

## Arsi Oromo Society Viewed Through Its Wedding Music

Leila Qashu<sup>1</sup>

Arsi Oromo society can be divided into three main groups of actors that each has different social responsibilities and musical repertoires: men, women and youths. Wedding rituals are a reflection of social structure, but they are also the means by which the different groups construct their identities and values. This paper analyzes the different groups and their music through song lyrics and examples from the wedding rituals.

In the regions of the Arsi Oromo<sup>2</sup>, the wedding period takes place during a quieter time, after the fall harvest and before preparing the land for the crop planting, generally between the months of November and February. On the night preceding a wedding, from a distance one can often see the rented tent that has been set up for the occasion, and if it is a clear night, one can hear the voices of youths gathered outside, practicing their songs, which are accompanied by the *dibbe* (single or double membrane, circular, metal framed drum). Members of a same clan are invited directly by the family of the groom or bride when they pass by their house or see them at the market. In this patriarchal and clan-based society, as the weddings are exogamous, and the ceremony takes place in two locations – at the groom's and the bride's houses – these preparations are done simultaneously in the different areas, among the members of the same clan. Wedding rituals provide an essential insight to understanding Arsi culture, because there are many elements in a wedding that shape Arsi ideas, practices and traditions, such as the rite of passage of the bride and groom to adulthood, the history of the clan and its ancestors, and the kinship links between two clans.

As Martin Stokes (1994: 4) affirmed, we must remember that music and dance don't just reflect society; "...they provide the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed." When observing and participating in Arsi Oromo wedding rituals, I noticed that men, women and youths occupied different spaces and sang different musical repertoires.<sup>3</sup> In society, these three groups of actors are also organized in the same manner, but on a daily basis the Arsi remain with their nuclear family, and they are not necessarily in direct contact with neighbors or other members of the clan. Wedding rituals and the different repertoires of music are a means by which different members of society can create and reinforce group identities, providing a unique

<sup>1</sup> Masters and Pre-doctoral work completed at University Paris VIII, Saint Denis, France. Member of the UNESCO/Norway Funds-In-Trust Program, "Ethiopia – Traditional Music, Dance and Instruments."

<sup>2</sup> The Arsi Oromo live in East Shewa, Arsi, and Bale administrative zones. These begin about 150 kilometers south of Addis Ababa, in the lake region of the Rift Valley, extending to the town of Assela in the southeast and down to the Bale Mountains in the south.

<sup>3</sup> The examples and descriptions in this paper are based on research and recordings among the Arsi Oromo during stays of several months each, in 2002 – 2003, 2005 and 2006. I lived with Arsi families in the countryside and attended many wedding ceremonies and rehearsals among the Arsi in the areas of Langanu and Abijata lakes in the Rift Valley, in the Luuga region and the area around the town of Qarsa in the highlands, east of Langanu Lake. I had the opportunity to spend time with all the different actors in the ceremony so as to better understand each group's position and contributions.

opportunity for each of these groups to have a specific role in the ritual. This paper will reveal the wedding through a brief description of each of the group's perspectives, demonstrating how they create and emphasize this feeling of group identity that is also a necessary component to the overall societal structure.

### **“Taking” the bride: the *Hamoomota***

*Hamoomota* refers to a repertoire of songs, but it also designates the group of men from a same clan who accompany the husband (*ilma*), his father (*abbaa ilmaa*) and his best man (*jalaa*) to get the bride of another clan from her home.<sup>4</sup> The union is not only a contract between the groom and the father of the bride, but also an agreement between two clans, providing them with allies to help them if they are ever needed. Often marriages are performed with the same clans and lineages over several generations so as to strengthen the common bonds. The *hamoomota* represents the clan, and it must meet the bride's family, participate in ceremonies that seal the marriage and bring the bride back to the groom's house before sunset. For the Arsi, the larger the *hamoomota*, the stronger the clan appears to the bride's family and clan. The *hamoomota* is also an occasion to reinforce clan cohesion and values, and the men are proud to participate.

