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Echi Christina Gabbert

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This article shows how music and song provide exclusive expressive means outside the spoken discourse among the Arbore of Southern Ethiopia. After a short discussion of speech ethics, two songs are analyzed regarding their potential for reflecting, reinforcing and creating notions of sentiments and cultural morals that play an important part in the constitution and maintenance of cultural and personal identity.

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**NARRATED IDENTITIES OR THE SAID AND THE SUNG:
PRAISE AND CONDEMNATION OF SELF AND OTHERS IN ARBORE
SONG POETICS**

Echi Christina GABBERT

We must reach out for the narrated identities of others
(N. Rapport & J. Overing 2000: 290)

Abstract

This article shows how music and song provide exclusive expressive means outside the spoken discourse among the Arbore of Southern Ethiopia. After a short discussion of speech ethics, two songs are analyzed regarding their potential for reflecting, reinforcing and creating notions of sentiments and cultural morals that play an important part in the constitution and maintenance of cultural and personal identity.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Arbore, Songs, identities

**IDENTITÉS NARRÉES, OU LE DIT ET LE CHANTÉ:
LOUANGE ET CONDAMNATION DE SOI ET DES AUTRES
DANS LA POÉSIE EN CHANSON DES ARBORE**

Résumé

Chez les Arbore du Sud de l'Éthiopie, les œuvres musicales et chantées ont pour particularité de thématiser certains comportements et événements d'une autre manière que le langage parlé. Après une brève présentation de l'éthique de la parole dans la société, nous analyserons deux chants par rapport à leur capacité d'évoquer, de créer ou de renforcer certains sentiments et valeurs morales jouant un rôle important dans la constitution et le maintien de l'identité personnelle et sociale.

Mots-clés: Éthiopie, Arbore, chansons, identités

Musical aspects of anthropological research can add to existing research as an audible illustration or densification of description. In this essay, I want to concentrate on examples where music and song provide exclusive expressive means outside the spoken discourse, revealing meanings that could only be elicited with a focus on music. For this purpose, I will look at song lyrics to

describe and discuss their potential for reflecting, reinforcing and creating notions of sentiments and cultural morals that play a part in the constitution and maintenance of identity. I will start with some remarks on Arbore speech ethics and show how they differ from the use of words in song. Then, I will discuss the lyrics of two types of song in detail to throw light on their meanings and the implications for the constitution of places, people and cultural self esteem.

Introduction: Talk-lost in the forest

Yebe gorte angumure
Karo hasow aygumurta
 I traverse the road
 The skilled speaker traverses the talk
 (Passage from an Arbore-gobba song)¹

“*Hasow effey il manakawa.*” - “Talk should not be put in the outside”, it is said in Arbore, meaning that one cannot talk about everything, displaying it for everybody to see. One fascinating aspect of focusing on narratives in songs in Arbore stems from their difference from everyday talk. Much that is not clearly articulated in daily conversation finds explicit expression in songs. This is partly grounded in Arbore conversational ethics formed by the underlying question of who can claim his words to be true? This might be illustrated with an example from the field. Trying to find out as much as possible about music in Arbore, I asked somebody to name a good singer and I would not be told a single name. I think that everyone *could* tell me and yet find that nobody will tell me. The same happens with certain questions about the beautiful, the ugly, some elderly, the deceased, the other – with sentiments like love and desire. Certain attributes in Arbore like beautiful and ugly, skilled and unskilled, the brave and the cowardly – certain subjects, certain sentiments and certain categorical judgments about people are not frequently found in daily conversation. One of the unspoken issues concern praise and condemnation. One finds that to judge loudly about others in any way is not a sign of a good character. Does not judging a person contain the exaltation of oneself to know conclusively? Does such an attitude not show a lack of respect because it is limiting the space that should be offered to the counterparts in the conversation? Except for certain ritualised speeches and songs, speaking in Arbore is always in conversation. One of its important elements is the extreme

¹ The Arbore, also called Hor, are a Cushitic agro-pastoral group of around 5,000 people living in the Rift Valley north of lake Stephanie close to the Kenyan border in the South Omo Zone of Southwestern Ethiopia. The Arbore language has no approved orthography. My simple transcriptions only partly follow Hayward’s (D. HAYWARD 1984) and are meant to present an identifiable text. I give selected comments for apparent and intended meanings after each paragraph to provide the reader with a body for understanding and contextualizing.

