

**KNOWLEDGE, IDENTITY
AND
THE COLONIZING STRUCTURE**

THE CASE OF THE OROMO IN EAST AND NORTHEAST AFRICA

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KNOWLEDGE, IDENTITY AND THE COLONIZING STRUCTURE: THE CASE OF THE OROMO IN EAST AND NORTHEAST AFRICA.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to describe the underlying principle known as *ayaana*, upon which the Oromo system of knowledge is constructed. The term *ayaana* can be understood at many different levels. A number of ethnographers have unsuccessfully attempted to describe the construct, but as outsiders to the culture, they were unable to differentiate these levels, they provided a confusing array of meanings. It was in trying to unravel these meanings from the inside, from the point of view of the bearers of the culture, that the intrinsic nature of the construct was revealed and its meanings deciphered. This discovery can be said to constitute the major contribution of the thesis to the anthropological study of the Oromo people.

In the Oromo cosmological scheme, *ayaana* is a religious and philosophical construct which represents the principles of temporality and spirituality it thus permeates every aspect of life. According to the experts of Oromo oral tradition *ayaana* also serves as an ordering device according to which the entire universe is organized and classified. The thesis explores in depth the working of this principle through various Oromo institutions.

The premise of this thesis is that every culture has an organised system of thought which provides the basis upon which identity is constructed. It argues, therefore, that when the underlying ordering principle is overlaid by that of another culture, this results in the distortion of the peoples world-view and ultimately in their loss of identity.

In the case of the Oromo this process has historically been brought about by their enforced submission to the Abyssinian colonial rule. It is these superimposed colonizing structures that have distorted the traditional system of knowledge and profoundly affected the identity of the Oromo as a people. Thus the thesis will also review the nature of these colonizing structures.

Preface

The material in this thesis is presented in the following order.

Part one will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will begin by introducing what knowledge is in the Oromo sense of the term. This will be followed by the chapter that will place the Oromo within their natural habitat that will briefly describe the land, environmental zones of human habitation and the seasons. I am fully aware that this description is not in any way complete and that there are great variation in both climate, as well as the way people have adapted to this environment differ. However the description given could be taken as a fair representation of the Oromo view of their own land. The general overview of the Oromo economy will also be introduced here. Chapter three contains a full description of the research methodology interweaving my own experience as an Oromo with the opportunities that this provides to explain the traditional view of the cosmological setting of Oromo society. A brief discussion presents issues regarding transmission of knowledge in general and that of the Oromo in particular. This will be based on my quest for the Oromo concept of *ayaana*. I then discuss my teachers and important informants. I have also tried to point out advantages and disadvantages involved in understanding culture from within.

Part two consists of the actual discussion of the concept of *ayaana*. It begins by making few remarks on the way *ayaana* has been presented in the literature reviewed. The full literature review is given in an **appendix**. This then leads to the actual description of *ayaana* from the Oromo view point. I have tried to present both the diversity and unity among my teachers and informants. I have, of course, placed emphasis on the underlying common meanings and/or unity as Oromos tend to do. It begins by considering *ayaana* in relation to the Oromo view of creation. But *ayaana* also has a range of other associations, meanings and this leads to an attempt to pin down the core meaning. Thus I begin with the description of the patterns of behaviour of the twenty-

seven *ayaana*, in chapter four, as perceived, by traditional Oromo. This will be followed by discussion regarding the role of numbers in Oromo thought and culture. It has been claimed that Oromos attach magical significance to numbers, hence chapter five will examine the nature of this magic. From these discussions emerges the meaning of *ayaana* as a system by which time is classified. In order to depict this aspect of the meaning of *ayaana*, I have described time and time reckoning in the Oromo calendar, at different temporal levels.

This starts with the Oromo concept of *Yerro* (time in general) followed by the discussion of the classification of the one day *ayaana*. The second temporal level is that of the seven day week system, Despite the claim by many ethnographers that Oromo did not have the seven day week system. The third temporal level is the month. The concept 'month' in Oromo refers to two independent systems that are simultaneously in motion. These refer to the period of time between one new moon and another new moon on the one hand and the 30 day cycle linked to solar year on the other. The fourth temporal level in Oromo calendar is the year. It consists of 12 solar months. In Oromo the 12 month year is said to constitute the four seasons, each of which are believed to be 90 days long. These add up to 360 days. The Oromo strategy to deal with the five or so remaining days of the year is also explained. The 5th temporal level is known as the "*Gadaa*". This concerns an eight year period, when a particular *Gadaa* class remain in power. *Gadaa*, refers to more than just one thing and meaning. It could refer to the organization of the society and it also means generation sets. Five such eight years *Gadaa* periods constitutes a generation, thus creating the sixth temporal level in a cycle of forty years. This refers to the number of years that should exist between the father and the son that also serve as a frame of reference in time reckoning.

The seventh temporal level refers to the nine times return of these 40 years generation. Oromo refer to this by the term "*Saglli*". The Oromo concept of "*Saglli*" is even more complicated than the concept of "*Ayaana*" itself. In short, however, "the core meaning

of "*Saglli*" could be taken as a transition between an end and a new beginning. The last temporal level is the recurrence of these 360 years cycle that Oromo refer to by the term "*Jaatama*". It basically refers to an end of the rule of a dominant group. Oromo oral tradition recounts eight of such periods to have elapsed and the present to be the ninth one. All these are carefully described in this part and chapters of the thesis.

Part three of the thesis explores the working of these concepts in the different Oromo institutions. Chapter eight then sets out to describe the structure of traditional Oromo marriage and the different levels of kinship relations. Chapter nine discusses the administrative and residential patterns of the traditional Oromo society. Here I include the conceptual classification of the traditional Oromo house, water wells, animals, and ideas of resource management. Chapter ten is an attempt to describe the structure of traditional Oromo military organization based on the views of both my teachers Dabassa Guyo and Bule Guyo.

The pastoral economy in general and that of the Booran Oromo in particular have been and continues to be discussed by many different scholars. My own interest in part three, the eleventh chapter of this thesis is to describe the "*Dabarre*" institution as the traditional form of exchange relation.

In chapter twelve, description is made of the two dominant Oromo institutions ,i.e, that of the "*Gadaa*" and the "*Qaallu*". This is basically a description of the organization of the Booran Oromo power structure, as it is perceived and understood by my teachers and informants. This is followed by the discussion of the Oromo view of custom and law, appearing in chapter thirteen of the thesis. Here too, an attempt is made to show that custom and law also follows the patterning of the concept of *ayaana*.

Chapter fourteen deals with the Oromo view of development. The data is a direct translation of an interview conducted by me with Dabassa Guyo. This kind of presentation has more than one purpose. The first is to present the Oromo view of

development in the words of the custodians of the wisdom, while the second reason is to show the kind of source material and interview conducted with the teachers. It should be mentioned that when this question was put to Dabassa I only expected him to tell me what Oromo thought of modern development. I never expected a comprehensive traditional Oromo view of development. This interview belies an assumption of the educated or developers that traditional mode of thought in Oromo society cannot encompass the innovations of a developing economy.

Chapter fifteen of the thesis summarizes the entire discussion and attempt to reconstruct the Oromo world-view. This is done by considering the exposition of the Oromo world-view under three headings, i.e, *AYAANA*, *UUMAA* and *SAFFU*.

Finally the sixteenth chapter of the thesis in part four raises some questions regarding what happens to cultures and systems of knowledge under a colonial situations in general and the Oromo in particular. By way of conclusion I would also reflect on the present situation of the Oromo

In the thesis I have used so many Oromo terms, such that few pages of glossary can not contain them. Consequently, I have provided a seperate glossary that briefly describes most of the Oromo terms that appear in the study. The glossary was origionally meant for the source material I transcribed from the interviews. The glossary will show not only the sense in which I have employed the terms and the concepts they stand for but also the problem languadge poses in the understanding of any culture. Infact one very important limitation of this thesis is the fact that Oromo culture has to be witten in English language. One could even argue culture to be the mental language of the culture bearer to which no other language has a full access.

PART I

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

KNOWLEDGE, IDENTITY AND THE COLONIZING STRUCTURE

The Oromo are an Eastern Cushitic speaking people, who live in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. As Baxter (1985:1) correctly observes 'demographic data on Ethiopia are poor.' And the issue of the population of the Oromo is a highly politicized one. The successive Abyssinian rulers have^{and} continue to downplay the reality of Oromo population. Baxter refers to Abegaz's claim that Oromos constitute around 40% of Ethiopia's population. Hassen.M (1990) suggests Oromos to constitute 'a good half of Ethiopia's population'. Rikitu (1992:xi) in his recent work refers to some recent World Bank report in claiming that the Oromo constitute well over 25 million people in Ethiopia alone. Whatever the case might be, the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in the whole region and 'the Oromo language is the second most widely spread indigenous language in Africa' Bulcha.M (1989:1). All Oromos speak the same language, whether they may be in Ethiopia, Kenya or Somalia. The difference is only one of intonation that derives from the influences the language receives in its interaction with other languages in the region. Such languages include Somali with which the Oromo language share over 30% of its vocabulary. There are also languages such as Kswahili, Amharic, English and many other languages of the region.

According to Bulcha (1989:1) the Oromo constitute more than two-thirds of the speakers of the Cushitic languages, that makes it the largest Afro-Asiatic language in the world. As Bulcha further indicates, in spite of its importance as a vernacular language widely spoken in the Horn of Africa, the Oromo language lacks a developed literature. There are multiplicities of reasons to explain this situation, of which the Abyssinian colonial policy regarding languages in general and the Oromo language in particular is the most important reason. Due to the lack of written records on Oromo

history and culture, myths and fables fabricated by their colonizers have been cycled and recycled and today people have come to believe them as the truth about the Oromo. Oromo knowledge regarding their history and culture, however, disagrees with most of the views advanced by others.

Although the issue of what constitutes knowledge will remain the subject of disagreement, most scholars in the field will agree that every human society possesses one form of knowledge or another. The problem is to explain the nature and structure of the knowledge possessed. In this thesis my attempt is to describe the nature and structure of knowledge among the traditional Oromo in East and Northeast Africa. Knowledge perhaps is central to those elements that constitute the identity of a people, whether in the form of self perception of the person or social, cultural or ethnic identity. Thus knowledge and identity are inseparably linked.

As far as the Oromo experience is concerned, colonization is a very recent phenomena. It is only a century old. Although colonialism represents only a brief moment in the long history of the Oromo, its effect has been and continues to be devastating. It has distorted the traditional knowledge and profoundly affected the identity of the Oromo as a people.

Unlike most other parts of Africa, the Oromo were colonized by Abyssinians, who though Africans, place themselves outside the continent through ideology of descent that served as an aspect of the colonizing structure.

KNOWLEDGE

The Oromo designate knowledge by the term *Bekumssa* the noun form derived from the verb *Beeku* meaning to know. The Oromo associate knowledge with three centers of the human body: the belly or the abdominal cavity, the head and the heart. A fourth location of knowledge is thought to be throughout the extremities of the body.

The abdominal knowledge is seen as unifying and harmonizing. Boundaries between the self and others, high and low, good and bad, etc are all infused in this area. By contrast the thinking with the head is patriarchal and hierarchical. This center is one of distinction and division. The third modality of knowing or thinking, the heart, is prophetic and poetic, inspirational and oracular. It is feminine oriented, giving emphasis to hearth and home, heritage and *communitas*. The fourth category of thinking, that has to do with the total body seems to refer to feeling which integrates one or more of the other centers, in establishing opinion about the issue under consideration. It is in this sense that the Oromo Booran say '*Qaroon nafatuu illaa*', meaning, the intelligent has his eyes all over his body.

The view that there are four types of knowledge associated with some kind of centers of the human body that are simultaneously present may seem strange. However, this may be understood by considering what knowledge really is in traditional societies.

In Oromo for instance, knowledge, in one context, is what is believed to be true or to which one can give belief, whether it is a person or a thing. The basis upon which belief rests is the lasting nature of the truth, therefore, the knowledge. The fact that it does not collapse upon testing. Secondly knowledge could also be seen from a functional context. Any thing could be understood in terms of what it does. Third, we could also have knowledge by knowing how the thing we know relates to all the other things we know, including the things that we know we do not know. Finally we could also know by integrating one or more of these three aspects of knowing.

The Oromo language has no specialized terms corresponding to any one of the centers. Knowledge is referred to by the same term '*Beekumssa*', regardless of the center for its origin.

There is an over-lap between the term '*Beeku*' to know and '*Barachu*' to learn. In this sense to know could also mean to have an affair (sexual) with a woman. The process is

referred to as '*barachu*' while the end result or the sexual intercourse is designated as '*Beeku*' or knowing.

Oromo tend to make a distinction between knowledge and skill. One who knows an art or craft is designated by the term '*Oggesa*'. The etymology of the term is uncertain. The term however refers to skill and/or knowledge of the use of the body, especially the hands in making or shaping something. Although the distinction is marked by the use of two terms to designate knowledge and skill, the boundary is indistinct in the sense that a wise man could be said to have the skill of knowing or being wise.

Knowledge also refers to acquaintance, whether it may be knowing some one or something. To know is, therefore, to distinguish some one or something from all the rest. This is then extended to distinguishing good from bad, up from down, right from left etc. In short, therefore, to know is to distinguish.

To sum-up, one could say that, at the basis of it, knowledge is associated with one form of experience or another.

The Oromo also make a distinction between two types of knowledge. The first refers to the unlimited knowledge of *Waaqa* and the second to the limited knowledge of man. *Waaqa* knows anything and everything because He is in it, with it, and like it through '*ayaana*'. It is in this sense that Oromos say, '*Waaqatu beeka*' (God knows), when they are uncertain about something or when their knowledge of a subject comes to an end.

The knowledge of a man, according to my teachers both Bule Guyo and Dabassa Guyo, is further classified into two. The first refers to '*Aadaa*' or customary knowledge; the second is knowledge according to '*seera*' or knowledge according to rules or law. Knowledge according to '*aadaa*' refers to knowledge that every normal

member of the society possesses by virtue of being born and brought up in the community. Dabassa Guyo explains customary knowledge in the following words.

"...*Beekumsa* (Knowledge) according to '*Aadaa*' is known to everybody. It is a public and common knowledge. It is made up of the pieces of knowledge that direct all the every day activities of a person. It is that by which you set out and come back home. That by which you enter your house and sleep. That by which you greet your neighbours. With this common knowledge an ordinary Oromo speaks and makes decisions. But everything has a limit, so this knowledge according to '*Aadaa*' comes and comes and comes and reaches a certain stage '*Fulaa seeraa*': the level or the stage of law. Once it enters the level of law it is no longer common knowledge. It becomes a matter to be referred to experts, (those who think by the rules). These are people who have been trained to think according to rules from childhood..."

Knowledge according to rules is, therefore, an expert knowledge. It is the knowledge of the rules of knowledge. It is the knowledge of the patterns and/or rules that culture creates as it organizes societal experience, both in time and space. It is the knowledge of the principles, underlying the working of both nature and society as perceived by the Oromo specializing in an aspect of the traditional knowledge. It is directly or indirectly the knowledge of '*ayaana*', consisting of those principles that underlie the Oromo world-view. Derived from the human body and organized into some kind of religious philosophical construct, this knowledge serves to classify anything and everything and ultimately structure the cosmos. It is that which gives a form and therefore an identity to the Oromo Culture and thought.

THE COLONIZING STRUCTURE

Colonialism has been and continues to be defined. The definition varies with the purpose intended for it to serve. There are those who view colonialism as a specific form of imperialism in which territories annexed by a dominant power are clearly defined as subordinate in status. Local political and governmental authorities and institutions are either replaced by colonial authorities or incorporated into the colonial power structure. This definition is essentially a description of the political aspect of colonial domination.

Others have placed the emphasis on the aspect of economic domination and exploitation. This links colonialism with the growth and development of a capitalist world system. A further definition places the emphasis on the social and/or cultural aspect of colonial domination. Whatever definition one may choose to adopt, colonialism remains an all embracing structure. The Colonizing Structure is a design, an arrangement or organization by which every aspect of the colonized people is contained and controlled and modified as is felt necessary.

Abyssinians who colonized the Oromo only around 1900, created and imposed a colonial administrative structure. It is this colonizing administrative structure that divides the Oromo into *Arsi, Wallegaa, Shoa, Harrar, Wallo, Baale, Boorana, Jimma, etc.* As I hope to show in this thesis, traditionally Oromos did not see and a good part of them still do not see, their own division in this way. This represents the political aspect of the Colonizing Structure. Since the colonial military conquest Abyssinians have taken over the entire Oromo land and made it into their own property, distributing it among themselves. On his own land the Oromo has become a slave. The Abyssinian church also accompanied the colonizing armed settler and carried out forceful conversion of the Oromo into the Abyssinian brand of Christianity. After all, every colonial

conquest is, to a greater or lesser degree, a conquest of knowledge. This is the role played by the Abyssinian church.

Thus, since the turn of the century Oromos have been and continue to be Abyssinian colonial subjects. Besides forcefully converting Oromos to the Abyssinian colonial state religion, Oromo, the name the Oromo people used throughout history, was officially changed to '*Galla*'. The term *Galla* is a term Abyssinians always used to designate a black man; which they view as an inferior race, primitive and pagan. All these attributes of the term *Galla*, of course, acquire their meaning in opposition to the Abyssinians, who hold themselves to be a superior race, claiming descent from King Solomon, who was supposedly white. They also claim to be civilized as opposed to the 'primitive' people they have colonized. And they are Christian as opposed to the pagan. In short opposing the *Galla* to Abyssinia pervades every aspect of life. The Oromo is made into a nomad opposed to the permanently settled 'civilization' of Abyssinia. Even the Oromo God is made into a devil, opposed to the God of the colonizer. It is the same phenomena that reduces Oromo knowledge to superstition and the Oromo concept of *ayaana* to an evil spirit that possesses and harms people

Here I have tried to give a general overview of what knowledge is in the Oromo sense of the term. I have also indicated the inseparability of knowledge from identity. This I believe to be true whether the knowledge may be magical or empirical. Finally I have also introduced the nature of the colonizing structure and its effect on the Oromo knowledge, identity and total livelihood.

The Oromo concept of *Ayaana* has already been discussed by ethnographers and other writers since 1844. What all the writers failed to consider is that *Ayaana* constituted a structure and serves custodians of Oromo traditional knowledge as a frame of reference. This constitutes an aspect of my contribution to Oromo studies.

In writing this thesis I have learnt from the recent work of Mudimbe, 'The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge.' In fact the idea of the Colonizing Structure is borrowed from Mudimbe. I have also benefited from Marcel Griaule's work among the Dogon in West Africa. Griaule took his point of departure from the assumption that '...the ideas of the Dogon may best be understood by considering the forms in which they express them.' (1954:83). Apart from such underlying assumptions I have tried my best to keep the identity of Oromo knowledge system. Consequently if there are similarities between my work and that of Griaule and Mudimbe it is coincidental.

PART I

Chapter I

THE SETTING

THE OROMO PEOPLE

The name Oromo

The term 'Oromo' is derived from the eponym Horo. In Oromo, a Cushitic language belonging to the Afro-Asiatic family, the phoneme /h/ is not always articulated before the vowels /a/, /i/, /o/ and /u/, this not being a phonologically relevant trait. Thus the name (H)oromo could be pronounced both with and without the initial /h/. The link between these two names is made clear in the ritual of adoption, when the verbal form of the word is used to describe the process of becoming a full member of the Oromo community. The ritual is known as *horomssa* meaning literally "to let (someone) become part of (H)oromo". Horo, the root word from which (H)oromo is derived, can in turn be traced to the verb *horu* meaning "to reproduce". In the Oromo sense of this word, reproduction is not only a biological phenomenon, it is also a social one. By their incorporation into Oromo through the ritual of adoption, non-Oromo, even those captured in battle, can be socially transformed and acquire an absolute equality of rights and privileges with those who are Oromo by biological descent. This includes the right to claim direct connection with the apical ancestor, Horo. The traditional Oromo law strictly forbids and severely punishes anyone who attempts to make a distinction between social and biological descent. The reason for this refusal to distinguish between the cultural and the biological will be clear with the discussion of the Oromo world view later in the thesis. Here it is meant only to indicate the fact that in the case of the Oromo, in terms of kinship, 'blood' is not necessarily 'thicker than water'.

Whilst the core meaning of *horu* refers to biological and social reproduction in both the human and animal worlds, it also carries other contextual meanings. In one context, *horu* could signify "to prosper". This prosperity is achieved not only through the biological multiplication of animals and plants, but also socially, through men. The Booran Oromo thus often repeat the expression "a man does not prosper with animals alone; he also prospers with human beings".

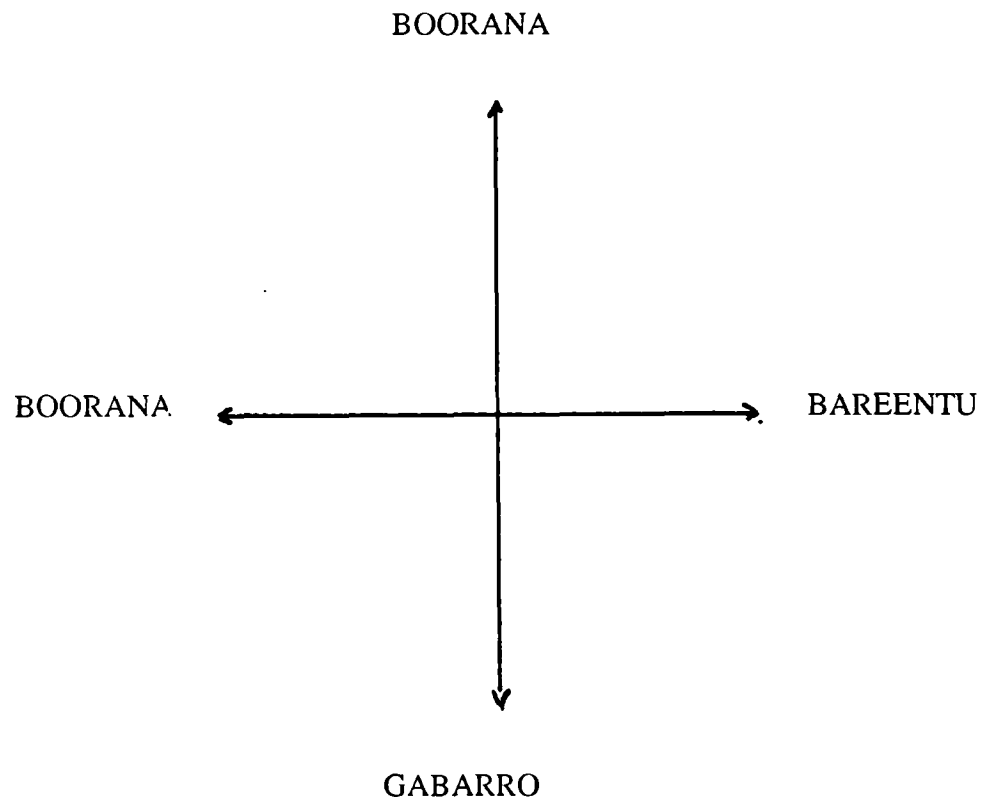
Another derivative belonging to this same semantic field is the word *hormaata*. This term represents a concept belonging to a complex chain of eight other concepts that make up a system known as *finna*, standing for the notion of 'development'. These eight processes are seen to be simultaneously in motion. The term *finna* is derived from the verb *fidu*, signifying "to bring". It refers to a total way of life, brought down from the past to the present, in which the present adds its own experiences to those of the past and hands them over to the next generation. This process of transmission is thus an infinite one, the successors building on the achievements of their predecessors. *Hormaata* thus refers to growth in numerical terms, to the multiplication of plants, animals and men as part of the octad of development.

In short, therefore, it can be said that names, like words, have great symbolic power, the force of which should never be underestimated. Ethonyms in particular encode complex social, political, historical and religious significance for the bearers. The ideas of growth and fertility associated with the name Oromo are thus encapsulated in this term, capturing in essence the Oromo vision of their own identity.

CONCEPTUAL DIVISIONS OF THE OROMO PEOPLE

Conceptually, the Oromo viewed themselves as dividing into lateral and vertical categories. The lateral category consists of the division into Booran and Barrentu. The vertical category, on the other hand, categorizes the Oromo into the Booran and

the Gabarro. It is interesting to note that in both the lateral and vertical categories, Booran remains the medium of focus, linking both categorizations.



1) A Diagram showing the Conceptual Division of the Oromo into Booran and Baarrentu and Booran and Gabaro.

The Booran and the Barrentu

The division of the Oromo into Booran and Barrentu is one that is the most misunderstood by both ethnographers and historians alike. It is true that most ordinary Oromo will also think of Booran and Barrentu as two distinct personalities or

founding fathers. To the custodians of the traditional wisdom, however, this division, among other things, is a mental one, designating the division of the social body into right and left respectively.

According to the independent opinion of both my Booran teachers Bule Guyyo and Dabassa Guyyo, the Oromo people, whom they refer to as the "sons of Horo", are divided into five groups:

- (1) the *Sabbo* and the *Goon*a;
- (2) the *Mac'c'ca* and the *Tulama*;
- (3) the *Rayaa* and the *Asebo*;
- (4) the *Siiko* and the *Mando*; and
- (5) the *Itu* and *Karayyu*.

It is only then that these five groups divide into two, known as the Booran and the Barrentu. This is in line with and follows the same principle at work in other areas of Oromo culture as will be shown throughout this thesis.

According to Jimmale Diima, an expert time-reckoner (*ayaantu*) and oral historian interviewed in the Ambo area of the Mac'c'a and Tulama region, neither Booran nor Barrentu designate any group in particular, but stand rather for the duality of the right and the left. This principle, whereby five subdivides into two, follows one of the basic numeric patterns of the Oromo system of classification. In the case of the Booran and Barrentu, this idea is further confirmed by the meaning of the terms themselves.

By examining the semantic structure of the term Booran, it can be seen to be made up of two distinct lexemes: *boroo* and *aana*. The term *boroo* signifies the wall of the back or bed room of the traditional Oromo house. The entrance of the house,

from the inside looking out, ideally faces the east. The rays of the rising sun thus penetrate the western wall of the house, in the room where the head of the household sleeps. *Aana* means "towards" or "next to". The two terms *boroo-aana* which enter into the composition of the name Booran together signify "those towards the west" (*boru*), or "those who face the east", the source or origin of light or life. Similarly, Barrentu is a compound word made up of two terms; *barii* meaning "sunrise" and *aantu*, the feminine form of *aana*, which as we have already seen, signifies "towards" or "next to". Together they designate "those towards the east", or "those facing the west", towards the direction of the setting sun (cf. Lepissa 1975 :3).

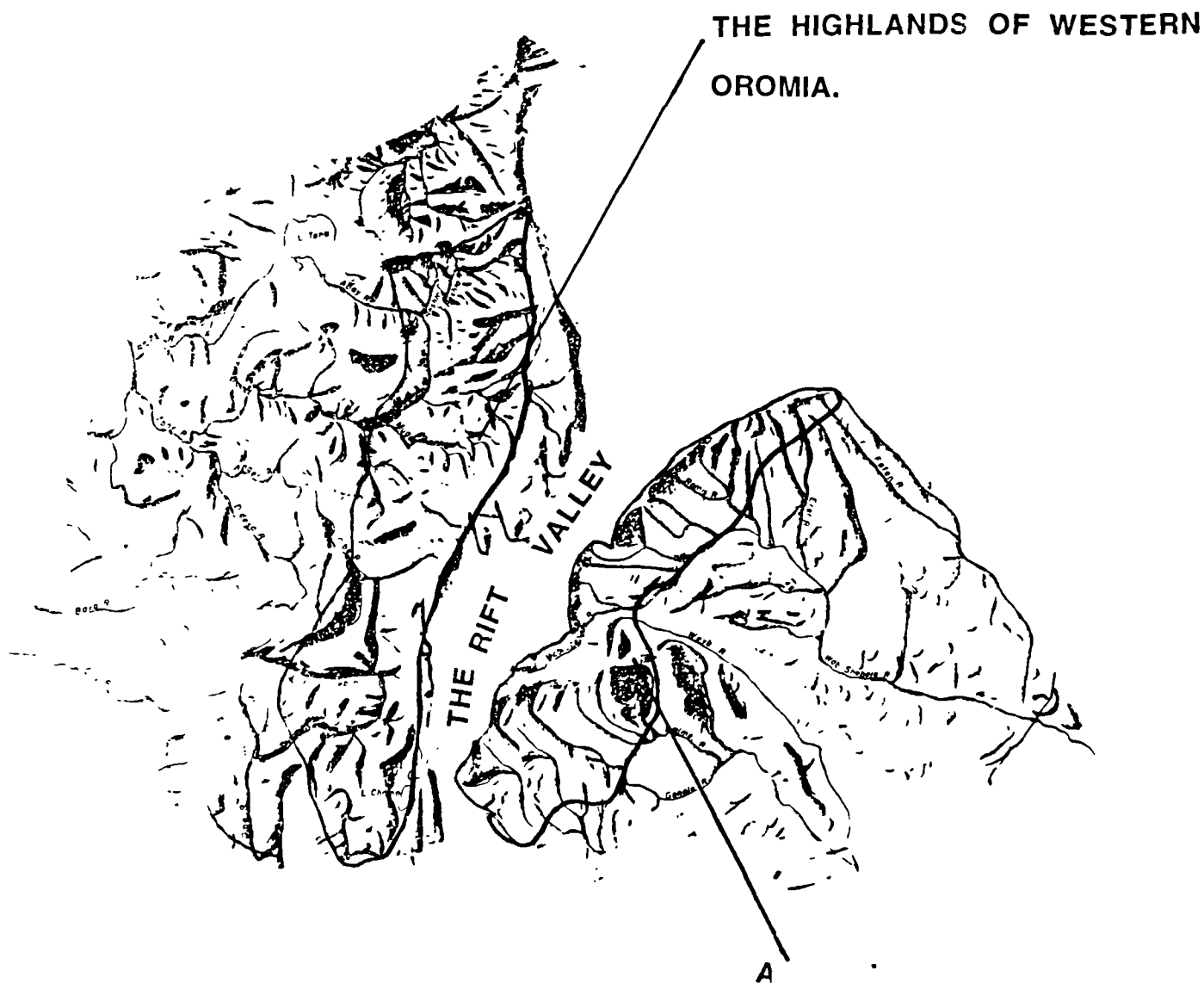
The terms Boorana and Barrentu were therefore not originally names of specific groups but conceptual categories standing for the division of the Oromo into east and west, or right and left, constituting the lateral or horizontal form of classification of the people into two halves .

A striking point to note here in terms of classification into east and west is the fact that the two highland massifs of Oromoland, the Arssi/Bale massif to the east, and the western massifs of Kaffa, Shoa, Wallaga and Illu-Ababor, are divided geographically into two by the Great Rift Valley.

The second type of division which categorizes the society into two conceptual divisions is one which follows a vertical axis into Booran and Gabarro

The Booran and the Gabarro

The conceptual division of the Oromo into Booran and Gabarro is based on the notions of primogeniture and ultimogeniture, or the idea of the elder or first born sons (*angafa*) and that of the other or younger sons (*qutisu*). This division was originally meant to draw a distinction between the secular rule of the *Gadaa*, seen as



A PHYSICAL MAP OF OROMIA.

being constituted of the first born sons, and the temporal authority of the *Qaalluu*, represented by the younger sons.

There is a general belief among the Oromo that age edifies and sobers preparing one for leadership in all the fields of activity associated with the male sphere of influence, political, social as well as economic. As the elder sons of Oromo, the Booran thus have precedence over their younger progeny in all decision making matters. However, as the control of power in Oromo operates on the principle of checks and balances (*cf.* Legesse 1989) this pre-eminence is counter-checked and counter-balanced through the female sphere of ritual. secular power is thus transmitted through the elder sons, whilst the temporal power is wielded by the younger sons. In Oromo, this concept is articulated symbolically in the *Booran/Gabarro* division and given credence through powerful myths and rituals.

This conceptual division into *Booran* and *Gabarro* will be made clear in the discussion of the relationship between the *Gadaa* and the *Qaallu* institutions.

The Booran: Medium of primary focus

The name Booran is no less complex than the name Oromo. I have already briefly shown how Booran appears as the medial focus in both the lateral and vertical conceptual classificatory categories. We have also seen how the term itself is derived from the words *boroo* and *aana*, representing those towards or next to the sunset, or those whose door opens out to face the sunrise. This idea of facing the sunrise is also evident in rituals of mountain sacrifice (*cf.* Bartels 1983:161).

In Oromo, sunrise is a symbolic expression for origin. The origin of the day begins with the first morning light, termed *boru* in Oromo. *Boru* is phonetically

associated with the word *booru*, meaning "muddy water". This phonetic difference is contextual rather than semantic, for the core meaning of the two terms translates the idea of transformation from the original state. Just as dawn is the penetration of light into darkness, soil changes crystal clear water into muddy water. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that in Oromo, "clear water" is termed *madda guraaca*. *Madda* is water obtained from an underground source, in its pure original state. *Booru*, in contrast, is muddied surface water. Similarly, the first light breaks into the darkness, termed *dukkana guraaca*.

In both these cases, a primary trait which can be discerned is the idea of being first. It is evident, then, from this pattern of meaning which enters into the composition of the name Booran, that in conceptual terms, it stands for the notion of first birth. For the Oromo, the idea of primogeniture is a law inherent in nature which manifests itself at all the cosmic levels, such that each species, be it man, animal or plant, possesses an idealized version or prototype. In this sense, the Booran are considered to be the first born sons of the Oromo just as much as the right hand of the father is associated with his first born son.

This anthropomorphization of the primal principle is further conceptualized in the form of the Boorantica. This word, made of the name Booran and the suffix *-tica*, by which the Oromo language emphasizes the definite article, thus means "the Booran" or "the ideal son of the Oromo". It is through this personified image of the mediator that the Oromo understood their Creator, *Waaqa*.

It is in this sense then that Booran becomes the central pivotal term in the conceptual categorization system of the Oromo. It not only joins the lateral and vertical categories, but also stands in between heaven and earth linking man and God at all levels of culture and society. It is for this reason that emphasis is laid on the

Booran in this study of the Oromo. But it should be clear here that Booran does not refer to any one Oromo tribe as many have come to believe, for the traditional Oromo Booran did not designate any particular Oromo group.

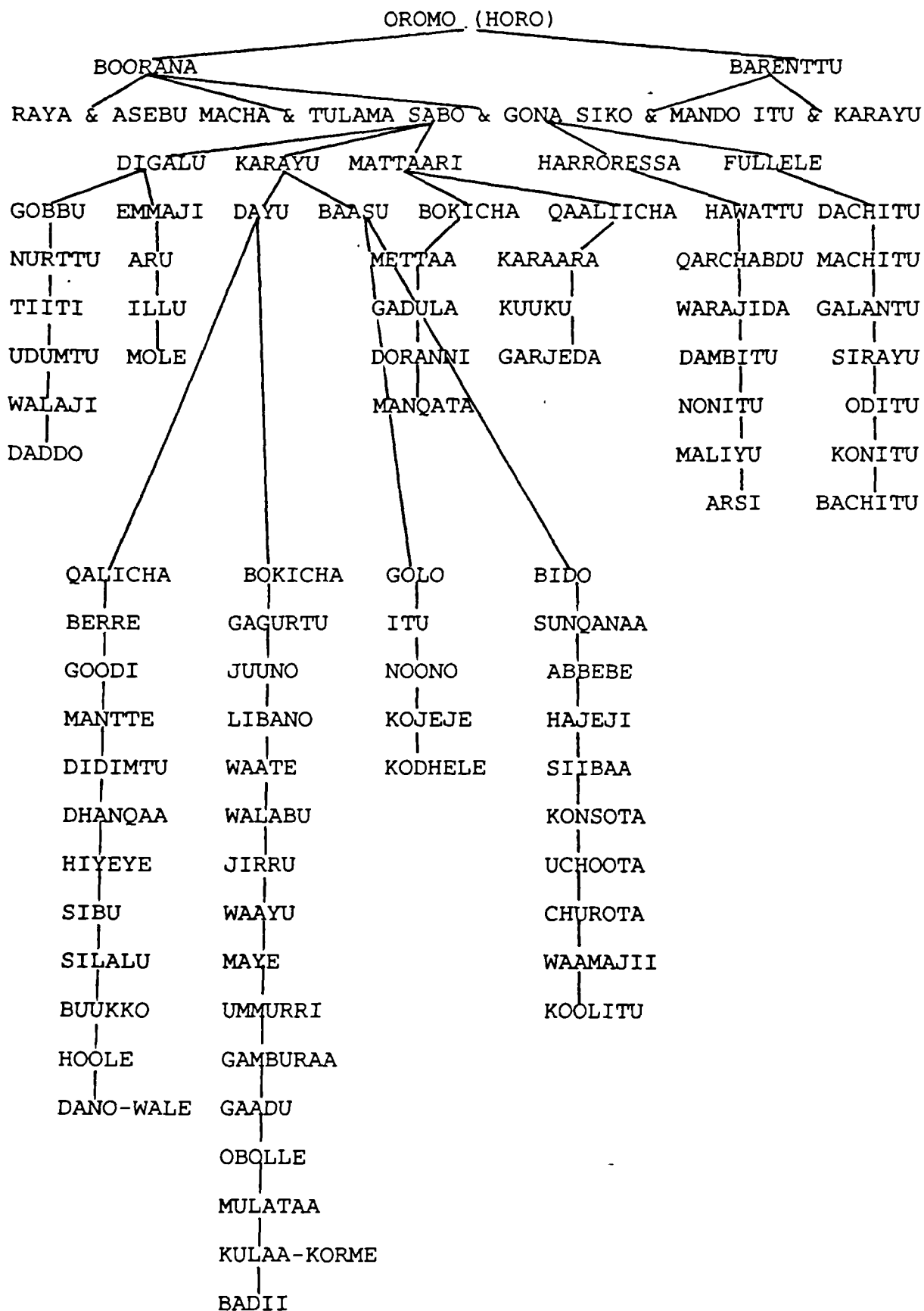
THE LAND OF THE OROMO

Biyya, the Oromo term for land or country, is derived from the term *biyyee* or *biyyo*, as it is called in some Oromo regions. *Biyyo* is the Oromo word for "soil". Thus *biyya* refers to the soil and all living things that derive their sustenance from it. On this land, according to the Oromo can be found three categories of things:

- (i) water and vegetation;
- (ii) animals that depend on this water and vegetation; and
- (iii) human beings and other carnivorous animals.

On this land, live the descendants of the five sons of Horo, its legitimate owners. These five regions of sons of Horo and/or Oromoland could be divided into the following:

- (i) the region of the *Raayaa* and the *Assebu* that included the present land of the *Raayaa* and *Assebu* the whole of *Wallo* and some part of northern *Shawaa*;
- (ii) the region of the *Machaa* and the *Tuulama*, this included most of the present region of *Shawaa*, the highlands of *Wallagaa*, *Illu-ababoor* and *Kaffaa* and the adjacent lowlands;
- (iii) the region of the *Sabbo* and *Goona* includes some of the highlands of *Sidaancha* (*Sidamo*), part of *Gaamo-goffaa*, all of the relative highlands of *Booran* and *Gujji* lands and all the adjacent lowlands;
- (iv) the region of the *Siiko* and *Manddo*, this has to do with the highlands found immediate to both east and western part of the Rift valley, all the highlands of the *Baale* region and all its related lowlands. and



A CHART SHOWING THE DIVISION OF THE OROMO.

(v) the region of the *Itu* and *Karayu*, refers to all the highlands of *Harrarghe* and adjacent lowlands that some times extended to *Wallo* in the north.

These are then seen as dividing into three environmental zones based on their climate and altitude regardless of which region one may be in. These are: the *badda* or highlands; the *baddadarre* or temperate middle zone; and the *gammooggi* or lowlands. These classifications are what people see when they deal with details. Conceptually and when people talk in general terms they would simply refers to *badda* and *gammooggi*, i.e, highlands and lowlands respectively.

Environmental zones

In presenting this classification of the major environmental zones, my interest is not to describe them as a geographer would do. Given the vastness of the land Oromo inhabit, moreover, it is difficult to present a uniform and standard picture of the environment. I am rather interested in the environment as a phenomenon and how this phenomenon is perceived and conceptualised by the people themselves, as part of their system of thought. The classificatory scheme outlined here should therefore be seen as representing broad conceptual categories employed by the Oromo in all the regions they occupy. Based on one of the Oromo principles of classification, the climatic zones are ordered on a vertical axis, following the elevation of the land from its highest to its lowest point.

Badda

Located roughly between 2,000 and 3,000 metres above sea level, *badda* constitutes the highest elevation of human habitation. In terms of temperature, it is therefore the coldest region. It is a region blessed with abundant rainfall and perennial rivers and forests. The lower part of this zone is especially favoured by the Oromo, which tends to be the centre for population concentration. As Gidada

(1984:20) rightly points out, this semi-high potential region is conducive to horse raising and barley cultivation, two activities which are central to the Oromo culture and economic life. It is also here that the most important politico-religious centres are located.

Bada-dare

Next to the *badda* in descending order, is the *baddadarre* zone, situated between about 1,400 and 2,000 metres above sea level. It is seen as a transitional zone (*darre*, literally meaning "add to") connecting the highland (*badda*) and the lowland (*gammoojji*). It can be said that 80% of the Oromo population is to be found living in the lower half of the highlands and the lowest point of this climatically temperate middle zone. In fact, very little of Oromoland lies below 1,000 metres. (cf. Helland 1980:56). *Bada-dare* is perhaps the most fertile region, as rivers originating in the highlands leave great quantities of fertile top soil as they wash down from the uplands. Grain cultivation and other forms of agriculture are thus the predominant activity in this high potential zone. As Gidada (1984:19) also shows, the wide flat plains of the lower river valleys known as *c'affee* were the meeting place of the *Gadaa* councils and law-making assemblies, the *seera c'affee Oromo* (cf. Lepisa 1975).

Gammoojji

The term *gammoojji* refers to all land lying below 1,400 metres down to sea level. This climatic zone is characterized by unreliable rainfall and extreme scarcity of water. Vegetation, especially in the lower zone, consists of thorn trees and ~~s~~scrub.

About 20% of the Oromo population lives in this arid and semi-arid region, where the economic activity is predominately pastoral, semi-nomadic and nomadic.

On the basis of its ecology and livestock production, the region could be further subdivided into two. In the upper semi-arid half, where water and vegetation are better, cattle pastoralism is the main means of subsistence, whilst in the lower more marginal half, camel pastoralism dominates, camels being more adapted to the extreme arid conditions pertaining. Traditionally, it was the area where young men went into the wilderness to hunt big game trophies (cf. Bartels 1983:257-286).

Seasons

Perhaps another aspect of the environment without which this description would be incomplete, is the Oromo concept of seasons. The Oromo divide the year into four seasons, each of which is believed to consist of three equal months. These are: *birraa*, *bona*, *abraasaa* and *ganna*. In the Oromo view, although the sequence of these seasons follow a horizontal line, they are not linear. To mark the beginning and end of this cycle, the Oromo use expressions such as *birraan hin barri'ee* ("birraa dawned") and *ganni halkani* ("ganna is the night"). From this it should be clear that the Oromo year begins with *birraa* as the day begins with dawn and ends with *ganna* as night is the end of the day.

Let us then begin the description of each of these seasons to see how these broad horizontal categories change over the vertically arranged climatic zones discussed earlier.

Birraa

The first Oromo season, *birraa*, consists of three months, called *birraa*, *c'iqawa* and *saddaasaa*. These are the months over which the rainfall decreases progressively. With the decrease in the rainfall, temperature too rises progressively. As we have already seen, this season is metaphorically viewed as the morning of the

year, which is associated with childhood and happiness. This is not just imagined, but what people see around them, for this is the season when hundreds of flowers bloom and the fields everywhere are covered with a mass of different colours, Giddada has described this nicely. It is also the season of plenty, as opposed to the season which precedes it, *ganna*. Early crops such as barley in the *badda* and upper half of the *baddadarree* regions are already harvested during the first month of this season. Most of the staple crops are also ready to be gathered towards the end of the last month of the season. It is also the season when distant relatives and affines visit one another and exchange gifts since the level of water in the rivers falls in volume allowing safe crossing for both humans and animals.

Birraa thus seems to be a happy gap in the Oromo year filled with ups and downs. As the season of *birraa* draws to a close, there is a progressive rise in temperature and *birraa* is now the past as the season of *bona* becomes the present.

Bona

The season *bona* consists of the months of *ammajji*, *gurandala* and *bittotessa*. In the *badda* region and even in the upper half of the *baddadarree*, rainfall does not completely disappear, though it is reduced to the minimum. In the lowland and the lowest parts of the *baddadarree*, even the first month of the season of *bona* is already a period of hardship as the rays of the sun increasingly become more aggressive, so that trees that last are the most valued by travellers and elders for the shade they give. Here the elders can sit and plan their herding strategies and settle any petty disputes that arise between individuals in the community. The fields grow increasingly more greyish brown and the colourfulness of the *birraa* season is no more. The year is gradually ageing, approaching the middle course of its time-span. Life is no longer filled with the joy of its young days. For people in the *gammoojji* region especially, the challenge to survive has begun. Even the amount of milk acquired from cattle

gradually decreases over the three months. Usually small stock and in extreme cases even a few heads of cattle may be killed to supplement the diminishing milk supply. In the *badda* and upper half of the *baddadarree*, where people cultivate staple crops, such shortages are not felt until much later, unless the family in question happens to be poor, usually as a result of landlessness. Here, with good management, the harvested staple crops can be made to last over the season of *bona*.

The most important activity in the *badda* and *baddadarree* region over the last one hundred years has been that of the migrant labour. Migration of young and able bodied individuals of the family into coffee growing areas has created an economic bond between the cash crop growing and other areas. With the development of plantation agriculture over the last forty years, this season has increasingly become economically crucial to the landless Oromo masses, who travel very long distances to be seasonally employed on sugarcane plantations such as *Wonjji* and *Mathaara* or *Tandaaho* cotton fields. The details of such economic activities are not pertinent here; their relevance for this description of the Oromo seasonal year is to show how the seasons have continued to some extent to regulate both the traditional as well the contemporary life of the Oromo.

Finally, we should also mention the importance of the season of *bona* as the season of trade, when people in different regions with different products met at traditional centres of exchange (*gaba*). Here goods were traditionally bartered or salt bars served as the medium of exchange.

Gradually the three months of the season of *bona* fade away and the rains begin to fall. The year continues to grow older bringing with it important responsibilities. It is now the season of *abrassa* (or *arfassa*, as it is called in some Oromo regions) that has just arrived.

Abraasa

The season of *abraasa* covers the months of *abraasa*, *buufa* and *wac'abajji*. This season is marked by the appearance of a plant known as *arfaaso*, which begins to flower in this month and from which both the name of the month and the season are derived.

With the first rainfall of the season, both plant and animal life undergoes a change. The greyish brown grass in the fields refinds its true colour. Insects from within the earth or those which have attached themselves to the wet branches of trees start singing producing many different sounds. Everyone now knows that *abraasa* is in the making.

In the *baddaa* and in the upper half of the *baddadarre*, farmers have already begun the preparation of the farm lands. They also prepare their farm tools and special care begins to be given to plough oxen. They are usually taken to pasture in and around the river valleys. The well-to-do families have *kaloo* for their plough oxen. *Kaloo* is an area of grassland specially preserved for such animals. In the lowland or *gammoojji* region; the same term, *kaloo*, refers to grazing area around the settlement sites which are specially preserved for old and milk cows, while the rest of the family herd goes to distant grazing ground known as *foraa*.

As *abraasa* grows older, rainfall increases. To use the same metaphor, it is now approaching the evening of the ageing year.

Abraasa is a crucial season in the life of the Oromo peasant. It is possible to tell individual differences between household activities by the type of preparations they make during this time. The importance of *Abraasa* is well articulated in the following peasant song.

<i>Arfaasa qotan male</i>	Unless one cultivated during Arfaasa
<i>Birraa maal nagadattu?</i>	What would one take to the market during Birraa?
<i>Qerrummaan horan male</i>	Unless work hard while single
<i>Niiti fuudhan mal nyaatu?</i>	what would one feed on when married?

One very important point that needs to be made regarding this season is the fact that from around the middle of the season, the food supply of the peasant home also begins to diminish. This is due to a number of reasons, of which one is the fact that there is an increase in the consumption of food by the members of the family to replace the energy lost during the periods of hard work demanded of them at this time of cultivation.

Contrary to the situation in the highlands, people in the lowlands are under less pressure. Animals that have been taken to distant pastures during the season of *bona* now begin to return to the settlement sites, where, with increased humidity, there is enough grass for them to graze on. With the greater availability of water and fodder, milk cows also begin to give more generously. The arduous work of watering stock also decreases, as animals obtain sufficient moisture from the wet grass and can drink frequently from the run-off of rain. In short, therefore, it is not difficult to see that whilst people engaged in one mode of subsistence are pressed, the work for those in another is considerably eased.

Now the year is getting dark. Abraasa has elapsed and the night is falling. Ganna or the rainy season proper has arrived.

Ganna

The season *ganna* covers the three months of *addollessa*, *oborraa-gudda* and *oborraa diqaa*. The year has entered its night phase. Heaven is obscured with thick, dark clouds and is truly sombre compared with and opposed to the bright light days of the *bona* or dry season. The ground is wet and muddy, especially in the highlands. Long distance movements are restricted by the rise in the volume of water in the rivers. In contrast to the alacrity of the preceding season, now people seem to have gone to sleep. This is the most miserable season of the year. It is comparable to old age. It is cold, and the body requires more heat than ever. Paradoxically, for the Oromo peasant in particular, this is when food supplies have fallen to their lowest level. Fuel in the form of firewood is difficult to obtain. That wood found is wet and hence difficult to burn. Those who can afford them, wrap themselves in blankets and sit by a cold fire. Children fight to get as close as possible to the meagre fire. Everyone seems to visibly shrink and to lose weight during this season. The lack of proper clothing to retain the little heat that the body cannot afford to lose becomes obvious. No wonder this season is called the "night" part of the year. One can do nothing but sleep, but how can one sleep on an empty stomach?

The rainy season is a bane for the poor Oromo families, especially in the highlands. It is these poor families that constitute the bulk of the Oromo population today. The difference in the conditions of the rainy season between the highland and the lowland is one of magnitude rather than kind. It is under these conditions that people continue to plough, to sow and to weed. And no wonder *birraa* is considered the morning after such a long night.

In short, this presentation gives a very general picture of the Oromo annual seasonal cycle. In describing it, I am fully aware that there are great variations in climate, and that the ways in which people have adapted to this environment differ.

However, given the fact that very little of Oromo territory falls under 1,000 metres from sea level and all the areas inhabited by them above 1,300 metres are exposed to the climatic conditions of the east and northeast African monsoon system, this generalized picture can be said to be fairly representative of the reality in which the Oromo find themselves.

In this description, therefore, I have attempted to present in very broad terms the land of the Oromo and to trace the predominant patterns of their adaptation to it. It thus provides the framework within which the general laws of nature and society can be seen to be interacting, resulting in the formulation of a system of knowledge.

THE OROMO ECONOMY

The Oromo concept of work

Perhaps the best point of departure to understand the Oromo view of life and the activities needed to sustain it, is the Oromo concept of work. Work in the Oromo view can be seen at two different levels. The first level refers to the work of God. For the Oromo, heaven and earth and all that is found in them is the work of *Waaqa*, the Creator. The Oromo cannot imagine life without work. This is perhaps why their word for work is derived from and usually linked with that for life.

The Oromo term for work is derived from the word for "existence", *jireenya*. The verbal form of *jireenya* is *jiruu*, meaning both to work and to live. The two terms *jiruu* ("being"; "work") and *jireenya* ("life", "existence") are coupled together in the formula, *jiruuf-jireenya* following a characteristic pattern of the Oromo oral tradition. Judging from the order in which the two terms are strung together, it would

appear that in the Oromo view, life is the product of work. In essence, therefore, for the Oromo, to work is to live.

This conception of work is obviously derived from the religious view of man's existence. There are, however, also other terms which refer to the more pragmatic aspects of work. These are such terms as *hojji* or *hojjaa* depending on the region, or in Eastern Oromo, *dalagaa*. All these terms designate the practical, everyday activity of working. This does not mean that there is no continuity between the two terms. On the conceptual level, the latter are a further development of the former.

The notion of work is often associated with the hardship and perserverance necessary to produce the necessities of life through work. In Oromo, this is designated by the word *taara*. It connotes the idea of *dafqa* or *danfa*, meaning "sweat", corresponding to the English word "labour".

In short, the Oromo term *jiruu* is an abstraction of the highest level for the concept of work. It encompasses the notion of the life-force at work within the universe which provides the material base upon which man toils to perpetuate his own life and that of his group through labour. This labour takes different forms and is culturally regulated.

The modes of subsistence

I have already mentioned the fact that Oromo occupy a vast territory. This vast territory shows great ecological diversity. Within this great ecological diversity, the Oromo carry out three types of economic activity. These are:

- (i) the pastoral economy in which the Oromo engage in cattle or camel raising as the predominant life sustaining activity;

(ii) the agro-pastoral economy, in which the precarious pastoral economy is supplemented by performing at the same time seasonal cultivation activities;

(iii) the agricultural economy, in which the Oromo depend on the cultivation of the land but nevertheless keep some livestock.

Domestic animals thus occur in all the three modes of production. The Oromo economy can therefore be termed a multi-resource one. These modes of subsistence are greatly influenced by the physical environment, though they are not determined by it. I have already briefly discussed the nature of this physical environment, the zones of human habitation which have been established within this environment and discussed the seasons that influence activities within it. Let us now examine the different types of production that the Oromo carry out to sustain their lives both as individuals and groups living in the land they believe to have been given to them by *Waaqa*.

The pastoral economy

When considering the pastoral mode of subsistence, the first image that comes to mind is that of herds of animals driven by human beings from one site to another in search of pasture and water.

