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Oral poetry as herding tool: a study of cattle songs as children's art and cultural exercise among the Guji-Oromo in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

African societies attach great value to folksongs but the literature on African verbal arts has so far paid little attention to the role of children in performance oral arts. Similarly, the existing body of literature on Oromo folksongs places its empirical focus and analytical emphasis on the role of adults, neglecting the role of children in the performance and utilization of folksongs. In this article, based on empirical data from the Guji-Oromo of Ethiopia, I argue that children are capable actors in performance of folksongs and construing their social world through it. I analyse the way the children of the Guji-Oromo perform a type of folksong known as 'cattle songs' (locally called as *wedduu loonii*) and document its connection to the everyday life and culture of their society. Through demonstrating the capacity of children to use songs as a way of understanding their environment and performing their cultural roles, I argue that cattle songs are a cultural exercise that reflects as well as shapes the bond between human beings and their environment. Data discussed in this article was gathered through 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork among the Guji-Oromo in the years 2013 and 2014.

WALTIQABO

Ummattoota Afrikaa kessatti Afoolli bakka guddaa qaba garuu qorannoon gama kanaan godhame bayyee muraasadha. Qorannowan jiranilee Afoollii aadaa jaarsaa fi maanguddoo akka ta'etti waan xinxalaaniif beekumsi ijoolleen Afoolaa irratti qabdu fi akkaataa ijoolleen Afoolaa keessaan waa'ee naannoo ishee barattuu dagatamee jira. Waraqaa qorannoo kiyya kana kessatti, odeeffannoo qabatamaa Gujii-Oromoo kessaa walttiqabe irraatti hundaa'ee, akkaataa ijoolleen Afoolaa fayyadamuun waa'ee naannoo ishee barattu fi addunyaa keessa jirtu beektu agarsiisa. Kessummattu, akkaataa ijoolleen Gujii-Oromoo Afoola 'weedduu loonii' jedhamu xabattu xinxalee beekumsa gama kanna dhokatee jiru mul'isa. Akkataa kanaan, weedduun loonii aadaa uumaa fi uummata, dhala-namaa fi naannoo isaa walitti hidhe ta'uu isaa agarsiisa. Oddeeffaanoo waraqaa kana keessa jiru kanaan walttiqabe bara 2013 fi 2014 kessa jira kudhaniif ummata Gujii-Oromoo waliin jiraachudahan.

KEYWORDS

folksongs; cattle songs; *wedduu loonii*; children; Guji-Oromo; Ethiopia

JECHOOTA UOO

weedduu; weedduu-loonii; Ijoollee; Gujii-Oromoo; Etopia

Introduction

In various African cultures, the performance of verbal arts in general and folksongs in particular has been highly valued as art, but also as conveyor of the knowledge and wisdom of adults and elders (Burton 1998; Deng 1973; Eyoh 2011; Finnegan 2007; Lindfors 1977). As a result, studies of African verbal arts emphasize the roles of adults and the elderly in oral performance and have given little attention to the capacity of children in connecting folksongs, folktales, and riddles to their living social and cultural contexts (Okafor 2004; Scheub 1985; Vansina 1971). Finnegan (1970, 1992, 2007) and Okpewho (1992) present the performance of folksongs as demonstration of adults' ability to use tone and gesture as well as melody and rhythm, through forms that involve dramatization and humour, to shape the receptivity and reactions of the audience. Such remarkable studies have so far placed little analytical emphasis on the potential roles of children in enacting the artistic beauty of folksongs, and interpreting the meanings inherent in them as part of their living social interactions and livelihood practices.

Similarly, studies on Oromo verbal arts, besides being limited, have concentrated exclusively on adults and the elderly as bearers of skills and knowledge in the performance of folksongs. The existing studies show adults and the elderly as key actors in the performance and interpretation of the various forms of the Oromo folksongs such as *gerarsa* (patriotic songs), *weddu* (love, work songs), *qexala* (ritual songs), *sirba* (dance) and *ilille* (ululation) which are the important elements of work events, rituals, ceremonies, expressions of political resistance and other social and cultural occasions (Eshete 2008; Hussen 2005). This is clear from Van de Loo (1991), who discusses the relation between folksongs and the Oromo religion, and presents Oromo folksongs as integral parts of adult cultural practices and everyday life.

An analysis of the Guji-Oromo folksongs as shown in Van de Loo (1991) reflects how the performance of customary practices and verbal arts is understood solely as the culture of the senior members of the society, and how children's role in ensuring the continuity of such cultural thickness is missing. Similar studies on Oromo folksongs reflect how adults use folksongs to express their sentiments and resistance to political suppression and exploitation. Hussen (2005) who presents Oromo folksongs as a performance that connects the past to the present, also argues that Oromo songs embody the inherent values, world outlook, communication style, and traditional art of adult men and women depicting them as knowledgeable actors in this cultural process. However, the place of Oromo children in performing folksongs as channels between nature and human acts, and reflecting the indigenous patterns of life among the Oromo, is not clear from these studies. In more recent times, although the focus is on how children perform and interpret folktales and riddles, there is an emerging interest in researching children's folklore (Jirata 2011, 2012; Jirata and Benti 2013; Jirata and Simonsen 2014). However, in one of the few discussions, Jirata (2013) shows how Oromo children are active in the performance and interpretation of folktales and riddles and that less attention is still given to children's capability in the performance of folksongs, as folksongs are considered to be parts of adults' culture and knowledge. The role of Oromo children in the performance of folksongs has still not been given attention.

