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## THE FUNCTIONS OF AFRICAN ORAL ARTS: THE ARSI-OROMO ORAL ARTS IN FOCUS

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**ABSTRACT** Every African society south of the Sahara has a long history of transmitting knowledge and human experience through the medium of oral tradition. This paper is on the function of oral traditions among the Arsi-Oromo of Ethiopia. Before the coming of Islam and Christianity, the Arsi were followers of Waaqeffannaa (belief in Sky God), the Oromo version of the African traditional religion. In the Arsiland, the Oromo traditional religion existed side by side with Islam, as the latter was mostly tolerant in the past. The indigenous Oromo religious traditions offered Islam an African feature. The cult of Sheikh Hussein of Bale is one quasi-Islamic tradition that has survived. The Arsi oral traditions are good sources about the nature of Waaqeffannaa and the cult of Sheikh Hussein. Based on the oral traditions of the Arsi and other African societies, the writer concluded that in Africa the function of oral traditions is in constant flux. In addition to replicating the past experiences of the society, African oral traditions serve also as mediums to provide self-conscious commentary on the patterns of life in their societies. Another conclusion is that the homology or dialectical unity between oral art and its social function is contextually determined.

**Key Words:** African oral art; Arsi-Oromo; Sheikh Hussein; Waaq; Muudaa; Annajina.

I will show in this paper that the Arsi make extensive use of oral arts to portray the sanctity of an un-lived past in an imaginative way. I particularly emphasize how the Arsi use their oral arts to symbolize their religious philosophy.

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF ORAL ARTS IN AFRICA

Africa is a continent known for its rich oral traditions. The African oral arts are part and parcel of the continent's long-standing tradition of folk culture. Africa's long tradition of oral artistry still wields a remarkable influence on the contemporary life of its society (Zewde, 2000). The African oral traditions facilitate the transmission of knowledge and conventions from generation to generation. The economic structure and relationships, political traditions and practices, social rules and values of the African societies are still transmitted orally.<sup>(1)</sup>

Oral genres such as love songs, narrative stories, proverbs, cradlesongs, eulogies and hymns (poems of praise), epic verses and dirges are examples of African oral tradition. In addition to these, each African society has songs concerning wars, social conflicts, and funerary rites. The life situation of the African society ranging from sublime religious ideals to everyday practical advice gained symbolic expressions in oral arts. In short, the African oral arts are

bearers of the ineffable complexity of the experience of the society that created them (Alnaes, 1989; Beier, 1970; Finnegan, 1970; Gbadegesin, 1998; Joseph, 1996; Obiechina, 1973; Okpewho, 1979). It is very difficult to list the role of oral arts in Africa in distinct terms. An oral art does not have a fixed function. In order to understand the functions of a piece of oral art, one has to develop a sociological semiotics between the art and its users. The following are the most obvious functions of oral arts in African situations.

A) THE ILLUMINATION OF A SOCIETY'S MYTHS OF CREATION: Every African society has myths that explain the origin of the universe, or cosmos and the coming into being of social order, long before they were exposed to the Judeo-Christian views of Creation (Esler, 1996; Kayode, 1998). African oral arts communicate the myths of creation that explain how the creatures differed in essence from each other and the role of the Creator in establishing the differentiation between the creatures.

B) THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORY OF A SOCIETY: All human history is fundamentally oral. The role of oral tradition in constructing African history is enormous as Africans transferred their natural and cultural heritage orally (Curtin *et al.*, 1995). Zewde (2000: 34) stated: "The value of African oral tradition for historical reconstruction attests to the contemporary relevance of orality." When they wrote their histories in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the first Christian African elites drew from oral traditions (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2000). The African oral traditions inform us also about why and how ethnic groups created their sense of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. The oral traditions of the Somali pastoralists of northeast Africa claim of a mythical ancestor from Arabia (Lewis, 1985). Some African societies use oral traditions to invent as well as maintain royal genealogy. For instance, in West Africa, myths and legends are used to legitimize royal genealogy and to gain the submission or loyalty of the subject group (Kottak, 2001). The myths about ancient Chwezi heroes in Great Lakes region and the legends of Queen of Sheba in the political culture of Ethiopia (Curtin *et al.*, 1995) are worth mentioning.

In the Ethiopian legend, Makeda is believed to have founded the royal line of the Kingdom of Sheba in southwest Arabia. The legend gained its apotheosis when it was declared as *Kebra Nagast* (The Glory of Kings) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Zewde (1994: 147) wrote that the "Makeda -Solomon complex" formed "the ideological linchpin of the ancient regime in Ethiopia" and became "the base for the popular perception of the country's three thousand years of old history." In her recent field work among the Menz and Gagn people of Northern Shoa (Ethiopia), Pankhurst (1992) revealed how the local people reiterate oral poetry to invoke lineage with Menelik I and the grandchildren of the legendary Makeda, Queen Sheba, and King Solomon:

Afk'era the child of Goleé,  
Dibini the child of Tsgga,

Moret the child of Tsedu,  
 Gishe the child of Awsabé  
 Gidam the child of Leta  
 Aradma the child of Asbo,  
 Agancha the child of Amdé

The above verse points to the legendary base of the orientalist discourse in Ethiopia nationalism (Sorenson, 1993). Sorenson (1993: 5) argued that in the Horn of Africa, the discourse of greater Ethiopian nationalism shaped itself on similar imaginative “genealogy that stretches into the biblical past and suggests a virtually primordial and essential identity shared by all those who live within the current boundaries of the Ethiopian state regardless of their particular ethnic affiliation...”

C) THE ILLUMINATION OF THE RELIGIOUS CULTURE OF A PEOPLE: In Africa each religious cult has its own kind of poetry with special techniques of recitation (Jahn, 1969). Oral arts play a significant role in symbolizing the religious as well as the secular image of each society. The following ballad shows the Igbo’s conviction that God has reined supreme:

What happened to Nwaniga?  
 Breadfruit killed Nwaniga.  
 What happened to the breadfruit?  
 Wedge split the breadfruit.  
 What happened to the wedge?  
 Termites ate up the wedge.  
 What happened to the termites?  
 Hen ate up the termites.  
 What happened to the hen?  
 Hawk carried the hen.  
 What happened to the hawk?  
 Gun killed the hawk.  
 What happened to the gun?  
 Blacksmith made the gun.  
 What happened to the blacksmith?  
 God made the blacksmith. (Duruoha, 1991: 187).

According to the ballad, the world is arranged in a hierarchy of separate echelons. God, who represents perfection, is at the topmost of the hierarchy. Below Him are living creatures and other materials. In this chain of command, humans are at the top of animals. The logic then is that only God is a holy being worthy of worship as He is infinitely powerful and the ultimate Creator of all things.

Oral arts enable their society to consciously evoke the religious world that they have not lived in. Through artistic expressions, “the world invisible is

viewed, the world intangible is touched, the world unknown known and the world inapprehensible clutched” (Idowu, 1973: 30).

D) COMMUNICATION OF THE STEREOTYPES OF SELF AND OTHERS IN A SOCIETY: In Africa, individuals and groups construct stereotypes of self and others through oral narratives. For example, feelings of pride in one’s own ethnic group are orally perpetuated. The following Oromo song collected from Dambi Dolo (Wallaga) is about food avoidance in the society’s culture. The song communicates how the Oromo demarcated between themselves and the Gabarao, the autochthonous groups of people whom the Oromo subjected and assimilated (Braukämper, 1984: 435).

<i>Ganjiin omne lagata</i>	Ganji avoids (eating) the heart
<i>Borani ire lagata</i>	Borana avoids the foreleg
<i>Saniin hunde qaba</i>	Races have known roots
<i>Gabaro hunde foomtiin cite</i>	Gabaro eats all kinds of meat

In the following narrative (Curtin *et al.*, 1995: 113), the Maasai, the quintessential pastoralists of East Africa, use their oral tradition to distinguish themselves from the people they call the Dorobo.

God then let down a bark-rope... from the sky and began to let cattle down, until there were so many that they intermingled with those of the Dorobo. Then the Dorobo came, and when he could no longer recognize his cattle among those of the Maasai, he was angry and shot away the bark-rope with an arrow.... God caused the cattle to stop descending and he moved up into the sky, and was never seen on the ground again. Thus all the cattle which Maasai now own were first given to them by God, and it is because the Dorobo lost his cattle by not listening to God that he must hunt wild animals for his food.

According to the myth, the Maasai “claim a God-given right to all cattle and therefore speak of themselves as the ‘people of cattle’, and of their leaders as ‘leaders of the cattle’ rather than leaders of people.” Issues of gender and class also carry much weight in African oral traditions. The following allegorical story of the Arsi about a legendary woman called Akko Manoyye sheds light on the gender relationship in the Arsi society.<sup>(2)</sup>

There lived a woman whose name was Akko Manoyye. She ruled her people in absolute dictatorship. She always ordered them to accomplish things that were impossible for them. Her people tolerated this for several years. One day, Akko Manoyye gathered her people and ordered them to build for her a beautiful palace between the earth and the heaven. This instruction perplexed her people. A wise man from among her people went to Akko Manoyye and said to her: “Dear mother, we are happy to build the palace for you as you wanted, but we ask you to ‘put

the dung' between the earth and the heaven to inaugurate the project." This was absolutely impossible for the woman. Her people united and removed her from her throne for she ordered them to accomplish what she could not do herself. That is why women are denied access to power up to today.

E) ILLUMINATION OF THE ETHNO-PHILOSOPHY OF A PEOPLE: African oral traditions inform us much about Africa's folk philosophy. The philosophical dialogue of the Mrog-Atangana-Mballa of Ngomedzap (Southern Cameroon) links the people's culture to the long tradition of the world philosophy (Fouda, 1998). Ethical philosophy on man-nature relationship, the essentiality of wisdom for humanity and ethical and social idealism are expressed in oral traditions. Based on her study of African oral arts and cultural vocabulary, Finnegan (1970: 519) concluded:

[...] it should now be clear from the descriptions and examples given in this book that being non-literate or technologically simple does not mean that such societies are lacking in elaborate artistic forms, in literature, in complex symbolism, in scope for the individual to express his own artistry and insights, or in an awareness of the depths and subtleties of the world and of human life.

Philosophy is not the cryptic meditation made by a few groups of individuals. Gramsci (1971: 321) stated that philosophy is "not just the abstract cogitation of a few professional intellectual, but a concrete social activity in which, implicitly, all men are engaged." The Oromo word for Socrates' "philosophical dialogue" is *qorqortii* (literarily interrogative inquiry). The Pythagorean philosophy that the soul is a prisoner of the body and is released from the body at death is roughly captured by the Oromo proverb: *Lubbuu jirtu hudduum xiixxi* (the anus sounds out only while the soul exists). The Hegelian social philosophy that individuals are subordinate to their community and must commit themselves to the ethical whole is echoed in the following Oromo narrative proverb: A man was asked, "*Gaarri sitti jiguu wayyadoo firri sitti jiguu wayyaa*" (should a mountain fall on you or should your people fall on you?). The man's reply was: "*Gaarri natti jiguu wayya; yoo gaarri natti jige firatu narraa kaasa; yoo firri natti jige wanti narraa kaasu hinjiru*" (I prefer a mountain to fall on me; because if a mountain falls on me, my people will remove it from me, but if my people fall on me, no one can remove them from me).<sup>(3)</sup>

F) THE EXPRESSION OF REJECTION OF DOMINATION AND OPPOSITIONALITY: The functions of oral tradition in preceding pages were related to cultural expressions in constructing and articulating one's cultural and ideological identities. Cultural expression, Steiner (1991:342) argued, "is not only the process by which we symbolically construct meaningful identities and worlds but also a rejection of who we are not and a repudiation of worlds in which we do not want to live." Similarly, the African oral arts are not functionally

limited to an unproblematic representation of the external social and historical reality. African oral arts evoke questions about power relationships in a society, as a means of articulating the individual as well as communal protests against social and political deprivations. I point out here the case of *geerarsa* (heroic recitation), one of the most developed Oromo folk genres. Traditionally and context-free, the word *geerarsa* is a generic name for hunting and war songs. In the past, the Oromo hunters and warriors strongly asserted their traits and accomplishments through this genre. As a cultural medium, the genre facilitated for the Oromo traditional singers the opportunity to participate in the discourse of patronage. The singers celebrated their friends and wise men to enhance their public image. The *geerarsa* genre was also instrumental in defending oneself against unkind remarks made about one's traits and accomplishments.