The pastoral economy is thus characterized by three major features: pasture and water, the different categories of livestock which derive their sustenance from these natural resources, and the human beings who depend on these animals for their livelihood. The availability of pasture is itself dependent, at least in East Africa, on the presence of water. By water is meant rain, for in the marginal ecological niche occupied by the Oromo pastoralists the only permanent water resources are underground ones. Here rainfall is low and generally very unreliable. It has often

been said therefore that to graze their animals pastoralists have to "follow the rain." Hence it is clear that all the elements constituting the pastoral mode of subsistence are interconnected and interdependent ones.

Among the Booran and Gabra Oromo of southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya, engaging respectively in cattle and camel pastoralism, this man/animal/nature interdependency and the delicate balance existing between them requires skilled herdsmanship and expertise based on culturally derived knowledge and practices, many of which are common to other nomadic pastoralists.

Like any other property owner, the Oromo pastoralist desires the multiplication of his herds. Consequently, only under exceptional circumstances will he kill or sell his female animals. Yet, as the animals increase, they put pressure on the natural resources and the human labour resources required to herd them. It is this pressure on the water and grass that necessitates the movement of the herds. The Oromo pastoralists are well aware therefore that unless this pressure is eased by the mobility of man and animal, and their pasturelands left to recover, the ^{land} will become what they term *addaal-malaq* or wastelands. In order to ensure the survival of man and animal in this fragile environment, the traditional pastoral economy therefore devised a number of strategies to safeguard the natural resources.

To collectively protect their communal land, the Booran held a conference on the state of their environment at a place called *El-Dallo*, where the laws governing land use were reviewed every eight years. Through their system of computing time, they were also able to establish patterns affecting climatic change. Booran elders thus claim that there is a cyclical return of *oolaa* or drought once every forty years. They say there is also a return of *olkky* or war. Both of these affected the subsistence

economy. Traditionally, the *ayyaantu* "time-reckoners" served as a system of early warning by predicting the repetition of such cycles.

Another traditional method for easing the pressure on pastures was the strategy of splitting up the animals into subsistence and fallow herds. The subsistence herd, consisting of all the milk stock required to feed the household, were grazed, with the old and sick animals, on reserved areas close to the homestead called *kaloo*. All other animals, forming the *foora* or fallow herd, were dispatched to distant grazing sites. The animals and the herders tending them sometimes remained away for as long as a year. The environmental consciousness of this practice is apparent in the word *foora* itself. According to Dabassa Guyyo, the term *foora* is composed of the fusion of two terms *foa* and *irra* meaning "to take off". The selection of such *foora* sites involved careful discussion and a long process of decision making. Several factors, such as the availability of water, security from raiders, presence or absence of other *foora* groups, were taken into consideration by the elders. In the case of the presence of other *foora* groups, the herd owners also had to identify the other camps, estimate the size of their herds in order to judge whether there would be sufficient resources for their own additions, and find out whether there was any indication of either domestic or wild animal disease in the area. This feasibility survey was carried out by scouts known as *abburu*. It was only after such a careful study of the site was made that the animals were moved there.

As repeatedly reported by the different ethnographers studying pastoral societies, animals multiply much faster than human beings, this is specially true of cattle pastoralism. This fast growing animal population requires manpower to graze it, water it, and defend it against wild animals and raiders. Both among the Booran and Gabra, it is believed that the number of animals a man can look after without losing sight of them is about fifty. This figure does not, however, include the young male and female animals which have not yet attained the reproductive age. Such a

number of animals is termed an *ullee* or "stick". Thus a man owning about two hundred and fifty heads of cattle will require about five herdsmen to look after them. The need for manpower on the part of the cattle rich increases with the number of his cattle. Thus in order to overcome this serious demand, the cattle rich will distribute his female animals among the cattle poor or to those who do not have as many animals as himself and can still manage to look after more. Perhaps one of the most important strategies devised by the pastoral Oromo to create the necessary socio-economic bond to regulate the relationship between the animal rich and the animal poor is the *dabarre* institution or system of exchange. Apart from being an institution of investment and a means of solving labour problems, it also played an important role as a strategy to combat disease, drought, ensure against raids and alleviate pressure on the resources.

By placing his animals in the herds of others in different areas, the rich cattle owner avoided the possibility of losing all his stock when an epidemic struck his herd in one area. The same could be said of drought. In this case, widely spread out animals stood a better chance of survival than those concentrated in one area affected by drought. This is even more evident when it came to raids. By distributing his animals in this way, the owner also reduced the pressure of a large concentrated herd on the grazing and water resources.

Since the *dabarre* institution constitutes perhaps the most important aspect of the pastoral subsistence economy, it will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis. For the moment, it should be considered as one of the many strategies by which a delicate balance between man, animal and nature was achieved in the pastoral economy of survival.

Up to now I have briefly described the Oromo people, the meaning they have for their name which is part if not the heart of the world-view. An attempt has also been made to depict the conceptual division of the Oromo as it existed before Abyssinian colonization and as it is remembered by the **custodians** of Oromo oral tradition. Description has also been made regarding zones of human habitation and seasons. Finally I have also discussed the Oromo economy under which I presented the Oromo concept of work and the different modes of subsistence with special reference to the pastoral economy. It is an attempt to place the study in the context of the given natural environment in which society and culture unfolds and tradition from one generation to the other is transmitted. With this general over-view I can now inter into discussing oral tradition and its transmission in general and that of the Oromo in particular.

Chapter II

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The transmission of knowledge in the Oromo oral tradition

As in most other African societies south of the Sahara, the Oromo civilisation has been a culture of the spoken word.

Until the beginning of the sixteenth century, there were no written manuscripts on the Oromo history and culture. Even those written after that were meant to purport "the brutality of the Oromo manners that depicts the Oromo as barbarian hordes and people without history who brought darkness and ignorance in their train", (M. Hassen 1990:)

To some degree, such a view stems from the innate contempt in which the literate hold the so-called illiterate. It also demonstrates the depth of the ignorance that *Abyssinian* writers, both past and present, have displayed about the oral civilisation of the Oromo. This misconception is echoed by such supporters of the *Abyssinian* cultural hegemony as Ullendorf (1960:76), when he comments:

"The *Gallas* had nothing to contribute to the civilisation of Ethiopia, they possessed no material or intellectual culture".

As a result of this deliberate misrepresentation by *Abyssinians* and by their intellectual overlords, the values of the oral civilisation of the Oromo has received none or very little attention over the last four centuries.

As Vansina (1981:142) rightly argues, "it is the power of the word (in addition, of course to economy) that binds people together". He also shows how the "disclosure of the secret destroys the society by destroying the identity, for the word is a common secret". The word has been important in every society, because it constructs reality. This is also the case for the Oromo. A son born while his grandfather is still alive takes the name of his grandfather. In Oromo, as in many other traditional societies, to say is to do. As the Booran idiom puts it, *afuantu raada koolu tolcha*, meaning "the word of mouth makes a prisoner of war out of the heifer".

One of the primary characteristics of oral tradition is the fact that it constantly repeats the same fact in various forms; as I hope to show throughout this thesis in the case of the Oromo. There is also a continual return to origins at different temporal levels. The oral text also has several layers of meaning. To decipher these meanings it is necessary to understand the language of the people. By language is meant not only the spoken word, but also the language of the mind. This language of the mind is transmitted in the world-view of a people. It is thus only within the context of this world-view that the oral tradition can be interpreted.

Vansina defines oral tradition as "a testimony transmitted orally from one generation to another". The oral traditions of a people are vast, and any definition therefore falls short of and cannot capture the reality. No two informants or even experts will give an account in exactly the same way. This is, of course, one of the points which distinguishes oral tradition from written tradition. Far from representing a weakness this trait enriches the sources, for rather than giving an individual version which is fixed in time, it provides multiple versions based on the collective memory.

Oral traditions are kept secret to protect them against infiltration based on the same model or distortion of the original message. When a deliberate falsification takes place, there is no way of controlling the falsehood from being perniciously incorporated into the oral tradition and it thus endangers the entire system of transmission. For this reason, the knowledge of the oral traditions is entrusted to only a few individuals, who are recognised by the society as its custodians. In Oromo, any member of the society who is genuinely interested in learning this knowledge can approach such a custodian and ask to be taught. But before the expert consents to such a request, the student must fulfill certain conditions. In order to be accepted, the learner must display great patience and follow the right cultural procedure.

The process binding the two parties is a long one and is similar to the negotiations entered upon by other contractual relationships such as marriage or the loan of a milk animal (*dabarre*). As in these other transactions, the person initiating the request visits the home of the custodian with a gift of the ritual substances of coffee and tobacco, figurately known as *darara* "flowers". With this gift the prospective student expresses his desire to be taught a certain aspect of the oral tradition. In Oromo, no one is allowed to learn more than one aspect of this oral tradition, a privilege reserved only for the prophets or *raaga*. The custodian will receive the gift and will tell the person to return on a fixed date at some future time. The period of waiting may be between three to six months or even longer. During this time, the master will make a thorough investigation into the background of the candidate. He will trace his ancestral line of descent and establish his present connections and will pay particular attention to his character and social behaviour. It is only when the teacher is fully satisfied with the information he has gathered on the student, that the actual negotiations between them can begin. These are primarily of an economic nature and centre around payment. This payment is usually given in

kind and depends on the type of instruction to be given. If the subject of learning is the law, then payment is made in the form of horses; if it concerns history (*argaa-dhageetti*), it is made in cattle. Alternatively, the seeker of knowledge can offer domestic service to the teacher, such that the lesson can be given at a time and speed convenient to the latter.

This request to be taught does not necessarily mean that the learner is completely ignorant of the subject about which he wishes to be instructed. The difference between common knowledge and expert knowledge is obviously one of degree, and there exists a very fine boundary between the two, but it could be said that the knowledge we live is unlike the knowledge we think. Expert knowledge is of the type of knowledge we think.

To comprehend some of the reasons that would prompt a member of the society to pursue such a specialised knowledge, it is important to understand the process through which education is acquired by the individual in the traditional Oromo context of the *Gadaa* life cycle.

As Legesse (1989:1) rightly defines it, *Gadaa* is the term employed by all the Oromo groups to refer to the organisation of the society into a staggered series of generation sets known as *luba*. Each successive *luba* belongs to one of the five patrilineally based descent groups which rotate every eight years and succeed one another in assuming power. Thus an individual is always born into one of these *luba*, which in turn belongs to one of the five patriline.

A child born into any one of these different levels of social grouping passes through a successive series of stages in life. In this process, he is expected to learn

all the things considered to be important not only for his social integration into the society, but for his own personal development as an individual.

The first stage in the *Gadaa* process is that of childhood (boyhood), boys born when their fathers were in *Gadaa* office were ritually protected. They were often raised in their early years by surrogate parents. This stage was known as the *daballe* stage and covered the first eight years of the boy's life. During this period, the young boy learnt to observe his surrounding environment and to model his behaviour on that of the adults in his immediate circle. As he grew older, he also learnt the folktales, dominated by different animal characters, riddles, tongue twisters and other physical and mental games that would prepare him for his future learning. The *daballe* child was greatly favoured, as the surrogate parents were usually from among the *Waata* hunter-gatherers who are well known for their knowledge of animals and plants. The animal stories learnt by the child were thus enriched by the lived experiences of the teller of the tales.

The more serious learning however begins when the child returns to live with his real parents. The credit or the blame for a child's success or failure in acquiring the knowledge of the society is generally attributed to the father. This is because the father is himself a graduate from the same school of life. This is why the Booran Oromo say, , such and such person has inherited nothing from his father but cattle (or worldly goods). From this saying, it is clear that the child's knowledge is transmitted by his father. This father/son relationship is however not only one of biological relationship. The organisation of the *luba* sets is also based on the social father/son relationship in which a generation of fathers engender as a group a generation of sons. It is thus the foot-steps of the generation of *luba* fathers that children follow in their learning as they go through the *Gadaa* cycle from birth to death. Traditionally, Oromo children also engaged in economic activities at an early age, work which

provided the basis for the former type of knowledge. Thus as children grew older in the second stage of their lives and entered another set of eight years, they began to herd the domestic stock around the pastoral settlement and later even accompanied the dry herd to the *fora* satellite camps in the company of older boys.

During their adolescent years, the boys are initiated and elect six leaders or *hayyuu*. This is when society and social responsibility begins for them. The boys are constantly instructed and counselled by senior *hayyuu* assigned to their group by the *Gadaa* class in power. These elders are drawn from the ranks of those leaders who have retired from power. As such, the organization of the boys represent the model upon which power is based. Guided by these elders, the boys emulate all their fathers' activities: their school is obviously a preparatory one for the positions of power they will one day also assume. By this time they already know all the different categories of songs and dances. They also memorise long poems. An example of such a poem is one in which they mock a certain *Gadaa* class or social category which tradition allows them to mock. They also memorise recitations in praise of the dead heroes. This memorisation is not obligatory: it is done by those who are interested and have the talent to do so.

One important feature of the boys' training is nevertheless in the mastery of public speech. The art of public speaking is highly valued in traditional Oromo society. This involves the ability to use well-illustrated language which draws upon such collective sources as history (*argaa-dhageetti*), proverbs and parables. Also of value are the forms of delivery, the wit of the speaker, his tone of voice, his posture, eye contact and ability to command the attention of the audience. This is especially important in the training given to the six elected leaders.

After this period of training the young men become junior warriors and begin to take part in war campaigns. In this activity they follow the leadership of those in the grade above them. Here they acquire the practical skills of fighting and the organisational knowledge of war based on actual combat experience.

Only after their training as warriors is completed are the men allowed to marry. They are however not allowed to procreate. Now they are adults and they become full time warriors and engage in different types of battle as necessity requires. Upon completion of the first part of the fifth grade in the fortieth year of the *Gadaa* cycle, the men perform the fatherhood ceremony which allows them to raise children. These children are the ones who will be entrusted to surrogate parents in order to allow their fathers to continue their defensive duties. At this time, therefore, they are fully engaged in military activity in service of the society.

When the men complete the fifth grade, they in turn accede to power in the *Gadaa* class. The six previously elected leaders of the set, who are now fully grown, adult and mature men with families, become *Gadaa* leaders, not only of their generation set, but of the entire society. This transition is marked by a ceremony in which they take over the *baalli* or ostrich feather representing power. They retain this power for a fixed period of eight years and then relinquish it to the next group in line.

The purpose of this detailed description of the different processes entailed by the education of the child is not to give a description of the *Gadaa* system as such, this has been done by other ethnographers. This is rather to show how it functions in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. Above all it is meant to show that traditional 'common' knowledge is different from the traditional 'expert' knowledge that a person goes out of his way to seek. This expert knowledge is in

essence¹⁵ the knowledge of the common knowledge. It is this expert knowledge which protects and ensures the continuity of the tradition itself. It is the knowledge about the basic laws believed to operate in the workings of the entire system and which make up parts of the system. This is the nature of the knowledge contained in the Oromo concept of *ayaana*. Being an all-pervasive phenomenon, it gives form to and shapes the Oromo world-view by dividing and sub-dividing the universe into categories, sub-categories, classes and sub-classes. It is upon this underlying principle of *ayaana* that the Oromo universe is constructed. It is this that is the subject matter of the expert knowledge.

The quest for the Oromo concept of Ayana

It is very difficult to speak about the methodology one has employed in studying one's own culture. This is because everything that one knows about this culture contributes to the formulation of the end result. Having such an inside view can be both advantageous and disadvantageous to the writer. Being on the inside, one is able to have a much greater understanding of the social facts and one is able to relate them to various other aspects of the culture. One also has a greater command over language and the meanings of things. However this advantage can also be a disadvantage because one takes it for granted that one knows these cultural meanings. I was perfectly assured for instance, that I knew the meanings of the concepts that I was dealing with in my research only to discover, when set to define them for others, that I realised in fact how ignorant I really was not only about the terms themselves, but also about their relationships in the system of thought. This misleading aspect of language for the culture-bearer is especially evident in the case of *ayaana*. I am sure that every Oromo will assume that he/she knows the meaning of the word *ayaana*: whether as a term referring to spirit possession; as designating a day in the calendar of time; as God's creative power, etc. These aspects all constitute categories of

knowledge about *ayaana*, just as stereotypes are categories of knowledge. The cultural knowledge of a term however goes much deeper than its surface knowledge. The latter is meant only to facilitate ease of communication. Knowing the cultural significance of a term is having the ability to see it as part of the cosmic whole, in relationship to all the other patterns of meaning which it has generated. In other words, the cultural meaning of a term only makes sense in the total context of the world-view.

In trying to decipher the meaning of *ayaana*, I should admit that I did not follow any particular method. I have obviously always known the term and its many stereotypical meanings since my early childhood days. The fact that I was born and brought up in family where the traditional knowledge was still vitally alive and kept secret for both internal and external reasons, must have aroused my curiosity and stimulated my eagerness to gain an insight into the workings of my own culture. But such a quest cannot be triggered off without reason.

My interest in Oromo began at a very early age, when I was old enough to realise that my grandfather, who was the *Abba Bokku* or holder of the scepter, occupied the highest political and ritual office in the land of my birth. As a child, I sat at 'the knees', as the Oromo expression goes, of my grandfather, listening attentively as he and other elders discussed matters of great cultural, social, political and juridical importance. I should also mention the role played by my grandmother, Balfie Kura, her close friend and relative Bejje Torbaan and their age-mates in sowing in me the first seeds of knowledge and arousing my interest in the Oromo culture.

It was while I was still in elementary school in *Ghimbi* in *Wallaga* western part of Oromo country that I collected over one thousand five hundred proverbs.

This school, which was a boarding school, was the ideal place for such a collection, as they were recorded amongst boys and girls who came from different parts of the same region. I thus began to realise at a very early age that there exist variations in the use of the proverbs I knew and that there was no proverb which had a rigidly fixed text.

After completing Grade 8 at the same school, I went to *Addis Ababa*, where I met Oromo from all other regions of Oromo country. This brought the realisation that the land occupied by the Oromo was a vast one and the people a populous one. I was soon employed in one of the largest agricultural development projects in the country and was sent to work among the *Arssi* Oromo of Central Oromia. Here I witnessed and experienced with a deep sense of pain at what *Abyssinian* colonial settlers and the *Amhara* colonial bureaucracy had done to my people.

Two years later, I gave up my job in Arssi and moved to Boorana country further south, where my uncle was the director of a high school. I was intrigued to discover a people who spoke a language, practised a culture, told the same myths, proverbs, stories worshipped the same God, *Waaqa* and performed rituals that I had been told about in my childhood in the far western part of the country almost one thousand kilometres away.

After spending a year in Booranland, I returned to the capital to complete my high school education. Throughout this time, conscientised by my experiences, I was surprised to see how little mention was made in the text books I was made to study of the Oromo history, geography, and the common cultural values they shared.

As my dissatisfaction with the whole system and the conditions under which the Oromo lived grew, I began to be active in a student movement with the hope that its activities would lead to the common good of all the Ethiopian peoples. Having no

regard for our ethnic differences, I and my student companions organised a five-man committee to lead the political movement of the Ethiopian students at my high school. One of the committee members however soon reported our group to the state security. A member of the committee, an *Eritrean*, was arrested. The three others ran for our lives, crossing over the border into Sudan on foot. All three of us were Oromo. The only committee member who did not have to flee and was the one who had instigated our disbandment was, as we later came to realise, an *Amhara*. This incident marked a turning point in my outlook about the situation of the Oromo in Ethiopia.

Upon reaching Khartoum, in January 1971 I and my companions in flight had to give a detailed report on ourselves to the Sudanese security. This included providing information about our ethnic origins. After we had been separately interrogated, we were called together to the security headquarters and accused by the head of the Sudanese security of lying about our claim to be members of an Ethiopian student movement, since we were all Oromo. Therefore, we must rather be members of the *Macha-Tullama* student movement. I was surprised to discover that my two other companions were Oromo like myself, as we had not spoken in Oromo and, unlike myself, they bore *Amharic* names.

After living in exile in the Sudan for a year, during which time I followed with growing concern the course that had been taken by the student movement in Ethiopia, and seeing that it continued to take no action to rectify the situation of the Oromo people suffering under the yoke of *Abyssinian* colonialism, I returned to Ethiopia determined to die struggling in the cause of my people. I was soon back in the country and to avoid arrest, I went to live in my home area in *Wallaga* province. Here I organised a literacy programme in cooperation with the employees of the Ministry of Social Work and Community Development and we produced teaching materials in the Oromo language written in the *Sabeen* script. This led to my arrest.

I was imprisoned for sixteen months without a court hearing and was accused of plotting to overthrow the government. A letter recently discovered in the state security archives written by an informant to the then Prime Minister, *Aklilu Habtewold*, at this date, even preposterously accuses me of planning to hijack an Ethiopian airlines plane! I was then taken to stand trial in *Addis Ababa* and was released on bail, with the strict instruction that I was not to return to the *Dambidollo* area of Western Ethiopia, my place of birth, without permission from the state security.

A year after my release from prison, I was once again employed in *Arssi* in the same agricultural development project in which I had previously worked, this time as a cooperative promoter. It was at this time that I began to be more and more interested in the concept of *ayyaana* and began to properly document the subject. I was told that many Oromo from different parts of the empire state came to visit a centre known as *Had'ha-Abayi* usually referred to as *Wara Ayyaana*. To my great disappointment, however, I discovered that this centre of pilgrimage had been taken over by an *Abyssinian* named *Tayye* and that it had nothing whatsoever to do with the ancient concept of *ayyaana*, but had become a sort of possession cult. The local *Arssi* Oromo had completely disassociated themselves from this cult in protest at its estrangement from their culture. They themselves went to another ritual centre, that of caves of *Soffumar*, which in its turn had become Islamised and was now connected with *Sheikh Hussein*.

After living and working in *Arssi* country for a year, during which time the regime of Haile Selassie was overthrown, I was assigned by the Ministry of Land Reform to return to *Dambidollo* to assist in the implementation of the agrarian reform programme of 1975 in my home area. This transfer allowed me to break the exile that had been imposed upon me and to see my family and parents again. Here I once

again witnessed Oromo nationalism burning like a wild fire. The youth had already organised an underground movement. As part of my work, I was soon involved in a programme to redistribute land to the Oromo tiller, expropriating it from the colonial settlers and other commercial settlers who had come to settle in Western Oromia from outside the region. As they regained their land, Oromo peasants in the area regained hope and confidence in themselves and in their cultural traditions. This marked the revival of rituals long forgotten and peace-making ceremonies began to be performed between different Christian and Islamic groups and communities who had been engaged in a bitter struggle between themselves, disunited by creeds that were culturally alien to them. I personally witnessed, for instance, two such groups make sacrifices with animals which they had slaughtered each according to their religious tradition, then mix the meat of the animals and share it commensally. For the first time in almost a century, they broke the century-old taboos imposed on them by the colonial rulers and slave-raiders. People began to disobey the colonial system of classification of land, people and religion.

I lived during this time with my maternal uncle Dibaba Chalassa who for the first time gave me the definition of the concept of *ayaana*. But this euphoria was not to last long. After an eight month stay in the region, I was reported by those whom I had ousted from their land to a mobile Dergue military unit that was travelling around the country imposing death sentences at will. Informed that this unit had been bribed to arrest me, I had once again to go into hiding to save my life. Fortunately for me, all the members of this unit were themselves wiped out in a purge on their return to the capital. This greatly eased my own situation and after the issue had subsided, I requested a transfer to the head office and was assigned the post of junior land redistribution expert. As part of my work, I was sent to different parts of the country to report on problems regarding the redistribution of land. This gave me the chance to see other Oromo areas which I had not visited until then, such as those of the *Rayya*

and Assebo. A year later I was transferred to the newly established Settlement Authority as Project Manager in the *Limmu* and *Jimma* area in the *Kaffa* region. The project site was in an isolated area with only limited forms of communication with the rest of the country. Here I was able to participate for over eighteen months in the numerous monthly and annual celebrations and rituals of the Oromo community. After this I was once again transferred to the capital to serve as a national settlement policy auditor, work which again led to my arrest as a counter-revolutionary. I was kept in custody and then served a nine month prison sentence without trial.

It was whilst I was in prison that I met a Catholic priest with whom I shared a cell for some time. The priest was released before me and when I myself emerged from internment, he introduced me to Father Lambert Bartels, a Catholic priest and visiting scholar who was conducting research of an anthropological nature in my home region. I later became the assistant to this Dutch priest and through him came to work on a full-time basis on my own culture. As his principal assistant, my travel to different parts of Oromo country to collect data for his book on Oromo religion (Bartels 1984) was generously supported. Since Bartels' study was conducted under the auspices of the Institute of *Ethiopian Studies*, I was given a letter of introduction which gave me the official right of enquiry into my own culture. This greatly facilitated my work and my movement. I came at last to do what I had always wanted to do: participate in the study of my own culture. Under agreement with the Institute, this work was to be regarded as a form of anthropological training in field methods and research. As I had already worked independently on various aspects of the Oromo culture, my work with Father Bartels allowed me to see once again the importance of the concept of *ayaana* for the understanding of the Oromo world-view. I therefore proposed that this topic be the subject of further research and be considered as part of my training as an anthropologist. It is in this way that I

embarked in 1981 on the study of this concept which has culminated in becoming the subject matter of this thesis.

Teachers and informants

I could say that over the last twelve years I have been possessed by the concept of *ayaana*. I have raised the topic with almost every Oromo I have come across, in the hope that I would find another bit of information on the subject. It would be impossible to list all the names of the people who have helped me to formulate the views I present about the concept in this thesis. I will therefore limit my discussion to those outstanding teachers and informants who have contributed to my understanding of *ayaana*. I will present them in chronological order and will give a brief background information about each one of them. I do this not only in acknowledgement of their great teaching, but also to show the bearing they have had on the form and content of the thesis.

Dibaabaa Chalaassaa

Dibaabaa is my maternal uncle. He is more or less the same age as myself. He belongs to the *Tullama-Soddo* lineage of the *Galan* clan, one of the six clans of the *Sayyo*, in the extreme western part of Oromia.

It is Dibaabaa who first called my attention to the concept of *ayaana*. My own statement of what he told me is recorded in Bartels (1983:112). According to Dibaabaa:-

"Everything has a twofold nature: one part we see with our own eyes, the other part we do not see with our eyes but by our own hearts. This invisible part of them we call ayaana. You will never understand us unless you realise that we see everything in this way".

Dibaabaa is not a traditional Oromo in the sense that he had already had over nine years of formal education when he made this statement in 1975. I am saying this to be extra coasconscious, otherwise I do not believe that nine years of *Abyssinian* education can bring a qualitative change in an Oromo child.

As soon as I began assisting Father Bartels in his work on the Oromo religion, Dibaabaa was the first person I invited to *Addis Ababa* and whom I extensively interviewed about his view of the concept. When I asked him to tell me what he knew about the subject, he began by citing an Oromo proverb: *ayaanaaf fagaara wajin dhalatu*, meaning there are two things which are indistinguishable markers of ourselves at the moment of our birth: our *ayaana* and our backsides. Dibaaba then went on to explain the idea that *ayaana* both precedes and follows everything that exists in the universe. To illustrate this, he explained that the father's *ayaana* could continue to affect that of his son, even after the death of the former. It survived even after the physical person was long gone. But when I asked him to tell me the difference between me and my *ayaana*, Dibaabaa could not help committing the logical contradiction of arguing that "one's own *ayaana* is one's own self and one's own self is one's own *ayaana*" To overcome this contradiction he then resorted to *uumaa* as that which is in the nature of the thing. Finally his argument led to the conclusion that it is impossible to distinguish between *ayaana* and *uumaa*: *uumaa* being the thing *ayaana* constitutes and *ayaana* being simultaneously that which causes the thing to come into existence as well as becoming that which it has caused.

In terms of the research method I employed in conducting this interview, there emerge some important points which are worth noting. When one conducts, as I did, an interview of this sort with a close friend and relative, between whom and the researcher there exists a total sense of confidence, it allows the respondent to

speculate. This is because he knows that he and the researcher are on an equal intellectual footing in respect of the topic under discussion.

In any case, speculation is unavoidable in researching a subject such as *ayaana*. Moreover such speculation on the part of the respondent should not be regarded as a limitation on the research. On the contrary: at times it can be highly productive, as the interviewee will begin to introduce new data unknown to the researcher in order to defend the line of argument he has taken. Rather than dismissing such speculations, the researcher should rather try to study carefully the grounds on which the speculation is being made and the way in which the informant has tried to connect issues and events to justify the end result of his/her argument. He should also be in a position to control wild speculation, for wild speculation usually fails to hold ground. But when the speculation is a natural one, when it follows the rules of both deductive and inductive logic, then it helps to throw light on the matter under discussion. It is in this sense that my interviews with Dibaabaa, which started with the classical approach of question and answer, developed into a form of dialogue and debate.

Another problem which should be mentioned is that in interviews such as these, there is a tendency to present only the positive aspects of the culture and of exaggerating the common and ordinary data. In my conversations with Dibaabaa, this exaggeration appeared in the form of the idea of the past of the Oromo as a 'paradise lost'. This theme recurs in the interviews of almost all my teachers and informants, although the degree varies from one person to another. In such cases, the researcher should carefully observe the background of each of his informants. He will find that it is those who come from a group holding a high status or whose clan or lineage were entitled to certain privileges who tend to exaggerate the common facts.

Nevertheless, it should also be clear that exaggeration is as much a part of oral tradition as is oratory, in which emphasis and exaggeration tend to overlap.

I do not think, however, that these short-comings, if short comings they are, affected my own research findings. This is because the concept of *ayaana* and the nature of its study as a religious and philosophical subject belongs to the domain of the ideological. What was rather more important was to try to identify the common elements in all the discourse on the subject and to base on these elements to construct a system which would serve as a frame of reference to explain the origin, the relations and the destiny of things in the cultural universe.

In my study of the concept of *ayaana* and its relevance to the Oromo world-view, Dibaabaa's view on the subject therefore served me not so much in the details he provided, but because he touched upon the fundamental nature of the concept.

Gaadissee

Gaadissee was a woman in her early thirties when I met her. She comes from one of the most important families in terms of the knowledge of *ayaana*. She is the grand-daughter of the *ayaantu* or expert on Oromo time-reckoning and oral historian, Jimmale Diima, who was also later to become my teacher. It was through Gaadissee that I was introduced to Jimmale. When I interviewed Gaadissee twelve years ago in *Addis Ababa*, she did not know how to read and write. She is the wife of Abdissa Turane, a mathematician friend and clansman whom I met when I was living in the Booran area. He was carrying out his national service at the time, and was teaching mathematics at the high school where my uncle was a director.

Despite the fact that she was the grand-daughter of a reputed *ayaantu* Gaadissee's view of the subject can be taken to be one representing the ordinary or lay

person's view on the matter. For her *ayaana* exists in the same way that *Waaqa* exists. This is, for her a fact beyond any doubt. In her mind, *ayaana* is *Waaqa*; but the reverse is not true. When I asked her if my *ayaana* could be her *Waaqa*, she replied: No, your *ayaana* is not my *Waaqa*; your *ayaana* is *Waaqa* for you". This common view of *ayaana* is one which conceives it as a particularisation of *Waaqa*'s creative power. Like other Oromo, she believes that *ayaana* exists both before and after the thing it causes to come into being. And like my maternal uncle, she believes that *ayaana* can survive death. She thinks the *ayaana* of the father can be transmitted not only to his son, but also to a great grandson, by becoming the child in question. This idea concerning the transmission of *ayaana* from the past to the present and of *ayaana* as being the cause of that which exists in the present is one of the most commonly held beliefs about the concept in Oromo. It is a belief which would appear to be related to the idea of reincarnation.

When I asked Gaadissee whether it was only the father's *ayaana* or also the mother's *ayaana* which could be transmitted in this way, she responded: "Are they different? I thought they were the same". This response contains an element of uncertainty. This ambiguity of course is linked to the nature of the subject itself and is manifested at all levels of investigation, from the most mundane to the most complex aspects of the problem. For Gaadissee, as for other Oromo women, it is the religious perspective of *ayaana* that is the most predominant one, and as such it transcends the gender issue.

In the twelve years that I have been studying and writing about the subject, I have discussed *ayaana* with a number of women from different parts of Oromia. In this investigation, I did not come across any woman who was considered to be a custodian of the oral tradition, despite the fact that many women have a vast knowledge about this wisdom. Their knowledge at times even surpassed that of their

menfolk and I found that they were in many instances even more articulate than their husbands who came from a similar social status. Oromo women can therefore be said to place high value on the oral tradition. It is this general attitude of Oromo women that led Gaadisse to take the trouble of inviting her grandfather to the capital so that I might benefit from his expertise on the subject. Later, when I used to travel to the *Ambo* area to interview her grandfather at his home at *Dandii*, upon my return, I found Gaadisse eagerly awaiting the new information I might have learnt from the elder.

Jimaale Diimaa

Jimaale Diimaa was in his late seventies when I first met him twelve years ago. He was an old man with a wonderful sense of humour who loved to be surrounded by children. On several of the visits which I made to his village, I observed them gathered around him and watched him tease them. He would imitate the manner in which they talked, laughed and cried and the children would break out into peals of laughter. At other times, he would tell them a story from his repertoire, or he would play with them one of the many pedagogic children's games. Such games included learning the names of plants and trees, such as *mukki-mukko*, in which one of the children would begin by citing this phrase. Another would take up the challenge and respond *mukka*. He would then say *makannisa hangafa mukka lafatan dhiisa*, literally "the *makannisa* tree is the eldest of all trees; this one I leave aside", after which he would recite as many names of trees as he could possibly remember without breathing. As soon as he stopped to take a breath, another child would enter the game and try to outwit him/her. A similar game was played in regard to the names of animals. In the evenings around the fire-place he would pose riddles (*himpoyya*) or built on the same structure of the game of riddles, were games destined to teach the children kinship relations (*hibbon-teen*). Other more serious games included remembering chains of events or numbers in both ascending and descending order. I

found this to be the most efficient and effective way of teaching a child and of developing his memory. Jimaale had an encyclopedic knowledge about games for all age groups of children.

Jimaale was also a very well recognised oral historian (*nama argaa-dhaggeetti*). His knowledge of the version of the *Gadaa* system practised in his area before it was banned by the *Abyssinian* colonial rulers, his memories of the different *Gadaa* classes and grades were vast and interesting and the manner in which he presented his facts and characterised the various *Abba Gadaa* leaders made him a master of the art of orature. But above all, Jimaale was an *ayaantu*, or a time-reckoner.

It was Jimaale who advised me to schedule my visits at different seasons. During these different times of the year, he taught me the names of the stars and groups of stars and showed me how they moved into different positions in the sky not only at different seasons, but also during the different hours of the night. There were nights when we had to sit and drink coffee prepared in the Oromo fashion in order to stay awake to watch the movement of the stars. From him I learnt in detail how each of the twenty-seven *ayaana* which occur between one new moon and the next are characterised and in turn characterise everything that comes into being on one of these *ayaana*.

Jimaale was convinced that the movements of the heavenly bodies affected the lives of individuals and the destinies of societies. According to him, it is the position taken by the heavenly bodies at the time of birth of the individual which influences his character and the pattern of his future life, in other words his *ayaana*. Similarly, the position of the stars on the day of a couple's marriage influences their future

relationship. He believed that all the important events in the life of an individual or in that of a group are contained in these heavenly configurations.

On the different occasions on which I visited him, Jimaale also received visitors who came from distant places on foot to consult him on such matters as the best day on which a marriage ceremony should be celebrated and on the type of rituals and the order in which they should be performed. The date of marriage is just one example of the type of advice that an *ayaantu* gives regarding the important transactions members of the society undertake.

Jimaale's knowledge was that of an expert, not in the sense of the expertise that is found among the Booran where it connects all the diverse aspects of the cultural universe into a unified whole, but in regard to the detail in which he knew the subject and the art with which he mastered it.

When I left Ethiopia in 1983 to go into self-exile in Kenya, I left Jimaale and his beautiful little old wife living by themselves at their home, for all their children had married and had moved away from the area. Yet he and his wife were never lonely: their house was filled with the laughter of the village children and the many visitors who still came to seek his advice on different matters.

When I returned to Ethiopia briefly in September 1991 and travelled to the *Ambo* area to try to collect further comparative data for this thesis as well as to share with Jimaale what I had learnt about *ayaana* during our long years of separation, I was extremely saddened to discover that he had died when he had angrily learnt of the murder of his daughter by her husband. This incident had struck a fatal blow to this great custodian of the Oromo national wisdom.

Bule Guyyo

When I arrived in Kenya in 1983, I had no intention or plan to carry out any anthropological work. Studying for my university bachelor of arts degree in Sociology was enough to keep me fully occupied. Around the beginning of the second year of my stay in Kenya, however, I was introduced to the famous Booran Oromo singer, the late Abdullahi Jirma. As part of my cultural struggle on behalf of the Oromo people, I myself had written a number of the songs that have since become popularised through my friend the great artist and singer Ali Birra. It was through him that I came to know Abdullahi. Through this encounter I entered and later became part of the Booran Oromo community living in the area of Nairobi known as *Eastleigh*. As I became a regular visitor to Abdullahi's home in this part of Nairobi, we were amazed to discover that despite the fact that we came from different parts of Oromo country, we were clansmen, and that we both came from the *Dayu (Doyyu)* lineage of the *Karayyu* clan, one of the major *Qaalluu* clans and lineages of the *Sabbo* moiety. As such I soon came to be accepted as a member of the Jirma family. Abdullahi's home was the focal point for many visitors. But as many of his friends were 'educated' people like ourselves, in the many discussions I held with them, I learnt little new apart from the fact that we shared a common culture and identity.

The death of Abdullahi's drummer at the beginning of 1985 marked the turning point which set me on a new path that was to lead to my own initiation into the ranks of the oral historians. According to custom, the close friends and relatives of the bereaved are supposed to keep vigil for the first three nights after the death of a member of his family. Thus I too had to fulfill this social obligation. On the third night following the demise of our friend, some of the people gathered in the room where Abdullahi and myself were sitting near the father of the drummer, *Abba Dallacha*, began to discuss Booran tradition. The topic of discussion centred around traditional burial customs, which was of course an appropriate one for the occasion at

hand. But as the night grew older, other topics and/or aspects of Booran-Oromo tradition were introduced and as one subject led to another, the discussions grew warmer. I also participated, making the point that there was a need to record this traditional knowledge and to pass it on to the future generations. *Abba Dallacha*, aroused by this statement and moved by his own concern about the younger generation, singled out this issue and began to condemn those of us who had received a formal education for being ignorant about our own common culture and traditions. This led to a debate between ourselves and the elders and the discussion ended with the elders blaming those who had been to school for neglecting their past and the latter blaming the elders for making the oral traditions inaccessible to them. The young educated Booran accused the elders of whispering about these matters between themselves and of preventing the younger educated generation from preserving the traditions in a written form. At this point, *Abba Dallacha* asked in a tone full of reproach and resentment as to which one of us would be willing to spare the time and money to undergo such a learning if there were an elder who could qualify to teach us. All of us of course responded that we would all be willing. *Abba Dallacha* then stood up and raising his voice above our clamour, said: "Right now, in this house, there is one such elder, who has the knowledge of the *argaa-dhageetti* ("historical oral traditions"). I will call him and we shall see which one of you really means what he says". Inside the house, there were a group of elders seated in a room which had especially been prepared for them so that they could spend the night chewing the stimulant *chat* talking quietly amongst themselves. We challenged *Abba Dallacha* to introduce the elder to us. Then *Abba Dallacha* walked into the house and emerged some fifteen minutes later with a well-built, slightly dark man in his early forties. He introduced him to us as Bule Guyyo. In his presentation, he emphasised that Bule was from the *Dirre* region in the Booran heartland of Southern Ethiopia, seat of the *Qaalluu* and the *Gadaa*. In other words, from the centre of the learned and of learning in terms of the traditional Oromo wisdom.

Thus Bule sat amidst those of us of the younger generation who had received some form of formal education. Abdullahi began by asking Bule his *gossa* "phratry", *balbala* "clan", etc., the normal way in which an individual is localised in the Booran Oromo kinship structure, and Bule responded accordingly. It was then his turn to identify our affiliations. When it came to my turn, Bule could tell immediately that I was not a Booran, however much I tried to make my Oromo sound like his own. The intonation difference was apparent. Abdullahi noticed that Bule was getting suspicious about all of us and he intervened on my behalf and explained why I was different. He reminded Bule that there were many other Oromo groups in Ethiopia and told him that I was from one of them, the *Macha* Oromo, in the far west of the country. Bule conceded to this fact, but commented, "those Oromo speak like *Sidaama*". '*Sidaama*' is the term by which all Oromo refer to *Abyssinians*. It is a compound name, made up of two words, *sidi* and *hamaaa*. *Sidi* means "enemy" and *hamaa* "bitter", phonetically fused to become *Sidaama*. This explained Bule's nervousness about my presence

Although on this evening Bule feigned acceptance of this explanation, in reality he still harboured great doubts and reservations about me. Abdullahi and I discovered this about a month later, when we had been meeting Bule at regular intervals. One day, he took Abdullahi aside and asked him how certain he was that I was not a *Sidaama*, an agent of the *Abyssinians*, who was only pretending to be an Oromo in order to gain access to the secret knowledge of the Booran. After a while I noticed Abdullahi go into his room and bring out the newly published book on *Oromo Religion*. I saw ^{him} turn the pages and showed Bule something contained in the book. As Abdullahi later explained, he was using information on page 45 of the book, on which Bartels bears witness to the fact that my family is one of Booran origin (in the true sense of the meaning of Booran, representing the notion of primogeniture) and

that my grandfather was the last *Abba Bokku* or *Gadaa* leader of the *Macha*. Abdullahi assured him that he should not doubt my loyalty to the Booran.

As we also discovered later, during this one month, when we met Bule almost every other day and spent time with him, Bule did not tell us anything of importance. But once his mind had been put to rest about me and he had accepted me as a legitimate son of Oromo, he admitted that he could now begin teaching us. He then ordered me to buy, for the following Friday, a male goat with a coat that was two-tone in colour. The lesson began with the sacrifice of this goat. Bule initiated us by placing the blood left on the knife against our foreheads and blessing each of us in turn. The blessing was also a kind of prayer. Neither Bule, Abdullahi nor myself were to eat the meat of the animal killed.

Our teaching began on the same Friday night, and I had prepared the questions I expected Bule to answer. As soon as the house was quiet and everyone else was asleep, with only the three of us seated on the floor of Abdullahi's bedroom, I began throwing out my questions in much the same way I had done during the past month. Bule continued to answer them also in the same manner. After about half an hour of my questions, he protested angrily, saying "What do you know that you ask questions? You ask questions only after you have been taught, and only if there are things you have not understood in the teaching given". I apologised and kept quiet, waiting for him to lead the way. I had in fact already come to doubt the anthropological technique I was using with him in our previous interviews of structured questionnaires and could clearly see that they were not working with him. There was silence in the room for some time. Then he began.

He began telling us about how the entire universe is polarised between what he called *Issa* ("he") and *Issi* ("she"). This polarisation, he instructed us, is one which

is created by *Waaqa*. It was however the first man on earth, *Tabbo*, who first observed that this eternal truth appears in all things and thus made it into a law of mankind. The female counter-part of *Tabbo* was *Tabaabbo*, the first woman on earth. Then Bule went into describing the characteristics of *Issa* and *Issi*. He explained that not all things fall into one of these categories, but that some of them fall in between into a neutral category, which he called *Issaan*, "they". He took the phenomenon of rain as an example of this categorisation. "When rain is still a cloud, it is referred to as *issa*. When it becomes water and begins to flow down, as long as it remains between the cloud and the ground, it is referred to as *issaan*. Once it touches ground and enters the soil, it becomes *issi*". He concluded the lesson by stating, *waan qarri qabu, qarqarri qaba*, a difficult expression to translate, but meaning that "which applies to the centre, also applies to the periphery", in other words, on the basis of a given demonstration, it is possible to extrapolate.

The first night's lesson ended here, after which Bule laughed and said to me, "now if there are any questions, you can ask me". Abdullahi and I were too dumbfounded to say anything, amazed that a person without any formal education could have such an organised view of the world and could present it in such a structured way. Sometimes, in Bule's absence, Abdullahi and I discussed this fact and wondered if in fact Bule was not lying to us and if he did not after all know how to read and write. But it is clear that the literate have a tendency to underestimate the oral tradition.

The second session took place two days later, when Bule used the same rule as he had taught us the first night and applied it to the explanation of the institution of the *Gadaa* and the *Qaalluu*. The *Qaalluu* he designated as *Issa* and the *Gadaa* as *Issi*. He classified the *hayyuu* or judicial system under the *Qaalluu* and the *aadaa* or customary law under the *Gadaa*, whilst the *wayyuu* and the *reddimesa*^{he} attributed to

those things which fall in between. The rest of the evening was spent in learning about the different situations in which transformations from one state to another can take place.

Our lessons with Bule continued for a month, during which time we touched upon practically every aspect of the Oromo culture, applying the same principle to the study of all the aspects. After this Bule insisted that we slaughter another goat, this time a female one of a similar colour. As we later realised, the sacrifice of both the first and the second goat coincided with the day of the new moon and we could also see a pattern in the days that Bule chose for our instruction: they corresponded to the eleven single *ayaana*.

One of the most interesting points that emerged from the teaching I received from Bule, is that he links the idea of *Issa*, *Issi* and *Issaan* with the division into single, dual and triple *ayaana*. The single *ayaana* are associated with the category *Issa*; the dual *ayaana* with that of *Issi* and the triple *ayaana* with *Issaan*. It was Bule who advised me and the late Abdullahi Jirma to seek an *ayaantu* if we wanted to understand the Booran Oromo tradition and its intricate inter-connections more fully. The death of my friend Abdullahi Jirma in 1991 left a great emotional gap in my life, whose intellectual companionship I greatly miss.

In terms of the methodology used, it is obvious that I used none in obtaining my data, and that I was rather placed in a student/teacher relationship. It was only after we had been taught in the way chosen by Bule that Abdullahi and I requested that we be allowed to use a tape-recorder. In these recorded interviews, I begin, as a matter of formality, by asking Bule a leading question and interrupt him sometimes to seek clarification about a term which is unfamiliar to me. Similarly, at the end of the interview, I ask a few questions to develop aspects of certain points that were not clear to me. Apart from these interjections, the data contained in the interviews are

simply records of the lesson given to Abdullahi and myself by the master Bule Guyyo. But who is Bule Guyyo and how did he acquire the knowledge that he transmitted to us?

Bule Guyyo belongs to the *Mat't'aarri* clan in the *Sabbo* moiety of the Booran Oromo group. His father, Guyyo, was a well-known *hayyuu* when in his *Gadaa* class and he continued to serve as a *liichoo-dullaati* or "old whip" even after his retirement from office. The father of Bule was not only known for his skill and talent in Oromo traditional law, but he was one of the cattle rich persons in Booran. Although he was not from one of the "filthy rich" or *durressa chichita* families, he was among the "rich" or *durressa* families and owned more than seven hundred head of cattle. The fact that his clan was a *Qaalluu* one which provides the second wife of the most important of the Booran, also gave his family social standing and prestige.

Bule was born at the right time into his *Gadaa* class, that is when his father was forty years old, and thus he underwent all the necessary training from childhood until he was twenty-four years old. Until this date, his family was still a rich one, but soon after this time, it was suddenly reduced to destitution (*deega*). The family lost all its cattle in repeated raids by armed Somali.

Bule, who was born at Irdar, one of the nine well complexes around which the entire Booran Oromo society is organised, now had to leave the *Tullaa* region and look for other means of subsistence. He was obliged to make this decision, because, as he himself states, the customary institutions of *buusaa* and *gonoffaa* through which the society traditionally overcame such problems, was simply not able to cope with the large number of destitute families which were constantly being raided. A significant part of the society had been impoverished. Bule says "the *Sidaama* neither protected the Booran from these cattle razzias nor provided them with the

means of defending themselves against the sophisticated weaponry of the raiders. They were caught, as Bule himself puts it, "between two enemies".

And so Bule's family moved to one of the three *baddaa* or highland regions of Booranland, that of *Baddaa Hiddii*, where part of his family still resides. This is an area where some cultivation is still possible. Here the family began a new way of life, based on agriculture. It was here that Bule's father lived and as time passed, it was to Bule, as the eldest son in the family, that many of the questions pertaining to the social laws and customs were addressed. Finding that he was often unable to respond to these questions with the necessary facts, Bule determined to obtain the necessary instruction. He therefore approached the man who was to become his teacher, Addii Diida, and requested to be taught. In order to be initiated as an oral historian, he moved out of his own family and went to live in that of Addii Diida, rendering him domestic service in form of payment.

Bule recalls the experience as a very painful one. He complains that the lessons were often long and complicated and difficult to remember. The teacher would refuse to repeat them, accusing Bule of being incapable of learning. Bule pointed to tape-recorder I was using and said: "in those days, such a thing did not exist; even if I had had one like this, the man would have refused to be recorded. He would have said, 'do you want to put my breath into an iron thing?'". Bule claims to have served Addii Diida for five years, during which time he acquired the knowledge he later transmitted to Abdullahi and myself.

But unlike Bule's expectations, no one came to learn from him when he was ready to teach. Bule says that unless one is a wealthy person in terms of property, people do not trust the knowledge one has. Everytime he mentioned this problem, Bule would cite a 'fixed text', a kind of parable:

Yaa nama har'aa
Kan du'ee hin kaafu
Kan jirru wa hin-qaafatu
Yaa gowaa si durri bowaa

Wo! men of the present
Bring back the dead to life you cannot
The living wise men you consult not
Wo! fools there is an oblivion ahead of you

Bule's personal situation was further aggravated in 1974 when the *Abyssinian* colonial army overthrew its monarch, *Haile Selassie*. As part of this national political change students were sent to the Booranland to promote the new regime. These students condemned the Booran *hayyuu* and *Qaalluu* families as being exploiters and reactionaries. To escape persecution, Bule had to flee into neighbouring Kenya. He worked for some time in *Marsabit* as a daily wage labourer on a private farm for a salary that was tantamount to slavery before moving to the slums of Nairobi in search of a better life. It was shortly after his arrival in the capital that Abdullahi and I met him.

Today Bule is married and has three children. He still lives in one of the slum districts and after being employed for a short while as a night guard in a factory, he struggles to make a living for himself and his family by assisting goat merchants trade the animals in the market.

Dabassa Guyyo

As the lessons and recording sessions continued with Bule for another month at the home of Abdullahi Jirma, unbeknown to us there was someone in the family

who was equally listening to the discussion. This was Qaballe Jirma, the younger sister of Abdullahi. She had been equally participating in the learning, but from behind the scene. This is perhaps also the way in which traditional Oromo women acquired their knowledge of the oral tradition. It had never occurred to any of us that Qaballe could be listening to the conversation we were holding in the room next door to hers. Our recording sessions usually took place late at night, after everyone in the house had gone to bed and the noise had died down to ensure a good recording. When we started, we used to leave the door adjoining her room and that of Abdullahi's slightly ajar, so that light from the corridor could penetrate the room. As she lay in her bed, Qaballe's ears and eyes were wide open.

After our lessons and their recording had come to an end after about three months, Qaballe had come to realise the importance of the oral tradition and to appreciate it as much as we ourselves did. Since she worked with what was then the Voice of Kenya at the Booran vernacular language desk, she had the means and the access to cry out her concern on the air. One day, therefore, without consulting anyone, when she was broadcasting one of her normal programmes, she accused both the Booran elders for withholding vital information about the culture from the younger generation and the educated younger generation for being contemptuous of their known traditional knowledge. She called upon both the elders and the younger generation to end their mutual disdain and hostility for one another. She pleaded to the elders to come out and teach the young and encouraged the young to be willing to listen and to learn from their elders. She declared her own readiness to be taught if such an elder were available to teach her.

There was a man listening to this radio broadcast in the *Kwangare* area of Nairobi. This man was Dabassa Guyyo. After hearing Qaballe's plea and touched by the concern of this young girl in a world where other adult males would have turned a deaf ear, Dabassa 'agreed with himself' to go and meet Qaballe at her office

at the V.O.K. (now the Kenya Broadcasting Station) and to volunteer to teach her. This led to the pair recording programmes on aspects of the oral tradition, which were transmitted on the air. As general as these interviews were, they stirred an enthusiastic response from the Booran listeners. The Booran public was especially moved by the blessing, which is also a form of prayer, that Dabassa used as a prelude to the programme. Being a born orator, Dabassa was able to present his teaching in a voice and a poetry that captivated the imagination of all who heard him.

I had already met Dabassa once or twice briefly before this time, but did not pay any particular attention to him. After hearing about this incident, however, I was eager to make his acquaintance. This opportunity arose when he came to visit Abdullahi and Qaballe at their house one week-end. Since his sister was also married to a man from the *Wallaga* region from which I come, I often met Dabassa at their home.

Dabassa belongs to the *Hawattu* clan, the most senior clan in the entire Booran Oromo society. His lineage and his family are associated with a mythical personality by the name of *Jaarsso Waadaa*. This ancestor is said to have been a man who allowed his life to be sacrificed to bring an end to a feud that was being fought among different Booran clans. As a result of this blood offering made by a member of the clan, the *Hawattu* are said to have been granted permanent representation in the *Gadaa* rule, occupying one of the highest seats, that of an *addulla* councillor. At the time of this research, Dabassa's elder brother held the position of one of the six *addulla* in the *Gadaa* council in power.

It was a standing policy of the *Abyssinian* colonial rule since the time of *Menelik* to recruit into the army unqualified Oromo generally and the nomadic and semi-nomadic Booran in particular. Dabassa was thus one of those who entered the service as a military intelligence officer covering the southern borders of the country at the frontiers of Kenya and Somalia. This field training, in addition to the

traditional forms of learning he was given as a special *daballe* child, must no doubt have widened his knowledge of the region and sharpened his natural intelligence.

As a result, Dabassa, as I came to appreciate during the long years of our acquaintanceship, is an expert not only of the historical oral traditions of the Booran, but also, as a result of his contacts and his travels, of the history of the colonial empire over the last hundred years. He also has a fascinating grasp of the relationships that exist between the different ethnic groups on the Ethiopia-Kenya-Somalia borders. This knowledge rivals that of any anthropologist who has worked in the region for a decade or more. Based on his traditional knowledge of the patterns of history and the return of the cycles, and combined with his skill of 'reading the stars' he has been able, without any formal training, to 'predict' with uncanny and almost unbelievable precision, the general political trends taking place on the African continent and in the world at large. It is obvious that in terms of his awareness and knowledge of the world, he thinks and acts at a level far removed from the 'ordinary' human being, and has an intelligence that surpasses that of the common 'educated' person. As a teacher and informant, in terms of the elegance of his presentations and of brilliance of his analyses, he is an incomparable virtuoso. In the anthropological world, were it possible to prove their absolute authenticity, he ranks among such masters of the Word as Don Juan and Ogotomeli.

