Qallačča and Bokkuu: Themes in the ancient Qaallu institution and rock paintings of Hararqee—implications for social semiosis and history of Ethiopia

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Little or none is known about the social origin and meaning of the ancient rock paintings of Ethiopia and Horn of Africa. This article critically analyzed some of the ancient rock paintings of Hararqee (Eastern Ethiopia) with the intention to understand the social semiotical and rhetorical structures that underlie beneath these social ‘texts’. It did so through using the ancient Qaallu Institution of the Oromo of East and Horn of Africa as analytical device. Multi-disciplinary approach that combined concepts from various disciples was adopted as a guiding theoretical framework, while the Eurocentric approach that mystifies and de-Ethiopinizes them was rejected. Field data was collected from various sites besides archival data. Informants expert with the local’s social epistemology or wisdom were selected and used as ‘critical friends’. The results revealed both substantive and methodological insights. Substantively, it suggests that the Oromo Qaallu Institution and its sub-themes such as the pre-Christian belief in Black Sky-God, line of descent and identity, kingdomization, pastoral festival, and bovine symbolism crosscutting all of these. Methodologically, the unique Oromo social semiosis which can be referred to as ‘metaplasmic witticism’ appeared as the underlying rhetorical structure.

Key words: Oromo, Qaallu institution, Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, ancient rock paintings, language, social semiosis, Laga Oda.

INTRODUCTION

Hararqee, the vast land in the Horn of Africa (Eastern Ethiopia), is not only where the Qaallu Institution had been practiced since time immemorial up until the first half of the twentieth century, but is also where over 50% of Ethiopia’s (possibly including Horn of Africa) rock painting sites are found (Bravo 2007:137). Among these is the famous Laga Oda Site “dating to at least 16,000 BP” (Shaw and Jameson 1999:349) and comprising depictions of bovines and many different types of animals. Today, Hararqee is part of Eastern Oromia State as well as of Ethiopia. Corresponding to the Oromo oral history, the plausible Oromo historians (Gidada 2006, Hassen 1990, to mention a few) and non-biased European theologico-ethnologists (Krapf 1842; De Abbadie 1880; De Salviac 1980, to mention a few), all agree that the homeland and origin of the Oromo, the largest tribe of the Cushitic stock, is Eastern or Horn of Africa, specifically a place known as Hooro Ṭalaßu or Maḍḍa Wolabu ‘the Spring Water of Genesis of Humanity’ (Dahl and Mergusss 1990).

The Classical Greek writers wrote the Ancient Ethiopians were “inventors of worship, of festivals, of solemn assemblies, of sacrifice, and of every religious practice” (Bekerie, 2004:114). The oral history of the Oromo states that it was Makko Billii3, whom Antonio De

2 The orthography ‘Hararqee’ is preferred to the usual ‘Hararghe’ for the latter conceals the fact that the toponym is composite of two free morphemes wherein the second morpheme qee (some also spell it kee, kee, qee, qe’e) means ‘home, house, dwelling, habitation; birthplace, native land, environ; homestead, property; home-born, native’ (Gidada 2006: 100; Tutschek 1844: 60; Viterbo 1892: 89; Foot 1913: 35). It comes from non-finite qa ‘orifice, disc, hole, black-hole’.

3 Without going to too details, the IPA transcription style with some necessary exceptions is pursued. The doubling of consonants signifies gemination, while the doubling of the vowel indicates very long vowels, a common feature of Oromo language that makes significant typological difference. Instead of the IPA /j/, /ʃ/ and /ʧ/, the more familiar /y/ or ‘y’, /š/ and /č/ are, respectively, used. In the pre-1990s works, many scholars did not take care of the gemination (consonants) and elongation (vowels) issue. Therefore, in direct quotations, they are kept as original.
Abbadie, one of the early European scholars who studied and lived with the Oromo, described as “African Lycurgus” (Werner 1914: 263; Triulzi and Triulzi 1990:319; De Abbadie 1880) and son of the primogenitor of the Oromo nation (Raya or Raâ), who hammered out the antique, generation-based social philosophy known as Gada System (Legesse 1973, 2006; Bartels 1983; Gidada 2006).

A key ingredient in Gada system is the Qaallu4 Institution. Though narrower in scope compared to the generic Gada System, the “ancient” Qaallu Institution (Baxter 1987:168 quoted and elaborated in Gidada 2005:146-147) is as much cosmogonal, identification as it is theologico-political to the Oromo nation, in particular, and, at large, the pre-colonial (pre-Christian, pre-Islam) Cushites who uniformly believed in Water as a source of life and Waaqa, a duality (naturally co-relative) concept/word that designates simultaneously ‘Black-God, Heaven’, ‘sun-in-constant motion/day and night, epoch’ and ‘Sky, Divinely Milk’(Hassen 1990).5

For Oromo, the first Qaallu “Hereditary ritual officiant” and “high priest” was of “divine origin” and, as the myth tells us, “fell from the sky itself”…with the first black cow and he was the “eldest son of Ilma Ooma[Oromo]”, i.e., “Son of Man”, as Oromo self-identify themselves (Hassen 1990:6; Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi 1996:6). In its “dual[ity] nature”, Waaqa, the black Sky-God “controlled fertility, peace, and lifegiving rains… [hence] prayers for peace, fertility, and rain” are the core recursive themes in Oromo religion (Hassen 1990:7).

Hence, the concept/word Qaallu refers at large to “Divinity’s fount of blessings in the world” (Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi 1996: 1996: 21).

As De Salviac (2005 [1901]: 285) explicated “The Oromo are not fetishists. They believe in Waaqa Tokko, a unique universal creator and master. They see His manifestations in great forces of nature, without mistaking for Him.” As a result of this ‘pre-historic’, Baruch de Spinozaean like social epistemology6, but unlike Martin Heideggerean “ancients” who never dared questioning or confronting ontology but endorsed only veneering it, for the Oromo social semiosis8 has never been new since time immemorial. Although Eurocentric archaeologists rarely acknowledge, “the identification of cultural themes and symbolic interpretation” on Ethiopian rock arts has revealed affinities between contemporary Oromo practices and those of other East African culture groups, both ancient and modern (Grant, 2000: np).

The so-far few studies made on the Ethiopian ancient rock paintings and rock arts are only positivist description (of types, size and/or number of the signs) rather than explanation of the social origin and the underlying social meaning, praxis or worldview (Brandt and Carder 1987).

Partly, the reason is the studies are totally dominated by Eurocentric paradigms that de-Africanize and extrude the native people and their language, religion, social structure, material cultures and, in general, their interpretive worldview. Besides, some of the native researchers are no different since they have unconditionally accepted this Eurocentric, hegemonic epistemology (Bekerie 1997).

As a result it is neither possible to understand the social origin of these amazing ‘texts’ nor is it possible to explain the underlying social semiosis. Furthermore, due to this kind of mystification or possible distortion of human (past) knowledge, we miss the golden opportunities that these ancient documents offer for advancing human knowledge about human past.


They call for “an interpretation of the pastoral rock arts which goes beyond simple description” and that “must obtain securely dated environmental and culture/historical sequences in conjunction with regional analyses of settlement and subsistence patterns” (1987:209). Likewise, the aim of this paper is to use the ancient Qaallu Institution of the Oromo and its two sub-themes—qallächä and bokkuu—which shall be defined and discussed ahead—as a general sensitizing, analytical device in order to draw attentions, guide and explain the underlying social epistemological, semiotical and

4 Among the different orthographies known in the literature are k'alu, k'alu, qaalluu, qalloo, etc; here qaallu is adopted as most appropriate unless in direct quotations.