The *geerarsa* genre has long made functional transformations. Its analyses showed that the genre is critical as much as it is celebratory. Two decades ago, Triulzi analyzed the theme of peasant protest as depicted in the *geerarsa* genre in Qellam (Wallagga) Oromo of Western Ethiopia. In his article, Triulzi revealed that the *geerarsa* texts depicted the peasants' sorrowful lot in the hands of the feudal officials throughout Emperor Haileselassie's *gabbar* (feudal tribute) system.<sup>(4)</sup> The peasants used the *geerarsa* genre to express pathos of their victimization in the hands of local officials. The sociological transformation of the *geerarsa* folk-genre from its traditional status as a medium of celebration to a mode of protest against administrative injustices is an indication that oral arts are dynamic in their nature. The other modern function of the *geerarsa* genre is its service as a cultural medium for drawing the audience's attention to the adverse effects of social disintegration.

The following texts of Oromo *geerarsa* genre are taken from Triulzi (1980: 180-186). According to Triulzi, the text expresses the anguished endurance of the oppressed peasants under the oppressive feudal system of Emperor Haileselassie's Ethiopia. It conveys the pathetic agony and the sense of unfairness felt on the part of the local peasants:

1. Oh boys, the water-flow of winter  
No one knows when it is full;  
The heart of a hero is big  
No one knows when it dies;
5. Boys of our region,  
What have we done to our region?  
We farmed and filled the grain store  
And couldn't say, "The wealth is ours";
10. We killed and brought the trophies  
And couldn't say, "See, here is my trophy."  
Oh *Mäsaquli* of the dry season,  
We live uncertainly (?).  
So, they tore the grain store.
15. So, a bad case just came.

- Oh boys of the region  
 Did you say to me “speak?”  
 And when I spoke, did you say any thing?  
 The mother of a man is fool.
20. Saying “it ate my thin/son?”  
 She watches the stomach of the eagle.  
 Oh boys of the region,  
 The hen of the Tokké doesn’t shout,  
 It doesn’t dawn in Tokké,
25. The old woman of Tokké doesn’t cough,  
 One doesn’t spend the night at Tokké,  
 The hen of the Tokké doesn’t shout,  
 It doesn’t dawn in Tokké,  
 The old woman of Tokké doesn’t cough.

The following is Triulzi’s own annotation about the *geerarsa* text.

- 1-4. The flow of water in winter is stronger than in summer. A man with many worries doesn’t make much difference between summer and winter. Also if the water-flow of winter is low during the day, it will be full during the night. It becomes full when it rains in the hilly areas.
- 5-8. Some people had land and lived a good life. But the *gäbbar* [the tribute payer] lost his land and so he is worrying. The meaning is: we cannot farm and fill the grain store and say ‘here is my wealth’. So how can we live in this region?
- 9-12. The meaning is that they don’t have any trophy to be proud of because they have been deprived of every right. That is why they say that their life is full of uncertainty. *Mäsaqul* is a kind of multi-coloured gourd which the people of Däräsa take along with them. It is said in these verses just for poetic sake.
- 13-17. *Dagusaa* and *téff* are put in the *gumbi*, a kind of grain stone used around *Mändi* and *Näjjo*. If a dog pierced this *gumbi*, the grain would be flowing down to the ground. Equally, if an angry person is provoked, he will pour down his anger.
- 18-19. In the past people used to hunt wild animals. When they went searching for wild animals, big birds were flying in the sky. The mother of a hunter is always anxious; she looks at the sky and seeing the eagle she thinks: ‘is this bird flying away after killing my son?’
- 20-27. Tokké was a barren land between Gudär and Gédo. It is said that only one old woman lived in that area. A man was crossing this land when it became dark and a lion came out of the forest. The man climbed a tree to escape from the lion and spent the night on that tree. It is then that he saw the house of the old woman. After he went home he sang these verses (Triulzi, 1980: 181).



The above *geerarsa* text combines at least the cognitive function (expression of a directly experienced social situation) and the expressive function (expression of one's disapproval of the experienced reality). For example, the last lines express disillusionment. "It doesn't dawn at Tokké," means that there is no social development and personal self-improvement as long as what one has toiled on is easily confiscated by the powerful.

In Africa, not only groups, but also individuals use oral arts to reject domination and to articulate their oppositionality, as in the following Akan cradlesong (Nketia, 1970: 27). In the cradlesong, the Akan women feature their stream of consciousness and dialogue with the reality they have experienced in their domestic spheres:

Someone would like to have you for her child  
 But you are my own.  
 Someone wished she had you to nurse on a good mat;  
 Someone wished she had you to nurse on a good mat;  
 Someone wished you were hers: she would put you on camel blanket;  
 But I have you to rear you on a torn mat.  
 Someone wished she had you, but I have you.  
 Who took away my child?  
 Is the one who took away my child a woman or a man?  
 If a woman, she would know what it means to deliver a baby.  
 Kwakye's child,  
 I am anxious and troubled.  
 Kwakye's child,  
 I am anxious and troubled.

All of the cross-cultural comparisons made so far in this article clearly indicate that the social function of African oral arts is unlimited to the expression of rituals and moral values. I submit here, the idea that art is a reflection of the concrete situation of the society and derives its service from the real condition it is situated in. The homology or transparency between a piece of art and its social function is contextually determined. It is difficult to accurately determine the functions of an art when it is wrenched from the objective social and cultural contexts. An oral art can, for example, serve various extra-linguistic functions depending on where and by whom it is used. It is, therefore, illusory to look for functional invariance or constancy of a piece of art. Sumner (1995: 361) stated that the Oromo oral arts serve at least five extra-linguistic functions. These are cognitive, expressive, normative and educative, disruptive and cultural functions. I like to add to this the manipulative function, as the hymns sung in praise of Sheikh Hussein discussed below, are used to manipulate the passions of the audiences (Andrzejewski, 1972a). Finally, I add here that African oral arts, like their modern counterparts, can illuminate servitude and other social ills.

## THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF OROMO ORAL TRADITION

The Oromo are the largest ethno-nation in East Africa and the speakers of one of the most widely spoken languages on the continent.<sup>(5)</sup> The Oromo did not have written literature in the past.<sup>(6)</sup> Oral traditions thus remained as the sole source of knowledge about the society's socio-cultural experiences (Legesse, 1973). The Oromo oral art provides us with ample information about the entire society, including the myths from God's attributes, through the relation of God to man to the complimentary aspects of man's relation to him (Sumner, 1995, 1996, 1997).

The Oromo were victims of the Ethiopian feudal system that followed Menelik II's (1889-1913) occupation of southern Ethiopia at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cultural domination was one of the systematic social deprivations which the Oromo and other conquered peoples endured. The Oromo culture and history were largely uncharted in the Ethiopian studies. Only recently have some students of Oromo history and culture highlighted the importance of Oromo culture. Legesse (1973) produced the most comprehensive ethnographic work on the traditional Oromo political socio-organization based on the people's oral historic data. As shown above, Triulzi (1980) fully relied on an oral genre called *geerarsa* to present his critique on the relationship between the people and the state during Ethiopian feudalism.

In his *The Oromo of Ethiopia*, Hassen (1990) placed importance on the people's oral traditions. Andrzejewski (1972a) and Haji (1991) on their part revealed the significance of oral traditions for the further understanding of the cult of Sheikh Hussein and to explain the nature of Islamization (or Islamic tradition) in the southeastern parts of Ethiopia. The Oromo word for oral tradition is *Afoola*. *Afoola* contains myths, wisdoms, and belief systems of the society that have been passed down to the present generation through oral mediums. As Sumner (1996: 2) argued, the Oromo are thus "an ideal group for a study based on oral literature."

## CHANGES AND ADAPTATIONS IN THE OROMO ORAL ARTS

The cultural arts of a society, like other social and historical phenomena, are in constant change and adaptation. The socio-economic changes that occurred to the Oromo, starting from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had exerted great impact on the form as well as the content of the Oromo oral arts. Among the Mecha Oromo, the egalitarian *gada system*<sup>(7)</sup> started to give way to the monarchic and semi-monarchic rules from the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gidada & Crummey, 1972; Hassen, 1990). The Mecha Oromo of Wallaga Province largely adapted the European Protestantism whereas those in Jimma and surrounding vicinities embraced Islam (Hassen, 1990).

The conquest of Menelik II exacerbated the problem of cultural disintegration. The most drastic effect of the occupation was the devastation of the indig-

enous socio-political institutions and their substitution by new repressive systems. The prevalent political situation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century affected the religious affiliation of the Oromo people as well. In the south and southeastern part of Oromia, the Arsi Oromo, as did the Wallo Oromo in the northeast Ethiopia (Hassen, 1992), enthusiastically adapted Islam to resist the Abyssinian-Christian domination (Braukämper, 2002; Trimmingham, 1965).<sup>(8)</sup> Among the Tulama Oromo groups, geographically much closer to the Christian Amhara, Ethiopian Orthodox expanded although it could not fully weaken the power and function of the indigenous religious institutions (Bartels, 1983).

In addition to the above problems, the Oromo encountered various other pressures that challenged their cultural homogeneity. The major ones are the society's economic transformation from cattle husbandry to sedentary agriculture and the relatively increased access to modern education (Hassen, 1990; Legesse, 1973; Sumner, 1995). In the southernmost part of the region, the Boran and the Guji Oromo maintained their complex socio-political ideology intact in the face of competing religious allegiances in the country (Abbink, 1997; Legesse, 1973; Sumner, 1995).

By and large, three dimensions of adaptations can be said about the nature of Oromo's expressive culture. In most of the central and western parts of the territory, Christianity was more readily adapted during and following the domination. Among the Boran, where the role of age and generational loyalties are strong cultural paradigms, one should expect that the most obvious function of an oral art to be the propagation of peace and integrity. In south and southeastern Oromia, the hymns praising Sheikh Hussein of Bale and other Muslim saints are the dominant artistic forms. They mirror the Arsi Oromo's gradual adaptation of the indigenous poetic art to their quasi-Islamic orientation. In western and southwestern Oromia, *geerarsa* remained as the most dominant mode of verbal expression.

## A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE ARSI AND THEIR SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Arsi are one of the largest groups of the Oromo of Ethiopia.<sup>(9)</sup> Their livelihood is based largely on subsistence farming. The Arsiland is suitable for the cultivation of bread wheat, barley, emmer wheat, linseed, and field pea (Tanner *et al.*, 1994). As other Oromos do (Sumner, 1997), the Arsi hold high regard for cattle economy.

The oral traditions of the Arsi people inform us about the culture and history of the people. We can also infer the economic situation of the people from oral traditions. For example, the *faaruu loonii* (cattle praise songs) of the Arsi convey the prestige of cattle economy in the society. The following two praise songs are examples of how the Arsi extol the virtues of their herds and live in symbiosis with them: *Ana haa lolanii, loon maleen tolani* (Oh, may I suffer on your behalf! No one can do well without cattle). *Daalee suraa kiyya daalee suraa, bakkuma sii tolte laalee bulaa* (Oh, my fine cow, *Daalee*, I would prom-

ise to stay wherever you are comforted). In the songs, the cattle are personified in terms of human experiences, feelings, needs, and responses. The first of these praise songs sings that life without cattle is devoid of meaning for the Arsi. The second one reveals that herders never hesitate to stay away from their home if they find pasture and water for their herds.

The Arsi oral traditions also reveal that the people had an elaborate tradition of marriage (Badhaasoo, 2000), with various prohibitions and preferences concerning marriage. The Arsi oral traditions reveal the strong root of polygamy, which is also well known in other Sub-Saharan countries (Hayase & Liaw, 1997; Lewis, 1985). The Arsi's saying: *Namni niitii takka nama ija takkaati* (A man who is limited just to one wife is like one who has only one eye) indicates the value of polygamy in the society.

Among the Arsi, as is the case among other African peoples (Lewis, 1985; Siegel, 1996; Solivetti, 1994), marriage is not so much a union between the couple as it is a social merger between families and descent groups. It is largely an enterprise in which adults assume a large and wide control. The kinsmen assist the groom's parents during the latter's search for a girl of good breeding. The following Arsi Oromo proverb reveals the importance of the assistance of elders at the time of selecting a wife: *Niitiin marii malee fudhan marii malee baati*, a woman whom one has brought into the clan without the consultation of kinsmen goes back without the consultation of the kinsmen. Implied in this proverb is the view that once a woman is taken out of her paternal clan, she belongs not only to the groom or his parents, but also to the rest of the patrilineal groups. The proverb underscores the importance of patri-locality, a situation that encourages the wife to form a network of alliance and support within her husband's vast lineage (Kottak, 2001).