Dabassa arrived in Kenya between 1984, fleeing the intensification of the persecution of the Oromo by the *Abyssinian* military leaders in the 1980s. I did not however begin my work with him until 1985, shortly after I met him, when as part of the joint study I was undertaking with my wife on the *ethno-botanical* knowledge of the Oromo, that I began to interview him on the meanings of the plant names and their uses. It was during this research that I began to sense the depth of his knowledge about the traditional Oromo knowledge. Dabassa later accompanied my wife, Dr.

Aneesa Kassam, and myself on field trips to the *Isiolo* district to collect specimens of the plants submitted to the *East African Herbarium* for identification purposes. As part of a national project coordinated by my wife on the anthropology of birds, based at the National Museums of Kenya, I did a similar study, partly with Dabassa's assistance, on the *ethno-ornithology* of the Booran and Gabra Oromo. Dabassa also contributed, with my participation, to the study done by my wife at this time on the ornaments of the Oromo and other Kenyan ethnic groups on behalf of the Museum. Through these studies, I began to see *ayaana* at work from different angles, in areas of the culture into which I had hitherto not systematically ventured.

It was only after this experience of working together on these different projects that Dabassa began to initiate me much more intensively in my own right into his own version of the Oromo knowledge. In terms of research methodology, this helped me to counter-check the information I had received from Bule. By adopting this procedure, I was able to determine what was common to them both and to see where they differed. I kept notes on the points upon which they disagreed, in order to control which version was the more consistent over the whole lesson delivered. In the final analysis, there were no significant differences between the two. Even where these differences existed, as far as the concept of *ayaana* was concerned, they mattered very little, for it is after all I who have reconstructed the system based on what they and my other informants and teachers told me.

The most striking differences between the two masters arise from the following three points:-

- (a) the point of departure they use;
- (b) the context in which the past is considered;

- (c) details regarding the specific names of the actors and the names of places where an event is said to have taken place.

I will now briefly discuss these differences.

Differences between Bule Guyyo and Dabassa Guyyo

In terms of the point of departure chosen by my two Booran teachers, Dabassa prefers to begin with the origins, whereas Bule tends to go directly to the human applications of the divine laws. For Dabassa, these laws are implicit in their making, whereas Bule gives explicit explanations regarding their formulation. Bule does not however develop the subject matter in the manner that Dabassa does and presents a more 'objective' matter of fact view of the data, whereas Dabassa tends to interpret the data in more poetic and creative way.

Similarly, as regards the context in which the laws are presented, Dabassa relates the past in the context of the present. This is not unique to Dabassa, and is part of the nature of oral tradition, in which the story of the past changes to suit the purposes of the present situation. Bule on the other hand, separates the past from the present. For him, it would appear that the events of the past happened according to some basic laws. These basic laws are taken as unchanging, an assumption which allows him to ignore the context. I think that both approaches are valid and complementary and do not affect the outcome of the research.

The issue of the exact names of the actors and the precise locations at which events took place is also not an important one for the type of research I was conducting. As part of their teaching, both Bule and Dabassa recount myths and give accounts about the events of the past. Despite the differences of detail in the versions

they present, the message contained in them is intrinsically the same. Variants pose problems for students engaged in research of an historical nature. For the student of anthropology, who does not study a society in a strictly historical perspective, the different versions help to create a composite picture and enriches rather than detracts from the data.

Finally, I should also mention one major problem I encountered in working with my two teachers. As part of my strategy of checking and counter-checking the expert knowledge I was being taught by my two teachers, I managed for some time, although not as long as I would have wished, to keep secret from them that I was meeting both of them at different times. This tactic was soon discovered.

It was Dabassa who first found out that I had also been meeting Bule and that Bule's teaching had not only preceded his, but that I continued to see and consult him on various aspects of the data I was gathering or rather being taught. This created a situation of rivalry between the two, especially on the part of Dabassa, who is younger than Bule and whose flamboyance makes him more prone to relationships of a conflictual nature. Dabassa began to insist that I told him what I had learnt from Bule. I was now in a dilemma. Not knowing how to find the medium between lying to him and upsetting him even further, I simply refused to discuss the matter with him. At first, he used my refusal as a bargaining point in the lessons he was giving me, but the issue infuriated him to such a degree that he began to accuse me of being an agent of the *Sidaama* and refused to talk to me anymore. This led to our separation for nine months. I had no choice but be patient and bear the consequences of my research method.

Fortunately, however, the relationship was repaired when I was able to prove to him that I had his interests at heart and was a true friend. This happened when he

was arrested in *Marsabit* in Northern Kenya for trading goods he was bringing in from the border area without a licence for a small profit. As soon as I heard about his arrest, I contacted the Catholic fathers at the Mission in *Marsabit* whom I had known for a long time and asked them to intervene on behalf of Dabassa. I promised to cover the expense that his release entailed. With the help of one of the Fathers, Dabassa was freed and even given the money with which to travel back to Nairobi. When the Father told him that it was I who had been behind his release, Dabassa returned from *Marsabit* with the realisation that I was indeed a true friend. Our normal relationship was thus resumed, and an unspoken compromise was reached over my dual loyalties and the lesson continued. Unlike the formal teacher/student, intellectual father/son relationship⁴ that developed between myself and Bule, the rather more playful relationship I have had with Dabassa has been a more tempestuous one. My social obligations to both these teachers has also laid great economic strain to my student purse.

Dabassa is now in his middle forties, has married and is the father of two beautiful children. He lives in a suburb of Nairobi, where he has founded a ritual centre around a *dambii* tree which has historical significance in the Booran oral tradition. Here he holds ceremonies to which many Booran living in and around Nairobi go and perform peace rituals and pray to their own traditional God.

Like Bule, Dabassa has no reliable source of income and both are reduced to a life of desperation and poverty. It is unfortunate that such masters of the oral traditions of the Oromo should have to suffer in this abject and degrading way, cut off from their cultural roots and whose gift of teaching must so needlessly be wasted.

Now that I have made a brief description of what oral tradition in general and that of the Oromo in particular is and I have introduced my teachers and informants, I

can begin the study of the Oromo concept of *ayaana* by making few remarks on the literature review presented under **Appendix A**.

Chapter III
REMARKS ON LITERATURE
ON THE OROMO CONCEPT OF AYAANA

There has been no independent study of this important philosophico-religious Oromo concept of *ayaana* as it was perceived by the Oromo people themselves before the advent of missionary contact and as it is still remembered by the guardians of the oral traditions today. The subject has, however, received passing reference by a number of writers. In the literature review, extracts from each one of the writers who have touched upon the subject is presented under **Appendix A**. The review covers the years 1844 to 1989, and is given in chronological order. I have tried to be as exhaustive as possible and cover as many as possible of the known sources. Translations given are those provided by (L. Bartels & Megerssa .G 1985)

In this literature review we see *ayaanaa* being given a rather confusing set of meanings. For Tutschek (1844,) *ayaanaa* is a kind of priest, who interprets dreams. For D'Abbadie (1979) it is angels. Viterbo (1892) takes it to be a nightmare. Salviac (1905) says it is good spirit. Cerulli's (1922) view is interesting in that he links it to the notion of time. He mentions the fact that the *Shoan* Oromo tribes have their *ayaantu*, time experts, who know these special kind of spirits. Legesse (1973), although he recognizes this meaning of *ayaantu*, still refers to *ayaana* in the context of the possession cult known by the same name. As has already been indicated, this phenomenon is a later development in the history of this concept, and is not original to Oromo thought. It is, however, the view which predominates in the work of most of the ethnographers reviewed.

Although Haberland (1963) attempts, in a limited fashion, to trace the linguistic and historic roots of the word, his reconstruction is carried out within a diffusionist framework. This influences his conclusion that the concept is borrowed from the Arabic culture.

From a purely academic point of view, the work of the Swedish anthropologist, Karl Eric Knutsson (1967) is perhaps the most instructive. He was the first to see the presence of some form of *ayaana* at every level of the *Macha* Oromo society. He also has a clear view of the relationship between *Waaqa* and *ayaana*. The limitation to Knutsson's understanding of the concept stems, however, both from the specialized nature of his research and his reluctance to differentiate between what is Oromo and what has been borrowed from other invading world views, namely Christianity and Islam.

Comparable with Knutsson's work is that of I. M. Lewis (1966). The latter clearly shows how the structure of the social organization corresponds to the people's view of *ayaana*. The same could be said of J. Hinnant (1970), who discusses the Guji view regarding this concept. The difference between Hinnant and Lewis is one of clarity rather than one of meaning. Baxter (1984) agrees with Knutsson and Bartels when he uses *ayaana* in the religious sense of particularization of *Waaqa*'s creative power in any creature.

Generally speaking, however, none of the many writers on the subject of *ayaana* has succeeded in tracing the significance to its root meaning (atleast as the evidence from my findings indicate). As Knutsson aptly describes the problem, *ayaana* belongs to a category of concepts whose common or basic meaning is specialised in various contexts. Depending on the context of study and the theoretical position adopted by the researcher, therefore, a number of meanings have been

emphasized at the expense of the totality of the phenomenon, the conceptual basis of which has never been described. Knutsson distinguishes five different meanings. Although he is right in his observation that the meaning of *ayaana* changes with the context, he is wrong in limiting the contexts to five.

For the Oromo the concept of *ayaana* is a very complex one. As this thesis hopes to demonstrate, it constitutes one of the major organising principles of the Oromo cosmology. It is, in fact, primarily a device for putting order to time. The same principle that orders time is extended to the whole of creation.

As regards this implication of *ayaana* for the Oromo world view, *ayaana* fills the gap by remaining something of the creator, while at the same time becoming that which is created. This helps to overcome the logical contradiction Persons like Dibaabaa could not help committing. In this sense, *ayaana* also becomes that which differentiates all created things, while at the same time uniting them. In short, *ayaana* is a system of classification.

The major premise of the thesis will therefore be that it is such systems of classification that give rise to cosmology.

Cosmology is a social construct. Every society has a cosmology based on the particularities of people's experience. Cosmology is a view of the world and of a society's place in this world. Such a view of the world gives coherence to its members' experience of that world. It is from such a coherent point of view that order and meanings are derived. Members of every society must begin by defining chaos and then placing order within it in the form of cosmos set within space and time. Order refers to the perceived natural order of things in the universe as well as to the patterning of social relationships. The difference between the natural order of

things and the patterning of social relationships is perhaps one of the areas of controversy in social science in general and in anthropology in particular. In this respect, *ayaana* will be seen as a kind of prime mover through which the Creator is seen to be creating order.

The notion of order also is another problem area in anthropology, as it is in all social sciences. Order has a content that is believed to vary from one society to another. In Oromo, one of the many names given to the Creator is that of *Fedha-bulo* which means "He who does not live according to order". This means that the Creator is beyond and above the order He creates in the universe, as the *Qaalluu* is beyond and above it in Oromo society. The act creates human beings and the rest of existence. In most cosmologies, the means used in this creation are usually given in the form of myth.

Myths help to place in time happenings that are otherwise outside time. Unlike other religions, such as Islam for instance, which explain at length why human beings can no longer understand the act of creation, Oromo religion provides an explanation of how things come into being. This is closely linked to the concept of *ayaana*.

I have studied the Oromo concept of *ayaana*, not only because it is the most misunderstood, but also because understanding Oromo culture requires the understanding of this concept. In Oromo religion and philosophy the concept of *ayaana* forms the basic reality. It is in the light of this reality that everything assumes meaning. Faced with the concrete reality of existence and the contradictions, Oromo seem to have been compelled to look for a creator, who not only creates, but also holds the opposing forces in balance, and represents permanence behind the flux of existence. In the Oromo view all things that are

created were made possible through *ayaana*. *Ayaana* is the organizing principle, that which gives the form to anything and everything. Thus in Oromo the primordial category is the division into the creator that is permanent and the universe it creates which is in a constant flux. The former Oromos designates as *isa* (he) and the later as *issi* (she). The metaphor father and mother are commonly employed to refer to heaven and earth respectively. Through *ayaana* which originates in the creator (the father) the mother (earth) outpours beings that are cross-bred between heaven and earth. This is made possible through *ayaana*, the organizing principle without which matter would have been nothing more than scattered mass.

Perhaps for practical reasons we could refer to the creator as the universe of thought and the other as the universe of nature. Then we can assume *ayaana* to be the knowledge of the laws of thought that is at the same time the knowledge of the nature of reality. This is the closest we can come in defining *ayaana*. The greatest problem involved in the nature of Oromo thinking is the fact that it denies any distinction between thought and things. From this standpoint one is tempted to conclude that *ayaana* is the mechanism by which the creator propels itself into becoming its own opposite, and dwells in that which it creates. This is then transposed to explain the basic principles that embed themselves in the diverse Oromo institutions, since there is no distinction between the laws of thought, the laws of nature, history and society. This perhaps was what made it difficult for the writers, as it is clear from the literature review to grasp what *ayaana* exactly meant within the framework of Oromo world view.

AYAANA THE OROMO VIEWPOINT

Ayaana and the traditional Oromo view of creation and time

The traditional Oromo believed in a monotheistic God, creator of the world, whom they call *Waaqa Tokkicha*, meaning "the One God". The term *tokkicha* is derived from *tokko*, the Oromo word for the number one. The suffix *-icha* added to the end of the term is a definite article, hence together, the term signifies "the One". This term may be used in more than one context. When it is used with the name of the Creator, it carries the sense of "that one before which nothing existed".

This Creator is also frequently referred to as *Waaqa Gur'aacha*, usually translated as the "Black God". This qualification stands however for much more than colour. *Gur'aacha* refers rather to the idea of absolute origin: *Waaqa* as the ultimate source of all things. It is that which is in its original state, or put in the words of an educated Booran, "that which has not been interfered with" (A. Jirma, personal communication). It also carries the sense of mystery, of that which is still in the shadow, or not yet revealed.

The term *Waaqa* has often been represented by both ethnographers and historians alike, as signifying "sky" or "Sky-God". This is a surface meaning. It is true that like all other people of the world the Oromo will look upwards when referring to their Creator. They do not however confuse him with the sky. It is equally true that Oromo will use the term *Waaqa* in reference to the sky and to all that is contained in it. In this sense, *Waaqa* is used in the sense of "heaven", rather than that of the sky. These terms overlap even in the English language. It would therefore be naive to say that the term *Waaqa* signifies the sky, since no Oromo will say that *ayaana* come out of the physical sky. Moreover, the Oromo have a different word for this physical sky: *qoollo*, probably derived from the term *qola* meaning "cover". The Oromo believe

that there are seven skies above and below the earth. The sky is therefore seen as the abode of *Waaqa* rather than confused with *Waaqa* Himself. In fact, it is generally agreed that *Waaqa* is to be found beyond these seven skies.

The traditional Oromo believed that it was *Waaqa* who created heaven and earth and all that is found on and in them. The Oromo view of their Creator and of his creation differs however from other monotheistic world religions, in that *Waaqa* is at the same time one and many. These multiple aspects of the Supreme Deity are designated by the word *ayaana*.

Ayaana emanates out of this *gurr'aacha*, penetrates out of the womb of this mysterious absolute, as the morning light penetrates darkness, marking the beginning of time.

The origin of *Ayaana* and/or time

The Oromo concept of the process of creation begins with the element of water. According to Dabassa Guyyo "in the beginning, there was nothing but water". The Creator divided the water into that of the *gubba* or "above" and into that of *gooda* or "below". This *Waaqa* created in the dim light, in a light resembling that of *boru*, Dabassa Guyyo explains.

Then *Waaqa* created the sky (*qollo*) out of the upper water, separating water from sky. In the sky, *Waaqa* placed *bakkalca*, the morning star. *Waaqa* then brought forth dry land out of the water below. This was followed by the rising sun. Before this time, the sun did not exist. With this first rising sun, appeared the first *ayaana*. This, according to Dabassa Guyyo is *ayaana* referred to as *addulaa dura*

meaning the "first *addulaa*". He derives the word from that of the sun, *addu*. The term *addu* is itself viewed as related to *addii*, meaning "white" and describes the sunlight. Once the sun was set in motion, its movement created day and night. Then using *bakkalcha*, the morning star, *Waaqa* created all the numerous stars of heaven, the animals and plants of the dry land and all the creatures that float in the air and those that swim in water.

There is no agreement among my teachers as to what exactly *Waaqa* created and on which day *ayaana*. Bule Guyo takes the animal and other symbolisms attached to the 27 *ayaana* literally and sees them as representing the order of creation. Addi Diida, on the other hand, disagrees with this view and feels that it is impossible to know this order. For him, the meanings attached to the 27 *ayaana* are merely a form of child's play. For Dabassa Guyyo, on the other hand, it is not the origins attached to each of the 27 *ayaana* which are important, but rather their structure. The *ayyaana* appear in three different sets: as single, as dual, and finally as triple *ayaana*.

Thus according to Dabassa Guyyo, all the single *ayyaana* represent the days on which *Waaqa* created that which is in heaven. On the days of the dual *ayaana* were created that which we find on earth. And finally, on the days of the triple *ayaana*, *Waaqa* created that which are in between, creatures of the air and of the water. Below this will be discussed at length.

The view of Bule Guyyo is that of the majority of the Oromo. For Dabassa Guyyo, the structure of the *ayaana* is one designed to train the young or prospective *ayaantu* (time reckoner). In his view, the primary function of the symbols is to facilitate memorisation; they are a mnemonic device. However, he also admits that the meanings attached to the different *ayaana* also explain their temporal aspects, such that they predict the character and destiny of a person, a people, or thing which

comes into existence on that particular *ayaana*, day determining and giving a beginning to the chain of events that follow.

Definition and meaning

The literature review clearly shows how different writers grasped different aspects of the term *ayaana*, focussing for the most part on the peripheral meanings of the term. Those writers who did touch upon the core meaning of the word contributed very little to elaborate this primary meaning of the concept however.

The word *ayaana* refers first and foremost to the Oromo concept of time and to the unfolding passage of time and history. As A. Jirma (personal communication) expresses it, "to us Booran, the first idea that comes to mind when we think of the term *ayaana* is the idea of time. It could mean any one day, whether in the week (*torbaan*) or in a month (*jiaa*) or a year (*ganna*)". Jirma further explained that *ayaana* derives its meaning from the stars, the moon and the sun as they relate to each other in their respective movements. In his opinion, the *ayaana* of a day could only be understood in relation to these movements beyond which it had no existence or meaning.

Naturally these relations are only significant in so far as they affect human beings. The first and basic way in which these relations affect every individual is that every person in the world has come into existence at a particular point in time. This is socially defined in terms of its temporal relations the time of birth in relation to the subdivision of the one day (*ayaana*); the day of birth in relation to the lunar, solar and stellar month *ayaana*; the month of birth in relation to the one year or twelve month *ayaana*; the year of birth in relation to the eight year *ayaana* of a *Gadaa* period; the *Gadaa* period of birth in relation to the forty year *Gadaa* cycle or

generation consisting of five successive patriline; the generation of birth in relation to the nine cycles of forty years, a return known as *sagli*; and with this *sagli*, the closure of the entire cycle, known as *jaatama*. The term *jaatama* is the Oromo word for the number sixty, but when it is used technically by time reckoning experts, it refers to the end of a process, at all of these temporal levels, by which a qualitative change is marked. In the expression *gadaan hin jaatame*, for example, the verbal form describes the end of the cycle of the *Gadaa*. Similarly, all temporal processes from the most particular to the most general are thought of coming to an end at a particular point in time.

It is this tendency to see all things as coming into being in time, and continuing to exist within it, in their relation to all the other things which have preceded them and are governed by the same law, and the belief that according to an inherent principle of this law, all things must come inevitably to an end, at different levels and to different degrees, which is at the centre of the Oromo concept of *ayaana*.

The concept is therefore a religious and philosophical construct by which the Oromo culture attempts to explain the origin of all things, to classify them into categories based on their temporal relationships and trace their development towards an inevitable end.

In order to understand these different temporal levels, let us now consider each one of them in greater detail and study how they structure the Oromo world view.

The patterns of behaviour of the twenty-seven ayaana

Before discussing the knowledge of the experts on the subject of the *ayaana*, it would be appropriate to relate what is common knowledge concerning the concept of *ayaana*.

Every Oromo knows that the term *ayaana* refers to any one day between two new moons and/or to the set of the 27 *ayaana*, the named days of the month. The average person in the traditional society also knew that to each of these names corresponded a type or character which was derived from the position of a star or a constellation of stars in conjunction with the moon and other heavenly bodies. Let us now examine each of these *ayaana* as they are characterised and understood by the people. The order of the *ayaana* followed in this part does not have anything to do with the order that is followed by an *ayaantu*. The ordinary person will begin the cycle of days by starting the count with the date on which he is relating to the list. Thus Dabassa Guyyo, who is not an *ayaantu* himself, began his description with *ayaana* of *lummassa*, because it was on this day that we discussed this cycle.

Lummassa

The term *lummassa* is derived from the noun *lumme*. *Lumme* refers to the part of the body found between the head and the upper half of the chest of the animal, especially of the lion. *Lummassa* is therefore a characterisation of this heavily built part of the lion's body. The strength of the lion is viewed as dwelling in the *lumme* region.

The *ayaana* referred to as *lummassa* therefore has to do with the strength of the lion. This strength is primarily seen as contained in the origin of the lion not as an animal but as a creature that came into existence on a certain day (*ayaana*). This day refers in turn to a particular day in the cycle of the moon, when the heavenly bodies are in a specific relationship to one another, especially at the *boru* time of day, which marks the coming into being of every *ayaana*.

Although this *ayaana* is represented by the lion and is also viewed as constituting the *ayaana* of all lions as a group, other creatures, especially human beings, can acquire the quality contained in this *ayaana* through birth. In other words, a man born on this day *ayaana* is viewed as sharing the same essence as the lion.

People born on this day are believed to have a good life as long as they are physically fit. In their old age, this strength declines. This diminishing power seems to be inherent in the nature of the *ayaana* itself.

Giddaada

The etymology of the term *giddaada* is not known. It is believed, however, that this *ayaana* is connected to a state of disorder. It is associated with chaos and confusion, in short, to the total breakdown of the social order. Dabassa explains it as the *ayaana* on which the young do not obey the elderly. In this sense, it refers to the authority of the elders. With this *ayaana*, distance and respect among people disappears. There can be no *c'eeraa fokko*, to put it in the words of Dabassa Guyyo. Thus there is a general tendency to see a person born on this *ayaana* to be characterised by lawlessness. To reverse this trend, a ritual can be performed on the day of the birth of the child.

Ruuda

The term *ruuda* is said to be a variation of the term *ruufa*. It is not uncommon in the Oromo language to give names with the same sound a different

ending, and to associate them conceptually. The term *ruufa* refers primarily to the envelope that encloses the child in the mother's womb. The same term is also employed to refer to the ceremonial head dress of married men, associated with the *Qaalluu*. *Ruufa* is a symbol of peace, whether in its sense of enclosing the child in the womb, or the head of a married man on ceremonial occasions. Thus, according to Dabassa Guyyo, the term for the *ayaana ruuda* is derived from the term *ruufa*. It is linked with *ruufa* in essence and meaning. It therefore stands for peace. The *ayaana* is often associated with sheep. In Oromo, it is through the sacrifice of sheep in rituals that peace is made. The following evening prayer illustrates the meaning of *ruufa*:

Nagaan nu olchite

In peace you made us pass the day

Nagaan nu bulchi Waaqa,

Make us pass the night in peace Waaqa

Allaa mana nu tikssi

Watch over our inside and our outside

Kotte hamttu nurraa qabii

Keep away the evil foot from us

Kop'p'e hamtu nurraa qabii

Divert evil shoes from reaching us

Ruufa kettin nu mari

Enclose us with your turban of peace (*Ruufa*)

It is evident from this prayer that *Waaqa* is also viewed as being enturbaned, but unlike the human head dress, that of *Waaqa* is peace itself. With *Waaqa*, peace is objectified.

The *ayaana* is therefore an absolutely positive one, whether for those born on it, or those married on it. Whether in birth or marriage, the activity which begins on this day seems to acquire the potentiality of peacefulness.

Arreri

The term *arreri* is derived from *arrera*, an Oromo term for the mixture of milk and water. Milk and water are used to wetten hair when it is being shaved, especially on ceremonial occasions. *Arreri* is one of the *ayaana* which occurs in pairs. The *ayaana* is generally characterised by milk cows and/or cattle as a whole. A person born on one of these days is endowed with the quality of being a good husbandman, and through whose care cattle will naturally multiply. While both *arreri* refer to cattle, the second *arreri* is associated with the *ayaana* or day of the hair shaving ceremony which forms part of the rites of passage performed at different stages of the life cycle.

In short, therefore, *arreri* is connected with the production and reproduction of cattle and the qualities associated with this activity.

Addulaa

Addula, like *arreri*, is a paired *ayaana*. According to all my teachers, *addula* is the first *ayaana* and is associated with the origin of the sun. The term *addulaa* is said to have been derived from *addu*, meaning "sun".

The word also designates dignitaries in the highest position of authority in the traditional Oromo politico-religious system of government or *Gadaa*. There are six *addula* officials at any one time. These six *addula* are divided into two groups, the *addula fiite* and the *addula garbbaa*, designating the senior and junior in rank respectively. The two types of *addula* wield the highest judicial authority in the land.

It is in this sense that the *ayaana* of *addula* should be understood. The *ayaana* stands for such high authority. This does not mean, however, that those who do not hold this position cannot acquire this quality. A person born on this day may acquire it; but he may not necessarily hold the office. It signifies the potential leadership quality of a person, his ability to rise to such a position, rather than actual incumbency. This gift may or may not be realised. *Gadaa* authorities are therefore elected on these two days.

Garba

The term *garba* refers to a body of stagnant water. As a group *ayaana*, *garba* is said to be the *ayaana* of the left half of the social body or moiety. Among the Booran Oromo, for instance, the *ayaana* is associated with the collective *ayaana* of the *Goona* moiety. Group *ayaana* are usually associated with leadership, and so this *ayaana*, which occurs in a set of three, refers to the *Qaalluu* of the *Oditu*, who is celebrated by all the *Goona* moiety. *Goona* communal prayers are held on these three *ayaana*.

Bitaa

The term *bitaa* means "left". The *ayaana* is one which occurs in pairs. Dabassa Guyyo qualifies the *ayaana* as being characterised as 'hot', and refers to that which is hard, solid, sharp-edged or impenetrable. Dabassa compares it to glowing iron. All these descriptions are an attempt to capture the powerful nature of this *ayaana*. According to Dabassa, only God is more powerful than this *ayaana*.

The two *ayaana* of *bitaa* constitute the group *ayaana* of the right hand side of the social body, that of the *Sabbo* moiety in the case of the Booran. It is on these two days that the *Sabbo* celebrate and hold communal prayer.

Sorssa

According to Dabassa Guyyo, the term *sorsaa* refers to a very bright star. For him, it is another of the *bakkalca*, of which, apart from the morning and evening stars, there are several in the sky. *Sorssa* is visible in the sky from evening to morning, and is also known as *ejjaa-bule*, "standing all night". The star is also said to be visible all year round, although it appears at different times during each season. According to Dabassa, the *ayaana* represents the collective *ayaana* of all stars, such that a person born on this day will be endowed with the power of deciphering the mysteries of the stars. This may perhaps refer to the art of the *ayaantu*.

Alggajima

The etymology of the term *alggajima* is not known. All my teachers and informants however agree that *alggajima*, like *sorssa*, refers to one of the bright heavenly stars. According to Legesse (1973:181), it designates Bellatrix. It is one of the single *ayaana*.

There is no common accord on the meaning of this *ayaana*. For Dabassa, it is the *ayaana* of stones. Another informant thinks it designates that which is barren. Yet another thinks it qualifies old age. Bule Guyyo tells a story about how all three, the rock or stone, the barren and the very old quarreled over this *ayaana* and the sun had set before their dispute was resolved in favour of any one of them.

Whatever the case, it is clear that all these qualifications have one trait in common, that of infertility.

Arba

The term *arba* designates the elephant. Whether it refers to the animal or to the quality of the day, it connotes physical enormity.

According to Jimmale Dima, a woman given in marriage on this day, will frequently desert her household, will return when asked to, but will run away again. The husband of such a woman therefore has to demonstrate great patience. This restlessness is associated with the wild nature of the animal. These characteristics are found associated in an Oromo tale about a woman who ran away from her husband and became an elephant.

Walla

The etymology of the term *walla* is also not known. *Walla* is believed to be the collective *ayaana* of the *Qaalluu*. However, each *Qaalluu* also have their own personal *ayaana* known as *gaara*. *Walla* perhaps refers to the *ayaana* of the first *Qaalluu*. The *ayaana* figures in the following ceremonial song sung by the Booran Oromo:

Ayaani ke walla
Walla is your ayyaana

Naqaan ke salbaani
Your offerings are brought on Salbaan.

Walla therefore seems to be a quality of holiness associated with the *Qaalluu*.

Bassa

Bassa is one of the *ayaana* which occurs in pairs. *Bassa*, according to Dabassa Guyyo, refers to sympathy or soft heartedness. It concerns the sympathy shown by someone born on this day to the ill and the hungry, the weak and the dying. As a group *ayaana*, it is associated with women, as women demonstrate more such qualities than men.

Chaaraa

Dabassa Guyyo thinks that *chaaraa* comes from *challalaqa* or *chulki*. He associates it with a reflective body which emanates light in the dark. The *ayaana* is linked to the origin of the moon. It is also believed that since its origin, the new moon has never occurred on this *ayaana*. According to both Dabassa Guyyo and Adii Diida, when the new moon occurs again on this day, it will mark the end of the world. It would be interesting to chart the movement of the moon over an extended period of time to determine the possibility of such a conjunction of events.

It is due to this eschatological point of view that *chaaraa* is associated with war and is called *ayaana waraanaa*. According to Jimmale Diima, a child born on this day will be helpless, as every child born during wartime would be. To reverse the nature of the child, a ritual is performed in which the child is made to scratch the mother's breast with a sharp instrument. By doing this, the child should draw blood, if he is to be successful in battle in later life.

The day is thus linked with the origin and the end of (lunar) time.

Maganetti jaarraa

Besides being the names of two days in the cycle of twenty-seven *ayaana*, *Maganetti* also designates a ritual ceremony. The ceremony involves the making of special milk containers from the underground roots of special plants. Through the ceremony, different families are brought together. The ceremony is performed on the second *maganetti*, while the first is a day of preparation for the ritual. The ritual is one for the *gadamojji* elders. These are *Gadaa* elders who have undergone their economic, social and politico-religious obligations and pass into a stage of complete retirement. In fact, the terms *gada* and *mojji* literally mean those who "no longer

know the *Gadaa*", or for whom *Gadaa* as time is no longer significant. During the ritual, this end is symbolically performed through the hair-shaving ceremony. In Oromo, the complete shaving of hair is indicative of loss of personality. The elders thus shed their politico-jural duties and devote themselves to religious ones.

The two *ayaana* are thus associated with this passage of time from active to the age of retirement.

Salbaan

Salbaan belongs to the set of triple *ayaana*. The etymology of the term is uncertain. It is, however, associated with repetition. According to Jimmale Diima, if death occurs in the family on one of these *ayaana*, it will claim two other lives. This could be prevented by performing the prescribed rituals. Dabassa Guyyo associates *salbaan* with a type of rain that comes and goes and comes again. The triple *ayaana* are referred to as the *ayaana* of the *muuda* of the *Qaalluu*. Since offerings are brought in honour of the *Qaalluu* from near and far, there is a continual stream of pilgrims at the site of the *Abba Muudaa* or Father of Anointment.

Gardaaduma

The term *gardaaduma*, according to Dabassa Guyyo, is derived from the root word *gardaada* or *garmaama* as it is known in other Oromo areas. *Gardaada* or *garmaama* refer to the movements of a well-kept and well-trained horse. Traditionally, Oromo were skilled horsemen, a talent for which they are still reputed. Horses are one of the most important domestic animals kept by the Oromo and were collectively entrusted to the care of a group known as the *wara golaa*.

The Oromo attribute many fine qualities to horses. Horses are believed to be able to distinguish between their owners and the enemy when properly trained. It is

also said that horses abide by the same laws of sexuality kept by human beings, and are thought to avoid mating with their mothers and first cousins of their generation.

The *ayaana* is therefore associated with the horse. A man born on this day is said to make a good fighter. However, marriage is avoided on this day as it is thought to cause the tendency for the wife to break household utensils too frequently. This habit is said to be acquired from the *ayaana* of this day.

Sonsa

The term *sonsa* is derived from the word for "wasp". The *ayaana* is associated with the precision of the hunter. In Oromo this precision is associated with stinging. For this reason, the day is connected with the group of Oromo hunters known as *Waata*. The term *Waata* itself is made up, according to Dabassa Guyyo, of two words *waa*-, "something" and *haata*, "you shall kill", signifying together, "you shall kill something".

In other Oromo areas, such as in *Shoa*, the same *ayaana* is associated with the snake, expressing essentially the same idea of a deadly and poisonous bite or sting.

The *ayaana* is thus considered negative both for birth and marriage. In the former case, there are preventative rituals to reverse the effects; marriage is generally avoided, as the *ayaana* involves death.

Rubrumma

The etymology of the term *rubrumma* is uncertain. Dabassa Guyyo thinks that it refers to the size and shape of the hyaena and to be associated with the nature of this animal.

In Oromo, unlike in other cultures, the hyaena has both negative and positive connotations, and it is the latter that dominate in the nature of this day *ayaana*. The day is believed to be one of the best of all the *ayaana*. This is because the hyaena is thought to live the better part of its life at night. Since night is a metaphor for old age, anyone born on this day is said to live well and be well favoured in the latter part of his life, acquiring health, wealth and strength at this time. In contrast, his early age is one of difficulty. In this sense, the *ayaana* is opposed to that of the lion or *lummassa*, whose physical strength is said to diminish as it grows old, but to be at its height in the morning, or metaphorically, at the beginning of its life.

Perhaps what is most important and interesting to note in these patterns of behaviour and characterisation of the *ayaana* is the fact that these patterns relate to the traditional view of creation as briefly outlined above.

As Dabassa Guyyo explained, in the beginning there was nothing but water. This water is said to have been divided into the waters of the above and those of the below. Water is thus viewed as the primordial substance. Water is the one thing that is created outside of time and *ayaana*. It precedes *ayaana*, being created in the "dim light" or twilight of time. It is out of this water that *Waaqa* created all the other things, known and unknown to the Oromo. It is in this sense that the Oromo claim that all creatures came out of water, "*ummen walaabu baate*". *Walaabu* here stands for water as the primordial substance, as water par excellence. It does not refer to a specific body of water. It should therefore not be accepted too literally, as marking the mythological origin of the Oromo, as a number of writers on the Oromo have tended to do. The origin of *ayaana* is linked to that of the sun, which effectively sets in motion the process of time and creation. through which all things come to life.

To return to the discussion on the relationship between the process of creation and the patterning of the *ayaana*, it will be remembered that for Dabassa Guyyo the *ayaana* appear in three different sets, as single, dual and triple *ayaana*. According to him, therefore, all the single *ayaana* represent the days on which *Waaqa* created that which ^{are in} heaven. On the days of the dual *ayaana*, He created that which ^{are} found on earth. And finally, on the days of the triple *ayaana*, He created that which is in between, the creatures of the air and of the water, collectively termed *waan koolaa*, "winged things".

In reflecting on Dabassa Guyyos's characterisation of the *ayaana*, there would appear to be a link between the single *ayaana* and heavenly qualities. *Lummassa*, for instance, is associated with strength (*irre*). Strength is an attribute connected with Heaven, as opposed to weakness, connected with Earth. *Giddaada* is associated with earthly disorder, as opposed to Heavenly order. *Ruuda* stands for Heavenly peace, as opposed to Earthly lack of peace, where men pray for it to be accorded to them. *Sorssa*, *algaajimma*, *arba*, *walla* and *chara* are all represented by stars, to be found in the Heavenly sphere. *Walla*, moreover, apart from its connection with a star, is the *ayaana* of the *Qaalluu*, mediator between men and God, who is believed to have originated in Heaven. Similarly, *chara* is the *ayaana* of the moon, a Heavenly phenomenon.

The remaining single *ayaana*, *gardaaduma*, *sonsa* and *rubruma*, may be more difficult to explain from this point of view. However, even here, it can be seen that the single *ayaana* can still be linked to Heavenly qualities. *Gardaaduma* is the *ayaana* of the horse. In Oromo, the horse is believed to communicate with Heaven and to be a recipient of knowledge not ordinarily known by human beings. *Sonssa*, the *ayaana* of the wasp possesses the Heavenly power to cause death through the act of stinging. *Rubruma*, the *ayaana* of the hyaena, reverses the normal order of

things, by defying the process of ageing and living well in the latter part of its life, contrary to the 'natural' law. It can therefore also be seen as possessing a supernatural quality, not shared with other Earthly creatures.

In short, therefore, the single *ayaana* would appear to represent strength, order, peace, knowledge and other positive qualities which the Oromo believe originate in heaven. Such attributes are absolute in nature, as opposed to the qualities associated with the dual, or *ayaana* connected with the Earthly sphere. The triple *ayaana*, which fall in between these two spheres, stand for the ambiguous nature of things. They are therefore subject to food taboos in the Oromo culture (*cf.* Megerssa 1990).

With this brief overview of the patterns of behaviour associated with the *ayaana*, which is generally laymen's knowledge, let us now turn to the more complicated and complex knowledge of the experts. But before we could do that it is necessary to introduce the role played by numbers in the Oromo thought and culture.

Chapter V

THE ROLE OF NUMBER IN OROMO THOUGHT AND CULTURE

Counting is the primary function of number in Oromo culture. The term for number is *lakkobssa*, derived from the verb *lakkaaawu* "to count".

According to Dabassa Guyyo, there are only nine "true" counting numbers (*lakkobssa dhugga*) in Oromo. These are the digital numerals one to nine. All the other numbers are said to be a reproduction of this fundamental series that can be repeated to infinity. In Oromo, this repetition is called *mara*, "round" or "return". According to Dabassa, the impulsion which causes the first set of true numbers to "go around" and initiate another series of a higher order is produced by what is called *saglli*. This is a difficult concept to define as already indicated. It is derived from the word designating the number "nine", *sagal*, but cannot be reduced to this number. Given its function in the system of counting, and its significance in other areas of the culture, it is tempting to see it as representing the zero concept.

Dabassa distinguishes five levels at which numbers are transposed: the first level consists of the numbers from one to nine; the second includes the numbers ten to 100; the third comprises of the numbers from 100 to 1,000; the fourth ranges from 1,000 to a million; finally the fifth stretches from one million to the infinite (*dukkana*, literally "darkness"). Dabassa has a complicated method of explaining the manner in which the set of nine figures repeats itself at different levels of enumeration, the details of which are given in the interview conducted on this subject.

Apart from their enumerative role, numbers play an important role in articulating certain key concepts and structural principles in the Oromo system of knowledge. They thus have symbolic significance in the culture. The true counting

numbers in particular are used to signify categories of things and actions. The meaning of these numbers in Booran Oromo will now be examined.

Tokko, the number one

The etymology of the word for the number one, *tokko*, is uncertain. This is generally true of all the numbers. One refers to the indivisibility in the absolute sense of the term. There is no good and bad, left and right, or up and down in the number one. It is seen in absolute unity with itself. The Oromo word for "unity" *tokkummaa*, is derived from it and stands for unity at different levels of the society. When the term is emphasised by adding the affix *-icha*, it refers to a unity of a special order. It is in this sense that the Oromo refer to God as *Waaqa Tokkicha*, "the One God".

Lama, the number two

As a symbol, the number two, *lama* stands for the primary division of everything into two halves, whether in nature or in culture. In Booran, which has retained the original features of the Oromo language, male and female gender is attributed to almost everything in the universe. Only substances such as water or milk, considered indivisible, have a neutral plural form, beyond gender distinction. The division of the Oromo into *Boro-anna* and *Barri-anttu* and the replication of this principle of duality at different levels of social classification such as the division into moieties is another example of this numerical pattern. In the Oromo system of thought, these dualities are not polarities, but rather complementary opposites. The difference between dualities as complementarities and those opposed is a subject of research, linked to the Oromo view of the different thought worlds as taking place (i) in the abdominal cavity (ii) in the heart (iii) in the head and (iv) in the body as a whole. For the Oromo, the complementarity is exemplified by the figure of the human body, which is

divided along the vertical axis of the trunk into balanced opposites: two legs, two arms, two hands, two eyes, and two ears.

***Sadii*, the number three**

The number three, *sadii*, stands for both unity and diversity in Oromo thought. It is an important numerical concept upon which the *Gadaa* system itself is constructed. It symbolizes some sort of mediated conflict through which the conflicting parties enter into alliance. This can be seen in case of the *Digallu/Mat't'aarri* clan conflict in *Booran* and that of the *Aawu/Alakuu* clans in *Macha*, where a third clan, *Hawattu* in the case of the *Booran*, and *Gallaan* in the case of the *Macha*, is interposed to resolve the opposition. This relationship is symbolically represented in Oromo material culture by the three hearth stones or *sunsuma*. The largest of the stones which is buried half way into the ground represents the fixed point around which the other two stones are moved in relation to the container that is placed on them. The permanence of the large hearth-stone thus mediates or determines the movement of the two other stones. At a further level of symbolism, the *sunsuma* hearth-stones are also used to designate the alliance of two families through marriage. The symbolic value of the numbers one and two can be said to be derived to a large extent from the nature of nature. In the number three, where we see polarized dualities being mediated by a third element which is different from the two others, this value is socially or mentally constructed.

***Afur*, the number four**

The original significance of the number four probably comes from the four points of the Oromo compass. Thus it seems that the number four is associated with the conception of a visible universe. Four is also two in a certain way, since it is the

addition of two plus two. It has already been shown that two stands for the complementary duality inherent in all things by which they perpetuate themselves. Thus the number four stands for blessing from *Waaqa*. Four is also the number of teats of a cow, whose milk is an important source of food especially for children. My teachers and many other ordinary Booran frequently associate the number four with blessing.

***Shan*, the number five**

The number five is perhaps the most important number in terms of its function in the Oromo culture. The number seems to be a central one around which the Oromo world-view is constructed. There is a tendency to see both nature and culture as being structured according to the quintipal principle. The principle is believed to be of divine origin and is found to be at work everywhere in the created universe. This natural form is in turn imitated by culture.

According to Dabassa Guyyo, the cultural model is derived principally from the figure of the human body. The Oromo refer to this basic pattern by the expression *yaayaa shanan*, or the five fundamentals. The phrase is associated with the names of five founding fathers who are said to have laid down the ancestral laws. It is these laws that structure the social, economic and political life of the traditional Oromo. The symbolic value of the number five can be thought to emanate from its tendency to divide into diads and triads. This is an opposition which operates without a fixed mediator. Almost all the major categories in the Oromo system of classification follow this diadic/triadic opposition.

Ja'aa, the number six

As described above, there are four cardinal points and a fifth central point in the Oromo map of the universe. According to Dabassa Guyyo, there is also another sixth, unseen dimension to the world. He relates that when *Waaqa* created the world, He set out the four directions, then like a person preparing a cowhide, He pegged it down (*dhisu*) and kept the sky up with an invisible pillar. This divine pillar (*donggoraa Waaqaa*) is thought to pass through the centre of the world and to link heaven and earth. Like its secular counterpart, the central pole of the round Oromo house, this cosmic pillar stands for the highest moral authority. This association is also reflected in the political tradition of the Oromo. The entire political structure of the *Gadaa* system is headed by six legal councillors known as the *addulaa*. The *Gadaa* divides into two sets, that of the active (*ya'aa*) and the passive or retired (*yuuba*) elders, each of which have three divisions, those of the *Hawattu*, of the *Koonitu* and of the *Harbbora*, making a total of six.

Torba, the number seven

Like the number five, seven is a significant figure which plays an important role in structuring the Oromo patterns of thought. The difference between the two digits can be said to lie in the fact that five usually structures the universe in space, while seven structures it in time. This is illustrated in the movement of the cycle of the seven *maqabassa* over the five *gogessa* lines down to the ninth father/son generation span*. The number seven is associated with the seven features or openings of a human head. The cycle of the *Gadaa* rule also consists of seven ceremonies, the *torbaan jillaa*. There is also believed to be a conceptual link between the seven features of the human head, the seven ceremonies, and the seven stars in the constellation of *Ursa Major*. According to Dabassa Guyyo, these seven 'openings' of the northern sky are permanently visible at all seasons during all the phases of the waxing and waning of

the moon. Seven therefore appears to be a channel of communication which runs like a thread through time, linking the past and the present.

Saddeet, the number eight

The number eight is the highest even figure in the set of true counting numbers recognised by the Oromo. Eight is also four in a certain way, being a multiple of four and could therefore be seen as a two-fold blessing. According to the Oromo, there are eight major blood vessels, *hidda saddeet*, in the body, which culminate in the neck. Eight is thus a symbol of the physical life. When an animal is sacrificed, it is done by cutting through the throat, severing the knot which holds the vessels together. Similarly, a man claims his right over the woman he takes in marriage, by severing her bond with her natal lineage in the offering of the matrimonial sacrificial animal (*rakko*). Eight also represents the life-span of political power of the *Gadaa*.

The full meaning of the number eight is perhaps articulated in the Oromo theory of development. Development, termed *finna*, consists of eight independent but interlocked forms of growth that are simultaneously present at all stages of the development process. The symbolic value of the number eight can therefore be said to lie in the notion that the process of human life and endeavour resembles a spiral: the circle never closes but moves forward, straining towards the apex of perfection.

Sagal, the number nine

The significance of the number nine is perhaps one of the most difficult to articulate. As the number which brings to a close the series of the true counting numbers, it represents both the end of a process and the beginning of a new one. According to Dabassa Guyyo, counting is nothing but the 'roundings' that occur at the end of every series of nine figures. These roundings are called *mara*, or returns. As the transition

from one level of *mara* to another is made, it causes what the Oromo call *sagli*, which ensures the continuity of the process at another level. The concept of *sagli*, which refers to the motive force that causes the process of coming into being and the going out of being of all phenomena, thus shares a common feature with the number nine from which it is derived. It operates at all levels of culture and society.

Thus the present day Booran Oromo, who according to their oral traditions, claim to have been preceded by eight other ancient Oromo groups, are linked to the number nine. In this case, the name Booran does not refer to the two moieties which make up the group called Booran today. Booran designates rather the dominant social class of the Oromo of the present era. It is made up of nine divisions, the *Sabbo*, the *Goona*, the *Diggallu*, the *Karrayyu*, the *Dayyu*, and the *Baassu* with their primary subdivisions which must have been those that existed in traditional Oromo society in the past. The inter-relationship of the number nine and of the concept of *sagli* as described by both my teachers Dabassa Guyyo and Bule Guyyo is extremely difficult to grasp. The complexity lies in the fact that they appear to be inseparably connected with the workings of the *mara* cycles. Their understanding will require further research with experts in the area of time-reckoning, numerology and the movement of the mysterious *sagli*.

However, some elucidation of how these numerical values operate within the temporal framework have been given in the examination of the concept of *ayaana*.

Apart from the meanings attached to the basic or true numbers considered here, other numbers such as 12, 18, 27, 30, 40, 60, 80, 90, 360 and 1,000 also have symbolic value whose significance will become obvious in the following Chapter as I present the Oromo concept of *ayaana* as a system of classification.

From this brief description it should be clear that numbers play an important role in Oromo thought and culture. Numbers do serve as a system of counting and arithmetic. They have both practical as well as religious and philosophical use and meaning. The form numbers take in a given culture is an important element in shaping

and facilitating the world-view that arises from it. Thus with this Oromo view of numbers in mind we can now discuss *ayaana* as a system of classification.

Chapter VI

AYYAANA AS A SYSTEM OF CLASSIFICATION

THE CLASSIFICATION OF TIME

Yerro: The Oromo concept of time

Yerro, the Oromo word indicating time in the strict sense, refers to the division of the one day, *ayaana*, into segments of intervals. Such segments are marked both by the positions of the sun, the moon, the stars and/or the predominant socio-economic activities of daily life.

The Single day Ayyaana

Boru

In the Oromo view, a day or *ayaana*, refers to the period between two dawns (*boru*). *Boru* is believed to be the dividing line marking the boundary between the light part of the day from the dark part. According to both Dabassa Guyyo and Addi Diida, "*boru* appears long before the sun does. It is the first light from towards the sunrise, whilst you can still see the darkness towards the sundown. It is light coming to birth, which inherits and replaces its father and/or origin, the darkness. It is the birth of a new day. This new *ayaana* muddies the darkness of the *ayaana* of the day that preceded it. The name *boru* itself is in reference to this first light that penetrates the darkness, changes the colour of the darkness in the same way as disturbed soil muddies as it penetrates clean water".

By extension, it can be said that the sun is the mother that gives birth to light. It is also interesting to note that the sun (*addu*) carries the feminine gender in the Oromo language, whilst the light it gives birth to (*iffa*) is masculine. In this sense, the sun is taken as the mother who is the source of light.

Light or first light also connotes the idea of the first born, which in the Oromo culture is associated with the male child. In the Oromo myth of origin, *Horo*, or the ancestor of the Oromo people, known also as *Guraaca Yaayaa*, gives birth to Booran, a name also derived from the term *boru* or "first light".

In Oromo, as in many other cultures, light is symbolically associated with vision. This light is given by *Waaqa*, as every child is also given by Him. Light is also associated with hope. The first born child represents the fulfillment of hope and of continuity. The father continues to live through his son. This relationship between father and son is such a complex one, that it merits a separate study. For the moment, it suffices to note that the first male child is both a vision and a hope for the father. In fact, when the birth of the first child is celebrated in Oromo, the usual expression of congratulation offered by a person is: *baga ija kettin ijake argite*, literally meaning, "I congratulate you on the occasion of seeing your own eyes with your own eyes".

Thus far, it is clear that the word *boru*, which is the dividing line between lightness and darkness in the dawn of a new day, stands for much more than time in the western sense of the term.

Barri

According to my teachers and informants, the term *barri* refers to the period between *boru* and the physical appearance of the sun (*ba'a bifttu*). According to Bule

Guyyo, that which distinguishes *barri* from *boru*, is the fact that with *barri*, the darkness in the west disappears and the light becomes clear and loses its 'muddiness' or mixture of light and darkness. *Barri* marks the definite beginning of a new day or *ayaana*; the preceding *boru* is now part of the previous day. In practical terms, *barri* is the time of rising to greet the new day and to begin the cycle of daily activities.

Ba'a biiftu

Ba'a biiftu refers to the physical appearance of the sun. The expression is made of a compound noun constituted of *ba'a* meaning "appearance" and *biiftu*, meaning "sun". Together they simply mean "appearance of the sun". *Biiftu*, is derived from the verb *biifu*, meaning "to spray". The morning sun is thus viewed as the spraying of light. Spraying is associated with blessing in the Oromo as in many other cultures of the region.

It is also important to make a distinction here between *ba'a biiftu* meaning sunrise and *aduu*, the general name for "sun". *Aduu* simply refers to sunlight in general.

As in other East and Northeast African cultures, there is a tendency to associate the sun with the eye ball (*illa*). Thus the rising sun is termed *illa biiftu* and the setting sun *illa galcu*. This is perhaps ^{because} the sun at these times has the appearance of a ball. Among the Booran *Sabbo* and *Goona* of Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya, the two terms are also used to indicate east and west, perhaps to mark the points of sunrise and sunset on the horizon.

Ganama (Diirama)

Generally speaking, the term *ganama* simply refers to the entire period from the rising sun to the noon, when the sun is directly overhead. There is a tendency to

divide this period into two parts, where *ganama* or *diirama* refer to the first half of the morning, whilst the second half is referred to *gala-waare*, meaning "the coming in of the overhead sun".

Waare (wal-qitta guyyaa)

Waare refers to mid-day, noon, or to the overhead sun. The term is exchangeably used with the expression *wal-qitta guyyaa*, which means the dividing point in the light part of the day. This part of the day is viewed as a point at which the sun is poised as it travels across the sky. This is also the time when the strong rays of the sun cause the temperature to rise, and the heat (*saaffa*) of the sun is at its most intense. In the second part of the afternoon, which begins with the sun at its climax, this heat begins to diminish (*saaffa diqaa*) as the sun moves downwards to the horizon across the western sky.

Maaru

Maaru is the period of the day that corresponds to *boru* as discussed above. The day enters a period of transition between *guyyaa*, the light part of the day and *halkan* the night and dark part of the day. The eastern sky begins to darken, whilst the western sky still remains bright. It is in this sense that Dabassa Guyyo claims that both lightness and darkness originate in the east. With the progressive movement of the period of *maaru*, the light gradually fades and the night begins to enter at the same pace.

This is followed by *galgala*, which literally means coming home, both for animals and human beings. Although each of the divisions in the sunlight parts of the one day *ayaana* has its corresponding point the night or dark part, no significant symbolism is attached to this fact.

This discussion of the divisions of the day has shown its most general segments. The day is further subdivided according to the various pastoral or agricultural activities that take place within it. In fact, the basic difference between the light part of the day and the dark part, is that the latter has fewer divisions than the former. This is obviously due to the restricted activities of the night.

By way of concluding this description of the division of the one day *ayaana*, it can be said that this one day *ayaana* divides into ten conceptual categories. The further subdivision of each of these categories is determined by the type of economic activity engaged in by a particular group. A day or *ayaana* in Oromo is the smallest unit, not only of time reckoning, but also of the regulation of the activities of life. Although the day is perceived as cyclical, this cycle is never seen as being infinitely repeated. Rather, it is viewed as building up to form a higher cyclical level known as *torbaan*, literally meaning "the seven".

The Week (*Torbaan*)

All the different Oromo groups without exception use the word *torbaan* to refer to the seven day week system. The term *torbaan* is derived from the word *torba*, representing the number seven. The suffix *-aan* marks grammatically the definite article.