5 An elderly Oromo versed in traditional Oromo wisdom says: Waqqayyo nuf roobuufi ‘God (hypocoristic) is to rain for us’ or Waaqqni d'ad'aa nu dibé ‘God has smeared/painted us butter’ (i.e., rained for us) and butter is a symbol of fertility. This concept/word Waqqaa Black-Sky God is well documented—albeit less spoken/written—in Ancient Egyptian texts (Bekerie 2004: 116 based on W.E.B DuBois).

6 The term ‘social epistemology’, here, is used to refer to a society's whole lots of ‘devices’ of representation, objectification and communication of its social epistemology—linguistic and non-linguistic, literary and non-literary, natural (e.g., trees, hilltop, cattle) or designed (e.g., sticks), tangible objects or abstract signs, symbolic or physically enacted.
rhetorical structures.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Whose social origins are the rock paintings?

So far studies ascribe the socio-cultural origin of ancient rock paintings of Hararqee, like the rest of Ethiopian as well as African regions, is either ascribed to ‘fabulous’ communities or eclecticized or mystified. Cervicek and Braukämper ascribed it to an imaginary community they signify “Harla” or “Arla” (Cervicek and Braukämper 1975:49). Cervicek and Braukämper, based on a person they call “Huntingford (1965:74)”, state:

According to popular beliefs Harla generally refers to a mysterious, wealthy and mighty people, (frequently even imagined as giants!), who had once occupied large stretches of the Harar Province before they were destroyed by the supernatural powers through natural catastrophes as punishment for their inordinate pride. This occurred prior to the Galla (Oromo) incursions into these areas during the 16th and 17th centuries” (Cervicek and Braukämper 1975: 49; Emphasis added).

Cervicek and Braukämper (1975:49) quote Huntingford on the identity of the Harla: “The name “Harla” is first mentioned, as far as we know, in the chronicle of the Ethiopian Emperor Amda Seyon9 in the 14th century (Huntingford 1965:74).” Professor Claude Sumner (Sumner 1996: 26), however, shows us that it was not Huntingford but early twentieth century French Catholic missionaries by the name François Azais and Roger Chambard who not only documented the Hararqee ancient rock paintings (as also acknowledged by Cervicek and Braukämper 1975:49), but also who first reconstructed the imaginary “Harla” (spelling it rather as “Arla”) from an oral history told to them by an Oromo old man from Alla clan of Barentuu.10 The story itself is about a “wealthy” Oromo man called “Barento” [Barentuu] who was “very rich but very proud farmer” (Sumner 1996: 26). For it is both vital and complex (in its usual metaphoric rhetorics of Oromo, which cannot however be analyzed here) it is necessary to quote it in full:

There was in the Guiri11 country, at Tchenassen [Ĉenāssan], an Oromo, a very rich but very proud farmer called Barento. A cloth merchant, an Arab who was also very rich, lived a short distance from there at Derbiga.12 The merchant’s daughter went one day to see the farmer and told him: “I would like to marry your son.”—“Very well, I shall give him to you,” he answered. The merchant in turn, gave his daughter and made under her daughter’s steps a road of cloth, from Derbiga to Tchenassen, residence of the rich farmer. The tailor replied to this act by making a road of dourah and maize under his son’s steps, from Tchenassen to Derbiga. But God was incensed by this double pride and to punish him, shaked Tchenassen Mountain and brought down a rain of stones which destroyed men and houses; it was then that the race of Arla [Ala] was destroyed (Sumner 1996: 26).

Confirming the antiquity and unity of this story and the Oromo, similar story is found in Western Oromo as far closer to the Southern Sudan: “in interpreting certain of their [Oromo] myths about the beginning of things, it was because of man’s taking cultivation and pro-creation too much into his own hands, that Waqa withdrew from him—a withdrawal resulting in a diminution of life on earth in all its forms” (Bartels 1975:512). Cervicek and Braukamper (1975:74) described the Laga Gafra area and its population as: “The area of the site is part of the Gafra Golla Dofa village, and the indigenous Ala [Oromo] call it Gada Ba’la (‘large shelter’).”13 Here, let us only

consonant de-voicing the original voiced consonant. Yet, the very long vowel /ée/ is also a compensatory lengthening for the lost long /oo/. Hence, Booreetuu and Booreetuma are taken here as most appropriate orthography. While Booreetuu designates the Easter moiety, one of whose descendants are the Hararqee Oromo known as the Afran Qaalluu/Qalloo sub-tribe (comprising four or five clans), the term Booreetuma translates Booranization or Booranism principle.

9 See also Dr. Negasso Gidada (Gidada 2006), the plausible historian and former president of Ethiopia who convincingly explained away this and many mystifications and deformations in Ethiopian history including the fact that the so-called “Amda Seyon” is in fact deformation of Sayyo Mač’aa, an early classical era Oromo War General of the Central-Western Oromo from who are the Sayyoo Clan, a sub-clan of the Mač’aa Confederation, are descendant today.

10 The Oromo are divided into two major mo’o ‘moieties’ (literally designates ‘both sides of the back’) namely “Borana” and “Barentu”, each of which subdivides into sub-sub-moieties and sub-sub-sub clans. Legesse (2006:144) analyzes how various authors spell the latter “ancient moiety”: Bareytuma, Barento, Bartuma, Barttuma, Barentuma, Barento, etc. He states that Boorana ritual texts indicates that the ancient name of the junior moiety was, rather, “Bareyetum(a)”. Like the other retroflex liquids, /ŋ/ appears as an epenthetic

11 Wakefield (Ravenstein and Wakefield 1884: 263) recorded “Five great tribes” of Oromo occupying “to the West of Wébi” River among who are the “Gerér” and the “minor” one named “Gorre”.

12 A strange toponym, Hecht (1987) quotes Wilding (1975:5) who claimed to have collected “Chinese porcelain” from that locality as well as Leslau (1963:58) who claimed the etymology “Darbi Gar’–Harari style stone building.”

13 The Oromo ‘Gafra’ means ‘buffalo’ (also gafraa or gafarsa), Golla means ‘very enclosed place’ (Tutschke 1844), Dofa means ‘fertile land; fat, big (bovine)’ (Tutschcke 1844: 118; Stegman 2011: 30); Gada ‘temple’ and baal’a (baal, nominative) ‘very large, wide’ are ordinary definitions and undermine the meaning of otherwise complex, social-philosophical concepts. Their “Ba’la” is strange form or Semiticized.
remember that Alla and lttu clans of the Hararqee Oromo who “provide[d] a basis for...construct[ing] models for prehistoric land and resource use” (Clark and Williams: 1978:19).

The Ancient Egyptians used the principles of sound-meaning association, semantic and ontologic (what something/somebody can cause) similarization, principle of physical resemblance, principle of grouping (duplication or triplication of the same pictograms to represent meaning), principle of aggregation (pictograms are combined in or around a spot or a pictogram is duplicated as many as necessary and congregated in or around a spot), principle of sequencing vertically or horizontally (a semotact for creating a lexical or syntactic structure) and so forth.

Some of these or similar principles or ‘stylistic features’ are observed, particularly, in the Laga Oda painting styles. Cervicek (1971:132-133), for instance, observed in Laga Oda paintings such stylized ‘discourse’ as ‘group of horseshoe-like headless bovine motifs’, ‘paired ‘soles of feet’ from Bake Khallo [Qaallu]’, ‘oval symbols accompanied as a rule by a stroke on their left side’, ‘sun-like symbol in the centre with animal and anthropomorphic representations grouped around it’, paired ‘soles of feet’, carefully profiled styles (overhead, side, back point-of-view of bovines), zooming (large versus small size of bovine motifs), headless versus headed bovines, H-shaped anthropomorphic representations with raised hands’, superimposition and so forth.