Traditionally, the Arsi discourage marriage between children that have grown up together as well as consanguineous marriage. One reason for avoiding marriage within the surrounding area is the view that such marriage dissociates one group from other groups and limits economic access and social interaction (Kottak, 2001). The Arsi abhorrence of marriage within close vicinity is mainly rooted in the Oromo culture that imposes strict taboos on loose and regular contact between the affines (Baxter, 1996). In Oromo, the generic term *soddaa*, inclusively denotes the whole opposite moiety to the close agnatic relatives of the couple (Helland, 1994), is held in great reverence. The Arsi discourage intimate and uncontrolled relationship between the affines before and even after the couple have married. They do this through conversation, lore, proverbs and songs. In the following proverb, the Arsi clearly show their hatred of marriage within a close distance: *Soddaan da'oo udaan da'ooti*, having in-laws within one's close vicinity is like passing excrement within one's own compound. As one has to put away one's excrement (otherwise it would be stepped on), one has to distance one's in-laws (otherwise regular contact breeds contempt). As the following proverbs also prescribe, the in-laws are to be held in great awe and distance: *Soddaan sadaa*, the affinal kindred are to be treated with the utmost awe). Or *soddaa fi ibidda bayyatti o'ifatan*, one should keep oneself warm with

fire and the love of the affinal kindred, of course, by keeping one's distance away from them. The latter proverb points out that it is very unsafe to indulge in loose intimacy and rivalry with the affinal kindred.<sup>(10)</sup>

Even in the literate society, the way people define relationships among themselves is also transmitted orally. The Arsi classify themselves into two contrasting, but complementary subdivisions called moieties (from the French word for "half"). As the Borana are divided into the *Sabbo* and the *Gona* moieties (Legesse, 1973; Nyamongo, 2000), the Arsi are divided into the *Mando* and the *Siko* moieties. The *Siko* has five sub-moieties collectively called *Shanan Siko* (the five ones of *Siko*). They are *Bullallaa*, *Wacaalee*, *Jaawii*, *Waajii* and *Ilaanii*. The *Mando* has seven sub-moieties collectively called *Torban Mandoo* (the seven ones of *Mando*). They are *Raayyaa*, *Kajawaa*, *Hawaxaa* (*Hawaxxuu*), *Utaa*, *Waaqyuu*, *Harawaa* and *Biiltuu*. The Arsi who inhabit the whole of present Arsi and Bale provinces, as well as a large portion of Eastern Showa and a small portion of the Sidama Zone of SNNPR (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region) are descendants of the *Siko* and the *Mando* moieties (Badhaasoo, 2000; Kifle, 1999; Trimmingham, 1965).

The Arsi moiety system is an aspect of the Oromo dual organization that cuts across territorial groupings that includes tribes and clans, and has many sociological roles in the society. First, it shows the direction of the Oromo peoples' demographic movement in the past. Second, it determines the positions of the moiety leaders in electoral politics. It also defines and limits the politico-legal role of the moiety leaders. Once more, the moiety structure enables the society to sort out social groups on the basis of their seniority. The other social function of the moiety system is that it enables the society to define and maintain rules governing who is to marry whom. In the Borana case, only exogamic alliances are permitted. According to Legesse (1973: 39), "... a man of Sabbo moiety must avoid all forms of sexual intercourse with Sabbo women because they are all said to be his 'sister.'" Of course, a society's reaction to taboos related to marriage changes over time. Endogamic practices, which are considered heinous sin among the Borana Oromo, are now common among the Arsi, and this could be the influence of Islam in the area.

The Arsi are a patrilineal society and identify their relationships in three other principal ways. The first is *aanoma* (relation through descent or parentage). The second is relation through *soddooma* (relation through affinity or marriage). These two types of identifying relations together indicate the people's system of classifying *warrooma* (family relationship). The third and the broadest form of relationship is *Arsooma* (Arsihood), and it refers to the cultural homogeneity and the *aaloo* (the customary code) of the people. Arsihood provides the people with an identity that cuts across allegiances based on moiety and other localized groupings.

The Arsi parents encourage their children to recite their legendarily common ancestors (the father's line of descents). If a child makes a mistake while reciting the lineage, the questioner interrupts saying, "*Hin beeyne* (No, you did not know)" and forces him/her to retry. Currently, clanship plays a superficial role

in determining every aspect of the people's life, compared to the more determinative role of clan and lineage in other traditional African societies.<sup>(11)</sup>

## THE CONCEPT OF GOD AS DEPICTED IN ARSI ORAL ARTS

All religions of the world share one common characteristic, that is, they preach the worship of a supernatural force that has non-human attributes, including immutability, eternity, infinitude, wisdom and omnipotence. On the meaning and role of religion in a society, Ejituwu (1995: 97) wrote:

Religion is the worship of supernatural; and it derives its force from man's observation that nature, or the unseen, appears too powerful, harsh and unfriendly. He therefore seeks harmony with it through prayers, worship and adulation. One may add that religion is a universal phenomenon devised by people, a race, etc., to explain the mysteries of their individual physical environment in the search for peace with such environments. Whether it is Christianity, Islam or African religion, it is the same. Man is seeking to reach God by supplication, submission, offerings and faith, all in the attempt to respond effectively to his physical environment.

All religions, irrespective of when and where they were invented, reflect the nature of a society they are set in and derive their images from the real conditions of the society (Hicks & Gwynne, 1996).

All religions provide their societies with values and standards that are then used as connectors to fasten together the social order. Thus, no religion is better than the other as long as each, in its own specific situation, builds on and reflects the objective situation of human survival. Functionally thinking, there is no distinction between the monotheistic religious practices characterizing the major religions of the world and the ritual performance on the Island of Flore in eastern Indonesia where men from different villages flog each other with buffalo-hide whips (Hicks & Gwynne, 1996: 322), for both show an adaptive response to the objective situation of man's survival. There is always a social precondition in the embracing of any new religion. Islam, for example, emerged to heal the contemporary social problems in Arabia (Esler, 1996). In this light, the Arsi Oromo's enthusiastic acceptance of Islam and their cult of Sheikh Hussein of Bale intensified by the socio-political situation existed in the country at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Braukämper, 2002).

The notion of God constitutes a part of Africa's cultural heritage. Africans long perceived their very existence as caused by a being that transcends "both ontologically and logically the order of contingency and perishableness" (Topor, 1998). As Moyo (1996: 2730) noted, "Religion permeates all aspects of African traditional societies. It is a way of life in which the whole community is involved, and as such it is identical with life itself." To say that Africa had no



religion prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity is utterly wrong.

For over many thousand years, the African societies symbolized the mystery of their Creator in various ways. Oral arts are part of the system through which they invoked the supernatural power. As other African societies, the Arsi Oromo were followers of traditional African religion and only recently did they adapt Islam and Christianity. *Waaqeffannaa* (belief in Sky God) was the traditional religion of the Oromo people in general and the Arsi in particular. The Oromo name for Supreme Being is *Waaq*. As Yahweh of the Hebrews and Allah of Muslims, the Oromo *Waaq* has no representation with an image. The Oromo's belief in Sky God antedates both Christianity and Islam (Trimingham, 1965). The Oromo (and also the Somali) regard *Waaq* as the owner and sustainer of the universe (Bartels, 1983; Lewis, 1955, 1956). The pre-Islamic and pre-Christian concepts of the Oromo Supreme Being include the cardinal concepts of Supreme Being in the scriptural religions (Aguilar, 1995; Bartels, 1983).<sup>(12)</sup>

The Oromo had a sophisticated mythology of Creation, called *Uumaa* (*Uumee*). Creation, as the Oromo see it, is God's perfect accomplishment. For them, *Waaq* is source of life and identity (Dahl, 1996). *Waaq*'s Creation is a process that incessantly and dynamically continues into the present and the future, where God makes, owns and then keeps going. According to the Oromo religious philosophy, *Waaq* never lapsed into neutrality after creating the world. The Oromo believe that He directly intervenes in the day-to-day motion of His creatures. The Arsi people's traditional belief reveals the Oromo's awareness that God is the Creator and Sustainer of humanity and the owner of the entire universe.

<i>Waaqa uumu danda'u</i>	God, the creator
<i>Waaqa unshuu/balleessuu/ danda'u</i>	<i>Waaqa</i> can devastate (any force)
<i>Ka lafa dhisaa malee diriirse</i>	And stretched the earth with out any peg.
<i>Ka samii utubaa malee dhaabe.</i>	And kept the heaven in position with out any pillar. (Hindheessa, 2001)

In the above verses, the Arsi Oromo sing what Lewis (1985: 145) called "the existence of mystical powers in terms of which men endow their surroundings with ultimate, transcendental meaning." The Arsi refer to the mysteriously configured nature in their surrounding to show that the surrounding world is an immutable proof of the ceaseless operation of the power of God.

During harsh ecological disruptions and difficult social crises, the Arsi gathered and prayed to their *Waaq*.

<i>Kombolchi Roobe Jiraa</i>	The Kombolcha tree is found at Robe
<i>Tokkochi mooye simaa</i>	God, you are the Sole and Ultimate Ruler
<i>Roobe dhaqaa gabayaa</i>	I go to the Robe market
<i>Roobi bishaan nagayaa</i>	Give (us) a peaceful rain
<i>Walii galii kadhu/kadhadhu</i>	Pray high to Him jointly (all of you together)
<i>Si jalaa dhagayaa.</i>	My folk men, He (surely) listens to you. (Hind-

heessa, 2001)

The Arsi have maintained from the past the various verbal expressions symbolizing the existence of a transcendent being. The Arsi's alternative expression for the Supreme Being is *tokkicha mooye* (literarily, the sole and ultimate ruler). Expressions such as *sodaa Waaqaa* (fear of God), *kadhaa or iltama Waaqaa* (invocation of God's bounty and benevolence), *dallansuu Waaqaa* (God's wrath), and *balaa Waaqaan dhufu* (calamity that comes down from God's wrath) are also most widely used to exalt "The Sole and Ultimate Ruler."

The Arsi Oromo's common prayer, *Waaqana, waan lafaa fi waaqa (hawaa) jidduu jiru nagaa nuu godhi* (O God, make tranquil for us everything that rests between the Earth and the Heaven!) shows the people's exaltation of their powerlessness. To point out God's clairvoyance, the Arsi say: *Waaqni dhuka bookeetuu arga* (*Waaq* sees even the marrow of bookee, a very tiny insect). According to one of the Arsi narrative proverbs, an old woman remained barren throughout her life. Childless as she was, her family members as well as the entire community used to call her by her first name.<sup>(13)</sup> One day, indignant at being always called by her first name, the woman optimistically demanded: *Waan Waaqaa hin beekanii Haadha Waaqoo naan jedhaa* (refer to me as "Waaqoo's Mother," for no one knows how *Waaq* makes out things). The proverb reveals the woman's sensitivity to the immanence of God, and her belief that God is an intervener in human day-to-day life. It also shows her perception that God is a rewarding Creator. Likewise, another Oromo proverb, *Dubbii Waaqaaf Kolfa saree hinbeekan* (*one cannot understand the words of God nor the smile of a dog*) conveys the society's awareness that since God has a mysterious and fascinating power that extends much beyond human perception, a perfect knowledge of what He intends is humanly unattainable (Cotter, 1990).

Prophethood, one aspect of scriptural religions, was present in the Oromo traditional belief systems. As Muslims and Christians revered the different God-sent prophets, the Oromo once looked up to *Abbaa Muudaa*, their spiritual leader whom *Waaq* selected to guide the people (Braukämper, 2002; Hassen, 1990; Legesse, 1973). In the past the European scholars had misinterpreted the meaning of *Abbaa Muudaa*. For example, they referred to *Abbaa Muudaa* as the Oromo cradle land (Legesse, 1973: 10). The root cause for the wrong interpretation could be partially lack of the meaning of the word *muudaa*. The word *muudaa* has several interrelated meanings in different contexts. As a verb, it has three meanings. These are to make pilgrimage, to anoint and to provide a religious or sacrificial offering. As a noun also, it has three meanings. These are anointment, pilgrimage and pilgrims. The different meanings of the word *muudaa* together tell us something about the Oromo religious ceremony. In the *muudaa* ceremony, expedition is made to a sacred place where there is a ritual leader who takes offerings and in turn blesses those who made a long and arduous journey.<sup>(14)</sup>

Legesse (1973: 10) made clear what I pointed out above in the following account of the pilgrims to Borana thirty years ago:



They [the pilgrims] made the expedition on foot, seeking the assistance of friendly communities as they traveled. The trip took one to two months and was apparently an extremely arduous undertaking. So long as they exhibited the pilgrim's regalia-of which the most important was the forked walking stick-most communities give them food and shelter. Up on arriving in Borana, they took part in the *muda* and offered their presents to one of the ritual leaders of Borana and received his blessings.

Pilgrims that go to Annajina are also assisted in similar way. If a pilgrim from a far place enters a village and says, "*Gariibaa Sheekanaa Husseinii waa nutti sadaqadhaa* (I'm the guest of Sheikh Hussein here, please offer me something to eat)," the villagers offer what they have. The *garibaa* (adapted from the Arabic *Gharib*, guest) invokes Sheikh Hussein's blessing on the generous villagers and continues his journey. The *garibaa* carry *dhanqee*, Y-shaped sticks as a symbol of Nur Husayn (Braukämper, 2002: 141).