A number of writers including Haberland and Legesse have suggested that the traditional Oromo did not have a concept for the seven day week system. This claim is based on the fact that in the different Oromo groups, different words are used to refer to the week. However, these differences do not necessarily indicate that the concept did not exist. The Oromo have and continue to use the seven day *torbaan* concept. To understand how this concept functions as part of the calendrical *ayaana*

system, it is necessary to see it in relation to the other concepts contained in this system and to comprehend how it fits into the general world-view.

As has already been indicated, *ayaana* as a concept operates at different levels which form a cumulative temporal chain: the day, the week, the month, the year, the eight year *gadaa* cycle, the forty year *gadaa* period or the cycling of the five *gogessa* patriline, the *jaatama*, or the nonary return of the forty year generation, and the final return to the *yaayaa shanan*. However, what compounds the difficulty in understanding this conceptual representation is the fact that each of these levels functions simultaneously at the micro as well as the macro levels of time segmentation. Therefore, whilst *jaatama* will occur every 360 years, on the macro level of the ascending order of time, it also occurs on the micro level of a cycle of time, marking the completion of the 360 day year. The different temporal units have structural significance and meaning rather than signifying fixed phenomena. The difference between the two levels is therefore one of magnitude rather than one indicative of a difference in basic principle at work.

With this view in mind, let us now return to the examination of the concept of *torbaan*. The traditional Oromo attributed seven names to each of the units or *ayaana* which composed the week cycle. These were known as the *maqabassa torbaan*, literally, the seven name givings. These were seven consecutive names used to designate the five lines of generation classes between which power rotated every eight years. This mechanism will be discussed in detail later. For the present purpose, it is enough to note that both the seven *maqabassa* and the seven day week system operate on exactly the same principle. This is clearly evident in the *Gabra* Oromo system of computing the *torbaan*. Whilst the *Gabra* have substituted a corrupted version of Arabic names for the seven traditional Oromo names for the *maqabassa*,

they use these week-day names not only to designate the days of the week, but also to name each of the years of the *gadaa* cycle.

In short, this suggests that the concept of *maqabassa* was used in the Oromo culture to reckon cycles of seven temporal units, at the level not only of the week, but also at the level of years. The latter served as a means of recording the constituent years of the Gadaa rule in their proper order. It is important therefore to grasp how the *maqabassa* works within the general principle of the concept of *ayaana*.

Let us now see how *ayaana*, which refers not only to the one day but to the set of 27 days which make up the lunar month, functions at this level of the month.

The Month (*ji'aa*)

All Oromo use four different terms to refer to the moon, *ji'aa*. These four terms are the following: *baati*, *addessa*, *goobana* and *ji'aa*.

Although the word *baati* refers both to the physical moon and to the month, the core meaning of the term refers literally to the "birth" or appearance of the new moon. The word is derived from the verb *ba'uu*, meaning "to come out or to appear".

Similarly, the term *addessa* whilst referring to the physical moon in common daily usage, more specifically designates the moonlight.

Goobana refers to the full moon.

Ji'aa is used in a broad sense to refer to the entire process of the lunar cycle, as well as to the physical moon at different stages of its development. It differs from the other terms in that it also includes the dark period occurring between two new moons.

A parallel cycle (mara) month consists of 30 days, (*dhaha*) of which only 27 are named. Out of these 27, only 11 are independently named, the rest are grouped in pairs and triples and share the same name, and in these instances only the first day has a full identity. These names are as follows:

<u>Single Ayyaana</u>	<u>Paired Ayyaana</u>	<u>Triple Ayyaana</u>
<i>Chaaraa</i>	<i>Arreri dura</i>	<i>Salbaan dura</i>
<i>Sorssa</i>	<i>Arreri ballo</i>	<i>Salbaan ballaa</i>
<i>Arba</i>		<i>Salbaan dullacha</i>
<i>Giddaadaa</i>	<i>Addula dura</i>	
<i>Ruuda</i>	<i>Addula ballo</i>	<i>Garba dura</i>
<i>Algaajima</i>		<i>Garba balla</i>
<i>Walla</i>	<i>Bitta qaraa</i>	<i>Garba dullacha</i>
<i>Gardaaduma</i>	<i>Bitta balla</i>	
<i>Sonssa</i>		
<i>Rubruma</i>	<i>Bassa qara</i>	
<i>Lumaassaa</i>	<i>Bassa balla</i>	
	<i>Maganeti jarra</i>	
	<i>Maganeti biriti</i>	

In short, therefore, there are only 18 names for the 27 named days of the thirty day cycle. This means that nine days remain floating, with only a secondary identity of their own. These days are referred to as *sagli*. According to both Dabassa Guyyo and Addi Diidaa, it is these nine identity-less floating days which are manipulated to

adjust the calendar over the period of the 30 day solar month and 12 month solar year.

The Oromo term *sagli* is derived from *sagal*, the word for the number nine. It should be noted that *sagli*, despite its numerical derivation, does not refer to the number in the usual sense. Rather, it stands for this set of identity-less floating days, both as a group and individually. The nine days derive their meaning from this concept of *sagli*.

The notion of *sagli* emanates from the nature of the Oromo time-reckoning system. This system of time reckoning is dependent on the independent movement of the three heavenly bodies: that of the moon, of the sun and of the stars. The time reckoner or *ayaantu* uses the formally named 27 days to account for the movement of the lunar month within the 30 day cycle. There is therefore a need for the observation of the different stars or groups of stars in relation to the position and movement of the moon, in order to deal with the fractions involved and to adjust the solar and lunar time count over the whole year. The critical moments for this adjustment are the transition period around full moon between the waxing and the waning phases of the moon referred to as *addessa dumaatu*, literally "the ending of the moonlight". According to Addi Diida, the 13th, 14th and 15th days of the moon play an important role in determining on which day the next new moon will occur. Therefore, in addition to the names they bear in the 27 day naming process, these three days are also known by other names. The 13th day is called *qonchoora*, derived from the verb *qonchooru*, meaning "to shrink". On this day, a shrunken version of the full moon is expected to appear. This will be followed by the 14th day, known as *goobana*, meaning "full moon". The 15th day is referred to as *dukkan durro*, literally meaning the "first dark night".

The *ayaantu* or time reckoner can calculate on which day the next new moon will occur through his observation of these three transitional days. The fact that these three days may or may not begin to occur on the 13th day of the waxing moon of every month is problematical for the time reckoner's calculations. The three transitional days may be delayed by a day or a maximum of two days. In this case, the time reckoner needs to observe another type of transition. This is the period between the waning and the waxing moon or that between the light and dark phases of the moon. As in the case of the first transitional period, this passage also consists of three days which are identified by a specific set of names. The period is known as that of *dukkana dumatu*, "the ending of darkness". The three transitional days are once again expected to occur on the 13th, 14th and 15th days before the appearance of the new moon, the sighting of which is not included in the count. The 13th day is referred to as *diba*. The 14th day is called *luo* and the 15th day is *baati* or new moon. Although *luo*, the 14th day in the waning phase of the moon precedes the appearance of the new moon, it is *diba*, the 13th day, which marks the end of this phase. This is because there is a belief that on the day of *luo* the moon is never visible to human beings, only to domestic animals. The new moon is expected to appear on the fifteenth dark night of the waning phase. This obviously is dependent on the correct observation made during the transition from the waxing and waning moon.

In essence, therefore, the Oromo month consists of 30 days. The reason why Oromo do not name the last three days is dictated by the nature of the movement of the moon over the 12 month period. The two transitional periods therefore serve as an important cultural device for verifying the solar, lunar and stellar relationships.

Before ending this discussion on the passage of time within the month or *ji'aa*, it should be mentioned that for the Oromo there exists another overlapping type of transitional period between the end of one month and the next. This is the gap

between the 27 named *ayaana*, and the actual 30 day month within which these names rotate. These three days also bear a different set of names and are called *bollolitu*, *shanaataa* and *aggaga* and stand for the 28th, 29th and 30th days.

The year (*ganna* or *wagga*)

There are two Oromo terms which are commonly used to refer to the year. These are *wagga* and *ganna*. The etymology of the term *wagga* is uncertain; *ganna* refers to the period of the rainy season. It is not surprising that the Oromo derive their name for the year from this season, as traditionally, the end of the rains marked a new period of time. The year was composed of the following 12 months:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) <i>birraa</i> | (7) <i>chamssaa</i> |
| (2) <i>chiqaawaa</i> | (8) <i>buufaa</i> |
| (3) <i>sadaassa</i> | (9) <i>wachaba</i> |
| (4) <i>ammajji</i> | (10) <i>abraasaa</i> |
| (5) <i>gurrandala</i> | (11) <i>oborro gudda</i> |
| (6) <i>bittotessa</i> | (12) <i>oborro diqqa</i> |

The traditional Oromo year was marked by two feasts. The name of these feasts are by and large forgotten today, or have been replaced by other local names. This lapse can be attributed to the colonial dismantling of the politico-religious centre of the *Abba Muuda*. It was in fact this centre that unified the Oromo and despite the ecological diversity of their land, rendered possible their adoption of a common calendar. The necessity for accuracy in maintaining this calendar could perhaps be explained by the need for regulating this vast population.

The annual feast common to all Oromo was that known as *ayaana waggaa* or "annual *ayaana*". It marked the passage between the end of one year and the

beginning of the next , adding five extra days to the 360 day cycle (12x30) and thereby adjusting to a solar year of 365 days. It was celebrated by the lighting of a communal fire preceded by five days of ritual cleansing. This cleansing was practised by every Oromo above the age of eight years and was collectively performed. It consisted of bathing together in a flowing river every morning for five consecutive days. Ideally, the time of bathing had to coincide with the *boru* or beginning of the day. Conceptually, the beginning of a day and the beginning of a year are equivalent. This is because in both cases the same underlying principle structuring time can be seen to be at work, but at different temporal levels. The idea of the origin symbolised as a new 'birth' are made explicit in the songs sung at the new year festival, as the following two stanzas indicate:

Ayaana wagga
Ayaantu argaa
Kan dagan danqada
Kan nyaatan margaada

The ayyaana is that of the year
 Reckoned by the *Ayaantu*
 The drinks are those of the feast
 The food is porridge

Porridge is communally consumed by the Oromo on only two occasions: at the feast marking the birth of a child, at which all adult males are excluded; and at the feast of the new year, when all females are excluded.

In short, therefore, a year in the Oromo view is the period extending between two consecutive events: the lighting of the annual fire and the feast known as *ayaana wagga*. It was composed of 360 days, spread over a period of 12 months each consisting of 30 days, and of five days of ritual cleansing, making a total of 365 days.

The Oromo did not recognise leap years, as the fractions were handled in monthly strategy of time calculation.

It is true that the entire year is marked by a cycle of religious and political activity. However, it would be misleading to assert, as some writers have done (*cf. Tablino*), that the year is regulated by such activities. This is tantamount to saying that the calendar exists merely at a subconscious level.

Traditionally, the Oromo divided the year into four seasons of equal length. Each of these seasons consisted of different socio-economic activities which served as a temporal marker for the ordinary member of the society according to which he was able to situate himself in the unfolding sequence of time. The expert on the other hand, had to take into account a multiplicity of other factors. These ranged from a common sense knowledge of the patterning of time to that which involved complex mathematical calculations based on their observation of the heavenly bodies and of their relationship to one another in order to deduce where the society was situated in the passage of historical time. My own understanding of Oromo time reckoning does not extend to this esoteric aspect of specialist knowledge which takes years to acquire from the *Ayaantu*, living with them and learning over a prolonged period.

To understand the Oromo concept of time, it is important to know that the entire system is founded upon a few underlying principles that form the basis for all other temporal phenomena. These principles are generalized and their application is used to account for all aspects of time. In the Oromo system of knowledge, this is termed by the custodians of the traditional wisdom as the principle of *waan qarri qabbu, qaraarri qaba*, meaning, "that which applies to the centre also applies to the periphery". In this case, that which applies to the lower level, applies to the higher. It would be misleading, however to take this principle as a simple mathematical

formula. For the entire system is constructed on the knowledge that different numbers and their combinations lead to different patterns. These patterns are seen to pervade the entire universe, thus affecting human society both as individuals and as groups. In fact, it was the discovery of the existence of this law in the Oromo thought system which led Haberland to the conclusion that they "attach magical significance to numbers". It was in reaction to this view of Haberland that Legesse responded with the polemical statement that

"if the ethnographer fails to understand a particular system of thought, he accuses his informants of 'magical thought' or of prelogical childlike mental operations rather than admitting that his data are inadequate and his understanding limited" (Legesse 1973:180).

The context of this polemical exchange concerning the 'magical' nature of numbers is that of the Oromo concept of *ayaana*. Haberland attempted in vain to trace the linguistic and historical root of the term, concluding that it was a word borrowed from the Arabic. Employing his diffusionist model, based on the notion that non-Western societies are incapable of evolving complex structures of their own, Haberland never sought to find an explanation for these 'magical' numbers amongst the people themselves. Instead, he looked for a justification outside the society. Legesse went to great lengths to unravel the minor details of how the system functioned. What he did not consider is the ideological base upon which the system is constructed and which facilitates its functioning, founded on the principle of opposition and conflict. He cannot however be accused of not having achieving this, as it was not his major aim in describing the system. Despite his attempt, the one major reproach that can be made of his study, is the fact that having recognised that the *ayaantu* or time reckoner played a crucial role, he relegated the concept of *ayaana* to peripheral status by

associating it with the secondary phenomena, of a possession cult. And yet it is evident that the terms are derived from the same root concept of time.

To the custodians of the Oromo oral traditions, *ayaana* is a system of knowledge. It is the system according to which all things in the universe can be classified. This classification system takes as its building blocks the factors of both time and space.

Chapter VI

AYAANA AND THE OROMO VIEW OF CHRONOLOGY

THE OROMO CONCEPT OF YAAYAA SHANAAN

According to my teacher Dabassa Guyyo, everything in the universe is classified according to the laws of *yaayaa shanaan*. The term *yaayaa* is derived from the verb *yaayuu*, which means "to mark on the ground" or "to make a ground plan". The term is used, for example, to describe the act of laying the foundations for traditional circular house. It thus marks a beginning.

When constructing the Oromo house, one begins by drawing a circle, *naano*, on the ground. The house is then built according to this ground plan, which is seen as the fundament, *yayaba*, upon which the house reposes. Furthermore, according to the customary laws pertaining to the house, this traditional structure is divided into five parts, termed *shanaan*, meaning "the (set) of five". The expression *yaayaa shanaan* can thus be translated "the five fundaments".

When this idea of origin is expressed in mythical form, it refers to the first five founding fathers of the Oromo law, all of whom bear the first name *Yaayaa*. These founding fathers, who were said to lay down the laws governing the Oromo society, were *Yaayaa Gallee Anno*, *Yaayaa Gollo Gobbo*, *Yaayaa Maane Leqaa Jarso*, *Yaayaa Boru Billo*, and *Yaayaa Baabo Gallessa*.

Although the exact details and the specific role played by each one of these ancestral figures in the promulgation of the laws is not clear, according to Dabassa Guyyo, they are said to have been responsible for forging the rules governing the animal world, both domestic and wild; the place of man in society and his relationship to his fellow creatures; the domestication and watering of stock; the plant world; and

the methods of time computation. Bule Guyyo, on the other hand, disagrees with this view. Whilst agreeing in principle on the role played by these founding fathers in the establishment of the Oromo law, he disagrees on the nature and sequence of the laws attributed to each. In his opinion, the origin of the time reckoning system and of the genealogical recording of history can be attributed to *Yaayaa Boru Billo*. For him, it was *Yaayaa Gollo Gobbo* who laid down the laws regarding man's place in society and his relations to his fellow creatures. According to Bule Guyyo, these laws established the family code and explain the rules of marriage and the origin of the custom of exogamy as well as the special place of the male child, and define the relationship of the Oromo to non-Oromo. The third founding father, *Yaayaa Galle Anno*, formulated the laws regarding animals, both domestic and wild. These laws had to do with the categories of animals that could be killed and whose flesh and milk could be consumed and whose hides used and those animals whose milk, meat and hides could not be used. The fourth founding father, *Yaayaa Maane Leqqa Jarssu*, was responsible for instituting the laws regarding the *wayyu*, that of the notion of seniority (*angafriti*), whether in the family, community or society and formulated the laws of inheritance of both wives and property. The fifth *Yaayaa, Baabo Gaallessaa*, devised the laws ^{of} time reckoning, which perhaps regulates all the rest.

Although Bule Guyyo and Dabassa Guyyo disagree on the specific details of these laws and the law-makers who propounded them, they agree that it was these five founding fathers who laid the basis of the laws of the Oromo society and structured it according to the quintuple principle of the *yaayaa shanaan*.

According to Dabassa Guyyo, *Yaayaa Babbo Gallessa* founded the laws of time computation on a model derived from the human body. For Bule Guyyo, the name was not that of the one of the founding fathers, and for him the origin of this system can be attributed rather to the first *Yaayaa, Boru Billo*. Whilst the differences

between the interpretations of Bule Guyyo and that of Dabassa Guyyo are far from being fundamental ones, in the light of the discussion on boru above, and given the association of this concept with origin, one is tempted to attribute more credence in this particular case to the views of Bule Guyyo on this matter. What is important to retain here, is however the fact that according to both these oral historians, the human body serves as a basic or key metaphor for articulating the concrete workings of the natural principles.

So, according to Dabassa Guyyo, "a full human being" is one who is born according to the laws of *yaayaa shanan*. He should therefore be endowed with two legs, two arms and one head, making a total of five limbs. These limbs should be further sub-divided into two sets of five toes, two sets of five fingers and seven facial features, making up a total of 27. Both Dabassa and Bule are in accordance on the origin of the 27 day *ayaana* system. It is also fascinating to note that in enumerating these 27 physical divisions, the three private parts of the body are deliberately omitted, just as they are in computing the calendar.

The classificatory role of *ayaana* played in this context as a means of structuring time and space is clearly evident.

THE CONCEPT OF *SAGLII*

In order to understand the Oromo concept of *sagli*, it is important to have some idea of what is meant by the notions of *ba'ha*, *dha'ha* and *mara*.

As indicated earlier, *ba'ha* is derived from the verb *ba'hu* or *ba'uu*, and describes the physical appearance of the moon, the stars and of the sun. In the context of time reckoning, the term *ba'hu* or *ba'uu* is used to describe the position of

the moon to a particular star at the moment of rising. *Dha'ha* designates the pattern this conjunction creates for their interpretation by the time reckoner. The relationship will tell him in which order the stars will appear and whether the following new moon will appear earlier or later than expected and thus allow him to make adjustments in his computation. This observation will also allow him to forecast the weather, and to predict rain, after consulting the cloud formation and direction and speed of the wind, based on his experience and training as an *ayaantu*. *Mara* refers to the cycle of the physical appearances of the heavenly bodies, but also, more specifically, to the transitional periods between them, which have to be constantly checked against the 27 *ayaana*. As a tool for computing time, *mara* differs from the two other methods in that it deals with the unpredictable nature of the time process. It is this unpredictable nature of time that gives rise to the Oromo concept of *sagli*.

In the Oromo culture, the notion of *sagli* is based on the attempt to create consistency out of inconsistency. This inconsistency in the time process has to be accounted for and explained. Thus as both Dabassa Guyyo and Addi Diida explain, *sagli* consists of the differences arising between the 27 named days of the stellar cycle and the 30 (more precisely 29.5) days of the lunar cycle, observed through the *ba'ha* and reconciled through the strategy of the *da'ha*.

According to Legesse, the 27 days of the month are permuted through the 12 months of the year such that the beginning of each month recedes by approximately 2.5 days and completes the cycle of 29.5 days in one lunar year. What Legesse fails to see is that these 27 days are what the Oromo refer to as *ayaana*. These *ayaana* will be patterned in such a way that there will be nine days among the 27 that will not have an identity of their own. These nine days will assume an identity as the need arises or as the lunar cycle dictates. If it were true, as Legesse suggests, that the

problem is a mathematical one which is solved by the annual permutation, there would be no need for Oromo to see *sagli* as a phenomenon that moves through the entire time process at many different levels, manifesting itself in the eight year *Gadaa*, in the 40 year generation span and in the era of the *jaatama*.

To understand the movement of *sagli* within the eight year *Gadaa* rule, the 40 year cycle of generations, and the nonary repetition of this cycle of generations referred to as *jaatama*, it is necessary to first introduce the notion of *Gadaa*.

THE CONCEPT OF GADAA

The meaning of the term *gadaa* is no less difficult to define than that of *ayaana*. This is perhaps because, like *ayaana*, it refers to processes that are linked with varying degrees at different levels of the socio-political and religious structure of society.

The etymology of the term *gadaa* is as yet uncertain. In his attempt to try to trace the root of the word, Massaja 1867, (as referred to in M. Hassen 1990:9) suggests, it is derived from *gaadisa*, which he defines as "shelter, shade that protects from the heat of the sun". Legesse also admits that "the term *gadaa* cannot be given an univocal interpretation" and as he also shows, the term is loosely employed to refer to a number of interlinked concepts. It would be useful in trying to understand the term, to examine some of these related ideas

Gadaa as the organisation of society

The term *Gadaa* refers first of all to the two institutions in Oromo society which represent temporal and secular authority, the *Gadaa-Qaalluu* institutions. There is a tendency, in the Oromo language, to generalize terms, such that the particular is used to refer to the general in an inclusive manner. We have already seen this linguistic

tendency at work in the examination of the one day *ayaana*, where *guyya*, which refers specifically to the sunlight part of the day, is used to designate the entire twenty-four hour period in daily usage. The use of the term *gadaa* seems to follow the same pattern. Thus, whilst the *Gadaa* or secular authority structure is inseparable from the *Qaalluu* or temporal authority structure, the term *Gadaa* is generally used to encompass both aspects.

Gadaa as generation set

The dual *Gadaa* and *Qaalluu* institutions are composed of five generation sets and are known, both individually and as a group, by the term *gadaa*.

Gadaa as an eight-year time period

The core meaning of the term *gadaa* lies perhaps in its significance as an eight year time period. Just as the one day *ayaana* constitutes the basic unit for the reckoning of time within the one year, so the eight year *gadaa* period represents the basic unit in reckoning the chronology of the unfolding of history. The fact that a similar principle, used to reckon the passage of time within the year, is employed to record the chronology of events in history, confirms the idea that the concept of *gadaa* is an extension of that of *ayaana* at a different level. The recognition of this operative principle justifies the assertion that the core meaning of *gadaa* lies in its designation as an eight year period. In this sense, the meanings of *gadaa* as an eight year period and of *gadaa* as a generation set are directly connected. Since each of the generation sets will exercise power for a period of eight years, the total 40 year period of power is also referred to as *gadaa*.

Gadaa as a 40-year Gadaa period

Gadaa, or the Oromo system of government, was a system in which power rotated from one generation class to another every eight years. In this system of government, a generation class was elected into office every eight years. *Gadaa* also referred to this office. The office and term of office were therefore semantically inseparable.

Based on these multiple layers of meaning, *gadaa* could be defined as the organisation of the society into five generation sets, which succeeded each other every eight years in assuming political office, and by which the society kept a chronological record of the historical events marking each of these successions.

Now that we have a basic idea of the meaning of *gadaa*, let us now consider the concept of *sagli* in its relationship to the movement of the *gadaa* process.

SAGLI AND THE MOVEMENT OF THE GADAA PROCESS

As was pointed out earlier, the concept of *sagli* arises from the inconsistency of the solar relations as perceived by the Oromo. One of the basic functions of culture is to create consistency out of these inconsistencies. This is evident in the strategy employed in handling irregularities in the Oromo calendar. This problem does not however remain only at the level of the reckoning of one year. It also appears at other levels of the social construction of reality. This is especially true of the processes of the *Gadaa* at their different levels of temporal conception.

Gadaa as defined earlier is the organisation of the society into five generation sets which succeed one another every eight years in assuming political office. The *Gadaa* process is made up of different but closely related processes of eight year terms of office, 40-year generation sets, 56 years of the *maqabassa* cycle, and 360 years of an era of *jaatama*. Thus the life cycle of the *Gadaa* begins with the first eight years and ends with the completion of 360 years referred to as *jaatama*. It is perhaps interesting to note here the fact that the same structure and principle seems to underly the *Gadaa* process as that which was seen at work in the reckoning of the one year.

As the one day constitutes the basic unit in the one year time reckoning system, so the eight year *Gadaa* reign of power constitutes the basic unit of the life cycle of the *Gadaa* process. The second level in the one year time reckoning system is that of the seven day week system. To this in the *Gadaa* chronology, corresponds the process of the *maqabassa*. In the reckoning of the year, the third level is that of the month. To this corresponds the 40 year cycle of generation classes. Finally, to the last level in the year consisting of 12 months of 30 days, is linked the 360 years or the repetition nine times of the 40 year generation classes.

But how does the concept of *sagli* occur at the different levels of this *Gadaa* process?

Here too the concept of *sagli* arises as a result of the inconsistency that exists between reality and the cultural model. To understand this inconsistency, it is necessary to give a brief description of the structure of the traditional Oromo society against which we may then view the cultural model, and ultimately, the discrepancy between them.

TIME AND THE STRUCTURE OF TRADITIONAL OROMO SOCIETY

As was mentioned earlier, the Oromo term *Ayaana* carries as its core meaning the concept of time whilst also being used to refer to the structure of the society. In its reference to the structure of society, it depicts the organisation of society into staggered series of generation sets or *luba*. While each successive *luba* belongs to one of the five patrilineal descent groups or *gogessa* that rotate every eight years in assuming political power consisting of 360 years or the repetition nine times of the 40 year generation classes. How then does the concept of *sagli* relate to these processes?

To understand this, it is necessary to go into more detail regarding the different meanings of the term *Gadaa* itself. Let us therefore look at the significance of *Gadaa* as a socio-political and religious organisation, whilst bearing in mind that it is essentially a time concept.

Traditionally, the Oromo society was constituted of two moieties. There were five such groups, each divided into halves: the (1) *Macha/Tullama*, the *Rayaa/Assebu*, the (3) *Sikko/Mando*, (4) the *Sabbo and Goona* and the (5) *Ittu/Karayyu*. Each of these dualities then divided into generation classes, known as *luba*. *Luba* actually refers to the generation group that forms a set. The eight year period during which a set remained in the position of leadership of the society was known as *Gadaa* and this period constituted the basic time reckoning unit for the historical process, termed *mara-gadaa*. There were five staggered series of generation sets between whom political leadership rotated every eight years. These were the five patrilineal groups known as *gogessa*. Although the number of the patrilineal descent groups was fixed, the number of *luba* increased progressively, from the minimum five at the beginning

of the *Gadaa* cycle, to a maximum of 11 at its end, marked by the culmination of the cycle in *jaatama*.

Although power rotated between the five patriline, this rotation was not simply a circular one, in which time came back to the same point on a circle. Rather, there was a larger circle, known as the seven *maqabasse* in which the five patriline rotated, whereby the generations of the fathers were separated from those of their sons by 40 years, whilst at the same time maintaining the opposition between these groups and those which were allied. As far as the model could function, it served these purposes perfectly.

The simultaneous movement of the *gogessa* (patriline), of the *luba* (generation sets), of the *maqabassa* (name giving) and of the movement of the *sagli*, could be illustrated in the following manner:

A	B	C	D	E
1	2	3	4	5
6	7	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	1
2	3	4	5	6
7	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	1	2
3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5
6	7	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	1
2	3	4	5	6

4) A TABLE SHOWING HOW THE MAQABAASA CYCLE MOVES OVER THE GOGGESSA.

The letters A to E represent the five patrilineal (*gogessa*) within which the cycle of the seven *maqabassa* move, such that the number six becomes the son of number one in the same column, four the son of six in the next generation and two the son of four in the following generation, and so forth as indicated vertically in column A. Thus the cycle of the *maqabassa* which moves through the five *gogessa* continues for nine generations without repeating itself. By the ninth generation at the point where the seven *maqabassa* repeats itself, the cycle of *sagli* enters. From this point through the following three generations, the repetition of the entire seven *maqabassa* cycle will be completed. The disaster (*sagli*) which is believed to bring the entire *Gadaa* cycle to an end and the *jaatama* could occur at any point, depending on the proper performance of rituals in the past, through which, it is believed, disaster could be postponed.

The period of the *Gadaa* life cycle from its beginning to the ninth generation (40 times nine) gives us a total of 360 years of successive *Gadaa* governments each having held power for eight years. In other words, it consists of 45 successive eight year periods. The period from the point at which the *sagli* enters to the end of the twelfth generation is a kind of a transitional period consisting of 120 years. This transitional period is composed of 15 *Gadaa* governments holding power for eight

years each. When these two figures are added together, they give a total of 60. Booran believe that beyond this the *Gadaa* cannot continue and must cease completely: "*Gadaa hinjaatamme*".

In short, the entire *Gadaa* cycle consists of 60 successive governments, each holding power for eight years. When multiplied, this gives a total of 480. If the 120 years of the transitional period is subtracted from this, there remain 360 years.

At this point of the discussion, it would be useful to pause here and compare the two levels of time reckoning, the Oromo calendar and the *Gadaa* chronology, to see whether there exist any structural similarities between the two sets.

AYYAANA AND THE GADAA CHRONOLOGY

As has already been discussed, in the Oromo calendar, the month consists of 30 days out of which only 27 are named. It has also been seen that the three days without names exist due to the unpredictability of the movement of the moon as it moves across the sky in its relation to certain stars. It has also been made clear that this inconsistency and this unpredictability give rise to the idea of *sagli*. Finally, it has also been demonstrated how these unpredictable elements are accommodated over the entire 12 month period. The question that needs to be asked now is whether this principle also underlies the recording of the *Gadaa* chronology.

It could be stated that the fundamental difference inherent in the two systems of Oromo time-reckoning, referred to as *ayaana*, and of the chronological recording of history, through the *Gadaa*, is one of level rather than one of principle. For the principle at work in both systems is derived from the model of the human body, consisting of the five fundamental laws of the *yaayaa shanaan* and of its subdivisions into the 27 constituent parts. Just as the year is seen as being made up of 360 days, so the cycle of *sagli* is viewed as consisting of 360 years. Just as three days are kept aside in the 30 day/27 *ayaana* count, so three *luba* are kept apart in the *Gadaa* chronology. It is within these three *luba* that events of an unpredictable nature could occur. There is a difference of three generations between the 12 generations corresponding to the 12 month year. These three generations are also those which make up the difference between the 360 years of and the 120 years. These 12

generations bring the entire *Gadaa* process to an end in the *jaatama*, just as the twelve months bring the year to a close.

What is even more fascinating in this view of the structural similarities of time and history, is the fact that according to Oromo oral history, the present time represents the ninth repetition of the *jaatama*, and Booran has been preceded by eight other Oromo groups.

To closely examine this claim and elaborate on this view let us take a brief look at the traditional Oromo view of history.

The Oromo concept of history

The Oromo use the compound noun *argaa-d'ageeti* to refer to history. *Argaa* means "that which is seen" and *d'ageeti* signifies "that which is heard". Together, these two words refer to both those events that have been witnessed in the present and to those handed down by word of mouth from the past.

According to Bule Guyyo, *argaa-d'ageeti* are two aspects of the same phenomenon called *mara*. *Mara* is a difficult word to translate as has ^{been} made clear in the section discussing the Oromo concept of *ayaana*. But generally it could be said to refer to a kind of cyclical return of events at many different temporal levels, such as within the units of the day, the *maqa-baasa*, the 27 day month, the 12 month year, the eight year return of the *Gada* rule, the 40 year return of the five *gogessa*, and the nonary return of the 40 year *goggessa* referred to as *sagli*. This entire process is called *jaatama*. With the completion of one *jaatama*, one cycle of *mara* ends, giving

way to a new beginning and to another set of *jaatama*. According to Dabassa Guyyo, five sets of *jaatama* ends these cyclical processes. When this revolution of all the cycles take place, it is referred to as the fulfillment of the *yaayaa shanan*. The entire process, which begins with the epicycle of the day and culminates in the fulfillment of the five *yaayaa*, makes one complete unit.

The complicating factor in this view of time and of the historical process, is the fact that each of these cycles, beginning with that of the day and ending with one *jaatama*, is treated simultaneously as independent cycling units and as parts of the larger cycle of the total *mara*. Experts who follow these processes of the unfolding nature of time and who are able to compute them, are called *ayaantu*, whilst the processes themselves are called *ayaana*.

The Oromo concept of history therefore refers to keeping a record of the incidents that have occurred in this process of the continually unfolding *mara*. The work of the historian, according to my teacher Bule Guyyo, is to learn the general nature of these processes and to continue to obtain information about the incidents occurring at different points in time. These incidents are not seen as isolated phenomena, but as constituting repetitions at different levels of past events. These levels are interconnected, forming one system, just as the different parts of the human body make up a composite whole. Each one of these levels of repetition, from the lowest level of the cycle of the day, to the highest level of the completion of the *yaayaa shanan*, have already been discussed in detail.

According to Bule Guyyo, the understanding of *argaa-d'ageeti* demands the knowledge of the language and of the meaning of words. This knowledge begins with the understanding of the two terms *argaa* and *d'ageeti*. The following passage is an extract from a long text on the definition of these terms:-

BG: We should make this *yaada*, "idea", clear, so that those who may listen to us later may not make mistakes. When we say *argaa*, it does not simply refer to things that have happened in our life time alone. In fact, there are very few things that we see in our life that belong to the present. Most things we see have come from the past. We have the and the *Qaalluu*;, the *hayyuu* and the *wayyuu*. All these are not of our life time; they have come from the past. But we also see the *Qaalluu*; today. Thus most of what we see has its feet in the past. That is why we say that *argaa* does not only refer to the things we see with our own eyes.

D'ageeti also does not refer to stories about the past. We hear every day about things that are happening today. A man of *argaa-d'ageeti* is aware that what he hears of today are mostly events that are in the past *mara*.

So now do you understand that *argaa* does not only mean the present and *d'ageeti* the past?

GM: Yes, I understand.

BG: *D'ageeti* could even refer to those things that are yet to happen. The prophecies of *Arero Bosaro* are yet to happen, yet we have already 'heard' about them. Now do you understand?

GM: Yes, I do understand.

Oromo Oral History

Origion

As already mentioned the first historical written records on the Oromo go back only as far as 1593 when the Abyssinian monk Bahrey opened up writing on Oromo, declaring the purpose of his writing as:

"to make known the number of their tribes, their readiness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners."

As M. Hassen clearly points out,

"... Since Bahrey subsequent 'historical' accounts not only continued to perpetuate the myth regarding Oromo manners propagated by Bahrey, but also magnified and embroidered with grotesque distortions of history, which depicts the Oromo as "barbarian hordes who brought darkness and ignorance in their train." M.Hassen, (1990: 2).

On the same page Hassen lamented:

"In such writings the Oromo were never credited as creators of an original culture, or as having religious and democratic political institutions which flowered in patterns of their own making and nourished their spiritual and material well-being."

It is interesting to note that almost none of these accounts have ever been based upon or presented the Oromo history from the perspective of the Oromo people themselves.

Such Writers as Bahrey and those that followed him have obviously been influenced by socio-political, economic and religious interests.

The Oromo version of their own origins and history will therefore be presented in this section of the thesis. The presentation will not attempt to prove or disprove the Oromo view of their own past. For, as it is with all societies, Oromo history is significant only to the extent that it gives the group a sense of unity. It does this by providing legitimacy to the rule and order of a political society. After all, it should not also be forgotten that history for a good part of it, is an idea we have about our selves, in the past in which we did not participate.

Myth

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

Rivers have been the natural division between the five Oromo groups. Thus the *Gannaale* river made the division between the *Sabbo* and the *Goonaa* and the *Siiko* and *Maddo* groups. The *Waabi Shaballe* made a division between the *Siiko* and *Maddo* on the one hand and the *Ittu* and *Karrayyu* on the other. The River *Awash* divided the *Siiko* and *Maddo* and the *Ittu* and *Karrayyu* from the *Rayaa* and *Assebu* and the *Mac'c'a* and *Tullamma* on the other. The crossing of the *Ghibe* also marks a

boundary between the *Siiko* and *Maddo* and the *Sabbo* and *Goona* on the one hand and the *Mac'c'a* and *Tullama* on the other, finally the river *Abbay* marked the boundary between the *Raayaa* and the *Assebu* on the one hand and the *Macca* and the *Tulama* on the other.

An Oromo who lives in one of these territories will therefore refer to the members of his/her fellow group as people with whom his/her forefather crossed the same river. If one was to mark the Oromo centre of origin on the basis of these assertions and take each group back across the rivers it claimed to have crossed, then the cradle-land would be the central plateau of the present day Ethiopia. This hypothesis would contradict all the views that were advanced claiming that

(1) the Oromo originated in the south west of Ethiopia in the area between *Arssi* and *Bale*, as claimed by Haberland.

(2) Areas outside Africa, as claimed by de Salviac, Atme Giyorgis and the blind Tayye.

(3) Oromo oral tradition would also contradict the idea that they originated in Arabian Peninsula

(4) J.Bruce takes them even as far as the Sudan. Others have suggested areas such as Somalia, Ogaden and all kinds of odd places, (*cf.* Braukamper 1980:31). Oromo oral tradition strongly suggests that the central high land of the present Empire state of Ethiopia is where *Waaqa* placed them at creation and granted them all the land they occupy today and no one scholar has produced a better convincing idea for us to believe otherwise.

Oromo in different regions of the Horn of Africa recount different versions of the same oral tradition. The common theme underlying these different versions is

perhaps the Oromo conception of history, of the passage of time and the evolution of their own society.

Traditional Oromo believed that the revolution of one *Jaatama* as described above constitutes one 'life' cycle of the society marking the end of a period of time. With the completion of such a cycle, society can no longer operate according to the same rules and continue in the old way. The entire social, political and economic life must undergo a radical transformation. Oromo oral historians claim that the return of each cycle of the *jaatama* brings into play forces that displace the former structures and reorganize them according to new modalities. The present Oromo society is a reflection of these evolutions.

Oromo oral tradition thus recognizes the existence of successive groups of Oromo peoples that 'disappeared' in the past. Although different names are given to these preceding peoples out of which the present Oromo are seen to have evolved, all Oromo agree on the number of these successive groups. The oral traditions of the *Shoa Arssi* and that of the southern *Booran* (the *Sabbo* and *Goona* groups) are particularly closely related.

According to Booran teachers, the nine successive people that preceded the present Booran were the *Tayaa*, *Tassa*, *Muunnyo*, *Ditacha*, *Mandille*, *Suftu*, *Abrojji* and the *Waradaye*, whom the *Booran* succeeded. *Arssi* oral tradition claims that the *Tayaa* or the *Ittayaa* as they are known in *Arssi*, were buried under the lakes in the Rift Valley, particular reference is made to the Lakes *Laaqii-Danbal* and *Shaallaa*, the later being the deepest of these lakes. The second group, or *Hitassa* (*Hittosaa*) is said to have disappeared through '*ayyaana*'. Further research needs to be done to establish the exact details of how this group disappeared. In *Arssi*, the names of the first two peoples remain anchored in memory by being associated with two localities

within a few kilometres of one another to the north of *Chillalo* Mountain. This group was succeeded by the group known as *Muunnyo*. There is nothing known about this people apart from the fact that the name occurs in women songs of name giving ceremony of the Oromo Booran. This were then succeeded by the group known as *Dhitacha*. Very little or nothing is also known about this people apart from the fact that there exists a tree by the same name. This is a highly ritualized plant and is associated with the wandering *Qaallu*, who forms a common link with all the Oromo groups. He was stabbed by a *Konso* and is said to have wiped the blood from the wound using the leaves of the *Dhitachaa* tree. For this reason the plant is never cut down or used in any way today. The *Dhitacha* were then succeeded by the *Suftu*. The name is derived from the verb *suufu* meaning "to smell". The *Suftu* are thus remembered both among the *Arssi* and the Booran for their skill in digging underground caves and water wells. The *Sofumar* Cave in *Bale* in particular and other caves in the region are attributed to their expertise, as well as the famous well complexes known as the *tulla*, which they are said to have initiated. The *Suftu* were succeeded by the *Maadille*. They are said to have expanded the well complexes of the Booran region. The etymology of the name is uncertain, but it could perhaps be associated with another word for the underground water and/or passages linking these wells, *maddo*.

These *Maddille* were succeeded by the *Abrojji* or *Arrojji* as they are known elsewhere in Oromo. In *Arssi* oral tradition, the *Abrojji* are the group who are thought to have first introduced the horse. The Booran attribute this important innovation to the *Macitu* clan. One wonders if there is any connection between this clan and this people of the past, since the *Abrobjji* or *Arrojji* as they are known among the *Mac'caa-Tulamaa* Oromo group, form one of the biggest section. The *Abrojji* were succeeded by the *Warrdaye* or *Ormma* in more recent times. Unlike the previous groups, the *Ormma* are still to be found today in the region of the *Tana* River

in Kenya. According to oral tradition, this group was the dominant one until it lost its supremacy to the Booran in the 1550s. From this time to the beginning of the 1880s, the Booran are said to have dominated the region and the history of the Oromo.

In all the different regions and in all the different Oromo groups that exist today, the Booran are referred to as representing the most 'senior' component of the Oromo society. Seniority in traditional societies is a position of socio-political and economic dominance. Though the concept may be based on the metaphor of primogeniture, it does not necessarily refer to this physical attribute. The case of the Booran serves as a good example. As already shown, the concept of Booran is devoid of kinship content. The state of the present Booran serves as an insight into the past. It can thus be hypothesized that each of the preceding Oromo groups discussed held similar positions of seniority. This view is confirmed by the Oromo view of history.

The Oromo concept of *jaatama* consisting of 40 years repeated nine times, ideally adding up to 360 years has already been briefly presented. In Booran Oromo the verb *jaatammu* from which the word is derived, literally means "sixty". It refers to the coming to an end of a cycle. According to my teacher Bule Guyyo, *jaatama* has the same meaning as the word *nyaatama*, meaning "to be consumed". Thus, if we reckon backwards, beginning from the year 1991, to the year when according to Booran-Oromo oral tradition the former *Gadaa* cycle enters its "*mara*" of "*saglii*" to come to an end and came back in a renewed shape in another cycle of time, we would obtain the following chronology:-

9.	<i>Booran</i>	1631 A.D -1991 A.D
8.	<i>Warrdaye</i>	1271 A.D -1631 A.D
7.	<i>Abrobji</i>	911 A.D -1271 A.D
6.	<i>Maadille</i>	551 A.D - 911 A.D
5.	<i>Dhitacha</i>	191 A.D - 551 A.D
4.	<i>Suftu</i>	169 B.C - 191 A.D
3.	<i>Muunnyo</i>	529 B.C - 169 B.C
2.	<i>Hitassa</i>	889 B.C - 529 B.C
1.	<i>Tayaa</i>	1249 B.C- 889 B.C

6) A TABLE SHOWING CHRONOLOGY OF OROMO ORAL HISTORY

Of course the experts of the oral tradition would not quantify time in this manner, for they have little or no interest in establishing such a chronology. For their own purposes, what is important is knowing the number of *Gadaa* or eight year periods of rule that build up to 40 years and when these 40 years have cycled nine times to constitute one *jaatama*. From the above it must have been already clear that what is known as Oromo history in the written tradition only refers to the ninth *jaatama* and there are practically nothing recorded regarding the eight times 360 years that preceeded the present era known as the era or the *jaatama* of the Booran. The question of how the oral historian remembers these cycles is already explained through the study of the concept of *ayyaana*, or their theory of knowledge.

Perhaps the difference between the western conception of history and that of the Oromo is that in the Oromo view emphasis is placed on the unity and continuity between the past, the present and the future dimensions of time. In the western conception, the emphasis is rather on the individually culturally determined segments of time and on the artificial distinctions between the different levels of the past, the present and the future. Similarly, the western view of history tends to focus on individual details, whilst the Oromo view tends to concern itself more with the

common pattern and the repetitive pattern of the nature of history. It should be interesting to note the fact that in the Oromo view what repeats in history are events rather than time.

By way of concluding this section therefore it could be argued that despite the disagreements between my teachers, it is evident that *ayaana* functions as a system of classification. “an intellectual effort of ordering human activities and social events chronologically “ to borrow a sentence from Mudimbe, (1988:187)

In the explanation of the process of creation, it is clear that things begin with the pre-existence of the Creator, *Waaqa*. The Creator is distinguished from his creatures. The first act of creation is that of water. This water is divided into that of the above and that of the below. From the water of the above, is created the sky, the morning star and the water separating from them. From the water of the below, there is a separation of water from dry land. These make up a set of five, a pattern of five in a set of two's and of two's in a set of five, a formula which is found throughout the Oromo system of classification.

Dabassa's view of the single *ayaana* as representing the creation of all those things which are found in heaven corresponds to the Oromo idea of the oneness or the unity of the heavenly beings. The dual *ayaana* represent the universal opposition of the nature of earthly life as opposed to the unity of heavenly life. Finally, the triple *ayaana*, representing the floating and swimming creatures stand for the ambiguous and/or marginal categories against which the Oromo culture maintains a complete food taboo (cf. Megerssa 1990).

There is also a structural correspondance between the process of creation and the Oromo view of a single day. In the process of creation, we see the idea that

Waaqa creates in dim light, corresponding to that of *boru*, the morning light that precedes sunrise. He begins by placing the morning star in heaven, thus setting into motion His creation. The upper and lower waters can thus be seen as corresponding to the notion of day and night, whilst the five categories of creation correspond to the five subdivisions of the day.

The Oromo concept of *ayaana* therefore constitutes the traditional system of classification, and was originally meant perhaps to classify the two cardinal axes of time and space, upon which all culture is founded.

Systems of classifications and the type of world-view that emanates from it must reflect the socio-economic and political relations of the society in question. Thus we can now attempt to explore the extent to which the Oromo concept of *ayaana* as described up to now reflects the structure and functions of the traditional Oromo institutions. I will begin by describing the structure of traditional kinship organization.

Chapter VIII

THE KINSHIP STRUCTURE OF TRADITIONAL OROMO SOCIETY

In this part of the thesis, an attempt will be made to identify and describe some of the different ways in which traditional Oromo society is structured .

The Family

Among the Oromo Booran of Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia, one of the Oromo groups which has, to a large degree, retained intact the traditional structure, the family consists of a male head, wives and male and female offspring. Wives are classified into the first wife (*hangafa* or *niiti gaame*) and second wives. The same classification is applied to the first born son and the younger sons. Thus all wives, apart from the first one, are referred to as second wives, whether they be third, fourth or fifth wives. In other words, second wives are opposed to the first regardless of their number or order of marriage, just as the younger sons are opposed to the first born regardless of their order of birth. These structural similarities are reinforced by the fact that the term *hangafa*, which refers to first birth, is used in reference to both first born sons and first wives.

In traditional Oromo society, the father and the mother 'owned' the children, especially the children begotten from the first wife in the sense of tutelage. The father is the *abba warra*, the head of the household, while the mother is referred to as *haadha warra* an expression connoting ownership. Such ownership is however only legitimate if the marriage has been performed according to the rules prescribed in the traditional marriage laws. In accordance with these laws, the groom must first kill an

animal of *rakoo*, or of blood shedding, on the doorway before he can take the bride into the house. This animal of *rakoo* marks the marriage contract. The killing of the *rakoo* animal severs the bond between the girl given in marriage and her parents, whilst at the same time establishing a new bond between the girl and her new parents in-law. From this moment onwards, she will address her new parents by the same terms as she used for her own father and mother, *aabo* and *aayo* respectively.

Traditionally, a man was not a father merely because he had biologically engendered his children. This right could only be claimed when he had fully settled the bridewealth payment. A man who begot children without fulfilling this duty had no legal claim to his children. Until such payment was made, both his wife and their children still rightly belonged to her parents. The dowry was therefore not what was paid for obtaining a wife, but for securing her reproductive capacity. A wife therefore wished to give birth to as many children as possible in order to repay this investment made in her by her husband and his lineage.

Male offspring were preferred to female, especially in the case of the first born child. This was because the first born son 'replaced' his father and became his legal heir. This preference for sons can evidently be explained by the fact that daughters had to be given away in marriage and could not inherit their father's estate. The traditional Oromo woman was therefore anxious to repay the debt of bridewealth by bearing as many children as she was able, by which she also establishes her own bond with the community she is married to, and barrenness was felt as a failure on her part to fulfill this obligation.

It was through the bridewealth payment that a life-long bond was established between the couple, and instituted the man's permanent legal right to the reproductive capacity of the woman taken in marriage. Thus in the eyes of the law, if the woman

decided to divorce her husband and marry another man, any children she bore the latter would still remain legally the 'children' of the former, unless prior agreement between the two male parties had been reached.

The number of wives a man took depended on his economic situation. As is the case in all traditional society, labour power, whether in an agricultural or a pastoral setting, was the primary condition for polygamy. A man therefore had to be economically affluent to be able to marry another wife. For the few rich owners, the traditional Oromo marriage was the mechanism through which the required man power was produced and reproduced in order to maintain the growing family estate. In the pastoral production system, for instance, where animals multiplied faster than human beings and where human beings were needed to care for these animals within the limited carrying capacity of the land and of its natural resources, even multiple marriage could cope with the problem to a very limited extent. It was this difficulty of maintaining the ratio between humans and animals that seems to have led to the creation of the institution of *dabarre* among the pastoral Oromo. Through this system, the cattle rich pastoralist lent female stock to the cattle poor but retained the reproductive capacity of his animals. This cultural strategy in keeping a balance between people, land and animals, will be dealt with in more detail in the discussion of the traditional Oromo economy.

In the traditional Oromo society, the family was the basic unit of production. As the head of this domestic unit, the father acted as its production manager. In fact, the term designating both roles was expressed by the same word, *abba*, meaning both "father" and "owner". Ownership thus implied assuming personal responsibility for the members of the group. The duties of the *abba warra* therefore entailed the management of all the social and economic activities relating to the family.

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

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

In carrying out their duties, the mother and father did not consciously reflect their status through their attitude or behaviour. Rather, they were conscious of the vital responsibilities that were attached to the positions of power they occupied.

Polygamous marriage in traditional Oromo is interesting to examine not only because it is one of the factors which created conflict of interest between the co-wives and their children, but also as an area in which to see at work the cultural mechanisms employed to resolve such conflict.

In actual fact, only a small percentage of Oromo men could afford to be polygamous. It can be said therefore that polygamy was rather the prerogative of the rich than the common practice. As a rule, the ordinary man normally only had one wife, whilst the poor man was unable to afford even one.

Among the polygamous rich classes of the traditional Oromo society, the family structure differed from that of the monogamous majority. Of course, every man desired to have as many wives as he could, not because he was particularly obsessed with this idea, but because it was indicative of wealth. But to return to the structure of the polygamous family, we find that wives are classified and different values are attached to the different categories.

The first wife or *niiti gaame* must be a virgin at marriage and through her, the husband theoretically has his first marital sexual experience. There is also the belief that the first wife may bring with her the luck necessary for the future prosperity of the herd and the family. Because of this and other beliefs and values attached to her, the first wife represents the ideal spouse and she retains this place of favour, whatever the number of wives there may follow. She remains the chief wife.

For his second and subsequent wives, there are a number of categories of women amongst whom a man can choose. Although parents rarely wish to give their daughter in marriage as a second wife, a married man can take a virgin girl as second wife. Such marriages are admitted for the social links they may help to create between the families concerned. Generally speaking, however, second wives are usually taken from the category of women known as *nad'een*. This category refers to women who are not virgin. They are therefore also referred^{to} as *gurguddo* "the bigger ones" or *gurssumaa*. These may be women who have lost their first husbands in some manner.

Polygamy not only allows a man to have more children and more affines, thus enabling him to extend his network of kin relations, but also provides him with a broader economic base, since he has at his disposal the labour of a greater number of women and children.

The depth and degree of the family's kin relationships are seen both from the patrilineal and matrilineal point of view. Descent in traditional Oromo society is reckoned only through the male line, hence no male child is allowed to marry or have any sexual relations with the women belonging to his father's descent group. Similarly, daughters marry men outside this group.

This means that both sons and daughters marry into the opposite moiety from that which they are born into. According to Oromo law, their children may not marry their bilateral kin until five generations have elapsed. The five generations of bilateral cousins with whom marriage cannot be contracted by both male and female Ego are the following: (1) *dubri diigaa*, blood or first cousin; (2) *dubri*, or second cousin; (3) *fiitaa* or close cousin; (4) *hidda* or far (literally "root") cousin and (5) *hidaada*, or very far removed cousin (literally "other root"). After the fifth generation,

it is believed that the kinship link disappears. A number of structural mechanisms are devised to maintain this kinship distance, which are reinforced through the belief system: it is thought, for instance, that the 'mixing of blood' before the expiry of the fifth generation causes leprosy and other physical defects.

Marriage in traditional Oromo society

There is no single term which designates 'marriage' in the Oromo language. *Fuudā* is used in the case of a man and *heeruma* in that of a woman. The word *fuudā* literally means "taking", whilst *heeruma* refers to the acquisition of legal status and implies that the girl is no longer under parental care and control. This latter meaning could be explained by the fact that until they marry, girls have no sexual experience, child-bearing by an unmarried woman being absolutely forbidden by the law. Contained in the meaning of *fuudā*, is the notion that the groom and his clan 'take' a bride, while the clan of the bride 'gives' a wife. Women are therefore the objects of gift and exchange between two social groups. Marriage in traditional Oromo was neither a religious nor a public concern; it was a private contract. The contracting parties were not however the two individuals involved, but their respective families. Both the paternal and maternal uncles played an important role in the marriage negotiations and process.

In traditional Oromo society, the core function of marriage seems to have been the control over and the legitimization of children. Although it also gave control over sexual activity, this was not the primary function of marriage. Through marriage, may be a contract between the two individuals, the two nuclear families (*ibidda*) the minor lineage (*warra*), the entire lineage (*balballa*), the clan (*mana*) and the society (*gossa*) were linked at different levels. Once the marriage was contracted, these relations, which were built into the system, were automatically established.