attentiveness about speaking the truth. “*Modo heesa, dugga inhasowe, bena in hasowe. Onfon yehe dugga mabasowi, iit mohlo bena ayhasowa ge!*” “Ask people, whether I spoke truth (*dugga*), or lies (*ben*). If I have not spoken the truth, then go and say that man is a liar!” With this common phrase the speaker gives the listener the powerful right to call him or her “liar”. Miyawaki describes the outcome of the Arbore *kako* ritual in which potential liars are judged: “The liar is believed to become dumb and mad, and finally dies” (Miyawaki 1997: 727). A careless speaker is in danger of being accused of being a liar, not necessarily because of the content of his speech but merely because of his dogmatic style or his loud voice. One basic thought of Haiku that Basho formulates, namely that “language resides in untruth and ought to comport with truth” (Hass 1994: 235), might well describe the Arbore vigilance in maintaining the fragile balance of speech and truth. *Nungo nahasowna* – “smoothly, slowly, carefully we talk” if we talk well. This slow talk in a low voice includes much listening, which is so very necessary for finding ways through what people want to tell to each other. Only smooth talk leaves enough space for searching both in words and silences, and its directions will be sensed rather than heard. Talking in absolute terms is brutish and resembles shouting. In Arbore the drunkards shout and the uncontrolled. The rules for good speech exceed the verbal content and are sensitive for even the “implicit *intonations*” of speech (Bakhtin 1986:166). This means that one needs to soften one’s ears² to discover the nuances inside and around speech.

I re-evaluate my search for a good singer: of course there is talk about one who sings well. Of course there is a notion of beauty, but as soon as I seem to have heard it, it is gone and will not be repeated, expounded upon or filled with gravity. When I asked for the good singer, I clearly moved beyond the reach of discourse in the sense Geertz argued in discussing the place of art in speech (Geertz, 1983: 94ff). I learn that what I hear should not be extracted from the flow - from its right place - its hiding place or humble place. More than that, I might even violate rules of speech that respect and fear the potent power of the words (Stoller, 1989: 115ff).³ My counterpart feels uneasy because he knows I want explicit information and because he talks without places for the words to gently land on. I feel uneasy because I know I talked us into a dilemma and will not find what I asked for anyhow. It just does not fit and we decide to abandon the dislocated interview. “*Amalo giddi deel il nagirrna.*”

² To soften one’s ear means to be more attentive. A very knowledgeable person is called “soft eared” (*neb nungata*). This perceptive intelligence is distinguished from verbal eloquence, called *karo*. *Karo* is also the term for the gap between the two upper front teeth.

³ In Arbore not only talking badly about someone but also thinking negatively about that person, for example with jealousy, might put a curse on this person. Only certain people have this power, and the danger of this kind of curse is that it is not actively put on somebody, but is evoked through a possibly uncontrolled thought or feeling.

– “We (and our talk) again are lost in the forest”, we so often say. And the forest like the city is a place where eyes and words hit trees and walls so very unlike the Arbore valley (*wando Arbore*) – these open lands that stretch out before our eyes always give enough space for the hot wind, the long talks, the colors of the ripe sorghum, the clouds of dust around the wandering cattle and the many songs to travel the savannah.

With these remarks on speech and some of its limits I will turn to the song descriptions. Music in Arbore as well as among the neighboring groups is part of everyday life and thus forms an integral part of everyday experience and creativity (Gabbert 2006a/b, Strecker 1981). Music is a way to do certain things and I want to show how it is also a way to express certain things by singing, dancing and experiencing them.

Finding a place in a song –The song as casket

“*Modo kure il nakawa*” – “To put, store and keep people in a song” it is said in Arbore. In the songs one finds stories about the newly born and the men who were killed by the enemy, about cattle, about the country and the neighbours, about the milk and the morning and so much more. Songs are sung in Arbore, Borana, Hamar, Tsamai and Dassanetch languages. They are open to be filled with more people and stories. Songs can deal basically with one subject matter or they can be “multifaceted”, expressing a larger variety of moods. For this analysis, I have chosen to discuss two typical songs, contradictory in their respective tenor, each rather homogeneous in itself. One tells of the beautiful and skilled (*aar arangyalle*), the other tells of fallen characters (*Dakara*). The latter has a storyline; the former has a body made of miscellaneous stories. The language of these stories exhibits a judgmental clarity and emphasis in connection with vivid exaggeration and the use of manifold metaphors that differ from what is expected from “smooth talk.” Both songs also provide moments for diverse interpretations.

First Song. *Dakara* – Falling from Grace (CD, tracks 37-38)

Favorable traits are praised in songs, failure can be explicitly scolded. *Dakara* is such a song of condemnation (*miidada*). Reasons for condemnation can be the breaking of rules of good behavior and the negligence of Arbore customs (*aada Arbore*), especially when being tempted by something outside Arbore ways and territory. This does not mean that everything new is despised as one can see in the *aray wale* song (praise of people who brought new and useful things from their travels). But the range from the acceptable to the unacceptable becomes clearer when looking closer at its evaluation in songs.