Although the men are well received by the bride's family, their actions are warrior-like and strongly evoke the ritualized kidnapping of a girl from another clan. This idea is clear in their actions and songs, as well as in their speech, when they say they go « to take the bride » (*intallah fudha*). When he wrote about nuptial songs among the Matcha Oromo, Cerulli (1922) also described the groom feigning abduction of the bride on the day of the wedding, which shows that this symbolic kidnapping has long been a part of these ceremonies.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, the *hamoomota* travels on horseback, but as many men no longer have horses, especially in the lowlands, they often rent a bus. I have participated in two *hamoomotas*, one by bus in the lowlands and the other by horse in the highlands. The *hamoomota* expedition is generally a physical challenge because of the speed on horseback, the long trip in the heat and the dust and the wear on the voice from singing all day. Men return exhausted, but at the end of the day they are applauded for having shown their strength by “taking” the bride at a gallop and returning the same day.<sup>6</sup>

As the men are traveling on horseback, they sing *hamoomota* or *faaruu farda* (horse praising songs), they play games and some discuss amongst themselves. Generally, with the exception of digression into games, the men try to remain in one solid group so they can sing together and remain a unified representation of the clan when going through towns. The games, however, are another demonstration of their strength and their warrior qualities, consisting mainly of chasing races. All of a sudden, one man may put

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description of the *Hamoomota*, refer to Qashu 2004, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> In the past it was more common for men from one clan to steal a woman and cattle from another clan. Now the government is trying to eliminate these kidnappings, but in certain regions they still occur. In Dakka Hora Qadho, the administrative district west of Langan Lake, I didn't hear of abductions, but in the highlands east of the lake, around the town of Qarsa, they are still occurring, so when young women walk long distances, they must be accompanied by their brothers. This shows that the ritualized abduction also represents a history of war-like captures.

<sup>6</sup> Some *hamoomotas* take pride in going to get the bride as fast as they can. When I took part in the Adaree *hamoomota*, the 20 kilometres were done at a fast gallop. This can be dangerous, as seen on that day when an experienced rider fell from his horse and had to be taken to the hospital in critical condition. Faced with this type of possible danger, returning in one piece is all the more heroic.

his horse in a run in front of the group or off to one side, and another chases him until one of the two tires. Sometimes, one man chases another, trying to hit him with his walking stick, using it like a club or like a lance. Once a man has won the race or has succeeded in hitting or reaching his competitor, the two men return to the group. These games demonstrate strength, but they are also a real competition which results in one man defeating another. All the other men watch these games of individual strength that go on outside the space of the group. Although the goal of the *hamoomota* is to stay in a group and represent the clan, these games show that, as with proud warriors going to fight, there is often individual competitiveness among members of the group.

During the journey, when a song leader (*afolee*) desires, he can launch a song and the other men will join in response. Most of the *hamoomota* songs are sung as call and response, with one soloist who leads and a choir (*hamoomotuu*) that responds, but sometimes they can be sung in antiphony, with two choirs that alternate singing their lines. The choir, *hamoomotuu*, can also be called *jalakabdota*, which signifies « those who receive ». This terminology is important because it shows that in the case of call and response, the leader gives the song to the others who receive it. Indeed, the leaders of the songs usually come from a family that knows and practices music, because they must have good knowledge of the verses of the poems in order to be able to lead the group. Many of the song leaders that I met are also very vocal in daily life, for example in community meetings.

Although the *hamoomota* is meant to represent the unity of the clan, as with the games, there are some individuals who show their competitive spirit in the songs. Sometimes two leaders start two different songs at the same time, creating an effect of polymusic (Rappoport 1999) in the middle space. At times, this is due to a separation between the two parts of the group, but it can also be a wilful assertion of independence and domination on the part of the leaders.

The following excerpts of *hamoomota* songs give an idea of their poetic form and content.<sup>7</sup> This first song, *Gosa tiyya goshoo tiyyaa odoo fooyoo galgaleessee*, is often sung while the men are traveling to and from the bride's house.

1. <i>Gosa tiyya goshoo tiyyaa odoo fooyoo galgaleessee</i>	My clan, my friends, night is coming when we take the cattle. <sup>8</sup>
2. <i>Loowwan jechoon geegayoo odoo fooyoo galgaleessee</i>	The cattle of <i>geegayo</i> is the best, night is coming when we take the cattle.
3. <i>Gosa tiyya goshoo tiyyaa odoo fooyoo galgaleessee</i>	My clan, my friends, night is coming when we take the cattle.
4. <i>Osoo kiyyaa durba dhabnee osoo fooyoo galgaleessee</i>	I could have a girl from my region (but I prefer to have your famous girl), night is coming when we take the cattle.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the limited space, I have chosen not to include the full songs as they were sung on my recordings. The song transcriptions and translations were done with local area students, and due to their education level and my Oromo level, we often had to discuss before finding equivalents of words. They are therefore to be treated as works in progress rather than a finished product.