Viewed from the integrativist perspective, the Oromo traditional *muudaa* ceremony has one unique significance, and that, according to Legesse (1973: 10)

lies in the fact that it is the point at which the two great institutions of the Oromo interact, namely, the moiety system and the Gada System. ... What is special about the *muda* ceremony is that it is one of the rare instances when the hereditary leaders of the kinship (Kallu) and the elected leaders of the Gada System (Abba Gada) come to the same ceremonial grounds to participate in the same event.

This highlights the complex relationship between the *qallu* institution and the Oromo socio-political organization.<sup>(15)</sup> The *qallu* institution kept the spirit of Oromo *Xabboo* (roots of ancient Oromohood) intact. The people's honor for their spiritual leaders was symbolically marked by religious gifts. The *qallu* institution always imposes an enormous religious impact on the *gada* politics, as the *gada* leaders do not have their own power. As Schlee (1998) pointed out, their power and authority comes from God through the *qallu*.

The *muudaa* ceremony in Annajina has, doubtless, lost the harmonizing role of the original *muudaa* ceremony as the *gada system* "could not be maintained under the '*pax aethiopica*'" (Braukämper, 2002: 143). The intensification of the cult of Sheikh Hussein at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and afterwards provided a one-hundred-percent substitute neither for the Arsi nor for other Oromo groups. As Braukämper (2002: 144) made clear however:

In the case of the Arsi, many practices of the cult of the *abba muda* were transferred to that of Shaikh Husayn. Numerous clans are accustomed to send official delegations with gifts, cattle and money to Annajina (as they formerly sent them to that of Shaikh Husayn) and offer them to the *imam* as the representative of the patron saint. At

their arrival they call the names of historical Arsi regions, Bale, Didá, Galbi and Dallo, and their songs reveal certain similarities with those dedicated to the *abba muda*.

Braukämper's idea above suggests that conquest by Menelik II at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century weakened the Oromo social and political intuitions, including their pan-Cushitic religious practices. However, it does not give us suggestions about the relation of the Arsi with the sanctuary of the Sheik Hussein in the time between the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the last section of this paper, I will point out the negligence of the Arsi Oromo's role in maintaining and preserving the sanctuary of Sheikh Hussein in Braukämper's (2002) collected essays.

### THE CULT OF SAINTS AND PROPHETS AMONG THE ARSI

A large body of literature on the history and spread of Islam shows that Sufism, broadly known as Islamic mysticism, firmly established itself as a religious movement in Africa as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Sanneh, 1999). Sufism was not only the cause for the fast spread of Islam in Africa, but also for its African features (Daniel, 1969; Schidknecht, 1969). In Africa, as in the rest of the Islamic world (Esler, 1996), Sufism is known for its elasticity and overt eclecticism. Simplicity of rituals and modesty of demands are the other characteristics of Sufism in Africa (Curtin *et al.*, 1995; Kritzeck & Lewis, 1969).

In Ethiopia, the religious venerations held in honor of saints including Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Jillian, Sheikh Hussein and Sof-Omar of Bale are typical proofs of the existence of a deep-rooted tradition of Sufism in the country. The gravestones bearing Arabic inscriptions from the past would help us trace how Islam descended on Ethiopia. In particular, the legends about and cults of Islamic saints in southeastern Ethiopia would inform us much about the adaptation of Islam. The holy shrines here and there in Arsiland suggest that the cult of saints was a deep-rooted religious practice among the people (Braukämper, 2002; Foucher, 1994; Kifleyesus, 1995; Zekaria, 1997a).

The Arsi's dominant religion at the moment is Islam. Among the neo-traditional religious practices in Arsiland, the most persistent seem to be the veneration of saints. The continuation of the cult of saints (particularly that of Sheikh Hussein) suggests that the history of Islam among the Arsi is more or less the history of saints.<sup>(16)</sup> In Arsiland, Islam was highly tolerant towards indigenous creeds in the past. As a result, numerous institutions of spirit veneration survived within the dominant faith. The folk cultures survived and created a type of Islam that is typically local. One of the institutions of spirit veneration towards which both men and women were highly attracted is *jaannii/jaarii*.<sup>(17)</sup> The other important religious practices that survived from the past are *waadef-fachuu* (exorcism), *raaga* (divination), *falaan-falii* (burnt-offering) and *kitimaa*

(sacrificial blessing).

Among the Arsi and other Muslims of Ethiopia, Sheikh Hussein of Bale is still the most celebrated *waliyyi*, the patron saint, pl. *awliyaa*. The history of Sheikh Hussein goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Braukämper, 2002; Hassen, 1990).<sup>(18)</sup> Over the last many centuries, quite many pilgrims in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia have revered Sheikh Hussein as their most venerated saint and gravitated towards Annajina, the place where the saint's shrine still shimmers.

## THE ARSI'S MYTHS AND LEGENDS ABOUT SHEIKH HUSSEIN OF BALE

Myths are a syntagmatic chain of a series of events. Among the Arsi, mythic narratives have long been used as means of constructing events and personalities in the past. By listening to myths, the Arsi were able to make sense of the life experience of their ancestors. As Hartley (1982: 30) stated, myths enable "a society to use factual or fictional characters and events to make sense of its environment, both physical and social." In societies without written records, the continuity between past and present is often maintained through myths (Heyer, 1988). According to Campbell (1991: 266), mythic narratives enable us to come to terms with contradictions and ambiguities; that is, they help us "resolve abstract conflicts such as life and death, good and evil, tradition and change, and nature and culture." Among the Arsi, mythic accounts that are no longer considered credible once had a fascinating power of convincing minds. The Arsi's religious narratives were largely based on myths. No wonder then as even today mythology serves as one of the most powerful means of charming the mind of believers about religious events and personages in the past.

The Arsi have countless oral traditions and legends about Sheikh Hussein of Bale. As is the case with other religious personages in Islamic Africa, the mythic narratives about Sheikh Hussein's *karaamaa* (charisma), *baraakaa* (holy virtues) and *mujjizaa* (miraculous manifestations) helped perpetuate the cult. The bulk of these myths were written in Arabic and published in three hagiographical works whose sources were exclusively oral.<sup>(19)</sup> Andrzejewski (1972a: 2) stated that among the Arsi, oral traditions concerning the life of Sheikh Hussein and his sanctuary are not only widespread, but also are the foremost source of information about him and the most instrumental means of perpetuating the saint's cultic fame. The Arsi have been composing oral and poetic narratives about Sheikh Hussein and singing them in angelic voices. Among the various tales of miracles attributed to Sheikh, one recounts that throughout his life, Sheikh Hussein was a faultless devotee. He is said to have led a cloistered life for religious mediation and prayer in the cave of *Aynageng*, which is found in the vicinage of Annajina. The adherents believe that his religious virtues gained the saint an infinity of spiritual blessing from God.<sup>(20)</sup>

Another legend about Sheikh Hussein is related to the formation of a marshland in Sinaana-Dinsho District of Bale Zone. According to one myth, one day

Sheikh Hussein went to a place called *Asanbareeraa*. As the time was midday, he wanted water for ablution to prepare for the *zuhr* (midday) prayer. To find the water, he only once speared the ground with his *masraaxaa* (a fine stick to which a thick, long and pointed metal piece is fixed at the base). Immediately, water gushed out in a great stream. Another story of Sheikh Hussein's holiness is about his miraculous crossing of an overflowing river. In Sinaana-Dinsho District of Bale Administrative Region, there is a river called Togona. A pre-historic dolmen called *Xarxaaraa* still lies across the river supported by a huge mass of stones, found between the Hamida Sole and Shawede Alage villages, a short distance before Togona merges into the Weib River. It is believed that the dolmen was formed for the Sheikh to cross the overflowing river.<sup>(21)</sup>

The legend about the birth of Sheikh Hussein is also one of the most widespread oral traditions in Arsiland. The first period of the two festivals at Annajina is observed to commemorate the saint's birth date. In the second period, the people celebrate *id al-kabir*, (the great feast) of *dhul-hijah*, a month of the pilgrimage to Makkah (Braukämper, 2002: 141). The oral sources reveal that the saint was born in the last quarter of the eleventh century in the fourth month of Islamic calendar at midnight of Monday. This period is locally remembered as *Zaraa Galgala Goobanaa* (the night of the Month of *Zaraa* when the moon was full).<sup>(22)</sup>

The legend has it that the Sheikh's birth was foretold as was the birth of Jesus Christ. According to the legend, through His *Wahy* (revelation or inspiration), God revealed the coming of Sheikh Hussein to Saint Abul-Qasim who is said to have visited 114 births of baby sons. Until then, none of the births Abul Qasim attended were accompanied by such revelation. According to the myth, the night when Sheikh Hussein was born was filled with light that made the mid-night colorful. It is also believed that Saint Abul-Qasim attended Sheikh Hussein's birth as Angel Gabriel attended that of Jesus Christ. The Sheikh's mother is said to have delivered him without any pain of childbirth. As is true with other myths (Heyer, 1988; Lewis, 1985; Okpewho, 1979), the myths about Sheikh Hussein are artistically presented in a way that creates forceful public currency. The hymns sung in praise of Sheikh Hussein are full of mythic scenarios. The names and situations alluded to in the hymns offer power to the linguistic expressions. As praise songs sung for Sufi leaders in other parts of Africa (McLaughlin, 1997: 568), the hymns sung in praise of Sheikh Hussein emphasize his charisma and spiritual qualities, particularly his role as a spiritual guide. The Arsi refer to Sheikh Hussein as Light. In similar way, the praise-singers in Senegal refer to the marabout Abdoul Aziz Sy as "*Lampa lislislam*, the lamp of Islam, a common image that emphasizes the marabout's role as a guide" (McLaughlin, 1997: 568). This comparison suggests that Sufism in Africa is a religious conversion shaped around the charismatic qualities and the social dynamism of the spiritual leaders.

## THE *BAAHROO* (HYMNS) OF SHEIKH HUSSEIN AND THEIR ALLUSIONS

The myths and legends about Sheikh Hussein resonate through the Oromo *baahroo* (folk hymn sung in honor of Sheikh Hussein). *Baahroo* is a loan word from the Arabic *bahar*, meaning sea. For the Arsi, “sea” is used as a panegyric reference to Sheikh Hussein. It symbolizes the perceived imminence of the saint’s generosity, benevolence and bounty. Historical records and legends indicate that *baahroo* was first inspired by the Sufi movement in the region (Andrzejewski, 1972a). The genre is not a new innovation, however. It is a continuation of the traditional Oromo arts merely adapted to suit to the Arsi’s quasi-Islamic orientation. Thus, the hymns maintained the major features of African oral literature in general (Finnegan, 1970) and the Oromo poetic tradition in particular (Andrzejewski, 1972a).

The hymns sung in honor of Sheikh Hussein allude to items of factual information and legends about the saint’s miraculous performance in the past (Andrzejewski, 1972a). A reasonable understanding of the hymns ought to take into account the real and fictitious historical contexts within which they were framed. The reason is that the message of a hymn is located not only in the individual words it is composed of, but in the complex whole of the universe of discourse. The legends about Sheikh Hussein that are referred to in the hymns are highly and systematically condensed. The condensation of the legends aside, if listeners lack adequate knowledge of the names and situations referred to in the hymns, they may not understand the essence of the hymn. The other difficulty is that in singing, the singers inadvertently shift their addressee from one hymn to the other and even within a single hymn (Andrzejewski, 1972a). To increase the musical flamboyance of their hymns, the *baahroo* singers make an extensive use of imageries and metaphors. The extensive use of poetic symbolism obscures the information being communicated (Andrzejewski, 1972b). Amongst all colorful imagery, a listener needs to have adequate knowledge of the Oromo language and culture to grasp the meaning of the exoteric symbolism as the hymns draw much of their symbolism from the material and spiritual culture of the people.