Unlike multifaceted and thematically heterogeneous songs where single lines express wrongdoing, this song is made exclusively to put wrongdoers into. The song becomes a container and the following is more a trashcan than a casket as it is one of the purest condemnation songs in Arbore. It is a song about a girl whose name is Dakara:

Dakara manasuudi
Dakara iyya magurgurri
Esse iy walgurgurte

Dakara did not get married
 Dakara was not given (to her husband) by her father
 She gave herself away

Once there was an Arbore girl called Dakara. Her story took place in the 1970s when she did something unbelievable: she went to live with her Borana boyfriend without the permission of her father. “*Iyya magurgurri*” literally means: “Her father did not trade her away”, but in this context it means that the whole marriage procedure was not carried out for her. She left without go-betweens, without bridewealth, without the agreement of neither her father nor her mother, without blessing, without family and friends to drink honey wine and slaughter goats, without dances of the age-mates. She left without any ritual to live with a man as if they were married. In this way she became “spoiled” (*iy bed’oyte*), a girl who in former times would have been given away to become a wife of a man in Hamar, Borana or Tsamai because no Arbore would want to marry her anymore. Sending her far away without bridewealth hid the shame. Nowadays there is a possibility that a girl can be married by the man who has “spoiled” her.

Dakara iy walsuudite
Harrate tolo makobagatto
Dakara tolo nesse

Dakara married herself away
 The (Arbore) girls did not know this
 It was Dakara who taught them

After Dakara, other girls chose their husbands without permission and went to Tsamai, to Dassanetch and to Borana and today even in Arbore some few couples live together without being married.

Iyya tolo mataabo
Iyya badalo teeto mataabo
Esse aytaata

Her father does not like this
 Her father does not like her living this way
 She likes it

Here one can find a clear hint on Dakara's persistence, which could be interpreted as a virtue in other contexts. But for the Arbore, not listening to other people's opinion is a sign of weakness. Not to listen to her father is a severe violation of basic social rules.

Moh Dakara eete Gossa Dula
Jimma "Dakara Gossa Dula bedda", gedde
"Mebkebeasuuda?"
Esse "nibay korunn deerata" geete
"Ilko nibay eseta, workida geete"

The man who took Dakara is Gossa Dula
 The age mates of Dakara say: "Gossa Dula is bad
 Why do you choose him?"
 She said: "He has the straightest nose
 He has the whitest teeth, shining with gold"

In Borana and especially in Konso, golden teeth are a sign of wealth. The straight and long nose is a sign of great beauty. Dakara's age-mates tell her straightforwardly that her choice is a bad one. But she praises her lover's beauty. Here the story still has a romantic touch but her lesson is unfolded in the following parts of the song.

Dakara amma Ganna
Heyi barday toko da eyi
Heyi Kaliko eyi
Heyi Kaliko djobbo kabba
Heyi wa barday tokoda
Esse heyi wa barday bulli kaate

Dakara the older sister of Ganna
 Her fill she had for a day
 Her fill she took from Kaliko
 The fill of Kaliko had evil in it
 The fill was something for a day
 She thought that the fill would last forever

Dakara and her lover ate from the good harvest from the Kaliko fields (area in Arbore) before they left together to Borana. But she did not foresee the evil that was hidden in her story (in the sorghum and in her relationship) because at the moment of satisfaction and happiness she did not recognize its imminent end.

Dakara djobbo aygatta
Dakara imme iyya Chao
Dakara marsate Doyo
Ontollo teete "Doyo hanno ayaw?" haygeete
"Gossa burrida" geete
"Gossa ferenji" geete
"Gossa konunn d'eerida" geete

Dakara had evil in her
 Dakara the sister of Doyo
 Dakara the daughter of the father of Chao
 After she had left she said: "Where is our Doyo?"
 "Gossa the red skinned one" she said
 "Gossa the ferenji" she said
 "Gossa the one with the straight nose" she said

Dakara had *djobbo*. *Djobbo* is a main character trait of the bad ones, the liars, the untrustworthy. Like the sorghum she ate, she carries all these traits of evil in her when leaving with the man she chose. But after having reached Borana she asks: "where is our Doyo?" Doyo is her brother whom she misses terribly while being away from Arbore. She is asking for *our* Doyo as if she were still at home. He stands for the loss of all her family. And all she can hold against is the glorification of Gossa's beauty whom in the height of her praise she compares to a *ferenji* (a white man). The following part of the Dakara song is a parable within the story:

Tabia indiy galsbum dayte
Tabia iy bobba dayte
Harake iy eenu dayte

Tabia turned into *galsbum*
 Tabia turned into *bobba*
 Liquor turned into milk

This is one of the powerful metaphorical turns in Arbore song lyrics. Dakara is left aside. The richness of these three short lines requires a more detailed description of their significance:

The parable

"The problem with these terms in any text is their powerful resonance in the minds of the performers and their public. Every mention recalls a portion of the semantic field to which

they apply and gives a particular emotional coloration to them, just as do the Portuguese *saudade* (“longing”) or the German *Heimat* (“home”). There exists no literal translation of such terms, precisely because of such emotional overtones. It takes a true knowledge of a whole culture or society to be able to find or rather to feel exactly what the meaning will be in such and such a case.” (J. Vansina, 1985: 85)

For understanding the metaphorical value of these lines and for the evaluation of the message of the song, the terms *tabia*, *galshum* and *gobba* have to be explained.