<sup>8</sup> The *Hamoomota* must leave the bride's house with the dowry before sunset.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 6. <i>Woree qabdaff sitti gamnee osoo fooyoo galgalessee</i> | Because you (the parents) are famous, I am coming to you night is coming when we take the cattle                       |
| 7. <i>Farda gurran gara dirraa osoo fooyoo galgalessee</i>   | I would like this beautiful horse with the black back, night is coming when we take the cattle.                        |
| 9. <i>Leencha jechoon gala irraa osoo fooyoo galgalessee</i> | If you give me what I want, I will say that you are like a lion, <sup>9</sup> night is coming when we take the cattle. |

As can be seen from the previous example, in these songs, the men often refer to their clan, their ancestors and toponyms, because they are all references that recall their common identity and unite them as a group. They also praise their new allies: the bride, her family and their clan.

This second example is often sung when the *hamoomota* is arriving at the house of the bride. It was sung by the Gambo clan, which is why they refer to themselves in the fourth line.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Loonii naa fooyi geegoo eehee!</i>    | Give me the cattle <i>geegayo</i> !                          |
| 2. <i>Aayyoon saamsite baarree eehee</i>    | The mother-in-law is making the <i>baarree</i> <sup>10</sup> |
| 3. <i>Ee Abbayyiin ka jajjaboo</i>          | The clan Abbayyiin is that of Jajjaboo <sup>11</sup>         |
| 4. <i>Dhufe Gamboon ka Dhaqqaboo</i>        | The clan Gambo is that of Dhaqqaboo                          |
| 5. <i>Loonii naa fooyi geegoo eehee!</i>    | Give me the cattle <i>geegayo</i> !                          |
| 6. <i>Loonii fooyadhu maarree eehee</i>     | Let's take the big <i>geegayo</i> of this well known family  |
| 7. <i>Dhibba gamman dabde lamaan</i>        | Add two cows to the 100 <i>geegayo</i>                       |
| 8. <i>Dhibbifattuun dhabde lamaa</i>        | There are jealous people <sup>12</sup>                       |
| 9. <i>Loonii naa fooyi geegoo eehee!</i>    | Give me the <i>geegayo</i> cattle!                           |
| 10. <i>Gosa mootii Gambo hin seetuu?</i>    | The clan gambo is not famous enough for you ?                |
| 11. <i>Dhigaa keetuu faaruu hin feetuu?</i> | You do not want the song for your family ?                   |

<sup>9</sup> The lion is a symbol of pride and strength.

<sup>10</sup> *Baarree* is a recipient in which the women put the milk. She is making it for her daughter's departure.

<sup>11</sup> Jajjaboo is a famous man from the past.

<sup>12</sup> In the past, when they added things to a very large *geegayo*, other people were jealous.

These brief excerpts offer an insight into the poetic richness that can be found in Arsi songs. As with many other Oromo repertoires, these songs have a corpus of metered verses that are shared by everyone. The order of the first verse (*Gosa tiyya goshoo tiyyaa odoo fooyoo galgaleessee*) and the second are fixed; but the rest can come in any order. For the *hamoomota*, the first verse is also the refrain.

The lyrics in these songs contain many cultural references, and by singing them together, the men reinforce their group values. For example, when the clan arrives at the bride's house on the day of the wedding, they arrive as fast as they can, singing their *hamoomota* that have references to their clan. It is as if they are musically attacking the other clan. Often they continue to sing once they've arrived, turning in circles on horseback or standing in a group and singing. This arrival reminds us of Fredrick Barth's analysis that the identity of one ethnic group is made in relation to another (Barth 1969). When arriving and "attacking" the other clan with its songs, the *hamoomota* is also in a continual process of reaffirming and creating its own clanic identity.

There is a series of ceremonies at the bride's house which seal the marriage and also unite the two clans: a welcome speech by the father of the bride, an exchange between the two families of *daadhii* (mead), then an exchange of butter with barley and coffee grains, the *dhamne* speech, in which the bride's clan describes the dowry (*geegayo*), and *buna buufachuu* (pouring of the coffee). During this last event, large quantities of butter are poured onto the heads of the groom, his father and his witness. The butter with coffee and barley grains is a symbol of fertility, peace and prosperity. In this case, it serves as a benediction between the groom and the bride and the two clans. Butter is produced from milk, and thus symbolizes the fertility of the cow, or more generally, that of a woman in Oromo culture. As Lambert Bartels (1983: 287) remarked, the grains of coffee in the bowl symbolize a woman's ovaries, and once penetrated by the butter, they come to represent the woman's fertilization. Although the children from this union will take the lineage and clan from their father, they will always be connected to their mother's clan, thus assuring an ongoing link between the two clans.