### A) THE TEXT OF ONE EXAMPLE IN THE *BAAHROO* GENRE

1. *Jimmatu si muudee gagaariin namatii*
2. *Wallotu si muudee gagaariin namatii*
3. *Wallaga si muudee gagaariin namatii*
4. *Silxetu si muudee gagaariin namatii*
5. *Sidama si muudee gagaariin namatii*
6. *Alaaba si muudee gagaariin namatii*
7. *Gujitu si muudee gagaariin namatii*
8. *Boorana si muudee gaggaariin namaati*
9. *Birka magganaanyaa aalama maraatii.*
10. *Yaa Sariian bil Karaamaa*

11. *Yaa shafi'an bi salaamaa*
12. *Baahroo yaa Nur Hussein.*
13. *Teettanii Gaara Kambaataa*
14. *Fuulli goobana fakkaataa*
15. *Lugaa waamaniin awwaataa*
16. *Baahroo yaa Nur Hussein.*
17. *Sheeka hoo yaa Sheek Hussein*
18. *Ka Rabbiin nuun qananiisee*
19. *Rasuuluu biyyoo sitti dhiisee*
20. *Baahroo yaa Nur Hussein.*
21. *Sheeka hoo yaa Sheek Hussein*
22. *Ka Rabbiin deeme oliinii*
23. *Harama ceena waliini*
24. *Baahroo yaa Nur Hussein.*
25. *Haati Nuur Huseen deette*
26. *Darajaa guddaa geette*
27. *Abul Qaasim eebbifnaan*
28. *Ciniinsuu malee deette.*
29. *Dheeratee samii bayee*
30. *Bal'atee ardii gayee*
31. *Dhaloonni Tolaa Baalee*
32. *Halkan Kiibxataa ta'e.*
33. *Dubarteen fadlii beeytee*
34. *Naddayaa martuu eeydee*
35. *Shamsiyyaan hiree qabdi*
36. *Haati Nur Huseen deette.*
37. *Takka bayiin baatee*
38. *Waleensorraa geennaan*
39. *Kuni maali jetteen adaadiin dakanaa*
40. *Ganda Sheeka Baalee kajedhantu kana*
41. *Allaa humaraam Sheek Huseen*
42. *Baahra ollaa Dadalaa*
43. *Eennu nu baasa bobaa teessan jala?*
44. *Allaa humaraam Sheek Huseen*
45. *Baahra Masgiida meetaa*
46. *Balbala tee dura caatiin asheetaa*
47. *Maal isiniin jedhe Gaarri Gagaashangala?*
48. *Na duuka galtan moo isin duuka gaala?*
49. *Eennu kiyya qabaa sitti cinaa gala?*
50. *Si biraa na kutuu didde abaabbaalaan.*
51. *Dilbii kiyya fuulaan natti gara galaa.*
52. *Anaajinaa silkiin jammartee haa sayuu*
53. *Baahra gaarri kulliin duubarra naannayuu*
54. *Uf na barsiiftanii an akkam haa ta'u,*
55. *Anillee amaanaa sirratti haa ta'u?*

56. *Biyya Sheeka Baalee бага wal geettanii*
57. *Oduu Sheeka keenna waa jab dhageettanii*
58. *Gaaf durii koleeraan biyyarraan safari*
59. *Baaleef Diida'iyyoon*
60. *Geejjiba Sheek Hussein Karratti garraree*
61. *Ani hingalu jedheen na falmitan malee.*
62. *Nageellee Boorana karaan jala bayee*
63. *Keenna hixaan duruu isinitti bayee*
64. *Waan jettan naan jedhaa bakka jettan gayee*
65. *Abbaa gaafa Roobee ka gaafa Daabayyaa*
66. *Maaliin diddiydanii gaara guutuu fayyaa*
67. *Gosa gadi dhiisanii si qabachuu wayyaa.*
68. *Diida'iyyon bayee Seeruu Abbaas gayee*
69. *Seera keetiif namuu manaa gadi bayee*
70. *Imimmaan bobbooyee boqoo wal dhungatee*
71. *Akkuma waan garaa haadha tokko bayee.*
72. *Maal jedheen namichoon ka gaafa Harannaa*
73. *Gichaan jalaa looyee gaaguraan korannaan*
74. *Ol bararuuf samii hin dhaqabuu*
75. *Gadi bararuuf dachii hin dhaqqabu*
76. *Nadhaqabaa Aabboo ka nama dhaqqabuu.*

## B) THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

[To Sheikh Hussein]

1. The great people of the Jimma made pilgrimage to your shrine
2. The great people of the Wallo made pilgrimage to your shrine
3. The great people of the Wallaga made pilgrimage to your shrine
4. The great people of the Silte made pilgrimage to your shrine
5. The great people of the Sidama made pilgrimage to your shrine
6. The great people of the Alaba made pilgrimage to your shrine
7. The great people of the Guji made pilgrimage to your shrine
8. The great people of the Borana made pilgrimage to your shrine
9. Your Birka is the meeting place of the entire world.
10. You whose karama is swift
11. You who mediates for the sake of our peace
12. Oh, the sea, our Light Hussein.
13. You sat on Mount. Kambata
14. The brightness of his face resembles the moon
15. He responds in any language that one has summoned him
16. Oh, our sea, Light Hussein.
17. Oh, our Sheikh, Sheikh Hussein
18. You whom God gave us
19. The prophet himself put the trust of the whole country on you
20. Oh, our sea, Light Hussein.



21. Oh, our Sheikh, Sheikh Hussein
22. He whom God ranked high
23. We shall go to the Haram together
24. Oh, our sea, Light Hussein.

[To the Audience]

25. The mother of Nur Hussein
26. Become the most honored
27. When Abul-Qasim blessed her
28. She delivered him with out any travail.
29. The miraculous light filled the sky
30. And it extended over the earth too
31. The birth of Bale's generous
32. Happened on the night before Tuesday.
33. The women knew the honor of being the mother of a saint
34. And all of them expected being blessed with the luck
35. But only Shamsia was lucky
36. The Mother who delivered Nur Hussein.
37. A woman took pilgrimage to Annajina for the first time
38. As she reached Walenso
39. She asked, "What is the beauteous white thing down there?"
40. "That is what has been famed as the village of Bale's Sheikh."
41. May Allah give mercy to Sheikh Hussein?
42. The Saint who is based near Dadala
43. Who has the power to wrench us from under your armpit (guardianship)?
44. May Allah give mercy to Sheikh Hussein?
45. The Saint whose Mosque is silver-roofed
46. *Khat* has flourished in front of your gate.

[To Sheikh Hussein]

47. What did Mount. Gashangala whisper to you?
48. "Should you come to me or should I come along with you?"
49. Who else do I have in my side to defect you?
50. All the effort to break me away from you has failed
51. My giant, give me your favor me.
52. The bell has started ringing from Annajina
53. My Saint, around whom multiple mountains form a chain
54. What can I do being addicted to you?
55. May you just put me in your trust?

[To the Audience]

56. Oh, that is nice of you, the peoples of Bale's Sheikh, to gather like this
57. You will listen to the good tidings of our Sheikh
58. At the time when the epidemic of cholera raged the whole country
59. Both Bale and Dida'iyo



60. Gathered the Sheikh's pack animals at Karraa
61. And said, "We never go back home unless you protect us."

[To Sheikh Hussein]

62. The road passed adjacent to Nagelle of Borana
63. Our fate is with you from the start
64. Offer me your favor as I fulfilled what you wanted of me.
65. The patron father of the event at Robe and Dabaya
66. How did you dismantle such a huge mountain?
67. It is better to relinquish one's clan and make union with you.
68. Dida'iyu has already reached Seru of Abbas
69. People from all walks of life have gathered here to celebrate your festival
70. They wept as they were kissing one other
71. Like children born of a single mother.
72. What did the man of Haranna say to him?
73. When the robe slipped off from under him as he was hanging a hive on a tree branch
74. "I'm unable, if I try to fly up into the sky"
75. "I'm unable again, if I try to jump down to the ground"
76. "My rescuer, come fast to my rescue."

#### C) THE ALLUSIONS AND THEIR EXPLANATIONS

The hymns sung in honor of Sheikh Hussein abound in wide-ranging historical and fictional allusions. The hymns allude to factual names such as of places and people or clans. They also allude to themes of local mythology about the Sheikh and his religious performances. In this section, I offer short annotations of the allusions and, where necessary, point out the implications of these allusions.

#### D) NOTES ON ITEMS OF FACTUAL INFORMATION ALLUDED TO IN THE HYMNS

- 1-8. Silte, Sidama, Alaba, Jimma, Wallo, Wallaga, Guji and Borana are names for the Oromo and non-Oromo groups who traditionally make pilgrimage to Annajina. The first three are the non-Oromo groups in southern Ethiopia. The latter five are the Oromo sub-groups living in different parts of Ethiopia.
9. Birka is another name for Annajina.
13. The Kambata are a group of people who live in the southern part of Ethiopia.
23. Haram refers to the al-Haram Mosque in Makkah, which holds Kaaba, the holiest shrine of Islam.
27. Abul Qasim is the name of a saint who is said to have lived in southern Ethiopia. On the edge of Wabe Shebele River, there is a big mountain named after this saint.
35. Shamsia is the name of Sheikh Hussein's mother.

38. Walenso is a hilly place near Annajina. This place allows the pilgrims the full view of the glistening dome of the shrine. It is customary for the pilgrims to stop here for a while, since, according to the oral tradition, Sheikh Hussein stopped there in one of his journeys (Andrzejewski, 1972a). At Walenso, the pilgrims are highly inspired by the sight of the sanctuary and, as a result, the fatigue of their long journey is completely forgotten. From Walenso, the pilgrims point their forked stick towards the shrine and sing a cheerful song of praise: *Allaahumaraam Sheek Huseen hoo* (May Allah give mercy to Sheikh Hussein!). As soon as they reach the village, they express more euphoria and ask their Sheikh to guarantee them warm reception, saying, “*Nuur Huseen Aabbiyyoo dhufnee. Ufitti nu fudhadhaa!* (Oh, Nur Hussein, the Father, we are at your shrine. Receive us with goodly acceptance!).” Then, they enter the shrine and prostrate themselves in front of the Sheikh’s tomb. They also grab a handful of *jawaaraa* (dust of the sacred lime from the floor of the Sheikh’s tomb) and eat some of it and rub some of it on different parts of their body as a cure for illness.
42. Dadala is a place near Annajina.
45. The “silver-roofed” mosque here refers to *Al-Masjid-al-Zuqtum*, the ancient mosque below the shrine, which, the local people believe, was built by Sheikh Hussein and his disciples.
46. Caatii is the Oromo version for *Khat* (*Catha edulis Forsk*). The leaves and shoots of this shrub “contain d-amphetamines (cathine and cathinone) which produce a euphoric, stimulating, exciting but finally depressing” (Maow, 2000; Tafla, 1981) effect. Throughout Ethiopia, *Khat* has social and religious connotation (Vecchiato, 1993). Chewing the leaves of this shrub features as one component of religious and cultural practice at Annajina as well. Readers are referred to Gebissa (2004) for the most recent information about the social, cultural and economic values of *Khat* in Ethiopia.
47. My informant could not locate the exact place of Mount. Gashangala. It, however, is part of the belief that Sheikh Hussein received veneration and affection from natural objects (Andrzejewski, 1972a).
59. Bale is the province of Ethiopia wherein the shrine of Sheikh Hussein is found. Diida’iyyo is the poetic form of Diida’aa, an area in the southern Arsi zone that is separated from Bale Province by Wabe Shebele River.
62. Nagelle is the capital city of the Borana zone in southern Ethiopia.
65. Robe and Daabayyaa are two places in Bale Province. Robe is also the name of one of the rural towns found in the southern part of the Arsi Province on the far side of Wabe Shebele.
68. Seeruu Abbaas is the name of a place found in the southern part of the Arsi Province.
72. Haranna, now a part of Bale Mountains National Park, is an area covered with dense mixed forest of coniferous and deciduous trees. It is one of the known areas in the province where apiculture is practiced using traditional beehives.

