

Poetry, Play and History: A Critical Appraisal of the Borana Age-set Joke Performance

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the age-set joke among the Borana community. It analyses direct face-to-face interaction between two male age-mates who take turns to exchange witticisms and topical comments composed for the purpose of teasing one who is in effect a peer-cum-friend. The age-set joke recounts a man's deeds with a slant. It seeks to entertain the audience by focusing on the misadventures of the man and bringing them out for laughter. Men are ridiculed for not being clever enough, wily or for making daring attempts where none are called for. Wooing of women is viewed like hunting from which a man cannot come out empty-handed. Humour is derived from a situation where the man is being outwitted, from failure to win in the game of wooing, irresponsible behaviour, and inability to sustain relationships. Similarly, age-mates chastise greed and unconventionality in social relations. Through joke, the weakness of a friend's mistress is revealed, a revelation on which he is expected to reflect and renegotiate his position vis-à-vis the narrative. In this world of the amorous young men, it is not immoral to have extramarital sex; it is feminine not to, and it is a weakness to be caught. The joke is a mirror that reflects a man's dented image for remedial attention, whether the weakness exposed is ineloquence or inelegance for which he is denied justice or favours from women. Thus the joke-teller friend becomes a kind of moral conscience whose claims serve to trigger moral introspection on the part of the butt.

Introduction

Among the Borana of northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, there is an elaborate literary genre of jocular nature with which men tease their male friends. This jocular oral form is both poetic, humorous and draws on factual

events in the life of an individual. The jests here rely on overstatement through which the stereotypes of the male subculture and in-group biases are brought to the fore. Humour acts as a double-edged sword being used for collaboration and inclusion, and collusion and exclusion (Rogerson-Revell, 2007: 4). An overview of these stereotypes betrays the aesthetic tastes of the male world projected onto the entire community. Behind these clichés is the often-unrecognised truth that, in communal cultures like that of the Borana, nothing is hidden and essentially there is no privacy in the sense of an individual having his little secrets. People's deeds are open to public scrutiny because everybody is known to everybody else, and all are related in a culturally designated web. In another sense, these stories form part of one's biographical data on which certain decisions regarding social ratings are based. Together with the praise poetry known as *dhadhu*¹ that virtually all males worth their status own, the joke ascribed to age-set members make up the character of an individual. The criticism engendered in the age-set joke and the praise epithets in *dhadhu* conjoin to give a balanced picture of men as humans with strengths and weaknesses, failures and successes. By enumerating and repeating the deviations from the norms, men underline what they consider to be a male code that members must conform to. The attachment of the stigmatic levels on deviants, are particularly meant to delineate the code that binds them as a group. The exhibition of naivety in getting women is laughed at because a true age-set member should not possess characteristics which are considered feminine. The cowards, those who abscond, the lovers of weak, ugly women are denigrated on the basis of their inability to measure up to the masculine expectations. By attributing to each of these men objectionable or disparaging epithets through an examination of their physical and behavioural traits, the age-set joke urges members to discard these deprecatory tendencies that portray them in bad light.

The joke composers are not professional performers in any sense of the word. They are ordinary members of the community who have the interest and the ability to joke with their friends in a poetic way. In the Borana oral tradition, there is no formal training institution for the would-be performers to attain and perfect their verbal art. People who have the flair for language just learn other people's jokes and create their own along the same lines. In fact, from childhood teenage boys are exposed to a genre of verbal dueling called *arraaba ilmaan d'iira* (literally, the insult of the male youths) that entails creating poetically constructed insult that uses all manner of vulgarity. Here, existing verbal insults are learned and appropriated as they are uttered to individuals. The recipient also learns and adds this to his repertoire of insults

and admonishes others with it, who, in turn, also utilise it as a learning opportunity. The performing forum is a sort of training ground for budding poets (Samatar, 1982: 57).

In the same way, the age-set joke performer learns the formula and the convention of the genre through listening to others. He then creates his own joke texts by fitting the particularity of his joking partner's inadequacy. There are no master artists but there are people who are renowned for their genius in the creation of the joke. Some people are more skilled in telling jokes and making puns than others (Karl-Heinz and Heydasch, 2010: 172). Such people are referred to in evaluative terms as *naam afaan hamaa*, people of bad language or sharp tongue. The composer generally emulates fluent and flamboyant joke composers and performers who do not falter or forget their lines. Consequently, most of the jokes draw on one another partly because of this interdependence at the level of learning through listening to others.

Although most informants agree that it takes quite an effort and a great deal of learning to create their own joke texts, they however do not think composition is a kind of inspiration that is sacred, as is the case with Somali poets. According to Samatar, a reluctant Somali poet, overwhelmed by passion, withdraws into himself and spends many sleepless nights and even months, to draft the proper language with which to express his deep feelings (1982: 69). In such an instance, poetry is reified and seen as tormenting the poet with an inner struggle. The joke poets I have interviewed, contend that, composition, like the joke itself, comes handy when couched in the form of play. To them, being serious actually kills the art because joking is meant in the first place, to bring lightness to the heart.

Composition and Context of Performance

The composition of the age-set joke is primarily based on events that have taken place in the life of the composer and his age-mate friend. It may be that the composer's friend was exposed as having an illicit affair, or had failed in accomplishing some goal. This incident in the life of the age-mate will prompt the composer to create jocular poetry about him, which in some playful way urges him to take action and right the wrong. He will in doing so, draw on other resources such as toponyms, the formulaic phrases in the tradition of joke performances such as *kopele fanaan yake*, *fano farada irati yaake* (he spoils shoes with his feet, he spoils saddle on the horse). Invariably, there must

be a history that acts as a prompt and the traditional stock formulas and the particular details of the person forming the body of the joke.