*Music in the evening: faaruu loonii and geerarsa*<sup>13</sup>

In the evening, when the *hamoomota* comes back from the bride's house, they are exhausted, but also generally in high spirits from the day's conquests. Once the men have had some food and alcohol, generally mead, they may sing more *hamoomota* or some *faaruu loonii* (cattle praising songs), which are poems that are sung in antiphony, with two choirs alternating and singing the lines. As with most other Arsi songs, there are leaders, one in each group, but their role is to help the group stay together. These songs are about the beloved cattle, the possession of highest value for cattle raisers, and when men sing together about the cattle, their environment, and their common ancestors, they reinforce their common values and heritage.

If a soloist is present, he may interrupt the *faaruu loonii* and begin singing *geerarsa* (heroic songs). The *geerarsa* soloists who have the official status are called *qondala* and they have obtained it by killing a dangerous wild animal (such as a lion or a leopard) or an enemy. These men sing of their heroic exploits, their ancestors, their clan and its history, their lovers, etc. If there are several *qondala* present, they alternate solos and often compete with each other on several levels: endurance, or who can sing the longest solos over the longest amount of time; clever use of poetic meter and rhyming in the

<sup>13</sup> For more information on *faaruu loonii* and *geerarsa*, see Qashu 2007.

verses; and quick and witty juxtaposition of meaningful words and phrases in their solos. More than the song leaders, these men are considered as heroes in society, and the other men show them respect. In the event of a problem or a conflict, they are often consulted for their military expertise. In the past, these soloists were actual warriors; fighting in various conflicts between groups or clans, but nowadays many of them sing of the history of the clan and are appreciated for their fine poetry.

The *hamoomota* is an occasion for many different types of men from the same clan to gather together and thus create a sense of group unity. Because of the war-like simulation in the event and the aggressive nature of certain individuals, there are sometimes conflicts between men of the same clan through their music. Likewise, although it is rare, tension can also exist between the *hamoomota* and the host clan. By singing and participating in the *hamoomota*, men can regulate relationships between members of their own clan and with men of the bride's clan. Music gives them a space in which they can express themselves, thus avoiding physical violence.

Within this music; there are different musical roles for each type of personality, and a man can sing *geerarsa* solos if he is a hero or even just a gifted poet, or he can lead the group songs if he knows the poems. He can also remain in the choir if he wants to remain part of the general group. For Arsi men, a wedding is an occasion to reaffirm group identity and its hierarchal components through music.

### **Comforting the bride and groom through women's music**

In daily life, Arsi women are generally in a different space than men: they take care of the children, prepare food, do housework and sometimes help on the field if needed. This can also be seen in the wedding, because the women are often inside, discussing, preparing food and comforting the bride. Their music and their role in the wedding are complementary to that of the men, the main goal being to take care of the emotional and personal aspects of marriage and to assist the development of individuals in society.

#### *Crying songs: bayee-bayee and tartarii birraa*

At the bride's house, while the men are involved in the ceremonies that seal the marriage between the groom and bride and the two clans, the bride sits in the dark with female friends and family, in the enclosed sleeping space (*gola*) of the home. In this intimate space, the girls and women cry and they help the bride sing *bayee-bayee* (leaving song). This is a solo repertoire, and the girls and women take turns in singing their songs all afternoon until the departure of the bride. When a woman sings a *bayee-bayee* solo, she evokes recurrent themes: spirits and ancestors, her parents, her mother's love, the family, the dowry, the wedding day, the ugliness and meanness and other imagined faults of the groom, the faults of the first wife (if the husband is marrying for a second time), his mother, his clan and his lineage, the fact that the father-in-law becomes a father to the bride, the fact the bride is ready to leave her home but is sad to do so, and poetic images. For the women, it is a time of grief, because the bride will go to live with another clan that is often many miles away, and often she knows neither the groom, nor his family. The following is an excerpt from a young bride's *bayee-bayee* sung in Dakka Hora Qadho district, west of Langano Lake in 2003.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>Daa sharkumee, Jala dhibbaa,</i>                                   | The groom has about 100 <i>sharxumee</i> <sup>14</sup> to hit me with    |
| 2. <i>goggogaa, nafa hiddaa,</i>   | His body is only made of veins and cartilage                             |
| 3. <i>bayaa galaa, ana iddaa,</i>  | He always insults me   |
| 4. <i>nyoorrii kee, haa caccabuu,</i>                                    | His eyebrow is disintegrated   |
| 5. <i>sinsilaannii, si haaqabuu,</i>                                     | You have chains on your legs   |
| 6. <i>buubaa saayyaa, an harkuu, hin beekuu,</i>                         | I don't know how to milk a bad cow without the calf                      |
| 7. <i>ollaa malee, maxaqee, bulee hin beekuu,</i>                        | If there is no neighbor, I can't stay with you                           |
| 8. <i>maxaqee, mana deegaa,</i>  | I lived in a poor house  |
| 9. <i>yoom taa'ee isa eegaa,</i>   | I don't have time to wait for him  |
| 10. <i>faradoon caffaa gutte,</i>  | There are many horses at the watering hole                               |
| 11. <i>adiidii keessaa dhabee,</i>                                       | You can't find white horses there  |
| 12. <i>abootiin kiyya duudee,</i>  | My clan has come   |
| 13. <i>abbaa kiyya Nagiyyoo keessaa dhabee,</i>                          | Nagiyyoo, my father, isn't among them                                    |
| 14. <i>Baabiyoo, keessaa dhabee abbaa jiruu abbaan hafee</i>             | Baabiyoo isn't among them.   |
| 15. <i>Haadha tiyyaa Turiyyoo ilma dhibee,</i>                           | My mother, the son of Tiriyyoo is dead                                   |
| 16. <i>waan ergaa sii barrisaa waa waaqa kee sii bakkisaa</i>            | I will go where you send me, God help me                                 |
| 17. <i>itittuu guchumme'ee itittuu bayya hin dhuguu</i>                  | The yoghurt is in the <i>guchumme'ee</i> <sup>15</sup> ; I don't like it |
| 18. <i>bididamaa garaa aayyii, Tibbiyyoon boonaafuu natti hin dhufuu</i> | My fat uncle Tibbiyyoon didn't come because he's too proud               |