## E) ALLUSIONS ON THEMES OF LOCAL MYTHOLOGY ABOUT SHEIKH HUSSEIN

- 10-12. The local people believe that Sheikh Hussein does not only protect them while they are alive, but also plays an intermediary role between them and their God after death.
- 13-16. These lines give mythological elaboration to the radiance of the Sheikh's face. They also point out that Sheikh Hussein understands the peoples' call to him in whatever language. That is why the pilgrimage to his shrine cuts across ethnic or tribal boundaries. The trans-territoriality of the cult is also emphasized in lines 1-9 of the text.
- 17-20. There is a belief that Sheikh Hussein took from Prophet Mohammed the full responsibility of propagating the faith of Islam in Ethiopia and the surrounding regions. It is clear now that Sheikh Hussein did not live in the days of Prophet Mohammed and was born at Annajina many centuries afterwards. Neither was Sheikh Hussein the first preacher of the Islamic faith in the region, as he himself learned the faith from his father, Sheikh Ibrahim (Braukämper, 2002).<sup>(23)</sup>
- 21-24. The local people believe that Sheikh Hussein is one of the persons whom God elevated to sainthood. It is also believed that those who called out his name can visit the holy sites within the sacred sanctuaries at al-Haram in Makkah.
- 25-36. In these lines, the singer recounts the miraculous happenings (manifests) on the birthday of the saint. The lines point out to the audience that the birth of the saint is unlike the birth of other ordinary persons. As it was revealed to Saint Abul Qasim, the miraculous light filled the sky and extended over the earth. The news of the coming saint thus kindled ambition in the local mothers. All of them greatly wished being the mother of a saint. Finally, only one woman was lucky and that was Shamsia.
- 37-40. News about the fame of Sheikh Hussein's pilgrimage at Annajina bewildered a woman. One day, she joined husband in the pilgrimage to see all the wonders she had been told. After a long and arduous traveling, the two reached Walenso. The woman looked into the valley and beheld the glory of the shrine of the saint.
- 41-43. The singer of this hymn directly invokes God's favor for Sheikh Hussein and abruptly switches to appreciating the protective power of the Sheikh. In general, Sheikh Hussein is believed to wield great power with which he protects the well-being of his adherents from any adversary.
- 44-46. As in lines 41-43, the singer of this hymn directly invokes God's favor for Sheikh Hussein and then admires the sacred environs of Annajina. The phrase "in front of your gate" refers to the wider vicinity of the shrine.
- 47-51. In this hymn, the singer directly refers to Sheikh Hussein himself. Those who are in trouble and thus desperately seek his help articulate this hymn. Here, "the effort of breaking," according to my informant, refers to the actions of the "unstated others," possibly, the orthodox Muslims who strive to reassert the cultural traditionality of Islam. If this is the case, one can designate the

- hymn as a way of giving symbolic expression to an offstage verbal protest, an aspect of hidden transcript (Kottak, 2001).
- 52-55. The “ringing bell at Annajina” alludes to the Sheikh’s spiritual call unto his adherents so that they may arrive without delay for the annual festival. The meaning of the line “My Saint, around whom multiple mountains form a chain” is completely incomprehensible for a casual reader. The reason is that the word mountain, the metaphor of hugeness in Oromo folk symbolism, pangeyrically refers to Sheikh Hussein. The multiple mountains that form a chain around Sheikh Hussein, the largest mountain, are other Muslim saints whose shrines are found across the Arsiland.
- 56-61. The hymn alludes to the cholera epidemic of 1970/1971 in southern Ethiopia, which killed 3,000 people in Annajina alone (Braukämper, 2002). The phrase “Sheikh’s pack animals” refers to the pilgrims’ own pack animals. The animals are referred simply because they traveled longer distances to help the pilgrims transport their goods to Sheikh’s shrine. According to the hymn, even in the cholera epidemic, thousands of pilgrims from Bale and Diida’iyyo refused to leave the place until the Sheikh would assure them safety.
- 62-64. In this hymn the singer directly addresses Sheikh Hussein. The hymn alludes to the promise entered between Sheikh Hussein and his follower. First, a person asked Sheikh Hussein for favor. The Sheikh enjoined a religious duty (it is difficult to know from the hymn what the duty exactly is) on the person as a condition to the fulfillment of the latter’s wishes. Without any hesitation, the believer carried out all the specific religious duties and pleads for a good turn.
- 65-67. As I have pointed out, the Arsi believe that Sheikh Hussein performed numerous miraculous acts at God’s bidding. This hymn articulates the Sheikh’s miraculous deeds at places called Robe and Dabaya. There the Sheikh miraculously destroyed a big mountain that challenged his journey. The last line points out the inner thoughts of the believers, their subjective conclusion that it is better to renounce one’s own close relatives and form union with the Sheikh.
- 68-71. The singer experienced a wonderful event at Annajina and communicated that to Sheikh Hussein. He is expressing his joy on seeing the people who conjoined at Annajina to celebrate the Sheikh’s festival. According to the hymn, when they met at Annajina, the pilgrims embraced one another and also wept. Their tears of joy are obviously the result of their religious cohesion. Through such a collective effervesce, the pilgrims ensure one another an emotional sustenance. The singer brought out this tendency in the last line where the emotional behavior of children born of a single mother is visualized for semantic effect. One aspect of religious involvement is that people who belong to common religious category “feel a deep sense of shared joy, meaning, experience, communion, belonging, and commitment to their religion” (Kottak, 2001: 496), and these elements serve as a core for the continuity of their religion.
- 72-76. When they are in trouble, the adherents of Sheikh Hussein call out his name to get by. This hymn alludes to a person who, in an attempt to hang a beehive on a top of tall and big tree, was about to fall from the tree and cried out for the help of the Sheikh. The hymn inordinately states how the Sheikh quickly ar-

rives for his followers when they are in trouble. Andrzejewski (1972a: 11) stated: "There is a widespread belief about his being invisibly present near people or even within their souls, and his invisible presence is often taken literally."

## THE OVERALL VALUES OF THE HYMNS OF SHEIKH HUSSEIN

The hymns sung in respect of Sheikh Hussein are an important cultural heritage. They serve many functions for the Oromo in general and the Arsi in particular. In addition to religious and psychological functions, the hymns may be of great value for scholastic purposes.

- (1) The most important value of these hymns is that they preserve the traditional Oromo poetic tradition.
- (2) The hymns can serve as source of data to reconstruct the history of the Oromo people and their relationships with other surrounding peoples. The names of places and situations mentioned in the hymns offer some suggestions about the settlement of the surrounding peoples and their demographic fluidity.
- (3) The hymns are replete with names of religious personalities in the region. This sheds some light on the role of those personalities in the dissemination of Islamic and quasi-Islamic traditions in the area.
- (4) The hymns, together with other practices around the shrine, may provide information concerning the preservation of the proto-Oromo religious ethics.
- (5) For the followers of the saint, the hymns offer psychological gratification. As a shaman enchants the eyes and minds of his patients with his baffling hallucinations, the singers of the hymns captivate the psychology of the pilgrims with their artistic vigor. About this manipulative function of the hymns Andrzejewski (1972a: 9) stated:

People who venerate Sheikh Hussein are usually very sensitive to appeals to their generosity if these are made by invoking his name. Gifts and hospitality are given particularly to pilgrims to his shrine, who carry a special stick resembling at its top the letter Y with the top line curved down on both sides. Some householders even keep special guest huts for pilgrims. There is a widespread belief that such generosity is rewarded and refusal punished even in his life. All this seems to have given rise to a phraseology in which favours shown by a person for the sake of Sheikh Hussein are spoken of as gifts of the Sheikh himself.

- (6) The hymns can provide ample data about the current dialectical tension between Afro-Islamic tradition and new religious awakening in the region. Like other Oromo oral arts, the hymns sung in honor of Sheikh Hussein are in constant functional transformation. One indicator of this situation is that the hymns are sung not only to praise the Sheikh, but also to protest the surrounding orthodox Islamic practices and attitudes that discourage pilgrimage to Annajina.

As implied in lines 47-51, the adherents of the saint express their rebuttal of religious awakening in the area.

## THE DRAMATIC ENACTMENT OF THE CULT OF SHEIKH HUSSEIN AT AN-NAJINA

In this section, I discuss the dramatic display of religious and social fulfillments at *waare*, the grand ceremony of Sheikh Hussein. A large number of people gather to celebrate *waare* at *Dhooqqoo Karraa* and *Diinkuree*. Both night and day times, a large number of pilgrims celebrate the dramatic shows. Hymn singing is the most prominent religious ceremony that is carried out in these places. At this performance, the hymn singers hold the forked stick on their shoulder, sometimes raising it to the sky and at other times gently waving it from side to side or pointing it to the audience. Since they sing aloud with much fervency, they insert their forefingers in their ears. They move along on balls their feet or make a fast turn from one side to the other in a very dramatic way. On their part, the audience adds vitality to the drama by repeating the singers' final words. Catharsis, an intense emotional outpouring in the audience during live performance (Kottak, 2001), is evident at the time of hymn singing. Some members of the enthusiastic spectator sob when they are highly touched by the message of the eulogy and its dramatic delivery.

The *waare* event involves also narratives of life experiences that recount the miraculous intervention of the Sheikh's sanctity. In the middle of the hymn-singing ritual, some of the pilgrims would take permission and recount how Sheikh Hussein had taken them out of problems they, in essence, had no little control over. I was informed that in the previous pilgrimages, a number of pilgrims used the occasion to narrate visions of conversion to Islam. The religious occasion on which the pilgrims narrate personal accounts and visions of contact with Sheikh Hussein is known as *Hikmaa Sheek Huseen Himuu* (bearing witness to the miraculous manifestations of Sheikh Hussein).<sup>(24)</sup>

The *hikmaa* session is a very dramatic process as well. The drama commences after the coordinator has announced to the assemblage the pilgrim's plan to bear witness to the miraculous deeds of Sheikh Hussein. Before the narrator begins the account, the coordinators ensure that the audience has made mental adjustment necessary for the adequate understanding of the witness. The coordinators emphasize to the audience the appropriateness and desirability of the narrator's self-disclosure. This emphasis stills all the background noise. After the silence is ensured, the said pilgrim comes into view and starts narrating the accounts of the miracle.

Like any other formal event of communication, the management of the *hikmaa* session requires a strict observance of what Bell and Daly (1984) termed as conventional rule keeping. Empathic listening, complete attentiveness to the thoughts and feelings of the discloser, is the most vital component of managing the narration of personal information. I observed that while a man was engaged



in a teary-eyed disclosure, the coordinator assured him with verbal as well as non-verbal intimacies. For example, using the traditional eloquence that switch-coded between *Oromiffaa* and Arabic, the coordinator amplified the words of the narrator to the congregation so that the latter would listen with eagerness.<sup>(25)</sup> This further encouraged the narrator to gather up more fervor and to continue with the narration. The session ended when the narrator submitted *godhaa* (votive offering) as thanks to the Sheikh's favor. In order to kindle the enthusiasm of the congregation, the *baahroo* man stepped in and sang some *baahroo* hymns that he thought would tie in with the witness the narrator had made about the holy virtues of the Sheikh.

At the place of *zeekkaraa*, the pilgrims demonstrate their religious affection through *gajafaa* (ecstasy) and *dibbee* (drum-beating). One night, many pilgrims gathered in front of Haji Adam Zikr's Mosque and performed *zeekkaraa*. On this *zeekkaraa* occasion, I observed two women, who were possessed by the spirits as the performance was going on. *Gajafaa* or possession by spirits is an aspect of "the public enactment of private attachment" with the cult (Rasmussen, 1994).

Annajina is a place where one observes a chaotic *mélange* of other divergent religious practices. The *muudaa* event reveals the dilution of the cult of Islamic saints and the traditional Oromo religious practices. There are many similarities between the ritual activities in the *muudaa* ceremony at Annajina and the *muudaa* ceremony to *Abbaa Muudaa* in the Oromo *gada system*, although the former has a noticeable Islamic overtone. For example, the pilgrims who go to Annajina bear a sacred Y-shaped stick called *dhanqee* or *ulee Sheikh Hussein*.<sup>(26)</sup>

The pilgrims to *Abbaa Muudaa* in Borana also held the forked stick during their long and arduous religious journey (Legesse, 1973). The two religious ceremonies are similar again as they intensively involve prayers, blessings, animal sacrificing and making pledges. What is known as *Korma Qalma* (sacrificial bull) in the Borana pilgrimage is known as *Korma Wareegaa* in Annajina. This means that the important elements of the traditional Oromo religious systems continued to operate in the Arsi Oromo's cult of Islamic saints. The prominent concepts in the *gada system*, such as *hayyuu* (senior legal councilor) and *wayyuu* (ritual officiant), are commonly used during the pilgrimage to Annajina.<sup>(27)</sup> The religious syncretism, a spontaneous mixture of divergent religious practices, at Annajina reveals that although Africans developed orientations towards modern religions, they have not yet completely parted with their indigenous belief systems (Moyo, 1996).

Chewing the leaves of *khat* shrubs is one of the most spectacular components of religious rituals at Annajina. While the majority of the adherents of Sheikh Hussein attend the religious ceremony at *Karraa and Diinkuree*, some of them invoke the favor of their Sheikh in *dawrii* (adapted from the Arabic brotherhood circles). The rectangular and grass-roofed huts of the *dargaa* (the custodians of Sheikh's shrine) serve as hospices for the pilgrims. In these huts, the unrelated pilgrims mingle as if a big African household, portioning among one another from their scanty *galaa* (foods-stuff) and wishing one another the

Sheikh's blessing. The brotherhood circles (normally composed of 5-10 persons) create religious and social cohesions among the adherents. Worried pilgrims voice their ills and seek the help of others during prayers to the Sheikh. The "favor-seekers" buy bulks of *khat* leaves and hand it over to the members of the brotherhood circles. The chewers place the shrub at the center of their circle and chew as much as they desire. The "favor-seekers" esteem as well as nurture members of the special circle by providing them with tea, coffee and other accessories that increase the stimulatory effect of *Khat*.