Let us take the case of two friends, Boru Guyo and Abduba Galgallo, both of whom belong to the age-set of Dambala Diida, within the age bracket of 58-66. I shall examine some of the stories that lie behind the text and how the lines are brought together to form the entire unified text. This is what Abduba said to Boru:

Galaani uuban d'oowa, laagi jiigeesan d'oowa
 Qalaamu diiman d'ae ablikeeshin kanke
 Kaar Torbi Chief Huqaan bau d'oowa
 Moona sii huqiise saa kanke ka mateta dalach jed'an
 D'ach'isan miil d'oowa
 Aat naami waan diqoo
 Barch'umaa kaanat hinejaatini
 Beeni ufuma nyaate guma gutuu sii d'oowa

Lake is difficult because of debris; river is difficult because of log
 He crosses with red pen, your application
 Chief Huqa made it difficult to pass Torbi gap
 It diminished your herd your cow called Why-Rest-Brown
 Disease denied it leg
 You who has little wealth
 Do not vie for this post
 People will merely eat your money
 And deny you the cow of the tuft of hair

The story behind this joke is that in 1981, Boru, a resident of Sololo town, had put in an application for the advertised post of Assistant Chief for the area. The then area Chief Huuqa Guulleid, was a power broker and had his preferred candidate in the person of one D'engee Okootu, from his immediate sub-clan, and who eventually got the post. Boru had wanted to sell a cow to pursue the matter but his friend Abduba, dissuades him from the pursuance of a futile endeavour since in Abduba's reasoning the matter has been conducted and concluded behind the scenes. The text of the joke is Abduba's speech uttered to awaken the butt to see sense and abandon the ambition.

How then is the text crafted from that story? The first line is a stock phrase that is common in the way poems are begun with some general philosophical statement. The important thing is the speaker's use of the word *d'oowa*, which

signifies impediment and obstruction, for the entire poem is built on it. Just as the river and lake impede or make passage difficult, the entire text uses *d'oowa* as a motif that has great import for the speaker. *D'oowa* as word has a wide semantic field and it is this field of possibilities that is exploited. The entire poem can be divided into four units each ending with the word *d'oowa* or some form of it, *sii d'oowa*. The first is about the lake/river difficulties, the second, the stoppage of the application to go beyond the Torbi gap, the third is the infliction that robbed the cow of its leg, and finally the fourth segment, is the warning to the butt against people who will eat his money and deny him the symbolic cow of the tuft of hair. This last is about what makes a Borana a Borana. The Borana often refer to themselves as Borana Guutu, the Borana with the tuft of pigtail hair on their heads. Oba (2000) has also indicated that *guuma guutu* (the cow of the tuft of hair) is a symbolic cow that separates Borana from non-Borana since cattle ownership is an identity marker.

Let us examine the line groups and see how they are made to carry the content and form of the joke text. Leaving aside the first line, the second line is concerned with the issue of the application and how it is blocked by the powers that be from reaching the district headquarters at which the considerations take place. The red pen is the instrument used in this blockage and in the mind of the speaker it is conceived as an instrument of hindrance. In school, for example, it is well known that exercises done by the pupils were corrected using the red pen. The crossings done in red pen by authoritative teachers, have made the red pen to be seen as an instrument that deters upward progress, say to the next class. In addition, the red pen is regarded as portending something dangerous, and can only be used when something is amiss. For example, there was a time between 1970s and 1990s when letter writing as a means of communication between the rural and urban Borana was a common phenomenon. The illiterate people who asked literate youths to write letters for them were very particular about the use of a red pen. The red pen was only used when conveying information about the death of a beloved member of the family. By using a red pen according to the speaker, the power broker Chief had marked Boru's application as something to be denied life. The toponym, the gap of Torbi, is potent with meaning because Torbi is a landmark dividing the district headquarters in Marsabit and Sololo location. By ensuring that the application does not reach the targeted place, the Chief had made it impossible for Boru to be considered for the post, a fact to which the jester draws his attention.

The third group of lines relates to Boru's property or rather his lack of it. The speaker personifies the ailment that inflicted the cow, thus impoverishing Boru's kraal, as if conspiring with those who stand in the way of his progress. The cow's name has its own little story. Why-Rest-Brown was named so, because it was bought with the money earned through menial labour. In this case, Boru the labourer was often subjected to the admonishing rebuke, why rest? Boru was a farmhand at a Kiambu coffee plantation near Nairobi in the late 1970s. The line serves to caution the butt that since the cow he laboured to buy has been rendered useless by a bovine disease, he should not venture to sell others to further aggravate his already dismal material condition.

The last group of lines links the ambition for the coveted post and the poverty of the applicant by suggesting that since the process is riddled with corruption, nepotism and favouritism, Boru should be prudent and stay away. He is being warned not to incur double loss through paying bribes and also missing the appointment.

It is clear from the foregoing that the age-set joke arises out of a particular situation and addresses that situation. It is a genre where poetry, play and historical events converge and illumine one another. But it should be noted that this is done with a light touch, and these line groups are meant to be humorous, a kind of play yet touching the truth about the realities of life.

In a similar age-set joke Boru in turn advises his friend Abduba in another context. This is what he tells him:

Dumansi gamaa d'ufe mukha irra taa
 Jalto issa Wakanyi gaaraan jilbaa irra taa
 Booba luku teeti eegataa risaan mukha irra taa
 Riisaan fiite luku tee reeffi tokochaan taa
 Agaa atin baraan riifaachifte
 Abbe arraalee gaaraachi madaan taa
 Ijjoleen isaa lama
 Guuda ganni kuud'ani lama
 Waan Borana seeda
 Arraalee tuuseen taa

Clouds come from yonder and settle on the trees
 His mistress Wakanyi her belly rests on her knees
 Waiting for your chicken hawks perch on the trees
 Hawks killed them your fowls their carcasses litter everywhere

Since you last startled him your father still remains with his unhealed wound
 His children are two
 The elder son is twelve years old
 What is a taboo to the Borana
 He still remains with the childhood hair

The story behind this text is that in 1979 when the two friends were working as labourers in Kiambu, Boru had gone home and found Abduba's father unhappy about his son's refusal to come home for the child naming ceremony of his own son which could not be carried out without him. The last time he was there two years earlier he had slighted his father by adamantly refusing to participate in the ceremony citing various reasons. In fact, since he had found a mistress for himself he cared little for the naming ceremony. As Boru was going back to work at the end of his leave, Abduba's father pleaded with him to convince his friend to come home and carry out the ceremonial rite expected of him. The text is composed to prick the prodigal son's conscience for the neglect of the cultural ceremony.

In terms of composition, the important word that gives shape to the poem is *taa*, which means settle, sit or a state of being that denotes something stationary. This word that implies stagnation in its many forms is used because the objective of the poem is to show that contrary to the societal expectations, the butt's son still remains with the childhood hair that should have been shaved in a ceremonial way. The lines are thus constructed from observable facts of life, and fashioned around the key word that shows things are stationary, and in this way also maintain rhyming pattern. The poem draws on Abduba's social history and relationship with other people, and culminates into a heavily loaded cultural statement, which is meant to shock him into consciousness.