A man normally obtained his wife from the opposite moiety. This principle of exogamy thus created one of the most important bonds linking the two moieties. Such was the importance of this bond, that it was personified and given the name of a female divinity known as Boorantiti. According to Dabassa Guyyo, it is in respecting this law of marriage, that the couple respect one another; between them stands the Boorantiti.

Despite its consequence for the entire society, the actual marriage process involved only the members of the two families and their immediate descent groups. The negotiation process was a simple one. It began with the visit of the father of the prospective groom to the family of the girl to "beg" her hand in marriage for his son. This marriage proposal could only be made during the propitious months of the year and was marked by the offering of tobacco and coffee beans. There was no stipulated amount to be preferred, but it had to be large enough to be passed around to all the members of the family. On receipt of these gifts, no immediate response was given and the proposer was asked to return a second time. This allowed the family to discuss the proposition among their immediate kin. According to my teacher Bule Guyyo, the points discussed were the "bones", *laffe*, the "veins" *hidda*, the "blood" *diiga*, the "flesh" *fooni* and the reputation or name, *maqa* of the candidate.

These deliberations could continue for some time. The father, accompanied by elders, of which one was usually a paternal or maternal uncle of his son, would therefore visit the family a number of times. According to Dabassa Guyyo, these visits should not exceed five. The decision of the girl's family had to be given to him as soon as possible, after his second or third visit, but should not be delayed for more than five visits. Once the decision has been conveyed, if the response was a positive

one, the date of the actual marriage celebrations were decided upon in consultation with the *ayaantu* or "time-reckoner".

Kinship structure

The kinship structure in traditional Oromo society followed a similar conceptual patterning. It consisted of five steps, progressing from the level of the particular family to that of the people or nation as a whole.

Ibidda

The particular or nuclear family is referred to as *ibidda*, literally meaning "fire". Fire is a common metaphor used to designate the family in Oromo, in particular the wife. For without a wife there can be no home, and no home without a fire. The expression *ibidda isaatu dhaame* "his fire went out" is used on the death of a man's wife. *Ibidda* thus stands basically for the mother and child household relationship.

Warra

The second level of kinship relations, comparable to the minimal lineage, was the extended or joint family, referred to as *warra*. In Oromo the notion of 'family' is slightly different to that in English. *Warra* refers to blood relations rather than cohabitation. Members of family, though widely dispersed geographically, are still considered as forming one unit. The best example of this is the polygamous family. The family could be made up of a number of *ibidda* living in different areas, but still constitute a *warra* regardless of the distance separating them. This is not the only type of *warra*, and a number of other examples could be cited.

Balballa

The third level of kinship relations, refer to those of the minor lineage. These are termed *balballa* in Oromo, literally meaning "door". The difference between *warra* and *balballa* is one of degree. *Balballa* is inclusive in terms of lineage, whereas *warra* refers to particular families in the same lineage group.

Mana

At the fourth level is situated the *mana* or "house". This refers to a coherent clan grouping found on both sides of the moiety divisions of the *Sabbo* and *Goona*.

Gossa

At the highest level of the Oromo kinship structure is found the *gossa*, or group. The etymology of the term *gossa* is uncertain, but amongst the neighbouring closely related *Walaa'ita*, the word signifies "sperm" (Sorssa Ganamo personal communication). It could be hypothesised therefore that the word indicates people of the same "gene" or "seed".

These five levels are conceptual categories and in daily usage there exists a certain amount of overlap between them, in which no clear distinctions tend to be made. It could be argued, moreover, that such conceptual categories are social constructs based on the general frame of blood relationships, and that they are only really relevant at the lowest level of conception, tending to become progressively more fluid at the higher levels of the structure.

Thus far, the vertical structure of the kinship system has been examined. There also exists a horizontal ordering, which is known to the custodians of the Oromo oral traditions. According to experts such ^{as} Bule Guyyo and Dabassa Guyyo amongst the *Booran*, and Jimmale Diima amongst the *Macha*, the entire Oromo *gossa* or people could be seen as dividing into five categories on the horizontal axis. These are the following:-

- (a) the *Raya* and the *Assebu* Oromo
- (b) the *Macha* and *Tulama* Oromo
- (b) the *Sabbo* and *Goona* Oromo
- (c) the *Sikko* and *Mando* Oromo
- (d) the *Ittu* and *Karayyu* Oromo

and in the view of these elders, keepers of the oral traditions, no Oromo group falls outside these five categories.

To complete this description it is necessary to also show the relationship between the structure of the kinship organization and the patterning of the residential and administrative organization of the Oromo society.

Chapter IX

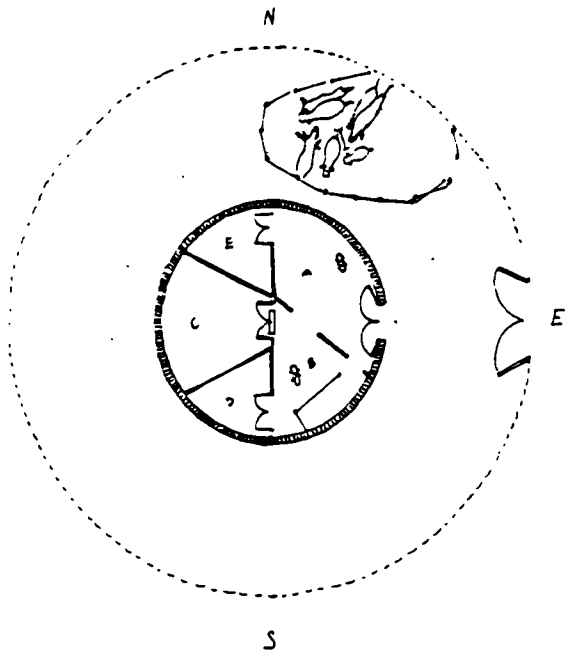
RESIDENTIAL AND ADMINSTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF OROMO SOCIETY

Traditional Oromo dwellings were never situated in isolated locations. Security and the proximity of water dictated the clustering of dwellings in villages.

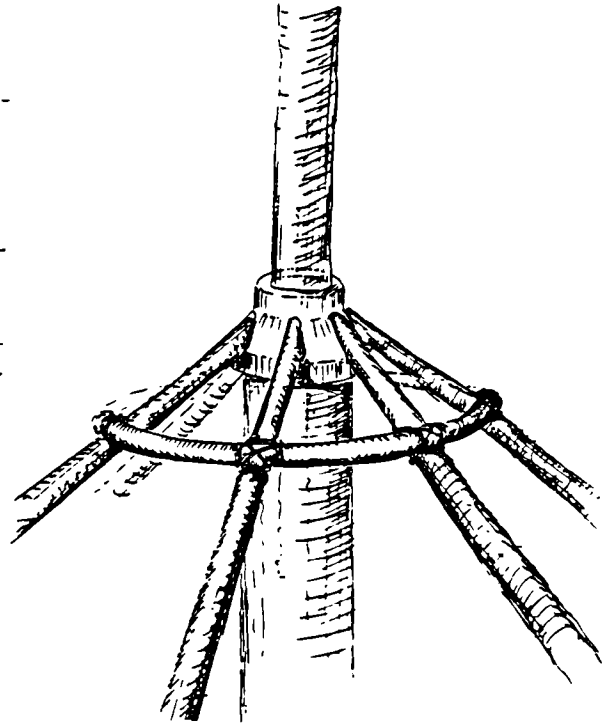
THE OROMO HOUSE

Oromo houses were built out of wood. The structure was a simple circular one. Before building commenced, a stick was placed in the ground. With the help of rope tied around the stick, a circle at an equidistance from it was drawn on the ground. According to Dabassa Guyyo, this marking of the ground plan of the house is known as *yayaba*, literally meaning "fundament". A round trench, the depth of which depended on how long the structure was intended to last, was then dug. A number of holes were then made and into these were inserted the *d'aabaa* or supporting poles of the house. The standard Oromo house (in the highlands) consisted of about 70 of these *d'aabaa*, and consequently, depending on how closely they were inserted, the house must have been a fairly large one. Then at the middle of ^{the} circle was placed the *utubba* or central pole. The *utubba* supported the upper part of the house from the roof to the centre, whilst the *d'aabaa* supported the lower part, forming the framework upon which the circular walls were constructed. The *utubba* penetrated through the roof of the house. The top of this pole as seen from outside was referred to as *guutu*, the same word used to designate the tuft of hair at the crown of the head in the traditional hair style of the Booran Oromo.

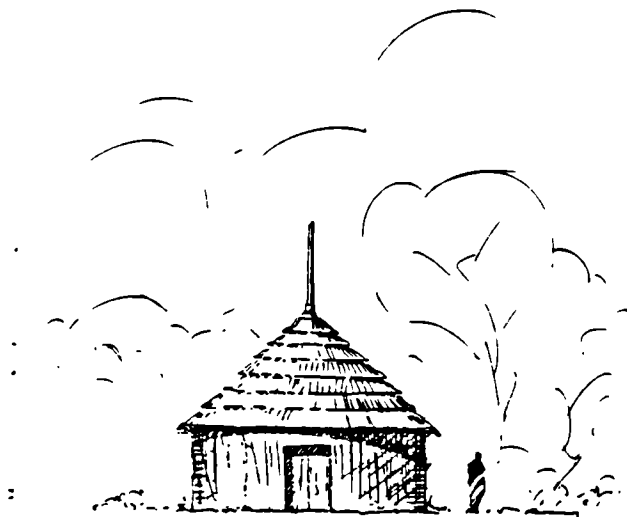
7) A Diagram of Traditional Oromo House



The ground plan of traditional Oromo house



The roof structure



Model structure of the traditional House

The inside of the house was divided into five parts. The walls that divided these parts were known as *goorro* or partitions. These are indicated by the letters A to E in the sketch of the house. ˆ

The first room or part, as one entered the house, was called the *badaa*, or in other Oromo areas, the *goorro dubaa* (A). It served as the living or sitting room in which visitors were received. On the other side of this room was the *golla* (B). The term referred to and implied that this part of the house was a reserved area and one could not enter it uninvited or without the consent of a member of the household.

Behind these first set of rooms and divided by a north-south vertical wall, were the three other rooms (C, D and E). C was alternatively referred to as *diinqa* or *borro*. More precisely, it would seem that the term *diinqa* referred to the whole room, whilst *borro* designated the wall of the room, situated directly behind the bed of the conjugal couple, towards which the back of their heads were turned. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the wooden head rest is also termed *borraati*. To the right of the parents' bedroom, was the bedroom (D) of unmarried daughters and other girls belonging to the family. To the left (E), that of unmarried sons and other male members, under the age of sixteen.

This description of the Oromo house obviously represents the ideal model, and its plan was only adhered to in former times, when according to my teachers, the culture was intact. Traditionally, therefore, each of the rooms were subject to a number of rules and regulations, emanating from Oromo law and tradition, *seera* and *aadaa*. Hence the living room was open to the outside world and there were no restrictions as to whom may or may not enter this part of the house. On the other hand, all the other rooms had restricted entry. The bedroom of the parents, for instance, was protected strictly by the law. The privacy of this room was marked by

a stick, *gulanataa*, placed at the entrance. There were also rules governing the manner and position in which household and especially ritual objects were placed within the house. Each of the ritual sticks, for instance, had its place, as did the spear and the containers.

In the lowlands, amongst the pastoral Oromo, the house is a variation on this theme, differing in size and in materials used. But even among the pastoral Booran, whenever there was a permanent source of water within proximity of the settlement, houses, far from being temporary structures, would be constructed to last for a minimum of five years, belying the notion that Booran is a completely nomadic society.

WATER

The Oromo country is abundantly blessed with rain, perennial streams, lakes, and rivers of different sizes. Even in the lowlands where rainfall is relatively scarce and water supply fluctuates greatly over the different seasons, the Oromo have developed the skill of digging very deep water wells known as *tulla*. This ancient engineering skill distinguished the Oromo pastoralists from other nomadic peoples in the region. Through their use of these wells, they managed to lead a semi-nomadic existence. This is especially true of the lowlands of *Harrarge* and of *Bale*.

Among the Booran Oromo water is viewed as the source of all life. This view is evident in the creation myth recounted earlier. It is out of the preexisting waters of the above and of the below that *Waaqa* creates the world and all things originate (*wallaabu*) from this substance.

Traditional Oromo divided water into two categories. The first included all types of water provided by *Waaqa* of heavenly or natural origin. The second category consisted of all those types of water catchments created by man.

In tracing the development of water technology in the cultural history of the Oromo, Dabassa Guyyo cites five major steps: from the *haadhaa* developed the *qabaa*; an improvement was made through the *harro*, giving rise to the *adaaddi* and finally came the *tullaa*.

A *haadhaa* or pan was the most basic type of surface water catchment known to the Oromo. It did not involve any form of technology. As the term itself implies, it is scooped out of the ground with the bare hands.

Qabaa, from the verb meaning to hold, is a pool in which rain water run-off is captured. The making of these pools involved a greater level of skill and planning than the simple *haadhaa*.

Although the word *harro* designates ponds in general, whether natural or man-made, in this context, it designates a pond purposefully created by man. The construction of the pond requires a certain amount of labour and in the history of water development in Oromo it marks the beginning of social cooperation in the provision of water to the community.

The building of the first shallow well or *adaadi* was based on these accumulated experiences and skills and represented the first attempt to store water underground.

The demand for these types of wells in the economic life of the people and their inadequacy for the watering of large herds of stock led to their further improvement in the form of the deep well or *tullaa*. The etymology of the term is uncertain, but it refers in general to the depth and the inexhaustability of the water stored. This technological achievement served as the basis for the expansion of the nomadic system of production. Nine such wells (*tulla saglaan*) were dug in different parts of the country by the ancient well-diggers and around this nucleus developed hundreds of other wells. The nine ancient wells are believed to be interlinked and to have underground chambers *madda* connecting them, known only to the experts. From this complex of wells, which included both those that were functional or dysfunctional (*eelaa goofe*), radiated the grazing lands of the entire Booran. Five grazing territories are defined, stretching out in different directions: towards the sunrise, towards the sunset, north, south and the centre. Each of these grazing grounds have as their hub, a well centre or *tullaa*.

No human habitation would be able to exist without the presence of water and Oromo settlement is not an exception to this rule. This fact is explicitly recognised by Oromo oral tradition such that the codes of human behaviour governing the use of water wells are categorised under the same law and custom as those relating to settlement. Similarly, the classification of these traditional water wells follows the same pattern as that applied to the house. According to my teacher Bule Guyyo, water wells are said to be 'homesteads', *eelli qe'edha*. They are divided into five parts, namely:-

- (1) the well yard or *ittissa*
- (2) the cattle corridor or *baqassaa*
- (3) the threshold of the well or *dargulaa*
- (4) the drinking trough or *naaniga*
- (5) the resting place for cattle or *fachana*.

The well yard is the outermost part of the well. Here is where the cattle are held when they enter the well area. Once the cattle have entered this space, which is equivalent to entering the gateway or *karra* of the homestead, they are bound by the laws of *aaadaa*. The animals then proceed down the cattle corridor, also governed by *aaadaa*. As they cross the threshold proper of the well, the cattle enter into the domain which falls under the jurisdiction of the law, *seera*. Similarly, the holding areas to the right and left of the threshold, the drinking trough and the resting place all come under the rule of the law. According to Dabassa Guyyo, these holding areas at the threshold correspond to the rooms occupied by the unmarried male and female members of the family in the house; the threshold dividing the outer and inner precincts of the well can be compared to the *gulanta* stick which demarcates the bedroom of the couple, and the cattle corridor to the living room.

All the forms of water bodies or catchments developed by the Oromo, from the most simple to the most complex need to be periodically maintained, and their resources shared equitably by the community as a whole. The rules regulating water in Oromo thus come under the dual control of custom (*aaadaa*) and law (*seera*).

When a person or a group of people decide to excavate a new well or reclaim an old one, the custodians (*abbootti seeraa*) of the laws of water and livestock (*seera horraaf horrii*) must first be consulted. Since the wells of the nine centres are classified according to the same principle as that which governs the classification of the entire population into clans and lineages, etc., the rights of the excavator to the underground water resources in the land in question must first be determined by the experts. This is because the issue of recovering and/or digging new wells demanded the specialised knowledge of these experts. It was believed that any new well would affected the supply and flow of water between the different wells.

According to both my teachers Bule Guyyo and Dabassa Guyyo, the excavator of the well is known as the *konficha*. The term is derived from the noun *konfii*, designating a digging instrument made out of wood. The same stick is used in the digging of graves. The *konficha* is therefore the 'owner' of this tool and the custodian of the well excavated. Not anyone can become a *konficha*. In order to qualify as one, a man must first prove he is genealogically descended from a *konficha* and has the hereditary right to become one through the historical oral traditions. This claim is lodged through the experts of the law. These "fathers of the law" will also decide which clans and families within the clan, in their order of seniority, will need to contribute livestock to feed the work force. This contribution will determine the rights and order of access to the well when it is completed. A well committee or *kora eelaa* is therefore constituted to oversee the entire process.

The *konficha* initiates the process of digging a well by placing the *konfii* into the ground. In other words, he performs the first act of digging a new well or recovering an old one (*goofa*). The *konficha* will also contribute the first animal to feed the men who will continue the work of excavating the well. As its initiator, the well will then bear the name of the *konficha* and he and his descendants will be the perpetual custodians of the well. The well will also have a number of secondary owners according to the number of livestock, reckoned in dewlaps (*maala*), that have been contributed for the work.

After the well has been completed, an opening ceremony is performed. The ceremony is known as the *harggugaa* ritual. The meaning of the term is not known, but it is tempting to derive it from the expression *hara-dhuga*, literally meaning "drinking from the well". On this day, the cattle of the *konficha* are led down to the well where they are the first animals to drink from the new water trough (*naaniga*).

As they approach the well, ritual whipping twigs (*harchumme*) from the *ogomddi* plant are spread on the ground in front of the well. After they have drunk the first water from the well, the cattle will trample these twigs, known as the *harchumme* of the *hargugga* ritual. On this occasion the *konficha* will be in full ceremonial dress. He will be wearing the ceremonial turban (*ruufa*) and in his hand he will carry the ceremonial whip (*liicho*) and marriage stick (*hororo*). The sunsuma relatives of the opposite moiety will also be invited to attend the ceremony and all the participants will bless the water by spitting symbolically in the direction of well. As Dabassa Guyyo puts it, this blessing ceremony is performed to ensure the health of the animals and to increase production, to make the new well "like the tail of a black sheep to the land". The spitting ritual is followed by the *hargugga* milking ceremony. A cow is led to the well and it is milked into the well. The teats of the animal selected must all yield milk. This is followed by the *dhibaayu* libation ceremony in memory of the ancestors when milk is poured into the ground at the threshold of the well. Myrrh (*qumbbii*) and salt (called *mi'awaa* "sweet") is then placed at the mouth of the well (*qaawaa eelaa*). With this the ceremony comes to an end.

Through his initiative in undertaking the construction of a well, the *konficha* establishes rights of precedence in the watering of his animals. The herd of his family will therefore have the first turn. Those families who have contributed stock for work will be given the second turn. The third place will be assigned to those who contributed their labour. This third category obtains this right through the law of *saddeta*. This refers to the queuing system in force at the wells. According to Dabassa Guyyo, people in this third category could sometimes also be requested to contribute livestock as well as labour. This contribution outside the normal practice is termed *galaata* or good will. Through such a good deed, the person gains a good name which will never be forgotten, enhancing his reputation and standing in the community.

The watering schedule, consisting of a cycle of three days, is also established through custom and law. The first day is termed *qara*, meaning "first" and/or "spearhead"; the second *dhabssu* and the third *limaalima*. The schedule is arranged in such a way that the clans from the different moities take alternate turns at the well. As mentioned above, an order of precedence is also enforced. The turn of the animals of the *konficha* on the first day is taken on the second day the animals of all those families who are believed to have special powers of some sort: the wayyu (those who are said to possess ritual power); the *reddimessa* (those who are believed to have supernatural powers), the *Qaalluu* and their *sunsumma* in the opposite moiety, the watering of whose stock is termed *laagaa*; the blacksmith (*tumticha*), the hunter gatherers (*waaticha*), and the medecine men (*chiressa*). There is sometimes an overlap between the wayyu and *reddimessa* and the *tumticha* and *waaticha*. The livestock of all other ordinary people can thus only be watered on the third day.

There is also an order of precedence pertaining to the different categories of livestock. All horses, to whichever families they may belong, are the first to be watered. Apart from the high regard in which they are held by custom and law, it is believed that horses are extremely vulnerable to lack of water. It is thought that extreme thirst will cause a pregnant mare to abort. Another important reason why they are watered first on any day of the cycle is that horses come under the collective ownership of the society. Although they are entrusted to the care of individuals, they can never become their private property. Any mistreatment of this animal will result in its confiscation and severe penalties for the miscreant. Horses are therefore under the absolute protection of the law. Cattle are given second turn on any day, then the small stock and lastly camels.

By way of concluding this discussion, it can be said that water occupies a central place in the cosmology and economic life of the people and it therefore plays a

pervasive part in the culture. As we have already seen in the other areas of the culture, water whether created by *Waaqa* or produced by man, is classified according to the same principles we find operative in other domains of society. These principles are also reflected in the management and use of water, as will become clearer later in the section discussing the traditional organisation of their grazing territories, and in the customs and laws regarding the distribution of water to both categories of animals and categories of human beings. For the present purposes however, it is important to stress the fact that the life of the entire Booran Oromo society is built around clusters of wells. These clusters are referred to as the *tullaa saglan*, the nine well complexes. All the wells in Booranaland are said to conceptually belong to these ancient well complexes, which are claimed to consist of a minimum of 40 groups of wells.

With this brief conclusion, let us now consider the traditional Oromo view of animals in general and that of cattle in particular.

TRADITIONAL OROMO VIEW OF ANIMALS

Both domestic and wild animals play a vital role in Oromo economic, social and religious life. This is true of the Oromo peasants generally and more so for the pastoralists.

The Oromo language does not have a word for "animal". The language distinguishes between two different categories of animals: domestic (*horri*) and wild (*bineensa*). The term *horri* however does not include all the domestic animals. It

designates two types of domestic animals, the hoofed (*kotte*) and the cloven-hoofed (*qeencha*). This categorisation excludes the "five-toed" (*kotte-qeencha shanaani*) creatures such as cats (*qatture*), dogs (*saree*) and camels (*gaala*). It is interesting to note here that man himself falls within this group of the five clawed animals. The hoofed animals include the horse (*farda*), the mule (*gaange*) and the donkey (*harre*) and amongst the cloven-hoofed are counted the cattle (*looni*), sheep (*hoolaa*) and goat (*re'ee*). As we have repeatedly seen, the Oromo system of classification involves five as the basic principle in which triads and diads are presented in opposition. How does this system operate in the case of the domestic animals? The problem here is that the animals under consideration are not of five species, but of six. So how does the system of classification overcome this difficulty? The first task of the system will be to reduce the six objects of classification to five. Once this task is achieved, then the diad/triad opposition can be worked out.

Here the six objects of classification are the horse, the mule and the donkey on the one hand, and the cattle, sheep and goat on the other. To reduce six species of animals to five categories, one animal on either side must be overlooked and a justification be found for doing so. This is usually done by attaching values to one of the sides of the equation. Such values are of a positive and negative kind. Oromo attributes a negative value to one of the animals in the hoofed category and a positive value to another in the cloven-hoofed category. The animal to be overlooked will depend on the context of classification. If the context is a negative one, then the animal which will be ignored will come from the hoofed category; if the context is a positive one, it will come from the cloven-hoofed category.

There are three species of animals on either side, so what determines the choice of the animal to be overlooked? The choice is made on the basis of the values attached to each of these animals in the belief system. The choice is reinforced by

the meanings attached to the animal in question in the language. In the first category, the horse and donkey have positive connotations; this leaves the mule as the negative entity. On the other side of the equation, cattle and sheep both have positive values, making the choice of endowing one of them with super-positive value difficult. The question of the goat does not pose a problem, as it is always negatively opposed to the sheep. The over-riding factor in making the choice here is a religious one. The question of the difference between the ordinary positive values emanating from the meaning system in language and that emanating from the belief system can be said to be one of degree. In this case, it is the sheep that emerges as the animal endowed with extra-positive attributes due to the religious connotations attached to it in the belief system. It is therefore the sheep that is ignored on the positive side of the equation, allowing the diad/triad scheme to operate. It should also be noted that it is not always the hoofed category that furnishes the negative element. In some cases, the goat from the cloven-hoofed category could also play this role. It is also interesting to see how the belief system places these animals at different levels in the scale of values and justifies this by creating myths. This evidenced by the myths explaining why the mule is a barren animal and why the sheep is an animal of peace favoured by the Creator.

In the Oromo scheme of classification, there are nine domestic animals, as enumerated above. The number nine is a recurrent figure of symbolical value which plays an important role in the mathematical patterning of the philosophico-religious concept of *ayyaana*. The significance of this number, has already been indicated and should be understood in relation to the notion of *sagli*.

By far the most important of the domestic animals in the economic life of the Oromo, whether they be agriculturalists or pastoralists, are cattle. The difference between the pastoral and the cultivating Oromo can thus be seen as the degree of

importance attached to the male and female species of cattle. Among the pastoral Oromo, where people predominantly engage in animal husbandry, the female category becomes vital to the system of production in terms of both producing food and reproducing other male and female young. As one moves up from the lowland to the highland areas of Oromo country, the importance of the cow is replaced by that of the ox. Among the cultivating Oromo, ox-drawn plough agriculture plays a vital role in the food producing system.

In the Oromo scheme, cattle, the most important of the domestic animals, are also classified following a vertical or temporal axis. This classification is based on the same quintenal principle applied to other categories of people and things. Oromo thus distinguishes five stages in the development of the calf. The first stage in the life of the calf is the period it spends inside the house. The animal is completely dependent on its mother's milk for its survival. At this stage the animal is referred to as *waatiye*.

The second stage is the period when the young animal is allowed to leave the house and to gradually begin grazing on grass and drinking water in addition to receiving its mother's milk. At this stage it is known as *aggoroo*.

In the third stage, the calf fully depends on grass and water and can survive independently of its mother. It is now referred to as *gorbaa*.

At the fourth stage, a qualitative change takes place in the development of the animal. Now it is big enough to join the family herd. The transition from grazing around the homestead to the daily trek to more distant pastures is made gradually until the animal adjusts to this new pattern of feeding. The animal thus undergoes 'rites of passage' and is given a new name, that of *lammacha*.

Finally, the animal reaches the stage of adulthood. This stage is marked by three phases linked to its reproductive capacities: when it is mature enough to mount the female stock, the young bull is called *dibicha* or *jibicha*. In mid-life, at the height of its reproductive forces, it is known as *korma* or mature bull. As this capacity diminishes it becomes *sangaa* or ox. There is however no sharp break between these different phases in the cycle of reproduction.

Cattle are the only animals to be so clearly categorised on the vertical scale. This is evidently due to their economic importance. It can thus be said in general that the pragmatic nature of language tends to attribute specialized terms only to those areas of life or activity which are of practical importance to the society and which touch upon its survival.

All domestic animals, and especially those termed *horri* or stock, which are related to subsistence, fall into this category. For their survival, these animals depend on the availability of grass (*marra*) and water (*bisaan*). In the following section, an attempt will be made to reconstruct the traditional Oromo structures of organisation and management of these vital natural resources.

TRADITIONAL OROMO CONCEPT OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

Among the traditional Oromo Booran, the primary unit of organisation is the household. These households are grouped to form what are known *shanacha* or homesteads. It is then clusters of such *shanacha* that constitute the *olla* or settlement. The further clustering of several *olla* in an area build up to form a unit of *re'era*. Several *re'era* then join to form what is known as district groups or *dhe'eda*. Finally these *dhe'eda*, which are composed of all the members of the Booran Oromo society come under the rule of the *Gadaa* socio-political system.

The role of the family as the primary and basic unit of organisation has already been discussed. In this section of the thesis, the manner in which these families cluster together at different levels to constitute the socio-political and economic system that organises and manages the natural resources vital to the life of every household will be elaborated.

Shanacha: the first level of organisation

The term *shanacha* is derived from the word *shan*, representing the number five. In other Oromo areas, the same concept most commonly found among the cultivators, is termed *shanne*, derived from the same root word.

Shanacha is therefore the first link in the chain of traditional Oromo socio-political and economic organisation. According to both my teachers Bule Guyyo and

Dabassa Guyyo, *shanacha* consists of a minimum of five households grouped together under the leadership of an *abba shanacha*. Dabassa emphasises the fact that a *shanacha* could be seen as forming one large household under the management of a leader. This leader or head of the *shanacha* is responsible for managing the overall affairs of the unit: ensuring its peace and security; discussing natural resource use with the heads of households and allocating labour for the different tasks; settling disputes between the individuals and families and representing their interests at the level of the *olla*.

***Olla*: the second level of organisation**

Just as five families group together to form a *shanacha*, a minimum of five *shanacha* come together to form an *olla*. An *olla* is similarly headed by an *abba ollaa*. The head of the *olla* will oversee the social, economic and ritual activities of the *olla* based on the custom and law and will maintain close links with other *olla* in the area. He will also handle cases that exceed the limits of the authority invested in the heads of the *shanacha* and will collaborate closely with them on all matters pertaining to the different *shanacha* under his leadership. People living in the same *olla* are expected to cooperate in the tasks of herding and watering stock and participate in all other community affairs.

***Re'era*: the third level of organisation**

At the third level of the socio-political and economic organisation, several *olla* will join loosely together in one neighbourhood to form a community of *re'era*. This level is similarly headed by an *abba re'era*, who will have overall charge of the *olla* in the particular area. The *re'era* committee made up of all the *abba olla* plays a very important one for the management of the natural resources in terms of grazing and

water available to the livestock in the area and it is at this level that all decisions regarding the equitable sharing of these resources are collectively made. It is also at this level that "well committees" can be formed to excavate a new well or retrieve an old one.

***Dhee'eda*: the fourth level of organisation**

The *dhe'eda* constitutes the highest unit of natural resource management and is headed by an *abba dhe'eda*. The council of *abba dhe'eda* representing all the grazing territories of the Booran are responsible for establishing internal law and order within the community as a whole and for maintaining the peace and harmony (*nagaa Boorana*) upon which all activity is founded. They are also responsible for activating the *yuuba* or people's militia that serves as a defence force in conjunction with the *Raaba* group of warriors at the level of the *yaa* or political assembly to protect the community and their land from external aggression and attack. This military organisation will be discussed in more detail below. The *abba dhe'eda* thus link the *yuuba* with the *yaa* at the level of *Gadaa*.

***Gadaa*: the fifth level of organisation**

The *Gadaa* assembly constitutes the most inclusive level of social, political and economic organisation in Oromo. In the words of Bule Guyyo, "everything that concerns the Booran is the concern of the *Gadaa*".

Since security is one of the important considerations in the patterning of the residential and administrative structure of the traditional Oromo society it is necessary to also briefly present a general picture of the military organization.

Chapter IX

THE STRUCTURE OF TRADITIONAL OROMO MILITARY ORGANISATION

As has been demonstrated in the previous section, the Oromo Booran traditional organisation is structured at different five levels on both the horizontal and vertical axes. The nine well complexes around which the major settlements of the Booran Oromo society are centred constitutes the horizontal level of social and economic organisation. It is based on the demarcation of the grazing territories and the distribution of the wells upon which they are dependent among the different clans. The division of these clans follows the same structural principles found at work throughout the culture. The vertical structure on the other hand is based on the management units needed to administer these territories.

Booran Oromo is surrounded by a number of other pastoral groups. To the west are the *Dassenetch*, the *Dime*, the *Murssi* and others. To the east live numerous hostile *Somali* clans. To the south are the *Rendille* and the *Samburu* or *Korre Maasai* as the Booran would call them. To the west and southwest are the *Turkana*. To the north are the *Gujji* and *Arssi* Oromo. Throughout their history, these pastoralists have raided one another, in some instances entirely displacing one of the groups from the region it occupied. To survive in these hostile conditions, there was a need for a highly developed system of security.

The case of the Booran can be said to be a special one. They occupy a relatively well-watered region in the East African pastoral system. Moreover, in this region, their ancestors developed the art of digging deep water wells, enabling them to lead a semi-settled existence. This availability of water and pasture distinguished them

from other nomadic pastoralists and made them highly vulnerable to attack. "This is why", Dabassa explains, "the Booran developed a strong security organisation". The defence of this territory however did not only consist in retaining the wells, but also in riposting raids, the most famous of which were the cattle raids.

According to both Bule Guyyo and Dabassa Guyyo, the Booran military organisation is based on the same vertical and horizontal structures found in the system of natural resource management. In their opinion, the grazing units described above were formed in such a way that they would enclose the *Tulla* well complex. For here were to be found the *horri* (livestock) and the *horra* (mineral waters); here were situated the pasturelands of the Booran flocks and herds; and here lived the women and the children and the elderly, all of which needed the protection of the society.

When calling up its defence force, Booran drew the active members from the *shanacha* and the *olla* to form a unit of 30 men. This unit was then broken up into three fighting squads of nine men, known as the *saglli lollaa*. These 27 men then formed the combat unit proper. The three remaining men constituted its leaders (*guddu*) and were known as the *abbotti uchumaa* or "holders of the firesticks". One of these firestick elders acted as the overall commander and the two others served as his aides.

The 30 men who constituted the combat unit were selected from amongst the ordinary retired citizens (*yuuba*) on proven ability: they were people who had already gone through the cycle of the *Gadaa* rituals together either as age-mates or as fellow gradesmen and had demonstrated their leadership skills and retained their positions as leaders after retirement from active service. Together they were known as the *sodoman Boro*, "the 30 man unit of *Boro*". The use of the name *Boro* in this context

linked the unit to the origins of Oromo and in recent historical oral traditions, is connected to *Abbayi Baabo*, who is said to have replaced the *Warday* in the present *Tulla* region. The separation of the three-man leadership committee from the nine-man squads served conceptual and administrative purposes rather than a real one: as the commanding officers of the unit they not only directed the battle but also participated in it. Here, as elsewhere in Oromo, authority did not mean privilege but responsibility. At the level of the *re'era*, the different units of 30 men come together to form what is known as a *chibra*. Derived literally from the word for a plait of hair, the term designates a battalion, vividly expressing the idea of a higher combat unit constituted of a minimum of 150 (30 by five) men. The five *re'era* will theoretically provide five battalions each or a brigade of 750 men. Since there are also five *dh'eeda* in the *Tulla* region, the army or *duula* will then consist of 3,750 men (750 by five). This gives some idea of the number of men that can be called up through the administrative structure to compose an army of men not in active service at the time of war.

Unlike their counterparts in the *yaa'a*, the *yuuba* combatants are men who have already undergone military service and are accustomed to the hardships of life. At the level of the *yaa'a* political assembly, men in the *Raba* grade are still undergoing their specialised training as junior and senior warriors and are actively in service. Together the *yaa'a* and the *yuuba* force form what is referred to as the *duula gubba* (literally "big army") which constitutes the entire military power of the Booran Oromo society.

Traditional Oromo warfare has been described by other anthropologists and scholars of different disciplines. My own objective in this section has been to show how the culture bearers themselves view their own military organisation and the

manner in which this organisation is structured and follows the same underlying principles at work in other areas of the Oromo culture.

With this general overview of Booran Oromo military organisation and system of security, we can now consider the traditional Oromo economy. This will be limited to a description and analysis of the *dabarre* institution as it is found among the Booran Oromo of Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya.

Chapter XII

THE TRADITIONAL OROMO BOORAN SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The Oromo designate "property" by the term *horii*. The term is derived from the verb *horu*, meaning "to reproduce". Property ownership is termed *qabbenya*, derived from the verb *qabaachuu*, meaning "to have" or "to own". In terms of the law, *qabbenya* refers to the relationship between the owner and everything that he owns.

There exist three distinct forms of property among the Oromo. First, there are those forms of property which are collectively owned by the society; secondly those that are owned by a group or family; and thirdly, those which are privately owned. According to the traditional Oromo law (*seera*), there are things which can never be owned. Such things include land, water and all other natural resources. These are owned and protected by the law itself (*cf.* Kassam and Megerssa 1992). By prohibiting private ownership of these natural resources the law ensures that every Oromo can have equal access to them. It also prohibits the private ownership of horses, which in the past constituted the means of controlling property and through which military power was exerted. However, it recognises the rights of a group or family to specific water wells, and to its own herd of domestic cloven-hoofed animals. In terms of stock, *horii* is constituted by all the animals domesticated by man, except for cats and dogs.

All these categories of animals, except for the horse, as we have already seen, may be privately owned by the individual members of the nuclear family, but are managed and controlled by the father or male head of the household. The law also recognises the male head's right to use the labour force of the members of his own

family. Individually owned animals are acquired in a number of different ways. The core or nucleus of a man's future herd is termed *handhuuraa*, literally meaning "umbilical cord". This core or nucleus is added to at all the subsequent rites of passage a young man undergoes before he himself can found a household and become an independent herd owner in his own right. A man may acquire animals at his circumcision and when he proves his manhood in the killing of a trophy animal. He also obtains animals in the form of gifts at marriage. Animals obtained in this way constitute an inalienable part of an individual's property.

Booran Oromo distinguish five classes of ownership. The existence of these classes belies the notion of egalitarianism favoured by some writers on Oromo, at least as far as property ownership is concerned. This wealth is measured in the number of herding sticks or *ulle* required to herd the animals. It is estimated that one herdsman with his stick can watch about 50 heads of cattle. The most affluent stock-owners are known as *durressa chichitaa*, literally "the rotten rich". They are said to own 20 or more *ulle* of cattle, excluding the young male and female stock that are not yet ready for propagation, as well as the old non-reproductive or sterile stock. The second class of owners are referred to simply as *durressa* meaning "the rich" and are thought of as owning at least 15 *ulle* of cattle. The third class of owners are called *off-bulcha*, meaning "the self-sufficient" and represent those who are capable of meeting the subsistence needs of their families. The fourth class of owners are termed *hark-galleesa*, literally meaning "the thin-handed", and are those herd-owners who are struggling to support their families. Finally, the fifth category are "the poor", *deegaa*, or destitute herd-owners, who have lost most of their stock. According to my teachers, the great majority of the present day Oromo are reduced to these last two categories.

Like everything else in the Oromo universe, the nature of property is determined by *marro*, literally meaning "turn". For the Oromo the wealth is thus not only a matter of judicious management. It is governed by the natural and cosmic laws of *ayaana* that determine, as we have seen throughout the thesis, the origin and character of all things and their development over time. It is commonly believed that no form of wealth can extend beyond three generations (*harka akkaku sadeen hindarbine*).

In all matters relating to property, there is also an element of luck. This idea of luck is related to the concept of *ayaana*. Depending on the numerological patterns which were in play at the moment of his birth, an individual is believed to be endowed with different degrees of success in the economic ventures he undertakes. All transactions are therefore carefully timed and can only be executed on particularly auspicious days of the month. The counter-part of the luck attached to one's person is called *gaara*. It is thought that any member of the household possessing one or the other of these birth attributes can entirely change the destiny of a herd, causing it to multiply or bringing about its ruin. This luck or the lack of it can also enter a herd through a particular animal in one's own herd or be introduced into the herd in the form of an animal loan. Such beliefs serve to reinforce socio-economic relationships. Generally speaking, property has the character of being like 'a passing cloud' (*horiin dumaasa*), such that the rich man of today could suddenly find himself the poor man of tomorrow. In order to survive, he must therefore not only invest in material wealth but also establish strong social relations that will stand him in good stead in the event of a crisis. Property must therefore not be accumulated but be "passed on" (*dabarre*) ; in other words, relations must be invested in people, and not in property alone.

The term *dabarre* is derived from the verb *dabarssu*, literally meaning "to pass on". Depending on the context in which it is used, the term could have a number of different meanings, but underlying most of them can be discerned the common semantic trait of 'assistance'. The provision of assistance is built on the recognition of the mutual interdependency of the members of the community and on the need for reciprocity. This notion is vividly expressed in the proverb *harkki dabarre wal dhiqa* meaning "hands wash each other reciprocally". All the forms of private property that are passed on have the capacity to be transformed and to adapt to different economic values. In the transaction that takes place between the giver and the taker, the returns may not however be immediate ones. The transaction cannot therefore be quantified in purely material terms. Through the act of giving, the giver receives what is known as *galata* or social acknowledgment. The good will generated by his generosity is believed to affect the giver and his property in many intangible ways, but it also has many tangible benefits. On the social level, the giver of *dabarre* gains prestige and heightened status in the society. The help he has given to the members of the community will be a mark of his social commitment and will be one of the factors that will qualify him for leadership on the political level. The institution could be defined as an institutionalised practice whereby a large herd owner loans different categories of stock to other members of the community according to the terms prescribed by the custom (*aadaa*) and law (*seera*), such that the interests of the two parties is mutually served.

There are many forms of reciprocal exchange among the Oromo. Most of these are institutionalised practices. Although there are some variations in terminology from one region to another, the basic principles of the institution remain the same, wherever it is practised. The differences emanate from the two modes of production of the Oromo: agricultural in the highlands and pastoral in the lowlands. The institution is necessitated principally, but not exclusively, by the shortage of

labour. With this understanding of the meaning of the term *dabarre*, let us now consider how the institution it designates operates both among the pastoral and agricultural Oromo and the significance of the concept for the systems of production.

Loosely subsumed under the institution of *dabarre*, are several forms of mutual assistance, which could be said to generally fall within the scope of two major practices known as *gonoffaa* and *buusaa*. The first type consists of forms of assistance imposed by the law. The second are those initiated at different levels by the members of the community themselves.

The first of these, *gonoffaa* is an institution through which the law imposes obligatory contributions of animals, especially of cattle, to rehabilitate and reestablish families that have been rendered destitute through raids, epidemics or some other calamity. The term is derived from the verb *gonoffu* "to force". The same law obliges people to contribute livestock for the performance of rituals and other ceremonies requiring the sacrifice of animals. It also implements the organisation of counter-attacks to recapture animals lost in raids and institutes retaliatory measures against the offending party. It can also intervene in inter-personal disputes and can exact compensation in livestock depending on the gravity of the offence committed.

Coupled with this institution is that of *buusaa*, from the verb meaning "to pour". *Buusaa* is a type of voluntary contribution which is made between families which reside in the same *shanacha* and/or *olla*. It often happens that in a *shanacha* there may be families which have a large number of milk cows in excess of their needs, whilst others may be dependent on a very restricted number of lactating animals. It is one of the many responsibilities of the *abba shanacha* to look into such matters and to see to it that the second type of family receives its fair share of milk from those who have more than they need. The lack and/or shortage of milk is not

always due to poverty in cattle. The family in question could be rich in cattle but still experience a shortage in its daily supply of milk due to the number of lactating cows it may possess at a particular time of the year. At the request of the *abba shanacha*, family heads instruct the young men to take a container full to the needy household, after the animals are milked. The practice of *buusaa* thus ensures that no family goes hungry within a *shanacha* or *olla*. Through the practice, immediate assistance can also be organised for a family or group of families who have lost their animals in a raid or in some other unpredictable manner. As we have seen, the collective responsibility of the society for restocking such victims is assumed by the law through the practice of *gonoffa*. However, as this involves the meeting of those in authority at the clan level (*gossa*) to decide on questions such as who should contribute stock and how many animals should be given, the process could be a lengthy one. In the meantime, it is the affinal relations which will normally come to the help of the distressed family to ensure that it receives a regular supply of food. The mother's brothers or *abbuyya* relations are amongst the first to come to the succour of their kinsman. The animals are loaned to him in the form of *dabarre*.

To supplement the milk needs of his family, a herd-owner could also borrow a milch cow from a person outside his own immediate camp and/or kin relations. This type of loan is also known as *dabarre*. *Dabarre* animals change hands in many different ways. *Dabassa Guyyo* describes *dabarre* 'proper' in the following manner:-

"...*Dabarre* proper is not based on kinship relations. It is not based on relations of affinity. It is not based on neighbourhood relations. It is based on wealth. It is a relation of the haves and the have-nots. There are different categories of have-nots: they are known as *dhipataa* ("the miserable"), *dhabaaa* ("the needy"), *qollee* ("the threadbare"), *deegaa* ("the impoverished") and the like.

Each of these terms refer to causes of impoverishment. Whatever the reason for their impoverishment, such people are generally known as *deegaa*. Then there are the classes of the rich such as the *durressa chichitaa* and the *durressa*. These people own more cattle than they can manage. They own so many cattle that they are unable to look after them. They therefore look for people who could take care of an *ulle* or more of their animals in exchange for the male offspring. With the consent of the owner, they can take these male animals to the market or slaughter them for food. The female offspring of the *dabarre* animals remain the exclusive property of the owner. This is to the advantage of both the cattle poor and to the cattle rich. The cattle poor can now depend on the *dabarre* animals for their subsistence, whether in terms of milk or meat and can even take some of the animals to the market and sell them to meet other needs. In the meantime, his own animals will continue to multiply and his own cows will not need to be milked. The calves can suckle and grow faster. So it is in this sense that we say *dabarre* is in the interest of the two categories of people, of the rich and the poor.

This type of *dabarre* is different from other forms of *dabarre*. In the case of the other *dabarre*, the poor man can only use the product of the *dabarre* animal. He can only keep such animals for a short period of time. *Dabarre* proper on the other hand is of great advantage to the cattle poor. *Dabarre* proper is also of great advantage to the cattle rich. *Dabarre* frees the cattle rich from the immense problems of grazing and watering. If he loans 200 head of cattle in the form of *dabarre*, you can imagine the relief he gets in his work of grazing and watering 200 fewer animals.

Besides this advantage the cattle rich also have other advantages. If a rich man keeps his animals in different places in the form of *dabarre*, he will minimize the risk of losing all his animals, say in cattle raid. In the case of drought also, herds in

an area would have a higher chance of survival than those in another area. The same could be said about epidemics. He will also reduce the possibility of over-grazing by distributing the animals in the form of *dabarre*. The cattle rich will also avoid putting pressure on the water in the few wells in the area by distributing his animals through *dabarre*. Even if there is sufficient water, he simply does not have the manpower to water such a big population of animals. Thus the *dabarre* form of relation is to the advantage not only of the cattle rich and the cattle poor, but also to the advantage of the animals, the grass and the water". In the highland agricultural communities *dabarre* appears in the form of village based agricultural cooperatives.

The *wanfala* form of exchange and cooperation is most common among the Oromo of southern Shoa, Arsi, Baale and the adjacent areas. The cooperation is agreed upon between two or more people. It is based on the definite understanding that a day of labour equal in length and intensity will be provided by the members of the cooperative for whichever activity they decide upon. In the case of *wanfala*, the activity usually involves cooperating with oxen as well. The land worked on is either owned by a member of the *wanfala* or is rented from the landed rich on the basis of share cropping or some other agreement.

After the *wanfala* is formed, the group decides on whose land the group should work on each day by casting lots according to the number of members in the group. If the members are seven, the cycle of return will consist of the seven days of the week. The seven man and/or oxen team then goes to work on the land of one of the members. If the member does not require his share of the team's work, he can also 'sell' his workday to a rich landowner who is short of labour and will receive payment for the value of the work force he has thus provided.

Among the western Macha, the same practice is referred to by the term *daado*. *Daado* is a cooperative in which young men and women of productive age come together to provide their joint labour. The male and female members are usually drawn from the same village or adjacent villages. They normally number about 10 unmarried persons who generally belong to the same age group. The group assists in all the agricultural activities of the farm: weeding, planting, harvesting, etc. rotating in the same manner as in the *wanfala* cooperative.

Another form of cooperation common among the agricultural Oromo is that known as *qabbo*. The term is derived from the verb *qabbu*, meaning "to hold". It can be roughly translated as 'giving a hand to'. Unlike *daado* and *wanfala*, which are strictly contractual in nature, in terms of an equivalent provision of labour on a fixed day in the cycle of work, *qabbo* cooperation is an informal type of cooperation requested and received by a member of the village community for work that requires the help of more than one person. *Qabbo* usually consists of a task that does not take the whole day. A good example of such a task is that of placing the roof onto the structure of the traditional Oromo house. In constructing the house, the round roof is normally prepared separately on the ground and is placed onto the circular base after its completion. In activities such as this, every able-bodied member of the village community regardless of his or her age is expected to participate.

Daku-butee is another type of assistance based not on an obligation to provide help, but on the critical factor of time. It is a short-term cooperation between individuals who are closely related. Such cooperation is needed to carry out a task in the most timely manner possible, failing which further action would be futile.

The *dabbo* or *jiggi* form of cooperation differs from all the others described so far in that it is one initiated by the well to do members of the community. The

request is made by leading members of the community based on their family history. It involves obtaining the assistance of the whole community and especially of its less privileged members in the form of a *dabbo* cooperative.

As we have seen in this discussion of property, (*horii*), is derived from *horru* meaning to reproduce. In Oromo, however, the concept is a much wider one and extends to forms of social and cultural reproduction. This is evident in the idea of 'passing on' contained in *dabarre* under which all the institutionalised forms of assistance can be subsumed. In this social and cultural reproduction, custom (*aadaa*) and law (*seera*), play a very important role in maintaining the economic institutions. Custom is seen as the mother who produces all the mechanisms and processes through which the system of production is sustained. The law is seen as the father, who protects the achievements of the tradition, whilst at the same time keeping it in check. It is perhaps for this reason that the Oromo say, *horri aadat horaata*, literally meaning "productivity is produced through custom".

Throughout this thesis, we have constantly referred to the notions of the *Gadaa* and the *Qaallu* which are the two basic institutions upon which the Oromo culture is founded. Let us now attempt to describe what the Oromo mean by these two conceptual and institutional categories. and see whether it follows the general patterning of the concept of *ayaana* as described previously.

Chapter XIII

THE GADAA AND THE QAALLUU: CLANS AND CLASSES THE BOORAN OROMO POWER STRUCTURE

The traditional Oromo power structure is constituted of two different yet inseparable institutions, namely the *Qaalluu* and the *Gadaa*. The *Qaalluu* institution represents temporal rule, whilst that of the *Gadaa* stands for secular rule.

There are five *Qaalluu* institutions in each of the Oromo groups, the *Sabbo* and *Goona*, the *Rayaa* and *Assebo*, the *Macha* and the *Tullama*, the *Sikko* and the *Manddo* and the *Ittu* and *Karayyu*. Of the five *Qaalluu* found amongst the *Sabbo* and *Goona*, for instance, four belong to the *Sabbo*, and only one to the *Goona*. Similarly, three of the *Qaalluu* amongst the *Sabbo* belong to the *Mat't'aarri* phratry, whilst only one belongs to the *Karayyu* phratry. The fifth *Qaalluu* comes from the *Oditu*, one of the seven sub-divisions of the *Fullele* on the *Goona* side.

In terms of the power relationship of the *Qaalluu*, that of the *Karayyu* prevails. This power dominance of the *Qaalluu* of the *Karayyu* is justified by the myth that traces his descent from heaven, a prestige enjoyed by all his descendants (cf. Knutsson 1967; and Legesse 1973 for versions of this myth).

On the other hand, the *Qaalluu* of the *Goona* claims preeminence not in terms of his heavenly descent, but by virtue of his virgin birth, an earthly occurrence predating the arrival of the *Qaalluu* from heaven. The three other *Qaalluu* of the *Mat't'aari*, about whom there is no pronounced myth, come from the *Karaara*, *Kukku* and *Garjedaa* lineages. These lineages are however closely linked to the *Qaalluu* of

Moiety	Sub-division	Order of Seniority	Lineage
Goona	Harroresa	1	Hawattu
Sabbo	Digallu	2	Nurttu
"	"	3	Tiiti
"	"	4	Udumttu
"	"	5	Walaajji
"	"	6	Daado
"	"	7	Emmajji
Goona	Fullele	8	Dhaachitu
"	"	9	Machitu
Sabbo	Karayyu	Not of earth	Dayyu
"	"	11	Baasu
"	Mattaari	12	Mettaa
"	"	13	Gaadullaa
Goona	Fullele	14	Galaantu
Sabbo	Mattaari	15	Dooranni
Goona	Harroresa	16	Qarchabdu
Sabbo	Mattaari	17	Bokkicha
"	Karayyu	18	Golo
"	Karayyu	19	Bido
"	Mattaari	Not of earth	Karaara
Goona	Fullele	21	Siraayu
"	Harroresa	22	Wara-Jiddaa
Sabbo	Mattaari	23	Maangata
Goona	Harroresa	24	Dambittu
"	"	25	Nonnittu
"	Fullele	26	Konnittu
"	Harroresa	27	Maliyyu
"	"	28	Arssi
"	Fullele	29	Bachittu
"	"	Not of earth	Odittu

A CHART SHOWING CLAN SENIORITY AMONG THE OROMO-BOORAN

the *Karayyu*, as it is amongst them that he will take his second wife, the mother of his successor.

At the basis of this classificatory scheme relating to the *Qaalluu*, is another conceptual division which is commonly found in the Oromo system of classification: that of the principle of seniority (*angafa*) and of juniority (*qut'tisu*) based on the order of birth. There is a general belief among the Oromo that *Qaalluu*-ship is transmitted through the younger son, that of the second wife, a belief which is once again given credence through myth.

Thus the *Digallu* of the *Sabbo*, and the *Hawat'tu* of the *Goona* which are the most senior groups on both sides of the moiety system, do not possess *Qaalluu*. They constitute, however, the core of the *Gadaa* institution.

It should be stressed here that the term *hangafa*, usually translated as "elderhood", has a wider semantic content in Oromo than its equivalent has in English. In Oromo, a person may first of all be *hangafa* by birth; secondly, he may also claim this right if he is the child of the first wife; thirdly, he is entitled to this position if he comes from a senior clan; fourthly, he may aspire to this status if he comes from a lineage which is genealogically superior to the rest; and finally, an *illmaan kormaa* is conceptually elder to an *illmaan jarsaa*. The notion of *illmaan kormaa* is applied to all those sons of Booran Oromo who are born at the 'right' time of the *Gadaa* cycle, that is, when their fathers are actively in power. Such children are viewed collectively as representing the first born sons of the Booran Oromo community as a whole, for it is they who will replace their fathers as *Gadaa* rulers when the 40 year cycle (*gogessa*) returns (*mara gogessaa*). The *illmaan jarsaa*, on the other hand, are the children born outside the 'right' period, when their fathers have

retired from *Gadaa* office. They are thus collectively opposed to the *illmaan kormaa*.