After they have chewed on a considerable portion of the leaves and stimulatory enhancers, the *dawrii* members become enthused to sing out countless hymns of Sheikh Hussein and to implore the Sheikh's favor for the needy pilgrims. The hymns that are sung at *dawrii* usually align with the type of demand the pilgrims make on Sheikh Hussein.<sup>(28)</sup> If say, their problem is *dhuk-kuba* (long-drawn ailment), the singers sing the hymns that point to the healing power of the Sheikh's *karama*. If the pilgrims' problem is childlessness, the singers select and sing hymns that recount the Sheikh's alleged mystical power to enable the parents to conceive. The following hymn is a good example of texts sung to implore the Sheikh's intervention in favor of the childless:

<i>Baahra guchiin simtee</i>	Oh, the sea whom the ostrich welcomed
<i>Daarii Gannaaleetti</i>	At the boarder of River Gannale
<i>Qorichi maseenaa</i>	The remedy of sterility
<i>Argame Baaletti</i>	Has been discovered in Bale)
<i>Nagarfajii kiyaa bakka wallaaletti</i>	Oh, my consultant whenever I'm baffled. <sup>(29)</sup>

## THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF ANNAJINA FOR NORTHEAST AFRICAN MUSLIMS

Annajina had a powerful symbolic significance for Northeast African Muslims over the last many centuries. The symbolic value of Annajina for the Northeast African Muslims is parallel to the significance that Makkah has gained in the eyes of the world Muslims. Braukämper (2002: 163) designated Annajina as the "Northeast African Mecca." Lewis (1980: 412) similarly stated that Annajina was a religious site that long pulled together all Muslims in the northeast African for a common religious identity:

The Sheikh's annual festival held on February 7th attracts huge crowds of pilgrims from regions as distant as Wollega (Western Oromia), northern Kenya and southern Somalia. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that in the last decade particularly, Sheikh Hussein has become the patron saint for all Muslims in the region. As the spiritual residue, so to speak, of the ancient state of Bale... it is, of course, extremely appropriate that Sheikh Hussein should have such significance as a contemporary symbol of Islamic Identity.



There are various similarities between the religious and social practices at Annajina and the Manasik (prescribed duties) of Hajji at Makkah. During Hajji at Makkah, pilgrims are required to fulfill duty of stoning the Devil. Similar obligation is prescribed at Annajina in a place called *Qacamsaree*. At Annajina, the sacred *Karraa* (gate) that leads into the shrine is referred to as *Bab-al-Salam* (the gate of peace). There is functional similarity between the *Karraa* of Annajina and the *Bab-al-Salam* at Makkah. Just behind *Bab-al-Salam* at Annajina, there is a dark stone that Sheikh Hussein is believed to have brought from Makkah. The name of this sacred stone is *Daarara Bashuu*. Just as the pilgrims to Makkah are prescribed to kiss *Hajjaral-Aswad* closer to the Kaaba, the pilgrims to Annajina are required to kiss *Daarara Bashuu* (Braukämper, 2002). What is more, just as the water from *Zamzam* (the sacred well inside the grand mosque at Makkah) is considered sacred, the water from *Haroo Lukkuu* (the sacred pond to have been dug in the time of Nur Hussein) is also taken as blessed water. Again, as the pilgrims who go to Makkah return with water from *Zamzam*, the pilgrims from Annajina take home some water of *Haroo Lukkuu*<sup>(30)</sup> and *jawaaraa* dust, both of which are believed to have infallible medicinal values. The main difference between the pilgrimage to Annajina and that to Makkah is that after they return from the pilgrimage, the former pilgrims are not called by the courtesy title *Haji*, accorded to those who have made pilgrimage to Makkah.

As Lewis (1980) stated above, the most vital socio-cultural significance of Annajina is that it kept together a large number of Muslims across vast Northeast Africa, regardless of their ethnic and social differences (Braukämper, 2002).<sup>(31)</sup> The whole Oromo, the Somali, the Silte-Guraghe and other neighboring Muslim peoples have long been traveling towards the shrine to accomplish both religious and social fulfillments.

Among the neighboring Muslim states, the Harar city-state had a stronger historical connection to the shrine of Sheikh Hussein. The background for the historical bond that the Harar city-state made with Annajina should concern us here before we discuss the Arsi's striking spiritual attachment with Sheikh Hussein. Braukämper (2002: 155) stated:

A decisive event with respect to the neither cult of Nor Husayn, as far as can be reconstructed from the resources, took place at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Abd al-Shakur, the amir of Harar from 1783 to 1794, initiated the construction of a shrine in Annajina, which was dedicated to Abd al-Kadir al-Djilani, the founder of the Kadiriyya order. The establishment of this sanctuary was obviously intended to strengthen the Islamic mission among the 'pagan' Arsi-Oromo. That is why Abd al-Shakur also sent trained religious personnel to Bale, notably a Somali Shaikh called Aw Muhammad, who originated from the region of Berbera and lived in Harar.

It is important to critically analyze why Amir Abd al-Shakur (1783-94), the eleventh amir of Ali ibn Dawud's dynasty and the most widely chronicled Amir in the contemporary accounts, was interested in Annajina. Amir Abd al-Shakur is remembered for two important steps in the history of the Harar city-state. One is that he increased the economic prosperity of the city-state and his own personal economic status. Secondly, the amir attempted to regenerate the city-state's previous fame as a radiant center of religious propagation (Zekaria, 1997b). Towards this end, the amir tried to devise a strategy that, perhaps, none of his predecessors had thought of. That is, he wanted to spread Islam through the agency of religious scholars and through building mosques at the off-lying shrines of the Muslim saints. This strategy reveals his strong conviction about the usefulness of the fame of Islamic saints in order to spread the faith across the southeastern parts of the country.

The background information on the attraction of Amir Abd al-Shakur's towards Annajina is far from conclusive. At first glance, one may view his construction of a mosque in dedication to Sheikh Abd al-Qadir al-Djilani solely as a deed of personal piety. However, the fact that he appointed and sent religious scholars to this mosque suggests that he had a plan of setting up outlying settlement in non-Muslim or semi-Muslim lands to spread the faith. The Amir may also have had the intention of using Islam as a supra-tribal weapon to amalgamate the Muslims and non-Muslims that existed in the vast tract of Bale, Arsi, Hararge and Somali regions. The fact that the amir laid claim to and restored the possession of Sar Amba and Aleyo Amba in northern Shoa (Zekaria, 1997b) provides further clue about the aim of propagating Islam as a supra-tribal ideology.<sup>(32)</sup>

#### NEGLIGENCE OF THE ARSI-OROMO'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE CULT OF SHEIKH HUSSEIN

It is important to critically look at Braukämper's (2002) understanding of the Arsi-Oromo's associations with Annajina. Braukämper is one of the prominent figures in the German socio-cultural research in northeast Africa, highly credited for providing a large corpus of literature on the subject. But his failure to clearly articulate the extent to which the Arsi assimilated the cult and were themselves influenced by the pockets of persisting Islamic practices is a serious drawback of his works. His explanations are marred by some contradictory reflections.

In Chapter IV of his book, Braukämper (2002: 139) confirmed that: "After the Oromo invasion of Bale, the region of Annajina was occupied by the Waw, who belonged to a "true" Oromo clan. By contact with the surviving Muslims they developed a kind of syncretism, and, in addition, pockets of orthodox Islam seem to have persisted through the centuries." He continued to point out: ...it was for good reason that Amir Abd al-Shakur just elected Annajina to establish a shrine of the Kadiriyya order as a focus for missionary activi-

ties. Braukämper (2002) is not clear in what he means by “good reason.” He unconvincingly stated that the amir’s plan was to strengthen the Islamic mission among the “pagan” Arsi-Oromo, without first indicating why and how the Arsi remained pagan up to that time.

He also suggested that few pockets of orthodox Islamic practices persisted even after the Oromo overwhelmed the area, but said nothing about how the Islamic practices and the pre-Islamic Cushitic belief systems influenced each other to create a type of Islam that is local. Neither did he provide us with clear information concerning the Oromo’s actions to assimilate the Islamic practices into the cultural mainstream. If one looks seriously into the Arsi-Oromo’s social and cultural themes of tradition and the available linguistic-etymological data, one comes to realize that the cult of Sheikh Hussein, in its current development, is the result of long years of mutual assimilation.

Since the Oromo occupied the area at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Braukämper & Mishago, 1999; Davis, 1963; Shillington, 1995), the Arsi’s association with the cult of Sheikh Hussein most likely occurred around the same period. For Braukämper (2002), the Arsi’s association with the cult of Sheikh Hussein is a recent religious adherence developed merely from socio-political crises. In Chapter V, Braukämper (2002: 163), pointed out that the cult of Sheikh Hussein provided the Arsi with a new cultural identity after their religious complex associated with the *Abbaa Muudaa* (father of anointment) at Horra Wolabu “declined considerably in the 1950s and replaced by the cult of Shaikh Nur Husayn, the patron saint of Muslim Arsiland.” (Braukämper, 2002: 163).<sup>(33)</sup> Throughout Braukämper (2002), he intensely focused on excavating the historical and linguistic-sediments of the apogee of Muslim principalities “during the last centuries of what can be classified as the Middle Ages of Ethiopian history in southern Ethiopia” (Braukämper, 2002: 170). This caused him to relegate to the fringe the Arsi’s job in preserving the sediments of the medieval Islamic beliefs which, according to him, acted as stimulating factors in the (re)Islamization of southern Ethiopia since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The cultural history of southeastern Ethiopia remains incomplete as long as the following questions remain unanswered. None of the literature on the nature of Islam in Southern Ethiopia (including Braukämper) has provided us clear answers to the following questions about the Arsi Oromo’s connection to the Shrine of Sheikh Hussein:

- (1) What are the social, economic and religious relationships between the Harar city-state and the Arsi-Oromo people before amir Abd al-Shakur initiated the revitalization of Islamic teaching through the sanctuary of Sheikh Hussein?
- (2) How had the sanctuary been treated by the Arsi or other Oromo clans before the amir’s religious scholars arrived there?
- (3) What happened to the people who had the full possession of the shrine before the Oromo’s advancement in the area?
- (4) Did the Arsi really begin or were they already in religious transformation when the missionaries of Abd al-Shakur arrived at Annajina?
- (5) Why did Amir Abd-al Shakur make a missionary endeavor in Arsiland with-

out first getting his Islam fully accepted by the Oromo who settled around the city of Harar?

Lastly, it is important to say a few words about Arsi's domination of the cult of Sheikh Hussein. Currently, the Arsi are the most important people in the cult of Sheikh Hussein, although they are not the sole claimants. The Arsi pilgrims are larger in number than the pilgrims from other groups. In 1971, the number of pilgrims in Annajina was estimated at 100,000 and most were the Arsi (Braukämper, 2002). As I observed in October 1997, apart from the numerical magnitude, the Arsi assumed the most important role in organizing and directing the dedicated works of pilgrimage at Annajina.

All of the hymn singers I met both at *Dhooqqoo Karraa* and *Diinkuree* were Arsi. Similarly, all of the *wanbaraa* (those who preside over the pilgrimage ceremony) were Arsi. The *dargaa* (custodians of the holy shrine) were also mostly the Arsi, although some of them could be of Somali origin (Lewis, 1980). Religious and ritual practices that are characteristic of the Sufi tradition, such as *zeekkaraa* (exaltation) and its *shubbisaa* (a rhythmic rocking motion), *eebaa* (blessing), and *gajafaa* (ecstasy), are channeled through the Oromo language, the dominant of which is arguably the Arsi-Bale dialect. The Arsi who strongly adhere to the cult of the saint are called *jaalalloo sheekanaa Huseen* (literally, the fervent adherents of Sheikh Hussein).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this paper I demonstrated the importance of expressive culture in Africa, drawing on the data I collected from the Arsi Oromo oral tradition. I emphasize that one inherent quality of the African oral arts is that they exist to satisfy the communicative desire of the society that created it. They flourish whenever the social situation of the society calls for a commentary or reflections. They thus interweave with the cultural, social, political and economic situation of the society. Actually, they draw their substance and function from the concrete social context that gives rise to them.

Of all the functions of the African oral arts, I focused on their use to symbolize the religious institution of the society that created them. In Africa as elsewhere, art and religion (including magic) mutually reinforce each other. They are indivisible fusions in the cultural heritage of the African societies in general. One universal quality of arts is that they "are media for expressing sentiments and emotions not easily expressed in ordinary life. They impart a sense of mastery over or communion with unpredictable events and mysterious, unseen powers" and directly "impose human meanings and values on an indifferent world, a world that has no humanly intelligible meanings and values of its own" (Harris, 1995: 252).

As other traditional societies in Ethiopia and other African countries, the Arsi used their oral traditions to worship their Sky God and to eulogize Sheikh Hussein of Bale. Through their oral arts, they evoked their fear of the transcendent

being and their want of harmony with it. I point out that the cult of Sheikh Hussein of Bale is one of the dominant examples of Afro-Islamic tradition of our continent. The mythology and hymns of the saint reveal the importance of syncretistic religion in Africa.

I argue against the western view that in a structurally less complex society, the most dominant use of oral arts is to transmit cultures and to preserve tradition. I emphasize that oral arts may not necessarily remain a passive reflector of historical events or experiences in the past.