Line 1 which points out the cloud settling on trees, like in the previous poem, is a common way of beginning a poem. The second line is an observation that ridicules the butt on account of his foreign mistress. The woman named Wakaanyi was from the Kikuyu community and from the description of her belly, Abduba had impregnated her, something that explains his estrangement from his cultural roots and the paternal duties he was required to perform. Line 3 and 4 are about Abduba's fowls that were devoured by hawks and in the manner of age-set joke, are used to diminish the image of the butt. The fifth line refers to Abduba's slighting of his parent. The last two lines are meant to

draw the butt's attention to the need for him to carry out the *rite de passage* for his children, the avoidance of which is found to be a cultural anomaly. The invoking of Borana culture makes it a grave issue that the butt should not continue to ignore.

As in the other text by Abduba, the butt is being joked about, teased, his stature diminished, and later advised to take action about something that if neglected will result in social embarrassment for him. The speaker resorted to joke because the genre is convincing, mirthful, appealing and truthful. It is a way of communicating with one another, unique to age-mates and sanctioned by society. More than that it remains a record of biographical facts of the man for whom it is composed.

Themes and Styles in Age-Set Joke

In this section, I look at the major themes that preoccupy the age-set joke and the styles in which they are rendered. This is important because certain key issues seem to underlie and mark the relationships of the age-mates and these are the things crucial to their lives and thus joked about. By subjecting to scrutiny the themes and styles of their joke, we learn of their woes and worries, their hopes and aspirations, and their worldview. More importantly, we learn the ways in which the age-set joke is constituted as a genre within the society by its performers, and what ends it serves for them and the larger society. This face-to-face joke is moreover agonistic, and involves the positing of challenges and the responding to them. The aim is to deflate the image of the joking partner by the use of a series of negative images from disparate realms of social life that build to a climax. One's gait, eating habits, facial features, relation with one's mistress, issues of morality and honour, one's involvement in corruption, weaknesses about controlling libido, in short practically everything can be a subject of the age-set joke. Here I select the more recurring themes from the field data and the discussion I had with some of the performers.

The Mistress

One of the most persistent themes the age-set joke revolves around are the real or imagined foibles of the butt's mistress. So central is the mistress theme in the joke circle amongst the age-mates that it appears, she and not the man, is the target of the joke. The question then is why does this apparent male genre grant a prominent place to what may easily pass as female aggression? One

answer, rooted in theoretical formulations of psychoanalytic persuasions is that, owing to peer competition amongst the age-mates, anxiety is produced by the judgmental attitude towards the beauty of one's woman friend² (mistress) in relation to others. The fear of being thought inadequate amongst peers on account of an ugly woman-friend would drive an age-set member to joke about his peer's mistresses. In a sense it is emotionally cathartic to laugh at the mistress of the other with whom one is linked as a best friend. As Gilooly observes, humour transforms the pain of frustrated aggression into a source of pleasure by offering its practitioners a real, if momentary, triumph over lived experience (1999: 37).

Yet whether one perceives the mistress theme psychologically or functionally, the fact is that because having a mistress is a rather illegitimate enterprise, it is an anxiety-producing venture at several levels. On the one hand, there is the danger of being discovered by the husband of the mistress with its ensuing social embarrassment; on the other, not having a mistress breeds the fear of being thought weak by peers, all of whom have acquired women-friends. According to Baxter (1974: 813), if a young man is discovered in a liaison, he can gain some credit from his age-mates, but he risks public opprobrium and perhaps a beating and a fine. It is the realities and fears of these beatings, fines, and anxieties that are dramatised in play and joke.

Even as the relief/release theories explicate some features of the joke there is no doubt as to the genre's social nature. This is best explained by Radcliffe-Brown's functionalist formulation (1940; 1949). According to Radcliffe-Brown, joking occurs at a tension point in the social structure of the society, and it serves, as many other kinds of social behaviours in Radcliffe-Brown's functional trope, to maintain equilibrium. Competition over favours from women may bring tension amongst the age-mates that needs to be diffused through the joke genre. As joke theorists (Davies, 1990; Palmer, 1994) have found out, in-group jokes are told in the face of internal division as ways of coping with the harsh reality by making it temporarily less threatening.

The text below amply illustrates the way in which a jester mocks his co-performer by exposing the intention of the latter's mistress to buy hair from Yaballo town, an intention that is unusual in the circumscribed and fairly unsophisticated Borana world. Let us examine this text closely:

Waaqayo guudan roobe duur bukiyeen d'ufte
Gaara Qanchaaro irra urriin dhalaatin d'ufte
Qanchaara sarba kuutu odduun te qaata d'ufte

Maata bitaad'a jeete niitin garaayu teeti kiibbi diir Yabaallo d'ufte
Maata gaatin waranaa tokooch riifeensa hinqabdu boori moyiitin ak
loon Guuyo Daada buulte

Before the rain begins heavy fog precedes it
From Qanchaaro hill came the dull fog
You the stunted one of bandy legs your deeds have circulated
Wishing to purchase hair your mistress went to Yabaallo town
The price of hair is dear, without any she slept bare like the cattle of
Guuyo Daada

First by narrating that the mistress in question attempted to purchase hair, the jester is implying she is foolish. The jester plays on the script of surprise that borders on absurdity for it is unusual for women in Borana especially the rural ones where the joke is set, to do so. Humour is also made apparent at the exposure of ignorance played on the urban/rural axis. The rural people, to whom the woman in question belongs, are perpetually uninformed, desirous of town things and make fool of themselves owing to this same ignorance such as not knowing the prohibitive price of the desired object, and thus become easy objects of laughter.

The climax (line 5) juxtaposes the bare head of cattle with that of the butt's mistress. The age-mate is considered as *qanchaara*, the stunted one, one who is older than his looks. The shape of his legs is captured with the metaphorical word, *kuutu*, a small container fashioned as a tobacco holder. Humour is evoked by the epithets used to describe the joking partner. His mistress is not spared either. She is *bor moyyiti*, which roughly means a blue hornless cow, which applied to the bovine, is an epithet of affection but detestable when used to refer to women. She craves the things of modernity but she cannot afford them. Having lost her natural beauty of long lush hair, the artificial one eludes her because she does not have the means to acquire it. The aim is to ridicule the butt as a man whose mistress is ugly, old and unfeminine within the trope of masculine culture.