<sup>14</sup> A wooden whip.

<sup>15</sup> A milk recipient.

19. <i>bididamaa garaa aayyii, Saariyyoon boonaafuu natti hin dhufuu</i>	My fat uncle Saariyyoon didn't come because he's too proud
20. <i>bididamaa garaa aayyii, Gabiyyoon boonaafuu natti hin dhufuu</i>	My fat uncle Gabiyyoon didn't come because he's too proud
21. <i>boona kee gadi tufii afur</i>	Leave your pride and come see me when my wedding is in 4 days
22. <i>re'ee adii reiichoo bona dhalatti</i>	The white goat gave birth during the winter
23. <i>masaanuu daganda'aa</i>	There are too many <i>masaanuus</i> <sup>16</sup>
24. <i>miila jalaan nama nyaattii</i>	The other women are starting to fight.
25. <i>waaqa dhaqaa laboobaan hin lawwisaa</i>	I fly in the sky like a <i>laboobaan</i> <sup>17</sup>
26. <i>nyaapha dhaqaa attamiin gadi cadhisaa</i>	How can I stay calm if I am going to a foreign country?
27. <i>qarrisaa jalli rigaa qandhafnii faaya godhee</i>	I take the button as a simple and beautiful jewel
28. <i>worrattii jaleen garbaa lallabnii balchaa godhee</i>	The members of the groom's clan are slaves; make them normal.

Musically, these solos are very repetitive, with a single melodic and rhythmic cell that is repeated through the entire song. Each region seems to have its own melody and rhythm, but in all cases the singers think that the melody is sad and melancholy. In addition to singing them on wedding days, women practice these songs during solitary, pensive moments, when they are alone fetching water or sitting in a dark house.

As can be seen from this solo, it is the moment for the bride to express her sorrow. For a young woman, her wedding is one of the most difficult rites of passages in her life. Not only will she go to a far off location where she may not know anybody, but this is also the passage into womanhood. From this day forward, she will leave her youth behind her. As Van Gennep (1909: 176-177) and many other authors have described, this rupture with childhood, and this change from one family, clan, and village to another, is bound to be difficult emotionally and psychologically. The bride in our example is sad that her parents cannot be present because they are dead. Women and friends are there to help the young bride in this emotional transition. They help her cry, sitting close to her and hugging her at times when she is the most affected. Although the crying may be genuine at times, it is also performed in a ritualized and forced manner, which, combined with the bride's insults of the husband and his clan, are a way she can exteriorize her fear in the face of an unknown future.

<sup>16</sup> This is the term for women who live in proximity with other co-wives.

<sup>17</sup> A type of bird.

As the bride is being “taken” from her home, her young friends gather in a circle outside to cry and sing *tartarii birraa* (until spring) for her departure. Traditionally, the bride comes back to visit her family after three months of married life, which generally corresponds to the spring. The song is in call and response, accompanied by hand clapping. Similar to *baye-bayee*, the young women are crying because of the departure of their friend, and the music is a means for them to overcome their unhappiness and say a final goodbye as a group.