The *Qaalluu* marries two wives. The first wife is referred to by the usual expression of *niiti gaamme*. The second wife is called *geesiti* at marriage and *Qaalliti*, the feminine form of *Qaalluu*, after her marriage. Like any other ordinary Booran, the *Qaalluu* begets as many children as *Waaqa* may offer from his first wife. Their first born son is the eldest son. However, this first born son and his younger brothers have no claim whatsoever to the *Qaalluu-ship*. This rightly belongs to the male child of the second wife, who is believed to bear only one son, who will become the future *Qaalluu*. After the birth of this child she ceases to be productive. The oral traditions however relate one incident in which the *Qaalliti* gave birth to twins, known as *Iggu Berre* and *Dhaaye Berre*. As a result, one of the sons was obliged to leave the land of his birth. His departure marks the beginning of the *muuda* or pilgrimage made by all Oromo to the *Abba Muudaa* ("Father of Sacrifice"), as the second twin later came to be known. Most of the Oromo religious rituals, especially that performed with the offering of roasted coffee beans (*bunna qalaa*), is believed to have originated with this *Qaalluu* who is common to all Oromo, irrespective of their regional affiliations. This Father of Sacrifice is also known as *Tokkicha Maqaan Kumaa*, "the One with a Thousand Names". It is interesting to note, in this respect, that one of the ritual terms for roasted coffee beans is *kuma*, meaning a "thousand". The detailed description of the historical role played by the *Abba Muudaa* in Oromo culture and society would form the topic of another thesis and is too long to expound upon here.

According to Booran oral tradition, none of the *Qaalluu*, who preceded the one known as Affalata Dido, were buried on earth. At their death, they are said to have ascended to heaven envelopped in a cloud of mist.

The *Qaalluu* can be said to represent an embodiment of all the positive cultural values esteemed by the Oromo. He never curses, only blesses. He never engages in battle, but does not fail to face the challenge when confronted. He does not handle any instrument of death such as a spear. He never wears sandals that cover the heels of his feet. He adheres strictly to all the prescribed taboos. In this sense, the *Qaalluu* could be said to be the physical manifestation of the ideal son of the Oromo nation.

Beside all these behavioural patterns, there are also material objects and ornaments that are identified with the *Qaalluu* and the *Qaalluu* institution. The first of these are the three iron bracelets worn on the left hand known as the *ladduu*. These bracelets distinguish him from ordinary Booran. The etymology of the term *ladduu* is uncertain, but may be derived from the verb *lagddu*, meaning "that which prohibits". The other object associated with him is the drum, *dibbe*. The word for a small drum is closely linked to the term for the spoken word, *dubbi*. *Dibbe* is grammatically feminine in gender. The link between the two terms is rendered even more explicit when one compares them to the word designating a large drum. This is referred to as *dubbisa*, literally "the speaker", and is masculine in gender. The *dibbe* or the drum of the *Qaalluu* is used in the ceremonial occasions linked to his person and figures in the funerary rites performed at his demise. Bule Guyyo, however, thinks that the drum is used only to announce the death of the *Qaalluu* and is not used on any other occasion. He claims that the sound of this drum is so distinct, that its beating is a clear indication of the passing away of its owner. Whatever the case may be, the drum, like the bracelets, are important insignia related to the *Qaalluu* institution. The large drum, on the other hand, is linked with the *Gadaa* institution, and is used to announce a war.

Certain wild creatures are also believed to be the *Qaalluu*'s familiars. The first of these is the *buutii* or spitting cobra. These snakes are said to be bred by the *Qaalluu* of the *Karayyu* and be carried by members of one of the other *Qaalluu* lineages when his homestead migrates from one ritual centre to another. The puff adder, *bofa*, is associated with the *Qaalluu* of the opposite moiety. In one of the cycle of folktales relating the exploits of the *Qaalluu*, he is saved by a certain bird, which is always associated with him. The domestic stock of the *Qaalluu* are also subjected to certain taboos. A special breed of cattle termed *loon kateebu*, are only grazed and watered in restricted areas. The word *kateebu* is another name for the spitting cobra.

All these objects and animals obviously have symbolical significance, and are believed to have been 'found' with the original *Qaalluu* when he descended from heaven.

Let us now briefly examine the role played by the sons of the first wife of the *Qaalluu*, as it constitutes a link with the *Gadaa* institution.

There is no consensus amongst my teachers and amongst ordinary lay informants regarding the role played by the children borne to the *Qaalluu* by his first wife. This is because there is generally a certain amount of reticence expressed by Oromo when discussing the *Qaalluu* institution. This is understandable, as the subject matter is a religious one. According to Bule Guyyo, however, it is the first born son of the *Qaalluu* who becomes the *Addulla Fiit't'e*, or the highest legal councillor to the *Gadaa* class in power. He thus occupied the position equivalent to the Attorney General in the modern state. This position was however under the domain of the *Qaalluu*.

Now that a general overview of the background to the *Qaalluu* institution has been given, its relationship to that of the *Gadaa* should now be examined. In discussing this relationship, an attempt will be made to show the extent to which the internal classification of each of these institutions and their over-all features reflect the Oromo system of classification, which this thesis purports to be based on the Oromo concept of *ayyaana*.

To understand the relationship between the *Gadaa* and the *Qaalluu*, it is necessary to first grasp the principles of classification which rank the Booran Oromo groups according to their order of seniority.

As shown on the chart, the *Hawat't'u* clan of the *Goona* moiety, belonging to the *Harroressa* subdivision, occupies the highest rank in the Booran Oromo social structure. Between the *Hawat't'u* and the *Machittu*, there are a series of nine clans, none of which is a *Qaalluu* clan. This *Qaalluu* clan appears in 10th position with the *Karayyu*. The *Bokkicha* subdivision of the *Karayyu* marks the beginning of another set of nine clans ending with the *Bidoo* in which, similarly, there figures no *Qaalluu* clan or lineage. The transition between this second set of nine clans and the third set of nine is marked by the ...The *Siraayu* demarcates the beginning of a third set of clans, which ends with the *Arssi* of the *Harroressa*. Another *Qaalluu*; clan, that of the *Oditu*, again marks the end of the set in 10th position. It is interesting to note here that if each of the transitional *Qaalluu* clans were to be overlooked, there would be a total of 27 constituent groups within the Booran Oromo. This spatial ordering of social groups thus corresponds to the temporal ordering of days that extend from one new moon to the next. Just as the time-reckoning system plays on the ambiguity of the three days that separate the lunar from the solar count, the social system creates a structural similarity in regard to the three *Qaalluu*; clans.

Another structural similarity that exists between the classification of time and that of people, is the fact that there are six triple *ayyaana* and six *Digaalu* lineages; just as there are five paired *ayyaana*, so there are five paired clan groupings; and finally, as there are 11 single *ayyaana*, so there are 11 single clan groups, totalling 27 in both cases.

But this scheme of classification based on the order of seniority would be incomplete if it did not take into account such groups as the *Waata* and the *Garba* or *Gabraa*. Let us now examine how these Oromo groups fit into this scheme.

The *Waata* hunter-gatherers are found amongst all the regional Oromo groups. They are said to be the descendants of an elder named *Waayu Banoo* and are thus considered to be the eldest of all Oromo. The name *waayu* means "everything" and *banoo* means "the opener". The notion of 'opening' is a figurative expression in Oromo standing for birth: the first-born child is said to 'open' his mother's womb. The seniority of the *Waata* is confirmed in a number of oral traditions collected by both *Waata* and non-*Waata* researchers. The story relating how *Waayu Banoo* lost this position of seniority in Oromo society is too long to be recounted here. A detailed version of the tale is recorded in the source materials; another unpublished version is given by Balla (1992). However, in brief, it is the story of how *Waayu Banoo*, the richest man in the land, lost all his cattle by comparing his wealth to that of God. As a punishment for this arrogance and pride, he and his descendants were reduced to hunting wild game.

According to Ali Balla (1992), who is *Waata* himself, the *Waata* are divided into 14 clans. These are the following:-

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. <i>Egan</i> | 8. <i>Gabbata</i> |
| 2. <i>Shama</i> | 9. <i>Chaaqo</i> |
| 3. <i>Kodhele</i> | 10. <i>Bachessa</i> |
| 4. <i>Tiyyoole</i> | 11. <i>Shirshiro</i> |
| 5. <i>Rogoblaa</i> | 12. <i>Goorille</i> |
| 6. <i>Aqooqii</i> | 13. <i>Tuma</i> |
| 7. <i>Saqan</i> | 14. <i>Kochota</i> |

These 14 *Waata* clans, with their own internal order of seniority and with very few subdivisions, all trace their origin to the Booran *Karayyu* clan.

Contrary to the position occupied by the *Waata* in the Oromo scheme of things as the elder sons, the *Gabra* or *Gabaro* stand for the younger sons. As has already been discussed elsewhere in the thesis, the juniority of the *Gabra* is symbolised by their association with a body of stagnant water (*garba*). The *Gabra* are divided into five phratries, each one of which is linked to the five Booran *Qaalluu*; clans. This idea of juniority associated with the term *garba* can be seen for example in the designation of the three *addulaa* councillors: the senior or *addulaa fir'r'e*, the junior or *addula garba* and the *addulaa mededhichaa* of the sub-moiety. In this sense, it is not difficult to understand that the junior position of the *Gabra* is opposed in the Oromo conceptual scheme to the senior position of the *Waata*.

We have already seen that according to this scheme of classification, descent is marked according to the order of birth. This idea of seniority and of juniority is thus also applied to the two wives of the *Qaalluu*; and to their children. The *Waata* can therefore be seen as descendants of the first wife of the *Qaalluu*;, whilst the *Gabra* can be viewed as the descendants of the second wife. As oral tradition recounts, both were excluded from the *Qaalluu*; clans as a result of a ritual fault committed by their ancestors, in violation of the laws and customs that are rigourously observed by these clans.

Unfortunately, this relationship of the *Waata* and of the *Gabra* to the Booran *Qaalluu*; clans has been forgotten over time. They are now erroneously considered independent groups with an inferior status. This false representation has been accentuated by the administrative policies of the governments in power, and has been propagated by ethnographers who being non-Oromo, have tended to confuse the peripheral meanings of the terms with their core meanings. As a result, many Oromo themselves, who have not had the chance or the means to reflect upon their own culture, have come to believe the new myths generated about them. The *Waata* and *Gabra* issue can only be fully understood in terms of the conceptual division of the traditional Oromo society into junior and senior categories. This division manifests itself at different levels of society and is derived from the system of classification underlying the world-view of the Oromo people.

One more aspect of Oromo culture that needs to be considered is the Oromo view of "*aadaa*" (custom) and "*seera*" (law). Thus let us now turn to these two important concepts and briefly introduce what they mean to Oromo and how they relate to the Oromo concept of "*ayaana*".

Chapter XIII
AADAA AND SEERA TRADITIONAL OROMO VIEWS
OF CUSTOM AND LAW

Social scientists usually refer to traditional legal systems as 'customary law'. This would imply that traditional legal practices make no distinction between custom and law. That this is not the case of the traditional Oromo in general and of the Booran Oromo in particular is evidenced by the fact that there are two distinct terms to designate custom (*aadaa*) and law (*seera*). Whilst recognising the specificity of each, the Oromo see the two institutions as being inseparably linked. They represent, in the view of my teacher Dabassa Guyyo "the two sides of a balance" that constantly serve to check one another:-

"This thing we call *seera* goes with *aadaa*. *seera* and *aadaa* are twins or things that are tied together. They cannot be separated. They go together because *seera* checks *aadaa* and *aadaa* checks *seera*...If *aadaa* and *seera* were to be seen with the eyes (which they cannot be), they would look like the two sides of a balance, whose up and down movements alternate".

According to Dabassa, *aadaa* "is that which is known to everybody" by the very virtue of the fact that they belong to the same culture. It is "public and common knowledge". It is made up of the "pieces of knowledge" that direct all the every day actions of a person. It is that by which "you set out and come back home; by which you enter your house and sleep; by which you greet your neighbours; by which you speak with men under the shade; by which you sell things in the market; by which you buy things in the market". *Seera* on the other hand, is known only to those who

specialise in it. Dabassa describes the distinction between the two in the following manner:

"...[W]ith this common knowledge, an ordinary Oromo speaks and makes decisions. But everything has a limit. So this *aadaa* comes and comes and comes and reaches a certain stage. It then enters the level of the law (*fullaa seera*). Once it enters the place of the law, it is no longer common knowledge. It becomes a matter to be referred to the fathers of the law (*abbooti seeraa*). These are people who have been taught about the law from childhood".

The Oromo term for "law" is derived from the verb *seeruu*, meaning "to forbid". The term *heera* is used in the eastern part of Oromoland. *Aadaa*, "custom" is derived from *aadabu*, meaning "to discipline".

The Oromo distinguish between two types of laws: the laws of God (*seera Waaqaa*) and the laws of man (*seera namaa*). According to Dabassa Guyyo, the laws of man are derived from the laws of God. The laws of God are the eternal and immutable laws of Nature: "The dry season has its time and length; the rainy season has its time and length; the cool season has its time to come. The day has its time and the night its time. Evenings and mornings have their time.

These are all laws of *Waaqa*. It is by the law of *Waaqa* that all things are born, grow, become old and die" Dabassa shows ^{hm} a Natural law provides man with one of the bases for secular law. The laws of man however also have a divine origin. They are believed to be revealed to man through the prophets (*raaga*), who are said to be able to hear the "whisper of God" (*hassasa Waaqaa*). *Waaqa* is therefore the ultimate source of all laws, whether natural or human. Only the laws of man (*seera namaa*) will be examined here.

According to both Bule Guyyo and Dabassa Guyyo, the *seera namaaa* or laws of the Oromo people are contained in what are known as the *yaayaa shanan*, the five fundamentals, (this has been briefly discussed earlier). To ordinary Oromo, the expression refers to the killing of big game animals. A person who has killed a buffalo, a giraffe, an elephant, a rhino and a lion in the hunt or their human equivalents in battle, is said to have fulfilled the *yaayaa shanan*. To the *abbooti seeraa* or fathers of the law, the words have a much deeper meaning. The *yaayaa shanan* refer to the five founding fathers who are believed to have laid down the foundation of the traditional Oromo law. These five founding fathers, as we have referred to them earlier, are known by the following names: *Yaayaa Boru Bilo*, *Yaayaa Galle Anno*, *Yaayaa Maane Leqa Jaarsso*, *Yaayaa Gollo Gobbo*, *Yaayaa Baabbo Gallessa*. *Yaayaa* is derived from the verb *yaayuu*, meaning to make a ground plan or to lay the fundament. *Yaayaba*, the word for "fundament" is derived from the same root. The designation *yaayaa* in each of these names therefore simply means "founder".

These five founding fathers are believed to have elaborated the principles of ancient Oromo law. They are said to have formulated the rules governing such issues as the animal world, both domestic and wild; the place of man in society and his relationship to his fellow creatures; the domestication and the watering of stock; the plant world; and the methods of time computation. The exact role played by each of the founding fathers in relation to the codification of the specific laws is however not clearly remembered by my teachers. The laws of these five founding fathers seem to deal with the general principles in the different areas of the Law rather than with specific legal cases. The specific laws were empirically developed and resulted as a response to customary practices. In this sense, it could be argued that many instances

of the Law exist because they codify social behaviour. The chief function of the Law was therefore to protect Custom, as a man protects his wife.

In those Oromo areas that have survived the destructive effects of Abyssinian rule, those laws which are still practised today can be said to be ones governing the relationship between man and the divine. These include the laws of sacrifice, prayer and blessing and all that is done out of respect for God's creation. It is here that the rules concerning the plant and animal world belong. These laws binding man and God also determine the proper performance of rituals, most of which contain deep religious elements. All that touches upon this bond must therefore be done according to specific rules. The day on which the ceremony is performed, the choice of the animal to be sacrificed, the position in which it is laid, the person who will cut its throat, and the parts of the animal to be distributed to the members of the community and who may or may not eat them, are all prescribed by the law. The role of custom in this domain is to ensure that the procedures laid down by the law are adhered to and respected. Custom will advise the transgressor five times that he is deviating from the norm laid down before bringing him before the Law. This practice of issuing five warnings is also linked to the idea of *yaayaa shanan*. The phrase *yaayaa shanan iti gutate* or *aada iti gutate* is used to express the number of times a person is allowed to infringe the law before his disobedience exceeds the limits of Custom and becomes a matter for the Law.

It should be pointed out here that in the traditional Oromo legal system, the courts of Custom and Law were conceptually separate ones. Disputes arising between individuals, families and groups were settled either out of court or in the court of Custom, such that few cases went before the Law. Family issues were termed *dubbi garaa waraa*, literally "words in the womb of the family", or a private internal matter, and as such were only brought before the court when all other means

of resolving the affair have been exhausted by the clan elders (*jarrolle gossaa*). In some cases, only indirect sanctions were applied by Custom against offenders. Proper sexual conduct was one such category. Custom interdicted the sexual relationship of a man with a virgin girl and all forms of intercourse that could be interpreted as being incestuous, including those with classificatory kinswomen. Any man violating this law was termed *chapana* and became a virtual social outcaste: he could not marry, could not stand for office and was forbidden from taking part in all ceremonies performed collectively. According to Bule Guyyo, the law neither forgives, teaches, instructs nor advises. It is there to impose punishment. There exists one exception to this rule: that of an offence committed by the legal experts (*hayyu*) themselves. Such a case is not presented to Custom, but goes directly to the Law. In some circumstances, a person can escape punishment by appealing to people or objects symbolically beyond the arm of the Law. This includes the Qaallu, the Wayyu and the Odaa tree.

One of the most unique traits about Oromo Law is the fact that the people developed an institution that would review the effective functioning of the Custom once every eight years. This was done at the *Gumii Gaayoo* or "assembly of the multitudes". The word *gumii* means "assembly", whilst *Gaayoo* is the name which designates the place where the assembly is held. The members of the society responsible for formulating and reformulating the laws were known as the *liicho dullaatti*, literally the "old whips". These men were actually retired legal experts (*hayyuu*). According to Bule Guyyo, before proceeding to modify or propound laws, these elders consulted with the "fathers of knowledge" or of the historical oral traditions. These oral historians were known as the *warra arggaa-dhaggeetti*, or men whose claim to knowledge was based on both practical experience (seeing) and theoretical understanding (hearing). The oral historians could either accept or reject the innovations or modifications proposed by the retired legal elders based on the

historical antecedents. Thus it is only after consensus is reached between these two experts that the proposed changes to existing laws or new laws can be deliberated at the *Gumii Gaayo* assembly. Once this formulation or reformulation of the law is accepted and approved by the assembly, it is instituted until such time as further revision becomes necessary.

The making of such laws is termed *tumaa*. *Tumaa* is derived from the verb *tumuu*, literally signifying "to beat". Although the sense of the term changes with the context in which it is used, the core meaning refers to the beating or hammering by which the blacksmith known as *tumtuu* transforms heated metal. The promulgation, passing, and putting into effect of the law is metaphorically likened to this process of forging, by which shapeless matter is given form. *Tumaa* normally only affects laws derived from *aadaa*; the laws of *seera* or Law proper, are based on principles that remain unchanged.

The administration of the Law is entrusted to a judiciary composed of a hierarchy of legal experts. What is perhaps interesting to note here regarding the duties executed by the retired *hayyuu* or "old whips", is that they administer justice at the different levels of the society, such as at the residential, village, neighbourhood, and district levels of society described earlier. It is these elders who normally occupy such positions of authority as *abba shanachaa*, *abba ollaa*, *abba reeraa*, *abba dheedaa*, etc. The difference in the type of justice administered by retired legal elders and those actively in service, is that although the "old whips" can serve as judges, they are not allowed to use Law in dealing with the cases they hear; they can only employ Custom in the decisions they make. They are expected to hand over cases that involve Law to the *hayyuu*, who are actively in power.

The court 'room' sessions of Custom were usually held under the shade of a tree, preferably that of a *dambii*. The court is referred to as *gaadissa*, meaning "shade". The term 'shade' should not however be taken literally. The elders could even meet to consider a case in a house, but the meeting would still be referred to as *gaadissa*. Though the core meaning of *gaadissa* refers to the "shade" of a tree, its metaphorical meaning can be said to be 'protection'. Just as the shade of a tree protects people from the rays of the hot sun, so the Law protects those who take refuge in its institutions. A person who gives protection to another could also be called his *gaadissa* as the following two lines from an Oromo song show:

Obolessi gaadissa
Biyyi orma biyye nama nyaachissa

("A brother is a shade
People of another land will feed you soil")

meaning that in one's own country where one has a brother, one is protected; in a foreign land one is at the mercy of others. *Gaadissa* therefore clearly refers to (legal) protection rather than to the actual shade of a tree.

Traditional Oromo law protected the individual, the family, the group and their property at different levels. The individual was first and foremost protected against physical abuse. No Oromo was allowed to punish one of its members without the consent of the Custom or the Law. As far as the imposition of fines was concerned, all Oromo were considered to be divided into two categories, the married and the unmarried. Only married men, being propertied, could be summoned to answer a case in court. The cases of unmarried men were handled in the family and immediate neighbourhood, they were never taken to court or fined. In Oromo, generally speaking, young people and especially children are rarely

disciplined using physical means. A legal option to inflict physical punishment was however retained by the Law for those unmarried offenders who over-stepped the boundaries of the Custom and the Law. Similarly, no married man could be punished physically. In the eyes of the Law the infliction of such a penalty was equivalent to rape (*middisomsu*). He could only be fined. Capital punishment could only be inflicted by the Law. No woman, married or unmarried could be brought to court. She, on the other hand, could accuse a man and have him summoned to court. In matters such as rape, according to Bule Guyyo, she did not need to produce evidence. Her testimony was accepted at face value. If a married woman committed a crime, it was her husband and not herself who was answerable. Retired elders were treated by the same Law as that applied to women. No children under sixteen could be tried by the Law.

Five levels of offence were recognised by the system of the law, to each of which corresponded five types of penalties.

The minimal form of penalty that could be imposed was referred to as *walaala*, literally meaning "ignorance". If the court of Custom found that an offence had been committed due to sheer ignorance on the part of the offender, his crime would be termed *walaala*. Although no formal penalty was imposed, the very fact of being pronounced 'ignorant' by the elders was a socially humiliating one for an adult, who was expected to fully know the rules by which the society lived by the time he reached marriageable age.

The second type of punishment was called *gatti*. The word literally means "price". In the context of the law, it referred to the price the offender had to pay for his crime. The maximum penalty in such offences did not exceed five. If the

offence committed was against a woman, the fine consisted of five female animals; if against a man, a fine of five male animals was imposed.

The third type of fine was called *karaa-mataa*, which could be translated as meaning "the kraals of animals owned". Offences classified under this category could result in the expropriation by the court of the entire herd of the offender.

The fourth level of penalty was *qakke*. The etymology of the term is uncertain. There are two types of *qakke*: that of the "living" (*qakke nama jiru*) and that of the "dead" (*qakke nama du'ee*), depending on the seriousness of the crime committed. The first type involved payment of the stock fine by the minimal lineage; in the second the whole clan had to contribute stock in settlement of the crime. The *qakke* of the dead was also referred to as *qakke riffeensa mataa*, the "*qakke* of the hairs on a person's head" and constituted the maximum penalty that could be imposed in terms of property owned by him and his clansmen.

Finally, there is the penalty known as *hamaa-mudaamuddi* or "capital punishment". This compound noun is made up of two terms: *hama* in this context refers to the major blood vessels of the human body, whilst *mudaamuddi* designates the lymphatic glands. The expression was one used when a person received the death sentence for the crime he had committed and had to be physically eliminated.⁴

In order to see the criteria upon which an offence was judged and the type of fine that was imposed, let us take one example in which the law is infringed: that of the physical fight. The example is taken from one given from Dabassa Guyyo.

When two adults fight, their case is brought before the *gaadissa* shade court. After investigation, the court could pronounce the offending party *walaala*. In such a

case the aggressor is made to sacrifice an animal for the aggressed and to feed him until he has recovered from the wounds inflicted on this person. The second instance is when the fight involves two men ranged against one, termed *kalchaa*. The court will oblige the offending party to feed the offended party food until his recovery and a fine of not more than five head of cattle will be imposed in the form of *gaati*. The third instance could be when three men are found guilty of unjustly inflicting injury on one person. Such a crime is known as *gaada*, meaning to hunt down. It will result in the *karaa-mataa* type of fine. When four men attack one person, their action is considered to be the equivalent of a raid and is known as *bochessa* or *danaba*. Depending on the injury inflicted or amount of damage done, the penalty could be the *qakke* of either the living or that of the dead. When five or more people attack a person, their crime is considered to be comparable to an organised campaign *dulla* and could result in the imposition of the death sentence for the guilty party, specially of the person who led the campaign.

The detailed study of Oromo custom and law is a vast subject that demands special attention, skill and much more space than could be devoted to it in this thesis, and the examples presented are obviously over-simplified ones and are only meant to illustrate how different types of offence are treated at different levels within the conceptual framework of the Law.

Up to now attempts have been made to present the structuring of Oromo society from different perspectives, but all these may not be complete before the Oromo view of development is considered. This is so because it is another important area that is directly relevant to Oromo world view. The material to be presented regarding the Oromo view of development is the view of my teacher Dabassa Guyo. In translating the text into English I have tried my level best to make the English language obey the Oromo text. There is no way this can be achieved 100 per cent.,

hence on this subject I choose to reserve my own view and simply present the words of the master. I hope this will also give the reader the nature of the material I have utilized and the nature of the interview I conducted with my teachers.

Chapter XIV

AN OROMO VIEW OF DEVELOPMENT

Interview conducted with .Dabassa Guyyo by Gemetchu Megerssa, September 1987.

Gemetchu: What I would like to ask you about concerns what people call *maendeleo* in Kiswahili, and which we call *limmaati* on the Ethiopian side. When people mention this idea in the two countries, what does it mean to the Oromo and what sense do they attach to the terms when they hear them? What do they understand exactly by these terms? But before we discuss this, I would also like you to tell me if we have ever had such a concept or something related to it. If we did, what was it and what did it mean to us? If we did have a related concept, then how do our people perceive or understand development? I would like you to be as simple and as clear as you can be, so that anyone listening to our interview may be able to follow it.

Dabassa: Well good! I will try to tell you what I know about this matter. What people call *limmaati* and what others call *maendeleo*, also exists in our language. This is what is called *finna* (or *fidnaa*) in the Oromo language. *Finna* is the Oromo word for *Limaatii* or *maendeleo*. This idea used to be a very common one; the word was widely used and the concept was understood and practised. When we speak of *finna* it begins at the level of the individual family, then from that of different families that make up a region (*d'eeda*): that by which the Gadaa leads the whole people can be generally summarised by the word *finna*. So this *finna* could be viewed at different levels. Or in other words, one form of *finna* may be higher or lower than the other. To begin

with the lowest level, the lowest stage of *finna* we call *guddina*. For us, growth does not end with *guddina*, it leads to something else which we call *gabbina*. Then this *gabbina* also leads to another level we call *ballina*. Then *ballina* is also linked with what we call *baddaada*. Then *baddaada* has its link with what we call *hormaata*. Then this *hormaata* leads to what we call *dagaaga*. This *dagaaga* finally leads to what we call *daga-horaa*. There is no end to each in itself whether it be *guddina*, *hormaata* or the others. But to show how it is viewed it could be outlined in this manner, beginning with *guddina* right through to *daga-horaa*. This is how we view what you call *maendeleo*. When we talk of *gabbina*, for instance, some people may think that it refers only to living things. Whether it be *gabbina*, *guddina* and the rest, some people think that it refers only to living things (*waan lubbu qabu*). We do not view it in this way, but there are those whose knowledge and understanding is simply limited to this level. In the same way when we speak of *ballina*, for the lay-man the meaning is limited to size: as a measure of cloth and other such things. These terms, however, carry a much deeper meaning. The life of man is a process. In order to come to where we are today man had to multiply (*horra*) whether in property (cattle) or whether in human beings. Life reached its present state through *hormaata*. If there was no *hormaata* or if *hormaata* was something that could come to an end, then life would have ended a long time ago. So it is the same with the process of *finna*. If the outgoing did not hand over the knowledge, experience, and other *finna* to the incoming *Gadaa*, then, there would not be anything to build upon. This is why we say that this is a thing which had *guddina*, *gabbina*, *ballina*, *dagaaga*, *daga-horaa*, etc.

To make it clearer to you, let us take that which we call ^{Gadaa this} ~~a~~. By ~~a~~ we are referring to the group of persons that lead the people by going in front of them. This group of persons are like the modern day *mangisti* or *sirkaalaa* ("government"). Our's also has a judicial system. Our law, (*seera*), is similar to *shariyaa*: the laws by which governments regulate the living together of people in one nation or by which the living together of the whole world is regulated. Our *seera* is also exactly of this nature and it is that by which the living together of the Oromo people is regulated.

So what makes this *finna* or what keeps it alive, and why it is kept alive is because it is up for *hormaata*, up for *bultumma*, it is up for *horaachaa*, and up for *horaata*. And what keeps it alive and makes it continue and protects it are these laws and customs (*aadaa*). Then when one looks carefully, these *seera* laws and customs themselves become part and parcel of *finna* itself. In other words, there is no *finna* without law and custom. There cannot be law and custom without *finna* also. All these things are things that are intertwined or interconnected. In other words these are things that cannot exist without each other. The one word in our language is understood in different ways in different contexts. In our language, the meanings of words themselves throw light on each other. Therefore these laws and customs keep the *finna* from disappearing. They show us the way by which we can achieve it; the manner through which we can achieve it and the knowledge through which to achieve it. It is, therefore, by following this path that *finna* can move forward and grow.

But before one can speak of growth, one should create the right conditions in which this growth, however small, can be attained. It is this kernel that acquires *gabbina*. This *gabbina* allows its *guddina* to occur.

Then from within this *guddina* it acquires *ballina*. First you give it a beginning, from that comes *guddina* and from the *guddina* comes *ballina*. It is through *ballina* that a state of harmony is attained. What is this harmony? It is what is called *baddadda*. This means *gabbina*, *guddina* and *ballina* all build up and result in *baddadda*. What is this *baddadda*? It is that which has *guddina*, that which has *ballina* and *gabbina* favoured by conditions such as peace (*nagaa*), satisfaction or contentment (*quufaa*), and other conditions necessary for well-being in life. When conditions such as peace, rain (*rooba*), are fulfilled there is *hormataa* which is the next level. When there is *guddina*, there is *gabbina*, there is also well-being (*fayya*) and when all the necessary conditions of life are fulfilled, they together make up *baddadda*. This *baddadda*, therefore indicates a state of affairs where there is happiness and the absence of *naassu* (fear) Then as it moves forward, this *baddaadumaa* leads to *horraa*. This *horraa* is achieved through *baddadda*. In other words, *baddadda* means that all the conditions for growth are fulfilled, and are favourable in all aspects. A nation's state of *finna*, in property (*horri*), in people, in its custom and laws, etc., in which nothing is missing, has now become complete, such that it can now begin to expand in all its aspects. Once *guddina* is fully achieved, it leads to *dagaaga*. In this *dagaaga* are found, or contained *gabbina*, *guddina*, *ballina*, *baddadda*, *guddina*, which are all in *dagaaga* or lead to *dagaaga*. By *dagaaga* we are not referring to *dagaaga* in the sense of the twisted horn of a sheep. Although this meaning is also reflected in the term, by *dagaaga* we are referring to the different aspects of this *finna*, that grow uniformly and simultaneously. It is a *finna* that grows for everybody, for everybody in the land without leaving out any one individual, whether big or small, young or elderly. The entire people are encompassed within and ruled by this *finna*. The entire people is treated by the same law (*seera*). The entire people acts according to the same custom

(*aadaa*). The entire people is ruled by the same *finna*. This means in *guddina*, are included other such things as *rooba* ("rain"), *seera* ("law") and *aadaa* ("custom"), so that *guddina*, *gabbina*, *ballina*, *baddadda* and the rest put together make up *dagaaga*. So this *dagaaga* is like a tree whose trunk grows thick, whose branches grow wide and whose every branch branches and hence becomes visible to everyone in the world. In terms of *finna* it means that the people of this *finna* become known or visible to the world. Now the world can talk about your *finna*; now they see it for themselves whether they want to be part of it or not.

Even in *dagaaga*, *guddina* continues. The *guddina* of this *dagaaga* results in *daga-horra*. As all that preceded *dagaaga* built up to *dagaaga*, the *guddina* in *dagaaga* brings about *daga-horra*. By *dag-horra* we mean when the *finna* by which the life of your people is regulated extends out to other peoples whose *finna* is not yet as good or developed as that of yours; hence it is when you can lend them your *finna* and through which they can improve their own. To give you an example, if the *finna* of this of the Government of Kenya reaches *daga-horra* and say countries around it such as Djibouti, Ethiopia and that of Somalia happen not to have it, then you can extend to them your good *finna*. Since they are your *ollaa* or neighbours, whether to the north, south, east or west, this *finna* has to extend out to other *ollaa*. In this way the *dag-horra* can continue passing from one *ollaa* to another until it becomes *finna* for the world as a whole. Unless there may be an enemy who will obstruct it or unless it is challenged by another competing *finna*, or unless there may be disagreements from within, by following the truth, such *daga-horra* could become the *finna* of the entire world.

In brief therefore, what some call *limmaati* and others call *maendeleo* has such a meaning for us. This is what we knew long before we knew of either *limmaati* or *maendeleo*

G: Now let me ask you some questions regarding what you have already told me for the sake of clarification for myself.

First of all let us take the term *guddina*. When we say *guddina* what I used to understand was that a tree has *guddina*, a child has *guddina*, calves have *guddina*, even the hair on one's head has *guddina*. *Guddina* in this sense is therefore an increase in height, isn't it? So you agree, but is there any other meaning of *guddina* apart from this or what exactly does *guddina* mean?

D: *guddina*, as far as its meaning in our language is concerned, is an increase in what is originally given. Do you understand? It means that a thing does not remain at the given or original state, it is rather that which adds onto what is originally given. In other words we are talking of that which has the ability to grow, whether it be ideas or thought (*yaada*), whether it be *finna*, whether it be a tree, whether it be man or animal. That which has *lata*, branches, that which increases in height, or that which spreads, that which does not remain at the given original state is what we call *guddina*. Hence by *guddina* we mean that which adds onto which is originally given.

G: You give thought as one example of *guddina*. The *guddina* of a tree I understand because we can see it with our eyes, but when you talk of the

guddina of thought, what do you mean? Do you mean that thoughts also grow like a tree?

D: Yes, thoughts also have *guddina* just like the tree. You do not see its growth with your eyes, but instead you see it with your heart. We can give an example of such *guddina* -- not just one example, but many; we can demonstrate that *yaada* (*thoughts*) also grows. Amongst us, there are those whom we call *Warra Horaa*, the Well People. In the beginning, the *Warra Horaa* dug what is called *qabaa* Cattle drank from these *qabaa*. Then the Well People wanted to improve these water pans and they made them into *harro*, or ponds. Here you see that improvement comes about as a result of the growth of ideas. From *harro* they devised *ellaa*; wells. Here again there is *guddina* in the idea, in the sense that from *harro* which only give water during the rains they fashioned *ellaa* in which they could have water at all seasons. Even in respect to the *ellaa*, the ideas improved: from the digging of the *ellaa* called *addaadi*, they moved to those *ellaa* called *Tullaa*. *Addaadi* are shallow wells which sometimes dry up, while *tullaa* are deep wells whose water is permanent. This too is the result of an improved idea which moved from *addaadi* to *tullaa*. If there was no *guddina* of thought, digging would have stopped with the *qabaa* and would not have led to the digging of *ellaa*. It is in this way that the *guddina* of an idea or thought becomes visible.

G: In this sense it seems that you are saying that thought is part of this *finna*?

D: Not only is thought part of it, but it is this thought that guides every *finna*. You know that cattle are tended by man, in setting them out to pasture and in protecting them from wild animals and bringing them safely home. In the same manner, *finna* is tended like those cattle. That which looks after it and without which it cannot survive is *yaada*, (thought). If there was no thought all those things we have said about *finna* earlier, the *finna* which has *guddina*, *ballina*, *baddaada*, *guddina*, *daggaaga* and *dag-horra* in it, would not have made any sense in the absence of thought. This itself is another example for the *guddina* of thought.

G: Then the second thing you mentioned in *finna* was *gabbina*. To my understanding *gabbina* is what we see when a person is well fed and has no worries and as a result he will gain weight, his skin gets smoother and shines. This is what I understand by *gabbina*. In this sense what is the difference and similarity between *gabbina* and *guddina*?

D: *gabbina* and *guddina* are different in one sense. This is when we apply these terms to living things, or living objects. But our earlier use of *gabbina* does not refer to an object, it rather refers to *finna*. In the case of *finna* there can be no *guddina* if there is no *gabbina*. The *gabbina* of *finna* is different from the example of a man gaining weight. The two are different in form. When we talk of the *gabbina* of *finna*, we are talking of the laws which are placed as a point of departure. Or the basis on which people agree to make or achieve something.

The rule of the *Gadaa* may be agreed upon and then the laws by which it should rule are agreed. The laws that protect the *horra* from vanishing; those which protect the *golaa*, the *gossa*, so that the *horra* and the *ellaa* are safe. Even that which protects wild animals. So that the path may not disappear, that the *dargulaa* may not break. A beginning is given to *finna*. This beginning of the idea of *finna* is placed within the group (*gossa*). They agree on it. When it is agreed upon without opposition and without excluding anybody. And when there is no force that wants to break-up this force. It is that which the greater majority of the people have approved for it to go ahead. When this idea is implemented without distortion, whether it is to do with water, war, people, roads, wells, *Daargulaa* and *Kossi*, When it reaches everything and everybody both inside and outside the family circle. At this moment we say the *finna* has *gabbina*, but not yet *guddina*. *Guddina* comes after this. *Guddina* is that which will be added to make it larger than before, whether big or small, whatever you add to it is what we call *guddina*.

But when a significant number of people oppose the idea, and when there is a situation of disagreement then the *finna* is said to be lacking *gabbina* and we cannot talk of *guddina*. In short, therefore, this is what *gabbina* is and how it is understood.

G: Then you also talked of *baddaada*, what is this *baddaada*?

D: Before we came to *baddaada* we talked about *ballina*. So let us look into *ballina* because *baddaada* can only be clear after that. *ballina* is when we have placed our *finna* amidst ourselves and it acquires *gabbina* -- then it will

also acquire *guddina* in time. By this *guddina* we are not talking of its growing up towards the clouds, rather we are talking of its growth in all directions -- towards the east, towards the west and towards the other two directions (*qataamuraa*). In other words it spreads to every people found in the land. This means that it covers all the land without excluding any region. Its movement in this way shows its *ballina*. Here you should understand that both *ballina* and the *guddina* of *finna* lead to *ballina*. At this point we come to see the *baddaada* which you were asking about. Here the previous types of growth put together build up to make what we call *baddaada*. But there is a point at which the former types of growth change and that is, at the stage of *baddaada*. At *baddaada* two things should agree: that which is done by man and that which is done by *Waaqa*. This *baddaada* is not something that we can achieve by ourselves by creating the idea and agreeing on it as we did for the former. Rather it comes about when God (*Waaqa*) does His share to make it come true. What does this mean? This means that our *finna* that has acquired *guddina*, *gabbina*, and *ballina* now becomes *baddaada* or acquires *baddaada*. The reason why we said that the *finna* of man and that of *Waaqa* should come together to make *baddaada* come true, is that when we say *baddaada* first of all we mean peace and peace comes from *Waaqa*. *Baddaada* also means the absence of disease, both that of man and that of cattle. In other words all conditions are good for both people and stock. When we speak of the *finna* of *horri*, we are talking of that of all livestock whether it be of the horse, small stock, donkeys, mules, camels, *yabbi* or even of the *Hawicha* and oxen. It includes that of the *Karmmaa* and the *Goromsaa*. God's *finna* is conducive to the prosperity of both those animals both on the side of the hooved and the cloven-hoofed, so that there is no disease and drought but only rain, and so cattle graze until they are full instead of starving. The satisfaction of cattle is the basis for the satisfaction of man. The

starvation of animals is what causes the starvation of man. If there is no drought the two seasons become *untaa*, By this we mean when the rain continues from one rainy season to another without there being a real dry season break in between. If the condition or the *finna* of *Waaqa* becomes favourable and when the *finna* of the people rests on basic consensus, guided by honest and dedicated *finna* leaders, and assuming that no external power (*irre*) wishes to obstruct this *finna*, then we say that *baddaada* has been achieved.

G: Then after *baddaada* you mentioned ^{*hormaata*} / What does it mean?

D: Now about this *guddina*. You have seen that all the other forms of growth we mentioned earlier such as *gabbina*, *guddina*, *ballina*, which all together build up to the state of *baddaada*. In this *baddaada*, when there is no *Dippu*, where there is no *Dh'iba* and no damaging interruption of *finna*, no loss of the law and suppression of ideas (*yaada*); in such a condition cattle and people, whether hoofed or claved, will reproduce and multiply. This is the condition we call *hormaata*. It reproduces from all aspects, whether in livestock, in water, *horri*, *Hooraa*, *Daarggulaa*, *Kossi*, *Danddi*, *Karra*, whether *Maddo*, *Haadaa*, *Qabaa*, or *Dollolo*, it reproduces and increases in all things. Such growth in reproduction builds up to *hormaata*.

G: Then after *hormaata* you mentioned *dagaaga*. As far as my knowledge of the concept goes, I have heard people referring to a big tree as *dagaaga*. When trees like *odaa* (the fig tree) and *waddessa* grow big their branches also branch

out and this is referred to as *dagaaga*. This is how I understand the word. Does it have any other meaning?

D: When we say *dagaaga*, it is when the idea or *finna* we have agreed on originally acquires *gabbina*, *guddina* and with that, *ballina* then *baddaada* and all these acquire *hormaata* and through *hormaata* they build up to *dagaaga*. All these put together result in *dagaaga*. What we call *dagaaga* here is that *finna* which guides you. When it is complete, in one piece, without breaks or obstructions, without opposition, without a competing power or without any external enemy threatening it, without any external evil eye on it. It is that on which the entire *gossa* have agreed on, accepting the rule of this *finna*. It follows its own customs and traditions, its own laws and is unadulterated by foreign ideas. Then such an independent *finna* becomes the only one for its people. And when all the people ruled are happy about its rule -- when they see themselves prospering through it, they see it as a good *finna*. At this point we say it has attained *dagaaga*. It means it has become visible. If we were to illustrate it by an example of a tree, it means it has grown both in width and in height and its branches also branch out. What we mean by visible is not that it will be seen like a tree. But it means that at this point the *finna* will be known, not only by those ruled under it, but by all other peoples living in *Addunga* will come to know it. It should be visible to all and be talked about. Peoples should see it and hear about it and talk of its good and bad aspects. They cannot talk of its bad aspects, however, because a bad *finna* will never achieve such a level, but will disappear at a lower level. In short, therefore, by *dagaaga* we are referring to the fact that even others see it and say that it is a good *finna*.

- G:** After *dagaaga* you mentioned *daga-horra*. By this, it seems to me as though two things are connected: *daga* and *horra*. It is as if the two words were combined. By the word *daga* I understand a place one can retreat to. Then *horra* must come from the word *horri*, meaning property. This is what I understand by the terms. What other meaning do they have for you?
- D:** What we understand by *daga-horra* is different. If we take the word *daga*, it means *jara*, "those". For instance, if I repeated some news I had heard people would ask me where I heard it from, then I would reply *jara kanaraa dagaye*. Then they would ask further, "who are these people whom we don't know?" Then I would answer *daga kanraan daga'ee*. by *jara* or *daga* I am referring to a group of people. This means more than one person whether they may be 100 or 2,000; we refer to them as *daga* or *jara*. We never refer to cattle or land as *daga*. It refers only to human beings. Then when we say *daga-horra* we are adding *hormaata* to it. By *daga-horra*, therefore, we are referring to that *finna* that is fully grown among the people that developed it and is now ready to serve those people in the neighborhood. For example, if the *finna* of the *Gadaa* ("government") which is ruling this country (Kenya) happens to be good, then its *finna* can pass to Somalia, to other countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda. These countries, in turn, can pass it onto their neighbours. So to express it briefly, *daga-horra* means to get more and more people through your *finna*.

G: I have understood all of this very well. But I would like to ask a further practical question. After hearing all these things, one is tempted to ask whether our people the Oromo are in a state of *finna* at all in the manner in which you have explained it. If you say they are in a state of *finna*, could you explain what type of *finna* they are in? If they are not in *finna*, how would you describe the state of affairs in which they find themselves?

D: I have understood your question. You ask if our people the Oromo are in a state of *finna* or not. I say that they are in a state of *finna*. All persons, whether as an individual, as a group or as a human being, are in a state of *finna*. The question rather is, in what type of *finna* do they find themselves?

They could either be in a state of good *finna* (*finna danssa*) or an evil or bad *finna* (*finnaa hamaa*). Since all living human beings are in *finna*, our people cannot be outside it. But as I have already told you, there are two types of *finna*. Our people are not in a good state of *finna*; they are rather in an evil *finna*. To live is not a choice since life is given by *Waaqa*. With this God-given life we see our people living and they live in *finna*. When we speak of *finna*, it is either one that you make as a people for yourselves or one in which you live made for you by other people. Furthermore, there is also that which is made against you. Our people find themselves in the latter which is an evil *finna*.

G: Up to now you have been telling me about the good *finna* and I have understood that. But when you say that there exists an evil *finna*, what do you mean? What does an evil *finna* resemble?

D: There is nothing that the evil *finna* resembles; it simply looks like itself. What do we mean by "it looks like itself?" If one is asked as to what death looks like, one would say it looks like sleeping. But as to what life looks like, one can only say "it simply looks like itself." It has nothing to which it can be compared. It instead has an opposite (*walaanaa*), which is death. We have already said that what looks like death, is sleep; but life has nothing that looks like it except itself. When we talk of *finna* we cannot speak in terms of what it looks like, we can only talk of it in terms of its opposites. The opposite of good *finna* is an evil *finna* and vice versa. Evil *finna* does not resemble anything. It simply looks like itself. Life has only its opposite or what does not look like it. That is why I say evil *finna* has nothing that looks like it: it simply looks like itself. This thing we say looks like itself is an evil *finna*. Evil leads one to destruction: it is the process which brings about destruction, or is the cause of it. Therefore, there is no way one can speak of likening it to something than what it is in itself.

When we talk of an evil *finna*, it is one which contains *dh'aaba* that will expose its evil nature. All laws are meant to protect something or stand for something. There is no people that have no law in one form or another. In the same manner there is nobody or no group of people that does not have one form of *finna* or another. In other words there are different forms of *finna*:-

1. The *finna* that you did not make yourself, for yourself, but which is made for you or forced upon you. The *finna* in the making of which you did not participate is one form and has its own *dhaaba*.

2. The *finna* that you made for yourself or one in whose making you participated is another form of *finna* and hence has its own distinct form or *dhaaba*. It does not matter how good or how bad that *finna* may be.

When we say our people are in an evil *finna* we are not referring to a *finna* that the Oromo have made for themselves, nor are we referring to a *finna* in the making of which the Oromo participated but which later turned wrong and evil. We are rather referring to the type of *finna* which others made, a *finna* made in their own favour and against the Oromo and which they imposed on the Oromo by force against their will. Therefore, it is a *finna* in the making of which the Oromo did not participate. Moreover, whereas you are barred from participating in the making of *finna*, you are forced to live in the one which is not of your making. You are deprived totally of the right of making one of your own. The *finna* of others is dictated to you; you have no say in the matter and are forced to obey. This is a *finna* which does not suit me as an Oromo. What I would have preferred would have been either to be a party to the making of the common *finna* or if I had been given the right to speak out about what I feel is good or bad for me. If someone must make my *finna* for me, I would have understood it better if it had been based on that which I already have. Or if it had been made through dialogue so as to amalgamate the two sides and build a new *finna* on a ground common to both parties (mine and his); then I would have said that we had made it together. But when he denies me any say in the whole matter and he rejects the one that I have already made for myself and denies me the right to live according to it, and instead forces me to go in an opposite direction to that which was mine, it is not a good *finna*. You know full well that unless forced, no-one will leave his own *finna* and follow that of another. Even if my *finna* is considered to be

bad that I was forced to follow that of another for my own benefit, then at least I should have been allowed to keep those aspects of my own *finna* that can never be considered bad. This applies to my own language, my own history, etc., which under no circumstances can be considered bad. We should have been given the right to keep our identity as a people, which is the *yayaba*, the foundation, of our culture without which we can have no hold. In short, had it been the case that my *finna* was bad for me and that I was being done a favour by being forced into one that did not belong to me, then at least such positive values as my history and my identity should not have been destroyed. Such is the *finna* that I as an Oromo am now in. When one is forced to go this way, one refuses to do so if one has the power to resist. When one has no power to resist there is nothing one can do. This *finna* is not made for me but made to work against me. Yet I also realize that I have no power to resist this unjust rule. I live in and must follow this evil *finna* while I am fully aware of the fact that it is evil. What we mean by evil is anything that does not benefit you, that which you are forced into against your own will. In short, therefore, this is the *finna* our people are forced to live in today.

Our people were not people who lived like wild animals in the bush and caves. They were not like cattle who were led in any direction or did not live in trees like birds. Our people are people who have had a custom (*aadaa*), law (*seera*), a development (*finna*), a language and a history of their own. Of this, our oppressors are very well conscious and the *Addunga* is also aware, whether they be black men or white men. We are among the first of the black race to have shown a distinctive identity. Our people had their own *finna* even before some of the white men whose *finna* today has grown to such an extent that they rule not only themselves but Africa as well. Hence our

people are not just an insignificant minority, we are people of history and value.

And so it is that our people have been occupied by an enemy (the Amhara) through the arms and support of foreigners (*faranji*), from whom they claim descent. In the days when the *faranji* shared black people among themselves, when they made the black men stand in line and shared them among themselves like cattle acquired in a raid or like a loaf of bread split into pieces and shared, in those days, under the arms and protection of the white man, the Amhara succeeded in enslaving our people. From its very beginning the devices used have been back-handed and utterly vicious. In terms of their colour, the enemy is not white: he is as brown as I am. Yet he has denied the fact that he is of black origin. With the superiority he acquired through the fire arms supplied to him by the *faranji* he massacred our *mo'aa* and our *mootii* ("rulers"). All that were left were women and children. All this, he achieved through the *faranji*'s fire arms. The enemy also obtained his advice from the *faranji*, his mother's secret lover whom he claims as his father (*abberaa*). That was the day we lost our *mo'aa* and our *mootii*. He hunted down anyone suspected of being the custodian of our wisdom. Any young man suspected of having learned or inherited wisdom from his father was hunted down and butchered. Only women and children below the age of knowledge of any type were left alive. That was the beginning of our dark age, the day we were reduced from a people of wisdom, to a society of enslaved women and children who were given new names and shifted around from the place they originally knew. Between our two settlements he settled his own people. That was the day on which and how our people's *finna*--our people's identity and pride, was struck down by the arms of the enemy. That was the day he buried our law, custom, language, history and *finna* in general.

Then on the grave of my image, of my identity and values, he planted the false tree of his image. The enemy does not say that he came from outside like the *farenji*. Instead he erased our name as a people and told us to claim a strange name he calls Ethiopia. This itself was done in order to make our own name disappear. Our language he declared to be the language of wild animals, hence he banned it and forced my young ones to forget their father's language and learn his. My law and custom he condemned as backward, hence replaced them with those of his own. My beliefs and values he ridiculed as false. My name for the supreme deity *Waaqa* he said was not the name of the true Creator. He said that the true God does not know himself by that name. He claimed that unless I became an Orthodox Christian and prayed in his way I would be payed no heed, and so he forced my young to give up the way in which their forefathers had prayed and follow his way. This was how I lost my law, my custom of *bussaa*, and *gonoofaa*. I am denied the right to rebuild my culture by bringing the scattered and lost ones of my people together. I do not even have the right over my dead ones: I cannot even bury them in the way in which I want. He made it impossible for my scattered people to come together. He even causes problems to make understanding impossible among those who live together. A child should have a heritage, a culture by which to be brought up. But when one's life is threatened simply because one teaches his own child his father's language, when one is punished by death simply for stating the simple fact that the Oromo in all regions are sons and daughters of the same father; when one is killed for teaching his young the law and the custom and the other wisdom of our *Gadaa*, then a man like me, who is forced to lose his law, custom, and *finna* in general, is reduced to a kind of a lesser human being. The life or *finna* we are in, therefore, is that of the living dead. It is a life in which I have no right, no equal access to anything with him. We live without any sense or feeling of belonging or of

feeling at home; we are denied the right to use our common and natural tongue. That is why I said, yes, our people are in a state of *finna*. But the *finna* we are in is an evil *finna* as I have tried to show. As I have also said an evil *finna* looks like itself and I have described it and I have given you its general features.

And with this I conclude hoping that I have answered your question. But you can ask further questions if you need more clarification.

G: Very good. Up to now we have seen what an evil *finna* is like. We have also seen what a good *finna* is like. Then the question I would like to ask you now is: do these two *finna*, that is the good and the evil *finna*, do they go hand in hand, like the *aadaa* and the *seeraa* go together according to your earlier teachings, or do they follow one another, such that only one can exist at a time?

D: The good and evil *finna* are not like the *aadaa* and *seera*. They do not go hand in hand. Instead they follow one another. Whenever there is a good *finna*, you can be sure that it will be followed by an evil *finna* and vice versa. The examples by which this could be illustrated are found in all aspects of *finna*, beginning from the *finna* of *Waaqa* down to that made by man. As we sit here, it is night. Behind this night, there is a day. This is inevitable whether it be for the dead or for the living. Today we are alive, yet there is death beyond life. This is inevitable unless one is not born at all. Satisfaction is followed by starvation and starvation is followed by satisfaction. From these examples, beginning with the *finna* of *Waaqa* down

to that made by man, there are such things that move in pairs in which one is followed by another. When the foundation for a good *finna* is laid and this acquires *gabbina*, *guddina* and all the other forms of growth, and when people prosper, be sure and know that evil *finna* is to follow. This is inevitable -- whether it follows immediately or takes a long time, it is sure to come. It occurs or follows in the form of either *daqqabi* or as *sirriqi*, yet no one can tell in which form it will come about. If on the contrary a foundation is laid for an evil *finna*, though nobody knows when it will occur, know that this evil *finna* will be followed by a good *finna*. Therefore, the good and the evil *finna* are not two states that go hand in hand like custom and law. They are rather things that follow each other. The good leads at one time and is followed by the evil. The bad leads at another time and is followed by the good. And this is inevitable, though nobody can tell the day it will occur. In short, I think this is the answer to your question.