Tabia is the police town in Arbore territory and is very different from the traditional Arbore villages. This settlement the Arbore “have allocated to outsiders as a place of residence. Those associated with the state, traders, groups they refer to as non-herders, that is people who consume animals without the pain of herding them (...)” (Tadesse, 1999:261f). Tabia is a mixture of a police post, trading village and school town and its inhabitants are people mainly from Konso, Tsamai, Karmet and Arbore who live in a rather unordered spatial and social organization. Especially for Arbore girls, Tabia is not seen as a good place, and most Arbore girls depict this place of lost souls and abandoned customs, of alcohol and promiscuity. As Tadesse explains: “from the Hor (Arbore) point of view, Tabya can be seen as a terrible place” (Tadesse 1999: 265). But because of the proximity to the Arbore villages, especially on market days, they are also curious to go to Tabia. The ambiguity about Tabia being a part of Arbore and at the same time such an ambiguous and alien element is mirrored in the song line. But the message is as clear: people who spend their time in Tabia do this at the risk of their Arbore life and values. These values are symbolized by two essential moments in Arbore everyday life: *galshum* and *bobba*.

“When in Arbore the sun goes down, the cattle return to the homestead (*galshum*) one should not be elsewhere than in the homestead, the goats, the calves, the cattle - one waits for them, one watches to end the day properly. Nowadays the Arbore who have lost their customs sit in Tabia and drink when the sun goes down, they do not see the *galshum* anymore.

The same way it should be in the morning. When the goats, the calves, the cattle are let out

for the daily grazing (*bobba*), a good Arbore should be present and not go to any other place. The Arbore who have lost their customs (*aada*), they even go to Tabia before the animals have left the kraal. They spend the day in Tabia, they do not come back when the animals come home.

The one who goes to Tabia before the animals are let out, he will have left without drinking milk. All he will find in Tabia is *arake* (liquor) and will spend the day drinking. In the evening he will also not drink milk.”(Interview with Ginno⁴, November 2002)

An Arbore should be at home at *bobba* and *galsbum* to cherish the value of these crucial moments that embrace the daily cycle of the Arbore day. One of the most precious moments I picture when imagining Arbore is *galsbum* - this long moment before sunset, when the father of the homestead stands in front of the house watching the savannah, waiting for the herding boys and girls to bring home the family’s cattle and goats. First, always in daylight, the younger boys and girls return with the goats and the calves. The children who have played or worked elsewhere come home. If they do not work in the house they might sit down in the cattle kraal to wait together. The heat of the Arbore valley has turned into pleasant warmth; the dazzling sun has softened and covers everything with a warm yellow light. We wait. If it is a good day we will see the herds show up on the horizon before sunset. What do we see far away? Are they our cattle? Is it our brother in his white shirt coming closer? Does he walk tall and proudly and calm? Has he brought all the cattle back? Or does he walk hastily? Maybe a small silhouette slips out of the picture on the horizon. A young boy comes running in our direction to tell us that cattle are missing. Everybody is ready to leave and find them before they get lost in the dark. If the picture stays the same and the herding boy walks calmly, we just watch them come closer. The black, the yellow, the spotted one, the one with the bent horns. None are missing. Have they found good grass? Have they drunk enough water? Serenely they all enter the kraal. The cattle know their way and gather around their fire. The smoke will keep the mosquitoes at bay. The herding boy is silent. His face is of someone who comes back from a long journey – full of something I cannot name but something rich that lets us

⁴ I am indebted to Ginno Ballo from Arbore who helped me to transcribe and explain Arbore song lyrics in detail. His vivid explanations made it possible to understand and discuss the many apparent and intended meanings that would otherwise have stayed silent for me.

remain still silent. Behind him his younger brother closes the entrance of the kraal with a large and dry thorny bush. “*Nawgall?*” - “How was the herding?” the father says. “*Fayya*” - “Good”, the son answers. He is somehow skinnier, somewhat prouder than in the morning. The others welcome him: “*Nawgall?*” - No other talk. His younger sister looks at him with admiration as he crosses the kraal and walks towards the house. His older sister steps out of the house and waits for him to sit down. Then she hands him a calabash of fresh water that his mother has filled for him. “*Nawgall*” she says. “*Fayya*” he says and drinks. After that, everybody’s heart is in the right place. The sun goes down and very soon it is dark. We are happy that we have seen the cattle and the herding boy’s face. Everybody is back, *galsbum*, we can sit and cook and talk about the day and the world. Spending the time together before the cows get milked and we have our evening meal in the very dark Arbore night.