The body of literature on African children's folksongs is growing but there is a strong analytical emphasis on form and content, and less attention has been given to how

children use folksongs to understand their social world. For instance, Mtonga (2012) and Blacking (1967) who discuss Zambian and Venda children's songs respectively, demonstrate the rich and diverse form and content of African children's songs and games, but they limit their analyses to showing how children use the songs and the games to learn from their social environment. In the same manner, Mushengyezi (2008) discusses children's play-songs in Uganda, but presents folksongs as a less child-centred performance. Mushengyezi observes that children's songs are intended for children but are dominated by adult-focused themes in layered language that only adults can interpret. According to Mushengyezi, children's folksongs focus on children but children may not understand their underlying meanings as these meanings are adult-centred. Mushengyezi further argues that only adults are knowledgeable and skilful in understanding and using folksongs. As can be observed from these studies, empirical knowledge on children's capacity in producing folksongs creatively and artistically, and understanding their social world through it, has been missing from the scholarship.

The purpose of this article is to analyse how children perform folksongs and how, through their performances, they demonstrate their artistic ability and contribute to the continuity of the tradition of the society they live with. More specifically, the article introduces a form of folksong known as cattle songs (*wedduu loonii* in the Oromo language), conceptualizes the interconnection between this form of folksong and children's artistic ability, and discusses the role of children in the perpetuation of cultural practices through oral performances. In doing so, the article presents children as experts in the performance of folksongs, and as actors in demonstrating the interface between verbal arts and everyday life. The article has been divided into six subsections. First I shall briefly discuss the methodology, after which follows an outline of the contexts and performance of cattle songs. The next section contains a discussion of cattle songs as a form of socialization of children into the culture of the Guji-Oromo, and then I discuss cattle songs as containers of knowledge about animal husbandry, concluding by returning to my argument that cattle songs are an expression of cultural values and a container of knowledge.

Social context and methodology of the study

This article discusses folksongs in the context of the social and cultural practices of children among the Guji-Oromo, who speak Oromo language – one of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia – and live on cattle rearing in the southern part of Ethiopia (Van de Loo 1991). The Guji-Oromo reside in rural areas and subsist on traditional agriculture with cattle rearing as their main cultural and economic activity (Hinnant 1977; Beriso 1995). As I have argued elsewhere Jirata and Simonsen (2004) the Guji-Oromo attach two-fold values to folksongs, cattle and cattle herding tradition. The first is the value of performing folksongs to present cattle as a symbol of abundance and fertility. In line with this value, folksongs are used to recognize a person who has a large number of cattle as prosperous (*dureessa*). Cattle and the products they yield are integral elements of the customary practices of the Guji-Oromo. Rituals involve the slaughtering of a bull (*qorma-qala*) which is a symbolic presentation of homage to the supernatural power (Van de Loo 1991). Through their verbal arts, the Guji-Oromo praise cattle as cultural symbols that represent the relationship between human beings and the supernatural power.

The second value of cattle that the Guji-Oromo recognize through their verbal arts is related to the economic benefits that show the place of cattle in sustaining life for the people (Jirata 2013). For example, animal products such as milk, meat and butter serve as popular food items. Children and adults use milk as staple food, mainly, in the lowland areas (Beriso 2004). Verbal arts play a central role in interpersonal and intergroup communications among the Guji-Oromo. The majority of Guji-Oromo people are not able to read and write. They depend on oral forms of communication, which means that the various forms of verbal arts such as oral narratives, songs, expressions and performances act as crucial recurrent forms of knowledge transmission and information sharing (Jirata 2013).

The data discussed in this article was drawn from the social and cultural contexts related to the traditions of cattle herding, cattle ownership and everyday life through 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork which I carried out with children and their parents in 3 rural villages of the Guji-Oromo. My ethnographic fieldwork activities included participant observations and ethnographic interviews with children and their parents in cattle herding fields, at homes and in workplaces. I managed to establish myself as an 'adult friend' of the children through reciprocal and continuous interactions in their multiple places and contexts (Figure 1).

Through these methods, I generated data about how the children lead cattle from villages to distant grazing fields, and back from the grazing fields to the villages, how they perform cattle songs when they lead their cattle, how they explain their experiences of cattle herding activities, and the ways they express their social and natural environments through cattle songs. I also documented children's performances of the songs and their views about the songs during staying with the children in cattle herding fields. Through the participant observation and the interview activities, I learnt how children interpret their interaction and relationships with cattle and how they construe the cattle songs.



Figure 1. The author with his teachers: the children teaching him their cattle songs.

I also elicited from parents conversations about the values that the Guji-Oromo attach to cattle and how cattle herding is perceived to be children's social role. My participations, observations and interviews were based on the full interest and consents of the children and their parents which I obtained through extended stays and interactions with the people in the villages. Thirty children (13 girls and 17 boys) and 11 parents (5 fathers and 6 mothers) who were randomly selected from the people in the villages were interviewed. I focused on children between 7 and 14 years old. The fact that I am a native speaker of the Oromo language, my familiarity with the Guji-Oromo culture, as well as my ethnic affinity with the society enabled me to establish a close relationship with adults and children, to participate in social and cultural events in the villages easily, and to become friendly with children across different places and observe their everyday activities. I used field notes and audio recorders to record the data from the observations and interviews. All data used in this article was translated from the Oromo language into English. In the translations, I have tried to maintain the poetic quality of the songs in English.