- G:** Yes I have very well understood this. Up to now, we have seen what good *finna* looks like; we have seen what evil *finna* looks like; and we have seen the nature of their relationship. You have also told me that we have had the concept of *limmaati* or *maendeleo* which you have said is termed *finna* in our language. Yet the *limmaati* or *maendeleo* we are in you said is an evil one. What I see is that both on the Ethiopian side and on the Kenyan side the two governments say that they are trying their best to improve the life of our people, yet you say that what they are attempting has nothing to do with improving our life. In your view, first why do you think that this is so? Second what do you think is the best way to bring about development to our people?

D: It is clear that the two views of development, that of the two governments and our view are contrary and contradictory to each other. They claim that they are doing everything towards developing us. Yet our people feel that on the contrary everything is being done towards our destruction. They have already destroyed us: now they are working for our total eradication. The claim of the governments is a plain lie, in that they say that we are all together; that we have everything in common and together they claim that we live for one another. They shout out aloud for equality and unity. They claim that we have a *finna* in common which they proclaim as though people have agreed to it. It is obvious that he who does evil doings never admits that he is doing evil and as a matter of fact he usually covers it up. These are people we call *kara-muraa*. The *kara-muraa* are well known for their cover-up language. They are afraid that someone might come up with a better idea of a better government. They are afraid that somebody may come up with a better idea and expose their evil to the world. Therefore, they shout out loud in order to mislead the world and the people they rule, so that no-one will get to the hear of the matter. The fact is that they have done nothing to develop the people, but are out to develop themselves. They have done nothing to help the people but are being helped by them. There is nothing they have done for the people, or that they have in common with the people, they have acted only for themselves. When we say all this, it poses a question as to how this has come about? And we should show how!

We say there is nothing they have done for the people, all they did is for their own benefit. We say this because we are a people who have our own law, our own custom, our own *finna*. They are outsiders to our *finna*. They moved into our land by the supremacy of arms. They attacked us in our own

land. We, a people attacked in our own land, people having *finna*, people having *bussaa* and *gonofaa*, people having the *yaa'a* and *yuuba*, people having the *raaba* and ("warriors and leaders") under which the people are organized into five *gogessa*. Such were the people they attacked in their own land and put under occupation. When they came to our land, they did not ask us what we had and knew. They did not bother to find out whether our *finna* was a good or bad one. They did not bother to find out how our *Gadaa* worked and ruled. By sheer force of arms they destroyed our *finna* and established theirs. Their claim that they are working towards developing the land and the people is a plain lie. They discarded our language and replaced it with their own. There is nothing that they did to develop us; rather they destroyed our *finna* and replaced it by theirs. The so-called *limmaati* or *maendeleo* they talk about is and has always been limited to their own area. It has never reached our people. Yet they force us to pay for developing their own area. They rob us day and night in the name of development. They do not charge the husband and spare the wife. They do not charge the mother and spare the children. They do not charge you for the cattle and exclude the goats. They do not charge for the horse and exclude the mule. They do not charge you for the donkey and exclude the camel. The worst form of robbery carried out in the name of development is that apart from the dog and the cat, there is no domestic animal for which we are not taxed. Despite the fact that the land is ours. Despite the fact that we are not traders who bring in commodities from outside. The very animal we care for and keep, they tax us on, taxing both men and domestic animal apart from the cat and the dog. They develop their own area with the money they get from us in the form of tax: this is the *limmaati* the government talks about. They build their own institutions with our tax money. They force us to learn their language which they want to develop and expand at the cost of and through the destruction of our own.

The two evil means by which they destroyed and continue to destroy us are

- (1) that they rob us for no return;
- (2) using the power of our own money they destroyed and continue to destroy our law, custom and other values. Then the third and most serious evil means is that they proclaim lies to the world about our situation under their evil rule.

No, they did not come to develop the land and the people, they did ~~not~~ develop the customs of our *golaa*, the customs of our *gossa* "people", the customs which we practice with the approval and the consensus of our people. They did not come to develop that which the people already have: the *aadaa* of the *golaa*, *gossa*, that of *bussaa* and *gonoofa* that of *d'ukissu* and *tarrabaa*, that of the *huraa* and *horri*, that of the *mano* and the *sirree*, that of *kutaa* and *mil-jallo*, that of burial and marriage, and that of sadness and joy. That which considers everything including the wild animals, whether they may be domestic or wild clawed animals, whether they be domestic or wild hoofed animals, such a great *aadaa* that *addunga* seek it; or such a great *aadaa* which is the only one of its type. One from which even those who claim to be advanced may learn something. We, a people of such a great *finna*... Without giving a place to any of our *aadaa* in its rule or explaining why it was rejecting it, the enemy simply campaigned against our customs, destroyed them and replaced them with his own.

To give you just one basic example: everyone knows that the first form of *limmaati* and the primary means of bringing the rulers and the ruled together is by building a road (*karaa*). Not only has the government done

nothing to develop us, there are even no roads that lead to our area. The few that have been built are quite recent ones. And even these were built to meet their own requirements and not with the view of developing the land and the people. Secondly, education is an important instrument in building the *finna* of a country. Regarding this, the enemy has always told and continues to tell the world that it is building schools and is educating the people. This also is part of its usual propoganda by which it covers up the fact that it is keeping the great majority of the people in the dark. If we take one administrative region for instance, at a minimum it is subdivided into six *awraaja* or districts. These six districts, if we once again take the minimum, will be divided into twenty-four *warreda* or localities. The schools they claim to have built are then one school in each district town. The ones who are educated in such rare schools are the most privileged, the hand-picked ones, who usually live in such towns. Then when we look into what such people learn and what such schools teach, we see that it has nothing to do with developing or of improving the life of the people. Instead they learn what is good for the government, that which will keep it in power and sustain its rule. And what they also learn is language. The language they learn is also the language that only the government people speak. Other languages such as ours, quite apart from learning them, it is even forbidden to speak them in such areas. Such schools and such education is meant for those that are privileged and people like us should not even dream of attending them. We hear what is being taught to them in the form of history. As to what the educated do and the way they are taught to act are facts of life we have to live with. We know what is happening. But we have no way and no right and no means of talking about it, leave alone exposing it. They have placed their bridles in our mouths. Our feet are in their shackles. Our backs are attached to their saddles. Their ropes are around our necks. We carry stones on our heads. We cannot see

through our eyes. Due to these circumstances and because of their harsh rule we cannot have any say in the affair. We are made to keep silent despite the fact that our heart knows that the enemy is doing everything to destroy us. In short, what we see being taught in these schools are in line with Christian ways, and this is what is emphasized. This Christianity is a custom which is strange to our land. The enemy borrowed it from the *farangi* since they do not have a religion of their own. *Waaqa* is my witness that they are a people who do not have any *aadaa* of any sort. Hence all that they possess, they have borrowed. And even worse is that they also force our young to abandon their own traditions and adopt those which they have borrowed. In this way our great traditions are denied their natural place. The young ones do not learn their own culture anymore. The adults who know these customs are afraid to practice them and are constantly being threatened not to use them. Our *finna*, that which had *bussaa* and *gonoofaa*, is disobeyed. That which had the *gaamee* and the *daballe* is being destroyed. That which cared for the high and the low, that which cared for the haves and the have-nots is equally being destroyed. My *finna*, in which the leaders (*addullaa*) are elected by the people, is made to disappear and instead people are ruled by the sheer force of arms. Such is the government that rules us; a government that has no law for the hand-over of political power (*baali*), which is taken over instead by armed force. I cannot say anything about all these evil matters since I know that they would punish such outspoken people with death.

This so-called education--what is it meant to achieve? Briefly, its lessons are meant to sustain and strengthen the rule of such evil. In my view this is not education. I think of it as device by which the state is out to make people forget what they already know. An instrument by which it destroys our age-old wisdom by making it impossible to pass it down to the younger

generation. In these areas, our own begotten children are thrown out of school for speaking or using their own language. Anybody who uses the Oromo language is seen as a criminal; he is punished for using it. Such a man is viewed as a wild animal. Whether he is young or old, he who speaks the Oromo language is liable to be ridiculed and faces contempt. If you were sent to some meeting to report on a serious issue, such as an epidemic disease, by which thousands are dying, or if you wanted to report that there is an invading army killing hundreds of people in your area, you are not allowed to use your own language. If you did, your information would not be heard. They expect you to report it in Amharic even when you do not know the language. These are just a few of the issues concerning our culture and language. The education they claim to have given in short is also only meant to facilitate their harsh rule rather than to develop anything.

Then the few among our educated ones who manage to see through this evil system and question it are not given a second chance; they are put to death right away. If one is lucky, one is only tortured severely and imprisoned without a sentence. Today there are hundreds and thousands of our people in prison. Those who have been disabled by severe torture are not one or two individuals. Most of these people are only believed to be in prison, yet nobody knows whether they are dead or alive since they also forbid relatives from visiting them. Anyone showing disagreement or suspected to have disagreed with their evil views is punished in this manner. Therefore, the world has no idea of our real situation. Yet the world is fully aware of the fact that we were a people of great history: people who had great culture, people who have had great leaders, a people of religion who believed in the one Creator, *Waaqa*. They know that we are a people of *Gadaa* and *finna* touching all aspects of life. The world is still aware of the fact that we were

such people before we were ambushed by these foreign agents, who imprisoned all our heroes and slaughtered all our wise men.

In spite of all these difficulties, we have still managed to retain the major parts of our *finna* to the present day. Hence, we still have our *Gadaa* which may symbolically unify our people though it still has no power to get rid of this evil. There is nothing they have not done to get rid of even this symbolic power. One thing they did to kill it was to buy off our five *qaallu*, to whom they gave titles of their own. Besides such families were given permanent financial benefits by the enemy rulers so that they could convince our people to accept their rule. And so the *Qaallu* of the *Odditu*, who was Guyyo Annaa, was renamed *Qangaamch* Guyyo Annaa. Those *qaallu* descending from Galgallo Geddo, beginning with Galgallo Geddo himself, were also named. These people were bribed and took the strange names the enemy gave them. Even then they could not put out the meager fire of our *finna*, that continues struggling to revive itself in order to give light to its people.

This is why we say that all the state claims to have done for people in terms of *limmaati* is that which they have made for themselves. Furthermore, we are denied the right to develop our own customs and our own language. How is it possible to even think of the development of our people when those who claim to develop us do not even know our language and cannot communicate with us, quite apart from having any idea of what we are and what our needs are?

This, in short, is what our life looks like. We say we are in a state of *finna* for there is no man who is alive that in one way or another does not find

himself in some sort of *finna* or another. Hence we also say that we are in a state of *finna*, but that this *finna* resembles what I have described to you up to now.

A good *finna* is one which you make and you make it in such a way that it is fair to everybody, or it is one in the making of which you yourself have participated.

REMARKS

The concept of development is already contained in the meaning of the word Finna itself. The term Finna is derived from the verb fidu, meaning to bring, in this case from the past. It is to hand down experience and skill both in the form of the spoken word and practice. The process of the handing down is a continuous one, as long as the people in question did not disappear as a people. As it is clear from Dabassa's description, the subject involves ideas of societal and cosmological order. There is also the cyclicity which of course is part of the nature of oral tradition. Perhaps the most important concept underlying the Oromo view of development is the fact that ideas and knowledge are seen as part of the flow of life. Dabassa's criticism on development reflects the Oromo experience under Abyssinian colonial rule.

Up to now we have considered the different aspects of the traditional Oromo view of the structuring of the society and how these relates to the Oromo concept of ayaana. Thus we now can attempt to summarize what has been said up to now by trying to pull some of the important concept together to reconstruct the Oromo world-view. It is hoped that this will depict the meaning of the Oromo concept of ayaana and its relevance to the Oromo system of knowledge and/or world-view.

Chapter XV

THE OROMO WORLD-VIEW

An exposition of the world-view of the Oromo could be treated under three headings: *ayyaana*, *uumaa* and *saffu*. It is however impossible to translate these terms into English without distorting them. For in Oromo, as in many other traditional languages, words have both a core meaning and peripheral meanings. This is especially true of those philosophico-religious terms, "*ayyaana*" "*uumaa*" and *saffu*". To unravel the complexity of a word, it is necessary therefore to distinguish between its core and its periphereal meanings.

In its core meaning, *ayyaana* refers to that by which and through which, *Waaqa*, God, creates everything. *Ayaana* is in fact both that which causes something to come into being and become that which it has caused. *Ayaana* is therefore that which exists before and after that which it causes to come into existence. There are several peripheral meanings of *ayyaana*. Most of these peripheral attributes of "*ayyaana*" are acquired through interaction with and colonial domination of the Abyssinian church and state. Thus has become part of the meanings of "*ayyaana*". But Oromos need to know what "*ayyaana*" meant to their forefathers.

Uumaa refers to the entire physical world and the living things and divine beings contained within it, animal, vegetal, mineral and spiritual. In this sense, *uumaa* even embraces *ayyaana* itself, just as *ayyaana*, which is the cause of *uumaa*, also encompasses it. The term *uumaa* is derived from the verb *uumu* literally meaning "to create". The nominal form *uumaa* therefore refers to everything that is created, in short, to "*Waaqa's* (God's) creation.

Saffu, is a moral category, based on Oromo notions of distance and respect for all things. The concept of *saffu* is not merely an abstract category: it constitutes the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded; it is that which directs one on the right path; it shows the way in which life can be best lived.

It is these three concepts which together constitute the basis of the Oromo world-view. Although presented separately here for methodological reasons, they should be seen as interlinked and interconnected aspects of a whole. Together they constitute three different but mutually interrelated points of view about the rational universe as seen through Oromo eyes.

For the Oromo, the knowledge of the world is an organic experience. As my teachers Dabassa Guyyo and Bule Guyyo put it, "knowledge has bones; knowledge has blood and knowledge has flesh". The knowledge of the world as sensed through the bones is physical knowledge: it is the knowledge of *uumaa*, of the created world. The knowledge that is felt through the blood is a knowledge of the inner qualities of things; it is the knowledge of *ayaana* or the cause of creation. The knowledge that comes through the flesh is knowing the moral values attached to things; it is the knowledge of *saffu*, of the right and just path. This is sometimes referred to as *qalbii*, "thought". A wise man is not a person who merely knows; it is rather a man who lives his knowledge. In order to live wisely, according to Bule Guyyo, *ayaana* and *uumaa* must in fact be subordinated to *saffu*. For, he argues, "The use of knowledge is to lead us to the right life?" *Saffu* therefore penetrates all action, as it sets the measure of what constitutes an appropriate act. Nevertheless, Bule admits that to know *saffu*, the wise man should also know *ayaana* and *uumaa*. These are therefore the three fundamental principles of the Oromo system of thought.

The subject matter of what constitutes knowledge is of course open to a number of interpretations. The wise-men or experts in particular, who are the elite of the society, have a greater command of the subject, since it is they who act as the moral guides to the whole community. No wonder then that it had been and continues to be the policy of Abyssinian colonizers to see to it that Oromo as a people did not develop a leadership of their own.

Coming back to the issue, For the Oromo, *ayaana* and *saffu* also have cosmic dimensions, and it is believed that there also exists a link between them and the occurrence of natural events. With this general overview, let us now consider each of the component parts of the Oromo world-view and its system of knowledge in more detail.

The Oromo concept of *ayaana*

In discussing this topic, there exist two problems which should be noted at the outset. The first problem arises out of the fact that the Oromo system of knowledge forms a unified whole. The dilemma which faces any body who wants to understand Oromo culture is therefore how to present the parts whilst retaining a picture of the whole. By treating one particular aspect in detail, we do not want to run the risk of confusing the issue and misrepresent the essential unity of the system. In describing the whole without analysing the parts also leads to a similar distortion. This has been the case with many who have tried to understand Oromo culture.

Another problem which arises in comprehending this concept, in particular for the non-Oromo and those of us who have been through western system of education, is the fact that *ayaana* operates at many different levels of reality and applies to different kinds of phenomena, many of which are religious and/or philosophical in

nature. At its highest level of abstraction, *ayaana* is that by which and/or through which Waaqa, God, creates everything in the universe. In this sense, *ayaana* causes the coming into being of everything. This idea of causality is simple enough to grasp. What complicates the matter however, is that according to my teachers and informants, *ayaana* also becomes that which it has caused to come into being. Yet even this cause and effect dichotomy does not really help to explain the essential nature of this concept. Nevertheless, the fact that this problem exists, tells us something about one of the fundamental characteristics of the Oromo system of thought. *Ayaana*, for the Oromo, is the creative act of thinking in which a thought becomes that which it mentally represents. In other words, it constitutes the recognition that there exists a dialectical relationship between thought and the object of thought. This explains why the Oromo employ the word *yaada*, for both thought and the logical reasoning process leading to its formulation, thinking and reasoning. In this sense, *ayaana* represents knowledge. This knowledge is not only externalised, it is not only knowledge about the object, but is also internalised, in that it also generates reflective thought about the object. It is this power of thought that distinguishes a wise-man or sage from the common man. For the sage does not possess knowledge alone; he also possesses knowledge about his knowledge. This knowledge about our knowledge is in fact what *saffu* represents in the Oromo view of the world.

Although this view of the world traces its origins back to *Waaqa* as the ultimate source and Creator, an approach which is partly religious and partly philosophical, at another level, the world as represented by the Oromo can be seen as constituted of these three elements, *ayaana*, *uumaa* and *saffu*, being the words, things and the relations between them which hold the created universe together.

The Oromo view of Uumaa

Gamtaa (1990) in his Oromo-English dictionary, defines *uumaa* in the following manner:

uma/u:'mu:/ tv (used of life) create, i.e., cause sth to exist or bring into being *eeNNutu si uume?* Who created you?

uma/u:'ma:/ adj, n 1 creation, creature, or a living being *uumaa rabbi* God's creation/creature. 2 (of deformity, disease, etc.) congenital, i.e., existing at birth *naafummaan saa uumaa miti booda itt Dufe* His deformity is not congenital; he became lame after birth"...

This definition provides a good entry point for the discussion of *uumaa*. In its nominal form, as demonstrated by Gamtaa, the term *uumaa* refers to a quality, attribute or characteristic acquired at birth. To qualify this statement, it could be added that if a person is born lame, then this lameness is part of his/her *uumaa*. The same could be said of someone who is either bad tempered, or patient, generous, greedy, etc. In other words, these are traits which he/she possesses in germ at birth, and which will develop as part of his/her nature or character. For the Oromo, all things have this intrinsic character or nature which are contained in them at their origin. In this sense, the idea of birth is not only literal but also metaphorical.

The problem then arises as to how to distinguish between the thing and its character. For the Oromo, nothing that exists (*uumaa*) which does not have a character (*ayaana*). The problem of distinguishing between a thing and its character is therefore one of distinguishing between *uumaa* and *ayaana*. This is why the Oromo do not make a distinction between a thing and its character: in the Oromo view nothing that exists is devoid of a character. Thus the very nature of a thing is described in terms of its character. The two are indisassociable and it is impossible to discuss a thing without at the same time discussing its characteristics. As in the

case of *ayaana*, as the force which causes and is the cause of a thing, so distinguishing between a thing and its character is another philosophical problem raised by the Oromo system of thought regarding the origin and the nature of the created universe.

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Although *ayaana* and *uumaa* are said to be inseparably linked in the Oromo world-view, this does not mean that they have exactly the same meaning.

The Oromo view of *Waaqa* or God is also directly linked to the existence of these governing principles. For they are all pervasive phenomena that operate in the universe as something of the Creator. As Bartels (1984) correctly observes at one level, *ayaana* is believed to be God's creative power manifesting itself through His creatures. As a result, there is some times a tendency to view *ayaana* as a kind of independent divinity. This is because *Waaqa* exists at the same time through His creation and independently of it. He is both the Creator and his Creation. For the Oromo, the existence of *Waaqa* is confirmed by the very existence of Heaven and Earth, and by the orderly movement that takes place within them. As Dabassa Guyyo puts it, "*Waaqa* creates because creating is His job; it is because He creates that He is recognised as *Waaqa*". This orderly movement can evidently be attributed to the governing principles of *uumaa* and *ayaana* at work within the universe. In the Oromo world-view, therefore, God, through His creative power, is placed within the world. By seeing *Waaqa* as part of the world as well as external to it, the Oromo cosmology unites under a principle single function what are otherwise considered opposites.

The concept of Nature or *uumaa* which has been dealt with thus far, can be described as a kind of body, in the broadest sense of the term. This body is not only a physical and material one, but also one which contains visible moral qualities.

Such qualities are *arjooma* "generosity"; *gara-laafina* "kindness"; *hammenya* "evil", etc. and many others. For the Oromo, these attributes actually exist; but we can only see them "with the eyes of our heart" to borrow an expression from Dabassa Guyyo.

The Oromo concept of *saffuu*

The Oromo concept of *saffuu* has been well documented in the work of the most recent ethnographer to have worked among in the Macha moeity of the Macha-Tulama Oromo. In his study of the concept of *saffuu*, L.Bartels first gives the daily contexts in which the word is used by the ordinary people themselves. Secondly, he asks his informants to comment on these usages. Thirdly, he depicts the relationship between the repetition of the term *saffuu* and the making of the Oromo law. Fourthly, he briefly describes the concept as representing an ancient value relating to the equally ancient socio-political institution of the *Gadaa*. Finally he concludes his discussion by linking the concept to the Oromo view of right and wrong.

These different approaches to the study of the concept can be obtained by referring to Bartels (1983:330-341). Here, for the purpose of illustration, we will only cite the commentaries made by his informants.

Saffuu, one of his informants states, "stands for everything we do not understand, including a person's evil deeds". Another claims that "having *saffu* means that you know how to behave according to the laws of our ancestors". For another, it means, for example, that "a younger boy may not sit on a higher stool than older boys. If he does this, people say, 'he does not know *saffu*'. Finally, another summarises *saffu* in this way: "people say *saffu* when they hear of things they do not want to hear.

They also say *saffu* of things they do not understand. It is as if they are saying, 'we do not understand these things. Only *Waaqa* knows'".

These informants, who are not experts of the oral traditions, obviously have no specialised knowledge of the subject, and each presents an aspect of the meaning. The second commentator, however, gives the gist of the meaning when he states that "having *saffu* means that you know how to behave according to the laws of our ancestors".

As has already been demonstrated, it is impossible to understand the Oromo concept of *saffu* in isolation from the concepts of *ayaana* and *uumaa*. *Ayaana*, as we have already said, is that by which and through which *Waaqa* creates the world, whilst *uumaa* refers to the entire physical world, both individually and collectively. In the Oromo world-view, *saffu* provides the moral and ethical code according to which events, whether at a personal, social or cosmic level take place. It is by living in harmony with these laws, by following the path of *Waaqa* that a full and happy life can be achieved. *Waaqa* in this case represents the highest form of abstraction unifying the whole of nature and more. More because *Waaqa* is believed to be greater than the sum of His creation.

The laws of the ancestors divide into two categories. The first consist of the laws given by *Waaqa*. These laws are the laws of nature. The second comprise of the laws made by man. *Saffu* thus refers to the knowledge of these natural laws as recognised by the ancestors. It is knowing how to relate to these laws and to act according to them.

But in what way is one affected by either respecting or failing to respect these eternal laws? This is an important question in understanding the Oromo view of the

world generally speaking and of comprehending the concept of *saffu* in particular. In order to answer this question there is a need to qualify what we mean by nature. This can best be illustrated by taking a number of examples.

The Oromo know that their domestic animals will only thrive and multiply if they are given the right conditions. They believe the same to be true for everything in the natural universe. For everything relates to nature out side itself. For the Oromo, this totality of nature, can be defined as that which is appropriate to the living being in question. Given the diversity of nature, what is appropriate for one living being or creature may not necessarily be the same for another. Eating grass is appropriate and natural to a cow; but it is not so for a human being. Speaking an articulate language is appropriate and natural to man; it is not so for an animal. Should a man eat grass or an animal speak like a human being, then the Oromo would say, *saffudha* "it is *saffu*" (cf. the examples given by Bartels 1983). For it is believed that it is totality of Nature that provides the norm: it defines the nature of plants, animals and human-beings. It is thus only by conforming to this norm that they can attain their individual destinies.

Thus far, I have been discussing the particular nature of all created things. Let us now deal with the Oromo view of the whole.

In this case, Universal Nature accomodates all particular natures. In the event of natural catastrophes such as drought, famine, disease, etc., some of the particular natures may be more affected than others. The Oromo, like many other traditional peoples, tend to see such natural calamities as being the work of the Totality of Nature itself. In this sense, the Totality of Nature is, *Waaqa* God Himself. For the Oromo, these natural disasters therefore represent the manner in which He has chosen to keep the whole together. Consequently, they accept the conditions imposed on

them by *Waaqa* and see the disasters as a necessity, events which occur for the good of the whole. Guided by their sages, who understand the patterns and the meanings of such occurrences, they perform the appropriate rituals and sacrifices and repeat the necessary prayers to survive the disasters. For the Oromo believe that nothing can stand in the way of the Will of the Totality of Nature, since it holds together and maintains all Nature. Hence everything that happens accords with the Universal Nature, or *Waaqa* and must therefore be right. Such a conclusion obviously emanates from the belief that there is a single guiding Principle behind all Nature, which is *Waaqa*. This in turn derives from the notion that the harmony of the whole transcends the parts.

Such a view may be taken to imply that the Oromo do not see any conflict in the universe. To the contrary, the Oromo distinguish between good (*danssa/gaarii*) and evil (*hama*). So how then do they account for such contradictions?

This takes us back to the idea of *saffu* and to the nature of man. In the Oromo view, man is both a logical abstraction in the sense of *ayaana* and a concretely existing being in the sense of *uumaa*. In the cosmos man constitutes one of the many elements. But as a group of beings in the diversity of the cosmos, man occupies a very important place, for unlike all other natural beings, man alone is endowed with the intelligence to comprehend his *ayaana* and *uumaa* through which he is able to understand cosmic events. According to both my teachers Dabassa Guyyo and Bule Guyyo, this gift places man at an advantageous position in respect to all the other natural beings in the universe. But in their view, *Waaqa* does not give such an advantage without responsibilities. Therefore He expects man to act in harmony with the cosmic whole. This is why, according to Dabassa Guyyo, the Oromo social law is derived from cosmic law.

As we have seen, traditional Oromo law is based on the same world-view and possesses the same organising principles discussed thus far. It consists of three elements, *seera* "law", *aadaa* "custom" and *c'eera-fokko*, "distance and respect". The society is thus a reflection of the macro-cosmos: *seera* corresponds to *ayaana*; *aadaa* to *uumaa* and *saffu* to *c'eera-fokko*. The very fact that man possesses such laws also make him different from all the other natural beings. According to Dabassa Guyyo, these laws, were devised to keep the action of man in harmony with the cosmic whole. Their existence can be seen as part of the will of *Waaqa*, for it is only man who fails to act in accordance with the natural laws set down by "*Waaqa*". For unlike any other creature, man has the choice between good and evil, and he is endowed with the natural impulse of differentiating between them. In short, *Waaqa* as Universal Nature has established the conditions and given man the status of a moral agent by making him a conscious participant in the natural process of the Universe. The laws made by man thus act as a social control, preventing evil deeds from overwhelming the harmony of the cosmic whole. The accumulated effect of such evil is seen as having serious repercussions for the universe, as it releases the anger of the Totality of Nature. This anger is referred to as the return of *Saglii*. When this happens, the process of the life cycle of the cosmic universe comes to an end and gives rise to a new cycle of time. There is no clear idea in Oromo specifying the length of this cycle of the natural universe. However, through experience, they have established the duration of the cycle of their social institutions as covering a period of between 360 and 480 years. This period corresponds to the rule of a dominant group, when the power it has wielded comes to an end and passes to another dominant group. This period of dominance of 360 to 480 years Oromo refer to by the term "*jaatama*" and recognize eight of such "*jaatama*" to have passed.

Thus according to these oral historians the present "*jaatama*", which is the ninth one is the "*jaatama*" of the *Gadaa* of the Boorana. If we were to take this oral

history at face value and multiply each of the "*jaatama*" by 360 years, we will have 3,060 years.

The Oromo concept of the after-life describes death as a transitional stage after which the human being rejoins all his or her dead forefathers and foremothers in a place called *Iddo-Dhugga*, the "Place of Truth". Here he or she lives in a community very similar to the one on Earth. There does not exist, however, any physical description of this Place of Truth.

THE OROMO SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE

The Oromo knowledge system embraces two broad categories: those of *ayaana* as signifier and *uumaa* as signified. The most important class of objects signified are perhaps the meanings of the term. This refers in short to the product of language. Using such a method to describe the Oromo world-view poses a certain number of problems, since it fails to take account of other equally important processes which are outside the phenomena of concept and object in the the signifier-signified dichotomy such as unnamed sense impressions.

The Oromo do not see external things as mere objects upon which human beings act. For them external objects are active and have the power to act on the sense organs. That is why the Oromo attribute *ayaana* to everything in the universe.

This does not mean to say that the mind is incapable of producing imagined objects. Nevertheless, such imaginary objects do not exist in a vacuum, outside the accumulated experience of reality. When the Booran Oromo elders encounter a strange object or experience: *taka argite taka dhagete?* "have you ever seen or heard of such a thing?".

This could be linked to the Oromo view of history, termed *argaa-dhageetti*, a compound expression meaning "that which is seen and heard". In this sense, knowledge is knowing the history of something; history being that which repeats itself. Thus knowledge is based on the repeated experience of primarily the senses. Of course the Oromo are well aware that the capacity to form general concepts is an innate faculty. But they know also that such a capacity is directly related to experience, an experience of the external world. Intelligence (*qarooma*), whilst being an innate quality, is known to be shaped and developed through experience.

In the Oromo view every living creature has its own governing principle. This they call *yaayaa shanan*, the "five fundamentals", the subdivisions of which constitute an aspect of the Oromo concept of *ayaana*. The same principle is seen as operating in both the general and the particular.

In man, language *afaan* and/or *dubbi* is believed to articulate such a principle. The most interesting point to note here is the Oromo notion of the difference between thought and language. According to Dabass Guyyo, there is no difference between *yaada* "thought" and *dubbi* "words". According to him, *dubbi* is nothing more than thinking aloud. He also thinks it is possible to speak without words. This happens when one speaks to oneself. Talking to oneself is nothing other than thought. For Dabassa, therefore, language is a form of thought for the other, while thought is a form of language for oneself. He argues, furthermore, that with thought, *yaada*, we order what we see and see. Once these sense experiences are ordered, they become thoughts or language for oneself. When these ordered thoughts are put into words, they become thoughts for others or language. In Oromo, the term for speech is derived from the word for drum (*dibbe*), an appropriate symbol for this process.

Such a philosophical view of language has its roots in the Oromo cosmology. According to the Oromo view of creation, all things emanate from *ayaana*, which is something of the Creator. The power of speech is therefore a God given attribute. Through this power, God provides man with the medium through which he can express his relations with the totality. Language is thus part of nature and nature is part of language. For articulate thought mirrors cosmic events.

In this thesis an attempt has been made to show that there is a link between systems of classification and worldview. This is evidenced by the study of the Oromo concept of *ayaanaa*, a concept central both to the system of classification and the worldview.

CHAPTER XVI

THE COLONIZING STRUCTURE OROMO OVER THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS

Up to now I have presented the Oromo as though they are all the same. I down played the differences in order to expose the underlying common cultural values and identity. But as Baxter (1985:1) correctly observes, 'there are considerable cultural diversities between the different Oromo groups, and Oromos are variously Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and followers of traditional religion'. To understand this diversity it is important to reflect on Oromo history over the last one hundred years.

THE ABYSSINIAN STATE AND CHURCH

It is perhaps necessary to start with the year 1870. The significance of this date is twofold. First, it is believed that it was around this time that the "*jaatama*" of the *Gadaa* of the Booran entered its "*sagli*". Secondly it was around the same period that the colonization of the Oromo began. Until this time, the Oromo ruled themselves in their different regions through the *Gadaa* system. In these regions, they elected their leaders every eight years, but were unified under the priest-king known as the *Abba Muda* or the *Qaalluu*. A pilgrimage was made to the *Qaalluu* by Oromo representatives from the different *Gadaa* regions once every eight years to whom they paid a tribute known as *daandana*. Besides this, the Oromo also paid a contribution for the maintenance of the regional *Gadaa* rule known as *kaatto*. Oromo oral tradition asserts that at this time, no power of any significance either among the Semitic Amhara nor among the Tigre dared to invade any part of Oromo territory.

The gradual loss of control of the Oromo over their territory began with the introduction of European political activity in the region and with the concomitant popularization of the use of fire arms.

European political activities can be seen in two phases. The first phase was marked by the advent of Christianity. This was a gradual process. Abyssinians not only accepted Christianity but also made it into an ideology of descent, by which they later justified the subjugation and enslavement of the Oromo people. In explaining the phenomena of the expansion of Christianity in the region, an oral historian Dabassa Guyyo described it in the following manner:-

"...in terms of their coming, it was Christianity that came to the region first; it is needless to say that Islam arrived only yesterday. Christianity was introduced by the white man. Among all human beings who walk on two legs and have language, the white men are the best known for their witchcraft and sorcery. Nobody can falsify or argue against this for it is evident even today. The white man brought Christianity to us, to the people living in the region called Ethiopia today, who already had such good customs *aadaa* and law *seera*. I have described these to you before. A people who had joint decision making *muraa* and decisive decisions *murtii*. A people who had regulations for everything including trees and grass. They intruded on the total way of life of a people's *finna*.. In intruding they used the illegitimate children *dikaalaa*. They used them as agents and infiltrators and took camouflage behind such people. By 'illegitimate children' we mean those who are not begotten according to custom, who are the result of an outside urine: cases where the mother may be one of our daughters and the father an outsider. They intruded on us through such people. Such children were born and grew up and began to claim descent from outside. Such people are the ones we referred to as

kara-mura, whose fathers are not known and who have been raised without a proper father. In the absence of a father, they learnt no history. They are born of women without a proper husband and begotten by a man without a proper wife. As a result of this, the total way of life and behaviour of the child becomes improper and odd. These are the children begotten by witches and sorcerers. These outside views intruded on our finna through using people of such birth as an instrument. In this way, they built a pathway which did not exist before. Nobody builds a way to a place where they do not have any intention to go. The begetting of such children is like making a road to a place they wanted to take over and control. They needed such people for their sorcery to hold and their witchcraft to work. Thus they handed the magic bead of sorcery and witchcraft to people of such a birth and continued to supply such people with the means by which they could spread their sorcery and gave them the cover-up for such sorcery. This sorcery is nothing but their own customs and that which they call Christianity. This is what destroyed and continues to destroy our way of life and forces our people into the way of life of the sorcerers. It is that which destroys our language and makes us speak their tongue. They have nothing apart from this Christianity by which they sorcered us. This is how they intruded on us. Once such a generation was formed, it came to be handed down, from one generation to another. Their mother's lovers continued to supply them with the necessary means such as money...This was not a matter of one or few years. It was a long process. The disease they introduced was unable to spread but it did not also die out. Instead, it continued in a gradual way. As it gradually began taking root in the region, it started to become a tribal identity rather than a religion. Every one who was converted into the sorcery they called *Amhara* instead of calling them Christians".

The reason for quoting this text at such length is to show how the spread of Christianity was perceived by the Oromo. The Abyssinian brand of Christianity to which Oromo oral tradition referred to as a "disease" was checked from spreading in its initial phase. In the second phase, the development of Abyssinian Christianity was reinforced through European support of it with the supply of firearms. This was done in order to check the spread of Islam in the region.

The first significant Abyssinian ruler oral tradition recalls is a man by the name of Theodorus. According to Dabassa Guyyo, Theodorus was the first Abyssinian to be recruited by Europeans and armed to destroy the Oromo people. Oromo oral history recounts a number of stories about the battles of resistance fought against Theodorus, whose army is portrayed as being led by Europeans. This claim of European participation in the military campaign of this Abyssinian ruler is confirmed in the written sources.

According to Newman (1936:19;26), the British advisor to Theodorus, Plowden, was killed in one of the many campaigns waged against the Oromo.

'In the war against the Galla Theodore used punishment with variations, such as cutting off either or both hands or feet, with or without the gouging out of eyes has long been a prominent feature in Ethiopian warfare, and is not yet considered out of date. It was at the time of the campaign against Negushe that Plowden was killed and his death marked a complete change in the character and conduct of Theodore.'

In the Oromo oral traditions, it is said that although Theodorus took advantage of the newly introduced firearms and massacred thousands of Oromo, especially those of the *Rayaa* and *Assebu* in the *Wallo* area, he died before he could gain control of their territory.

As Habte/Selassie (1980:51) correctly points out,

'the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 completely changed the geopolitical and economic importance of the region. It was this same year that an Italian ship company established a station at Assab. The French occupied Djibouti. This situation soon created suspicion among the European colonial powers, the British, the French and the Italians'.

Abyssinian factions also continued to fight among themselves over which of them would have the monopoly of access to Europeans.

Menelik who was brought up by Theodorus and his British advisors, was taken to northern Shoa for military training at a very early age. Shoa at that time consisted only of the District of Menz and was part of the land of the Rayaa and Assebu. Revealing his ambition to control the region, Menelik later proclaimed himself King of Shoa. This move brought him into conflict with Johannis of Tigre. This conflict was not in the best interest of their European masters, and suppliers of arms. Johannis was accordingly advised not to interfere with Menelik's colonization of the Oromo to the south; south-east and south-west of Menz. Menelik, on the other hand, was advised not to interfere with Johannis' intentions on the territory of the *Rayaa* and the Assebu. To conclude this pact, the two parties were counselled to exchange their children in marriage. Thus Menelik's daughter married Sahla Selassie, Johannis's son. All this was done so as to create a Christian Abyssinian hegemony over Islamic and 'pagan' 'Galla' forces and secure British colonial interests. When Johannis died, Menelik was counselled to proclaim himself 'king of kings'. Had the reverse happened, Johannis would probably have assumed the same position. And so, by this accident of death, the Tigreans lost the empire to their Amhara competitors.

Once Menelik was declared king of kings, the three European colonial powers began to compete among themselves. As Habte/Selassie further explains

the Italians, whose authority on the Red Sea coast had constantly been undermined through the British support of Johannis, were the first to support Menelik. This led to the signing of the treaty of Wichale. By this treaty, the Italian colony was extended from the Red Sea coast to include Asmara. The British remained silent about the Italian acquisition of this colony for two basic reasons. First, was the preference for the presence in the region of a European power to countermand the expansion of Islam. The British were already engaged in a bitter war in the then Anglo-Egyptian Sudan with the Mahdi and the successes of the latter had already forced the British to evacuate from their garrisons in the Sudan. The second, and perhaps the most important reason for the British non-interference of the colonization of Eritrea, was their rivalry with the French. The French already controlled Djibouti, a territory that lay at the entrance to the Red Sea. This threatened their control of the port of Aden. Both powers dreamed about possessing a territory which stretched from West Africa to the Indian Ocean, and from Cairo to the Cape of Good Hope. The Italian presence effectively sealed the Red Sea coast from Islamic penetration.

As for British control of inland Oromo territory, the work of colonizing was achieved through the creation of the Christian Abyssinian hegemony, who have long borrowed the European colonizing structure, with the superior firearms that the Abyssinians acquired from the different European powers at different times, with the constant military advice of these powers, including the participation of Russian mercenaries, the lands of the Oromo and other groups were invaded and their peoples subjected to genocidal wars, in which some ethnic groups completely disappeared, while the numbers of those who survived was much reduced. Reporting on the population of the region before and after the Abyssinian colonial wars, Newman (1936:93-94) comments:

"The extent to which these areas have been depopulated is shown by the fact that prior to its conquest, the population of Kaffa was estimated at 1,500,000, but owing to the slave trade and the removal of the population by the gabar system, it has been reduced to 20,000. In the same way, the slave trade in men, women and

children has so reduced the population of Gimirra, that it dropped in fifteen years from 100,000 to 20,000 inhabitants. The same may be said of many other states."

Between 1850 and 1870 the French historian Martial de Salviac estimated the Oromo population to be about ten million. In 1900 he reported that only about half survived the Abyssinian war of occupation. (de Slaviac cited in Gadaa Melbaa 1980:51).

Of course it would be naive to assume that Abyssinians accomplished this conquest on their own. Their success was largely due to their European firearms and advisors. As early as the 1890s, Menelik had a French advisor, an engineer who had originally come to work on the Djibouti-Addis railway line, the effective *adv*ⁱ*ce* of which aided the genocidal campaign against the Oromo. Newman (1936:46) shows how Ras Makonnen was aided by the French in his series of raids and conquests in the Ogaden region. Newman further notes the fact that Leon Darragon, a French 'explorer' set out with an army of 15,000 strong men and marched through the Booran country to the north of Lake Rudolf. On his return, he submitted a map of his route to Menelik, who immediately claimed sovereignty over all the regions covered. Since Menelik did not know how to read maps, this claim was obviously one counselled by his European advisors. At the beginning of 1898, Alexander Boulatowitch led a march south with 30,000 men against the Oromo. Newman shows us how Boulatowitch represented Menelik wherever he went, also submitting a map of all the territories he had destroyed and advising the king to claim authority over them. Countless other examples can be given. None of the Abyssinian conquests was achieved without European support. Gradually, however, through experience and training, they acquired their own expertise in such matters. Nevertheless they continued to depend on European firearms and other forms of support.

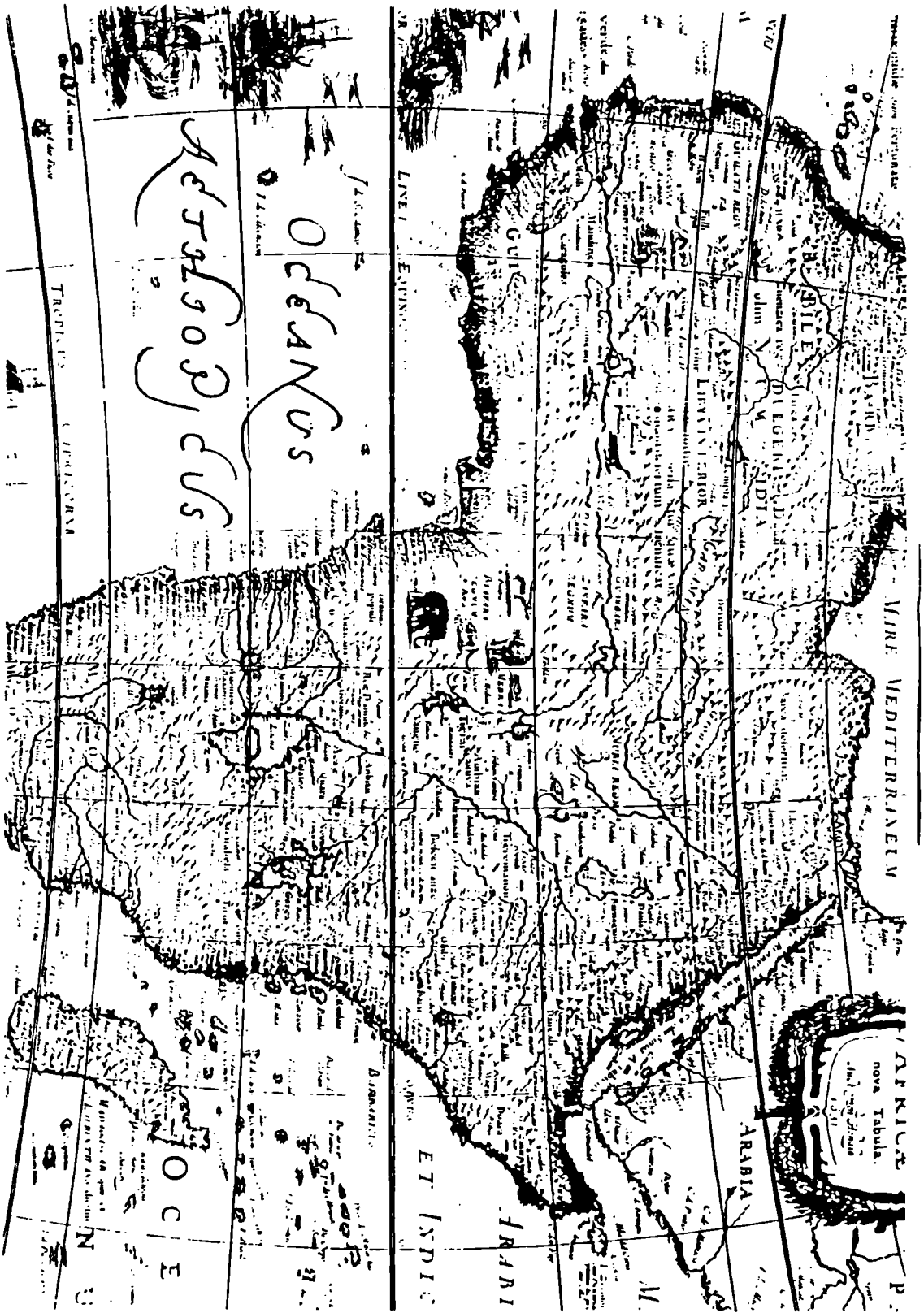
It was not until the 1950s that the colonial empire state emerged and assumed the name Ethiopia, an ancient name with a number of meanings none of which had to do with the Abyssinians. See for

instance the map on the next page . This map was made in 1630. On this map we see the fact that even the Atlantic ocean was referred to as *Oceanus Aethiopicus* or Ethiopian Ocean.

According to Oromo oral tradition, the colonizers hunted down all those reputed to be custodians of the Oromo wisdom. They hunted down and killed the *raaga* or prophets; they killed the *ayyaantu* or time reckoners; they killed the *warra arga d'ageeti* or historians and imprisoned the strong. The colonial rulers of Abyssinia not only expropriated Oromo horses and forced the Oromo to look after them, but also forbade the use of horses by the Oromo. This policy was modelled on that used by the British in East Africa. The Abyssinian colonial rulers also imposed a new administrative structure, dividing the *Sikko* from the *Mando*, the *Mac'c'a* from the *Tullama*, the *Raya* from the *Assebu*, the *Ittu* from the *Karrayyu*. The imposition of this colonial structure was one of the most important causes for the supposed weakening of the *Gadaa* system, as it dismantled the moiety system. The Oromo were forbidden to cross these new boundaries. To ensure that they did not attempt to do so, the colonial administration created pockets of colonial armed settlers known as *Mahaal-Sefaarii*, literally meaning "settlers in between". These are the centres which gradually evolved into garrison towns, as almost all the towns in the Oromo regions are.

While the Abyssinian colonial state was busy instituting these new administrative colonizing structures, the Abyssinian colonial church built Coptic Churches on the traditional Oromo ceremonial grounds. Most of these churches were built by forced slave labour of the vanquished Oromo and other colonized peoples. Worse than this, was the fact that the Church replaced the Oromo traditional ceremonial days used to mark the beginning of each season with Abyssinian ones. It was in this way that *sarara*, *daree* or *almado* rituals of the traditional Oromo was christened *masqal* or "cross" in the Church calendar. For the Oromo, this day marked the beginning of the *birra* "spring" and the end of the rainy season. In the same manner, the day that marked the end of

9) The Atlantic Ocean in 1630



the *birra* and the beginning of the *bona* seasons was renamed *lidat*, meaning "birth", supposedly of Christ. The day that marked the end of the *bona* and the *Abrassaa* or *Arfaasaa*, the dry and wet seasons respectively, were christened *faasekaa*, meaning Easter.

Apart from all this, the Abyssinians adopted round or circular buildings, which are not common to the Alexandrian tradition, and they also placed seven ostrich eggs on the zenith of the Church. Both circular constructions and ostriches constitute important symbolisms in the Oromo tradition.

Thus whilst they appropriated some Oromo traditions by christianising them, they ridiculed others and constantly eroded them. One such tradition which became a focus of attack was the *Qaalluu* institution.

The *Qaalluu* institution is perhaps the central structure around which all other Oromo institutions are organized. The *Qaallu* is placed at the heart of all the Oromo institutions. It could be said that one of the many functions of the *Gadaa* itself is the protection of the *Qaalluu*. As discussed earlier, by dislocating the *Gadaa* from the *Qaalluu* and by splitting up the moieties, the colonizing administrative structure weakened the *Gadaa* institution and thereby rendered the *Qaalluu* institution defenceless. Thus isolated from the *Gadaa* system, the *Qaalluu* and all the beliefs and values of which he was the living embodiment were constantly eroded, such that some Oromo themselves came to doubt their own belief system and their own idea of their Creator. It was in this process that the *Qaalluu* himself became a mere "witch-doctor" and was christened '*qaallicha*' in Amharic. Similarly, the Oromo concept of *ayaana*, which was central to the *Qaalluu* institution and therefore to the Oromo world-view in general, was linked to ecstatic experiences and became known as a possession cult. Spirit possession was in fact an Abyssinian tradition: the male cult was known as *zaar*, whilst the female one was referred to by the name *addokabire*.

From this discussion, it is evident that some form of syncretism occurred between the Abyssinian version of Christianity and the traditional Oromo beliefs. This religious syncretism occurred mainly through conquest. By overcoming a people by force of arms and with superior military technology, the conquerors championed a Euro-Abyssinian God proving that, the God of their victims was incapable of coming to their help, thus breaking their moral resistance to the new religion that represented an aspect of the colonizing structure.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Oromo people had been conquered and colonized. With this conquest, their name was officially changed, their history rewritten, their institutions destroyed, and their traditional culture and belief system sapped. Unlike the European colonial powers, however, Abyssinians were technologically and culturally backward. They were therefore unable, despite over one hundred years of colonial domination, to bring about a structural change in the Oromo view of the world. The custodians of the Oromo oral tradition were able to retain intact to a large degree the system of knowledge. Underlying this traditional world view was the religious and philosophical concept of *ayaana* which contributed to the functioning of both the *Gadaa* and *Qaalluu* institutions.

It is clear that Alexandrian monks and traders have been in and around Axum for quite a long time. It is also true that Abyssinians have been exposed for a long period of time to some kind of Orthodox Christian influence, such that Alexandrian orthodoxy became the prevalent factor of ethnic identity common to Abyssinia as a whole. This persisted despite the minor differences that were the subject of conflict between them in claims for court and church titles.

As Mohammed.H (1990:1) correctly argues, "the Oromo lived as neighbours with, but beyond military control and political influence of the medieval Christian kingdom of Abyssinia". This observation holds equally true for religious influence. It is only between 1885 and 1900 that all the

Oromo within the empire state of Ethiopia were subjected to Orthodox Christianity. Before this time, they came under Islamic influence if any.

The methods used by the Abyssinian colonial church and government to forcefully convert the Oromo to Christianity were violent and degrading. From the outset, all Oromo land was declared to be the property of the Emperor. A good part of this land went to the Church. In the conversion of the Oromo, therefore, the state and church collaborated; the soldier and priest worked together. Under threat of the European firearms wielded by the soldiers, the Oromo submitted to Christianity of the Abyssinian type, becoming slaves of a new order. Churches were built in Oromo villages and dedicated to particular saints. Soldiers raided Oromo villages every month on the day with which the saint was associated. Both males and females of all ages were driven to the river at gunpoint. There, they were made to separate into two groups, one male, the other female. A "priest" then murmured some verses from some odd books written in a language that neither he-himself nor the people he was supposedly baptizing understood.

The soldiers and priests did not receive any salary. They were paid in kind through land expropriated from the Oromo by their respective institutions. The size of the land acquired by these individuals depended on their church or court titles. In relation to the size of the land seized, a number of Oromo families were assigned to each one of these colonial agents. The Oromo people hated the priests, feared the soldiers and felt even more embittered about the loss of their land, on which they had now become slaves providing forced slave labour.

According to the law laid down by these colonizers, the Oromo could only bury their dead around the church; the inner circle was reserved for the families of the soldiers and priests, such that even in death, Oromo remained subservient to their new masters. Every year, both the government and church collected "tax". That of the church was called "*firre gibir*".

According to the circumstances of the imposition of this unjust and cruel rule, the Oromo responded differently in each of the regions they inhabited.

In Jimma, where Islam had long taken root, the Oromo king of the time negotiated with the Abyssinian colonial rulers. In Arssi, the Oromo people resisted both the Abyssinian colonial rule and its church. They fought fierce battles on horseback armed only with spears against soldiers with European musket guns. The guns proved superior. Thousands fell dead fighting until they could no longer fight. The Abyssinians took over the entire land of the Arssi. The Arssi-Oromos were officially declared slaves to be sold on the slave market. They were used as bearers to carry goods to the port for the European market. On arrival at the port, both they and the goods they were carrying were sold to European traders, (cf S.Waldron 1985) It was thus in protest against such cruelty that the Arssi Oromo turned to Islam between the years 1932 and 1936 (cf. Habte Selassie 1980:80).

In western Oromoland, the *Qaalluu* institution organized a propaganda campaign. They spread as a means of discouraging the institutionalization of the colonial burial centers rumours that priests were cannibals who enjoyed the flesh of people buried around the church

In short, therefore, the Oromo responded in different ways in different regions, as individuals, groups or institutions. Even those Oromo who remain Orthodox Christians today, do so more out of habit rather than affinity with the religion itself and in order to remain within the social circle for practical purposes. The fact that the priests themselves were ignorant of the religious dogma they preached, and so could not educate the people was in favour of the Oromo. They continued their own form of worship at home and attended church out of obligation and obedience to the colonial law.

1.3.3. THE ISLAMIC FAITH

As already mentioned, Islam was perhaps the first foreign religion to which the Oromo were exposed in part of their territory. Just as Christianity was introduced to Abyssinia through trade contacts and individuals fleeing religious persecution in Europe and North Africa, so did Islam come to the Oromo in the same manner.