Any interpretation that renders these as isolated case, arbitrary or pointless marks can be rejected outright. Some of these ‘early spelling’ are found not only across the whole Horn of Africa but also in Ancient Meroitic-Egyptian rock paintings, hieroglyphics and, generally, organized social semiosis.

Social semiosis in Oromo social epistemology

Since Oromo social epistemology and semiosis is the analytical devices for this analysis, it is good to see them briefly. In the words of one leading social philosopher and researcher at Addis Ababa University, Oromo social epistemology and semiosis uniquely exploits “intimate link...between form, content and concrete situation in life” (Sumner 1996:17-18).

Professor Claude Sumner, who has produced three volume analysis of Oromo wisdom literature (Sumner 1995, 1996, 1997), sees that like any “ancient texts”, in Oromo wisdom literature, “a same unit of formal characters, namely of expressions, of syntactic forms, of vocabulary, of metaphors, etc., which recur over and over again, and finally a vital situation...that is a

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Burton (1856: 1074-1075) wrote the Oromo “about Harar are divided into four several clans, separating as usual into a multitude of septs. The Alo [Aa] extend westwards from the city: the Nole inhabit the land to the east and north-east, about two days' journey between the Eesa Alo [Alla] extend westards from the city: the Nole inhabit the land to the east and north-east, about two days’ journey between the Eesa Somal, and Harar: on the south, are situated the Babuli [Babilee] ingenuities (see Bekerle 1997; Smith 1997; Gusarova 2009; Vaughan 2003; Ehret 1979; Finneran 2007).}

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This word, “Harla” or “Arla", violates the general Afro-Asiatic language principle of consonantal co-occurrence restriction or ‘dissimilation’ confirmed by Greenberg (1950) and Bender (1978), that /M/ and /R/ are isomorphic and, hence, cannot co-occur in any base word (excluding affixation). Consonantal co-occurrence restriction is also called consononal compatibility restrictions, or dissimilation. This is very true as far as Oromo is concerned; nowhere do rhotic liquids /l/ and /r/ co-occur in base word.

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Language and reality in early ‘spelling’ by painting on rocks

The Ancient Black Africans that some 19th century European missionaries and researchers referred to as ‘Ancient Egyptians’ (although still others refer to them by Ancient Cushites, Ancient Ethiopians, Ancient Nubians or Meroes) are the originators writing systems known by ‘hieroglyphics’. Initially, hieroglyphics was pictogram or semagram. That is, pictures of real world were ‘painted’ to communicate a sememe or motif, the smallest meaningful structure or concept, for instance, a picture of sitting man for their word for the English ‘sit’, a picture of man stretching his/her arms to the sky for ‘pray’, a lion for ‘great man’ etc.

Based on their social philosophy/paradigm, literary/figurative symbolism, and/or their word’s/language’s phonology/syntax for the English ‘woman’, they might have also depicted a picture of a pigeon, or an owl or a cow. This zoomorphic mode of representation as the Sign-Language of Totemism and Mythology was the first and early writing system in human history (Diop 2000; Massey 1907).
same original function in the life of [the people]" (Sumner 1996:19). An elderly Oromo skilled in Oromo wisdom speaks, to use the appropriate Marxian term, ‘historical materialism’, or he speaks “in ritual language, as it was used in old times at the proclamation of the law” (Bartels 1983:309). Moreover, he speaks in rhythmic verses, full of “sound parallelism” (Cerulli 1922), “parallelism of sounds” or “image” or “vocalic harmony” (Bartels 1975: 898). Even Gada Laws used to be “issued in verse” (Cotter 1990: 70), in “the long string of rhyme, which consists of repeating the same verse at the end of each couplet” or “series of short sententious phrases” that are “disposed to help memory” (De Salviac 2005 [1901]: 285). The highly experienced researchers on the ancient Oromo system of thought, which is now kept intact mainly by the Booran Gada System, emphasize that “the philosophical concepts that underlie the gadaa system...utilize a symbolic code much of which is common to all Oromo” (Baxter, et al 1996: 21).

The symbolic and material reproduction of Oromo society is incredibly alike, a feature “surely has developed within the [Oromo]18 language” and “is also only imaginable in a sonorous language such as Oromo” which “as a prerequisite, [has] a formally highly developed poetical technique” (Littmann 1925:25 cited in Bartels 1975:899). Claude Sumner finally formulates a “double analogy” tactic as prototypical feature of Oromo wisdom literature, i.e., “vertical” and “horizontal” parallelism style (Sumner 1996:25), known for the most part to linguists, respectively, as ‘paradigmatic’ (‘content’ or ‘material’) and ‘syntagmatic’ (‘form’ or ‘substance’) relations or in both literature and linguistics, as contextual-diachronic and textual-synchronic, relations. Oromo social epistemological concepts/words/signs offer important data for historical and evolutionary social sciences for they recycle and, consequently, are resistant to change both in form and meaning (Legesse, 1973).

Thus, this analysis jettisons the old Eurocentric view that narrows down the sphere of semiotics to only ‘the sign’, extruding the human agents and the social context, and attempts to use the ancient Qaallu Institutions of Oromo as sensitizing ‘device’ in order to understand the layers of social meaning and structure underlying the rock arts of the area in focus. Particularly, it adopts van Leeuwen’s (2005: 3) advanced approach to social semiotics. Primarily, Van Leeuwen (2005: 3) extends “semiotic resource” as involving “the actions and artefacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically” (with vocal apparatus, muscle, facial expressions, etc) or “by means of technologies” (e.g., ink, computer, fabrics, scissors, or sewing machines, etc). Van Leeuven (2005: xi) introduces the changing semiosphere of social semiotics:

From the ‘sentence’ to the ‘text’ and its ‘context’, and from ‘grammar’ to ‘discourse’;

From the ‘sign’ to the way people use semiotic ‘resources’ both to produce communicative artefacts and events and to interpret them;

From fragmentation of the semiotic modes, for instance, into the ‘semiotics of the image’, the ‘semiotics of music’, and so on, to comparing and contrasting semiotic modes, exploring what they have in common as well as how they differ, and investigating how they can be integrated in multimodal artefacts and events.

METHODS AND THE SEMIOTIC RESOURCES

For this analysis both archival and field data are collected. In 2012 visits were made to some of the popular (in literature) ancient rock painting sites in Hararqee (Laga Oda, Goda Agawa, Ganda Biiftu, etc.; comprehensive list of Ethiopian rock painting sites is presented by Bravo 2007). Also, field visits were made to less known (in literature) ancient to medieval era painting sites (e.g., Goda Rorris, Huursoo, Goda K’arree Galqessa, Goda Ummataa, Goda Daassa, etc). Huge visual data (still and motion) of paintings and engravings were collected, only very few of which are used in this paper.

During the data collection, it was found that sometimes visual data captured earlier by other scholars, for instance, Cervicek (1971) and Cervicek and Braukamper (1975) were preferably clearer due to wear-off or other factors. Yet, from the same popular sites, some previously unrevealed or undetected motifs were also collected. Another category of archival data for this analysis is the ‘scholastic’ research literature on Oromo social epistemology.

However, since the Qaallu Institutionas well as its sub-themes is used as a means rather than end by itself—hence is capitalization upon social semiotic and linguistic aspects—there is an inevitable risk of undermining this/these, otherwise, complex philosophical notion(s).