Contexts and performance of cattle songs

Cattle songs are traditional lyrics using iambic sound patterns (the pattern in which a short beat of sound is followed by a long one) that the Guji-Oromo children sing loudly and artistically whenever they lead cattle from home to grazing fields, and from grazing fields to home. While the cattle walk straight to their grazing fields in the morning and back to homes in the evening, a child who shepherds the cattle follows the cattle from behind and sings cattle songs. She/he composes the songs in attractive rhythms and rhymes with images reflecting her/his human and natural environments. Put in other words, in the performance of a cattle song, the Guji-Oromo child produces verses that contain couplets embodying images and symbols that reflect the values and livelihoods of pastoral communities. In the first line of each couplet, the child creates images of the cultural and natural setting (animals, physical environment) by which she/he can easily contextualize the meaning of the songs she/he performs. It is also in the couplets that the child uses a rhyme-scheme to produce poetic sound patterns as in the following verses. (Throughout the article, the songs are labelled as V1, V2 ... where V stands for 'verse'.)

- V1 Black with a long tail, black with a long tail
Honour for its owner, my cow stands in kraal
- V2 Lizards in hills, lizards in hills
My cow with fifty calves
- V3 My bulls with gentle legs, my cows with gentle legs
Graze in the distant fields

In original language:

- V1 Guraacha eegee yuubaa, guraacha eegee yuubaa,
Gurra warra boddoyyee, Daaleen boroo duuba.
- V2 Gaaraa irra yaati lootuun, gaaraa irra yaati lootuun,
Shantama horii hootu.
- V3 Korma dalluu kottee, wodoo dalluu kottee.
Ooliin soxxee.

By producing the first lines in the above verses, the children have depicted the images of animals (big black cow as in V1, large number of lizards moving in hills as in V2, a group of cows and bulls grazing in a field as in V3) and created patterns of sound that are at the heart of the musicality of the cattle song performance. While they presented, in the first line in each verse, images and symbols and created the musicality and melody, in the second line, they depicted the message of the verse (see V2 and V3). Through such performances, the children have shown the musicality and poetic quality of the cattle songs (their tone, voice and melody) which is a feature common to the various forms of Oromo folksongs, as discussed by Hussen (2005) and Van de Loo (1991). Children perform cattle songs to a non-human audience (the cattle) and this feature makes cattle songs distinct from the other forms of African folksongs (Finnegan 1992; Okpewho 1992). In other words, it is in the presence of the cattle, and not a human audience, that children's performance of cattle song makes sense.

When two or more children herd cattle together, they perform the song turn in turn. In the performance of cattle songs, which is a solo performance art form, the Guji-Oromo children are different from the Shona children who perform songs in chorus and use it as means of an interactive apprenticeship (Nyota and Mapara 2008). Similarly, the Venda children as discussed by Blacking (1967) do the chorus performances of songs with dances and musical instruments. This is also different from the way the Guji-Oromo children perform cattle songs, since they do not include dancing and musical instruments. All Guji-Oromo children are capable of singing cattle songs but they are different in their level of creativity and the skill of their performance. The variation in the of level creativity and skill of performance is mostly based on age difference, which means the older the child is, the better she or he is creative and skilful in artistic performances that require a high volume of sound, an attractive melody and tone, and striking rhythm and rhyme. Such age based differences in the performance of folksongs has already been discussed by Mtonga (2012) who has written about children's folksongs and games in Zambian culture. Unlike children's songs in Venda culture that Blacking (1967) categorizes as 'girls' songs' and 'boys' songs', gender-based difference in the performance of cattle song among the Guji-Oromo is seldom observable because both girls and boys of similar ages are equally competent.

As cattle herding is children's primary role among the Guji-Oromo, cattle songs are perceived to be distinctively a children's artistic performance and are child-centred oral practices. The following conversation (with Turi, a 50-year-old man) portrays how adults describe performances of cattle songs as a child-centred traditional practice.

- TJ Do you know cattle songs?
 Turi Yes, I know them. I was good at singing cattle songs when I was a child.
 TJ Do not you sing cattle songs when you herd cattle today?
 Turi I used to sing when I was a child. Today, I do not sing cattle songs.
 TJ Why do you not sing cattle songs?
 Turi Because, adults do not sing cattle songs. Cattle songs are children's songs.

In original language

- TJ Weedduu loonii nibeekta?
 Turi Nibeeka. Duri yeroo ijoollummaa niweeddisa ture.
 TJ Ammaan tana yeroo loon bobbaaftu weedduu loonii niweedifta?
 Turi Duri yeroo ijoollumma niweeddisa ture. Ammaan tana garuu hinweeddisu.

TJ Ammaan tana maaliif hinweedinne?
 Turi Nami guddaan weedduu loonii hinweeddiftu. Weedduu loonii ijoolleetu weeddisa.

Children's view on this point is not different from that of adults, as illustrated in the following conversation with two children (Bonnise and Tamenech, both are 9-year-old girls) who came from different households but were in school when I interviewed them.

TJ Do you know cattle songs?
 Bonnise and Tamenech [smiling] Yes, we know some.
 TJ Can you sing one?
 Bonnise and Tamenech [smiling] We do not sing cattle songs here. We sing when we lead cattle to grazing fields and back home.
 TJ Do adults also sing cattle songs?
 Bonnise Adults do not sing cattle songs.
 TJ Why do you think they do not sing?
 Bonnise Because they are not children. They do not know cattle songs.

As can be noticed from the conversations, the performance of cattle songs is considered to be children's expressive arts that connect the children to their societies. It is also notable that the performance of cattle songs is owned and controlled by children.