It was probably in *Wollo* that the Oromo of the *Raayaa* and *Assebu* groups first encountered Islam. It is said that Islam came across the Red Sea with the people of the Prophet fleeing religious persecution as a result of the jihad war being fought between *Mecca* and *Medina*. With the arrival of these religious refugees, Islam gradually spread among the Oromo of *Wollo*, in the region of *Raayaa* and *Assebu*, who lived between the burning plains of the Red Sea to the east and northeast and the highlands of *Beja-midir* to the west and northwest. Here, Islam was slowly integrated into the traditional Oromo religion and world-view, such that it spread easily to the rest of the Oromo regions, (see Al-hashimi.M 1987:29)

As oral tradition has it, the first two Islamic religious centres were founded at *Dirre*, at the holy site which became associated with cult of *Sheikh Hussein*, and at a place known as *Innarya*, one of the five *Gibe* states in central Oromo country. Both these centres were originally associated with the wandering *Qaallu* of the Oromo.

At *Dirre*, Islam further integrated itself strongly with the monotheistic traditional Oromo religion and belief system, until *Sheikh Hussein* became a de facto Islamic Oromo saint.

In the case of *Innarya*, a certain amount of psychological pressure was employed to convert the Oromo to Islam. According to Mohamed Haj, a Moslem from *Wollo* whom I interviewed in Nairobi, the term *Innarya* refers to the "people of fire". It is derived from the Arabic word *naar*,

meaning "fire", thus *Innaria* was the land or country of the people of fire. This derivation is associated with a myth, which was recounted to me orally by Mohamed Haj. In this myth, the Oromo people of *Innarya* were portrayed as descendants of pharaonic Egypt who disobeyed God. The myth tells of how God promised to prepare for all mankind a place in heaven, and how the Pharaoh refused this offer, saying that he would build it himself on this earth. As a consequence, God decreed that the Pharaoh and his descendants would be burnt in fire. But a person named *Nissir-Allah*, literally signifying "angel of God", intervened and requested Allah for the chance to go and preach Islam to those who were willing to repent, a wish which was granted. The story continues that *Nissir-Allah* therefore landed among the people of *Innarya* and converted them to Islam. In *Dawarro* where the people refused to submit, they were said to have been destroyed by a disease of the same name, *Dawarro* is an Oromo term for migraine.

Apart from such instances in which early Islam tended to employ threats of fire and disease in the conversion of people to this faith, it is largely thought that the religion spread among the Oromo through trade without the use of force.

It is interesting to note that Islam affected the lowland Oromo to a greater extent than it did the highlanders. This could perhaps be explained by many factors, one of these being that the highlands are the traditional seat of the Oromo rulers, who did not allow easy access to their territory for evangelical work. In the peripheral lowlands, however, people were more exposed and relatively less protected from outside influence. The other important factor was trade, in which salt played a very important role.

Traditional Oromo had already developed trade routes in which salt bars served as a medium of exchange. All Oromo mines were located in the lowland areas, for which the land of the *Sikko* and *Maddo* and that of the *Sabbo* and *Goona* were famous. The exchange of salt for other agricultural

commodities, especially coffee and barley, had thus already created a network of trade routes, which were utilized by Moslem traders and used to spread the religion.

Thus far, the early phase of the spread of Islam has been discussed. With the coming of Abyssinian colonialism, Islam in the Horn of Africa entered a new phase. The ambition and aspiration of Christian Abyssinia was of course to occupy all of "Galla-land", as Menelik called it, and to destroy Islam, which it feared provided the Oromo with a competing world-view and foreign contact. Here the interests of Christian Abyssinia overlapped with those of the European colonial powers, who also sought to check the spread of Islam. In the Sudan, the British even created a buffer zone between the north and the south. In the Horn of Africa, all the colonial powers, despite their diverging interests, agreed to arm Christian Abyssinia as a way of dominating the region and in particular of controlling the Oromo.

Thus in the Horn of Africa over the last one hundred years, Islam has developed in reaction to this Christian domination of the region. Somalia emerged as the representative of the Prophet, whilst Abyssinia claimed "blood relations" with Christ through their "mother", the Queen of Sheba. Over time, Islam has gradually become the ideology of domination over the Oromo and other peoples in the region by the Darod section of the Somali ruling class who also claim blood relation with the prophet.

With this gradual development of the role of Islam, the Oromo attitude has also changed and will continue to change as the war between Abyssinnia and Somalia continues over the control of the fertile Oromo country. The Oromo have always been and continue to be the victims of this crusade. But they are also learning quickly from history and from their own experience that the only way of bringing this crusade to an end is to establish their own right to self-determination. Only then can lasting peace come to the region and Oromo cease to be the victim of the two powers engaged in a war to dominate the Oromo and take possession of their fertile land.

In short, the Oromo response to Islam, therefore, has been of two types, depending on the different stages of its development. In its early stages, when conversion was based on persuading the individual and group that there was no claim or aspiration to their land, the Oromo generally accepted and respected Islam. Today, they clearly recognise the fact that religion is a salient feature of international relations, to which they should respond consciously in order to protect their rights and above all the Oromo national interest.

1.3.4. THE "MISSIONI"

"*Missioni*" is the term with which the Oromo refer to other Christian denominations. The term is clearly a corrupted form of the word "mission". For the Oromo, these religions are associated with Europeans, with their clinics and hospitals, schools, their style of dress and their goods, in short with modernity.

The first foreign missions were admitted to a few parts of Oromoland around 1920, not as missionaries in the doctrinal sense of the term, but as teachers, doctors, nurses, project leaders, and so forth. As this practical approach to religion was different to any they had hitherto known, the Oromo responded positively. Moreover, in proselytizing these denominations employed the traditional Oromo name for their God, *Waaqayo*. Conversion did not involve any physical force and no one was forced to change his or her Oromo name, although they were not discouraged from doing so either. Above all, people were paid for the work they did for the *Missioni*. Initially, they provided free education, health facilities and even clothing to the school children who attended their schools. As more and more churches of different denominations began to establish themselves in the same areas, and started to compete with one another in the number of convertees, Oromo children benefitted greatly from this rivalry in terms of access to modern education.

For some far-sighted Oromo, the only problem they foresaw in this "*missioni*" activity was the fact that these churches were critical of traditional Oromo values, such as reverence for the *Qaalluu* institution, the *Gadaa* rituals, mountain sacrifices and libations to the ancestors. These beliefs and practices the "*Missioni*" condemned as idol worship. They also discouraged all Oromo songs and dances. Their aim, especially in regard to the students they taught, was to assimilate them to the western way of life. In this, the "*Missioni*" succeeded to some degree. Initially, the Oromo accepted this process of assimilation, for unlike the Abyssinian Church, in destroying their old ways of life, the *Missioni* at least offered something else in exchange.

It can be said that for the great majority of the Oromo, the "*Missioni*" were not Christians or *Kristana*, in Oromo, since for them Christianity was represented by the Abyssinian Orthodox Church in reaction to which they accepted to become "*missioni*". In Wallaga, Illubabor, Arssi, and other Oromo areas, where such missionary activities have taken root, when asked for their religion, Oromo generally respond that they are "*Missioni*", followed by the name of the denomination.

Whilst the Oromo response to the "*Missioni*" was a generally positive one, as they began to be better educated and aspired to posts held by Europeans, for which they were often better qualified, to posts they were not allowed to accede, this situation became a source of tension and discord.

In Ethiopia by 1970's, the times had changed. Missionary schools became amongst the most expensive, accessible only to the sons and daughters of the colonial elite. Until most of the missionary hospitals were nationalized in 1974, these too were open mostly to the rich.

If the Oromo are relatively more favourably inclined towards Christian missionaries, it is because they compare them with the Abyssinian Orthodox Church. However, just as the Oromo response

to Islam has gradually changed, so does their response to the missionaries, as the exploitative attitudes of the latter become more and more apparent.

ABYSSINIA AND ITS 'MARXSIST REVOLUTION'

After the military take-over in 1974, the new Abyssinian ruling elite forged a new name for an old myth, replacing the old Abyssinian version of Christianity with new Marxist Leninist slogans. It was as if Marx, Engels and Lenin were to replace the Trinity. Marx and Lenin were assigned the roles of God the father and God the son, while Engels occupied an ambiguous position similar to that of the Holy Spirit. The three subsisted of one nature in the unity and territorial integrity of the Ethiopian colonial empire, of course allways under Abyssinian domination. It was in this sense that such Marxist slogans as 'Proletariat Internationalism' became the first creed of the new religion, by which Abyssinians were to resist the necessary and inevitable disintegration of the century old colonial empire. Anyone who refused to proclaim this slogan was suspected of being a traitor to the purported 'socialist programme' and cause. All discussion regarding the oppressed nations in the colonial empire and any issue of changing their situation led to the immidiate arrest and death for those who dared whisper the idea.

The right to self-determination of nations was not part of the creed of the new religion, not because it is not part of Marxist Leninst progamme, but because it did not suit the Abyssinian premise for domination. Thus it was not just accidental that the programme was referred to as 'Ethiopian Socialism'. It was an effort to replace the old Coptic Abyssinian Christian ideology that served as part of the colonizing structure by an Ethiopian version of Marxism Leninism that could serve the same purpose.

To confuse the Oromo question of National Self-determination, land, which was the issue that lay at the heart of the question, was nationalized. The first article of the so called agrarian reform proclamation declared:

'All rural land has become the property of the Ethiopian people.'

The purpose of this proclamation was four fold. First it was to give the impression to the outside world that Abyssinians were determined to bring about a revolutionary transformation of the rural economy. The second purpose was to mislead the land starved Oromo population with empty promises that land has now become theirs. The third reason was to weaken the power of the previous Abyssinian landlords who might resist the programme out of ignorance of the longterm Abyssinian national interest. The last and perhaps the main reason as to why the rural land was nationalized was to give the new Abyssinian ruling elite absolute control over the Oromo land and therefore over the Oromo economy, natural resources and man power without which Abyssinian political control and colonial domination could not be effective.

The regime also devised the idea of developing 'socialist culture' to support its programme, and the official Culture that was instantaneously propagated as the socialist norm to be followed throughout the whole empire was none other than the dominant Abyssinian culture. By the same token the cultures of the colonized nations, especially that of the Oromo, were branded as reactionary and backward, and their proponents officially persecuted as part of the national socialist programme. In Wallaga, the western part of Oromo country, over three hundred Oromos were arrested for participating in a celebration of a *Gadaa* ritual and the ritual leaders were put to death while the rest paid the price of their participation with over ten years of their life in prison.

In May 1991 the Amahara dominated so called "socialist" regime was removed only to be replaced by a Tigrian dominated E.P.R.D.F, another Abyssinian group. The fact of the matter is, whether

the colonial empire is ruled by Amhara or Tigre, whether it calls itself a Republic or Democratic, what every Abyssinian want regardless of its difference in dialect is to maintain the colonizing structure, and this is diametrically opposed to what the Oromos want. For the Oromo democracy and emanicipation lies in getting rid of the colonizing structure.

From this brief description it is clear that the Oromo encountered an insidious kind of colonialism. It is a colonialism that is unacknowledged. The world community ——— is not familiar with a none white non European kind of colonization. Dabassa Guyo calls it '*dhukuba gaaffi hin-qabne*' a disease whose existence is not acknowledged.

No colonial system is ever consolidated until the knowledge system of the colonized people is either destroyed or sufficiently distorted to give it a marginal status This is what has happened to the Oromo concept of *ayaana*.

For the Oromo, *ayaana* is a system of thought, not only a model by which the patterning of the culture is achieved but is also interpreted. It is a picture of *ayaana* as defeated and distorted by a succession of colonial conquest that most writers on the subject have portrayed. Even in that context many have failed to see the logic. The so-called spirit possession designated by the term *ayaana* in East and North-east Africa are of three types. The first category claim an Abyssinian identity and give themselves Abyssinian names, such as *Haile Getaawu*, *Wasanu*, *Mekuria* and the like. Most of the names reflect names of war lords at the time of colonial conquest and after. The second category claims Islamic identity and refer to themselves by names such as *Haji Rissa*, *Haji Abdella*, *Haji Suleman*, etc. The third category that has an Oromo identity is known by an Oromo term *Odaa*.

Perhaps the most interesting instructive point is the nature of each of these categories. The first category with its Abyssinian Christian identity and name demands conversion of the possessed into

Abyssinian Christianity and threatens to kill the possessed if its demands are not met. The second demands conversion into Islam with a death threat like the former. *Odaa*, which claims to be Oromo demands the fulfillment of '*Aadaa*' and '*Seera*' without posing any condition. These are clear indications that the three categories of spirit possessions are representatives of the three competing modes of thought.

The most logical explanation, therefore, is the fact that the Horn of Africa is not only where three continents meet but also a point at which the ancient Judaeo-Christian, Islamic and African traditional systems of thought and beliefs come into confrontation. That, the three categories of spirit possessions should be given the same name, *ayaana*, no doubt reflect the marginalized position of the Oromo people and their system of thought and beliefs as colonial subjects. These spirit possessions designated by the term *ayaana* are defined as evil and devilish in opposition, to the attribute of 'holy' that goes with the two other religions, which is perpetuated by the Colonizing Structure.

Colonialism as Mudimbe (1988:1) points out 'basically means organization, arrangements'. He explains how 'the words derive from the Latin term 'colere' meaning to cultivate or to design.' The same holds true for the Abyssinian term '*maaqnaat*'. Just as European colonisers created a European construct out of non European societies, so did Abyssinians out of non Abyssinian subjects.

In explaining the process Mudimbe (1988:2) suggests three basic methods as representative of colonial organization:

- (i) the procedure of acquiring, distributing, and exploiting lands in colonies,
- (ii) the policies of domesticating natives; and

(iii) the manner of managing ancient organizations and implementing new modes of production.

These three he then sees as three complementary hypotheses and actions, i.e, the domination of the physical space, the reformation of 'natives mind' and the integration of local economic histories into the colonizers perspective. All these together, Mudimbe suggests constitute 'the colonizing structure'. He sees this as embracing the physical, human, and spritual aspects of the colonizing experience.

I have already shown the procedures Abyssinians used in acquiring, distributing and exploiting the Oromo land they colonized. I have also described how the Abyssinian church accompaned wherever the colonial armed settlers went to add the human and spiritual aspect to the colonizing experience. The entire process resulted in the creation of the dichotomy between the colonizers and the colonized, in which the understanding of the one comes to be in opposition to the other.

In the case of Abyssinian colonialism, the dichotomies refer to Abyssinians as people with ancient civilization versus Oromo as people incapable of any civilization, Abyssinians as people with ancient Christian values versus Oromo 'tribes' with brutal pagan manners, Abyssinians with written and printed literature versus Oromo as people with no literature at all, Abyssinians as settled agricultural society versus Oromo restlessly moving hordes of nomads, Abyssinians as descendants of kings and queens, therefore superior versus Oromo people of African descent therefore slaves and inferior. There is no limit to these oppositions. It goes to the extremities of every aspect of the culture.

What is even more interesting is the way these dichotomies organize themselves into a colonizing ideological structure.

In Oromo, the philosophico-religious concept of *ayyaana* and the totality of the world-view which it constitutes is usually personified in the form of the *Booranticha*. The term '*Booranticha*' is derived from the root word *Booran*-, followed by the definite article *-ticha*. Together the name stands for the idea of Oromo unity as it is personified in the person of the first born son, Booran. The link between the concept of *Ayyaana* and that of *Booranticha* is confirmed by the fact that the two expressions are interchangeably used in the language. Just as the different parts of the human body fit together in the composition of the total or 'full' human being, the idealised figure of which is represented by the first born son, so the *Booranticha* stands for the idea of unity in diversity of the Oromo people.

In the areas of Ethiopia where the Oromo culture was able to survive the brutal repression and persecution of the Abyssinian church and state, the Oromo people still believe in the *Booranticha* and offer sacrifice to the ideal it represents. This sacrificial ceremony is performed once a year in the month known as *bittotessa* in the Oromo calendar. The offering made on this occasion consists of a fully-grown male sheep (*dagaaga*) which is black in colour. In Oromo, the sheep is regarded as an animal of peace, and black is a symbol of pure origin. It is a colour which stands for the ultimate source of everything and for the original truth, values which are concretised by the *Booranticha*.

When the Abyssinians conquered and colonised the Oromo with the help of the firearms they obtained from their European collaborators, the Oromo culture, belief system and values, in short, its entire modal personality, was destroyed and became an object of ridicule and mockery for the Abyssinian church and state elite. The case of the *Booranticha* is but one example amongst many others of this systematic campaign of destruction which has continued to the present day.

Soon after the colonial conquest, the members of the Abyssinian elite began to systematically attack the concept of the *Booranticha*, upon which the Oromo religion with its monotheistic belief in a supreme God and Creator, *Waaqa*, was founded. They did this by ridiculing the notion of the Ideal Son as a heathen concept associated with the devil. In its place they sought to substitute the notion of Christ as the Son of God. Similarly, in the process of the same campaign to destroy the indigenous belief system of the Oromo, they reduced the notion of the omnipresent *Ayyaana* to numerous invisible spirits which possess people and cause them physical harm and psychological distress. To the devilish *Ayyaana* of the Oromo, they opposed the 'purity' of their own Christian guardian angels.

One of the ways in which the Oromo ideal was subordinated to the Christian ideal was through cultural colour opposition. The Oromo attribute divine value to the black colour. In the Oromo conception, black stands for far more than colour. It represents the ultimate source of creation and is associated with the original state of all things. It signifies an absolute condition or that which has not been interfered with. The

value Oromo attach to the colour black stands in direct opposition to the notion of a 'white' Christian God with whom the Abyssinians associated themselves as part of their ideology of descent. It was by claiming their biblical link to the 'white' Christian God through King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba that the Abyssinians were able to gain access to the supply of firearms needed to carry out their crusade against the 'pagan' 'black' and/or 'Galla' and to legitimise their oppression of the Oromo.

In the Abyssinian view, the name 'Galla' is in fact equated with the colour 'black' and denotes racial inferiority. This connotation can also be seen in the term 'Shankqilla', a name which Abyssinians use to denote groups who are darker in colour than the *m*. The term is derived from the root word '*shanqo*' which usually refers to a male black coloured dog.

These views, arising out of political domination, were in turn translated into the every day language in the form of stereotypical sayings and expressions which served to reinforce the socio-political and economic relationship imposed upon the Oromo by their colonial masters and to perpetuate the myth of their inferiority. The following are but a few of the examples of this discourse of power:-

X 1. *Gallana sagaraa iyaadara yigamaal*

"As the latrine begins to eventually stink, so does the Galla"

X 2. *Gallan kamawuld masward*

"Better to abort than give birth to a Galla"

X 3. *Gallaana gaaari arraadaa ayigabaam*

"The Galla and the horse-drawn cart have no right of entry into the city centre"

X 4. *Gaalaana wushaa beta-Christian ayigabaam*

"A Christian home or church is forbidden to the Galla"

X 5. *La Gaalaa nafs-abaat diaqon mache anansa*

X "The soul of Galla requires no more than the mediation of a deacon"

X 6. *Ka gaallaa gaar yaballaa ba amattu yaqirwaal*

"Eat with a Galla and you will suffer heart-burn after a year".

In all these derogatory expressions, whenever the name 'Galla' occurs, it is contextually equivalent to "nigger" or "black man".

Similarly, the following insults are also commonly used when referring to the Oromo:-

farri Galla "coward Galla"; *timb Galla* "rotten Galla"; *kabt Galla* "animal Galla"; *dadab Galla* "stupid Galla"; *mahayim Galla* "illiterate Galla".

In short, the term 'Galla' meaning "black man", wherever it occurs in the Abyssinian language, always has a negative connotation.

In more recent times, another myth has been fabricated and circulates in the form of a joke. According to this myth, God created the world in the following ranking order. Being a white God, he began by creating the white man. Then he created the Abyssinians, followed by their cousins the Guraage. Then He made the domestic and wild animals and finally, He made the Galla. The moral of this story is one which clearly defines the place of the Oromo, in the world created by Abyssinians.

All that we have seen in this chapter clearly shows that Mudimbe's observation regarding the nature and structure of colonialism to be perfectly right. Mudimbe has already suggested three main concepts in accounting for the modulations and methods representative of colonial organization, all of which holds true of Abyssinian colonialism too.

The only problem I have with the approach is the fact that it presents the world as a dichotomy between the west and the rest. It is clear that this dichotomy as presented by Mudimbe emanates from the assumption that these dichotomies are products of Western epistemology. The question is then, which epistemology gives rise to the dichotomy between Abyssinians and the Oromo? Since Mudimbe has already told us to understand epistemology 'as both science and intellectual configuration' one then wonders what science and intellectual configuration Abyssinians had in

colonizing the Oromo ? Could it be the Orthodox Christianity that neither the 'priest' nor the people understood ? Maybe this could at best be seen as an intellectual configuration, but still according to Mudimbe the intellectual configuration itself is supposed to accompany science, or should we say that the intellectual configuration alone can produce the colonizing structure ?

I am fully aware that what Mudimbe has dealt with is an analysis of the rhetorical aspect of the colonizing structure. But that approach will betray the original cause by failing to place the emphasis where it should be.

There is no doubt that every colonial conquest is to a greater or lesser degree, also a conquest of knowledge. But this can only be achieved through the use of superior arms, whether these arms are acquired by forging alliances or whether they are produced at home makes no difference as long as they are available to do the job. What matters is the fact of over-coming a people to secure the ground for the conquest of knowledge. The emphasis must, therefore, be on this aspect of the colonizing structure to which the rest should be subordinated. Mudimbe's work only flashes in this direction at the beginning. He then abandons it for examining the methods. To begin with why should methods at all be of a primary concern? Can there at all be a correct method the colonizers could have or should have adopted in colonizing a people?

Many African scholars have tended to criticise the methodological aspect of Western domination. That only proves how good they themselves have become in the methods. What it does not prove is their commitment to change the colonial domination.

Legesse who studied the Oromo, for instance, made a great contribution in this direction. In his book 'Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Societies'. In his postscript the 'Essay in Protest Anthropology' he has the following to say:

'Africans who wish to learn about their culture find themselves in a peculiar position. They must fall back on sources written by westerners on the basis of data largely gathered by European scholars for the benefit of their own societies.'

Legesse (1973:272)

What Legesse does not say is, the fact that, Oromos who wish to learn about their culture find themselves in the same peculiar position. They must fall back on sources written by Abyssinians such as Bahrey, Aleqa Taye and the like, whose data Legesse set out to prove right, data merely gathered by Abyssinian sorcerers and magicians for the benefit of Abyssinian society.

The other problem with Mudimbe's approach is the problem of classifying knowledge into opinion, gnosis and philosophy. In this classification of knowledge, philosophy is presented as having nothing to do with African systems of thought. On this view I differ and agree with Okot p'Betek, referring to John Dewey:

"For philosophers to believe that they are endowed with unique powers giving them access to special truths is a gross piece of self delusion. Philosophers are gifted with no special powers of insight denied to other mortals. There are no exclusive regions of Being or Reality into which philosophers alone can enter because he carries philosophic passport - made out by himself. The only passport that commands entrance into Being, Reality, Nature....is the passport that is filled out signed and counter signed and stamped by public experience. And unless philosophers recognise this, until they accept their common humanity with good grace and without any mental reservation they can not hope to perform any intelligent function and make philosophy a living thing, a progressive force in our common life." (H.O. Oruka & D.A. Masolo 1983:106)

On the same page Okot p'Bitek further argues:

There is a false and misleading assumption that on the one end, there is some notion called philosophy and on the other, some things and actions named 'culture'. Culture is philosophy as lived and celebrated in a society. Human beings do not behave like dry leaves, smoke or clouds which are blown here and there by winds. Men live in organizations called institutions; the family and clan, a chiefdom or kingdom or age set system. He has a religion, an army, legal and other institutions. And all these institutions are formed by or built around the central issue of a people, what they believe, what life is all about, their social philosophy, their world-view."

By way of concluding this thesis I would like to reiterate the fact that Oromo knowledge is inseparable from Oromo identity. This knowledge and identity are in turn inseparably not only linked with the land they occupy but also with the universe they perceive. This is what the colonizing structure threatens to destroy. It is the defence of the Oromo people, their land, their values and the universe they perceive at large that created the Oromo Liberation Front (O.L.F). It is to free the Oromo nation from any psychological, emotional and legal subjugation of the colonizing structure. The Oromo people have rejected colonial domination after living through it. Thousands have already paid the price with their life. Millions are in line waiting for their turn. "Every sweat and every drop of blood will be put into it", to put it in the words of one of the O.L.F fighters. Thus it should be interesting to wait and see whether Abyssinian colonialism alone could continue in a world where colonial rule has long been out of date.

APPENDIX

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review covers the years 1844 to 1989 and is presented in chronological order.

1. K. Tutschek (1844) in his book *Lexicon of the Galla language* gives the following definitions for the word *ayyaana* and its derivatives:

- a) *Ayana*; soul, guardian angel.
- b) *Ayanditcha*; kind of priest, interpreter of dreams.
- c) *Ayanfada* (verb); sanctify, celebrate.
- d) *Ayana* (verb); to be solemn, religious, holy.

2. D'Abbadie (1879) in a lecture delivered in Brussels entitled *The Oromo, a great African Nation* presented *ayyaana* as follows:

"Those Africans believe in angels and above all in ayana, a word one is tempted to translate "guardian spirit". There are 44 ayana because this number is nearly sacred throughout Ethiopia, such as 12 was for us in olden times. Oromo bring sacrifices to the guardian spirits of mountains and trees and pour also libations on the biggest of their hearth-stones".

3. P. Viterbo (1892) in his book *Vocabulario della lingua Oromonica* lists the following meanings of *ayyaana*:

- a) genius
- b) spirit
- c) tutelary deity
- d) spirit of the forest

- e) good fortune
- f) nightmare
- g) guardian of treasures.

4. M. de Salviac (1910:130-31), a missionary who lived with the Oromo for many years writes the following in his book *An ancient people in the country of Menelik - The Galla a great African nation*:

"Beneath and subordinated to Waaga, Oromo religion puts the good spirits whom they call by two names. As far as they are living with God they call them *aulia* to express the role of benefice and protection with regard to men. They use the word *ayana* corresponding to guardian angels... The specific name for evil spirits is *djinni*. The Galla also know the *namesaitan* and those of Harar also use the term *ibilissa* taken from the Koran.

5. E. C. Foot (1913) in his *Galla-English, English-Galla Dictionary* gives the meanings:

- "fortune"
- "luck"
- "feast"
- "festival".

6. E. Cerulli (1922:57) in his article entitled 'Folk literature of the Galla' gives the following meanings:

- a) genius (guardian spirit) of a person
- b) beneficent genius.

In his book *Ethiopia Occidentale I* (1930:83), he writes:

"The Galla believe that some *nenii* have a relationship with certain days of the week in the sense that genius X is in the habit of manifesting itself on that day only".

In the second volume of his book (1933:59) we read as follows:

"Much important to the Shoa Galla is the cult of *ayana*, minor genii of paganism. Up to now the Shoa tribes have their *ayantu*, experts who know these special kind of spirits. The *ayana* move from animals to men and each of them has the characteristics of the animal which they pass onto the person, chosen by them from his birth onwords. Therefore, when a child is born, they call the *ayantu* who looks to see whether the new-born has the *ayana* of a lion, in which case he will be a brave warrior distinguishing himself in battle, or that of a hyena, which will be fatal to him, in accordance with the evil qualities of that beast, and so forth".

7. F. Azais and R. Chambard (1931:108), in their book *Five years of archaeological research in Ethiopia* (1931:108), wrote the following:

"This idea, that of angels, occupies a special place in Galla theology. In addition to the notion of one God, the Oromo preserved that of good and evil spirits, who only play a subordinate part. The first act as instruments of God, the benefactors and protectors of men. The Galla call them *ayana* "good spirits". The second are the ginni or evil spirits, who act as demons and play the part of tempters and seducers... Galla tradition does not exaggerate the part played by these good and evil spirits".

8. G. da Thiene (1939) in his *Dizionario della Lingua Galla* lists the following meanings:

aiana:

- a. good supernatural being
- b. guardian spirit (in opposition to evil spirit)
- c. feast

- d. any of the week-days
- e. prosperity
- f. good luck
- g. favour
- h. mysterious power inherent in the beings and elements of creation.

ayanesu: to bring good fortune; to make happy

ayanty: happy, fortunate, favoured, blessed, name of a woman.

9. M. M. Moreno (1939:152) in his *Grammatica teorrtco dpratica della lingua Galla* gives only the meaning of "feast".

10. E. Haberland (1963:584) in his book *Galla Sud-Athiopiens* writes as follows:

"The word *ayana* was perhaps borrowed from Arabic, deduced from the root *an*, "time" or a mutilation of *ayyam* "days". Or does it represent a Cushitic root for "genius" or "spirit", which only later on was transferred to the calendar ? Nowadays the word as it is used both in western and eastern Cushitic has so many meanings that it is hard to trace the original one: day, omen feast, weekday, spirit, guardian spirit, good luck, good portent, fortuna, etc. While with the southern Galla the day and its omen is still to the fore (until recently spirits were unknown to these tribes) with the western ones the meaning of *ayana* as a spirit which has disengaged itself from the day and exists independently as a guardian spirit or as a spirit of the dead, is paramount. By and large the word *ayana* is used for good spirits. Christian saints too, such as George and Michael, taken over from the still half pagan Shoa Galla and from adjacent areas are counted among the *ayana* and called by this name. With the Wolamo *ayana* is the spirit, given to each individual person, who also can descend on him and possess him. Southern Galla do not know this belief as yet, and as it can be deduced from the list of day names, are unacquainted with the idea of certain spirits who determine the life of those who are born on these days".

Earlier (1963:572-3) Haberland writes as follows:

"It seems that originally there was no place for minor divinities in the Galla's religious world-view, for demons and spirits, or for sorcerers and shamans. If ever they existed, they were not of much importance. While speaking of the possession spirit of the Arussi... I have given ample evidence that all powers which at present have gained such an impact on the northern Galla and partly also already on the Arussi and Alabdu, are young intruders who, within the frame of an all-round cultural decay are growing in numbers at the expense of ancient religion and social order. The tribes whose social life is still unbroken abhor these phenomena and try to oppose them as much as possible".

On the subject of the Mati (1963:506) he writes:

"With the Mati where the spirits are not that powerful as yet, my main informant could remember that the first possession spirits... invaded his country while he was still young, around 1900. In all these parts people also mostly call them by the Amharic word *wokabe*, while on the other hand, the word *ayana* is used for the month days but also for the spiritual origin of creation, God's spirit".

On page 511, still speaking of the Arussi, he continues

"...the servant of a spirit is called *abba-ayana* (father of the spirit), also *bala-wekabe* (Amharic: 'owner of the spirit' or Oromo ' *abba waka* 'father of God'.

11. Knutsson in his book *Authority and Change: A study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia* (1967:53-54) writes:

"For the Macha, Divinity is one. It includes the suprahuman quality quality in its entirety and in all its manifestations (note, certain reservations must be made for the "spirits", *setanas* which possess men and engender sickness). Nevertheless, much of the contact between man and the suprahuman takes place through the cult of special divine "agents". The general name of this is *ayana*. Like the word *waka*, *ayana* belongs to a category of concepts whose "common or basic meaning is specialized in various contexts. Depending on the context one can distinguish five different meanings:

a) *Ayana* has in part the meaning of divine being. As with *waka*, there is little attempt to keep to a precise picture of its appearance or exact place of abode, even though each *ayana* has its own "physical" symbols and is thought to belong to a certain general sphere within reality. Some *ayana* can possess men or as the expression is descend upon men.

b) *Ayana* also means a man's quality, character, or personality, and is at the same time regarded as the being that creates that personality. It is both the character and its cause. As the latter the *ayana* is conceived of as a kind of guardian divinity, which is believed to have its place on a man's right shoulder.

c) The third meaning is closely connected with the second. It refers to a kind of guardian divinity of the family called *ayana abba* the father's *ayana* or *Nabi*. There is also an *ayana hada* (the mother's *ayana*) identical with the female divinity *Atete*. For each level of the Macha social structure, there is an *ayana abba*. Like the individual and the family the lineage and the clan have theirs. The latter is the *ayana abba* of the senior clan *Kallu*. All *ayana abba* are ultimately identical with *Nabi* who is *waka* and who is, therefore, the *ayana abba* of all the *Galla*.

d) The fourth meaning is also closely associated with the second. *Ayana* which is the kernel of the personality and thereby the cause of the individual's character, can also be translated by "luck" or

"good fortune". The expression *ayana qaba* "he has *ayana*" is therefore the same as saying that a man is successful.

e) *Ayana* also means "day", in particular, festival day. Each day in the lunar month calendar is thought to be under the influence of an *ayana*, which makes the day favourable or unfavourable for various undertakings. Here too the meaning character and cause of character are combined in the word.

Knutsson continues:

"It can easily be seen that the element common to all these varying uses of the word is the meaning of suprahuman being or power. The division into human and suprahuman quality creates a basic boundary line in the Macha reality. But there are also other boundaries which contribute to form, and also to a certain extent, to differentiate the conceptions of the suprahuman. In comparison with the great boundary, the two most important of these lines have an almost vertical character in the sense that they cleave both the world of man and of Divinity, producing the same type of differentiation on each side. One of these boundaries is of a moral nature. On the human side, it runs between the experience of evil or (harmful) actions on the one side and good or (harmless) actions on the other. On the suprahuman side it leads to the conceptions of good and evil *ayana*.. The evil *ayanas* belong to the suprahuman world, they are more than human but at the same time they are inhuman. They are like *waka* in power but unlike him because of their amoral quality. Nor are they ever described as *waka*. They are thought of as both contrary and subordinate to *waka*, but he or an *ayana* can use them to punish *cubbu* (sin). These evil *ayana* which are usually called *setan* cannot be directly translated in terms of, for example, the Christian conceptions of the Devil. They are evil in the sense that they are harmful to men. They frighten and hurt, but they can be persuaded and calmed with appropriate respect. They can bring about a failure of the crops, send sickness and cause death, but they are not really needed as an explanation of the existence of evil in itself. To Macha the problem of evil can be satisfactorily explained as the result of man's crime and

Divinity's punishment. It is when the *duga-cubbu* ("good and evil") theory breaks down as an explanation, when no breach of the rules is found which could be atoned for, that the Macha refer to the *setanas*. They represent the seemingly unmotivated, chaotic, or anarchic type of evil.

Further on, Knutsson (1967:71) writes the following:

"In order to keep both his contact with Divinity and to demonstrate that it exists, every *kallu* has a system of rites recurring at short fixed intervals of usually two weeks. The climax in these ceremonies and their ritual purpose is the possession of the *kallu* by the *ayana*. Everyone is aware that this form of direct contact through possession is a new element in the Macha's system of division-transcending action; but it is not, therefore, opposed in principle to the traditional conception of reality. Neither the ecstasy itself nor the most important of the *kallu*'s *ayana* s are considered to be imported from outside.

In terms of the number of *ayyaana*, Knutsson (1967:80-81) says the following:

"The total number of *ayana* is difficult not to say impossible to give. For the Macha this is not a very important question. For them Divinity is one but can at the same time manifest or expresses itself in an infinite number of ways and, at least theoretically, through an infinite number of *ayana*.s. All attempts on my part to learn how the relationship of the *ayana* to waka and to other *ayanas* was conveyed usually elicited the answer that they are all waka... The *ayana* to whom a person turns in prayer and rite is Divinity for that person at that time".

12. In his book on Ecstacy Religion: An anthropological study of Shamanism *Spirit possession i*(1971), I. M. Lewis also discusses *ayyaana* and has written the following:

"Studies of shamanism and spirit possession have in the past been bedevilled by understandable, but none the less excessive concentration on all the dramatic and expressive aspects of possession to the exclusion of sustained enquiry into its significance in terms of social function. They have also... all too often neglected the time dimension tending to treat particular religious phenomena as permanent and unchanging rather than viewing them in a context of historical change".

Then the author sets out to account for the historical factors and the sociological incidence of possession and its relation to wider religious phenomena. He first makes a distinction between what he calls main morality and peripheral cults. Thus he writes:

"The first refers to the maintenance of general morality in a society, and the second to those cults which are not directly involved in this process. Cults venerating ancestors, or other mystical powers, who are believed to reward the just with prosperity and success and visit sickness and affliction on the unjust and sinful fall squarely within the first category. Cults addressed to disaffiliated spirits, or other powers, which are credited with bringing disease and affliction capriciously and without reference to the victim's moral condition, belong to the second. Whereas possession does not figure at all prominently, if at all, in the main morality cult, only women or (submerged classes of men) and psychologically disturbed individuals (of either sex) are subject to it. Today the Macha have a thriving possession cult centering on God, *waka*, and his various refractions, or subsidiary spirits known as *ayana*. God is the guardian of morality and punishes wrongs and misdemeanours, which are considered sins, but allowing sicknesses and misfortune to afflict those who have committed these offenses. Sacrifice and prayer for forgiveness and blessing are made to God through shamans (*kallu*) who hold specific priestly offices at all levels social grouping from that of the extended patrilineal family to the clan. The spirits summoned at each level of grouping are considered refractions of *waka*, who appears as a unity at the level of the Macha as a whole, and at that of the several million strong Galla nation of which the Macha are a part... There is abundant evidence that the main morality cult of the Macha Galla in its present shamanistic form is a cultural innovation.

13. Alice L. Morton (1973:74-76), in an article dealing with the Ada Oromo in the Bishoftu area entitled 'Mystical advocates: explanation and spirit sanctioned adjudication in the Shoa Galla *ayana* cult', writes, after having paid a tribute to Knutsson whilst at the same time emphasizing some differences of opinion with him:

"For believers, the *ayana* are a numberless category of invisible, intangible spirit beings, who inhabit the atmosphere. They live in a spirit society which resembles that of the earthly Galla. They are a creation of Waka, or Divinity. The *ayana* were given by Waka to the Galla as a special sign of his favor and to help them observe Galla law and custom, which are also his gifts. *Ayana* spirits are believed to be ranked hierarchically. Analytically this ranking may be seen in terms of their relative closeness to Divinity and, thus, their relative power "Generally speaking, earthly Galla come into contact with *ayana* spirits - which are highly moral divinities, guardians of the moral order - through possessed ritual officiants called Kallu. According to the ideology of possession by *ayana*, any *ayana* refraction can possess any human being at will. However in any given cult group, it is usually the case that only the Kallu or leader is regularly possessed, and he is said to inherit this special relationship from his ancestors. Intrusive possession of other participants or adepts is, however, theoretically possible and sometimes occurs. Such instances of unregularized possession generally are diagnosed retrospectively, either as attacks by evil spirits (*shetana*) or as warnings of punitive affliction by *ayana* which follows the breaking of law and custom by the adept in question.

"Although *ayana* possess individuals and not groups of people, their relationship to men is in fact most significantly group or community oriented. At the highest level, they are held to have a special relationship with the whole Galla people. At the local level, individually named *ayana* around whom a cult group is organized are thought of as being specially concerned with the lives and fortunes of members of that group or more properly of the broader community from which its adepts are drawn.

This community may be seen as based on common territoriality rather than on criteria of descent or filiation (This appears to be one

major way in which this *Ada-ayana* cult differs from the Macha cult described and analyzed by Knutsson). On most occasions, this community is formed by the group of people who live on the land of a given Kallu or near his homesteads, and is coterminous with his mystical sphere of influence. For the members of his ritual following, as well as for the members of his local community who need not participate fully in cult activities, the Kallu acts as a protector and representative of all vis-a-vis the *ayana* which possess him. He is said to transmit the requests of his people to the *ayana* and to make manifest to the people the will and desires of these spirits. In so far as he is able to do this successfully, he ensures the continued fertility, prosperity, health and peaceful coexistence of his people. All of these conditions are thought to depend on the will of the *ayana* acting as they do as agents of Waka and as mediators in the affairs of men. Without the active participation of these spirits, the Ada Galla believe that life would not go smoothly. This attitude seems to derive in part from the idea that Waka is remote, and in part from a somewhat vaguely defined view that men, if left to their own devices, will not behave properly. Shoa Galla of this area feel that they need the *ayana* to set them in the right path, to keep them from breaking the law (*sera*), and generally to remind them of their duties to each other and to Divinity.

The *ayana* also are seen as operating agents for men vis-a-vis Waka: their mediation is multidirectional. The Galla actively solicit the aid of the *ayana* in making representation to their just God, to ensure that Waka is cognizant of all the details of their individual situations.

14. J. Hinnant (1973) in an article, entitled 'Spirit possession, ritual and social change: current research in Southern Ethiopia' (1973) wrote the following as the result of his research among the Guji:

"Among the Guji, if a person has a very serious problem, such as chronic illness, crop failure, or continual involvement in disputes, there are a number of possible natural and supernatural explanations. Often the various explanations and the redressive mechanisms which they indicate are tried one after another, frequently concluding with a

decision that the person has a spirit. Once convinced of this he will go to a male Kallecha or female Kallele possession group leader and tell of his problems and of any dreams he may have had. He is advised to attend the next meeting, during which he is exposed to the songs which call the different beneficial spirits (*ayana*) of the group. That night the initiate may lose consciousness and upon awakening be informed that he has been possessed, first shaking violently and rotating his head, then getting up and running into the midst of the singing *jama* (non-possessed members)".

The nature of the possessing agent determines the next set of problems. A *shatana*, for instance, can never be controlled. Possession will be violent, the problems caused by the *shatana* will not disappear, and the person will eventually go mad. *Shatana* must be exorcised if the possessed has a gene (i.e. *jinni*) which is not like *shatana* but rather like a wild animal... its existence can probably be tolerated. Its owner will be violently possessed, but generally only at the ceremonies of the spirit group.

Usually however, the person is possessed by *ayana*. At first the *ayana* does not speak. It is given coffee and is allowed at each ceremony to take over its host and dance throughout the night. This satisfies it and it appears only at ceremonies. Should the person abandon the spirit group his *ayana* will appear spontaneously and cause the person to do serious damage to himself or others. By joining the group the person in effect makes a compromise with the *ayana*. By allowing the *ayana* its period of freedom during ceremonies, by feeding it and acceding to all the laws and demands of the spirit group, the person ensures that the *ayana* will not come upon him between ceremonies and will protect him in the face of danger. Some *ayana* never learn to speak. Others pass through a developmental sequence paralleling that of a person. When an *ayana* first begins to speak it is considered to be like a mischievous child. The *jama* joke with it and insult it. It reacts with raucous laughter. As time passes it makes

its needs and its adult character known. It demands an hamama (red paisly scarf) and various other items of adornment. It identifies its homeland, speaking occasionally in the distinctive language of that society or insisting that some obvious custom of that people be followed in its presence. Each *ayana* has a rich repertoire of mannerisms. In short the *ayana*'s personality is a caricature of a person.

As a *ayana* is fed (attends ceremonies and has ceremonies held for it), it grows. As it grows, so does the position of the host within the group. When the *ayana* is an adult, it is treated with respect. Its needs are ministered and its special talents are exploited.

15. A. Legesse (1973), in his book *Gada: Three approaches to the study of African societies* mentions the word *ayyaana* only once and even that in a footnote:

"One of the women was so completely out of control that the ceremony had to be postponed by about thirty minutes. She was the only woman who was described as having been possessed by the *ayana*. Men and women were holding her firmly to prevent her from hurting herself and others. After a long struggle, the possessing spirit was brought under control, and she returned to her previous position in the ritual alignment".

16. J. Lienhardt (1973:272) in his book *Guide to learning the Oromo language* writes the following conversation on the subject of *ayyaana*:

Q - How could the Kallu know it ?

A - God tells it to him.

Q - What ? Is it not satan who tells it to him ?

A - No, it is the spirit *ayana*, not satan.

He also gives the meanings of festival of the year (1973:276), and of spirit and grace (1973:344).

17. Fr. P. Tablino who has lived amongst the Gabra Oromo for about 20 years gives the following meanings in his book *I Gabbra del Kenya* (1980:165)

1. weekdays
2. good fortune, happy occurrence
3. "A religious sect whose members pay honour to an evil spirit called *ayana*. The adepts placate such a spirit by driving him out of the person he has possessed, in whom he causes serious and prolonged illness. They volunteer on payment to address him so that he may leave the sick person... These cults seem to have made their appearance among the Gabra some 30 years ago, coming from Ethiopia.

In a recent (1989) revision of some sections of his book, he now however concedes that *ayyaana* is much more than a spirit possession cult and has a more ancient substratum of meaning connected with the concept of time.

18. P.T.W. Baxter (1982), who for a long time has been one of the most committed writers on Oromo culture, uses the word *ayana* in his article 'Butter for barley and barley for cash: petty transactions and small transformations in an Arsi market' in the sense of particularization of Waka's creative power in any creature.

19. Gene B. Gragg (1982) in his *Oromo Dictionary* gave the following meanings:

ayyaana: celebration, luck, favor, kind of spirit
ayyaanessa: observe a feast, celebrate
ayyaantuu: graceful, merciful, lucky
ayyaama qabeessa (adj) graceful, merciful, lucky

ayyaanad'abeesa (adj) unfortunate, ungraceful

20. The anthropologist Rev. L. Bartels (1984) is perhaps the only ethnographer who not only has spent the longest time among the Oromo, but who has also devoted the whole of his later life to understanding Oromo religious concepts. Unlike most anthropologists, Bartels does not try to interpret the meaning of *ayyaana*. Instead he makes the Oromo themselves present their views of what they think *ayyaana* represents:

"Every thing has a twofold nature: one part we see with our own eyes, the other part we do not see with our eyes but with our heart. This invisible part of things is the most real one. We call it *ayyaana*. You will never understand us unless you realize that we see everything in this way".

Beginning with this introductory statement of an informant, he gives the following preliminary statement regarding what *ayyaana* is for the people:

" creatures people, animals, plants, have their own *ayyaana*.. If I slaughter an ox and kicks me, I say: his *ayyaana* has hurt me. Every one is afraid of the *ayyana* of a buffalo. After I have killed my buffalo the first thing I did was put my gun against his head. The iron of the gun is strong. I made it feel that I was stronger than he. Its *ayana* was still in it, you know. It is only after this that we cut his throat. Mountains too have their *ayyaana*. There are still people who pray to the *ayana* of Dimbo mountain. Every river has its own *ayaana* to which people make offerings of cocks... The earth herself her won *ayana* every stretch of land has its own *ayana* as well. Every person has his/her own *ayyaana*. Every lineage, every clan, and also our people as whole have their own *ayyaana*, and so had in former times our five Gadaa groups and the people belonging to the same Gadaa class. These *ayyaana* rules our lives. They make us the way we are".

Bartels also discerns a number of other meanings:

Ayyaana as something of Waaqa

This is seen through prayers where Waaqa and *ayyaana* are invoked in one breath:

"O Waaqa, O *ayana* of my father, give me peace"

"O Waaqa, O *ayana* of Friday, have mercy on us" (a prayer said at a sacrifice on Friday

"O Waaqa, O my own lineage's *ayana* restore my child to health for me"

and in rituals"

"At a sacrifice for Waaqa people say when a gust of wind passes over them, "Waaqa has come down to smell our sacrifice". At a sacrifice for an *ayyaana* they will say the same.

For both a sacrifice for Waaqa and a sacrifice for *ayana*, people must abstain from sexual intercourse the previous night.

For both Waaqa and *ayana* the sacrificial animal must be of a single colour, a symbol of purity and perfection".

"Nowadays (since we have become Christians) some people say that, in former times, we adored a tree when we prayed and poured our libations at its foot. But this is not true: we prayed to its *ayana*; we prayed to Waaqa"

b) *Ayana* are Waaqa but Waaqa is not *ayana*

To illustrate this point, Bartels gives the following from an interview he conducted with an Oromo ritual expert.

Q - "Can we say o *ayana* of my father you created me ?

No we can not say that. We say O Waaqa you created me. Waaqa alone creates.

Q - So Waaqa and *ayana* are not the same ?

A - *Ayana* is Waaqa but Waaqa is not *ayyaana*.

In another interview with a young man, L. Bartels writes the following:

"The *ayana* come downs on people Waaqa has created. The *ayana* come down on people, but Waaqa rules over the *ayana*. Therefore, we say: O Waaqa, make my father's *ayana* have pity on me". The young man continues... "When we bring a sacrifice to Waaqa we through meat in the fire, that the smell of it may go up to Waaqa, but we do not do this for *ayana*. Waaqa and *ayana* are not the same.

The crucial difference between Waaqa and *ayana* says L. Bartels, is that Waaqa is invoked by everyone since he is concerned with all, while an *ayana* linked as it is to a particular person or group, is only invoked and feared by those who are linked to it either by descent, social rules or free choice.

c. A child and his *ayana*

"... Every child is given his own *ayyaana* by Waaqa. This *ayana* is already with him before he is born. It is his own personal *ayana* not that of his father or his mother. People say that this *ayana* dwells under the spot on his head where the skin palpitates. They never will touch that spot; it is the seat of his *ayana* who protects him. For as long as the child is unable to pronounce Waaqa's name, the *ayana* often shows himself to him. When a child is babbling in his sleep, people say: he is talking to his *ayana* and when he laughs in his sleep, they say his *ayana* is playing with him".

"As soon as the child is born, his *ayana* shows him all things of the future. It also shows him the spot where he will be buried. The child then smells the earth of his grave. That is why he starts crying as soon as he is born. But afterwards he does not remember anything of what the *ayana* has shown him".

"In former times when a man had begotten a son, he would go to a prophet, *rajii*, who sees things hidden from other people or to a man who understood stars, *ayantu*. Such a man would tell him: your son has an *ayana* of a killer: give him a shield, or he would say your son has an *ayana* of a farmer; he will always have good harvest.

People still say I have an *ayana* of a farmer, of a teacher, of a killer. A man who has a killer's *ayana* will never grow rich by farming. (He will neglect his fields). A person's *ayana* remains with him for all his life".

Then Bartels provides the following information:

"To the Macha every month day has its own *ayana* who influences all things which happen or are done on that day, and also the fate or character of any child born on that day. The *ayantu* by looking at the moon and the stars, knows what day it is. What makes a day what it is, is its *ayana*. *Ayana* influence one another".

d) *Ayana* of the father and of the mother

"We pray to the *ayana* of our father and mother. We often say 'O *ayana* of my father, or O *ayana* of my mother' (these are common exclamations). But these *ayana* can also punish us, if we are doing wrong. If a mother is spoiling one of her children while neglecting the

others, her *ayana* may withdraw from the child and then some sickness will befall him. When my brother has killed somebody and I eat with him my father's *ayana* grows angry with me".

When I say 'O *ayana* of my father' I do not think so much of my father's own *ayana* but of all the *ayana* of my ancestors who are in him and also in me".

Bartels concludes with sayings relating to *ayana* and its interrelationship with other closely related concepts, too complex to broach in the context of this survey.

21. H. S. Lewis in an article entitled: 'Spirit mediums, social control and the moral order among the Oromo of Western Ethiopia' (1989) gives the following account:

"Spirit possession in Ethiopia is a familiar topic, but is usually associated with the well known *zar* possession. *Zar* are spirits that possessing women, primarily, leading their human hosts to act in a peculiar and possibly anti-social way".

This H.S. Lewis compares with *ayana*, which, according to him, is also a spirit possession cult. Thus he writes:

"... In contrast to those spirits that require exorcism because of the difficulties they cause, there are other spirits that, if attended to and cultivated, present opportunities for the improvement of human life. This is the case with the spirit that possesses the K'allu of the western Oromo".

Lewis sees *ayana* to be at the core of the *k'allu*'s status and activities and also recognizes the association of *ayana* with the high God, Wak'a and says the *ayana* are

capable of possessing men and women. He also asserts that the *ayana* are concerned with good and evil, truth and justice, peace and harmony, human behaviour and the moral order. He comments:

"The *ayana* become involved in the everyday affairs of humans as guardians of right conduct. They have the power to reward and punish, to help and harm humans in very direct and immediate ways. They can kill or cure a person; slay an ox or increase a herd; make one crazy or destroy one's enemy; wipe out a family or let the barren woman bare children. As guardian of justice, and morality they can aid the faithful and the wronged and punish the evil doer".

The rest of Lewis' paper is then devoted to the explanation of how it all works by going into the role of the K'allu in the wider society. These views are basically akin to those of I. M. Lewis and of J. Hinnant.

22. Finally we come to Gunther Schlee's work *Identities on the move: clanship and pastoralism in northern Kenya* (1989). On the subject of *ayana* as part of the computation of time, Schlee writes (1989:55):

"... Many of the rules which form the complicated codex about how to treat camels relate to what to do with a camel on a particular day of the week. The names of the days of the week in the languages of all the peoples discussed here are ultimately of Arabic derivation. There are, however, remnants of an older set of names, all relating to domestic animals. Thus for the Gabbra, Sunday is the *ayana gaala*, the day of the camel. Neither Rendile nor Gabbra nor Sakuye may move their settlements on Sundays or take camels on a journey which would oblige them to spend the Sunday night outside the settlement, except in an emergency and with special ritual precautions. Camels should not be bled on Sundays, nor can the promised gift of a camel be collected, and even camel milk be taken out of the settlement on this day. The Garre of Mandera District who are Somali and Muslims, share this fear about Sunday, although, as Muslims one would expect them to be more concerned about Friday.

Schlee (1989:90) disputes Haberland's claim of Oriental influence on the Oromo calendar, but does not provide any new information on the subject. In fact, he reverts to the stereotype of the possession cult as presented by so many other ethnographers (1989 107):

"... A link seems to exist between the ghost camels under the ground, the fabulous beings who leave footprints in the surface of a rock and the cult of *ayyaana*, a concept derived from the Boran 27 day week, in which each day is associated with an animal species. *Ayyaana* thus also means animal spirit or spirit animal and the states of possession they cause".

Schlee is also misled by the apparent differences between the Gabra and Booran time computation systems and uses this to prove his own mistaken hypotheses about their origins (1989:244):

"...the Boran, who do not form part of this camel culture, also have a different system of time reckoning and divination involving a cycle of 27 day *ayyanaa* instead of seven. The Boran speaking camel herders, Gabbra and Sakuye, however have the seven day week and the seven year cycle with the corresponding terminology".

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