Besides, two old men expert in Oromo social epistemology, are used as informants, namely Taaddasaa Birbirsoo Mootii, 87, from Wallagga, Western Oromia (Ethiopia) and Said Soddom Muummee, 85, from Hararqee Eastern Oromia (Ethiopia). Mootii, a Catholic Priest, was one of the informants and colleagues of Father Lambert Bartels (Bartels 1983, 1977, 1975) at Addo Catholic Mission although Bartels only referred to Mootii as “one priest”. Muummee, is not only well seasoned wiseman, but he still celebrates and identifies himself as Waqaeffata—believer, observer and practitioner of the pre-Christian Oromo religion founded on Waaqa, the Black Sky-God. Both Mootii and Muummee play the role of ‘critical friends’: they assist with the objectification needed for the all the way through the data collection and analysis as observers, descriptors, interpreters and explainators of not only the semiotic resource but also as validators, re-interpreters and re-contextualizers of pre-interpretations (the author’s

18 Delete racist, imposed and hatred terms such as “Galla”.
and other researchers’ on Oromo). Sometimes, they also sing the ancient pastoral songs and act out the symbolic actions of during ancient Qaallu rituals, bring back to memory and enfolding them in the archaic expressions.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Qaallu Institution, cosmogony and genesis of hierarchy

Above, under Introduction section, a remark was made on the mythical-social origin of the Qaallu Institution and its relation with genesis and cow-milk. Onomasiologically Qaallu comes from the gerundive qull (qu’qullu, intensive) ‘pure, holy, sacred, blameless; being black, pretty, neat’, pointing to the color and quality of Waaqa (see Bartels 1983; Hassen 1990 for detail). The Booran Oromo have still kept the Qaallu Institution ‘unspoiled’ and, thus, their world view is worth quoting:

The Booran view of cosmology, ecology and ontology is one of a flow of life emanating from God. For them, the benignancy of divinity is expressed in rain and other relative generations-based age-mates’, and ‘he is carrier of dark one [God] with hail under his abdomen give you all good things’ (Bartels 1983:90-91).21 Korma ‘buffalo-bull’ is a symbol of manliness (yet, ‘manliness’ for Oromo is ‘oromeness (masculine)’) combined with virility and temperament (korma) and, hence, “every [Oromo] man is a bull” (Bartels 1983:146).22 More importantly, the giant bull designated angafa, hançaffa (also ‘first-born (son)’) is a symbol of angaffitì “seniority of moieties: stratification and imbalance” (Legesse 2000:134); “he is carrier of “Boraanness” to a higher degree [=baron]” (Dahl 1996:172), for Booran is the first-born (angafa, from aca, aka ‘grand-parents, commencers; heaven’) or Horroo is the primogenitor (horroo, from hor ‘to vege, sprout, proliferate’) of the Oromo nation.

For the same reason, the separation of the most senior or ancient moieties imitates symbolized by hariera ‘spinal column’ or horroo ‘vertebrae’ of the bull (see Fig. P1C and F; usually Oromo words for animal and human body parts, etc., vary). So polysemous a word, the first (or extended) meaning of hariera, hariira is ‘hierarchy, queue, seam, line, suture’, hariyaa means ‘co-relative generations-based age-mates’, and horroo means ‘mineral spring water; those who are sprouted’ (Tutschek 1844: 98, 110; Stegman 2011: 95). The primogenitors of the Oromo nations settled, according to Hararqee Oromo, in an unverified country near a big river or spring water called Mormor or Horoor WalaSU (See Gidada 2006; Bartels 1983; BATO/Bureau of Oromia Culture and Tourism 1998).

They set the first Bal a ‘moiety, split’ (from bal ‘to flame, impel, fly; to split, have bilateral symmetry’) or WalaSU ‘freedom, bail, spring’, which grew into bala ‘sub-sub-sub-etc…lineages’ (also means ‘door, gate’; the reduplication showing ontic repetitiveness). They also set lamii, literally ‘citizens’ (accusative of lama ‘two’), but social-philosophically “the primary pair, among several pairs of binary oppositions…which are the creative communion between oppositions, the fertile unity of

[and the dabballe [who] are entering it...[are] groups of men are considered to belong to the sacred domain of the female (issi) and are referred to by the female pronoun” (Kassam 1999:494) they are male.

21 Here, Bartels was not interested in the unusual play on word, though he discussed this ‘sound-meaning’ parallelism stylistics elsewhere. Gurrači garaa ‘gabbii is, for lack expression, a polysemic metonymic witticism: ‘Sky-God, the one with q’abbi ‘hail, ice, snow’ and dark belly (=heavy cloud); God whose stomach [=heart] is tough (q’abbii); ‘God, under whose belly is there a bullock (q’abbii).’

22 Korma also designates ‘male or ram of all Capra varieties’ and ‘male of fowl (domestic and non-domestic).’ The underlying notion is hor ‘vege, proliferate, (re)produce, copulate, pierce’ and/or rom a, romma ‘rage (sexuality)’.

19,20 Fig. P1A is shorthand for PLATE 1, Figure A.
21,22 This is quite different from the biological male-female division. For instance, both the gadaammoji [who] are preparing to exit the cycle of social time
contrasts” (Baxter et al 1996: 21). See Figure P1 E.

Accordingly, the left hand and right hand of the bovine always represent, in rituals, the “sub-sections of the phratry” (Kassam 2005:105). That is, as the tradition sustains, when the ancient matrilineal-patrilineal moieties sowed, dissevered (fač’ā) from the original East (Boora, Òboro), the Booreetúma (designating matrilineality, feminine soul) took or went towards the left hand side, while the Hoorroo (also for the rare /ß/ and /β/ interchange, βooroo, designating patrilineality, masculine soul) took the right hand side. Both correspond, respectively, to the directions of sunrise and sunset, which configure in the way house is constructed: kà or kà raa23 ‘the front door’ (literally ‘Inception or Inception of Moving-Sun) always faces the East, while the back wall (Horoo) faces the West (also Horoo means ‘Horus, evening twilight’).24 This still governs the praxis that the backwall “is the place of the marriage negotiations and of

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23 Also called iffa, fue ‘arrow, beam, shine; sling’ (Krapf 1844: 3, 33) or badaa ‘front room; hearth’ (Stegman 2011:23). Hearth is a symbol of “nuclear family” or “mother-child household” (Legesse 1973:39).

24 Hooroo and Boora/Óboro are interchangeably used for back wall and front wall possibly because, for Oromo time or spatiotemporality is circular (Bartels 1983).
the first sexual intercourse of sons and their bride [i.e., behind the stage]” (Bartels 1983:296).

The second concept is, Moo’a, Môha, the ritual or holiday of the ancient primogenitors observed by their contemporary Family (Sabaa 2006:258). This concept that coheres both the primogenitors and the contemporary generations (third, second and first) is symbolized by moô, mo’ô ‘both side of loin/lumbar’ (see Figure P1B) and/or k’omô ‘nibs’ which also means ‘belongingness to common race, consanguinity’ (see Fig.P1D). From the same concept dissimilizes the Oromo concept of Moo’tumma ‘Kingdom’ (or the Biblical Kingdom of God) which Shongolo (1996) explicates etymologically:

[Moo’tumma comes] from moo’a, autobenefactive: moo’d’t/, is a cattle image. For example, Kormi sun him moo’a, “that bull is in heat” and sa’a sun iti moo’a ‘he is mounting that cow’. With reference to human beings, the implication is not necessarily sexual, but can denote superiority or dominance in general. An moo’a, an mooti is a formula of self praise by a new Abba Gada during his inauguration (Shongolo 1996: 273).