In original language

TJ Weedduu loonii weeddisu nibeektu?
 Bonnise and Tamenech [kollaa] Nibeekna.
 TJ Takka weeddisaa mee.
 Bonnise and Tamenech [Kollaa] Weedduu loonii bakka kanatti hinweeddisani. Weedduu loonii yeroo loon bobbaasan weeddisani.
 TJ Nami guddaan weedduu loonii niweeddisa?
 Bonnise Nami guddaan weedduu loonii hinweeddisu.
 TJ Maaliif hinweeddifne?
 Bonnise Weedduu loonii ijoolleetu beeka. Nama guddaan hinbeeku.

Two further points are observable from the conversations above. The first is that both adults and children consider singing cattle songs as a childhood tradition and children's oral wisdom. At the same time, they understand that cattle songs are artistic site through which children relate themselves to the adult world and comprehend adult values. This reflects that the tradition of singing is supposed to be children's shared entertainment practice. The fact that children resist adult beliefs and values is attributed to the emergence of children's own knowledge and culture. The second is that children perform cattle songs in the context of cattle herding which is a regular duty of children. The notion that children's lore is used to draw the relationship and at the same time mark the difference between childhood and adulthood is supported by what Argenti (2010) and Ekrem (2000) have argued in their studies of African and Finnish folklore respectively. Such a connection of cattle songs to childhood represents the potential of cattle herding activities to create contexts for children through which they produce and reproduce their folklore that connects them to adults and at the same time distinguish themselves from adults.

Children's performance of cattle songs is a reflection of Guji people's values for cattle and children's expressive potential of verbal arts. For instance, children reproduce the songs in line with sex, colour and behaviour of the animal they sing for. When I met 2

children (Getu, an 11-year-old boy and Ashebir, a 10-year-old boy) in a cattle herding field, I observed them while they were creatively performing the following verses of the cattle songs.

- V4 Getu Daalee¹ is good, Daalee is good
When my mother is milking Daalee; her joy is full.
- V5 Ashebir Goobee² is good, Goobee is good,
When my father is farming by Goobee; his produce is full.
- V6 Ashebir Goobee loves song,
It walks quickly when I sing.
- V7 Getu Daalee loves song,
When I sing, it does not stop walking.
- V8 Getu The rich eats meat, my Goobee becomes fat.
The rich drinks milk, my Daalee gives milk.
- V9 Getu She is honoured; owner of Daalee is honoured,
She drinks milk and eats butter.
- V10 Ashebir He is honoured; owner of Goobee is honoured,
He eats meat and owns birr (money).

In original language

- V4 Daaleen lammacha, daleen lammacha,
Haati Daalee elemmattu gammachuun dacha.
- V5 Goobeen lammacha, goobeen lammacha,
Abbaan goobeen qotate gammachuun dacha.
- V6 Goobe weeddun tola, Goobe weedduun tola,
Weedisaaniif beeka saffiseetu deema.
V7. Daaleen weedduu jaallata , Daaleen weedduu jaallata,
Yeroo weedisaanuuf beeka saffiseetu deema.
- V8 Dureessi foon nyaata, Goobeen dikkise,
Dureessi aanan una, Daaleen mirgise.
- V9 Soreetti, haati Daalee Sooretti,
Feete dhaha nyaatte, feete aanan unti.
- V10 Sorressa, abbaan Goobe sorressa
Fedhu foon nyaatee, fedhu qarshii roobsa

The children vocalized the verses artistically in high pitch tones and with an attractive melody, targeting the two different animals: Goobee (a bull) and Daalee (a cow). Both children referred to both animals as ‘good’ but expressed them differently by associating them to different contexts – the cow to a woman and milk (see V5) but the bull to a man and farming (see V4). This association reflects Guji-Oromo’s construction of gender roles in which milking cows, preserving milk and producing butter are considered to be women’s social roles, whereas cultivating land and producing food crops are men’s duties. The children stated the names, sexes and colour of the cattle in the first lines of the verses but produced the second lines of the verses to express the economic and cultural values of the particular cattle. Thus, it is by depending on the cultural and economic positions of the cattle that the children produce verses of the song. For example, the verse ‘The rich eat meat, my Goobee becomes fat’ is different from the verse ‘The rich drink milk, my Daalee gives milk’ as the former connects wealth to meat and the bull and the later relates wealth to milk and the cow (see V8). Similarly, in the verses ‘She is honoured; owner of Daalee is honoured, she drinks milk and eats butter’ (see V9), honour is related to the cow that gives milk and butter. However, in

the verses 'He is honoured; owner of *Goobee* is honoured, he eats meat and owns *birr*' (see V10), honour is related to bull which is a source of meat (food) and money. In such a way, the songs present the cattle and products of the cattle as symbols of honour and prosperity. What is notable from this scenario is that through contextual production and reproductions of the song, the children not only perform cattle songs, but also practice how to use voice and language creatively to share the customary practices of the society they live in, as also discussed by Blacking (1967) in Venda culture. Similar to the Venda children's song, the words and expressions in the Guji children's song give a deeper insight to Oromo culture and its relation to cattle herding.

The other important point that we can note from the conversation is that the performance of cattle songs has a specific place and time, and out of this place and time children perceive it as losing its meaning. For example, when I asked children in the classroom, 'Do you know cattle songs?' the majority of them responded 'yes'. However, when I asked them to perform the songs, some of them laughed at me and the others kept quiet. I also heard some children murmuring, 'There are no cattle here'. In this situation, I learnt that classrooms were not the appropriate places for performing cattle songs which requires the presence of cattle as an audience. The reality that children's songs are connected to time and place is widely discussed by Blacking (1967) and shows the similarity between children's songs among Guji-Oromo and Venda society. By performing folksongs, children become loud and self-assertive. Most children's songs mimic adults' songs (Argenti 2010) but the cattle songs of the Guji children have little rhythmic and melodic resemblance with the adult songs. Cattle songs embody childhood, environment and family while adult songs contain interpersonal interactions, the interaction between humankind and supernatural power and challenges in the everyday life of the Guji-Oromo.