Vulnerable targets for the jest composers are also some character traits of mistresses who have suffered misfortune of one kind or another. An examination of the text below concretises this point:

Alaan yabena dote alatin qenchan keete
Qench dedera qabda refu qadabin geete
Endegeen arma demte kara Mombasa deemte

Ak Ioni bobate niti garayu teti alat Jaluoon geete

The Somali camel dies, vulture tears with claws
 You have long claws, you are ready for scavenging
 The aeroplane leaves here for Mombasa
 She strayed like cattle; a Luo³ raped your mistress

In this text the jester turns the misfortune of his friend's mistress involving rape by an alien person into a comic occasion where the woman is blamed for straying into a domain that is ordinarily out of bounds for her. The man is likened to a scavenging bird, a vulture on account of his long nails. He is said to have come of age to go scavenging. His mistress is eroticised as seeking sex, and what she gets is a lesser man, an uncircumcised one. The text's use of the words plane, Mombasa (Kenya's second largest city), and its reference to Luo, locates it outside the Borana cultural domain to an urban setting. It is an indicator of the joke's ability to transcend its cultural environment by reinvention in a continual way. The humorous effect is realised by playing the trope of conventional/unconventional in which the norms of conventionality have been violated. In fact there is a sense in which the jester makes the rape sound as if the victim desired it. The words "strayed like cattle" imply that as cattle look for pasture the victim looked for her aggressor. The outside/inside domain and alien/own dichotomies heighten the transgression and violation of Borana cultural space that causes anxiety, which must be played out in jocular form. The poem acquires its rhythm from the rhyming words *keete/geete/deemte* that mark the end of each line. Parallelism and balance are achieved by the repetition of the word *qench/claw* and its variant *qench'an*/its verb form. Mombasa and *bobate* are used for purposes of sound pattern.

Poor housing structures that are put up by women often serve as a ready recipe for jest among peers. In the Borana community it is the sole responsibility of women to construct houses for their family, while the man is charged with the onus of providing shelter for cattle. This responsibility requires competence and is subject to criticism from the public. Very often house construction and general house keeping becomes a yardstick for gauging the neatness of a woman in a community bent on looking at women through a masculine lens. The text below is illustrative:

Mili waqaa d'abate golbo keesaa mulata
 Maan hinqabdu ofoor jalto teeti keesan waaqi mulata
 Ofori dudee jenan niti garayu teti irra odhan dubata
 (Injirti, odhaan korma)

The rain cloud gathered, and appeared in the plains
 She lacks a house, through the shack of your mistress the sky appears
 After the holes have been blocked, *odha*⁴ speaks on your mistress
 (It is true, *odha* is a male *ayyana*)

In this text two issues are used to chide the man, namely the shoddy work displayed by his mistress's house and the fact that after she had made efforts to somehow mend the gaping holes in her house, spirits possess her. The mistress is seen as prone to problems, suffering one calamity after another. She lives in a shanty that can hardly pass as a house. The word used is *ofoor*, a makeshift with many gaping holes through which sky is visible. Her handiwork is laughed at as something roughly strewn together. The line underscores her helplessness, her vulnerability, her weakness. She is a woman unable to take charge of her affairs, and therefore of no use for one as a lover. The text implies that the woman in question is crude, unsophisticated and susceptible to being a victim of an unpropitious spirit harmful to both the man and herself. Another version of this text contends that sheikh Hussein⁵ impaired her hearing ability in one case, rendering the woman a candidate for the *ayyana* (spirit possession) cultists to attend to.

Another character trait of the mistress that is mocked stems from the jester's reckoning "her being like men." In the text below, the targeted woman is said to have sat amongst men and treated herself to the luxury of the local brew. The jester first censures her walking style where she is said to have "thrown her right arm," and then subjects her to ridicule for violating social decorum of which he is the privileged overseer:

Koop'e faanan yakite
 Faano fardaan yakite
 Kara dirraa deemte
 Niti garayu teeti ark mirgich darbite
 Mirga d'iira tete farso t'assan darbite
 Farson kara keesat bufte
 Luketu keesat ch'apsite

You spoil shoes with your feet
 You spoil the saddle with the horse
 Walking on her way to the town
 The woman who is your mistress threw the right arm
 She sat on the right side of a man and gulped alcohol
 The liquor made her fall on the road
 Broke her hips

The method of joke making is that small allusions are used to display the character of the man as questionable, and in this case the reference made in the first line serves this purpose. A man who spoils the shoes with his feet is an epitome of ugliness. As in other jokes, getting at him through the flaws of his mistress diminishes the joking partner's stature. The text uses snippets of epithets to hint at the woman as loose, drunkard and a comic figure whose moral deprivation is symbolised by physical degeneration. Line 3 is a pun on *mirgich/mirga* for right hand and right side respectively and is used effectively to underscore her apparent daring posture in disregard of a male oriented arrangement that considers her being there, in the first place, illegitimate and subversive. The woman is made to appear even more ridiculous in that, the liquor, which like all tough things, belongs to the male domain, tripped her and broke her hip. Implied in this joke is the unspoken message that indulgence in culturally prohibited practices leads to disgrace for the woman and by extension the man who is inextricably associated with her.

Discovery by the Cuckold

Being caught by cuckolded husbands, like the incidents themselves, forms a large portion of thematised areas by age-mates in joke. The implicit message is that the butt was not wily enough to exercise caution and hence more than deserved to be caught. The indulgence in extramarital sex is shrouded in secrecy and thus, calls for dexterity, as essentially one is a thief as far as sexual liaison with someone else's wife is concerned. The following passage shows that the discovery by the cuckold is preceded by the butt's immodesty:

Ilad ilan d'ofte,
 Taari t'ururan d'ofte
 Ill gara keesa barisa d'ofte
 Ill yaabi daadi keesa ilisa d'ofte
 Waa d'ude ch'ich'o sepanin d'ofte
 Waa nyate shana lafan d'ofte
 Olli kaate lafat zimbabi d'ofte
 Olli deemta kara ka Waro diida d'ofte
 Dabdich faro hamaa mangul jaroti Dambala Diida ebbo udut sii d'ofte

You saw the mouse with your eyes
 The dikdik you caught in a trap
 From the gap in the hill you collected honey
 From the eyes of a rinderpest infested calf you ate worms
 You drink milk and drop the container

You ate something and drop faeces on the ground
 Going to seduce you wore the showy cloth
 Going to seduce you walked the path to Waro plain
 You stupid one of ill luck, how is it that the elders of Dambala Diida
 age-set nearly speared your buttocks?