**Holiday of the cattle**

It is no surprise that the Qaallu Institution has had a special cosmological symbolism and Law of the Bovine as well as the Holiday of the Cattle/Bovine, Gaarrii Looni (Haaji-Aadam 2010; Legesse 1973:96; Dahl and Megerssa 1990). On Gaarrii Loonii, cattle pen are renovated and embellished, and festivities and dances with praise songs to cattle was chanted (for more, Bartels 1975; Wako 2011; Kassam 2005). An excerpt from the poetic praise song to cows ‘talks’ about them with admiration of their body parts (See also Bartels 1975:911):

Chorus: Ahee-ee
Soloist: Yá saa, yá saa—o cattle, o cattle!
Saa Humbikooti—cattle of my Humbiland,
Saa eessa ġibbu?—What part of cattle is useless?
Saa qeesna qiċċu—Our cattle with soft hoofs,
kọtʃeenn šinii ta’e—from their hoofs, we make coffee-cups

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25 There are many Oromo words for the English ‘cattle’, none of which is not equivalent to it: looni, loon refers to ‘cattle’ but as a herd or when they are grazing; hōri includes ‘cattle’ but also is emphatic of the notion that they are part of all the invaluable and ‘amicable’ assets fulfilling our ‘manness’; saa, sa’a, sawa, saya refers to ‘cattle’, but usually to ‘a cow’ or ‘cows’; bēelāq (bao-lee-oja) refers to cattle but with the notion that they are among ‘the tamed kingdom’ but those graze away from home (excludes e.g., cats).

26 Motifs of coffee-cups and ḡabanà, ḡippanà ‘coffee pot’ (invariable from ḡippa ‘pipe’, see Fig.P1D), a symbol of cow’s leather cloth gaafi wann’a ta’a, -- from their horns, we make wàŋč’a large milk/beer cup fāl’ana ta’a!—as well as spoons! [See Fig.P2A, B, C, D]

Cerviçek (1971:124 Fig.10) wonders about the unexplained but recurrent “oval representations… painted black [and] white-dotted” and consistently painted “below” the cow udder (see Fig. P3B). This can be compared with wàŋč’a drinking horn-cup or č’ôč’oo, č’iič’oo milking (horn-)cup (see Fig.P2D). On Irreeča, Hûrreeča ritual of Thanking Waaqa Black Sky-God, a line of the doxology mentions, among others, ‘Waaqa č’iič’oo gūrraaṭii’ ‘God of the dark č’iič’oo milking-cup’ (Sabaa 2006:321). The deadjectival č’ôč’orree means ‘white-dotted (black background); turkey or similar white dotted bird’, while Waaŋč’e’e is a proper name for white-dotted cow.

**Qaallu, cradle land and eco-theology concept**

In Oromo social epistemology, holy spirits reside also in sacred realities, the mountain hills, river beds, pasture lands, evergreen trees. For they are considered as symbol of absolute ‘purity’ (gul’qullu), these are areas for ritual and religious performances. Thus, the word qaallu (also goolooo) refers to such important place for rituals of immortalizing ancestors, blessing the newborn, initiating the full-man, praying for fertility and rain, and praising the gracious God and so forth. The sacred land of spirituality must be mountain foot (goda, also means ‘cavity’, one of the words that recurrently forms toponymy of rock painting sites, besides odaa khalloo or qaallu, and laga) where there must be, naturally, laga ‘lagoon, river’ (also means ‘language, discourse, larynx, vocal cord’), č’affee ‘marshy area with green grasses’ (symbol of the parliamentary assembly), č’al’oo ‘pasture land’, and the evergreen ḡaafia, the sacred giant Ficus sycamoros. ḡaafia serves not only as “a depiction of a political power”, but “is also a centre of social and economic activities” and “symbolizes the entire corpus of their activities, history, culture and tradition” (Gutamaa 1997:14). ḡaafia tree varieties have ‘milk’ (latex); their large shade is used not only as a meeting ‘hall’ for communicative action and hammering out ḡuu ‘proclamations’ of Gada Law amendments (from ḡu’a ‘to be inspired, to pulsate; to inform, utter’), but also as a temple (gadaa) as well as graveyard. Its ‘milk’ is proportionate with ḍiffa ‘amniotic udder spitting milk; see Wako 2011:77) and coffee-cups are known in Laga Harro or Sok’a Gìbīčča (literally, ‘Bull Engraving’) in Boorana, Southern Ethiopia (Bravo 2007:219).

27 Toponyms provide essential archaeosemiotic evidence especially when they are metasemiotic language.
fluid', the primeval fluid.  

Five Qaallu centres are known in Booran sub-moiety: (1) Qaallu Odiituu, (2) Qaallu Karrayyuu, (3) Qaallu Mattarii, (4) Qaallu Karaar, (5) Qaallu Kuukuu, (10) Qaallu Arusii (Nicolas 2010). These centers serve politically as headquarters of (con-)federal states and simultaneously are (sub)clan names. These names are codes and decoders of not only genealogical and landscapes, but also of ancient (sub)-moieties and settlement patterns. Since they are cyclical, based on the principles of Gada System’s name-giving principle  

28 Corrupted in form and deteriorated in meaning (especially by second and foreign language writers) are the senior and ancient clan of “Wata”, “Wota” or “Wawat”, appropriately ṃṭṭaa/Ḍṭṭaa clan of the Oromo.  

(moggaassa, from mogga ‘literally ‘name, mock, namesake, detour’), they are widespread across Oromia29 and resistant to change. Werner (1915:2) observed that in Booran Oromo, “every clan has its own mark for cattle, usually a brand ([guwa] which is the name of the instrument used, is an iron spike fixed into a wooden handle)”, a fact which is signified in other parts of Oromia with different signifiers, for instance, pattern of settlement, which is determined by a korma karbaazaa ‘bull that bulldozes jungles’ or korma qallaččaa ‘kindling bull’ (Gidada 2006: 99-100) or bull’s anatomy (BATO 1998). For instance, quoting Makko Billii, the ancient Gada System law maker, the Wallaga Oromo  

29 Oromia’ refers to Oromoland in accordance to current Federal System of Ethiopia.
recite their settlement pattern metaphorizing it with the anatomy of Korma ‘the virile buffalo-bull’, symbol of macho man: Sibuun garaača. Haruu č’inaacha, Leeqaan dirra kommaati ‘The Sibuu [Sabboo] clan is the stomach, the Haruu [Hooroo] is the ribs, and Leeqaa is the hip of the bull’ (see also BATO 1998:164).30

Qallačča bull as a kindler is related to qallačča “a white patch between the horns of a cow running back down the two sides of the neck; a charm” (Foot 1913:33; Compare with See Figure P3 A, B, D). It is the symbol of a Qaallu’s qallačča, here meaning, an inherited--from ancestors--spiritual and (intellectual) grace, sublimity or power. This is quite related to of book’a ‘a black cow or bull or ram that has a white mark upon the forehead’ (Tutschek 1844:135-136), a natural phenomenon considered as a good omen (compared with Fig. P3 C). Adda īsā book’aa k’aba ‘his forehead has a blaze’ is an idiom appropriately meaning the person has the natural capacity, inherited from ancestors, to prophesize, foreknow. For this reason, “white-headedness” or wearing white turban is a symbol of (passage to) seasoned manhood, seniority class or superordinate moiety (Kassam 1999). As usual, there is “intimate link...between form, content and concrete situation in life” (Sumner 1996:17-18).

Qallačča as a mysterious metal

Qallačča31 is a polysemantic word in Qaallu Institution. One instantiation of this complex concept is that it is a mysterious sacred material culture worn on the forehead by Qaallu (Fig. P4B). For some ethnologists/anthropologists, it is a “white metal horn which is worn on the forehead” and is “horn-symbolism” (Bartels 1983: 146). For others it is just a ‘white metal horn’ which is a symbol of fertility or just is “phallic

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30 Baxter (1979:71) understood that in Oromo culture “big game hunting for trophies [was] considered as a pursuit that fostered “manly” attributes; successful hunter was, like a good warrior or a prolific father, d’ira “masculine” or “virile”, ḍjaba “tough” or korma “bull”.