The antipode in the song line might look like this: I sit at the table in the shelter of my “study house” in Tabia. I work with a friend on the transcription of the song lyrics. We are caught in work. The shadows inside the house have changed their patterns but we have almost forgotten the time and the sun. All of a sudden my friend gets nervous, he binds his head cloth anew, meaning he wants to leave. I am too slow to understand it right away. “I have to return to my homestead. If I miss the *galsbum* my father will look differently at me”, he says and leaves. I use the last moment of daylight to sit and write or to go and wash and put on mosquito safe clothes. Somebody shouts in front of my door. It is another friend. He is drunk. I ask if we should walk together as I am about to leave for Sere (the main Arbore village) for the *galsbum*. “I’ll just pack my backpack”, I say. He agrees and a moment later, when I step out of the house, he is gone. I hear his loud voice in the neighbouring bar. Peeping through the door of the liquor hut, I see my friend squeezed on a narrow wooden bench between the other drinkers. If it is a good day and I am at ease I ask him to get up and come with me so we can talk on the way home. He will tell me about his brother who is useless and will never marry. He holds a plastic bag with salt in one hand for his mother who cannot walk well. The warm light of the sun has already lost most of its color and the shapes of the trees along the way are starting to turn grey. Where the path forks, he turns left to his mother’s house. I turn right. On other days, I feel I should not tell him what to do and leave him drinking in Tabia and I walk to Sere alone. Late at night, after I have sat and drunk milk with my family, I pass by his mother’s house right by the dancing ground. She asks me if I have seen him, as he has not returned, not even for *galsbum*.

With the background of these meanings one can read the song lines anew:

Tabia indiy galsbum dayte
Tabia iy bobba dayte
Harake iy eenu dayte

Tabia turns into *galsbum*
 Tabia turns into *bobba*
 Liquor turns into milk

Galsbum the evening scene, *bobba* the morning scene. And the drinking of the milk that belongs to both: they are exchanged for one place – Tabia. And the only obvious reason for this is the liquor. Who prefers milk to liquor mirrors the ultimate loss of Arbore customs. Dakara's story is left aside in these lines but her loss of customs is put on a level with the most despicable loss of the right way to do things that can be put in words. Dakara's story has not ended yet.

Gossa Arbore hiyetcha
Dakara Gossa "duressada" geete
tip teete

Gossa in Arbore he is a beggar
 Dakara says: "Gossa is a rich man"
 followed hard on him

The clarity of the paradox of what the Arbore think of Dakara's lover and what she says about him is resounding just before we hear the end of the story.

Dakara wana taabi ko iytate
Gossa Dula dibite
Hobora iysuute

Dakara what we dislike she liked
 She left Gossa Dula
 Married Hobora

Dakara in the end only stayed in Borana for about a month. After that she broke up with Gossa and returned to Arbore. Later on she married another man from Borana with whom she lives in Arbore. Until today every girl that acts like Dakara might be stored in this song, like Orgo:

Naag taka Orgo
Imme Ano
Iy Geleba uteete, Geleba suute
Iyya magurgurri
Essete walgurgurre

One girl Orgo
 The daughter of Ano
 She went to Galeba, married a Galeba

Her father did not give her away
 She gave herself away

Or Gorre, who went to live with a man from Tsamai:

Gorre marsate Argeri
Gorre yellum aykatolla
Gorre aytallo danzidda
Karu taygatta
Wanatabi taate
Gorre moh suude Boko

Gorre the sister of Argeri
 Gorre whose tallness one likes
 Gorre the beautiful one over there
 She had a space between her front teeth
 What one dislikes she likes
 Gorre – the one who married her was Boko

There are more lines to the song but I have made my point. Like most songs, the Dakara song will always be renewed with new lines to remember.

Comment on the Dakara song

I recorded the Dakara song at a grinding party. About fifteen girls at a time were grinding large amounts of sorghum, which was a gift for one of the girl's boyfriend's mother.⁵ One girl was singing the solo part from which the lines are extracted and the other girls joined in the (wordless) refrain. On such occasions a girl asks her age-mates for help and the grinding takes place at night after all the girls have finished their daily duties. Since they might be very exhausted and the grinding takes several hours, the energetic (but non-aggressive) scorning songs are very apt for keeping on grinding. The scene of the age-mates grinding and their singing of Dakara's negligence of her age-mate's warnings mirrors the relation of age-mates on the situational, performative and discursive level well. One has called for help and they have come. To reject an age-mate's call is an offense. Everybody can expect help and protection from the age-mates as well as criticism and even punishment. In all cases, the age-mates act as the major supportive and corrective collective. In this setting, the singing of the Dakara song clearly shows the constitutive role it plays in forming a collective consensus and thus becomes a means for

⁵ Like in these grinding parties the songs are sung with many repetitions and in a fragmented form; I have extracted the main story out of the whole session in which "Dakara" was sung three times between other songs. I did not alter the order of the story parts. To put the lyrics in a narrative order is not seen as very important in most Arbore songs as the content of the song is clear to everybody despite omissions or restructuring.

identification both in content and through its performance. Dakara did not listen to her age-mates, she left, she failed badly enough to make a song for her. A song with a clear message that will be remembered in every performance: “We dislike what she liked”. Like in the Arbore punishment ritual (*yakka*), the explicit scolding serves as a reminder of Arbore values⁶. Along these do’s and don’ts one recognizes the living routines of Arbore identity. In the Dakara song the blast of the unwanted resounds forcefully. The parable underlines this tenor and yet there are undertones. Besides condemnation, the Dakara song contains a story of passionate love. Still, one cannot find one Arbore word for love (*taabin, nataaba, nageldota*) in its lyrics. Instead Dakara does not cease to praise her loved one with symbols of his beauty and metaphors for her love. Although the words are still not said, the sentiment is created. This story within the story makes one wonder whose ears might find a hum of pleasure (or refuge) in what Dakara taught the girls to do; to, for reasons yet unsung, decide to end up in this song herself one day?