Cattle songs for socialization of children into the culture of the Guji-Oromo

Cattle songs and cattle herding activities are closely associated with children among the Guji-Oromo in many ways. First, fathers sing cattle songs when they put the umbilical cord of a newly born baby boy in the mouth of a heifer. They embellish such events by singing:

My baby, an addition to my clan; for the Guji, cattle are close kin
 A baby kin to cattle is joyful, a baby without cattle is sorrowful
 This heifer is loved by its owner, and made its owner prosperous

In original language

Annuu kiyjaa, sanyii kiyjaa, Keenna Gujiif loon finna,
 Annuun finna loon gammada, annuun loon malee rakkina,
 Abbaan Jabbiin falata, jabbiin abbaa jaallata.

This performance symbolizes the tradition of celebrating the cultural bond between cattle and human beings as kin and as interdependent. An informant, Dube (a 60-year-old man) expressed that this practice is done to socialize children into cattle herding tradition which is the prime value of the Guji-Oromo and to teach them that cattle are kin that enable life

for the society. Second, cattle herding and cattle songs are the lore and responsibility of children in the tradition of verbal art and household labour division of the Guji-Oromo. During my fieldwork in the villages, I observed that all children (both boys and girls) aged 5–12 years were actively participating in the cattle herding activities as their main duties (Figure 2).

They attend school for half a day (from 8 am to 12 am) and devote the rest of their days to herding cattle. Through singing songs as part of their herding activities, the children socialize themselves into the Guji ways of life and exercise the style of communication among the pastoralist society that entails, according to Brocklesby, Hopley, and Scott-Villiers (2010), competence in the use of voice and language for learning about their social environment. This was also evident from statements of adults who asserted that cattle songs are the mechanism through which the Guji-Oromo children learn the values that their society attaches to owning large number of cattle and children. The following text has been taken from the interview with Shumbulo (a 50-year-old man) and illustrates the values that the Guji attach to cattle and children, and which the children learn through singing cattle songs.

Children are prosperity. Cattle are prosperity. Somebody who has many children and many heads of cattle is blessed. Both cattle and children are necessary for a household to sustain. I am blessed in this regard. I have cattle and I have children. My children herd my cattle and my cattle support my children.

In original language

Ijoolleen badhaadha. Loon badhaadha. Nami ijoollee fi loon baayyee qabu badhaadha. Jiruu jiraachuuf ijoollee fi loon qabaachuun barbaachisa. Ani badhadhan qaba, ijoolle fi loon wantan qabuuf. Ijoolleen kiyya loon kiyyaa tiksit. Loon kiyyaa moo ijoollee kiyyaa guddifti.

Through cattle songs children learn that a household in which there is no child (or fewer children than expected) cannot have labour for herding cattle and such a household is referred to as unlucky (*iyessa*). It is also through cattle songs that children learn how



Figure 2. Friendship between children and his cattle.

cattle represent wealth and fertility and are considered to be fortune and prosperity (Beriso 2002; Jirata 2013). Through their exercises with cattle songs, children understand that among the Guji-Oromo, ownership of large stock of cattle is expressed as wetness (*jiidha*) and to own many children is understood as blessing (*badhadha*). It is also observable that a household that owns both is known as a fortunate family (*Warra Duressa*.)

The Guji-Oromo children articulate the strong connection between cattle herding and cattle songs which they illustrate through the following text. The text is taken from the interview I made with two children (Temesgen, 12-year-old boy and Desta, 8-year-old boy) in a cattle herding field where they were looking after cattle in the day time.

- TJ [to both children] I know that you attend school. I also often meet you in this field. How are you able to combine school attendance and cattle herding?
- Temesgen I go to school in the mornings and herd cattle in the afternoons.
- TJ Which one do you like more? Is it cattle herding or going to school?
- Temesgen I like cattle herding more.
- Desta I also like cattle herding more.
- TJ Why do you like cattle herding more?
- Temesgen I love cattle and cattle songs. When I am in a cattle herding field, I can sing cattle songs. I can also meet my friends and play with them.
- Desta I also love to be with cattle.
- TJ [to Desta] why do you love to be with cattle?
- Desta My cattle are my friends. I sing songs for them and they love me.
- TJ How do you know that the cattle you are herding love you and your song?
- Temesgen When I call their names and sing for them, they come to me; they respond by looking towards me or by growling.
- TJ Does each head of cattle have a name?
- Temesgen Yes, each bull, cow, heifer, and calf has its own name.
- TJ Who gives a name to each head of cattle?
- Temesgen It is me and my father.
- TJ How?
- Temesgen According to the colour of the animal. For example, if a cow is white, its name is *Daalee*. If it has mixed colours, its name is *Burree*. If it is dark, its name is *Gurree*.