31 Various orthographies are known for the initial velar- gutturals /q/, /k/, /ɡ/, /χ/ alternate or interchange. In this paper the orthography qallačča is adopted unless in direct quotation. Here, q is backed, post-velar or laryngeal, semi-ejective or implosive different from k’. palato-velar ejective.
ornament” (Haberland 1963:51 quoted in Bartels 1983:146). These arguments share the stem qara ‘horn (sharp and tall); graining fruit, granulate, shoot’ and/or, by rhotics (rhotacization-lambadization dissipation)32) the metaphoric designation in Oromo doxology for God namely, Ğaľča ‘that Witnesses/Engages’ the Servant-man (Garbičča33)

32 Werner (1914b: 263) is the only scholar who, before linguists discovered rhotics, suspected that the "word gada (cerebral "d" and "l" are often confused by outsiders) might have originated the name Galla’. This dissipative phonological change is true of all the retroflex rhotic sounds /l/, /r/, /ɖ/, /ɳ/.

33 Garbičča also gapričča (metathesis) is a participative-accusative from gabra or garba whose first meaning is the black gigantic African buffalo (also gapričča, gaffarpa participative-absolutive). Through metonymic change, the semantic first extended to human as ‘servant, hard worker, tough man’ and finally deteriorated (recently and especially by second and foreign language writers) to ‘slave, vassal’. From the earlier semantic comes the hypocoristic-appreciative (marked by –ee) gabree, gabārre ‘farmer (tough and rich)’. Victims of this semantic deterioration are the senior (both in genealogy and social status) are the tough and ancient Oromo clan of Gabra/Garba/Gabaro (see many of the book chapters edited by Baxter and Triulzi 1996).

accompanying him in long travels and admitting him home safely (ufkala, ófyala)’ (from gala ‘to come home; to provide provisions for the road’) or simply Ğaľča designates ‘God’s Providence’ (see also Tutschek 1844:57; Foot 1913:21).34 Some flesh need to be added to both concepts next. Amborn (2009: 401) might be wrong when he completely rejects the “phallisphication” of qallačča by “some anthropologists”. The very Oromo word for ‘sex (intercourse)’, namely sāla also designates ‘horn, oryx’, from which comes, by rhotics, qarıtı ‘sex, characteristics’ (-ņı is invariable marker’) and qara(-muttee) ‘horny, clitoris’. Michel Foucault, the great social philosopher of the 20th century, has taught us that

34 Ufkala, also spelled Ofkala or Afkala by historians, are “Oromo merchant class” or “the intrepid Oromo traders…engaged in around-the-year brisk trade” known since early medieval times (Hassen 1990: 89, 98). The word is composite of uf, ȯf ‘self, selves’ and kala ‘construct, support, protect’ or corruption of gaļa ‘come home, return (safely)’.
there is no reason why sexuality, politics (power) and metaphysics (religion) cannot be interrelated by origin. Yet, he is right that qallačča is also a symbol of “socio-religious mediator which is able to bundle positive and negative “cosmic” (for want of a better word) energies” and rather “symbolizes a link between the human and the supernatural world; its function is to open up this connection between different spheres.” Knutsson (1967:88-90 quoted in Bartels 1983:145) describes qallačča as “a conically formed ‘lump’ of black iron…brought from the heaven by the lightening.” Both informants, Mootii and Moommee (personal communication, July 10, 2012) claim that the first qallačča was dropped from the sky with meteorites (goṛça) or lightening (bakakka), iterating the ‘historical materialism’ narrated to them by their predecessors. Plowman (1918:114), who took a sketch of qallačča (Fig.P4 C), described it as “emblem” of the Qaallu “Chief Priest”. Plowman fleshes out the components of qallačča: (1) “seven bosses superimposed on a raised rim running round the emblem”35; (2) “upright portion made of polished lead”; (3) “circular base of white polished shell-like substance resembling ivory”; (4) “leather straps for fastening emblem to forehead of weaver” (Plowman 1918:114).

This mysterious cultural object is multifunctional. Taaddasa Birbirso Mootii, informant and, in the expression of the locals, ‘a man who has sipped mouthful’ of Oromo traditional wisdom explains:

During the time of Gada System, government by the people’s justice, the Waaqeeffataa used to pour out milk of black cow on Dibayyuu ritual and discovered/got their qallačča [truth and abundance]. For it is a sacred object, qallačča never moved [transported, communicated] without blood—sacrificial blood of bulls. It must be smeared on the forehead [See Fig. P6B on the forehead]. How can urine/semen without water, child without blood, milk without udder/teats be discovered [gotten]? In the aftermath of lengthy drought, they used to take qallačča to depression/ford and hill-top to pray with one stomach [unanimously] to God with Qaallu the Spiritual Father. Immediately, qallačča [God’s riposte] reconciled streaming milk from the sky [rains] (Interview, September 27, 2012).

Note that from Laga Oda Cave, archaeologists (Brandt 1984:177) have found “sickle sheen’ gloss and polish”, which helped archaeologists to recover “possible indications of intensive harvesting of wild grasses as early as 15, 000 B. P.”; “one awl”, “one endscraper” and “one curved-backed flake” all “dated 1560 B.C.”; and, “a few microliths that show evidence of mastic adhering close to the backed edges” which “strongly suggests” that by “1560 B.C…stone tools were being used (probably as components of knives and sickles”).

Qallačča, Bokkuu and initiation to Gada class

Baxter (1979:73, 80) calls it “phallic” or “ritual paraphernalia”, which is worn on the head “by men at crucial stage in the gaada [gadada] cycle of rituals”. Muummee (personal communication, August 30, 2012) makes distinction between two types of qallačča: qallačča qaračča (the soft, acuminous qallačča), which is worn by the elderly Qaallu or Abba Gadaa; and qallačča korma (the virile man/bull qallačča), worn by macho man. Viterbo (1892) defines “kalalecčia”, qallačča as ‘disciple, pupil’, which cuts parallel with the anthropologist Baxter (1979: 82-84) who states that, in Oromo Gada System, a young man’s grown tuft (guudu; see Fig. P4 D) is “associated symbolically with an erect penis” and discourses that he is “guutu diira”, which means a “successful warrior”, the one who has reached a class of “member of political adultood”, for he has “become responsible for the nation”.36 At this age, Baxter adds, “each of its members puts up a phallic Kalaacha”, a “symbol of firm but responsible manliness.” The feminine counterpart to guudu hairstyle is “qudjeva” (Werner 1914: 141), guytguu (literally ‘go-away bird’ or its ‘tonsure’) or qarré ‘tonsure’ (literally, ‘kite’ or similar bird of prey) (Bartels 1983:262), while of the masculine qallačča head-gear is the feminine qärma (literally ‘sharpened, civilized’). In Gada System, this age-class is called Gaammee Guďq’guďa (reduplication guďa ‘big’) or ‘Senior Gamme’ III, the age at which the boys elect their six leaders to practice political leadership (Legesse 2006:124-125).

Hassen (1990:15) discusses that bokkuu has “two meanings”.37 One is “the wooden scepter kept by the Abba Gada in his belt during all the assembly meetings”, an “emblem of authority...the independence of a tribe, and...a symbol of unity, common law and common government” (Fig.P5 A and B). De Salvicic describes it “has the shape of a voluminous aspergilum (a container with a handle that is used for sprinkling holy water) or of a mace of gold of the speaker of the English parliament, but in iron and at the early beginning in hard wood” (De

35 As Plowman and others (e.g., Werner 1914b: 272) discuss the number 7 and all the ‘true’ numbers 1-10 and decadals 20-100 code mythical concepts. We cannot treat this complex concept here.

36 An excellent example of metonymic-homophonic complex, guďuu d’iiraa or guďuu d’iiraa comes from guďuu ‘full, virile, virgin, root, tuft (hair)’ (from guďa ‘to become full, big enough; to fill a hole’) and d’iiraa ‘male, boy, son; slit sting’.