The poem is based on a factual incident. The text recounts a near-tragic event where the butt of the joke, a village commune leader, during former President Mengistu's villagisation policy in Ethiopia, takes his lover woman with him to attend a meeting. The husband gets wind of their being together and complains about the matter to the elders who in a diplomatic way try to resolve it by bringing the aggrieved parties together. Unfortunately this effort at resolution ends up in a chaotic situation as the cuckolded husband lashes out after the accused denies any affair with his wife.

The indulgence in extramarital sex and the superficial manner in which it is handled is dramatised. The incongruity of overconfidence assumed on the road to seduction and the fatality of return with a spear thrust in the back is juxtaposed and mocked. The performer appears unsympathetic to the butt's predicament and because the event is now in the past, he can construct a joke around it, even though it was a serious one at the time it occurred. In fact joke texts are reflective in nature in that they involve reconstruction on the part of the performer who slants an incident, and interprets it in a way that renders the butt of the joke laughable. Because the entire discourse is slanted towards mockery and play, the victims are not sympathised with, and to win in these contest-like performances, one has to be more verbally articulate than his challenger.

The word for seduction in its original usage is derived from one that is applied to a bull at the apex of the mating season. To Borana, the image of maleness encapsulated in the idiom of the bull is apt. A virile bull presides and maintains domain over a number of herds. It goes both the ground and bullocks to sharpen its horn and to maintain its territoriality. This metaphor is exploited and transposed on to the man who prepares himself to go out to seduce, a venture which ironically turns abortive. By presenting behaviours of members of the age-set, as Hymes (1981) comments in another context, as something laughable and wrong, the speaker denounces them as deceptive, empty and unworthy of emulation.

There are parallel narratives in the Borana oral tradition on this theme that seems to point to a kind of motif, and chief among them is the story of Baboon who seduces Lion's wife when Lion is away. The woman was mesmerised by what she thought was a man considerably different from her husband and enquired about his peculiarities seen in his lean fingers, bare buttocks and hairy chest. Baboon boasted that his fingers were thin because the rings he wore had worn them out. In Borana, a man who has routed male enemies wears rings on his fingers as a mark of his bravery. As for the bare buttocks Baboon boasted that it was the work of the saddle as he was an erstwhile horse rider, and that his hairy chest is that of a brave warrior. Regarded as an act of valour, horse riding is associated with raiding other communities and hunting of big games. For a man to smooth his buttocks in this way, he must have been at the helm of many military expeditions. When Lion returned, his wife challenged him: although he boasts of bravery, she has discovered a greater man than him in the person of Baboon.

The following day they decided to test the veracity of Baboon's claims. Lion hides himself and his wife asks Baboon the same questions. Unaware of the test, Baboon repeats the same wild claims to the woman whom he has marked as an object of erotic attention. To his utter consternation Lion comes out of hiding and challenges him. Scared and begging for forgiveness, Baboon confesses that his thin fingers were caused by digging the ground for roots and his bare behind was a sign of sliding down rocks, and that his hairy chest is the result of the cold nights to which he is exposed.

This narrative can be read as a metacriticism of the Borana culture. As a text, it critiques the condoning of the practice of seducing wives whose husbands are away. The unscrupulous language of deceit and cajoling is simultaneously depicted and denigrated in the shifting mien of Baboon.

Unlike the supposition by Eastman (1936: 31) that laughter was a form of play *having no other ends than those of play* (emphasis added), this story and the joke are invented to laugh at the offending characters for violation of norms. The joke here is also a stage of negotiation about how to introduce taboo subjects into everyday discourse and deal with them in a serious vein by dramatising what is wrong (Basso, 1979).

The Personality of the Butt and his Diminished Image

A prevalent theme in the joke among an age-set has to do with the physical and moral inadequacies of the person with whom one is exchanging the joke. Jokes that are explicitly directed at the butt's personality abound, even though implicitly all are meant to dent his image. What jesters do is to deliberately attribute every misfortune in the butt's life to a kind of personal inadequacy. This functions as a strategy to render them failures at various levels. This is achieved, as Wickberg (1998) rightly observes, by cunningly exaggerating simple foibles into character traits. In some instances the urge to hit hard in this manner is so great that jesters violate the rules of discretion by mentioning the personal names of the butt's mistress. In one such text, a jester contends that the butt obtained love-inducing charm from his friend and applied it to dispossess the latter's wife:

Qay naqachu d'orte jarti Waaqo Darara bol qaya guba fuute
 Daab kaan sii keesat argaa qoosan walti nu buute
 Tolch jaal kanketi olla rimesan fuute
 Tolchum sunin niti jarsa arka fuute
 Falum falte jarroti waar ayyana wari rasula rabbi waari sheikhana
 Hussein
 Akaku Abilo Guyo fa ab Raach Elema fa ab Boru Konsoofa
 Jarroti waar ayyana tun falte afaan bolati fuute
 Atin maanin itdebitef niti suun egi faayyite d'ukub d'ibi fuute?

Interrupting her perfume smoking, you removed Waaqo Darara's wife from smoking hole
 I see this problem in you; this is why my joke clashes with yours
 You bought the love charm of your friend in exchange for an expectant ewe
 You placed the love-charm in the bedroom
 With that love-charm you snatched the old man his wife
 The *ayyana* cult elders, the people of god, the people of Sheikh Hussein
 Elders Abilo Guyo, Raach Elema, Boru Konso
 These elders of *ayyana* cult with a struggle rescued her from the verge of death
 What did you do to her again; the woman has contracted another disease?

The woman in question who was the object of the contest becomes critically ill but thanks to the elders of *ayyana* cult, was rescued from the jaws of death. It is fascinating that the jester refers to the cult elders as the people of Sheikh Hussein and *rasula rabbi* (line 5), words that belong to conventional Islamic diction. The repetition of them in this way serves to re-emphasise and add weight to the claim that superior forces rescued the woman. In this text humour resides in the use of the unexpected where the butt is shown to have acquired a potent love potion to enhance his seduction power. The application of the love potion seems to have exceeded what was bargained for as the woman suffers a recurrent malady that can be traced to the butt's association with her. But even more importantly, the text is a depiction of the absurdity of the preoccupation with wooing and the lengths to which people are prepared to go. The crafty and malicious behaviour imputed to the age-mate is a valid diagnostic tool with which to denigrate his harmful machination for personal aggrandizement.