In original language

- Temesgen Sa'atii duraa mina barumsaa deema, sa'atii booda loon tiksaa.
- TJ Kam irraa feeta? Loon tiksuu moo mina barumsaa deemuu?
- Temesgen Ani loon tiksuu irra fedha.
- Desta Anis akkasuma.
- TJ Maaliif loon tiksuu fedha jette?
- Temesgen Looni fi weedduu loonii jaalladha. Yeroon loon tiksuu weedduu loonii weeddisaa xabadha. Bakka loon tiksutti, ijoollee waliinis nixabadha.
- Desta Anis loon waliin ooluu fedha.
- TJ [Destaf] Loon waliin ooluu maaliif filatte?
- Desta Loon kiyya jaala kiyya. Waan weedduu weeddisuuf najaallatani.
- TJ Loon akka s'i fi weedduu kee jaallatan akkamiin beekte?
- Temesgen Yeroon weeddisu weedduu keessa maqaa dhawu, gara kiyyaa dhufan, nalalaa maarratani.
- TJ Loon hundi maqaa mataa isaanii qabani?
- Temesgen Eewo, loon hundi, (kormi, saani, goromsi, dibichi) maqaa qabani.
- TJ Eenyutuu loon maqaa baasa?
- Temesgen Anaa fi abbaa kiyyaa.

TJ Akkamiin?
 Temesgen Akkaata bifa looniin maqaa baasani. Bifaan adii yootaate, Daalee jedhani. Bifaan walkessa yootaate, Burree jedhani. Gurracha yootaate, Gurree jedhani.

An extract from the interview with two girls (Dureti, 10 years old and Soreti, 11 years old) in a cattle herding field also reflects the strong connection between cattle herding and cattle song.

TJ [to both girls] I often see you in cattle herding fields. When do you go to school?
 Soreti I go to school in the mornings and herd cattle in the afternoons.
 Dureti Me, too.
 TJ Which do you like more: going to school or herding cattle?
 Soreti I like both. But, to herd cattle is better than to go to school.
 Dureti For me cattle herding is better than going to school.
 TJ; [to both girls] Why do you say cattle herding is better?
 Soreti When we herd cattle, we can sing songs, we can play with each other and with other children also. At school, it is not possible to play. Teachers do not allow us to play.
 Dureti Here in the cattle herding fields, we can sing cattle songs, play games and tell stories. At school, we sit in the classroom and learn.

In original language

TJ [durree lameeniif] Yeroo hunda bakka tikkee kanatti siinarga. Yeroo akkam mina barumsa deenta?
 Soreti Sa'atii duraa mina barumsaa deema, sa'atii booda loon tiksa.
 Dureti Anis akasuma.
 TJ Kam irra feeta, mina barumsaa deemu moo loon tiksu?
 Soreti Lameenu nifedha. Garuu loon tiksuum irra fedha.
 Dureti Anillee mina barumsaa deemurra loon tiksuu nawayya jedha.
 TJ [durree lameen] Loon tiksuu maliif filatte?
 Soreti Yeroo loon tiksuu ijoolle waliin nixabadha, Weedduu loonii weeddisa. Mina barumsaa kessatti xabachuu hindandayu. Barsiisaan nidhogga.
 Dureti Bakka tikkeetti nixabanna. Mina barumsaatti garuu gola keessa teenne baranna.

All the 30 children included in this study (both girls and boys) have a similar view on cattle herding and cattle songs through which children acquire knowledge about the bond between cattle and human beings in pastoralist societies. The girls and the boys asserted that they enjoy cattle songs and even prefer cattle herding to attending school. The children understand that they have a close relationship with the cattle which they establish through singing cattle songs as part of herding practice (Figure 3).

This in turn reflects children's capability to socialize themselves into the culture of their society through verbal arts. Nyota and Mapara (2008) explain such condition as children's ability to become skilful in the practice valued by their society; in the context of this study, it is to mean children's ability to become skilful in cattle songs and cattle herding to which the Guji-Oromo attach high values. Children reinforce their skill of cattle herding by singing cattle songs and calling each head of cattle by its name as asserted by Temesgen (12-year-old boy), 'They (the cattle) love me because when I call their names and sing for them, they come to me'. The singing, calling and responding interaction between children and the cattle in turn illustrates children's process of learning the deep association between animals and human beings. Through the singing and calling practice, the children exercise how to share love and friendship with their cattle. Similarly, cattle herding

provides children with place and time for peer interaction through which they exercise not only cattle songs but also play practices such as folktales, riddles and everyday stories (Jirata 2011, 2012, 2014). This is also stated by Temesgen (12-year-old boy) as, 'When I am in a cattle herding field, I can sing cattle songs, I can meet my friends and play with them'. Children recognize cattle herding fields as social places where they learn not only how to herd cattle but also the way cultural values and beliefs are expressed through folksongs. This tradition demonstrates how, through performing cattle songs and cattle herding, children understand their contribution to economic sustainability and cultural continuity among their societies (Mtonga 2012; Van de Loo 1991).

Cattle songs as arts of animal husbandry

The children perform cattle songs as arts through which they reinforce their relationship with each head of cattle. The following conversation is an example that denotes how children use songs as art of herding cattle. The conversation took place in a cattle herding field between myself and two children, namely Udessa (11-year-old boy) and Gemede (12-year-old boy).

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| TJ | Can you sing cattle songs? |
| Udessa and Gemede [smiling] | We sing cattle songs when we lead cattle to field or to home. We do not sing when cattle are grazing or resting. |
| TJ | Why? Do you know the reason? |
| Udessa | We sing cattle songs to make the cattle be friendly with us. When we lead cattle without singing cattle songs, the cattle do not act friendly with us. They do not move mannerly and quickly. But, when we sing cattle songs, the cattle move quickly and mannerly. They do not horn each other. They follow each other and move straight as well as fast. |



Figure 3. Children at play with their cattle.