Born and Hesmondhalgh (2002: 35f) describe “techniques of the musical imaginary” to show the mutual constitutive relation of music and cultural identity. The Dakara song is a good example for how all of these possible articulations work as “a series of distinct potential moments or forms” in terms of a “quasi temporality”. The strongest effect in this example might be the “reinforcement” of the moral, the way things should be done and the respective scolding of undesired alternatives. This is related to the formal structure of the social structure of Arbore society, with a functioning age-grade system and with a normative set of rules of behavior that is carefully watched. The second effect is a “discussion” of behavior “after the fact”, where, in spite of the clear condemnation of Dakara’s action, her opinion is given a voice that might be re-interpreted differently at another point in time, e.g. when girls start to choose their husbands. The third position could be of a girl who personally identifies with Dakara, maybe in imaginary ways that “prefigure” behavior and would give the individual more space than one would have expected in the formalized ways of social roles in Arbore (the thinkable possibility). The fourth and last possibility would be a “purely imaginary” identification, an unattainable identification, which might be the least likely in this setting because of the proximity to its context. The first interpretation will serve its purpose when the young girls decide not to become like Dakara; the other positions open up ways for emergent identification. This means that in spite of

⁶ An age-set arranges the *yakka* (“mess up”) ritual to prevent one of their members being beaten as punishment for bad behavior. Instead of severely beating of an offender, the age-mates sacrifice an ox and call all the men to a place outside the settlement. There, in a day long meeting, the men eat the meat of the sacrificed ox and the elders hold long speeches. In these they account all the offenses they have observed among the Arbore people (and the world) and remind them to hold on to Arbore customs.

its clear message, the Dakara song displays a range of possibilities for reinterpretation for different people at different times. Here we see music both as a tool in the individual and the collective forming of identification with reflective and constitutive qualities as a mobile process, a becoming, in the sense Frith (1998: 109) describes: “Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics.”

Second song. *Aar arangyalle* – Manifold praise (CD, track 39)

When looking at the lyrics of *Aar arangyalle* one gets a picture of what is commonly regarded as achievement for Arbore men. It differs from the many praise songs in which hunting, fighting and killing are glorified (like *gobba* and *meerata*); instead, it reverberates other praiseworthy traits. As opposed to the storyline in the Dakara song, this song is a casket for a collection of stories of different people in different times.

Gora deera oho burre seete

A long way went the one with the red lips

The Arbore man called “the one with red lips”, whose stories we find in many songs, is known for the braveness he showed by having traveled to faraway places all on his own, not knowing anybody in the countries he went to. He has brought many new things to Arbore.

Angasse Hamu

Rubbu biyyetalahat girre

Hasay biyyetanno koonna

The older brother of Hamu

The sorghum that was in another country

He brought to our country

In this line people are mentioned who have organized relief-grain distributions in times of famine. Here it is the brother of Hamu, in other versions other names will be filled in.

Au Duba nibayguumita

Au Duba meel manadoya,

Usuko nadoya

Neek aykadeyya

The uncle of Duba sings so well

The uncle of Duba, one does not look down

One looks at him

Even the lion listens

Here I find the good singer. And what a glorious praise this is of his voice. One cannot look in any other direction when he comes to the dancing ground to sing. And the most powerful beast with the most powerful roar is silenced by his virtuosity.

Oho burre
Korkorro aydisse

The one with the red lips
Build a house with corrugated iron

From one of his travels the one with the red lips brought corrugated iron. He was the first to build the roof of his house with it.

Aar bitta moa kumma indiy niib day
Mob galle iyyeetche
Aar bitte moa kumma in di niib day
Moa raffe inko arkakehe

The *aar* of the short man he sings it so well
The ones who have left will return
The *aar* of the short man, he sings it so well,
The ones who have slept will get up from their sleep

The lines speak for themselves. *Aar* is a song a man sings for this favorite oxen. The beautiful singing of the man who is called “the short one” will make everybody return to the dancing ground. Names like “the short one” or “the one with red lips” are common in Arbore. Having been repeated in these songs for years, the names and the achievements of their bearers have been inextricably bound together. Mentioning these names will always be connoted with their stories, they mean these stories.

Iyya Hayto fay bulli koon

The father of Hayto brought all the good things

The good things here are the pieces of jewelry that are essential items for Arbore weddings such as glass beads, wound glass rings, brass arm rings and metal anklets. They often cannot be found on the Arbore market but on markets far away in the Konso and Borana mountains. The father of Hayto went all these long ways to supply the Arbore with these things.