In other instances age-set jest performers emphasise different facets of weakness of a friend such as the inability to obtain justice in situations where it is obviously deserved. In Borana, verbal dexterity is highly valued and lack of it is regarded as an abject weakness on the part of the man. In a somewhat similar way regarding Akan oratory, Yankah (1989) notes the potency of speech, and its ability to make or break those who utter it. Such potency has to be harnessed by those with know-how, a matter that entails eloquent knowledge of tradition and clarity of perception to argue for oneself or others. Indeed, conceding defeat in an argument in the Borana worldview is closely associated with being feminised. It is against the backdrop of such internalised cultural expectations that the text below constitutes a humorous jibe against one man who could not be granted justice even as the offence committed against him is glaringly obvious:

Aak jaabaa waaqi robe Tiitu galaani yae
 Gaalani Tiitu yae Tuula Qoochaat gargari bae
 Faal maleen gololfate niti Damabla ira garach bafta
 Allo niti Dambala Diidi Diqa Kule te barbatare ilat *maage*
 Barbaren daba jete kora jars Obbu yamte
 Jarsi Obbu dubate Diqaan qulqulo jed'e
 Jarsi naadabse jete iyite gar korte
 Hayu lichu dubate Digallu tesan shanan karat dubate
 Shanan gochi sii murte Didi Diqa dabse tokole fud'achu sii d'ooowe
 Shanan suni dubate Diidi Diqa Kule tetu amum mata argu sii d'ooowa

It rained heavily rivers flowed in T'iitu
 The rivulet from T'iitu branched at Tuula Qoch'a
 You engaged in unseemly sex with *Dambala* woman, you made her miscarry
 In revenge for *Dambala* woman Diid Diqa poured pepper in your wife Kule's eyes
 You perceived the incident as injustice and call the Obbu elders for arbitration
 The elders of Obbu discussed and found Diqa innocent
 You viewed foul play in it and took the matter to elders on the uphill
 The leaders of your Digallu clan talked and awarded you fine of five
 The five the clan sanctioned for you Diid Diqa denied you
 As you grumble over the fine, Diid shall soon deny you access to your wife Kule

The text recounts a real incident in which a man, Dima Jillo, had the unfortunate experience whereby a man by the name of Diid Diqa attacked his wife, Kule, by pouring hot pepper in her face for repudiating his sexual advances, back in the 1980s. The text recounts Dima's vain attempts to get justice. Line 3 refers to Dima's supposed mistress who miscarried due to unorthodox sexual demands. In vengeance, Diid Diqa who happens to be the age-mate of the woman's husband retaliates by committing the vengeful act of pouring pepper in the face of Dima's wife. The twist by the performer is deliberate, as he seems to insinuate that the culprit had the ill intention to cause harm to Dima's wife in vengeance for the miscarriage caused by her husband. But the line is peculiar for another reason: it takes the Kiswahili word "*maga*" (to pour) and superimposes it onto the Borana speech structure.

As Deng (qtd. in Gunner, 1984: 45) says, men who have travelled away from home have a tendency of projecting their experience into their verbal performance. This innovative utterance blends perfectly well with the Borana set rhyme and acoustic patterns of words. In line 6 a similar alien element is inserted where Diid Diqa's surname is used instead of his given name, as is normally the case in Borana. Lines 7-9 underscore the complainant's appeal to elders of his clan in Ethiopia. The tendency to seek justice in the Borana homelands in Ethiopia gives the juridical-political system in Borana as presided over by the *hayyu-lichu*, an unequivocal legitimacy on which the Kenyan Borana draw. The performer underscores the complainant's hopeless situation by sarcastically urging him to brace himself for stiffer consequences

for he is unlikely to see his wife again on account of Diida's aggressiveness. He jokes with him, as if to say, you ain't seen nothing yet.

For Dima Jillo and Roba Halake, the butt and the joke performer in this instance, this type of joke serves to underline the cordiality of their friendship. In their statements, they are categorical in underscoring their affection for each other as age-mates to which their exchange of highly esteemed gifts like cattle bears testimony. They assert that the closer one is to the other, the easier it is to exchange jokes without taking offence. Furthermore, since joke as a genre is in the realm of play, one plays more easily and freely with someone with whom one is familiar. But despite their candid claim, joke appears to be an instrument of negotiation of their friendship where contentiously stressful aspects of their relationship are introduced and discussed. Like the trickster who lives on the verge of society (Babcock, 1978), the man as a member of the age-set is supposed to be clever, slippery, a winner and an achiever where others have failed.

More often the joke arises from a factual event that the performers have shared in their daily experiences, as already observed. But the point that should not be missed is the way in which the butt is blamed for misfortunes over which he had no control. The miscarriage of his mistress is blamed on Dima, accidental though it was. He is said to have engaged in unorthodox sexual demeanour but this appears to be the fabrication of the jester.

The fictional attribute of the joke becomes more apparent with the consideration of the following joke uttered by Roba Halake to Dima Jillo. Part of the game is that one has to win it by convincing the audience through exaggeration. Roba Halake claims that an irate husband speared his friend in an abortive seduction adventure:

Aak jaaba sii jaalate ayo Siiren maaqa ke Dima bafte
 Aak jaaba sii jalaate Wakori Guyo maaqa ke aatuu baase
 Maaqa hanna kaan dide Robi Halake maaqa ke haraamuu koopu baase
 Imbadhi kaate niti garayu teti fanti kara bond'ori baate
 Fan karat argate Aban Karaa Dukalet ade Karayu tana
 D'engada waranaan d'aallu gargari sii baase jenna jirti?

She loved you so much your mother Siire called you Dima
 They loved you so much Wakor Guyo called you thief
 I refuted this thief name and called you incest-committer

In her attempt to flee, the woman who is your mistress her footprint was seen at the boundary
 He saw her footprint, the father of Kara he is a Karayu clan
 The other day he speared you and split your buttocks, is it true?

The story behind this joke, I learnt, is that Dima's mistress, after a provocative quarrel with her husband, had decided to run away to her people using the Kenya/Ethiopia border as her escape route. Dima and his friend found her and instead of apprehending and returning her to her husband, as is the custom, they abetted her escape bid by accompanying her, for it was getting dark. The husband on discovering that his wife has run away traces her footprints until he catches up with her in the company of Dima, her lover. It was at this juncture that the husband hurls two spears at him that according to the jester missed its target by inches. In explaining the circumstances surrounding the composition, Roba concludes his narrative, "he would be dead but for god's grace, so you see we do not utter falsehood against each other."