In original language

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| TJ | Weedduu loonii weeddisu dandeeta? |
| Udessa and Gemede [Kollaa] | Weedduu loonii kan weedisu yeroo loon bobbasanu fi galchanu. Yeroo loon dheedanuu fi ciisanu hinweeddisan. |
| TJ | Maaliif? Sababa isaa nibeekta? |
| Udessa | Weedduu loonii kan weedisani loon waareessuu fi amalees-suuf. Weedduu loonii malee loon yoo bobbaasani, loon amala dhaba. Qajeelee siriraan hinboba'u. Weedduu loonii yoo weedisani, loon siriree bobba'a. Walihiwaranu. Walfaanaa yaa'a, safissee deema. |

I stayed with these children in the field until it was evening. When it was evening, the children started leading the cattle back home. Both children were walking behind the cattle and singing cattle songs. The cattle were moving gently and straight home. The children continued singing while I was trying a few songs from my previous experiences. The following were some of the verses the children performed.

| | |
|------------|---|
| V11 Udessa | Grows in group, <u>Qobboo</u> , ³ Let us move to our place in <u>Gambo</u> . ⁴ |
| V12 Gemede | My cattle are in the field, my cattle are in the field, What is wrong with my cattle, the cows are growling. |
| V13 Udessa | In the field, there is no grass, The cattle owner is in a severe stress. |
| V14 Gemede | Cows move to the calves, awesome to see it, Their gazing is voracious, their movement is straight. |
| V15 Gemede | Yesterday was past, yesterday was past, My cattle are healthy as <u>Gandii</u> ⁵ has disappeared. |
| V16 Udessa | A good cattle is there, good cattle is there, It is bad cattle that horns a heifer. |
| V17 Gemede | The kraal is full, the kraal is full, It accommodates the cows, the heifers and the bull. |
| V18 Udessa | I lead you my cattle, I lead you, For you behave normally, I love you. |

In original language

| | |
|------------|---|
| V11 Udessa | Qobboon tutaan guddatti, Deeminne gallaa gambootti. |
| V12 Gemede | Diriir diida oolee, diriir diida oole Diriira malti nyaate, bokkuu marrataa oole |
| V13 Udessa | Marri jigeera baddaa, Malli dhibeera abbaa. |
| V14 Gemede | Galtuu jabbii wanti lowwan midhaksu galtuu jabbii, Maree nyaatee yasicha galti salfii. |
| V15 Gemede | Ani dhagna dubbii kalee dubbaanne ani dhagna, Gandiin biyyaa baddeetti loon gabbina. |
| V16 Udessa | Afuura tolaa bulee abbaan lensaamoo afuura tola, Afuurumaan caqasee goronsa dongora. |
| V17 Gemede | Foonaan battana, lafa teenna Gambooyyo, foonaan battana, Gambo jiritti kurkurtoon qolaa fanxara. |
| V18 Udessa | Qolaan baasa, hadha tiyya loowwanii, qolaan baasa, Doggee Haroo qolati teessoon yaasaa. |

In the meantime, I made the following conversation with the children.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| TJ | Do you enjoy singing cattle songs? |
| Udessa and Gemede [smiling] | Yes. |
| TJ | I am observing that the cattle are moving straight and in an orderly manner. |
| Udessa | Yes, they do that when we sing cattle songs. The cattle love songs and enjoy them. When we sing for them they like us and they neither horn each other nor move into bush. |

In original language

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| TJ | Weedduu loonii weeddisuu jaallata? |
| Udessa and Gemede [Kollaa] | Eewo. |
| TJ | Loowwan kee kinoo siriraan bobba'aa jiru. |
| Udessa | Eewo, weedduu loonii yoon weeddisu akkanatti bobba'ani, Yeroo weeddisu, loon najallatani. Wali hidongorani, kara irraa maqanii bosona hinseenani. |

What is notable from the songs (see V11–18) and the conversation text is how children use cattle songs as cultural sites of creative and artistic performance to humanize their cattle and manage their herding responsibility. When they sing the song, they put their stick on their shoulder, follow their cattle from behind and, walk slowly. They put their lips together and produce a high pitched sound that is followed by verse of the songs. Through such ways of performance, they try to draw the connection between the Guji-Oromo way of life, the cultural and economic benefits of cattle and the art of cattle herding to which the Guji-Oromo attach great values. On one hand, they perform the cattle songs to humanize the cattle to be obedient to the herder, be friendly with each other, and to become mannerly in their actions. They create this community of cattle through the performance of cattle songs. On the other hand, through performing such songs, they develop their abilities in the use of poetic language to express the depth of the relationship between the Guji-Oromo culture, cattle songs and cattle herding. Udessa explained this reality as, 'cattle are disobedient with a child who is not able to sing cattle songs. Children who cannot sing cattle songs cannot manage their herd'. This is to mean a child who is capable in artistic performance of cattle songs is considered to be skilful, knowledgeable and respected among both cattle and human beings on one hand and to have knowledge of the art of animal husbandry on the other hand. Such everyday practice of children denotes children's capability to use verbal arts to strengthen their bond with their environment and to make their social world conducive for achieving their social roles. This reality, in turn, inscribes children as competent performers who can create and recreate their social world through the performance of songs that Blacking (1967) expressed as humanly organized words. Such capability of children is presented by Skinner, Valsiner, and Basnet (1991, 38) as 'continual creation of songs by children as devices for construction of self-understandings and a means of creating social relationships and cultural meanings'. In the context of the Guji-Oromo children, the continual creation of cattle songs is related to formation of smooth and harmonious relationship with cattle and cattle herding contexts as well as humanization of the non-human entities through performance of oral poetry.