37 Some of the orthographies are bokkuu, bokku, boku, bukú, boqo, boqo, boko, boqo, etc. While it is clear that the confusion lies in the interchanging guttural consonants and the related back vowels, here the geminated guttural ‘kk’ and the longer final vowel ‘uu’ are preferred hence the orthography bokkuu.
Salviac 2005 [1901]: 216). Legesse (2006:104) describes it as “a specially curved baton”, which shows that there are two types in use. The second meaning of bokku is, "it refers to the keeper of the bokku—Abba Bokku" (Hassen 1990:15), or in plural Warra Bokku “people of the scepter”. Hence, after serving for full eight year, Abba Bokku must celebrate Bokku Walira Fuud’a (literally to exchange the scepter bokku), a Gada system concept that refers to two socio-political “events as a single act of “exchange”’ (Legesse 1973:81):

(1) the event of power “take over ceremony”, i.e., the symbolic act of the “incoming class” and
(2) the event of power “handover ceremony”, i.e., the symbolic act of “the outgoing class”.

This power-exchange ceremony is also called Baalli Walira Fuud’a “Power Exchange” or “transfer of ostrich feathers” (Legesse 1973:81-82; 2006:125). Here, baalli refers to not only ‘power, authority, responsibility’ (Stegman 2011:5, 68), but also ‘ostrich feather’ and ‘twig (leaved)’, both of which are cultural symbolic objects used on the day of Baalli—the power transfer—a day which by default was the first day of New Year (Foot 1913:5). De Salviac (2005 [1901]: 216) witnessed “the power is transferred to the successor by remittance of the scepter bokku.” After power exchange ceremony, the ‘neophyte’ Abba Bokku: “falls in his knees and raising in his hands the scepter towards the sky, he exclaims, with a majestic and soft voice: Yaa Waaq, Yaa Waaq [Behold! O, God!] Be on my side...make me rule over the Doorii...over the Qaallu...make me form the morals of the youth!!!...” (De Salviac 2005 [1901]: 213; See Fig.P5B taken from Cervicek 1971 Fig. 44). This kind of ‘speech’ is called laba (lablabaa, laqyaba, frequentative, emphatic), literally, ‘shout, proclaimation,publish/publication, decree (of Gada Law)’, but socially, a ceremonial, such as Baalli, speech, “highly stylized, but occasionally powerful, defense speeches eulogizing their own ancestors, their gada class, their gogessa39, and the house of the K’allu [Qaallu]” (Legesse 1973: 215). An excerpt from Lallaba text goes “…May the bulls multiply, may the streams swell. I took balli and served faithfully [as Abba Gada]...I have not fallen short of what custom requires. I am strong. I am wise. Our family has produced thirteen Abba Gada...” (Legesse, ibid.). Then, the new Abba Bokku/Gada takes possession of the seat and “immolates a sacrifice and recites prayers to obtain the assistance of On-High in the government of his people....The entire tribe assembled there, out of breath from emotion and from faith” (De Salviac 2005 [1901]: 212).

Cervicek (1971:130) described Fig. P5 B: “An anthropomorphic figure, H-shaped. Painted in graphite grey. The two bag-like representations above the hands are upwards weathered and lighter, therefore it is not clear if they belong to the foregoing picture.” Above, it was raised that two symmetrical acts/concepts are enfolded “as a single act [or word] of “exchange” is performed by exchanging the Bokkuu scepter during Baalli ceremony (Legesse 1973:81). That is, when the scepter is the one with bokkuu ‘knobs’ on each edge, it suffices to enfold it ‘Bokkuu Baalli’ since the symmetricality principle of the act of reciprocal remittance or power exchange is as adequately abstracted in the phrase as in the iconicity of the balanced bokkuu. Besides, the horooroo stick with a knob (bokkuu) on one side and a v-/y-shape (baalli)42 on the other side is a

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38 Here, Doorii and Qaallu refer to the ‘edifice, tradition’ trickling down (q’urura) since ancients (qur, qurquri, intensive).
39 Too complex a term, gogessa is described by Legesse (1973: 189): “The term includes the living as well as the dead gada classes and corresponds to the opposite sectors of the gada cycle.”
42 Horooroo and d’anggee sticks (both y-shaped and designed from sacred trees like harooressa, waddeessa) are “symbols of material life”, held on pilgrimages to the cradle lands and immortalize Hooroo ‘Primogenitor(s)’, the founder(s) of the Oromo nation (Megerssa and Megerssa 1988: 36-37; Braukämper 2002: 141).
semagram and semotactic for the same concept of symmetricality principle, i.e., Bokkuu Baalli.  

Qallačča, Qaallu and Bovines: A jigsaw motif

In this last section of this analysis, it is so vital to consider the symbolic significance of what an old man skilled in Oromo social epistemology (oral history) says in a book published by Oromia Cultural and Tourism Bureau () almost a decade and half ago:

The Qaallu did this. For the daughter/girl of Gillee [eponymous clan name] he took a heifer; for the daughter/girl of Eillee (eponymous clan name) he also took a heifer. Then, for the Eillee girl he erected the heifer of Eillee in such a way that her (the heifer’s) head is faced upwards. For the Gillee girl, he erected the heifer of Gillee in such a way that her (the heifer’s) head is faced downwards. The girl of Gillee took siqqee stick and hit the Mormor River; then, the Mormor River split into two… (BATO 1998: 75; own translation).

This story offers us a tremendously important insight. It corresponds with the amazing critical observation and re-interpretation of the informant Muumme (personal conversation, Semptember 21, 2012). Muumme rotated 90° CW cervizeck’s (1971) Laga Oda Figure 47 (or Fig.P6 A) which is observed as in Fig.P6 B after rotating.

In this motif, the Qaallu, with his qallačča headgear, is at the centre. It is possible to observe one heifer above the Qaallu (perhaps Gillee heifer) her head inverted, serving as qallačča headgear, and behind him to the right handside, two heifers (cattle, one headless), both of whose heads are faced downwards but in between them and the qallačča cattle is one anthropomorphic motif, unlike on the lefthand where there are many, possibly a chorus in praise of the sublime white spotted cow (adq’oolee) and of the reverenced Qaallu. Also a heifer (cow?) whose head is faced upwards (possibly Eillee heifer) can be seen from the motif. As usual, it is likely also that this style is as much for social-epistemological as is it for grammatical-semotactical reason. The downward-faced heifer or Gillee (apparently from hypocoristic-diminutive from ĝila ‘ritual ceremony, pilgrimage to Qaallu cradle lands’), which is equivalent to qallačča headgear of the Qaallu anthropomorphic, is a signification of the semantic of gaţa ‘to safely travel away and come home (or gaţma ‘the Sacred Temple of Qaallu) by the help of the Qallačča the providence of God. Thus, the collocation forming gaţa-gaţa gives the polysemous metonymic senses:

(1) to invert, make upside down,
(2) one who causes safe home-come i.e., Qallačča. The same ‘play on word’ is true of Eillee:

(1) reduplication (emphasis) of ĝt, ĝla ‘spring up; well (water)’, and
(2) ĝt literally ‘go up; upwards; spare the day peacefully’. “Ōgał!” is a farewell formula for ‘Good day!’ (literally ‘Be upward! Be above! Prevail!’).

Yet, the most interesting aspect lies beyond the lexico-syntactic or semotactic motives. Carefully observed, the head of the Qaallu motif and that of the foreparts of the downwards (gadi) facing Gillee heifer merge, which makes the latter headless (gad’ooma, literally ‘one who has become gaţa official’) a representation of the political term/concept koţoooma ‘sovereign, self-reliant’.