The jester seems to be speaking about conventional truth rather than literal truth. In the text of the joke itself the claim is that the husband has speared the butt to death (line 6), when of course he survived. But what we learn is a case of fictive projection on the basis of what nearly happened rather than what actually happened. The joke draws on real happenings but exaggerates the details for a purposive end that in the majority of cases is meant to belittle the addressee.

The notion of joke as play is especially reinforcing and illuminating here. Abrahams (1983: 58) in his study of West Indian culture, states that the joke speaker through his antics produces a needed sense of classless liminality, which serves as a creative channel. In turn, from the point of view of the people, by empowering him thus the community provides itself with a set of people who bring a sense of liminality upon the entire participating group, permitting them to forget themselves under a special circumstance and to enter into licentious occasion. Within the precept of this license, truth assumes a dimension of its own where exaggeration and hyperbolic assertions are never refuted. In the Borana joke genre, the formula for engaging in it clearly marks the rules where taking offence is forbidden a priori. The entering of the ludic space is prefaced with elaborate formulaic utterance whose content ranges from direct avowal to not only desist from uttering falsehoods against a joking partner, but also taking offence in a frank enjoyment of the imperfection of the other. But what is so interesting is the use to which such a freedom is put.

According to Freud the most conspicuous factor of the jest is the gratification it affords the speaker by making possible that which reason forbids (1916: 197). In the Borana age-set joke, the crucially essential factor is not just the gratification of doing what reason forbids, but the sheer ridiculing of individuals who have failed to measure up to the age-set ideals. According to Holt, the absence of laughter at an appropriate juncture may result from orientation to interactional considerations such as on-going trajectory of talk (2010: 1513).

The notion of belittling a joking partner draws on traditional theory of humour closely associated with Bergson (1911), which espouses the argument that humour is derived from a sensation of superiority over that which is laughed at. Studies of racial and ethnic humour (Burma, 1946; Davies, 1990) are particularly informative in the notion of superiority, where it is generally held that minority groups bear the brunt of humour that arises from a conception of superiority of the dominant groups. Significant in this direction is the contention that humour lends itself to use as a conflict device because its nature is such that it has well concealed malice. It is the object of the joke performer to portray the butt as a laughable object within the normative conventions of the genre. The text that follows uttered by Dima Jillo to Roba Halake brings out the theme of diminishing the stature of a joking partner by feminising him and rendering him a vehicle of mirth:

Lifii gae Hindi ruusa kadata
Lifaa dema bagi bobat qabata
 Dukub qaba jed'e waari Golole ira *kando* baqata
 Qors d'uga jed'e kara Biilu qabata
 Id'a sira baase Konso Galgallo Mega udu si qaqabata

His leave is due he asks permission from Indian employer
 Going on leave he carries his bag on his shoulder
 Suspecting sickness the Golole people keep away from him
 Going for medication he takes the path to Biilu
 Konso Galgallo Mega removes your trousers and fondles your buttocks

The text describes the typical lifestyle of the Borana watchman who stays in Nairobi working for an Asian family and how he sought permission from his employer to go home. The description in line 3 for instance is very accurate in that these migrant workers carry many odds and ends for their families such as 20-litre water cans, tea leaves, sugar, shoes and clothes. These are appreciated

as signs of modernity and form an increasing part of the household material culture of the people shedding traditional household wares.

The reference to ailment may be construed to refer to the rampant HIV/AIDS cases whose initial history has been assumed to have its genesis in towns, especially Nairobi. It is therefore plausible that any person coming from the slums of Nairobi was regarded as a victim of the scourge. Owing to the paucity of knowledge of the disease's mode of transmission, the rural populace avoid personal contact with such sojourners.

The use of the Kiswahili words *kando* (away from), *ruusa* (permission), *liffii* (leave), *liffa* (from leave), betrays the jester's versatility in "Boranising" a foreign word reflecting the new circumstances in town. The punch line (line 5) is a mockery over what in normal situations the healers do to their patients: examine them in their nudity. But the joke teller tilts it in a way to imply that the examination is turned into fondling of the buttocks as a seductive gesture. Being touched in the buttocks implies he is female, or at any rate the passive victim of a homosexual phallic attacks (Dundes and Falassi, 1982: 192). The joke enunciates the partial emasculation of the joking partner as a strategy to heighten the jester's superiority over him.

Lastly, as a way of indenting the personality of the butt, indecorous feeding and courting habits are employed as the following text shows.

Il lat ilan d'ofte tarri turanan d'ofte
 Il gara keesa barisa d'ofte
 Il yaabbi dhad'i keesa ilisa d'ofte
 Wad'udhe ch'ich'o sepanin d'ofte
 Wanyate shana lafan d'ofte
 Olli kaate lafat simbabi d'ofte
 Olli deemta kara ka Waro dida d'ofte
 Karan gargari bae faro arka mirgichat d'ofte
 Issi faro tante akan jira ka gusite jaroti tola keti
 Mangul ebo uduut si d'ofte?

Mouse you saw with your eyes, dik-dik you caught with trap
 In the gap of a mountain you eat bee larva
 From the eyes of sick calves you ate mucus
 You drunk milk and emptied the container
 You ate something and defecated leaves on the ground
 Ready to woo you dressed in clothes that swept the ground

Going to woo you took the path to Waro plain
 The path forked you followed the one on the right
 Is it that your luck is bad that the husband of your lover
 Chased and nearly speared your buttocks?

The poem hints at the butt's laughable engagements by a series of unrelated snippets that help build his character traits. Lines 2-5 state the butt's breaches of dietary rules beginning with the consumption of mouse, dik-dik meat, bee larva for honey, render-pest affected calf. The consumption of milk, which ordinarily cannot be considered low quality food, comes in the joke category because of the butt's lack of tact in drinking it. As Davies (1990: 282) observes, joke tellers characteristically depict the butt of their joke as being unable or unwilling to consume prestigious food and as subsisting on inferior foods either from choice or from necessity. Lines 4-5 recount the butt's indecorous habit that makes him discard the container from which he has taken milk, which is paralleled by the way in which he eats vegetable and defecates on the ground. The vegetable referred to, falls in the category of foods the Borana consider low quality, eaten by Konso and Burji, two non-pastoral groups living on the margins of the Borana community. The reference to scatology is also a feature of the joke that is exploited for humorous ends. Lines 6-10 are an explicit allusion to the butt's intention to carry out sexual exploits, which end up in a disastrous way. The butt is regarded as one who carries bad luck as he was close to being speared by an irate cuckold with whose wife he was consorting.