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#### NOTES

- (1) There is no one uniform term to refer to the oral transmission of the collective body of culture and wisdom in Africa. Writers variously have described this as folklore, oral art, verbal art, oral literature, oral tradition, oral genres, oral artistry and orature (Alnaes, 1989). In this article, I use the phrases oral traditions, oral arts, oral genres and oral artistry interchangeably, to refer to the verbal transmission of the Arsi Oromo's cultural knowledge and experience.
- (2) I heard this allegoric story as a high school student.
- (3) These examples counter the Eurocentric view of the African people and continent as "incapable of logical reasoning and hardly above a beast" (Mfoulou, 1998). This view emanates merely from an irrational conclusion that people with unsophisticated production and economic systems have no means to devote their time and effort on abstract thinking.
- (4) The *gabbar* system is a land tenure system which, following the conquests of Menelik II, enabled the feudal officials to turn the Oromo and other southern Ethiopian peoples into subject peasantry (Tareke, 1991).
- (5) The Oromo are the largest single national group in Eastern Africa (Legesse, 1973; Hassen, 1990, 1992). They constitute at least 40% of the Ethiopian population (Baxter, 1996; Burckhardt, 2000; Tareke, 1991), and speak *Afaan* Oromo (the language of Oromo), which belongs to the Eastern Kushitic family of Afro-Asiatic phylum. It is believed that in Africa only Arabic and Housa Fulani languages surpass the Oromo language in the number of people who speak it (Hordofa, 2001; Muudee, 1995). Outside Ethiopia, the language is spoken by thousands of other Oromo tribes in Kenya (Aguilar, 1995; Stroomer, 1985).

- (6) The Oromo language became the working language of Oromia in 1991, when the latter acquired the status of a regional state within the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. I admire the invaluable efforts of the Oromo Language Study and Standardization Team of the Culture and Information Bureau of the Regional State of Oromia for collecting and compiling the various nuances of the Oromo oral art over the last 10 years.
- (7) The *gada system* is a special political and social organization of the Oromo people and has its origin in the age-system of the Horn of Africa. In the *gada system*, every tribe is divided into groups called *gada* whose numbers vary from place to place or tribe to tribe (Trimingham, 1965). As an age-based social organization, the *gada system* provides the mechanism to motivate and organize members of the society into social structure. Various socio-political functions and responsibilities are associated with each group. As in other age-set systems in northeast African countries (Kurimoto, 1998: 48), the Oromo *gada system* provides a socio-political framework that institutionalizes stratified relationship between seniors and juniors and egalitarian relations among peers. Initiation into and promotion from one *gada* to the next is done after eight years (Abir, 1968; Legesse, 1973). The most important quality of the *gada system* is that it has segmentations and specified social functions for its members. As a result, the members may develop a consistent and stable sense of self and others. For elaborate role about the organizational features of the *gada-system* see Legesse (1973). For details about the socio-economic functions of the *gada-system* and other age-set systems in northeast Africa see Kurimoto & Simone (1998). A number of papers in Baxter *et al.* (1996) provide readers with adequate information about the symbolic elevation of the *gada system* in the current socio-political realities of the Horn.
- (8) One important social value of religion is that it assists individuals as well as the entire society to cope with adversities and tragedies (Kottak, 2001). Cults and alternative religions are intensified, particularly, in times of social problems since they provide the troubled members with timely solutions to their social problems. In this manner, the Arsi enthusiastically accepted Islam to cope with the religious and political dominations of the conquerors (Braukämper, 2002; Trimingham, 1965).
- (9) In the present day administrative division of Ethiopia, the name Arsi is used to refer to the smallest, but the most productive zone of the Regional State of Oromia. In this article, the term Arsi is used solely to refer to the Arsi people in general whereas Arsiland is used to refer to the vast regions occupied by the people.
- (10) The avoidance between the in-laws is an aspect of East African social order that is rooted in respect that commands deference and attention to proper decorum between members of a society (Heald, 1995).
- (11) Among some African societies, genealogical organizations “loom large in the overall social structure. In particular, they furnish the scaffolding up on which the political system is build. In extreme examples one may almost say that lineage organization is the political organization.” (Winter, 1968: 2). The Somali clan and lineage system is a good example of this extreme case (Lewis, 1962).
- (12) See also Aguilar’s (1995) note of Rigby’s (1966) impressive view that: “The pre-Islamic conception of the Cushitic God/Sky has many elements in common with Allah, one of the reasons why Islam was so readily adapted by the Somalis.”
- (13) In the Oromo moral values, one aspect of showing respect towards elders is by calling them within their children’s name. Of course, spouses or close friends may call each other by their first names. But, the youths in the community are expected to address adults by calling out their children’s name, usually of *hangafa* (the eldest child). For example, if a woman whose name is Roobduu has a *hangafa* daughter whose name is Diinkuree, the youths in the community are expected to refer to her by the courtesy



- name “Haadha Diinkuree” (Diinkuree’s Mother).
- (14) The *Abbaa Muudaa* was formerly the supreme religious leader of the Oromo. The Oromo had different places of *muudaa* (anointment). However, Dallo, a region on the left bank of the Gannale River, was the most celebrated place where *Abbaa Muudaa*, particularly at place called Horra Wolabu. In the past, representatives of the Oromo moieties from all over the country traveled to the centre of *Abba Muudaa* at Horra Wolabu to participate in mass pilgrimages and religious celebrations (Braukämper, 2002; Legesse, 1973; Trimmingham, 1965). The pilgrims made a long and tiresome pilgrimage to seek the *Abbaa Muudaa*’s “intercession to enable them to obtain their desires as with Muslim *wali*” (Trimingham, 1965: 255).
  - (15) The Oromo had two cradle lands in the past, each representing the two great moieties of the Borana and Barentuma. One was located in the north-eastern Borana region while the other was located in the south-western Arsi. The symbolic significance of the Borana as the cradle land and as the custodian of the Oromo heritage has been maintained to date. Conversely, the Arsiland gradually lost its symbolic value, following the people’s conquest at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and due to their enthusiastic acceptance of Islam as a faith of resistance (Braukämper, 2002).
  - (16) See Trimmingham (1965) and Hassen (1980) for the details of how Islam came into contact with the Oromo in general and the Arsi Oromo in particular. See also Braukämper (2002) for the view that the cult of Sheikh Hussein stimulated Islamization among the Arsi.
  - (17) The Oromo *jaannii/jaarii* cult is what is commonly known as *zar* or *saar* in Islamic Sub-Saharan states such as Sudan, Somali and Ethiopia (Ahmed, 2002; Giles, 1987; Hecht, 1996; Lewis, 1984; Nyamongo, 2000; Pankhurst, 1992; Vecchiato, 1993).
  - (18) See Braukämper (2002) for details about the contradictions and divergences in reckoning the genealogical and chronological data attributed to Sheikh Hussein.
  - (19) Andrzejewski (1972a: 11-12) analyzed the themes of several legends attributed to Sheikh Hussein. According to one legend, to shorten the tedium of the Sheikh’s journey, a place called Raare Ol’aantuu miraculously transported him to Raare Gad’aantuu. During his travels, hills and valleys passed along the news of his arrival and resounded with joy. One day, on his way back from Damascus, Sheikh Hussein had to cross the dark valley of Wabe Shebele. Then, two jets of burning light descended on his shoulders and lit up the dark valley. There is also a belief that even beasts of prey let go their prey when Sheikh Hussein was around. There is a legend about a crocodile that spared a monitor lizard for the sake of Sheikh Hussein.
  - (20) I acknowledge Abdella *et al.* (2003) for providing me with this legend.
  - (21) With no mention of the name of this natural bridge and its exact location, Andrzejewski (1972a: 24) wrote that “rocks arranged themselves into a natural bridge so that he [Sheikh Hussein] could step over them to the other side” out of veneration and affection.
  - (22) I am very much indebted to Abdella *et al.* (2003) for the legends about the glad tidings at the birth of Sheikh Hussein as well as for the hymns that reveal the society’s memory of the same mythical accounts.
  - (23) There are various other hymns sung in praise of Sheikh Hussein that recount spiritual connection between Mohammed and Sheikh Hussein. One should not be puzzled when the local people make connection between the two religious men, who lived generations apart and have no genealogical relationship. The connection obviously shows a superimposition of African ancestor worship on the cults of Islamic religious personages. Among the African societies that lately embraced Islam, the cult of Muslim saints works as a substitute of the pre-Islamic ancestor worship (Braukämper, 2002; Trimming-

- ham, 1965). The Arsi developed a belief that Prophet Mohammed, who is “a religious ancestor” for Sheikh Hussein, would spiritually communicate about the well-being of his Islamic society with Sheikh Hussein.
- (24) The word *Hikmaa* may well be the corrupted form of the Arabic original, *Al-Hikmah*, which means the complete knowledge of the Islamic jurisprudence or wisdom.
  - (25) The coordinator accompanied the narrator with various verbal encouragements and echoes. Some of the words and expressions used were: *Ajaa'iba* (Incredible!), *Na'am* (Oh, yes!), *Akkana* (It's that!), *Mee laalaa* (Look at the truth!), *Ani haa badu* (Oh, me!) *Abbichoo* (Oh, our Father!), and *Maashaa Allaahu* (God willed it!).
  - (26) *Dhanqee* (the forked stick) is a ritual object. For the adherents of Sheikh Hussein, it is a symbol of spiritual potency and is believed to have a protective power. Informants state that the stick is sacred only when it is cut from the trees growing in the valleys of *Qacamsaree* near Annajina. Otherwise similar sticks cut outside these places are considered fake.
  - (27) Braukämper (2002) made similar observation that the Arsi transferred several practices of the cult of *Abbaa Muudaa* to that of Sheikh Hussein.
  - (28) In African religious practice (Lambo, 1997), such a companionship at rituals is an influential therapeutic strategy of healing as well as gratifying the believer. Vecchiato (1993: 185), who did similar study away the Sidama people of southern Ethiopia, made the following conclusion about the solacing functions of groups in the context of ritualistic healings: The group thus plays an important psycho-therapeutic function, providing succor and empathy to the sick and reducing their uncertainties and anxiety.
  - (29) I acknowledge Mr. Gemechu Hinika of the Department of English (Alemaya University) for this hymn.
  - (30) In one of the hymns praising Sheikh Hussein, the Arsi sing that the water they draw from this sacred pond has a curing power: *Bishaan haroo lukkuu xabala keessanii* (The water from your sacred pond is the medicine you cure us with). *Rakkinna nu baafte jaalalti teessani* (Our attachment with you has delivered us from trouble).
  - (31) Braukämper (2002) noted that as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some European travelers held the impression that Annajina was a Muslim sanctuary of supra-regional importance.
  - (32) One important question seeks clarity: Why did Amir Abd-al Shakur make a missionary endeavor in Arsiland without first converting the Barentuma Oromo in Hararge and around the city-state of Harar? Different scholars (Caulk, 1977; Hassen, 1973, 1980) agree that the Harar city-state could not exert any relevant religious impact on the surrounding Oromo people. Until the Egyptian rulers came to the area, the city moved little out of the wall, which Nur ibn al-Wazir Mugahid (1551-1569), the nephew of Ahmad Grañ, erected to prevent the Oromo from entering and devastating the city.
  - (33) The view that Islam and the cult of Sheikh Hussein provided the Arsi with a new cultural identity is unacceptable due to the following reasons: Firstly, it has an overtone that the Arsi people's connection with Sheikh Hussein grew out of a desperate quest for new religious identity. Secondly, it casts too dark a shadow on his own idea that “when the Oromo had penetrated Annajina (likewise called dire Shaikh Husayn) in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they assimilated the cult and preserved the sanctuary” (Braukämper, 2002:155). In my view, religious adaptation, like any other cultural adaptations should be interpreted within a complex conflation of social domination and conflict. Culture and religion respond to internal dynamics as well as to new or externally imposed dynamics whose influence leads to multiple processes and institutional rearrangements (Thornton, 1998).



While he emphasized the role of internal dynamics, Braukämper (2002) gave little emphasis to the impact of external pressure on cultural adaptation. One example of the internal dynamics mentioned by Braukämper (2002) is the gradual increase in the value of being a Muslim than being a pagan among the Arsi. A reader is, however, left with a yawning gap in historiography about the interplay between the Christian domination at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the institutional rearrangements which the Oromo made in response to the domination. My observation of the *muudaa* ceremony at Annajina revealed that the pre-Islamic cultures of the Oromo formed not only the color, but also the substance of the cult of Sheikh Hussein. Because of this, it is difficult to consider the cult of Sheikh Hussein as a new religious and cultural identity. Viewed from the constructivist perspective too, religious conversion is not simple process of losing one identity and gaining a new one.

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