Lukko iyyite
Meel mahmay barije

The cock has crown
When has the country woken up

Here extremely good night dances are praised. Only seldom, when dances have reached an outstanding quality, one can forget time. The dancers at cockcrow wonder that the sun has gone up without them noticing it.

Bagadje Ello angasse Lago
Burra iy kebe laabe
Iy Burrate ugalle

The one with the bowlegs, Ello, older brother of Lago,
The Tsamai kept you
You left for Tsamai

Once there was a man called Ello. His bandy legs were his sign of beauty. He had two girlfriends in Tsamai. So he left Arbore, his livestock, his homestead, he left without anything to live with his two Tsamai wives. A man who finds his love in far-away places and dares to leave everything behind is seen as daring and strong.⁷

Gurunta K'or
Ta feka Lallaba seta

To the Gurunta Koro mountain
So far away Lallaba went

Another man whose travels are praised is Lallaba. Lallaba means “the caller”. He went to the mountain called Gurunta Koro in the Lake Stephanie area all on his own.

Billata usu niibay heruma yakadda
Usu kure hatta faya kaday

Billata, he adorns himself so beautifully
Sing beautifully for him

Billata was a man who adorned himself extremely beautifully and danced very well. When he joined the dance, everyone should support him and sing as well as he deserved with all his beauty and dancing skill.

Balle se Hamu
meel toko iy rubbu gosse

Balle of Hamu

⁷ The opposing interpretations of Dakara's and Ello's “going away for love” must be considered elsewhere in a discussion on “gender roles” in Arbore.

on one piece of land he grew sorghum

Balle is the older brother of Hamu. His achievement is that he was the first one to cultivate a new piece of land in Arbore territory.

Jimm bitta Marole
Moh hokkolanaana,
Moh beddana gididi
Danzadda aygedda
Jimm niibay walsaasa

The age mates of Marole
 Even the one who is limping
 Even the one who is ugly
 They call beautiful
 The age mates hold together immensely

The strong bonds of the age-mates are praised in these lines. Marole is an age-set and the support its members can expect from each other is as strong as the responsibility they have for each other. As they will grow together, they will dance and hunt together, share secrets and create new songs, will live out in the cattle camps, will praise, discuss, criticize and help each other, carry out rituals and spend countless moments in the course of their lives in active exchange. Being age-mates means taking care of the bonds with the ones who will always stay together. “Even the one who is limping they call beautiful”. With many shortcomings, everyone can be sure of his/her age-mate’s sympathy, but at the same time, failure in respecting the age-mate’s community will be seriously dealt with, in discussions and with punishment:

“Somebody who rejects a ritual like that (an age-mate’s ritual) has no way to go. If one marries, the age-mates will do all your rituals for you. You do not have other age-mates. If one rejects an age-set ritual, then he rejects his age-mates, doesn’t he? Then you have no other age-set. ‘So left out and lonely you will be.’ If someone would refuse [to participate], one would say this to him.” (Ginno, November 2002).

Comment on the *Aar arangyalle*

Aar arangyalle is one of the favorite and most important songs for nightly dances, for age-mates’ dances and for weddings. It belongs to the oldest

Arbore songs and thus is the heritage of all Arbore. *Aar arangyalle* is mainly danced on the *naab*, the central dancing place of the Arbore villages and it is sung and danced mainly by girls and boys and men together. The base sound layer is created by the boys and men's voices, the leading parts, from which the lyrics are drawn, are solo parts sung by boys and men. The girls accompany the song with clapping woods and with their clinging anklets when dancing.

I have not commented too much on the song lines as many stand well for themselves. Praise, which is simply not found in daily conversation, is found here in many forms. The answer about the good singer has found its hiding place. Here it can be sung, almost every other night. One can find various aspects for praise adding to the "usual" praise of bravery in warfare and hunting that is prominent in many other songs that are performed in Arbore. What is praised in *Aar arangyalle* is bravery shown in long travels, the skills of the good singers, the nights when all together turn dance into splendor, the beauty of the beautiful, the value of the age-mates, the one who found love far away, the one who dared to do something first. To find also more casual values so clearly formulated in one of the most cherished Arbore songs is interesting in many aspects. Unlike the large body of hunters' songs of the genres *gobba* and *meerata*, where the vigilance of the killer and the hunter are praised, the song *Aar arangyalle* belongs to the few genuine Arbore songs whose purity in language, form and performance is carefully watched and protected by the community. The paradox that one of the most "traditional" songs praises virtues that are more casual than outstanding and whose tenor is rather innovative than traditionalist, deserves attention. The prominent quality of the *Aar arangyalle* is not only the reinforcement of the existing values that praise always implies but also its sense for values like aesthetics and innovation in general. It expresses attitudes, it potentializes thought and actions and thus opens an imaginary dimension to be creative, virtuous or innovative in a positive way. This is especially interesting for the processes and discourses around cultural change. *Aar arangyalle* contains information on cultural values that are regularly being experienced collectively during the nightly dances. As such it forms an important part of Arbore identification processes.