*Joyous music to receive the newlyweds*

After a tiring journey, the bride arrives with the *hamoomota* at the groom’s house. At this stage, girls and women join together in a circle outside the groom’s home to sing their songs of welcome for the new couple in call and response or antiphony, accompanied by hand clapping and the *dibbe* (drum)<sup>18</sup>. These songs have a more joyous character than the previous repertoires and the goal is to greet the bride and groom, who have left their adolescence behind for a new status of married people. *Ashoo – ashilaa* (groom – bride), the first sung just as the *hamoomota* is arriving, is directed towards the newlyweds, to welcome and praise them and to wish them prosperity for the future. After this, they begin *fay-fayii* (beautified), which is sung in antiphony, as the bride enters her new home. The refrain and second verse are the following:

<i>Fay-faayoon aayyaa ee faayaan galee</i>	My brother has come with a good wife
<i>Isatuu faayaa ee haayaan galee</i>	Because he is handsome, he has come with a beautiful wife

These songs, especially the latter, hold considerable significance for the bride, because they show that she is welcome in her new family and clan, and they can help reassure her in her sadness to have left her family. By boasting of the virility of the groom, the women reinforce one of the strong values of Arsi men and emphasize the fact that the groom is becoming a man.

As we have seen with women’s repertoires, their role is central in the wedding and life in providing an emotional support for changes that life may bring. Just as some Arsi women sing lullabies and spiritual songs to comfort their families on a daily basis, wedding repertoires are used to help a young woman and man make the social and emotional change to adulthood.

*Youths’ wedding songs and dances*

As with men and women, adolescents also unite to express their joy through their wedding songs. They can join in the spaces of men and women at times, to listen or to sing, as with the girls who cry for the departure of their friend. However, these youth song and dance repertoires are the only ones that include both adolescent boys and girls. While the women are in the house and the men are in the tent, the youths are outside, under the shade of a tree if possible. At large weddings, there are several clusters of youths, each conducting their own song and dance. In the highlands, the youths sing and dance *tirrii*, while those in the lowlands perform *shiishiika*. Both of these names are inspired by the sound created by the musicians as they dance.

*Tirrii* is sung in antiphony, with a choir of girls and a choir of boys that respond to each other. These groups form two facing lines that are several meters apart. The girls

<sup>18</sup> Only unmarried girls can play the *dibbe*.

bring the percussion, called *kabala*, an idiophone composed of two pieces of wood that are hit together. While the girls stay in place, the boys move their line forwards and back. When the boys are ready, they move in towards the girls, and as they do so, they jump from one leg to the other and make throat scraping sounds. During this time, the girls shake their heads quickly in up and down motions, while hitting the *kabala* in a ternary rhythm that contrasts with the binary rhythm of the songs. In many Arsi dances, boys tend to move their legs and entire body more violently, while girls emphasize quick movements of the neck and head or slow movements of the entire body. The two lines never touch, and at various moments during the dance, the boys put their walking sticks down in front of the girls' feet or push them forwards or backwards to indicate the line of separation between the two groups. Culturally, boys and girls are not supposed to touch each other during the dances, so moving the stick forward or back is a way of playing this unspoken rule.

*Shiishiika* is sung by girls in call and response, with a small group of older girls that leads the song, accompanied by the *dibbe* (drum) and hand clapping. Generally, one of the song leaders is also the drummer, and she is the one who starts the song. Contrary to *tirrii*, the musicians do not perform the dance: they are gathered in a circle or semi-circle around the dancers. The dancers are again in two facing lines of girls and boys that do not touch, with the girls who stay in place, moving up and down, and the boys who jump from one foot to the other while making the “shh shh, shh shh” noises. The music is also punctuated with yells, such as “woo,” and loud whistles, which express the joy of the dancers.

In both of these dances, there is often an older boy who is an officially designated mediator. He may be from the family hosting the wedding, he may designate himself of his own authority, or he may be chosen by the other young people. For *shiishiika*, this person is called *tabbachu*, and he makes sure that the dance lines stay far enough away from each other and that there aren't too many dancers at once. When there is a fight, he helps break it up and puts the dance lines back in order. Sometimes he has to yell out or push people aside to be sure that music and dance are performed in good conditions, and I even saw one mediator who used a whip to keep the crowds back. For this job to be effective, it obviously requires an assertive person.

In both types of songs, the musicians sing of themes of youth, which include the departure of the bride, love, student life, the clan, their surroundings, AIDS and music and dance. In the following example of *emmoo riyaa*, which was recorded in 2003, some of these aforementioned themes can be found. The first line is also the refrain, and it is followed by some sample lines from the song.