Children perform cattle songs not only as cultural site to express the depth of connection between the Guji-Oromo ways of life and animal husbandry but also as an art of entertaining the cattle in the cattle herding fields. The entertainment action involves impressing and engaging the cattle through raising their names in the songs. The following text which is an extract from my field note is an illustration.

It was on 19 June, 2013. Ashagire (11 year old boy) and Elema (10 year old boy) were leading their cattle from a grazing field to home in the evening. I was cooperating with them by leading the cattle home. As soon as we [me and the children] started leading the cattle towards home, Ashagire began singing and Elema followed him. The cattle took their way home. The cattle were moving forward and we were following them. Ashagire and Elema continued singing turn by turn while I was listening and accompanying them. The followings text was taken from the songs performed by the children on the way home.

- V19 Ashagire It is good to sing for cattle,
My cattle love song.
- V20 Elema My Daalee is in the field; my Daalee is in the field,
He eats much grass and lays down under a shade.
- V21 Ashagire Black with long tail, black with long tail,
Fame for its owner, Booqaa⁶ stands in kraal.
- V22 Elema Booqaa is acting gently, Booqaa is acting gently,
My gentle bull learned from my father to behave well.
- V23 Elema My bulls with gentle legs, my cows with gentle legs,
Graze in distant fields.
- V24 Elema The rich man in the bed, the rich man in the bed,
My bull is gorgeous; it has got a big head.
- V25 Ashagire Horned cattle, horned cattle,
The horns of my cattle are as sharp as a needle.

In original language

- V19 Ashagire Weedisaaniif oduu, wedissaniif oduu,
Weedduu dhabelle hintolu.
- V20 Elema Diriiir diida oolee, diriiir diida oole
Diriirfatee ciisee madaqa oole
- V21 Ashagire Guracha eegee yuubaa, guraacha eegee yuubaa
Gurra warra boddoyee, Daaleen boroo duuba
- V22 Elema Booqa daaluu tarsiise, Daaleen daaluu tarsiise,
Booqa kiyya waan abbeen barsiise.
- V23 Elema Korma dalluu kootee, wadoo dalluu kootee,
Ooliin sooxee.
- V24 Elema Buunaan janjura, gurroon warra baddaa buunaan janjura,
Butee nyaatee bukutoo mataan gaaguraa.
- V25 Ashagire Loon abbaa gaafaa, loon abbaa gaafaa,
Gaafi akkaa marfee kutee seena lafa.

When we reached the village, it was not yet time to collect the cattle to their kraal; thus, we kept them in the nearby grazing field. While we were looking after the cattle in the place, I had the following conversation with the children.

- TJ Do cattle make sense of the songs?
- Ashagire Yes. They recognize the songs.
- TJ How do you know that they recognize the songs?

Ashagire When I state the name of a bull or a cow in a song, the bull or the cow responds by growling or looking towards me. That means it is happy with the song. I know when my cattle are happy or unhappy; when they are contented or starved.

In original language

TJ Loon weedduu kee addaa baasanii beeku ?
 Ashagire Ewo, beeku.
 TJ Akka loon weedduu lee adda baasanii beekan akkamitti beekte?
 Ashagire Yeroo weedduu keessaa maaqaa loonii yaame, loon maqaan yaamame ni maar-rata yookaan oljedhee nailaala. Yeroo sani loon weedduu jaallate jechuudha. Akkanaa loon gammadefuu fi dallane, quufee fi beela'e nibeeka.

As shown in the verses and the interview text, through the performance of cattle songs children entertain their cattle and exercise their skill in influencing and managing their environment through artistic expressions. Children address each head of cattle by calling its name in songs (Daalee as in V20; Booqa as in V21, and V22) and such artistic practice symbolizes the potential of children to use poetic language to express the deep connection between nature and humanity. Performances of the songs reinforce the mutual recognition between the cattle and the children and such mutual recognition represents the interdependence between human beings and cattle as well as human beings and their environments. Through cattle songs, the children not only exercise the skill of cattle herding but also express that singing is the art of speaking to nature. Thus, children perform cattle songs not only as part of the art of animal husbandry but also way of forming a pleasant environment through which they can achieve their household responsibilities.

Conclusion

This article shows the great contribution of children to the beauty and continuity of folk-songs and oral performance. It depicts that folksongs are important elements of not only adults' customary practices but also children's everyday social and cultural activities. The performance of folksongs is an art of life that children use to reinforce their relationship with their herd and recreate at ease conditions to achieve their social roles effectively. In other words, singing cattle songs is used by the children as a central element of the herding activity and as a means of acquiring skills and styles of communication among their pastoral society. It also connects children to the society in which they live. As cattle song is part of the verbal arts of the society, through performing it, children connect themselves to the established beliefs and values and develop their cultural competence. In short, cattle songs are children's folksongs embodying children's everyday activities and their ability to connect art to everyday life. As shown in this study, the cattle songs are performed to a non-human audience (the cattle) and this feature makes this form of folksongs distinct from the common forms of oral poetry that are performed to human audiences.

Notes

1. *Daalee* is a common name given to a white cow.
2. *Goobee* is a common name given to a fat and big bull.

3. *Qobboo* is the name of a plant that usually grows in the homestead of the Guji people.
4. *Gambo* is the name of the villages in which the Guji people live.
5. *Gandii* is an epidemic disease that often occurs in the lowland areas in Ethiopia and kills huge numbers of cattle. These days, this disease is being controlled through joint efforts of international organizations.
6. *Booqaa* is the name of a bull that has white spots on its head.

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