Jilted by Mistress

The fear of losing a mistress leads to another theme closely linked to the theme of the man's weakness. This theme, which in most instances is represented as the combination of the questionable character of the woman and the inadequacy of the man as lover, seems to have been employed by people at risk of being edged out by the younger generation as available lovers in the extramarital relationships. Consider the content of the text below:

Godaan Waata Golole ramo qubate
 Abuya kanke Diid Waaqo Sabura ira gambuti dimtu fud'ate
 Gara tokolchan si hinjalane ijolen sira jalto fud'ate
 Isi gurba waaqi akam si tolche ijole tol kanke sira fud'ate?

The shifting like that of Waata⁶, you settled at Golole
 From your uncle Diid Waaqo Sabura you obtained a red gum boot

She did not love you fully the youngsters took your mistress
 How is it that your affectionate was grabbed from you by the youth?

The jilting of the butt by a discontented mistress in this text is attributed to the fact that the woman after all did not love the butt wholeheartedly. Consequently youngsters won her from him and thus he stands ridiculed. This text has certain variants where the butt is chided because the youngsters conspired against him and confiscated his lover from him, a contention that seems to be critical of the man's inability to remain competitive.

The loss of a firm hold on a mistress is made even more humorous by the absurd ways in which they are displayed, where the butt is treated to a surprise ouster by one socially regarded as an eccentric. In the text below, the butt of the joke is shown as being outwitted by a member of *ayyana* cult who implants his cult's paraphernalia in the bedroom of the woman and in this respect the joke becomes doubly hilarious. This is because the *ayyana* devotee is a rustic religious pundit who goes around with forked sticks, scruffy hair and a drum under his arm as stock-in-trade of his little-known faith. *Ayyana* cultists are generally deemed as sly people who take advantage of people's misfortunes by purporting to have answers to all manner of afflictions and exploit their often-unsuspecting desperate clients. It is this play on the shared knowledge of the cultist's absurdity between the jester and the listeners that triggers comic reactions:

Kope fan keeyate
 Fano farda keeyate
 Waar itdalate élan gaam keeyate
 Élan gaam qubate tol kara lam keeyate
 Kan Kar Bururi ades kess keeyate
 Kan kara bima Ethiopia keeyate
 Ethiopiat deema biskili d'uda guba keeyate
 Waar ini goodat itdemu adho ini ufin bekhu
 Namichi waar ayyana hinkade affo boro keeyate

He put shoes on your feet
 You put feet on the horse
 His home where he was born he situated it across the well
 He settled on the other side of the well, he had his mistresses in two places
 One he situated her at Kar Bururi amid the *adesa* trees
 The other he situated her at the border with Ethiopia

He goes to Ethiopia he places the bicycle on his back
 The home that he frequents in Ethiopia as he still believes he is safe
 The man of *ayyana* cult placed his stuff in the bedroom of his mistress

Conclusion

In conclusion, one can infer that the age-set joke takes cognizance of the ambivalently configured peer relationship, which it embodies. Joking occurs more often between close friends than among people who are distant to one another. Among the Borana, friends pick on one another and then regale one another with jokes interchangeably. These peers serve as a mirror to one another where their human frailties are exposed, confirmed and corrected. A series of character traits are attached to people and derogatorily emphasised with the intent of subduing their self-esteem. Paradoxically this rigorous interrogation and negation of friends is the bedrock on which the sense of amity and its strength is founded and fostered. Irony permeates the genre in the sense that the speaker assumes an attitude of pretence as he makes it look as if he is about to deliver a speech but is actually expecting his audience to see through the pretence and recognise the mocking or critical attitude behind it (Wilson 2006: 1722). Although psychological tensions may have contributed to their genesis, most of the age-set jokes are satirical in nature and critique issues that are real in the lives of the jesters. It is primarily an affront against the targeted partner meant to establish superiority over him through reference to his weak points, especially his relationship with the female other. For the jester/butt, roles that are played interchangeably, the ludic space serves varying purposes, which include self-aggrandizement, enjoyment, and relief from anxiety. For the larger society, the age-set joke is critical in the deconstructive mould, a terrain that licenses their keen voices in ways that as Lincoln (1999: 149) observes elsewhere reflect their subjective position and advance their interest. To sum up, I shall argue with Dubisch (1995: 202), that to perform is to present the socially constructed self before others, to argue for that self, and thus to convince and draw recognition from others of one's place and one's satisfactory performance of that role. The age-set joke represents men's attempt to perform their role vis-à-vis society and themselves, and the public display of this performance is meant to make this role dramatically accessible to the rest of the people. In laughing at certain demeanours of their age-mates, men are constructing an ideal behavioural code for their age-set in particular and men in general, which they must live by or be mocked for falling short of it⁷.

Notes

1. This refers to boast poetry where persons who have routed known Borana traditional enemies from other communities and trophy games that the Borana find a menace, boast of their manhood. For a comprehensive analysis of *dhadhu* see Wako (2002).
2. I use this term to differentiate it from the traditional term "girlfriend" that is in common usage. A girl in the usual understanding of the Borana is one who is unmarried and in Borana culture, it is forbidden for a man to have a girl as a friend. Mistress is used interchangeably with "woman friend." Asmarom Legesse (1973) calls this relationship *cisbean*.
3. Refers to an ethnic group of Nilotic stock. In this case they are disparagingly referred to as an alien other who symbolically stand for any non-Borana.
4. This is the name of one of the *ayyana* spirits that possess people. In this instance the butt confirms the claim of possession but puts it jocosely by claiming that *odha* is a male *ayyana*, implying that even though being inflicted by *ayyana* is undesirable, its being male mitigates the misfortune of acquiring the spirit.
5. The name of the person believed to be the founder of the cult. Here it is used as the spirit itself. According Mohamed Hassen (1992), he was a 13th century standard-bearer of Islam, a Muslim scholar of Arab origin and an accomplished missionary saint in southern Ethiopia.
6. Waata can be defined as a hunter-gatherer people living on the fringe of Borana community. Owing to their custom of frequently moving from place to place, they have become proverbial nomads.
7. The oral texts on which these analyses were based were collected in 2001 for a larger project from Mr. Roba Halake Huqa, Mr. Dima Jillo Jirma, Mr. Boru Guyo Odha and Mr. Abduba Galgallo Bilala. These men were lifelong joking partners from two different age-sets of Wakora Guyo and Dambala Dida respectively. The performances were recorded in Sololo and Nairobi on various dates.

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