1. <i>Emmoo Riyaa Emmoo Riyaa Emmoo Riyaa.</i> <i>Jalaalli kee dhayee na baasee biyyaa.</i>	Emmoo Riyaa, your love brings me to another country.
2. <i>Si Yaade sii yade riya immo riyaa. Taliyoo si yaade riyaa immo riyaa.</i>	Taliyoo, I miss you. <sup>19</sup>
3. <i>Makiinati boontu riyaa emoo riyaa.</i> <i>Uduumen na nyaate riyaa shago riyaa.</i>	The car is nice, but I feel lonely.

<sup>19</sup> Often, they put the name of the bride here. In this case, it may be one of their friends who is already married.

4. <i>Ka ejersaa baalli firee qagqadhataa qashaa jedhee sobe edisii dabarfataa, edisii dabarfataa, qashaa jedhee sobe edisii dabarfataa.</i>	The olive tree has one leaf with fruit. He said you were his friend, but he cheated on you and gave you AIDS.
5. <i>Dhiisa nu hin jeeqina riyaa emmoo riyaa. Warrii dargagoota riyaa shagoo riyaa</i>	Please leave us alone. <sup>20</sup>
6. <i>Dubaree taaphadha riyaa emmoo riyaa. Yaboo'oo yaboo'o riyaa emmo riyaa.</i>	Please girls, play.
7. <i>Ooliyeen haabadu riyaa emmo riyaa. Jabiile fagoo riyaa emmo riyaa</i>	We do not need the Ooliyeen and Jabiile clans. <sup>21</sup>
8. <i>Limmoo bakkannee hee warraa wal jaalate nu maarakkannee, nu maarakkane he, waraa wal jaalate nu maarakkanne hee.</i>	The needle costs five cents. They love each other, so we shouldn't be worried.
9. <i>Eebada barumsa riyaa emoo riyaa kanamaa aamaarsu riyaa emoo riyaa.</i>	Ah, with education we become like the Amhara.
10. <i>Ha baadu heerumni riyaa emoo riyaa ka namaa kaasaruu riyaa emoo riyaa.</i>	I don't want to get married because it will make me poor.

The first three lines of the song evoke the fact that the bride is going to leave them. The singers will also marry and go live with another clan one day, so they may not see her again. Although these songs are joyful, like *baye-bayee*, they are also a way for the bride's friends to deal with her departure. In these songs, the girls also talk of love and marriage in general, sometimes referring to a lover. Normally, girls cannot have a boyfriend before marriage, but it has been documented that girls have them in certain regions (Holcomb 1973), and I did meet several adolescents in the highlands who had a boyfriend or girlfriend.

More than anything, these songs reflect adolescents' every day life, with subjects such as education (l. 8). The fact that AIDS is mentioned (l. 4) shows that the singers are influenced by current problems. In addition to AIDS, they know that if they marry and have many children, they may face economic difficulties (l. 10).

The fascinating aspect of *tirrii* and *shiishiika*, is that the words and the melodies change every year. The youths have told me that *shiishiika* songs come from the town of Zoway in the Rift Valley and that *tirrii* come from the mountains, east of Langan Lake. The new music spreads quickly and young people enjoy getting together on clear nights to practice them before the wedding season. This is one of the only ways for them to spend time together outside of school and market days, and it provides a means to reinforce bonds between young members of the same clan.

At the wedding ceremonies, music and dance also provides an excellent opportunity for young people to meet and flirt. Adolescent boys in the highlands have told me that they spot out pretty girls at weddings, and they use the opportunity to try to talk to them. Except if the young men are taking part in a *hamoomota*, the girls they see are from

<sup>20</sup> This is directed towards the boys.

<sup>21</sup> Jabiile is a place west of Zoway, a city situated about 160 Km south of Addis Ababa.

their own clan, so they would never be able to marry them. However, these interactions, flirtations and short relationships between the two sexes are still an integral part of any adolescence, and weddings provide a safe space for them to flourish.

### **Conclusion**

“Music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them (Stokes 1994: 5).” Throughout the wedding ceremony, Arsi men, women and youth create their own spaces in which they can assert their identities through music, a unique form of expression which is actually a foundation stone for Arsi society.

During the day’s expedition, the men sing together, reinforcing their clan’s common history and heritage as they sing. Their common values of virility, warrior-like behaviour, respect for their cattle, their clan, and their ancestors, are applauded by people in towns they pass through during the voyage. Although they go to unite with another clan, they “attack” them with their music and show their strength upon arrival. This confrontation with another clan also allows them to recognize their difference and thus better understand their own identity. As open conflicts and wars between clans have become rare, weddings are the occasion for men to show and create their group strength. Through music, the conflicts and hierarchies within the group can also be vented, as with conflicts between leaders of songs who sing at the same time, and with conflicts between proud *geerarsa* soloists and the group.