Conclusion – In which song to land?

"Is there any good in saying everything?"
(Basho *in* R. Hass, 1994: 234)

I have tried to show how songs' lyrics convey thoughts and sentiments for which the rules of everyday speaking and behavior do not leave much space. In song, scolding and praise rich in metaphor are placed in a surrounding that embraces their presence. A space is created where that which is sung can move and create meanings and resonances. These resonances express parts of Arbore

culture that are hardly found in “smooth talk”. Much information on history, ethics and emotion in Arbore is kept in song rather than in speech and their description can add significantly to other sources.⁸

I have given much space to the description of entities like *galshum*, *bobba* and age-mates as well as commenting on details of apparent meanings in the text and of possibly intended meanings in a wider context. Only then is it possible to understand the use of the terms in the songs and their evocative effects and the aims of the message, to finally evaluate the role of the song in its cultural setting (Vansina 1985:83ff). The intensity of the lines, the repetitions, the exaggerations, the analogies and the play of people, experience and place help to understand how people are and who they (do not) want to be.

One feature of Arbore songs is their function as caskets that might be opened. From the moment they are opened “a new dimension, the dimension of intimacy has just opened up” (Bachelard, 1994: 85). What might be a whisper in smooth talk we find resounding in songs. Bachelard recognizes the intimacy, the “hidden in men and the hidden in things as a region of the superlative”. As soon as one puts it back in discourse (the comparative) something happens: “And to tell the truth, all positivity makes the superlative fall back upon the comparative. To enter into the domain of the superlative, we must leave the positive for the imaginary. We must listen to poets” (Bachelard, 1994: 89). The places and moments of poetical and musical imaginary, the parts that evoke the whole, the placing for the said and the sung I have tried to describe as an ongoing activity in the constitution of identity. The same song might work as a reinforcing agent for cultural norms for the collective as well as providing possible places of imaginary individual and innovative identification with potential effects of action and behavior. I went into such detail based on the claim “that not all forms of musically articulated “identity” are the same” (Born and Hesmondhalgh, 2000: 36), not even in a single song (see also Blacking, 1995: 38ff).

I have abandoned the description of the musical and performative element in favor of the analysis of the narrative.⁹ It is clear that only in combination

⁸ Many of the excellent descriptions in the major contributions of Gebre, Miyawaki and Tadesse e.g. about warfare, agriculture and the age-set system have counterparts in Arbore music. In some cases the respective songs and performances are essential elements in the social creation of these parts of Arbore culture.

⁹ “Beyond the event as such, the real and significant historical fact which these narratives highlight is the memory itself” (A. PORTELLI, 1991:26). Although the particularity of the description of places and people gives a hint on their concrete historical background I have not entered a discussion about the historical verification of individual events mentioned in the songs. Instead I tried to attend closely “to those means of fabulation that become the instrumentalities of fact” (S. TYLER, I. STRECKER, C. MEYER 2000: 8).

with music do all these experiences, memories and feelings find their appropriate enunciation. To represent them as mere narratives does not sufficiently acknowledge their quality. The difficulty of this task also lies in the paradox of writing about what only sound can convey, always in danger of lingering in “sheer speculation” (Zuckermandl, 1956). Nevertheless, a fuller description should not only reveal songs as a space for sentiments that are not expressed in daily conversation but also as a space for sound “that wounds or pleasures in the audience, those places in the body that have no language either” (Certeau 1984:162). The fact that certain modes of verbal and emotional expression are kept in songs and then are combined with music into a rich semiotic mode allows some speculation on how they work in affective ways:

“Propositions and linguistic arguments about identity may even become emotionally heated, but because they call for mediated, word-based evaluations, they do not provide the feeling or direct experience *of* belonging; rather they are claims and arguments *about* belonging. The other arts involve iconicity and indexicality and have their distinct potentials for creating emotion and identity. But they typically do not engage large groups of people collectively in the actual doing of the activity that results in the experience of social synchrony. This is one of the special potentials of participatory music and dance.” (Turino 1999: 241).

Both songs I discussed are sung and danced collectively and provide communal experiences that form “social synchronies” in content and performance. Both songs provide explicit or implicit evaluations of Arbore values, norms and attitudes. The praise song reinforces positive aspects of Arbore identity, the condemnation song reflects up on the violation of Arbore morality. They represent and remind, they reflect and they constitute at the same time. And they are *mobile*, constantly subject to change. They work constitutively as invitation, temptation and threat, not only through imaginary identification and collective experience but also in its material dimension as a “casket”. Because every song is open for new lines, everybody could become subject of a song and end up in a song. Expression of praise and condemnation of behavior and events serve to position actors and acts. They provide a forum to identify the norms and values through which a self-understanding is created. The songs are the means where this constantly reverberates. They are the place to celebrate to do things well, to warn of the loss of virtue, to remember what it means to be Arbore and to imagine what would be lost if this challenge were not fulfilled.

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