Legesse (1973:63) described similar Gada structure/system:

The highest office is that of the Abba Gada Arbora. He is described as the adula fite or the apical councilor
(fitẽ=apex, pinnacle, top). The next two seniority positions are held by the councilors known as Abba Gada kontoma. These two officers always come from two specific clans from the two submoieties of the Gona moiety. The three senior officers of the council are collectively known as gada saden (the gada triumvirate). The remaining three councilors are simply adula hayyu (senior councilors).

The Elellee heifer, apparently with only one horn but full bok’uu ‘nape’ (pun on Bokkuu scepter, symbol of power), appears to be another jigsaw making a thorax (gûde’ča) of the Qaallu, possibly because in the “Barietuma” Gada System, the Qaallu are “central”, i.e., “occupy a special position, and their members act as “witnesses” (Galech) on the occasion of weddings or other important transaction” (Werner 1915:17, 1914a: 140; See also Legesse 2006: 104, 182, for “Gada Triumvirate System”). Pertaining to the “seven bosses” of the qallačča (Plowman 1918:114) is possibly equivalent to Cervicek’s (1971:192) description of this same motif: “Seven animal representations, painting of a symbol (centre) and pictures of H-shaped anthropomorphic figures...Painted in graphite grey, the big cattle picture a little darker, the smaller one beneath it in caput mortuum red.”

While we can consider, following Dr. Gemetchu Megerssa, anthropology professor, that the seven bosses might stand for the seven holes of human body (above the neck) which still stand for some mythical concepts we cannot discuss here, it is also possible to consider the (related) socio-political structure of the democratic Gada System. They might stand for what Legesse (1973: 82, 107) calls “torban baalli” “the seven assistants” of Abba Gada in “power” (his in-powerness makes him Abba Bokkuu, ‘Proprietor/Holder of the Bokkuu Scepter’). Long before Legesse’s critical and erudite study of Gada System, Phillipson (1916:180) wrote:

The petty chiefs act in conjunction with the king. These are, however, appointed by election of officers called Toib [Tö’b] or Toibi (= seven councilors or ministers). These are men of standing and character.... They are governed by, and work in unison with, the head. These officers are appointed by the king, and each of the seven has an alternative, so that the number is unbroken. Their office is to sit in council with the king, hear cases, administer justice...the Toibi stands in the order elected: 1, 2, and c.

These seven high ranking officials (agaoda) are purposely represented by forepart of bovine body (agooda), because this is the strongest and most powerful part. Öl, literally ‘up, upwards, upper’ is a metaphoric expression for those “On-High in the government of his [Abba Bokkuu] people” (De Salviac 2005 [1901]: 212). Cervicek (1971:130) is accurate when he theorized “anthropomorphic representations do not seem to have been painted for their own sake but in connection with the cattle and symbolic representations only.” Nor is the headless cattle drawn for the sake of fun or ‘scholastic’ pastime, but, without doubt, is intended to capture what Legesse (1973: 63) describes “Borana version of ‘government by committee’, called gadaa mura (from mura ‘cut (into equal seams); decide, judge, sentence’), but a paronomasia for the aforementioned system of Gada Arbora/Boora: “in spite of the fact that they were ordered by seniority, they were a community of equals and shared the same amount of decision-making power”(Legesse 1973: 63). In other words, it is stylized painting intended to texture the notions of seniority-cum-equality simultaneously, in caput mortuum.

Conclusion and implications

The aim of this paper is to illustrate how phantasms and political agenda blend some truth about ancient rock paintings and arts in Ethiopian history. The results reveal both substantive and methodological insights. Methodologically, the results suggest the importance, as social semiotic device, of the unique Oromo social semiotical rhetorics, which combines, into a single communicative structure, four features of social semiosis: homophonic (identical sound structures), homosemic
(synonymic structure), homosememic (semantically polysemous, etymologically ancient, phonologically harmonic, and hence is characteristically poetic, irrespective of whether the style is verse or prose), homomorphic (i.e., ontologically/causally systematizing the cognitive faculty, e.g., *korma* as ‘a virile bull’ and *korma* as ‘a macho man’, and hence metonymically symbolic). Again, for lack of expression, it is referred to as ‘metaplasmic witticism’—a socially intended project to systematize the Jakobsonian semiotic triangle—the signifier (the visual or phonemic substance of the word); the signified (the concept or image represented by the visual or phonemic sequence/the word); and, the referent (the pre-linguistic object or real world of the social or natural).

By more systematized way—in contrast to unsystematized one—of unwrapping the world and wrapping it with related words, Oromos believe, both the word and the world are “disposed to help memory” (De Salviac 2005 [1901]:285). This emanates from antique social epistemological praxis captured in the epistemic adages: *wal-fakkatuun wal-barbaaddii* ‘the similar/look-alike want/inquire one/each (an-)other’; *mi‘a wal-fakkatu wal-bira fannisu* ‘it is those look-alike/similar entities/things that (they) put/generate together’, and so forth. As such, the usual Western dualism (separating the world and word, the indigenous mind/people from their world/works) or arbitrarization of the semiotic triangle is a categorical mistake.

Substantively, the results show the separation of the people from their native land, symptomatic of the Eurocentric dualism, is and has never been useful for advancing human knowledge. Firstly, there must had been Peircean (Sanders Peirce) ‘community of inquirers’ or Habermasean (Jurgen Habermas) ‘communicative actors’ working for the advancement of scientific knowledge. This amazing widely distributed yet with shared linguistic-semiotic-epistemological structures could not have happened without ‘community of inquirers’.The very Hararqee Oromo clan-names or ethynonyms—as usual eponymous—are as metasemiotic evidence are the toponyms, i.e., they mean together ‘Community of Inquirers’—for instance, Warra D’aya ‘Community of Mimesis/Beaters/Reckoners (calendar)’, Afran Qał̣ğ̣o/Qaỵj̣o ‘The Quadruplet Wisemen; The Four Men of Reading/Writing’, Warra Hubana ‘The Community of Inquirers/Knowledge’.49 Quite contrary to what the mainstream Eurocentric historians and archaeologists tell us, the results of this study show, without doubt, the Oromo social epistemology, cultural history, social semiosis and unique rhetorical organization, are what underlie the ‘pre’-historic rock arts in focus.

Another important implication of the findings of this study is that the faulty literary/linguistics theory of ‘punning for punning’s sake’ or ‘metaphor for metaphor’s sake’, which dismisses social semiotic intentionality, is not plausible to accept. In this paper, we have gotten a glimpse of the fact that the ancient wisemen never chose everything at their own will, but, it was real generative mechanism that required systematization or linking of the ‘word’ and the ‘world’. Particularly, in Oromo, arbitrarization does not work or it may work to some degree today but never or less in the antiquity; it might be true of some languages.

For an Oromo, there is no difference between making a respectful speech (*seeda*) and erecting an obelisk (*сидá*) on *soodduu* *q’abaa’d* a ritual of paying homage to the departed Abba Gada, for it is a ritual/expression that involves “all the objects and substances that are placed at the graveside and all the actions that are performed by the family in remembrance of the deceased parent” (Baxter and Kassam 2005:1). Language and languaging are complex phenomena/structures intricately related to the emergence and life praxis (of tens/hundreds of thousands of years) of Homo sapiens sapiens, yet related never arbitrarily.

REFERENCES

49 The Oromo words for ‘wisemen’ or ‘men of reading’ such as *qaro*, *qoro* ‘wise man/ men, noble’ (also means ‘raven, black hawk’ from *qara’a* ‘sharp, sharpen, inquire, read, delineate, sculpture, do grammar’) and *qaffa* ‘wise person’ (from deverbal *qaffa*, *gafa* ‘to ask; horn, day’) are popular also in Ancient Meroitic-Egyptian texts (for the Meeo-Egyptian lexemes see Aubin 2003; Rowan 2006).