Women also affirm their role and boundaries through their musical performances. They gather their power in the home, where they can protect the bride and gather strength through music and crying. As each Arsi woman may have been through or may go through marriage and childbirth, by singing through the process, they create a united group or force that can be reassembled in times of need. There is, evidently, the emotion that a powerful performance can bring and instil in a person’s memory. For example, when women from the groom’s clan greet her with a song when she arrives, the bride may feel this acceptance and support through the sounds of music and remember that in difficult days to come, just as she will remember the comfort of her female friends and relatives who sang *baye-bayee* with her before leaving her home. Although the men perform the transaction that unites the clans, it would never be successful without the psychological transition that the women provide. They are the backbone of society, not only with childbearing, but also with the network of support that they constitute for the rest of the family and clan. Through their songs, and especially through the creation of *baye-bayee*, women are also able to express and recognize their personal identity, which is an imperative prerequisite to knowing what they really want and being able to express their desires.

The youths’ music is often cast aside by the older Arsi as being a modern trend, and not as significant as the other repertoires. This is, however, the music of people who will one day be adults in society, and they also have their space to create in the wedding and in society. By performing their songs, they strengthen their sense of clanic identity, but they also learn about each other and learn to express themselves. By putting a stick down as a barrier between the sexes, they know their limitations culturally, but as with adolescents all over the world, they also learn to test these limits by singing of sexuality, and by flirting during and around the performances. In song performance; they also begin to learn and assert their roles as leaders, as group members and as mediators, sometimes through conflict.

Through the three separate spaces of performance, men, women and youths lay down the foundations for the society they live in. They create the boundaries between the groups, and the music allows them to understand their identities and those of the other groups they confront. Although the two different clans have the same repertoires, their personal, geographical and historical references and their performance and its space are not the same. Musical performance in weddings allows each clan or community to create a common heritage, a good reference point to which they can return in the future for their culture, customs and general way of interacting with their family, friends and neighbors.

## References

- Asmarom Legesse. 1973. *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Bartels, Lambert. 1983. *Oromo Religion. Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia: An Attempt to Understand*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag.
- Barth, Fredrik. [ed.]. 1969. *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of cultural difference*. Oslo : Universitetsforlaget.
- Baxter, P.T.W. 1965. 'Repetition in Certain Boran Ceremonies.' In: Fortes, M. and Dieterlen, G. [eds.]. *African Systems of Thought*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 64-78.
- Baxter, P.T.W., Jan Hultin & Alessandro Triulzi [eds.] 1996. *Being and Becoming Oromo. Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*. Lawrenceville, N.J: Red Sea Press, Inc.
- Cerulli, Enrico. 1922. 'The Folk-Literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia.' In: *Harvard African Studies*, Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum, Vol. 3, pp. 9-228.
- Finnegan, Ruth. 1976. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Kenya: Oxford University Press.
- Finnegan, Ruth. 1977. *Oral Poetry: Its nature, significance and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Griefenow-Mewis, Catherine & Tamene Bitima [eds.]. 2004. *Oromo Oral Poetry Seen from Within*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Holcomb, Bonnie K. 1973. 'Oromo Marriage in Wälläga Province, Ethiopia.' *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 11(1), pp. 107-137.
- Husseen Badhaasootiin. 2000. *Seera Fuudhaa-Heeruma Oromoo Arsi'i (The Arsi Oromo Marriage Custom)*. Addis Ababa.
- Mohammed Hassen. 1990. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A history 1570-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Qashu, Leila. 2004. *Music in Arsi Weddings (La Musique dans les Mariages Arsi)*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Saint Denis : University Paris 8.
- Qashu, Leila. 2006. *The songs of Arsi Oromo men : from the group to the individual (Les chants des hommes arsi oromo en Éthiopie : du groupe à l'individu)*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Saint Denis : University Paris 8.
- Rappoport, Dana. 1999. 'Chanter sans être ensemble. Des musiques juxtaposées pour un public invisible.' *L'Homme*, Vol. 152, pp.143-162.
- Seydou, Christiane. 1991. *Bergers des mots : Poésie peule du Mâssina présentée et traduite par Christiane Seydou*. Paris : Classiques Africains.
- Stokes, Martin. [ed.]. 1994. *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Oxford: Berg.

- Van de Loo, Joseph. 1991. *Guji Oromo Culture in Southern Ethiopia: religious capabilities in rituals and songs*. Berlin: Anthropos Institut V., Dietrich Reimer Verlag.
- Tilahun Gamta. 1989. *Oromo-English Dictionary*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. 1909 (1981) *Les Rites de Passage*. Paris: Picard.