflected here. You and young people like you are true inspirations for old souls like me. *Jiraadhu! Guddadhu!*

I wish to close here by inviting younger Oromos, to pick up from here and make sense of *Songs of Exile* yourself. Go behind it, beyond it, and beneath it, and take it further. Yes, you are the hope and inspiration of my generation....

May *Waaqa* bless you in abundance!

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